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FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES
SCHOOL OF PEDAGOGY OF NATIONAL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES-ENGLISH

TITLE OF PAPER

Supporting speaking skills development through the use of puppets among fourth-grade EFL learners at a private school in the city of Guayaquil in the scholastic year 2025-2026.

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Manzaba Loor, Leisly Jamell

SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR OBTAINING THE BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN EFL PEDAGOGY

PROJECT ADVISOR
Loor Moreira, Melissa, Mgs.

GUAYAQUIL, ECUADOR
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We certify that this research project was presented by **Correa Guerra, Marión Jocelyn y Manzaba Loor, Leisly Jamell** as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the **Bachelor's Degree in EFL Pedagogy.**

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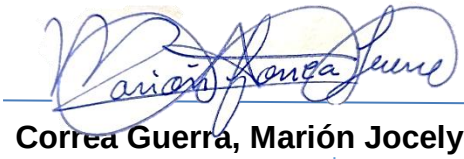

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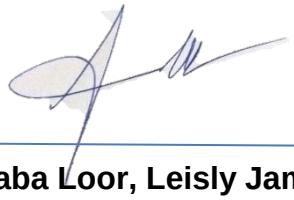

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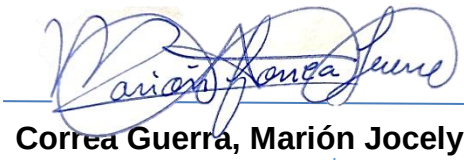

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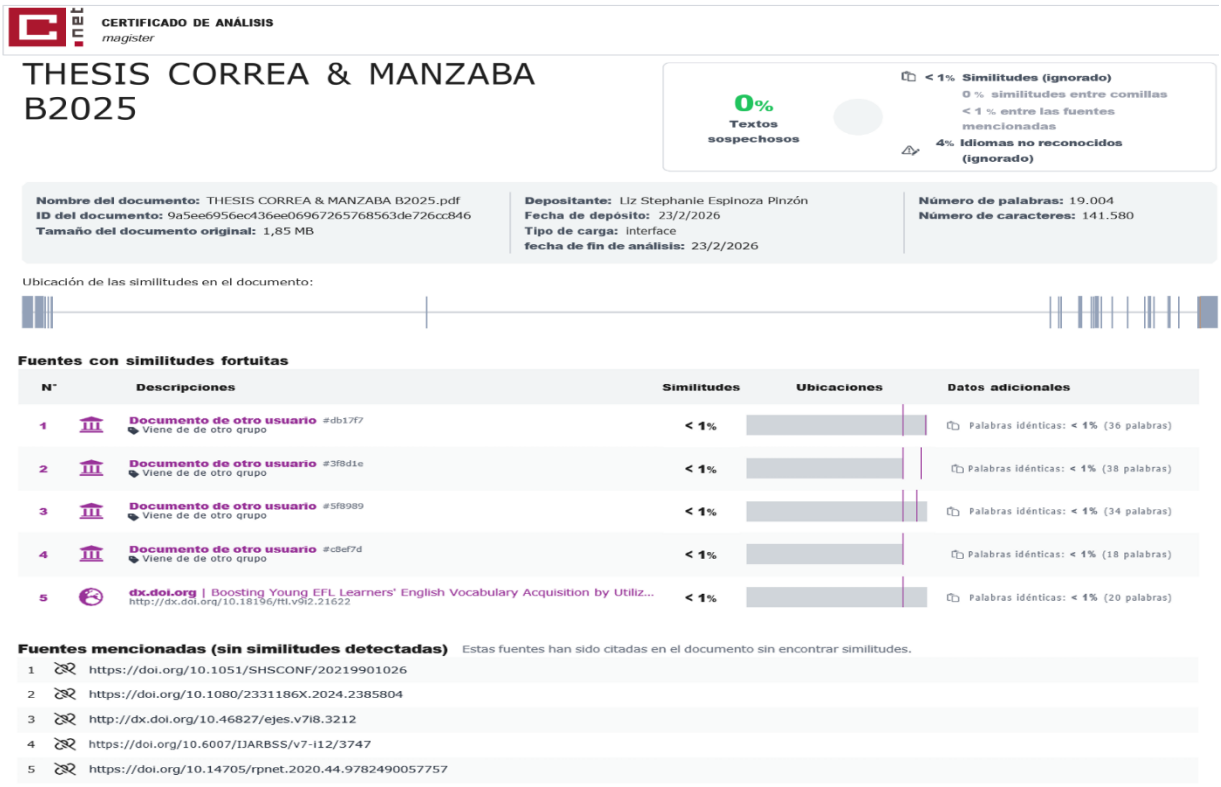

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to design a puppet performance-based pedagogical framework to strengthen speaking instruction for fourth-grade EFL students at a private school in southern Guayaquil during the 2025–2026 academic year. A mixed-methods analysis was conducted using a Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist and a semi-structured teacher interview. Quantitative observation data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative interview data were analyzed through thematic content analysis. Observation results showed a speaking profile characterized by limited performance in fluency and pronunciation, basic levels of accuracy and vocabulary, and stronger interaction. The interview findings indicated that students are beginner-level learners whose willingness to speak is strongly affected by fear of making mistakes, fear of negative peer judgment, and insecurity about pronunciation. Findings from both instruments were integrated through triangulation to develop a comprehensive needs analysis, which informed the design of a three-session, scaffolded sequence of puppet performance activities aligned with communicative objectives. The proposed framework emphasizes predictable routines, modeling, guided rehearsal, brief micro-performances, and gradual reduction of scaffolding to support increased fluency, clearer pronunciation, and greater speaking confidence in a supportive classroom environment.

Keywords: *EFL speaking; puppet-based learning; performance-based activities; fluency; pronunciation; speaking confidence*

SPANISH RESUMEN

El objetivo de este estudio era diseñar un marco pedagógico basado en representaciones con marionetas para reforzar la enseñanza de la expresión oral a alumnos de cuarto curso de inglés como lengua extranjera en una escuela privada del sur de Guayaquil durante el curso académico 2025-2026. Se llevó a cabo un análisis con métodos mixtos utilizando una lista de verificación para la observación de la expresión oral en el aula y una entrevista semiestructurada a los profesores. Los datos cuantitativos de la observación se analizaron mediante estadísticas descriptivas, mientras que los datos cualitativos de las entrevistas se analizaron mediante un análisis temático del contenido. Los resultados de la observación mostraron un perfil de expresión oral caracterizado por un rendimiento limitado en fluidez y pronunciación, niveles básicos de precisión y vocabulario, y una interacción más sólida. Las conclusiones de las entrevistas indicaron que los alumnos son estudiantes de nivel principiante cuya disposición a hablar se ve muy afectada por el miedo a cometer errores, el miedo al juicio negativo de sus compañeros y la inseguridad sobre la pronunciación. Los resultados de ambos instrumentos se integraron mediante triangulación para desarrollar un análisis exhaustivo de las necesidades, que sirvió de base para el diseño de una secuencia escalonada de tres sesiones de actividades de actuación con marionetas alineadas con los objetivos comunicativos. El marco propuesto hace hincapié en rutinas predecibles, modelado, ensayos guiados, micro actuaciones breves y reducción gradual del andamiaje para apoyar una mayor fluidez, una pronunciación más clara y una mayor confianza al hablar en un entorno de clase propicio.

Palabras claves: *Expresión oral en inglés como lengua extranjera; aprendizaje basado en marionetas; actividades basadas en la interpretación; fluidez; pronunciación; confianza al hablar.*

INTRODUCTION

English has become a key language for academic mobility, global communication, and future employment, yet in many EFL contexts learners still complete years of schooling without being able to speak with confidence. This gap matters most in the early grades, when children are developmentally ready to learn through interaction, play, and meaningful use of language that should make oral communication a natural outcome of classroom learning. However, when instruction prioritizes written accuracy and memorization over authentic talk, students may know vocabulary and grammar but still struggle to use English as a tool for real communication.

This work examines the problem of underdeveloped speaking proficiency in Ecuadorian EFL education, where classroom practice often concentrates on reading, writing, and listening while speaking receives limited time and methodological attention. It focuses specifically on fourth-grade learners in a private school in southern Guayaquil during the 2025–2026 school year, where students show reluctance to participate orally, difficulty recalling recently taught vocabulary, and low performance in English despite ongoing grammar and vocabulary instruction.

In response, the study diagnoses speaking-related needs and designs puppet performance activities as an innovative, developmentally appropriate approach to strengthen speaking proficiency while also supporting motivation, confidence, collaboration, and self-expression to address persistent speaking deficits in Ecuadorian EFL classrooms.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Currently, most learners throughout the country do not achieve a C1 level of English proficiency. According to Guapulema (2025), the majority of students do not surpass the A1 level of the CEFR; as they only acquire skills to elaborate basic sentences, while the fundamental purpose of language learning: communication and understanding, remains unaddressed.

Speaking skills are rarely developed in EFL classrooms, as instruction often prioritizes academic content, such as grammar, vocabulary, and written exercises, over speaking practice, which can limit students' ability to transfer what they know into fluent and confident oral communication (Ellah & Azmi, 2024). For learners, peer interaction and opportunities for supported self-expression are essential; without these opportunities, students may develop speaking anxiety and a reduced willingness to participate orally, as they have fewer communicative resources to manage oral tasks effectively.

Research shows that EFL learners face many speaking challenges, such as hesitation, low confidence, and the difficulty of expressing their thoughts clearly (Omar, 2023). These challenges are exacerbated when communication and self-expression are not prioritized in the classroom. It is therefore essential to implement innovative teaching methods that integrate interpersonal skills with second language development (Andrievskikh & Lapina, 2021).

During the 2025 – 2026 school year, in a private school in southern Guayaquil, students in the fourth grade of elementary school face problems with the development of English-speaking skills. Despite the efforts of the teacher on each grammar and vocabulary assignments, students have trouble expressing themselves in a second language because they cannot remember words, meanings, and expressions learned during the week; this includes recently taught vocabulary and difficulties in connecting meanings with their corresponding words. These challenges are reflected in the poor academic performance of students in English, evidenced in their low grades and their reluctance to participate in class, avoiding voluntary oral contributions.

Students often avoid voluntarily sharing their opinions due to the fear of being

judged for making mistakes or receiving negative feedback from the teacher, which creates a barrier between them and their instructors, whereas a strong emotional bond between educators and learners can enhance engagement and improve academic achievement (Quinapallo et al., 2024). This lack of participation also creates gaps in students' knowledge, as they do not ask questions when they have doubts about the lesson.

The use of puppets as mediating artifacts allows learners to speak through a character, creating a psychological distance that can reduce fear of evaluation and support confidence, while role-played interactions can foster perspective-taking and empathy through guided dialogue and emotional expression (Mogollon, 2024).

Therefore, this study seeks to address the identified speaking challenges by proposing a puppet-based pedagogical framework for fourth-grade EFL learners in a private school in southern Guayaquil during the 2025–2026 school year.

JUSTIFICATION

This study addresses a critical gap in Ecuadorian EFL pedagogy by examining the integration of speaking skills instruction through puppet-based methodologies, a gap evidenced by national analyses showing a persistent mismatch between the policy-level communicative expectations and classroom realities. Mayancha (2025) notes that although national policy promotes communicative competence, classroom practice continues to be dominated by traditional, grammar-focused instruction that overlooks the communicative and oral dimensions of English, which has contributed to Ecuador's low proficiency ranking in the EF English Proficiency Index and to persistent difficulties in developing students' oral competence.

In addition, a nationwide survey of Ecuadorian EFL teachers conducted by Guerrero and Moreira (2025), reports that limited instructional time, an emphasis on grammar and writing over speaking, insufficient teacher training, and uneven access to resources all hinder the development of students' oral communication skills in both public and private schools, showing that speaking remains one of the weakest and most challenging areas in current EFL practice.

The need for innovative speaking instruction methodologies is particularly acute in Ecuadorian primary schools, where traditional approaches have proven insufficient for developing communicative competence. For instance, Solórzano and Mendoza (2023) found that at Vicente Rocafuerte Educational Unit in Guayaquil, 60% of students could not produce oral language at age-appropriate levels, struggling to communicate effectively even in basic classroom interactions. This underscores the need to implement strategies to address this persistent problem in the country; without meaningful change, English proficiency among Ecuadorian students may continue to decline, further limiting their academic and professional opportunities.

As Rao (2019) explains, English is the global language of scientific research, higher education, business, technology, and international communication, and strong speaking skills are needed to succeed in job interviews, presentations,

and professional interactions, meaning that learners with low proficiency are at a clear disadvantage.

This research examines how puppet performance activities, by naturally eliciting collaboration, creativity, and emotional expression, can create contextualized opportunities for speaking practice while also strengthening interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies that are often neglected in conventional EFL instruction. In this sense, puppet performance–based instruction constitutes a developmentally appropriate approach that addresses both the linguistic and affective dimensions of speaking development (Bravo & del Carmen, 2020).

By providing a supportive and structured communicative frame, puppet activities can promote sustained oral practice, reduce communication anxiety, and nurture skills such as empathy, collaboration, and self-expression that underpin ongoing language learning. Empirical evidence supports puppet-based pedagogical interventions for young EFL learners: Yanac-Leon et al. (2021) established a causal relationship between puppet-based instruction and enhanced communicative competencies in elementary students, demonstrating that puppets significantly increase learners' attention, motivation, and willingness to express thoughts and emotions.

Therefore, this research proposes a pedagogical framework for addressing speaking proficiency challenges through puppet-based instruction. Beyond its immediate practical application, the study contributes to the limited body of literature on integrating interactional learning with communicative language teaching in Ecuadorian primary education contexts. The proposed strategies offer a replicable framework for educators seeking to simultaneously develop linguistic competence and interpersonal skills, with potential applications in similar private school settings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What speaking-related learning needs do fourth-grade EFL students present in terms of fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence in the target context?
2. What design principles and activity features should a puppet performance-based sequence include to align with communicative speaking objectives for fourth-grade learners?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main objective:

To design a puppet performance-based pedagogical framework to strengthen speaking instruction for fourth-grade EFL students at a private school in southern Guayaquil during the 2025–2026 academic year.

