



## STRENGTHENING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: ONLINE INTERNATIONAL CONVERSATION CLUBS<sup>i</sup>

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### Abstract:

This work aims to determine the contribution of Online Conversation Clubs to university students' listening and speaking skills. It used the action research technique to plan and implement an educational intervention that articulates the education for peace and global citizenship with the linguistic practice in COVID19 pandemic times. The participants were twenty-five university students from 6 different countries who took part in six conversation sessions. All participants identified flaws in their pronunciation when observing the language practices videos and showed high motivation to work on their self-correction. Contrast of listening and speaking skills pretest and post-test results shows that 100% of participants improved their communication skills significantly. It concluded that online conversation club practice could refine participants' listening comprehension and activates their speaking self-correction in using English as a Foreign Language. Besides, it became an efficient instrument to promote peace and global citizenship as part of their professional profile.

**Keywords:** English as a second language, teachers, conversation club, listening, speaking

### Resumen:

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo determinar la contribución de los Clubes de Conversación en Línea a las habilidades de escucha y expresión oral de los estudiantes

<sup>i</sup> FORTALECIMIENTO DE HABILIDADES DE ESCUCHA Y HABLA DE ESTUDIANTES EN INGLÉS COMO IDIOMA EXTRANJERO: CLUBES INTERNACIONALES DE CONVERSACIÓN EN LÍNEA

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universitarios. Se utilizó la técnica de investigación-acción para planificar e implementar una intervención educativa que articula la educación para la paz y la ciudadanía global con la práctica lingüística en tiempos de pandemia de COVID19. Los participantes fueron veinticinco estudiantes universitarios de 6 países diferentes que participaron en seis sesiones de conversación. Todos los participantes identificaron fallas en su pronunciación al observar los videos de prácticas lingüísticas y mostraron una alta motivación para trabajar en su autocorrección. El contraste de los resultados de las pruebas previas y posteriores a las habilidades para escuchar y hablar muestra que el 100% de los participantes mejoraron significativamente sus habilidades de comunicación. Concluyó que la práctica del club de conversación en línea podría refinar la comprensión auditiva de los participantes y activar su autocorrección oral al usar el inglés como lengua extranjera. Además, se convirtió en un eficaz instrumento para promover la paz y la ciudadanía global como parte de su perfil profesional.

**Palabras clave:** inglés como segundo idioma, profesores, club de conversación, escuchar, hablar

## 1. Introduction

The pronunciation errors that persist in nonnative speaking English teachers may have originated in how they learned this foreign language. Teachers probably repeat the same mistakes made in their training process to their current students, creating a new cycle that affects future generations of students. Its overcoming requires linguistic practices that activate their metacognitive self-correction process. This is an educational problem that requires linguistic research to overcome it.

To Ortega & Minchala (2018), oral production skills are among the most challenging skills for developing in the Foreign Language acquisition context. In this sense, learners retain the pronunciation or grammar mistakes learned since they began elementary school. Therefore, it constantly affects the English language learners' speeches. Besides, the learning errors become an error teaching when teachers do not self-correct. In such conditions, it is necessary to improve the English language teachers' communicational skills to correct their pronunciation, aiming to contribute to the improvement of English as a foreign language teaching and learning in Ecuador.

The effort established by Latin American governments to access the international economy has led to the implementation of policies to offer high-quality education for all students, especially towards the promotion of multilingualism and linguistic diversity (Soto et al., 2017). Thus, Ecuador introduced changes as the national curriculum for learning English as a foreign language and the beginning of the EFL instruction from 2<sup>nd</sup> year of elementary education in 2016 (Intriago et al., 2018; Cevallos et al., 2019).