Specific Objectives:

1. To identify fourth-grade students' speaking-related learning needs in regard to fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence in the target EFL context.
2. To explore the fourth-grade EFL teacher's perceptions of students' speaking proficiency, current instructional practices, and the feasibility of puppet-based performance activities.
3. To develop a structured sequence of puppet performance activities aligned with communicative objectives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LEARNING THEORIES

Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter

Krashen's theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) groups five hypotheses into what later became known as Input Theory, a framework that reoriented language teaching toward meaning-focused communication and learners' emotional states rather than isolated grammar practice (Luo, 2024). Within this model, the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis explain how linguistic input must be structured and under what emotional conditions it can be acquired.

The Input Hypothesis proposes that learners acquire a second language when they are exposed to comprehensible input, that is, messages they can understand that are slightly above their current level of competence (Koceva, 2018). Rather than starting from explicit rules, the learner's internal system gradually reorganizes itself as it processes meaning; form is acquired implicitly in the process of understanding messages. From this perspective, vocabulary and grammar are not first memorized and then used but are picked up as a by-product of meaningful communication and abundant exposure, especially through receptive skills such as listening and reading (Luo, 2024).

The Affective Filter Hypothesis complements the Input Hypothesis by explaining why not all comprehensible input becomes acquisition. Krashen proposes that variables such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety act as an affective filter that can either allow input to reach the internal language acquisition device or block it (Mammadova, 2024). Even if learners receive large quantities of understandable language, a high affective filter, associated with fear of failure, low self-esteem or a hostile environment, prevents much of that input from being transformed into intake.

Luo (2024) details three key affective factors in this process: motivation, personality traits (such as extroversion or self-confidence) and emotional state,

especially the level of anxiety; when students have clear goals, feel confident and are relaxed, the filter is low and more input can be processed by the acquisition system; when they are tense, embarrassed or afraid of making mistakes, the filter rise and intake is reduced, even if the input itself is sufficiently comprehensible, explaining why two learners in the same classroom, exposed to the same teaching, can progress at very different rates.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural Theory (SCT), grounded in the work of Vygotsky, conceives human cognition as fundamentally social and mediated: higher mental functions develop through participation in culturally organized activities using tools and signs, above all language (Lantolf et al., 2020). In second language learning, this means that acquiring an L2 is not simply an internal, individual process of rule acquisition, but a semiotic process that arises as learners engage in meaningful, collaborative activity within specific sociocultural contexts (Che Mustafa et al., 2017).

The social environment is therefore understood not as a mere backdrop for cognition but as the source of mental development given that language functions not only enable communication with others but also serve to regulate attention, memory, planning and problem-solving through private and inner speech. In L2 contexts, learners gradually appropriate the new language as a tool for both communication and thinking, using it to plan, rehearse, self-correct and monitor their performance (Pathan et al., 2018).

A core construct in SCT applied to SLA is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined by Vygotsky as the distance between what a learner can do independently and what they can accomplish with guidance from a more capable other (Vygotsky, 1978, as discussed in Pathan et al., 2018). In L2 learning, the ZPD is realized when teachers or more proficient peers offer mediation that enables learners to perform beyond their current level. Over time, this support is scaffolded: gradually reduced so that control shifts from other regulation to self-regulation. Scaffolding in interaction, for example, in collaborative dialogue, recasts, and negotiated help, allows learners to

internalize new forms and functions of the L2 while participating in meaningful tasks (Lantolf et al., 2023).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach that emerged in the 1970s as a response to structure-centered methods that produced learners who could manipulate grammatical forms but struggled to use the language for genuine communication (Desai, 2015, as cited in Adem & Berkessa, 2022). At its core, CLT views language primarily as a means of communication, so the main goal of teaching is to develop learners' ability to use the language appropriately and effectively in real contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, as cited in Adem & Berkessa, 2022).

Therefore, learners acquire language by using it to communicate, rather than practicing decontextualized patterns, as they engage in tasks where language is a tool to get things done: exchanging information, negotiating meaning, solving problems, or expressing opinions. Qasserras (2023) notes that CLT prioritizes real-life communication and meaningful language use as the route to developing communicative competence and overall proficiency.

CLT is strongly learner-centered as the teacher's role shifts from transmitter of knowledge to facilitator of communication: organizing tasks, setting up pair and group work, monitoring interaction and providing feedback. Students are positioned as communicators who take responsibility for their own learning, plan how to express meanings, and collaborate with peers, fostering learner autonomy, motivation, and active participation (Qasserras, 2023).

1.1 Cognitive and Developmental Theories for Young Learners

Piaget's Concrete Operational Stage

Piaget's concrete operational stage corresponds roughly to the ages of 7–11 and marks a qualitative shift in how children think about the world and, by extension, how they can approach a second language. In Piaget's model, this

stage comes after the preoperational period and before formal operations, and is characterized by the emergence of logical reasoning as egocentrism decreases: children begin to feel the need for reasons, evidence and explanations, and can use early forms of inductive and deductive reasoning grounded in direct experience (Piaget, 1928, as cited in Tunalı & Aktürkoğlu, 2025).

Children in the concrete operational period need to find reasons and evidence, attempt to link events logically, and can compare and establish relationships between situations, but their reasoning remains tied to isolated cases rather than generalized rules (Tunalı & Aktürkoğlu, 2025). This has direct implications for second language learning: learners at this stage can notice patterns in vocabulary and grammar, classify linguistic items, for example, grouping words by semantic field or grammatical category and understand simple cause–effect relations expressed in the L2, provided these are anchored in familiar, concrete contexts.

However, they are not yet ready for purely abstract explanations of language; metalinguistic rules are more accessible when they emerge from concrete examples and problem-solving activities rather than from decontextualized definitions. This reinforces the importance of concrete, activity-based learning for children in primary school; Ahmad et al. (2016) underline that play and hands-on activities help develop memory, problem-solving, decision-making and concept acquisition, all of which are central to cognitive development and therefore to second language learning as well.

Characteristics of fourth-grade learners

Fourth-grade learners, usually around nine to ten years old, are in a key transition stage where cognitive, social, and emotional demands increase notably compared with earlier grades. On the cognitive side, they are expected to identify main ideas and supporting details, draw inferences, synthesize and interpret information, and support their opinions with evidence; at this stage, vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure also grow in complexity.

They are also developing executive functions that allow them to manage school tasks with greater autonomy as their working memory is used to connect new academic content with what they already know, while planning and organization help them keep track of materials, assignments, and deadlines. They begin to break long-term projects into manageable steps, estimate how long tasks will take, and use tools such as calendars or planners to monitor their progress.

On the social and emotional level, fourth grade is characterized by growing independence and a heightened focus on peer relationships. Friendships become more complex as they begin to understand that relationships are based on more than shared activities, and they enjoy sharing secrets, inside jokes, and personal information with close friends. Also, peer pressure gains strength, and it can be difficult for them to resist group expectations, making friends' opinions especially influential.

This process of identity exploration is closely tied to their developing emotional regulation: they continue to strengthen their ability to inhibit inappropriate behaviors, adapt to changes in plans, and manage their feelings in social situations, skills that are essential for successful participation in the classroom and beyond.

Multisensory learning and engagement

Multisensory learning has become a powerful way to increase engagement and effectiveness in second language (L2) learning, especially with children, as it involves a combination of behavioral, emotional and cognitive involvement: students' participation and focus, their feelings of interest and enjoyment, and the mental effort they invest in tasks (Fredricks, 2023).

The multisensory approach, originally developed by Grace Fernald and popularized by Montessori, invites students to learn through sight, hearing, touch and physical movement, and sometimes also smell and taste (Rompas & Recard, 2021). Learning that involves multiple senses connects what learners think, do and feel, and has been shown to enhance memory and attention, which are essential for language acquisition (Nurjanah et al., 2024).

In L2 learning, this means that vocabulary, structures and discourse are embedded in sensory-rich experiences and students learn language as part of doing things: they pick up English while acting, manipulating objects, listening to stories, creating crafts or playing games, rather than by studying rules in isolation (Richards, 2015, as cited in Rompas & Recard, 2021).

From a broader perspective, multisensory learning also helps address diverse learning styles in L2 classrooms as many learners prefer visual, auditory or kinesthetic channels, and a single-mode approach often leaves some students behind. Nurjanah et al. (2024) indicate that in the L2 classroom, this means that learners who struggle with print-heavy, teacher-fronted lessons can participate more successfully when activities involve tracing letters or words in sand, matching spoken words to images, or acting out dialogues physically.

1.2 Speaking Proficiency in EFL

Components of speaking proficiency

Speaking proficiency in a second language is now widely understood as multicomponential rather than a single global ability. A particularly influential way of describing it is through the CAF framework: complexity, accuracy and fluency, often complemented by pronunciation as a distinct but closely related dimension (Yan et al., 2018). These components capture how advanced a learner's language system is, how target-like and appropriate it is, how efficiently it can be used in real time, and how intelligible the spoken signal is.

Complexity refers to the range and sophistication of linguistic forms that speakers use, both lexically, with the variety and sophistication of vocabulary, or grammatically with the use of subordination, embedding, longer and more elaborated clauses, this supports the idea that more proficient speakers not only make fewer errors, but also deploy a wider, more varied and more intricate repertoire of structures and words when they speak.

Accuracy is defined as the extent to which a learner's speech conforms to target-language norms and how appropriate it is in terms of grammar, morphology, word order and lexical choice (Housen et al., 2012). This means

that as learners' speaking proficiency rises, their speech tends to contain fewer grammatical and lexical errors and more target-like structures.

Fluency refers to the temporal flow of speech: the speed, smoothness and continuity with which a learner produces language, rather than how advanced their vocabulary or grammar is (Housen et al., 2012). It includes the speech rate, articulation rate, mean length of run and number of silent pauses, indicating that higher-proficiency speakers talk faster, in longer stretches, and with fewer disruptive pauses (Yan et al., 2018).

Although pronunciation is not always included in the original CAF triad, it is crucial for speaking proficiency because it underpins intelligibility and comprehensibility. Yan et al. (2018) explicitly treats pronunciation features as a subcomponent of speaking accuracy, arguing that segmental and suprasegmental realization affects how easily listeners can understand a speaker; thus, higher-level speakers produce more stable vowel length contrasts and more target-like patterns, contributing to clearer, more comprehensible speech.

Speaking assessment frameworks (CEFR descriptors for A1-A2 levels)

Speaking assessment frameworks for beginners in a second language are widely guided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which offers detailed descriptors of what learners can do orally at each level. At level A1, the CEFR describes the lowest level of generative language use, where learners move beyond a memorized phrasebook and begin to interact in very simple ways about themselves, where they live, people they know and things they have, usually in situations of immediate need or on very familiar topics (Council of Europe, 2020).

By contrast, level A2 is characterized by the emergence of basic social functions: learners can use simple polite forms, greet people, ask how they are, react to news, handle very short social exchanges, and talk about what people do at work or in their free time (Council of Europe, 2020). These salient features already suggest that speaking assessment at A1–A2 must focus on highly familiar content, formulaic language and short, supported interactions.

In terms of spoken production, the CEFR scales specify what learners can say in continuous speech. For sustained monologue (describing experience), A1 learners are expected to produce simple, mainly isolated phrases about people and places, or short descriptions of themselves, what they do and where they live, often with preparation and using basic words and phrases (Council of Europe, 2020).

At A2, learners can give simple descriptions of people, living or working conditions, daily routines, likes and dislikes as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list. They can tell very simple stories, describe everyday aspects of their environment, briefly describe events and activities, talk about habits, routines, past experiences and future plans, and explain in simple terms what they like or dislike (Council of Europe, 2020).

The CEFR also frames speaking in terms of interaction, not only monologue. At A1, learners are expected to ask and answer simple questions about personal details and to initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need (Council of Europe, 2020). By A2, they can handle very short social exchanges, make and respond to invitations and offers, discuss what to do and where to go, and carry out simple, routine transactions such as buying tickets or asking for basic travel information (Council of Europe, 2020).

Challenges in developing L2 speaking skills

Developing L2 speaking skills is widely recognized as one of the most demanding aspects of language learning, because it requires learners to mobilize linguistic knowledge in real time, under social pressure and within specific classroom and sociocultural constraints (Sabnani & Renandya, 2019;"). Unlike receptive skills, speaking exposes learners' errors publicly and forces them to plan, articulate and monitor their utterances on the spot. This combination of cognitive load and social exposure explains why even students who have studied English for many years still struggle to express themselves orally with confidence and fluency (Sharma, 2024).

Therefore, nervousness, shyness, fear of being laughed at and low self-confidence are among the most frequently reported obstacles to classroom

speaking (Alam & Ashrafuzzaman, 2018). Many students hesitate to speak because they are afraid of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes, or of receiving immediate criticism from teachers and peers. Leonita et al. (2023) likewise report that fear of mistakes, fear of criticism, shyness and nervousness undermine students' willingness to participate, even when they have basic vocabulary and grammar, turning speaking classes into high-stress events instead of spaces for experimentation.

A second set of difficulties concerns linguistic and cognitive resources as learners often lack sufficient vocabulary, grammar control and pronunciation to express their ideas smoothly; limited lexical repertoires are repeatedly mentioned as major barriers to participation in classroom interaction (Leonita et al., 2023).

Some students also report having no idea what to say or lacking enough content even in their first language to sustain talk on a given topic, which leads to hesitation and breakdowns after only a few sentences. Sabnani and Renandya (2019) emphasize that the real-time nature of speaking imposes heavy processing demands: learners must retrieve words, choose grammatical patterns, organize discourse and monitor listener reactions simultaneously, tasks that can overwhelm limited working memory and result in false starts, long pauses and fragmented utterances.

There are also contextual and pedagogical challenges such as large classes, time constraints and exam-oriented curricula that privilege reading and writing over oral practice, leave few opportunities for sustained interaction in the target language as traditional practices, that focus on written accuracy and rule learning, make many students accustomed to passive learning and reluctant to engage in communicative tasks (Sharma, 2024).

2. SPEAKING SKILLS IN EFL EDUCATION

2.1 Defining Speaking skills in Educational Contexts

Conceptualizations of speaking skills

Speaking skills are conceptualized as an expressive and social ability: the capacity to convey opinions, thoughts and feelings verbally to individuals or groups, whether in face-to-face situations or at a distance (Hussain, 2017); Marjonet et al. (2020) emphasize that speaking is a natural means of communication through which members of a community express their ideas and participate in social life, comprising both a linguistic skill and a form of social behaviour.

Therefore, it can also be understood as an active classroom skill that requires time, practice and suitable techniques. Guado and Mayorga (2021) stress that, although listening and speaking go together, it is speaking that makes the learner more active in the learning process, meaning that the effectiveness of a lesson can be judged by the ratio of pupil speaking time (PST) to teacher speaking time (TST); the greater the PST, the more effective the lesson is likely to be. From this angle, speaking is conceptualized as performance in communicative activities such as storytelling, dialogues, situational conversations, role plays, simulations and speech games, all of which provide contexts where learners can experiment with language, build confidence and develop fluency.

21st-century competencies and language learning

21st-century perspectives on language learning place oral communication at the center of what students need to succeed in a globalized, knowledge-based economy. Rao (2019) reinforces this view from a classroom and employability angle, arguing that in the current era of globalization, speaking skills are the most crucial of the four language skills because they allow learners to communicate their ambitions, goals and expertise in real-life situations.

English, as the dominant international language in fields such as scientific research, business, technology and higher education, becomes a key gateway to academic and professional mobility, and mastery of spoken English is repeatedly highlighted as a passport to better job opportunities, career advancement and participation in global networks.

This emphasis on speaking connects directly with competencies such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving, as strong speaking skills are essential for performing in job interviews, participating in debates and group discussions, giving presentations, negotiating in business contexts and building professional relationships; precisely the kinds of complex, interactive tasks that require learners to reason, argue, persuade and respond dynamically to others (Czerkawski & Berti, 2020). In other words, speaking in an additional language is not just about linguistic correctness; it is a vehicle for demonstrating leadership, creativity and critical thinking in high-stakes, real-world contexts, which are core elements of 21st-century competence frameworks.

Conceptualization of target speaking skills

In current approaches to second language speaking, target skills such as confidence, collaboration and empathy are increasingly understood as core components of communicative competence. From this perspective, communication and collaboration form part of the so-called 4Cs: creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication, which are described as key soft-skill competencies needed for education and the future of work (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). Developing learners' oral performance therefore means not only working on linguistic accuracy and fluency, but also intentionally fostering interpersonal and socio-emotional abilities that allow them to use English in real collaborative tasks.

Confidence in speaking emerges when learners experience themselves as capable communicators in meaningful situations, to achieve this, learners must be practice in authentic activities and supported at an institutional level, not treated as a purely individual talent. When learners take part in discussions,

problem-solving tasks or projects where their contributions are listened to and valued, their self-perception as competent speakers tend to grow (Nety & Nurhaeni, 2020).

In parallel, work on intrapersonal communication and self-awareness—understanding one's own values, beliefs and habitual responses—helps students recognize how they come across to others and adjust their communicative style more confidently (Pavord & Donnelly, 2015).

Therefore, communication and collaboration are deeply interconnected social and interpersonal processes; group speaking tasks require learners to negotiate meaning, share ideas and co-construct solutions in the target language. In doing so, they practice turn-taking, clarification requests and feedback, which strengthens both their linguistic resources and their capacity to function as members of a team (Care, 2017).

Empathy is another key target skill for speaking, as Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023) highlight, effective interpersonal communication depends heavily on the ability to listen actively and show people that they have been heard and understood. When these principles are transferred to language learning, speaking activities are designed so that learners attend closely to their partners' verbal and non-verbal messages, respond sensitively and adapt their language to the other person's needs. Tasks that require perspective-taking, such as role-plays, interviews or discussions about personal experiences, can explicitly train students to notice emotions, validate feelings and respond respectfully, thus integrating empathy into their communicative repertoire.

2.2 The Role of Speaking skills in Speaking Development

Relationship between affective factors and oral production

Difficulties in L2 oral production are not explained only by lack of vocabulary or grammar; affective factors such as anxiety, nervousness, embarrassment, motivation, self-confidence and risk-taking play a central role in how learners speak. Uriostegui and Vázquez (2022) highlight that for many students of,

speaking is the most problematic English skill, even at advanced levels, as they often feel afraid to participate, especially when they must speak in front of teachers and classmates, and frequently report feeling very nervous, embarrassed, anxious and even unable to communicate when speaking English.

These emotional reactions are closely linked to classroom conditions: limited oral practice, scarce use of English during class, and few varied, dynamic speaking activities leave students feeling underprepared, which in turn raises their anxiety and reluctance to speak (Illyn et al., 2019).

Yousefi (2016) suggests that affective factors are directly reflected in the quality of oral production, so that higher motivation tends to be accompanied by more complex, more accurate and somewhat more fluent speech, with a wider use of structures and verb forms and a more sustained speech rate. Likewise, linguistic confidence and willingness to take risks encourage learners to draw on a broader repertoire of grammatical and lexical resources instead of restricting themselves to simple, familiar constructions.

Therefore, improving L2 oral production requires working on the emotional climate of speaking activities, not only on linguistic content as a dynamic, varied, interaction-rich tasks and stress-free environments help build security and self-confidence by giving learners a sense of familiarity and security, freeing cognitive resources for more complex and accurate production (Illyn et al., 2019).

Self-confidence and willingness to communicate (WTC)

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is a construct that helps explain why some learners actively use the second language (L2) while others remain silent, even when they have similar levels of formal knowledge. MacIntyre et al. (1998 as cited in Ye & Hu, 2025) define L2 WTC as a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a second language and propose a pyramidal model where WTC is shaped by linguistic,

communicative and social-psychological variables operating at both situational and enduring levels.

Within this framework, L2 self-confidence is one of the key antecedents of WTC: learners who believe they can communicate effectively in the L2 and feel less anxious are more likely to initiate and sustain interaction. L2 self-confidence was originally conceptualized by Clément and colleagues as an overall belief in one's ability to communicate in the L2 in an adaptive and efficient way, combining perceived competence and L2 anxiety. Higher perceived competence and lower anxiety tend to promote WTC, while low self-confidence reduces learners' readiness to speak (Ye & Hu, 2025).

Riasati (2018) point out that many EFL learners remain reticent and struggle to sustain a conversation beyond initial greetings, with low WTC linked to inadequate proficiency, lack of confidence, L2 speaking anxiety, fear of teacher and peer judgment, limited opportunities for L2 use and exam-oriented teaching. These factors create a vicious cycle: reluctance to speak reduces practice, which in turn limits progress, lowers enjoyment, diminishes self-confidence and heightens anxiety, further suppressing WTC.

Therefore, high self-confidence, supported by positive classroom experiences and clear motivational visions, encourages learners to take the interpersonal risk of speaking; low self-confidence, often coupled with anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, leads to silence even in otherwise favorable conditions (Katiandagho & Sengkey, 2022). For pedagogy, this means that efforts to develop oral skills must systematically address learners' self-beliefs and emotions, through supportive classroom climates, explicit confidence-building and motivational strategies, if they aim to foster a genuine and sustained willingness to communicate in the L2.

Social skills and communicative competence

Communicative competence can be understood as a specialized form of social skill, grounded in the ability to achieve communicative goals in ways that are effective and socially appropriate, constituting purposeful and context-

sensitive behaviours. Kiessling and Fabry (2021) argue that communicative competence consists in selecting and using verbal and non-verbal behaviours that fit a given situation and interlocutor. Like other social skills, this competence is organized and goal-oriented, involves timing and coordination, and is shaped by the reactions, needs and expectations of others.

From this perspective, communicative competence is closely aligned with social interactional abilities rather than with purely motor skills. Social skills involve managing one's own goals and the goals of others, reading contextual cues and regulating emotions such as self-esteem and the need for acceptance (Kiessling & Fabry, 2021).

Communicative competence extends this logic into the linguistic domain: speakers must not only form grammatically correct sentences, but also adapt their language to interpersonal norms, display empathy and responsiveness, and regulate turn-taking, politeness and face-threatening acts. In this sense, communication is always simultaneously linguistic and social performance, requiring coordination of what is said with how, when and to whom it is said (Abdulrahman & Ayyash, 2019).

Within applied linguistics, Savignon (2018) situates communicative competence as a shift away from viewing language proficiency as the mastery of grammatical structures alone, towards understanding it as the ability to communicate meaningfully and appropriately in social contexts. This broader construct includes not only grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic knowledge, discourse skills and strategic competence; to be communicatively competent, therefore, is to mobilize social skills, such as interpreting others' intentions, negotiating meaning and managing interpersonal relationships, through the medium of language.

2.3 Integrating Speaking skills into EFL Instruction

Pedagogical approaches for speaking development in L2 classrooms have evolved from grammar-driven drills to communicative, task-based and multi-perspective models that aim to build both fluency and accuracy in meaningful

interaction. As previously mentioned, Communicicative Language Teaching (CLT), considers that speaking development is grounded in the idea that language is learned through communication; typical speaking tasks include role plays, dialogues, information-gap and information-gathering activities, opinion-sharing and task-completion, all of which require learners to exchange information, negotiate meaning and express personal viewpoints in English (Guado & Mayorga, 2021).

Building on CLT, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) places real-world tasks at the center of speaking development. Chen (2023) describes TBLT as an approach that fosters communicative competence by engaging learners in meaningful tasks linked to their lives, such as problem-solving, projects or role-plays, that require genuine use of the target language, while also promoting critical thinking and learner autonomy; it supports both fluency through extended language production and meaning negotiation, and accuracy through contextual feedback and post-task reflection.

A complementary strand focuses on novel, learner-friendly approaches to teaching speaking. Rao (2019) argues that teachers must say good-bye to purely traditional, teacher-centered methods and design motivating activities: games, pair and group work, storytelling, debates, interviews and other interactive tasks, that create a fun, low-anxiety environment where learners willingly practice oral production inside and outside the classroom (Rao, 2019).

More recently, multi-perspective models have been proposed to avoid one-sided emphasis on either structure or fluency. Demiröz (2025) argues that focusing on a single dimension leads learners to over-attend to that aspect, for example, only grammar or only speed, proposing a multiperspective approach that treats structure, fluency and communication as parallel, equally important strands. In this model, teachers explicitly teach speaking skills and strategies, balance work on form and message, and use pair and group work to provide rich opportunities for practice.

Across contexts, classroom techniques and teacher practices play a crucial role in operationalizing these approaches. Tiwari (2024) reports that teachers

commonly use learner-centered techniques such as role-plays, prepared talks, interviews, group discussions, debates, storytelling, information-gap tasks, communication games, picture description and dramatization to develop speaking skills.

Effective activities share certain characteristics: they maximize opportunities for students to speak, distribute participation widely, maintain high motivation through interesting topics, keep language at an accessible level, and orient talk toward clear communicative goals (Ur, 1996, as discussed in Tiwari, 2024). Attention to classroom climate, manageable group size, and motivational techniques further supports active participation and confidence.

Taken together, these sources suggest that effective pedagogical approaches to speaking development share several core features: they are communicative, task-rich, learner-centered and explicitly focused on speaking as a complex skill.

3. PUPPET-BASED PEDAGOGY

3.1 Theoretical Foundations of Puppet Use in Education

Drama and the creative arts turn language lessons into lived communication: learners rehearse meaning in context, with bodies, voices, emotions, and relationships. In EFL contexts, drama-based pedagogy is described as an experiential approach that immerses students in fictional situations through role-playing, improvisation, and acting-oriented instruction, which supports authentic language use and sustained engagement (Van de Water, 2021).

A key pedagogical strength of drama is that it naturally increases both input, with students surrounded by purposeful talk, gestures, and contextual clue, and output as students must respond, negotiate, and perform meanings, with gains in spoken English outcomes such as fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, learner interest, and self-confidence, precisely because students repeatedly (Dewi & Hiyati, 2025).

Puppet performances (including teacher-led puppet shows and student-created puppet theatre) can be understood as a distinctive stage genre with strong educational potential: beyond entertainment, puppetry carries historical, literary, and artistic value, which is why many teachers adopt it as a classroom tool (Kröger & Nupponen, 2019). At the same time, puppets have a long tradition in early childhood settings but have been used more sparsely in recent years, despite their capacity to integrate play-based intentions with academic learning goals.

Puppet theatre as a performance project can be pedagogically rich because it naturally integrates multiple literacies and collaborative skills across the whole production cycle, where students can work on scriptwriting, staging and directing, construction and manipulation techniques, and group organization; linking language arts with arts-based learning and teamwork. (Oltra, 2023). Puppet theatre can additionally be used to explore cultural heritage and traditions through folktales and oral literature, which supports multicultural learning; with an explicit focus on diversity and mutual enrichment, it can help develop positive attitudes and advance intercultural competence. (Råde, 2021).

A major pedagogical benefit of puppet performances is their power to intensify attention and engagement. Puppets' visual impact and playful aliveness can amuse children, stimulate imagination, and add spontaneity and humor to instructional moments, making learning feel enjoyable rather than pressured. (Råde, 2021). This engagement advantage is echoed in educators' perceptions: puppets are reported to positively impact engagement with learning and help mediate behaviour in the classroom. (Timmins & King, 2024).