Fernández and Torres (2015) argue that, to build learning processes consistent with the context and culture of the learners, it is necessary to increase direct and interactive contact between university students and their community. However,

University students show good attitudes using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the learning process, and EFL teachers in training use the ICT tools frequently, ratifying the access and use of diverse informatics applications (Villafuerte et al. 2017). However, students frequently reported a lack of Internet connection during online class in the context of the pandemic for COVID19, when countries worldwide had a fast migration from face-to-face education to online classes or hybrid education (Cabero, 2020; Villafuerte et al., 2020), expecting students to continue their studies (Fernández, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

Previous observations in educational institutions in Manta, Ecuador, show a deficit of speaking English as a second language, which confirms the necessity of didactics innovations. In such a condition emerged this educational research project as a contribution of the research project *Comprensión lectora y escritura académica 'LEA: Cambiando vidas'* of the Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí. Furthermore, inspired by Ploj et al. (2021), this paper's authors propose Conversation Clubs Didactics, expecting to contribute to the university students' and professors' global citizenship competencies. The questions guiding this study are:

- 1) What are the participants' fears and motivations to practice listening and speaking skills using conversation clubs?
- 2) How can the conversation clubs be organized?
- 3) What is the contribution of conversation clubs to students' listening and speaking skills improvement?

The hypothesis to be tested is:

**Ho:** There are no significant relationships between the conversation clubs and the strengthening of the listening and speaking skills of the participants.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Ecuador

Ecuadorian was a participant in the World Education Forum held in Dakar 2000 to re-affirm the countries' vision of the World Declaration on Education for All of Jomtien (1990) based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The government expected to create an education system to meet all people's basic learning needs in the best and most total sense, including the philosophy of learning to know, do, live together, and be.

Besides, the "Ecuadorian educational Reform 2005-2016 Ten-Year Plan" consisted of eight government policies for general education improvement (MinEduc, 2015). Thus, Espinosa (2016) maintains that Ecuador has achieved that 96% of children and youth have access to basic education and improved school infrastructure. Thus, 62 new schools called "Millennium Educational Units" were built to serve between 570 and 1140 students.

In concern to the English Language Teaching (ELT), Calle (2015) argues the EFL teachers' knowledge national evaluation showed 74% of the 5,022 participants reached the level B1 "basic users" being a weakness to improve. Then, The Ministry of Education

established that teachers must handle the language at a high intermediate level (B2) to continue teaching. Besides, the national project "It is time to teach English" considered teaching methodology and teaching skills as crucial elements to strength. Then, the Ecuadorian Agreement No. 0041-14 introduced the English subject to the formal national curriculum with a 5 hours'/week workload from the eighth year of primary education (MinEduc, 2016).

Within the educational policies of a nation, the norms concerning the preparation of future teachers in the field of foreign languages appear as an act of vindication and equity and as a national strategy aimed at increasing the competitiveness of its population (Intriago et al., 2018); Thus, Ecuador is the Latin American country that begins the earliest with compulsory English teaching in the public education system, after Costa Rica and Colombia. However, global English knowledge indices show that Ecuador has gone from 81 out of 100 countries in 2018 to position 93 out of 100 countries in 2020 (EF, 2020).

The Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) emerges in the new EFL Ecuadorian curriculum guidelines of 2016 as a foremost principle to prepare learners for successful participation in a globalized, democratic society in the 21st century by focusing on the development of life, work, and entrepreneurship skills (MinEduc, 2016). Therefore, ELT methodology and procedures expect to be oriented to enhancing English linguistic competencies using cross-curricular topics, fostering culture, and promoting the students' cognitive skills (Cevallos et al., 2019).

Consequently, EFL teaching consists of five basic principles: the communicative approach, Content and Language Integrated Learning, international standards, thinking skills, and a student-centered approach. These fundamentals of the curricular proposal seek to strengthen the student's training process, going beyond content acquisition. It is intended to provide students with the necessary tools to communicate orally and in writing in the English language in authentic contexts and develop their critical thinking (Intriago et al., 2019).