Puppet performances also support communication and classroom participation by creating a safe interpersonal channel. Because children often accept puppets as non-threatening, sympathetic friends, puppets can reduce affective barriers and encourage expression, especially among shy or apprehensive students, supporting oral participation and public speaking (Prabhakaran & Yamat, 2017). Relatedly, puppets can create a form of dramatic distance:

when the puppet holds the emotion or message, children may find it easier to speak openly and explore ideas in a protected space. (Timmins & King, 2024).

Evidence from classroom intervention research further suggests that puppet-mediated teaching can strengthen motivation and early literacy learning as puppets help teachers connect with children across cognitive, emotional, and social domains, which leads to increased cooperation, interest, attention span, and involvement during learning interactions. (Remer & Tzuriel, 2015). Puppet performances can also contribute to socio-emotional wellbeing and behaviour guidance, with educators' reporting that puppets help communicate behaviour expectations, functioning as a practical tool for behaviour mediation in early years environments (Kröger & Nupponen, 2019).

The main implementation barriers are that educators report lack of confidence and awareness on how to use puppets pedagogically as well as lack of puppet resources (Timmins & King, 2024). These findings imply that in order to successfully apply puppetry work, teachers need to receive concrete models (routines, scripts, role cards, assessment rubrics) within activities that are aligned to clear language outcomes.

3.2 Puppets in EFL Instruction for Young Learners

In early EFL classrooms, puppets work as symbolic-play mediators: children speak through a character, assign roles, and act out situations that are not literally present. This shift from "me speaking" to "my puppet speaking" allows learners to experiment with language as a representational tool through pretending, role-taking, and narrating, helping children cross boundaries between the real and the imagined, which enriches creative conversation and makes learners more willing to try language they might otherwise avoid (Ahlcrona, 2012, as cited in Khasanah & Burhan, 2022).

From a symbolic-play perspective, puppets are especially effective because they invite impersonation and character ownership. Mogollon (2024) highlights how children can treat a puppet as a real character, positioning the puppet as an alter ego that enables role-play and imaginative identity shifts that naturally

elicits functional language and pushes children to coordinate meaning across voice, gesture, and action, which fosters creative self-expression.

Puppets can amplify symbolic play through multimodal input and performance, giving children more semiotic supports for meaning-making through visual character cues, movement, and voice; Aridasarie and Rohmah (2024) describe that work with puppet character can support fluency-related features such as pronunciation, pacing, and expressive delivery, which are often difficult for young learners to practice.

Puppets are supported empirically as an-input-and-interaction scaffold for young learners' vocabulary learning that provides confidence for speaking development. One of the clearest quantitative effects appears in a pre-experimental, one-group pretest–posttest study conducted by Brilianti and Sugirin (2024) whom used puppet-picture storytelling to teach vocabulary to first-grade EFL learners. After the intervention, learners' vocabulary scores increased substantially (mean 57.86 to 88.57), and a paired-samples test indicated a statistically significant gain ($p = .000$), supporting the conclusion that puppet-picture storytelling can improve young learners' vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts.

Complementing this, Khasanah and Burhan (2022) conducted an EFL classroom action research account on teaching vocabulary to primary learners describes how instruction moved from drawings and vocabulary games toward puppet-show performance, reporting that the puppet-based stages increased learners' engagement; students were more enthusiastic and not easily bored, which supported vocabulary mastery during the cycle of implementation.

Also, a qualitative descriptive study by Aridasarie and Rohmah (2024) using puppetry work as a multimodal speaking pedagogy to build meaning and support performance, reported that these resources helped students gain confidence, and reinforced fluency and creativity while performing a puppet show in English.

Another intervention by Siregar et al. (2022) integrated hand puppets made from used socks with the Let's Read application (designed via ADDIE and tested for effectiveness), reporting statistically significant improvement from pre-test (63.7) to post-test (77.3) with a moderate N-gain (0.433). suggesting puppets can be combined with digital story resources to strengthen learning outcomes and instructional usability.

Otherwise, Yanac-Leon et al. (2021) contribute to the empirical basis for using puppets in language-oriented instruction by synthesizing research in their PRISMA-guided systematic review, set out to analyze the relationship between puppet use and the development of children's communication skills. Based on 11 empirical studies, the review concludes that there is a cause-effect relationship between puppets and communicative competencies, arguing that puppets facilitate communication largely by increasing attention and motivation and by enabling children to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas more readily.

3.3 Puppets as Tools for Speaking skills Development

Puppets strengthen language development through social interaction and scaffolded dialogue. Mogollon (2024) frames puppets as tools that can stimulate observation, mimicry, and imitation in children; processes aligned with a sociocultural view in which learning is supported by interaction and guided participation. When teachers animate a puppet as a conversational partner, the puppet can model pragmatic moves: asking questions, requesting clarification, and giving explanations. Khasanah and Burhan (2022) explicitly note that puppets can broaden classroom discussion and serve as role models for inquiry and explanation, encouraging children to contribute personal examples and experiences.

A key mechanism linking symbolic play to language development is psychological distance: when a child communicates via a puppet, errors are attributed to the puppet rather than the child, and that distance feels freeing (Iminjonova, 2024). This supports risk-taking and participation, conditions that matter for developing oral language in young learners, because children can rehearse and refine sounds, words and sentence patterns in a low-threat way

while still engaging authentically in interaction; this helps young learners internalize linguistic patterns, improve listening, build confidence, and encourage quieter students to express feelings and join group discussions (Insani, 2017).

Puppets can lower young learners' affective barriers by shifting the speaker identity from the child to a character, which makes oral production feel safer and more playful. In classroom practice, this happens through impersonation, which is deliberately built into puppet-based oral interaction activities to support participation in speaking (Mogollon, 2024). Therefore, puppets promote an increased comfort and risk-taking environment, as young learners may feel more at ease speaking to/through a puppet than speaking directly to the teacher (Bravo & del Carmen, 2020).

Because puppet work is grounded in pretend play, it naturally invites learners to invent characters, voices, and mini-stories; key pathways from symbolic play into meaningful L2 output; puppet-mediated performance contexts can build confidence through preparation and rehearsal: pairing less proficient learners with more fluent peers and giving rehearsal time supports confident delivery, improved fluency with reduced hesitation and a steadier pace, and clearer pronunciation (Aridasarie & Rohmah, 2024).

Puppet speaking tasks work especially well as social language events: learners negotiate meaning, plan a performance, and respond to peers, intentionally building peer collaboration and ownership before moving into speaking practice, emphasizing that social coordination is a prerequisite for more spontaneous oral interaction. Beyond rehearsal, puppet performances can incorporate peer-assessment, which keeps classmates attentive and gives them a role in discussing progress, strengthening participation and shared responsibility (Syafii et al., 2021).

From an empathy standpoint, puppet role-play can be leveraged as a perspective-taking routine: when learners speak as the character, they practice interpreting motives, emotions, and social intentions embedded in stories. This is reinforced when puppet use broadens classroom discussion

and prompts learners to share personal examples and experiences in response to what the puppet says or does (Iminjonova, 2024). In this way, puppet activities can simultaneously develop speaking confidence and nurture interpersonal sensitivity by making the classroom a cooperative, imaginative, and emotionally resonant space for EFL interaction.

4. EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 EFL Education in Ecuador

Ecuador's overall English proficiency remains very low. In the 2024 EF English Proficiency Index (EPI), Ecuador ranked 83 globally, with an average score of 466 (below the global average of 488); with its lowest skill being speaking (EPI speaking score 456 vs. reading 488). This poor performance is inconsistent across region: Quito metropolitan areas have high-medium proficiency (score ~517) whereas rural coastal and Amazon provinces score very low (e.g. Santa Elena 332, Galápagos 392). This means that very few young Ecuadorians achieve high English ability given, reflecting generally low exposure and attainment in the classroom.

A clear trend is that private schools and urban centers far outpace public schools in English outcomes: in public schools the technical limitations and policies often give little attention to English while in private-school teachers reported ample class time for English and strong parental support (Sevy-Biloon et al., 2020). These gaps translate to proficiency: EF testing shows Quito and coastal cities scoring in the "moderate" range (EF scores 470–520), while many rural provinces score in the "very low" range (EF scores below 400).

Ecuadorian educators cite multiple barriers to effective English instruction in early grades, including insufficient instructional time and prevalence of traditional methodology with English classes being heavily grammar-focused; also, there is lack of teacher training and qualifications, resource constraints, and low student motivation. Teachers report that much of the time dedicated to English instruction remains devoted to rote grammar and reading, with little room for interactive speaking (Álvarez et al., 2024).

At the same time, a severe teacher shortage persists: many schools lack any certified English instructor. Large districts struggle to recruit enough qualified staff: in 2014 the Ministry estimated a need for ~7,500 English teachers but only had ~4,000 (many underqualified); until recently, only a minority of teachers had formal English training, with just 15% of Ecuador's English teachers being B2-certified. In 2022 the Ministry of Education even allowed generalist tutor teachers to lead English classes without specialized training, further diluting quality (Barre-Parrales & Villafuerte, 2021).

Additionally, many students view English as a compulsory school subject rather than a useful skill; with few native-speaking peers or media exposure, children have little incentive to speak English outside class. Consequently, oral proficiency remains weak with Ecuadorian students struggling with basic speaking tasks (Soto et al., 2025).

Ecuador's consistently low English proficiency, especially in speaking, reflects a cycle in which restricted instructional time, grammar-centered practices, shortages of qualified teachers, and scarce resources reduce opportunities for meaningful oral interaction, while low motivation and minimal exposure outside school further weaken students' willingness to speak. As a result, many learners complete early schooling without developing confidence or functional communicative competence.

4.2 Fourth-Grade Learners in Private School Settings

Children in the Fourth Grade are in the middle-childhood stage, typically marked by concrete-operational thinking and rapid language growth as they expand their vocabulary and begin using increasingly complex sentence structures. By around 8 years old, they can also handle more abstract ideas and interpret meaning as their thinking becomes more logical and organized: Piaget's concrete-operational stage (roughly ages 7–11) allows them to classify information, understand concepts such as time and fractions, and reason effectively about concrete situations. As a result, they are generally

able to sustain attention for longer periods and retain more details than in earlier stages (Yanti et al., 2024).

Socially and cognitively, children in this age range also improve in perspective-taking and social reasoning as they become better at considering other people's viewpoints and responding to social cues in more nuanced ways. This development can be even more noticeable in bilingual or multilingual children, who often show stronger perspective-taking. In addition, research on the bilingual advantage suggests that bilingual children may outperform monolingual peers on certain executive-function tasks, particularly those requiring cognitive flexibility and inhibitory control, such as switching between activities or suppressing distractions. These executive strengths can support additional language learning and help children manage the cognitive demands of school tasks more effectively (Poarch & Krott, 2019).

Overall, ages 6–12 are still favorable for language learning: children are highly receptive, enjoy word games and stories, and can achieve strong proficiency. (Pronunciation accent tends to be easier for younger children, but school-age learners still develop solid grammar and vocabulary.) In bilingual settings, the early pairing of English and Spanish can leverage these developmental strengths, yielding both linguistic and cognitive benefits (Villafuerte & Mosquera, 2020).

In Ecuador, private education is predominantly attended by middle- and upper-income families; private school tuition ranges widely (roughly US$200–2000+ per month). plus, costs for books, materials and uniforms, placing it beyond most low-income households (López, 2024). Consequently, private pupils are overwhelmingly from high-income families from urban centers like Guayaquil, that have discretionary income to spend on education and extracurriculars (Clavijo et al., 2024).

These affluent families often make additional investments in English learning. It is common for parents to enroll children in supplementary English programs – ranging from after-school academies in Guayaquil to immersion courses abroad. Indeed, many middle-class families spend on private tutoring

(typically US$10–30 per hour) or send children to short-term study tours overseas; also, higher-income parents may travel or work internationally, giving children extra exposure to English and signaling the language's future value (Chicaiza & Valle, 2025).

Private elementary schools in Guayaquil tend to offer more resources and smaller classes than the average means more individual attention; many offer explicitly bilingual orientation that offer English as the primary medium of instruction, preparing students for global curricula and qualifications. Therefore, English instruction is intensive and immersive well over 15 hours of English per week– far above the handful of hours required by government minimums (Cuzco, 2024).

In Guayaquil private schools have well-equipped language labs, libraries with English materials, interactive whiteboards or computers for language learning, and frequent use of audio-visual media, while teachers are often required to hold specialized English-teaching credentials or international certifications; many schools also recruit native or near-native English-speaking staff. (Chicaiza & Valle, 2025). Overall, the private-school environment in Guayaquil is characterized by high instructional quality: ample funding for language materials and a teaching staff oriented toward bilingual education.

However, in the private school, subject of this investigation, in southern Guayaquil, fourth-grade elementary students show difficulties developing English speaking skills, struggling to communicate in the second language because they cannot retain newly learned words, meanings, and common expressions. As a result, students' performance in English is weak, reflected in low grades and a tendency to disengage in class by avoiding voluntary speaking, as they refrain from sharing their ideas because they fear being judged for mistakes or receiving negative feedback from the teacher. Their limited participation also leads to learning gaps, since they often remain silent instead of asking questions when they do not understand the lesson.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a non-experimental, descriptive and, propositive research design to diagnose speaking-related learning needs in a real educational context and, based on that diagnosis and relevant literature, design a puppet performance–based pedagogical proposal to strengthen speaking instruction for fourth-grade EFL learners at a private school in southern Guayaquil during the 2025–2026 academic year.

In the descriptive phase, data were gathered to characterize students' speaking-related needs in terms of fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence, as well as the teacher's perceptions regarding students' speaking proficiency, current classroom practices, and the feasibility of puppet-based performance activities.

In the propositive phase, the findings from the analysis inform the development of a structured sequence of puppet performance activities, including objectives, procedures, materials, roles, and interaction patterns, producing a replicable instructional framework suitable for the target context.