## **2.2 Communicative competence in the use of foreign languages**

The communicative environments offer students the ideal use of linguistic and non-linguistic codes present in the contexts. Consequently, they influence their language production. Besides, Manrique (2011) argues, the dynamics of acquiring a foreign language require strategies that lead to significant learning of the language and include aspects of oral production to optimize the conversational aspects of the language in informal conversations.

Phillips & Abbott (2011) presented the standards for communication that articulate the aspects: Communication, Comparisons, Cultures, Connections, and Communities. They establish interrelationships between the language and the culture of the learners to produce discursive formats that have different functions or purposes. Thus, Barragan & Mesa (2018), communicative competence includes three sub-competencies that are: (a) grammatical: lexical, phonological, morphological, semantic,

and syntactic elements; (b) sociolinguistics: sociocultural rules, discourse rules (c) strategic sub competency: use of verbal and non-verbal strategies. Thus, active learning in teaching another language requires a reflective and critical teacher about their practice and a learner committed to learning it. The reflective teacher questions her practice, yesterday's and today's, and looks for mechanisms to improve or adjust the next (Orosz et al., 2018). Besides, "*Communicative competence alludes to tacit knowledge of the language and the ability to understand and use the language effectively for communication purposes. Simply put, it refers to the ability to form correct utterances and using them appropriately*" (Çağrı, 2018, p.163). Finally, the communicative competence's mission is to ensure that language learners apply grammar correctly without neglecting social, contextual, and pragmatic values. Thus, the language characteristics are worked on at a formal, social, and performance level through communicative competence and linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic sub-competencies (Villafuerte, 2019).

### **2.2.1 Learning motivation in distance education**

The motivation to learn is one of the significant challenges in distance education. It demands to teachers to expose learners to learning experiences that stimulate them to avoid dropping out of the educational system. The interaction of students in the use of EFL is associated with their motivation for learning (Mahle, 2011), persistence, and student satisfaction (Joo et al., 2011).

To Hernández (2014) students at level A1 and B1 who used an active methodology compared to a traditional methodology, obtained more favorable results terms of emotional aspects and academic. To Harmer (2015) when student is given greater decision-making power, they should also be given greater responsibility in the construction of their learning; in this way, the student, when feeling a fundamental part of the teaching-learning process, increases his commitment to learning. Thus, an appropriate school climate and fostering empathy between students and teachers encourage students to participate and take an interest in their learning.

Furthermore, the students presented positive results within the emotional aspect since they were involved in their learning, looking for more dynamic ways to communicate. Regarding the academic aspect, the students who used an active methodology improved their linguistic skills in the English language. Thus, Cevallos et al. (2017), motivation in the field of EFL acquisition manifested in intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, autonomous work, and recognition. Then, Orosz et al. (2018) consider that the methodology of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has gradually changed from passive, teacher-centered approaches to increasingly active and student-centered approaches, which stimulates learning.

According to Alvarez (2019), the teaching of a foreign language is a platform par excellence for the teaching and learning of other cultures, other ways of seeing the world, establishing a position, understanding, recognizing, accepting, and taking advantage of diversity as a wealth, see the world differently and not in a stereotypical way; thus creating an opportunity to recognize each other in all possible ways and play with the

possibility of sharing it with the other. Nevertheless, Núñez (2020) argues, motivation is related to the scarce social and academic integration; it is one of the main reasons for the abandonment of students in the virtual teaching modality.

### **2.3 Conversation Club**

The Conversation Club (CC) is ideal for students and teachers to interact and exchange oral practice to acquire a new language. Its execution must consider the linguistic competence and the pragmatic competence developed by the participants where the sociolinguistic component contributes to the differentiation and recognition of the norms, varieties of communication styles, and behaviors of the participants.

In contrast, the discursive component allows the participants to construct coherent expressions, and the strategic component provides the elements whose purpose is to repair and increase the efficiency of the act of interaction and collective communication. To Trydy (2004), the characteristics and objectives of the Conversation Club are: (1) Improve speaking, and listening aspects, (2) Acquire greater verbal fluency, (3) Have direct contact with the culture of an English-speaking country, and (4) Share experiences with another person in the language learned.

In the review of previous studies, Manrique (2011) showed that a Conversation Club is a strategy capable of significantly increasing oral production in English students as a foreign language when they work with clear objectives. The study of Ortega & Minchala (2018) reveal serious problems teachers must develop the speaking skills in English as a foreign language. Another study that supports the implementation of active learning in English teaching is that developed by West (2018), who shows that active methodology motivates students to prepare for discussions and conversations in class.

The researcher's method was the literary circles with which the students got involved with the texts. The dynamics of this method was to assign roles to each student for each student to assume responsibility for reading. First, the students discussed their findings in small groups, and then socialization took place with the whole class; This socialization mainly strengthened reading and speaking skills, although writing and listening skills are closely connected. To Orosz et al. (2018), one of the most effective ways to create a transcendental shift from traditional teaching towards more meaningful and authentic teaching in the English class is implementing active learning strategies and techniques. It is possible because of the many benefits and advantages of active learning-based instruction.

The positive effects generated through this type of strategy and techniques in the classroom are multiple, which empowers students to play a central and active role in this crucial language's teaching and learning process.

In countries like Ecuador, the use of active learning in classrooms will improve English education at the school level, since as we have analyzed, these strategies and techniques lead to a more memorable and profound learning experience for students, which in turn can improve their command of English and thus open doors to all the opportunities that mastery of this language offers. Finally, Deregözüli & Kanburoğlu

(2021) showed, audacity offers teachers diverse possibilities to create audio materials considering learners' linguistic needs.

### 3. Material and Methods

This work subscribes to the cognitive and innovative approaches. It uses action research methodology. The analysis of qualitative information considers the recommendations of Limones et al. (2019) and the data statistical analysis follow techniques suggested by Malmberg (2018).

#### 3.1 Participants

They were 25 university students of four different knowledge fields and six countries. 75% of the participants were female, and 25% male. The criteria for selecting the participants were:

- 1) Having prior A2 knowledge level of the English language;
- 2) Accepting the invitation to voluntary participation in this research;
- 3) Having Internet connectivity to participate in the online conversations club sessions.

**Table 1:** The participants

Participants studies	National Students		Foreign Students		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
1. Teaching English	8	4	4	1	18
2. Odontology	2	0	0	0	2
3. Language and literature	0	0	1	0	1
4. Nanotechnology	0	0	1	1	2
4. Tourism and business	0	0	1	1	2
2. History, Social Studies	0	0	0	1	1
Total	10	4	7	4	25

**Source:** Participants register (July/2020).

#### 3.2 Instruments

The instruments used in this research were:

**In-depth interview.** The objective of the interview is to know directly from the participants the doubts and fears that they have regarding the online conversation club methodology. The aa research team prepared the instrument. Hoc. The initial version of the instrument consisted of 15 questions. The administered instrument was reduced to 10 questions as a recommendation of the panel of experts.

**Class observation.** Each session included an observation stage to generate a record of progress in each participant's development of listening and speaking skills. Appropriate and accurate fluency, pronunciation, intonation, and use of vocabulary are considered during online chat club sessions.

**PET Preliminary English Test.** The rubric of evaluation of listening and speaking skills. The instrument was produced and validated by Cambridge Press, and it is successfully applied worldwide. The instrument was used in the pretest and posttest.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The results obtained in this research are presented following the order of the research questions that appear in the introduction section.

**Question 1:** What are the doubts and motivations of the participants regarding listening and speaking practices using conversation clubs?

In Table 2 appear the evidence of the participants' motivations and fears (participants' voices) when doing listening and speaking practices with online conversation clubs.

The information collected through the interview to participants was organized according to the following categories (1) Unsafety, (2) Operability, (3) Contents, and (4) Motivation to participate in the online conversation clubs.