Key constructs

This research considers two main constructs. The first is the proposed puppet-based instructional sequence. This refers to a planned sequence of EFL lessons in which puppets are used systematically as mediating tools to stimulate oral production, foster participation, and create meaningful communicative situations.

The second construct is students' current speaking proficiency in English, operationalized through several observable dimensions:

1. Fluency: the ability to maintain speech with an appropriate flow, minimal hesitation, and continuity.
2. Accuracy: the correct use of basic grammatical structures and simple sentence patterns appropriate to the learners' level.
3. Pronunciation: the intelligible production of key sounds, word stress,

and basic intonation patterns.

4. Vocabulary: the use of topic-related words and expressions introduced or practiced during the lessons.
5. Interaction: the ability to respond to questions, initiate simple exchanges and take turns during communicative activities.

Population and Sample

The population of this study is composed of fourth-grade students enrolled in a private school located in the southern area of Guayaquil. At this grade level, students are in the early stages of formal English learning, holding an A1 level according to the CEFR, and are beginning to develop greater confidence in oral participation in the classroom. The school is currently undergoing a transition, as its English program was previously at a very basic level; in fact, English instruction comprised only two hours per week and has now been expanded to ten hours per week.

The sample consists of 27 fourth-grade students, aged 8–9 years; due to the relatively small size of the group and the feasibility of working with all its members, a census sampling strategy was used. This means that all students in the accessible population were included in the study; this approach ensures that the findings reflect the speaking skills development of the entire class.

Instruments

To address the study objectives, data was collected using two complementary instruments: a classroom speaking observation checklist and a semi-structured teacher interview guide; these instruments support a contextual needs analysis by combining the teacher's pedagogical perspective with direct classroom evidence of students' speaking behaviors.

Classroom speaking observation checklist

The Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist, adapted from the Cambridge English: Pre-A1 Starters Speaking paper, is used to document observable student speaking behaviors during regular EFL classroom activities. The instrument is organized into five sections aligned with the speaking-related

dimensions targeted by the study: (1) Fluency, (2) Accuracy, (3) Pronunciation, (4) Vocabulary, and (5) Interaction.

Within each dimension, the checklist provides brief descriptors that the observer can mark based on what is seen and heard during classroom speaking tasks, including a short example of student utterances or interactional behaviors that justify the markings. This instrument produces structured observational data that can be summarized to identify patterns of need across the five dimensions and to guide the selection of scaffolds, language supports, and interaction formats in the designed puppet performance sequence.

The checklist uses a 5-point rating scale for each dimension:

- 5 = Highly developed/proficient
- 4 = Generally developed/proficient
- 3 = Moderately developed
- 2 = Limited development
- 1 = Very limited development

Total scores range from 5 (minimum) to 25 (maximum). Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies) were calculated to characterize students' current speaking profile across the five dimensions. The observations were carried out during regularly scheduled speaking activities over a two-week period, from January 19 to January 30, 2026. observations were carried out.

To establish content validity, the adapted rubric was reviewed by an experienced EFL advisor to ensure that:

1. Descriptors accurately reflect A1-level speaking performance.
2. The five criteria adequately cover speaking proficiency constructs.
3. The 5-point scale provides appropriate differentiation between performance levels.

Inter-rater reliability was established by using two independent raters who observe the same speaking activity at the same time and complete the

checklist separately without discussing their judgments. Prior to the observation, both raters reviewed the checklist descriptors and agree on shared scoring criteria to reduce interpretation differences; any discrepancies were examined through a brief reconciliation procedure to identify the source of disagreement.

Semi-structured teacher interview guide

The semi-structured interview guide is designed to explore the fourth-grade EFL teacher's perceptions of students' current speaking proficiency, the most frequent speaking difficulties observed in class, as well as factors influencing students' willingness and confidence to speak, and current instructional and assessment practices for speaking. In addition, the guide includes questions that examine the feasibility of puppet-based performance activities in the target context, including the teacher's prior experience with performance-based strategies, expected benefits of puppet use for speaking development, anticipated implementation challenges, and support needs.

The interview guide contains 12 open-ended questions, organized into five thematic sections: (1) current speaking proficiency (questions 1-3), (2) current instructional practices (questions 4-6), (3) confidence and engagement (question 7), (4) experience with performance-based instruction (questions 8-9), and (5) feasibility of puppet-based activities (questions 10-12).

The interview lasted approximately 30-40 minutes and was audio-recorded with the teacher's consent. If the teacher declines recording, detailed handwritten notes were taken. The interview was conducted at the end of the observation period, in a quiet, private location at the school.

Data collection procedures

Data collection took place over a four-week period during the 2025–2026 school year and was carried out in two phases. During Phase 1 (Weeks 1–2), both researchers independently observed two to three regular speaking activities. Each observation lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, and researchers completed the Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist independently either during the observation or immediately afterward. These

observations were scheduled during normal class time to ensure minimal disruption to instruction.

During Phase 2 (Week 3), a semi-structured interview was conducted with the fourth-grade EFL teacher. The interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and took place at a specified location, such as the teacher's classroom during planning time. With the teacher's consent, the interview was audio-recorded, and transcription was completed within one week of the interview. All data collection procedures have been approved by the appropriate authority, such as the school administration and the university committee.

Data analysis

Quantitative data from the Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist was analyzed using descriptive statistics. For each speaking dimension—fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and interaction— ratings were summarized through mean scores to describe the group's overall speaking profile. When two independent observers rate the same speaking activity, inter-rater reliability was examined using percent agreement and Cohen's kappa coefficient. Kappa values were interpreted using a target criterion of $\kappa \geq 0.75$ to indicate substantial agreement. Results were presented in a table summarizing the group's performance across the five dimensions.

Qualitative data from the Teacher Interview was analyzed using thematic content analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis included transcription and familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes across codes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report supported by illustrative quotes. Codes and themes were organized around the study's key areas, including students' speaking needs, current instructional practices, and the feasibility of puppet-based activities.

Finally, findings from both instruments were integrated through triangulation to develop a comprehensive needs analysis, which informed the design of the puppet performance-based pedagogical proposal aligned with Specific Objective 3.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on data collected through the Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist that provides a quantitative profile of the group's speaking performance across five dimensions—fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and interaction— and a semi-structured teacher interview that offers qualitative insight into the contextual and affective factors that shape students' oral participation and classroom performance.

Findings are reported in a complementary way, first describing the observed speaking profile, then presenting the interview results, and finally integrating both sources through triangulation to develop a comprehensive needs analysis. This integrated interpretation establishes the evidence base for designing the puppet performance-based pedagogical proposal.

Findings from the Observation Checklist

Table 1.

Group Speaking Profile Based on Observation Checklist

Speaking dimension	Rater 1	Rater 2	Mean score	Agreement	Percent agreement	Cohen's κ
Fluency	2	2	2.0	Yes	100%	1.00
Accuracy	3	3	3.0	Yes	100%	1.00
Pronunciation	2	2	2.0	Yes	100%	1.00
Vocabulary	3	3	3.0	Yes	100%	1.00
Interaction	4	4	4.0	Yes	100%	1.00
Overall			**2.8**		**100%**	**1.00**

Note. Scores range from 1 to 5 according to the Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist descriptors (1 = Very limited, 5 = Excellent). Values represent the group's overall rating for each speaking dimension.

Based on the checklist descriptors and both raters' observation notes, the group's speaking profile reflects limited fluency, evidenced by students' tendency to produce only a few words at a time, with brief personal opinions, limited sentence connection, and frequent pauses that interrupt continuous

speech. Pronunciation is also limited, which both observers relate to little exposure to speaking English: learners can produce short and basic sentences, but many sounds are unclear and are strongly influenced by the first language, which reduces clarity and may require listener effort to understand.

In contrast, accuracy is basic, meaning students show some control of simple structures but commit frequent errors, especially when they cannot rely on written support, since their oral production depends heavily on rules and examples from the textbook; when the book or notes are not available, confusion increases and grammatical mistakes become more noticeable. A similar pattern appears in vocabulary: both rates indicate that students' lexical range is largely textbook-based, and that lack of consistent repetition leads to forgetting and difficulty recalling words during speaking tasks, which limits elaboration and contributes to short responses.

The strongest area is interaction: most students can generally follow and respond to teacher instructions, and the classroom climate is described as calm and supportive; however, both observers note that comprehension and participation decrease when instructions are too long or multi-step, causing some students to get lost or confused.

Overall, observers noted that students often avoid speaking English beyond what is strictly necessary, tend to give short, guided responses rather than spontaneous speech, and show anxiety when asked to speak without written support or to produce longer answers; contextual factors such as a traditional book-centered approach, limited resources, and occasionally lengthy oral instructions appear to constrain motivation, creativity, and engagement, whereas structured tasks, clear instructions, repetition, and more dynamic speaking conditions seem to improve confidence and participation.

Findings from the Teacher Interview

Table 2.

Interview Findings: Thematic Content Analysis

Theme	Description	Key codes	Example quote(s)
Affective barriers	Students are beginners; fear blocks participation	beginner level, fear of mistakes, fear of judgement, vocabulary limitations	“speaking ability beginners”; “afraid… pronunciation”; “fear… laughed or judge”
Confidence-centered instruction	Daily speaking practice; activities chosen to build confidence	singing for confidence, daily oral interaction, confidence as assessment focus	“start… singing”; “every day they practice”; “I practice the confidence”
Confidence shown through voluntary participation	Confidence is observed when students speak without prompting	volunteer answers, spontaneous participation	“volunteer answers… without being called”
Puppets feasibility	Puppets expected to engage; distraction must be managed	engagement potential, overexcitement risk, need examples, clear outcomes	“puppets… powerful effects”; “over excitement… distracted”; “examples… clear outcomes”

Note. Themes were generated through thematic content analysis; codes were derived inductively from the teacher’s responses and grouped into themes aligned with the study’s focus.

Overall, the teacher frames speaking as a gradual learning process for a group that is still at the beginning stages of English as a foreign language, emphasizing that learners are “beginners” because they are acquiring the language “from 0,” and that improvement depends on continued effort and practice. Within this context, the interview highlights that the most salient barrier to oral production is not only linguistic difficulty but also the emotional experience associated with speaking in front of others.

A central theme is that students’ speaking needs are strongly influenced by fear and self-consciousness. The teacher identifies students’ hesitation to

speak as primarily rooted in concerns about pronunciation, noting that children are frequently afraid to speak because they believe their pronunciation is incorrect. This fear is reinforced by broader performance anxieties, such as fear of making mistakes and fear of being laughed at or judged by peers. In addition, the teacher points to limited vocabulary knowledge as another factor that affects willingness to speak, suggesting that students may avoid oral participation when they are unsure of the words they need.

In terms of current instructional practices, the interview suggests that classroom speaking opportunities are frequent and that activities are intentionally oriented toward building confidence. The teacher explains that students have extensive exposure to English instruction during the week and that oral interaction is practiced daily.

To support participation, the teacher describes using singing as a preferred speaking-related activity, explaining that songs are enjoyable for the group and help establish confidence. Notably, the teacher's approach to assessment also reflects a confidence-centered orientation, as they emphasize practicing students' confidence in speaking rather than prioritizing accuracy-focused evaluation. This indicates that, within this classroom context, speaking instruction is already framed around affective support and participation.

Another relevant theme concerns how the teacher recognizes the development of speaking confidence in observable classroom behavior. The interview indicates that a key marker of increasing confidence is voluntary participation: students begin offering answers without being called on. This criterion is significant because it aligns confidence with initiative and spontaneity, rather than mere compliance with teacher prompts. From the perspective of speaking development, voluntary participation may be interpreted as a meaningful indicator that students feel safer taking linguistic risks and are more willing to engage orally in front of others.

Regarding performance-based instruction, the teacher reports not having used drama, acting, or storytelling activities and states that these approaches had not been previously considered, as other resources were typically used. Even

so, the teacher expresses a positive expectation about the potential value of puppets for speaking development, stating that introducing puppets could have powerful effects because students become more engaged.

At the same time, the teacher identifies clear implementation challenges: they anticipate that students may initially become overexcited, which could lead to increased noise and distraction. To address feasibility and sustainability, the teacher specifies the type of support needed to implement puppet performance activities effectively, particularly examples of age-appropriate performance tasks that include clear outcomes. This response indicates that successful implementation may depend on structured lesson designs that balance engagement with classroom management, including explicit procedures, step-by-step guidance, and well-defined speaking goals.

Integrated Findings: Triangulation and Needs Analysis

The Observation Checklist provided a clear performance profile across five speaking dimensions, showing limited fluency and pronunciation, basic accuracy and vocabulary, and comparatively stronger interaction. This quantitative pattern indicates that students can generally follow classroom exchanges and respond appropriately, but they struggle to sustain oral production, connect ideas into longer utterances, and maintain clarity in pronunciation.

The teacher interview helped explain why this profile emerges in the classroom. The teacher described the group as beginner-level learners who are acquiring English from scratch, and emphasized that fear is a central barrier to speaking, particularly fear of incorrect pronunciation, fear of making mistakes, and fear of being judged or laughed at by peers. These affective factors strongly reduce students' willingness to take risks in oral production.

Findings from both the observation and the interview highlighted strengths and contextual opportunities that can be leveraged. The observation results showed that interaction was the strongest dimension, and the teacher described frequent daily opportunities for oral practice within a calm and

supportive classroom atmosphere. The teacher also indicated that confidence development becomes visible when students begin volunteering without being called, which provides an important behavioral marker of progress that complements the checklist profile.

Table 3.