**Table 2:** Participants' motivations and fears related to online conversation clubs.

Categories	Participants voices	Subcategories
Unsafety	<p>P.1. " Who else is going to be in the conversation club? "</p> <p>P.2. "I feel like I need to improve my pronunciation before to participate."</p> <p>P.4. "I wish to participate, but I wonder if I will reach the level of the other heartbeats?"</p> <p>IN.4. "Do you have to see the international participants' time differences. Will that be a limitation for the online conversations?"</p> <p>P.16. "What if I can't speak like the other participants. They maybe speak English nice?"</p> <p>P.14. "I don't think I have a sufficient English language level for taking part of this project."</p> <p>P-10. "What would happen if I don't understand foreign guests, I'm going to keep quiet."</p>	Participants feel lack of confidence in their EFL knowledge
Operability	<p>P.7. "What time would the conversation clubs be? "</p> <p>P.4. "What days will the conversations take place?"</p> <p>P.12. "I am not sure if I have free time to connect to the conversations."</p> <p>P.15. "How will we do the meetings?"</p> <p>IN.4. "Will I need headphones or other devices?"</p>	<p>Doubts about the methodology and activities to forecast.</p> <p>Participants' free time to take part of activities</p>
Contents	<p>P.1. "What topics are we going to talk about?"</p> <p>P.13. "We will talk about cultures with those guests we should do it".</p> <p>IN.3. "We can talk about the environment. I have a wind energy project. I can share it with you.</p> <p>IN.5. "I would like to ask things about Ecuador. I hope one day to go".</p>	Topics to argue



Motivation to participate	<p>P.1. "I hope to improve my English pronunciation through online conversations."</p> <p>P.8. "I would like to improve my pronunciation".</p> <p>P.5. "I love to practice my listening and to know new people".</p> <p>P.13. "I wish to learn more about the culture of Ecuador."</p> <p>P.20. "I want to improve my self-confidence and improve as much as possible".</p>	Participants' Intrinsic motivation
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**Source:** Participants voices collected in the interviews (April, 2021).

## Question 2: How are conversation clubs planned for EFL practice purposes?

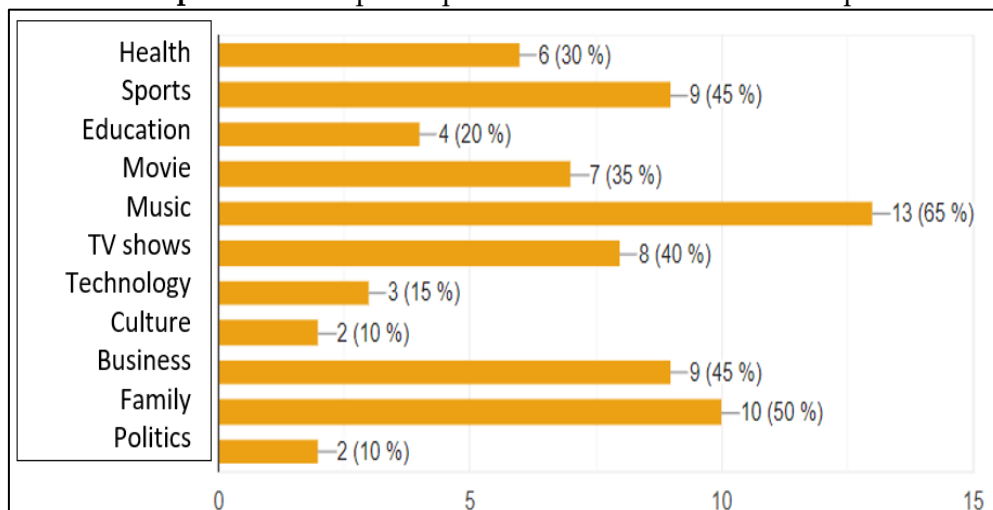
The process of planification of the conversation club is presented below.