Integrated Findings

Speaking area	Observation result	Interview evidence	Integrated need	Design decision for puppet proposal
Fluency	2 (Limited)	Brief answers, pauses; little sentence development	Increase continuous speech in a safe way	Gradual output frames
Pronunciation	2 (Limited)	Fear pronunciation is wrong; anxiety/judgment	Build pronunciation and confidence	Warm-ups, choral practice, gentle correction
Accuracy	3 (Basic)	Textbook-based, no feedback.	Move from supported to independent grammar use	Controlled structures, scaffolded speaking prompts
Vocabulary	3 (Basic)	Textbook-based; forget without repetition	Improve retrieval and recycling	Small word sets, spaced repetition across sessions
Interaction	4 (Good)	Generally, respond; long instructions confuse.	Leverage interaction; improve clarity of instructions	Chunked instructions modeled tasks turn-taking routines
Feasibility	—	Puppets engage; risk overexcitement; needs examples/outcomes	Ensure manageability and clear outcomes	Clear routines, rules, short segments, defined performance goals

Note. This joint display integrates quantitative findings from the Observation Checklist and qualitative themes from the Teacher Interview through triangulation to produce a comprehensive needs analysis.

However, both data sources suggest that the primary challenge is not the absence of speaking opportunities but the quality and spontaneity of production: learners often speak only as much as necessary, prefer short, guided responses, and become less effective when tasks require extended speech without scaffolding. For this reason, the teacher emphasized the need for concrete, age-appropriate performance activities with clearly defined outcomes.

Overall, the triangulated needs analysis therefore supports a puppet performance-based proposal that uses structured speaking routines, gradual progression from supported to more independent oral production, repeated recycling of a limited set of vocabulary and grammatical patterns, and explicit classroom management procedures to channel excitement into purposeful performance. In this way, integrating the checklist and interview findings allows the proposal to respond simultaneously to what students can currently do, what prevents them from speaking more spontaneously, and what practical conditions the teacher identifies as necessary for successful implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

In relation to the main objective, the study generated an evidence-based foundation to design a puppet performance-based pedagogical framework aimed at strengthening speaking instruction for fourth-grade EFL learners in a private school in southern Guayaquil during the 2025–2026 academic year. The integration of classroom observation data and the teacher interview produced a coherent needs analysis that directly informed the structure, focus, and feasibility considerations of the proposed framework. Overall, the findings indicate that a performance-based puppet approach is pedagogically justified because it targets the most urgent speaking limitations while responding to the classroom conditions reported by the teacher.

The Observation Checklist results identified a clear speaking profile across the five dimensions. Students showed limited performance in fluency and pronunciation, suggesting difficulty sustaining speech, connecting ideas into longer utterances, and maintaining clarity in oral production. In contrast, accuracy and vocabulary were at a basic but functional level, indicating that learners can produce simple structures and use familiar words, although these skills are not yet stable or expansive. Interaction emerged as the strongest dimension, suggesting that students are generally able to respond and participate when tasks are structured and teacher guidance is present.

The teacher interview provided an explanatory layer that clarified the factors behind students' speaking performance and the conditions necessary for improvement. The teacher described students as beginner learners, emphasizing that speaking development is a gradual process. The interview highlighted affective barriers, especially fear of pronunciation errors, fear of making mistakes, and fear of being judged or laughed at, as key determinants of students' willingness to speak. These perceptions confirm that speaking instruction should prioritize a safe environment, predictable routines, short and clear instructions, and structured tasks that gradually increase speaking demands.

The findings supported the development of a structured sequence of puppet performance activities aligned with communicative objectives. Triangulation showed

strong convergence between the observed profile and the teacher's explanation of fear and reliance on written support, indicating that the framework must build confidence while progressively expanding oral output. The resulting proposal therefore emphasizes consistent routines, strong teacher modeling, guided rehearsal, and brief performance moments that allow students to practice speaking with reduced anxiety. In addition, the framework strategically leverages the group's relative strength in interaction by prioritizing paired and small-group dialogues that scaffold turn-taking and maintain engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the speaking needs identified, it is recommended that speaking instruction prioritize fluency and pronunciation through repeated, short speaking cycles that build automaticity without increasing anxiety. Classroom practice should include brief choral repetition, modeled pronunciation of key chunks, and routine opportunities for students to produce slightly longer utterances over time. Because accuracy and vocabulary were basic but not fully consolidated, instruction should recycle a limited set of functional language across several sessions to support retention and retrieval. Confidence should be treated as a key learning outcome, with progress tracked not only through language performance but also through behavioral indicators such as increased voluntary participation and reduced hesitation.

To respond to the teacher's perceptions, it is recommended that the classroom climate explicitly protect students from fear of judgment by establishing consistent norms for respectful listening and supportive correction. Feedback should be delivered through low-pressure techniques such as gentle recasts, teacher modeling, and whole-class praise focused on effort and clarity rather than error. Since the teacher reported dependence on written resources, it is advisable to use scaffolds strategically while gradually fading them to support more independent speaking. Instructional directions should remain short, chunked, and modeled, especially because lengthy instructions were identified as a potential barrier to comprehension and participation.

To strengthen feasibility and implementation of the proposal, it is recommended that puppet performance activities be implemented with clear routines and classroom management support. Establishing "puppet rules," assigning roles (speaker, puppet handler, audience listener), and using time-limited micro-performances can maintain engagement while preventing overexcitement from disrupting learning. The proposal should also include clear success criteria for each session, so outcomes are observable and consistent with communicative goals.

As a broader recommendation for future practice and school-level decision-making, it would be beneficial to integrate speaking instruction into a regular routine that values

participation and confidence as much as linguistic correctness. Providing teachers with ongoing support, such as collaborative planning, access to simple performance materials, and brief training on scaffolded speaking routines, can increase sustainability. For future research or later implementation stages, it is recommended to evaluate the proposal's impact through pre- and post-measures of speaking performance using the same checklist dimensions, complemented by qualitative feedback from students and the teacher regarding confidence and engagement during puppet-based speaking tasks.

PROPOSAL

The pedagogical proposal “Puppet Talk Time” was designed in response to the identified needs and is organized as a three-session sequence with a gradual scaffolding progression, combining clear routines, modeled dialogues, guided practice, and brief performances to promote sustained speaking, clearer pronunciation, and more voluntary participation in a supportive classroom environment.

At the same time, performance-based tasks can be designed to gradually build fluency through structured dialogues, repeated practice, and incremental expansion of utterances from short phrases to connected sentences, while also supporting pronunciation through modeling, choral practice, and routine feedback that does not threaten students’ confidence. By addressing fluency and pronunciation within a supportive, engaging, and highly structured performance format, the puppet-based intervention is positioned as a targeted solution that aligns with students’ needs, fits the classroom context, and responds directly to the teacher’s expectations and implementation requirements.

General Information	
Project Title:	Supporting speaking skills development through the use of puppets among fourth-grade EFL learners at a private school in the city of Guayaquil in the scholastic year 2025-2026
Project Team:	Correa Guerra, Marión Jocelyn; Manzaba Loor, Leisly Jamell
Main Objective	To develop students’ English speaking-skills by participating in a three-session puppet performance sequence that progressively builds confidence, improves pronunciation clarity, and increases fluency through structured, age-appropriate dialogues and short performances.

Specific Objective	1. To increase students' willingness to speak in English through highly guided, short dialogues with strong modeling and support.			
	2. To develop students' fluency and pronunciation clarity by expanding speaking turns from single sentences to short, connected exchanges.			
	3. To promote more independent and sustained oral production by guiding students to create and perform short puppet scenes.			
Execution Time	***Starting:***	***19-01-26***	***Ending:***	***30-01-26***

Project Description

The pedagogical proposal is justified by the convergent evidence obtained through the observation and the teacher interview, which revealed a clear and prioritized set of speaking needs that are not being fully addressed by current classroom routines. Within this evidence base, a puppet performance-based proposal offers a low-risk communicative context that can reduce self-consciousness and shift attention away from the individual speaker.

STRUCTURE OF THE PROPOSAL

The proposal is organized as a short cycle of 3 sessions that follow a gradual scaffolding progression, supporting learners as they move from highly supported speaking to more independent and confident oral production. In the first phase (Session 1), the focus is on confidence and controlled production; students learn the routine and expectations for puppet work, and they practice short speaking exchanges through structured models, choral repetition, and guided rehearsal. At this stage, the goal is to reduce fear of making mistakes, strengthen pronunciation confidence, and establish a predictable format that supports participation.

In the second phase (Sessions 2), activities remain scaffolded with sentence frames and cue cards, but students begin to make small adaptations, such as swapping vocabulary, adding personal information, or extending responses. Speaking practice shifts toward short dialogues with clearer turn-taking, gradually increasing output from single sentences to two to four connected sentences per interaction. The emphasis is on sustaining speech for longer, using target vocabulary accurately, and improving clarity with teacher support.

In the third phase (Sessions 3), the proposal moves into a mini-showcase format; students create short puppet scenes based on prompts rather than fully scripted dialogues. Supports are reduced but still available when needed, and the focus is placed on producing more sustained speech, clearer pronunciation, and greater spontaneity, including increased willingness to volunteer and participate without relying entirely on written support.

Because overexcitement is anticipated as a classroom challenge, classroom management is directly built into the structure of the proposal. This includes establishing clear “puppet rules” that define when puppets can talk and when they must rest, delivering short and chunked instructions supported by consistent modeling, enforcing time limits for performances, and assigning clear roles so every student remains actively engaged throughout the session.

Table 4.

Phased Implementation Plan

Phase	Sessions	Main purpose	Key speaking focus	Level of support	Expected product
Phase 1: Controlled Production	1	Establish routines, reduce fear, build participation	Pronunciation confidence	High	Short scripted puppet dialogues
Phase 2: Guided Semi-Performance	2	Expand output and begin semi-spontaneous speaking	Fluency growth	Medium	Semi-scripted role-plays / adapted dialogues
Phase 3: Mini-Showcase	3	Increase independence and spontaneity in a safe format	Sustained speaking	Lower	Short original puppet scenes

Instructional Sequence

Each session follows the same predictable routine; this consistency is intended to reduce anxiety and help manage excitement, while progressively increasing students' speaking length and independence over time. the session begins with a short greeting and a quick reminder of the "puppet rules,", then the teacher does a very short "puppet voice" warm-up with sounds and words that children will use that day.

After that, the teacher introduces a tiny language goal for the session. This includes one simple speaking purpose, one short sentence pattern, and a small set of words that are repeated throughout the lesson so children can remember them. Next, the teacher models a very short puppet dialogue, showing exactly what children should say and do.

The session then moves into guided practice; children rehearse the mini-dialogue in pairs or small groups using supports like picture cue cards or sentence strips, while the teacher helps them say the words clearly and keep the dialogue going. The session ends with quick feedback and reflection. The teacher highlights one thing the children did well and gives one simple next step. The goal is to finish with encouragement, so children leave the activity feeling proud and ready to try again.

Table 5.

Standardized Session Routine

Stage	Time	Content	Primary goal
1. Hello routine and puppet rules	5 min	Greeting and “puppet rules	Classroom management
2. Warm-up	5 min	Choral repeat with gestures	Pronunciation and confidence
3. Teacher demonstration	5 min	Teacher performs a dialogue	Show the target
4. Guided practice	10 min	Kids repeat the dialogue with puppets.	Build fluency
6. Performance	10 min	2–3 pairs perform; others do “audience job”	Low-stakes performance
7. Praise and reflection	5 min	“Today I said…”	Reinforce confidence

SESSION DEVELOPMENT

Session 1 — "Meet My Puppet Voice!"

Learning goal: By the end of the session, students will be able to use a puppet to say a short greeting and introduce their name using a simple model, with clear voice and turn-taking.

Materials needed

- 1 puppet per pair (simple paper-bag/sock puppets)
- Teacher puppet for modeling
- Name cards or sticky labels and markers
- Mini dialogue strip with the 2–3 key lines
- Timer
- "Puppet rules" mini poster

1) Welcome (3–5 min)

Teacher does:

- Greets students and introduces the puppet as a "class helper."
- Presents rules
  - "Puppets talk softly."
  - "Puppets listen when the teacher talks."
  - "One puppet talks at a time."
  - "We don't laugh at mistakes—we help."

Students do:

- Repeat the rules once with a quick call-and-response

2) Puppet voice warm-up (4–6 min)

Teacher does:

- Quick choral repetition with the puppet: "Hello!" "My name is…"
- Models clear, slow pronunciation of key words: hello, name, I'm.
- Uses "say it like the puppet" to lower pressure.

Students do:

- Repeat as a class, then in pairs (quietly) with their puppet.

3) Language focus (5–7 min)

Teacher does:

- Shows the mini dialogue strip and reads it once.
- Underlines the two key lines students must learn:
  "Hello, I'm ___."

  "What's your name?" / "My name is ___."

Students do:

- Track with finger on the strip, repeat line by line.

4) Teacher modeling (3–5 min)

Teacher does:

- Performs a brief puppet dialogue with the puppet
- States success criteria in kid-friendly terms:
  "Use the two lines."
  "Speak clearly."
  "Take turns."

Students do:

- Listen and identify the lines they heard

5) Guided practice with scaffolds (10–12 min)

Teacher does:

- Puts students in pairs and gives each pair a puppet and dialogue strip.
- Circulates and supports with gentle correction:

Students do:

- Practice the dialogue 3 times, switching roles each time:
  Round 1: read with support
  Round 2: cover one word
  Round 3: try without looking for 5–10 seconds at a time

6) Micro-performance (6–8 min)

Teacher does:

- Selects 3–5 pairs to present
- Assigns "audience job": listen for the greeting and clap at the end.

Students do:

- Perform the dialogue with puppets.
- Audience listens and claps; no comments from peers yet.

7) Feedback and reflection (3–5 min)

Teacher does:

- One class praise: "Many puppets spoke clearly."
- One improvement target: "Next time, slower 'My name is…'"

Students do:

- Repeat the "next step" once as a class.
- End with a positive closure phrase: "My puppet can speak!"

Session 2 — "Puppet Talk Show!"

Learning goal: By the end of the session, students will be able to carry out a short puppet interview by asking and answering at least two questions about preferences.