### a. Online conversation club plan

The process begins with the compilation of the learning objectives achieved by both the participants and the group. In addition, objectives should include the language skills to achieve at the end of all conversation sessions. Subsequently, the researchers select the topics of the conversations and the agenda of activities.

Finally, to generate greater participation and commitment from the group, it is recommended to survey the participants' topics or desires to address during the conversations. It should be a participatory process to reach the collective goals. Thus, it stimulates participation and contributes to the significance of the process for each participant. Figure 1 shows the participants' responses to the flash survey and their preferences regarding online conversation club topics.

**Graphic 1:** Participants' preferences for conversation topics



**Resource:** Flash survey (April, 2020).

The results show that the three topics of most significant interest to the participants are: music 65%; family 50%, and business and sports 45%. The less popular activities are related to policies and culture 10%, and technology 15%.

## b. Conversation club plan

Goal: Strengthen the participants listening and speaking skills in English as a foreign language.

### Session 1: Motivation and organization of conversations clubs

<b>Topic: The relevance of knowing a second language. (pretest)</b>			<b>CC-1</b>
<b>The role of the facilitator:</b> Create an environment that fosters trust. of potential participants.			Practice time: 1 to 2 Weeks
<b>Learning Goal</b>	<b>Language Competence</b>	<b>Suggested Activities</b>	
Participants They will achieve. understand from auditory form and expressive. with level high complexity	Understanding auditory.  Oral expression	The contents to be taught in the sessions are shared. They are encouraged to talk and exchange ideas.	Time approx. In this session 1 Hour.
<b>Methodologies:</b> Content and Foreign Languages Integrated Learning (CLIL).			
<b>Resources:</b> ZOOM Platform			
<b>Didactic recommendations:</b> To motivate the participation of students from different levels of knowledge of English, it is recommended not to make grammar corrections in a public way, or questions that are confusing or require long answers.			

### Session 2: Participants' opinion's exchange

<b>Topic: Let's care the environment</b>			<b>CI-2b</b>
<b>The role of the facilitator:</b> Mediate interventions of the participants and facilitate the understanding of the interventions.			Time: 1 a 2 weeks
<b>Learning Goal</b>	<b>Language Competence</b>	<b>Suggested Activities</b>	
Participants can express themselves orally at a complex level. They will know how to give explanations about environmental issues	Understanding auditory. Oral expression. -oral comprehension	Awareness is raised to optimize natural resources to safeguard the planet	Time per this session max. 1 Hour.
<b>Methodologies:</b> Content and Foreign Languages Integrated Learning (CLIL).			
<b>Resources:</b> ZOOM Platform			
<b>Speaker:</b> Intervention of the guest Mexico with presentation			
<b>Didactic recommendations:</b> present pre - presentation vocabulary. Previous knowledge of natural resources and their problems in the world.			

### Session 3: Learning a second language

<b>Topic: Experiences of studying in a second language</b>			<b>CI-3</b>
<b>The role of the facilitator:</b> mediate interventions by participants and facilitate understanding of interventions.			Time of practice 1 week
<b>Learning Goal</b>	<b>Language Competence</b>	<b>Suggested Activities</b>	
Participants will express themselves in a	Auditive comprehension. Oral expression.	The experiences are shared in the sessions.	Time per session max. 1 Hour.

complex environment according to their level.	-oral comprehension.	The intervention of interventions is promoted.	
<b>Methodologies:</b> Content Integrated Learning and Foreign Languages (CLIL).			
<b>Resources:</b> ZOOM Platform, Guest Speech from Canada			
<b>Didactic recommendations:</b> present previous vocabulary if necessary			

#### Session 4: Participants' pinions' exchange

<b>Topic: Experiences of studying in a second language</b>			<b>CI-4</b>
The role of the facilitator to mediate interventions by participants and facilitate understanding of interventions.			Practice time max 2 weeks
Learning Goal	Language Competence	Suggested Activities	
Participants will express themselves orally according to a complex level	Auditive comprehension. Oral expression. -oral comprehension	The experiences are shared in the sessions. The intervention of interventions is promoted.	Time per session max 1 Hour.
<b>Methodologies:</b> Content and Foreign Languages Integrated Learning (CLIL).			
<b>Resources:</b> ZOOM Platform, intervention by the guest from Mexico			
<b>Didactic recommendations:</b> present previous vocabulary if necessary			

#### Session 5: Learning a second language

<b>Topic: Closure of the sessions, retelling anecdotes and collection of experiences</b>			<b>CI- 5</b>
<b>The role of the facilitator:</b> Mediate interventions by participants and facilitate understanding of interventions.			Practice time max 2 weeks
Learning Goal	Language Competence	Suggested Activities	
Participants will be able to speak in a simple context according to the topic of the session	Auditive comprehension. Oral expression. -oral comprehension	They narrate anecdotes of participants are shared and opinions are given. They are encouraged to participate demonstrating their speaking skills.	Time of session max 2 weeks and 1 hour per day
<b>Methodologies:</b> Content and Foreign Languages Integrated Learning (CLIL).			
<b>Resources:</b> ZOOM Platform, intervention by the guest from Mexico			
<b>Didactic recommendations:</b> present previous vocabulary if necessary			

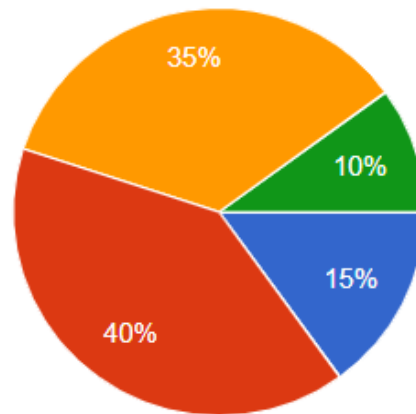
#### Session 6: Closing meeting

<b>Topic: Closure of the sessions (post-test)</b>			<b>CI- 5</b>
<b>The role of the facilitator:</b> Mediate interventions by participants and facilitate understanding of interventions			Total practice time: 1
Learning Goal	Language Competence	Suggested Activities	
Participants will express in a creative way. Using future time.	Auditive comprehension. Oral expression. -oral comprehension	Conversations about participants future professional plans	Session time: Max 1 hour
<b>Methodologies:</b> Evaluation using Speaking Cambridge Rubric.			
<b>Resources:</b> ZOOM Platform. Research team do observations following the Cambridge standards.			
<b>Didactic recommendations:</b> present previous vocabulary if necessary			

**Question 3:** What is the contribution of the conversation clubs to improve the participants' speaking and listening skills?

In Graphic 2 is possible to see the participants' listening and speaking skills in EFL.

**Graphic 2:** Self-evaluation of participants' listening and speaking skills



**Resource:** Flash survey (April, 2020).

It is shown that 40% of the participants stated that they had a regular English language level followed by 35% who expressed that they had a medium level and without leaving behind the 10% who knew how to say that they had an acceptable level of English. This result allows us to know how to measure the sessions at a level where everyone feels comfortable.