Materials needed

- 1 puppet per pair
- Teacher puppet
- “Talk show” sign
- Interview cue cards
- Item picture cards
- Sentence frame strip for interview structure

1) Welcome (3–5 min)

Teacher does:

- Quick greeting with the puppet and reviews puppet rules
- Announces today’s format: “Today our puppets are on a talk show!”

Students do:

- Quick repeat of one key line: “Do you like ___?”.

2) Puppet voice warm-up (4–6 min)

Teacher does:

- Rapid choral practice of the three “power lines”:
  “Do you like ___?”
  “Yes, I do / No, I don’t…because ___.”.

Students do:

- Repeat as a class, then practice in pairs quietly.

3) Language focus (5–7 min)

Teacher does:

- Shows the interview strip with the sequence:
  Greeting + name
  Question 1 (like/dislike)
  Question 2 (like/dislike)
- Clarifies roles:
  Puppet A = Host
  Puppet B = Guest
- Explains success criteria:
  “Ask 2 questions.”
  “Answer in full sentences.”
  “Use because 1 time.”.

Students do:

- Repeat the sequence with the teacher.
- Decide roles with their partner.

4) Teacher modeling (3–5 min)

Teacher does:

- Performs a puppet dialogue:
  “Host: “Hello! What’s your name?”

“Guest: “Hello, I’m ___.”

“Host: “Do you like ___?”

“Guest: “Yes, I do. I like ___ because ___.”

“Host: “Do you like ___?”

“Guest: “No, I don’t. I don’t like ___.”

“Host: “Thank you!”

“Guest: “Goodbye!”.”

Students do:

- Identify how many questions they heard.
- Identify the “because” sentence.

5) Guided practice with scaffolds (10–12 min)

Teacher does:

- Gives each pair: interview strip, 2 question cue cards, item cards and reason cards
- Circulates and supports

Students do:

- Practice the dialogue 3 times, switching roles each time:

  Round 1: follow the strip exactly

  Round 2: choose different item cards for Q1 and Q2

  Round 3: add one extra line or add “because” to both answers if able.

6) Micro-performance (6–8 min)

Teacher does:

- Selects 4–6 pairs to present
- Audience job: listen for “because” and thumbs-up when they hear it.”

Students do:

- Perform short dialogues with puppets.
- Audience responds with thumbs-up and applause.

7) Feedback and reflection (3–5 min)

Teacher does:

- Gives one class praise linked to goals
- Gives one simple next step

Students do:

- Repeat the “next step” once.
- Exit check: students say to puppet: “I like ___ because ___.”

Session 3 — “At the Restaurant!”

Learning goal: By the end of the session, students will be able to create and perform a short puppet restaurant scene using at least four speaking turns.

Materials needed

- 1 puppet per pair
- Teacher puppet
- Picture cards of food/drinks
- “Restaurant” prop: simple sign
- Prompt cards
- Mini word bank

1) Welcome (3–5 min)

Teacher does:

- Quick greeting with the puppet.
- Reviews puppet rules
- Announces:“Last time we were at the store. Today we are at the restaurant!!”

Students do:

- Choral repeat: “Can I have ___, please?” / “Thank you!”

2) Puppet voice warm-up (4–6 min)

Teacher does:

- Choral practice of key chunks with clear pronunciation:
  “Can I have… please?”
  “Anything else?”
  “No, thank you.”
  Models polite intonation and clear endings.

Students do:

- Repeat chorally, then practice quietly in pairs.

3) Language focus (5–7 min)

Teacher does:

- Shows menu/food picture cards and checks meaning.
- Posts the prompt sequence for today: Greeting → Order → Response → Anything else? → Closing
- Assigns roles:
  Puppet A = Customer
  Puppet B = Waiter/Server

Students do:

- Choose 2 food/drink items they will use.
- Practice saying the items clearly.

4) Teacher modeling (3–5 min)

Teacher does:

- Performs a puppet dialogue:

“Hello! Welcome!”

“Hello. Can I have pizza, please?”

“Sure! Here you are.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes, juice, please.” / “No, thank you.”

“Thank you. Goodbye.”

- Highlights success criteria:
  “Use 4+ turns.”

  “Say please/thank you.”

Students do:

- Count turns (teacher asks: “How many turns did we hear?”).
- Identify the polite words..

5) Guided practice with scaffolds (10–12 min)

Teacher does:

- Gives each pair: item cards and prompt sequence cards
- Circulates and reminds prompt order, encourages full phrases.

Students do:

- Build their scene with prompts:
  Round 1: practice with prompts visible

  Round 2: practice again, adding “Anything else?” and one extra order

  Round 3: performance rehearsal with clear voice and smooth turn-taking.

6) Micro-performance (6–8 min)

Teacher does:

- Selects 4–6 pairs to present
- Audience job: listen for polite words and clap.

Students do:

- Perform short dialogues with puppets.
- Audience signals when they hear “please/thank you” and applauds.

7) Feedback and reflection (3–5 min)

Teacher does:

- Gives one class praise linked to goals
- Gives one simple next step

Students do:

- Exit check: each student says one order line: “Can I have ___, please?”

Budget

Project	Supporting speaking skills development through the use of puppets among fourth-grade EFL learners at a private school in the city of Guayaquil in the scholastic year 2025-2026		
Responsible	Correa Guerra, Marión Jocelyn; Manzaba Loor, Leisly Jamell		
Date	19-01-26		
Institution	Private non-bilingual school		
		UNIT COST	SUBTOTAL
Diagnostic phase	Equipment		
	Laptop (lesson planning & assessment)*	$600,00	$600,00
	Printing speaking rubrics & observation checklists	$0,25	$5,50
Implementation phase	Per diem		
	Food expenses	$5,00	$50,00
	Office Supplies		
	Software: Microsoft Office & Canva	$0,00	$0,00
	Paper ream (A4 size)*	$4,00	$4,00
	Color Ink (kit)*	$10,00	$40,00
	Cambrela*	$0,50	$1,50
	Erasers	$0,25	$0,50
	Pencils	$0,30	$0,60
	Craft materials-glue	$2,00	$4,00
	Markers*	$0,50	$2,00
	Cardboard	$1,00	$3,00
	Scissors	$1,20	$2,40
	Portable speaker*	$30,00	$30,00
	Printing lesson plans*	$0,25	$1,00
	Equipment		
	Puppets	$10,00	$40,00
	Printer*	$200,00	$200,00
	Projector*	$76,00	$76,00
	Internet*	$45,00	$45,00
	Whiteboard*	$100,00	$100,00
Project evaluation	Office supplies		$45,00
	Printing speaking rubrics & observation checklists	$0,25	$1,25
	Subtotal	$1.086	$1.252
	Contingency reserves	5%	$63
		TOTAL BUDGET	$1.314

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APPENDICES

UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA
DE SANTIAGO DE GUAYAQUIL

Facultad de
Artes y Humanidades

FAH-PINE-016-2025
Guayaquil, 17 de diciembre del 2025

Mgtr. Leonidas Prieto
Director General
Unidad Educativa Master School
En su despacho.

Reciba un cordial saludo. Por el presente solicito a usted, muy comedidamente y salvo su mejor criterio, se permita a las señoritas Marion Jocelyn Correa Guerra con CI# 0931804280 y Leisly Jamell Manzaba Loor con CI# 0803131473 estudiantes del 8vo ciclo de la carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros – inglés, de la Facultad de Artes y Humanidades de la Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil, realizar recolección de información para elaborar su Trabajo de Integración Curricular (Proyecto de titulación) denominado "Supporting Speaking Skills Development through the Use of Puppets among Fourth-Grade EFL Learners at a Private School in the City of Guayaquil in the Scholastic Year 2025-2026: An Observational Study"

Las señoritas Correa y Manzaba estarán realizando dicha actividad en la clase de inglés que reciben los estudiantes en la institución que usted acertadamente dirige, durante el mes de diciembre 2025 y enero 2026.

De antemano agradezco la atención brindada.

Atentamente,

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CARRERA DE PEDAGOGÍA DE LOS IDIOMAS NACIONALES Y EXTRANJEROS - INGLÉS

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EXPERT VALIDATION FORM

This form is used to validate research instruments through expert judgment. Please review the instrument and rate each criterion.

Expert Identification

Expert full name: Melissa Loor Moreira

Academic degree / specialization: Magíster (Mgs.) in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Institution / affiliation: Universidad Catolica de Santiago de Guayaquil

Email: melissa.loor1@cu.ucsg.edu.ec

Instrument(s) Evaluated

[√] Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Guide

[√] Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist

Title of study / project (optional): Supporting Speaking Skills Development through the Use of Puppets among Fourth-Grade EFL Learners at a Private School in the City of Guayaquil in the Scholastic Year 2025–2026

Target population: Fourth-grade EFL students (A1 CEFR level), ages 8–9, enrolled in a private school in southern Guayaquil

Context (school/grade/subject): Private primary school, Grade 4, English as a Foreign Language

Global Evaluation: Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist

Rating scale (circle one): 1 = Not adequate 2 = Needs major revision 3 = Needs minor revision 4 = Adequate

If you choose 1–3, please write specific suggestions to improve the instrument.

Criterion	Rating (1–4)	Observations / suggestions for improvement
Relevance to objectives / variables	4	The checklist directly measures the five speaking dimensions (fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, interaction) that correspond to the study's specific objectives. All dimensions are theoretically grounded in communicative competence frameworks.
Clarity of wording and instructions	4	Instructions are concise and accessible. Each dimension is accompanied by a five-point descriptor scale that is unambiguous and appropriate for the A1 CEFR level of the target population.
Coherence / logical organization	4	The checklist follows a consistent internal structure across all five dimensions. The progression from fluency to interaction reflects established models of speaking proficiency assessment.
Sufficiency (covers what it must measure)	4	The five dimensions adequately cover the construct of speaking proficiency at A1 level. The inclusion of both linguistic (accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation) and interactional (fluency, interaction) dimensions ensures construct coverage.
Appropriateness for the target context	4	The instrument is well-calibrated for fourth- grade EFL learners in a Ecuadorian private school context. Descriptors reflect realistic expectations for A1-level production and classroom-based observation conditions.

Overall judgment: ☑ Approved without changes ☐ Approved with minor changes

☐ Approved with major changes ☐ Not approved

Content Validity: Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist Dimensions and Descriptors (rate each dimension)

Dimension	Relevance (1–4)	Clarity (1–4)	Suggestions
Fluency	4	4	Descriptors appropriately capture the continuum from minimal single-word utterances to sustained connected speech. Suitable for A1 level.
Accuracy (Grammar)	4	4	Criterion is appropriately scoped for the target level. Descriptors reflect realistic expectations without conflating accuracy with complexity.
Pronunciation	4	4	Descriptors focus on intelligibility rather than native- like accuracy, which is appropriate for the age group and proficiency level.
Vocabulary	4	4	Aligns with A1 lexical expectations. The distinction between textbook-dependent and spontaneous vocabulary use is pedagogically sound.
Interaction	4	4	Captures responsiveness and participation adequately. The descriptor progression from non-responsive to proactive engagement is well-calibrated.

Global Evaluation: Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist

Rating scale (circle one): 1 = Not adequate 2 = Needs major revision 3 = Needs minor revision 4 = Adequate

If you choose 1–3, please write specific suggestions to improve the instrument.

Criterion	Rating (1–4)	Observations / suggestions for improvement
Relevance to objectives / variables	4	The twelve open-ended questions are directly aligned with the second specific objective of the study. The five thematic sections (speaking proficiency, instructional practices, confidence/engagement, performance-based instruction, and puppet feasibility) provide comprehensive coverage of the variables under investigation.
Clarity of wording and instructions	4	Questions are formulated in accessible, non- leading language. The semi-structured format allows appropriate flexibility for probing without compromising standardization across the interview.
Coherence / logical organization	4	The five-section structure follows a logical progression: from general classroom observations to specific perceptions of the proposed intervention. This sequence supports natural conversational flow and reduces respondent fatigue.
Sufficiency (covers what it must measure)	4	The guide adequately captures teacher perceptions of student speaking proficiency, current instructional approaches, affective factors, and the feasibility of puppet-based activities.
Appropriateness for the target context	4	The instrument is well-suited for a single- teacher interview in an Ecuadorian private primary school context. The question scope is realistic given the constraints of a descriptive study and the accessible population.

Overall judgment: [√] Approved without changes ☐ Approved with minor changes.

☐ Approved with major changes ☐ Not approved

Expert Signature

Name: Melissa Loor Moreira

Signature:

Melissa Loor Moreira

CLASSROOM SPEAKING OBSERVATIONAL CHECKLIST

CLASSROOM SPEAKING OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Date: 30-01-2026 Observer: Marion Jocelyn Correa Guerra

Grade/Class: 4th "A" Observer role: ☐ Researcher 1 ☑ Researcher 2

Activity/Task: Observation

Time observed: 19th to 30th Number of students present: 27

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Observe students during a regular speaking activity (whole class or group work)
- For each dimension (1-5), select the ONE level that best describes the GROUP'S OVERALL performance
- Provide specific evidence/examples in the space provided

1) FLUENCY

Select the level that best describes the group's overall performance:

☐ **5 - Very good:** Students speak in short, continuous phrases with only brief, natural pauses. They respond immediately to almost all questions and sometimes add extra information.

☐ **4 - Good:** Students produce words and short phrases with some hesitation, but they can maintain answers once started (no long pauses).

☐ **3 - Basic:** Responses are generally very short (single words or short phrases) with frequent pauses and hesitation.

☑ **2 - Limited:** Students produce isolated words with long pauses; they often stop speaking or abandon utterances.

☐ **1 - Very limited / no evidence:** Students give no response or only repeat words from the examiner without meaningful answering.

Evidence (note specific examples):

Students have difficulty continuously and often pause between words. their responses are brief and lack sentence development

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2) ACCURACY (Grammar)

Select the level that best describes the group's overall performance:

□ **5 - Very good:** Students use very simple grammar (e.g., "It's a...", "She's...", "There are...") with few errors, and errors do not interfere with meaning.

□ **4 - Good:** Simple structures are mostly correct; errors are frequent but meaning remains clear.

☑ **3 - Basic:** Many grammatical errors in simple structures, but the overall message is usually understandable.

□ **2 - Limited:** Frequent errors even in single words or short patterns; grammar often prevents the message from being clear.

□ **1 - Very limited / no evidence:** No evidence of using English structures to convey meaning.

Evidence (note specific examples):

Students show a basic control of grammar and depend heavily on written rules to speack correctly, when they don't have access to their books or notes they make mistakes.

3) PRONUNCIATION

Select the level that best describes the group's overall performance:

□ **5 - Very good:** Speech is clearly intelligible. Sounds, word stress, and basic intonation are generally accurate; occasional slips do not hinder understanding.

□ **4 - Good:** Mostly intelligible; some sounds or stress patterns are inaccurate, but the examiner can understand with little effort.

□ **3 - Basic:** Intelligibility is inconsistent; several mispronunciations, but the examiner can usually work out meaning with support.

☑ **2 - Limited:** Pronunciation problems often make understanding difficult; many words need to be repeated or clarified.

□ **1 - Very limited / no evidence:** Speech (if any) is largely unintelligible to the examiner.

Evidence (note specific examples):

Students have little exposure to speaking English. which affects their pronunciation, they can produce short and simple sentences many sounds are unclear.

4) VOCABULARY

Select the level that best describes the group's overall performance:

□ **5 - Very good:** Students use a good range of familiar words from the task (objects, colours, numbers, places, activities) and sometimes add additional appropriate words.

□ **4 - Good:** Students use the key vocabulary required by the task and a few extra words; occasional searching for words.

☑ **3 - Basic:** Students use a limited range of vocabulary; often repeat the same words; sometimes cannot name an item even when familiar.

□ **2 - Limited:** Very small vocabulary; can name only a few items or colours; often resorts to L1 or silence.

□ **1 - Very limited / no evidence:** Cannot produce relevant English words for the task.

Evidence (note specific examples):

Students demostrate a limited range of vocabulary that is mainly taken from the course textbook. When words are not practiced, they have difficulty recalling them during speaking tasks.

5) INTERACTION

Select the level that best describes the group's overall performance:

□ **5 - Very good:** Students understand almost all examiner questions on the first attempt, respond without back-up questions, maintain turn-taking, and sometimes initiate or extend the exchange.

☑ **4 - Good:** Students understand most questions; may need occasional repetition or a back-up question; respond appropriately and take turns with some support.

□ **3 - Basic:** Students need some repetition, rephrasing, or back-up questions; respond to most questions but rarely extend beyond minimal answers.

□ **2 - Limited:** Students have difficulty understanding questions even with repetition and support; give very few appropriate responses; interaction frequently breaks down.

□ **1 - Very limited / no evidence:** Students do not respond, or responses are not related to the questions even with strong support.

Evidence (note specific examples):

Most students are able to understand and respond the instructions during speaking activities. However the structions are lengthy or include several steps and some students become confused.

OVERALL OBSERVATION NOTES:

General classroom atmosphere during speaking:

The atmosphere is calm and supportive, although students tend to give short, guided responses rather than speaking spontaneously.

Notable student behaviors (engagement, anxiety, enthusiasm):

They are generally engaged but show some anxiety when speaking without written support or when required to produce longer responses.

Contextual factors affecting performance (interruptions, technical issues):

the use of the book and the limited technological resources and lengthy oral instruction occasionally interfere with student's comprehension and performance during speaking activities

Additional comments:

Students response better in dynamic environment with clear instructions, repetition and structured speaking tasks. which help increase their confidence and participation.

CLASSROOM SPEAKING OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Date: 30-01-2026 Observer: Leisly Jamell Manzaba Loor

Grade/Class: 4th "A" Observer role: ☐ Researcher 1 ☑ Researcher 2

Activity/Task: Observation

Time observed: 19th to 30th January Number of students present: 27

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Observe students during a regular speaking activity (whole class or group work)
- For each dimension (1-5), select the ONE level that best describes the GROUP'S OVERALL performance
- Provide specific evidence/examples in the space provided

1) FLUENCY

Select the level that best describes the group's overall performance:

☐ **5 - Very good:** Students speak in short, continuous phrases with only brief, natural pauses. They respond immediately to almost all questions and sometimes add extra information.

☐ **4 - Good:** Students produce words and short phrases with some hesitation, but they can maintain answers once started (no long pauses).

☐ **3 - Basic:** Responses are generally very short (single words or short phrases) with frequent pauses and hesitation.

☑ **2 - Limited:** Students produce isolated words with long pauses; they often stop speaking or abandon utterances.

☐ **1 - Very limited / no evidence:** Students give no response or only repeat words from the examiner without meaningful answering.

Evidence (note specific examples):

Students don't connect sentences; they only express their ideas with a few words. For example their personal opinions are very short.

2) ACCURACY (Grammar)

Select the level that best describes the group's overall performance:

□ **5 - Very good:** Students use very simple grammar (e.g., "It's a...", "She's...", "There are...") with few errors, and errors do not interfere with meaning.

□ **4 - Good:** Simple structures are mostly correct; errors are frequent but meaning remains clear.

☑ **3 - Basic:** Many grammatical errors in simple structures, but the overall message is usually understandable.

□ **2 - Limited:** Frequent errors even in single words or short patterns; grammar often prevents the message from being clear.

□ **1 - Very limited / no evidence:** No evidence of using English structures to convey meaning.

Evidence (note specific examples):

They rely on the grammar in books, so they can often get confuse if they don't have the material with them

3) PRONUNCIATION

Select the level that best describes the group's overall performance:

□ **5 - Very good:** Speech is clearly intelligible. Sounds, word stress, and basic intonation are generally accurate; occasional slips do not hinder understanding.

□ **4 - Good:** Mostly intelligible; some sounds or stress patterns are inaccurate, but the examiner can understand with little effort.

□ **3 - Basic:** Intelligibility is inconsistent; several mispronunciations, but the examiner can usually work out meaning with support.

☑ **2 - Limited:** Pronunciation problems often make understanding difficult; many words need to be repeated or clarified.

□ **1 - Very limited / no evidence:** Speech (if any) is largely unintelligible to the examiner.

Evidence (note specific examples):

They don't speak English often, but they can say short and basic sentences.

4) VOCABULARY

Select the level that best describes the group's overall performance:

□ **5 - Very good:** Students use a good range of familiar words from the task (objects, colours, numbers, places, activities) and sometimes add additional appropriate words.

□ **4 - Good:** Students use the key vocabulary required by the task and a few extra words; occasional searching for words.

☑ **3 - Basic:** Students use a limited range of vocabulary; often repeat the same words; sometimes cannot name an item even when familiar.

□ **2 - Limited:** Very small vocabulary; can name only a few items or colours; often resorts to L1 or silence.

□ **1 - Very limited / no evidence:** Cannot produce relevant English words for the task.

Evidence (note specific examples):

The range of vocabulary that students posses is derived solely from what the book teaches them, but if it isn't repeated consistently, they forget many words.

5) INTERACTION

Select the level that best describes the group's overall performance:

□ **5 - Very good:** Students understand almost all examiner questions on the first attempt, respond without back-up questions, maintain turn-taking, and sometimes initiate or extend the exchange.

☑ **4 - Good:** Students understand most questions; may need occasional repetition or a back-up question; respond appropriately and take turns with some support.

□ **3 - Basic:** Students need some repetition, rephrasing, or back-up questions; respond to most questions but rarely extend beyond minimal answers.

□ **2 - Limited:** Students have difficulty understanding questions even with repetition and support; give very few appropriate responses; interaction frequently breaks down.

□ **1 - Very limited / no evidence:** Students do not respond, or responses are not related to the questions even with strong support.

Evidence (note specific examples):

Most of the students can follow the teacher's instructions, but if they are too long, they tend to get lost.

OVERALL OBSERVATION NOTES:

General classroom atmosphere during speaking:

The teacher has spoken in Englis, but the students tend to avoid doing so.

Notable student behaviors (engagement, anxiety, enthusiasm):

Most students only say what is necessary when asked.

Contextual factors affecting performance (interruptions, technical issues):

Traditional way of learning solely with the book and its resources.

Additional comments:

Lack of motivation, creativity and engagement

TEACHER´S INTERVIEW

SEMI-STRUCTURED TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

PURPOSE: To explore the fourth-grade EFL teacher's perceptions of students' speaking proficiency, current instructional practices, and the feasibility of puppet-based performance activities.

DURATION: Approximately 30-40 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERVIEWER:

- Ask all questions in order
- Use probes to encourage elaboration when responses are brief
- Allow teacher to speak freely without interruption
- Take notes or record with permission
- Thank teacher for participation

CONSENT SCRIPT:

"Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your responses will help inform the design of a puppet-based speaking instruction proposal. The interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and you may skip any question. May I record this interview for transcription purposes? All data will be kept confidential and your name will not appear in any reports."

☑ Teacher consents to interview ☑ Teacher consents to recording

PART A: CURRENT SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

1. How would you describe your students' current speaking ability in English?

English is a process they are learning a foreign language from 0 so I consider their speaking ability as a beginners and with effort they can do it better

2. What are the most common difficulties your students face when speaking English in class?

Most of the time children feel afraid of speaking because they think their pronunciation is not the corect

3. In your experience, what factors most affect students' willingness to speak?

fear of making mistakes, fear of being laughed or judge can be also Vocabulary Knowledge

PART B: CURRENT INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

4. What speaking activities do you use most often, and why?

One of the activities I like to start is singing a song because my group enjoy singing and this helps to create or build the confidence

5. "How frequently do your students get opportunities for meaningful oral interaction during a typical week?"

We have 10 hours per week and 2 hours per day for every weekday so everyday they practice their oral interaction

6. How do you usually assess speaking? What aspects do you prioritize?

I prioritize the confidence of speaking the language

PART C: CONFIDENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

7. What classroom behaviors show you that students are developing confidence when speaking English?

the most important could be the volunteer answers they are participating without being called

PART D: PERFORMANCE-BASED INSTRUCTION

8. Have you ever used performance-based activities (drama, acting, storytelling) to support speaking?

a) If YES: What worked well? What challenges did you encounter?

b) If NO: What has prevented you from trying these approaches?Have you used puppets?

If yes, how did students react? If not, what do you expect might happen?

No I haven't done it, I hadn't thought about it before I use other resources

9. Have you used puppets in your English teaching?

a) If YES:

- How did students react?
- What were the main benefits you observed?
- What challenges did you face?

b) If NO:

- What do you expect might happen if you introduced puppets?
- What concerns, if any, do you have about using puppets?

Introducing puppets can have really powerful effects because students engage

PART E: PUPPET-BASED ACTIVITIES - FEASIBILITY

10. What challenges do you foresee in implementing puppet-based activities?

the over excitement Students may get too loud or distracted at first

What support would you need to implement and sustain puppet performance activities effectively?

Examples of age - appropriate performance activities with clear outcomes

CLOSING:

"Thank you so much for your time and insights. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your students' speaking development or about the potential use of puppets in your classroom?"

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Consistent performance activities build confidence an communicators when supported by clear scaffolding a safe classroom

DECLARACIÓN Y AUTORIZACIÓN

Nosotras, **Correa Guerra, Marión Jocelyn**, con C.C: # **0931804280 y Manzaba Loor, Leisly Jamell**, con C.C: # **0803131473** autoras del trabajo de titulación: **Supporting speaking skills development through the use of puppets among fourth-grade EFL learners at a private school in the city of Guayaquil in the scholastic year 2025-2026** previo a la obtención del título de **Licenciadas en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros-Inglés** en la Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil.

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Guayaquil, **26** de **febrero** de **2026**

f. _____ f._____

Correa Guerra, Marión Jocelyn **Manzaba Loor, Leisly Jamell**

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REPOSITORIO NACIONAL EN CIENCIA Y TECNOLOGÍA			
FICHA DE REGISTRO DE TESIS/TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN			
TÍTULO Y SUBTÍTULO:	Supporting speaking skills development through the use of puppets among fourth-grade EFL learners at a private school in the city of Guayaquil in the scholastic year 2025-2026.		
AUTOR(ES)	Correa Guerra, Marión Jocelyn Manzaba Loor, Leisly Jamell		
REVISOR(ES)/TUTOR(ES)	Loor Moreira, Melissa		
INSTITUCIÓN:	Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil		
FACULTAD:	Artes y Humanidades		
CARRERA:	Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales Y Extranjeros-Ingles		
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ÁREAS TEMÁTICAS:	Teaching methods, Primary Education, Oral Expression		
PALABRAS CLAVES/ KEYWORDS:	*EFL speaking; puppet-based learning; performance-based activities; fluency; pronunciation; speaking confidence*		

RESUMEN/ABSTRACT (150-250 palabras):
This study aimed to design a puppet performance-based pedagogical framework to strengthen speaking instruction for fourth-grade EFL students at a private school in southern Guayaquil during the 2025–2026 academic year. A mixed-methods analysis was conducted using a Classroom Speaking Observation Checklist and a semi-structured teacher interview. Quantitative observation data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative interview data were analyzed through thematic content analysis. Observation results showed a speaking profile characterized by limited performance in fluency and pronunciation, basic levels of accuracy and vocabulary, and stronger interaction. The interview findings indicated that students are beginner-level learners whose willingness to speak is strongly affected by fear of making mistakes, fear of negative peer judgment, and insecurity about pronunciation. Findings from both instruments were integrated through triangulation to develop a comprehensive needs analysis, which informed the design of a three-session, scaffolded sequence of puppet performance activities aligned with communicative objectives. The proposed framework emphasizes predictable routines, modeling, guided rehearsal, brief micro-performances, and gradual reduction of scaffolding to support increased fluency, clearer pronunciation, and greater speaking confidence in a supportive classroom environment.

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