**Table 3:** Changes in the participants' Listening and Speaking skills levels

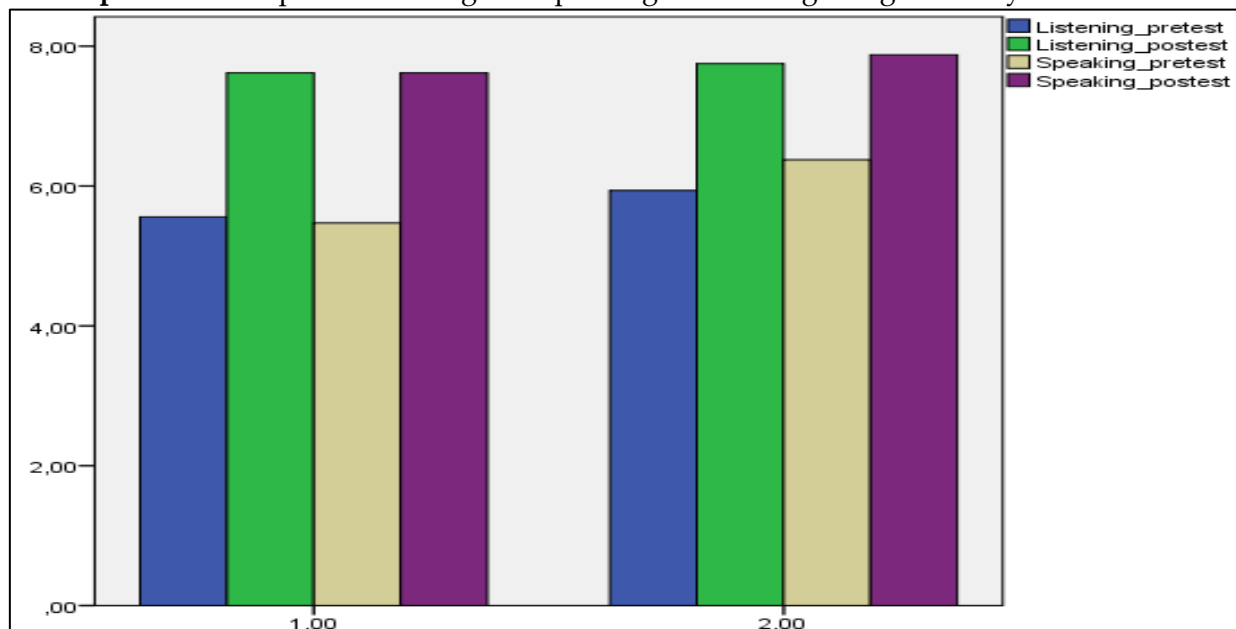
No.	Sex	Studies	Age	Nationality	Listening skill		Speaking skill	
					Pretest	Post-test	Pretest	Post-test
P.1	1	Pedagogy in English	19	Ecuador	8.0	9.0	7.0	8.0
P.2	1	Pedagogy in English	21	Ecuador	6.0	8.0	5.0	8.0
P.3	1	Pedagogy in English	20	Ecuador	7.0	8.5	6.0	8.0
P.4	1	Pedagogy in English	23	Ecuador	6.0	8.0	6.0	8.0
P.5	2	Pedagogy in English	21	Ecuador	5.0	7.0	6.0	7.0
P.6	1	Pedagogy in English	19	Ecuador	6.5	8.0	6.0	7.5
P.7	2	Pedagogy in English	20	Ecuador	7.0	7.0	6.0	7.0
P.8	1	Pedagogy in English	19	Ecuador	5.0	8.0	4.0	7.0
P.9	2	Pedagogy in English	22	Ecuador	5.0	7.0	5.0	7.0
P.10	1	Pedagogy in English	23	Ecuador	5.0	7.0	5.0	7.0
P.11	1	Pedagogy in English	21	Ecuador	4.0	7.0	4.0	7.0
P.12	1	English teaching	22	Mexico	6.5	8.0	6.0	8.0
P.13	1	English teaching	24	Mexico	5.0	7.0	5.0	7.0
P.14	2	English teaching	25	Mexico	5.5	7.0	6.0	7.0
P.15	2	English teaching	22	Mexico	5.0	7.0	5.0	7.0
P.16	1	English teaching	22	Mexico	5.0	7.0	5.0	7.0
P.17	2	Pedagogy in English	23	Ecuador	5.0	8.0	6.0	8.0
P.18	1	English course	19	Venezuela	4.0	6.0	3.0	6.0

P.19	1	Odontology	20	Ecuador	3.0	5.0	3.0	6.0
P.20	1	Odontology	20	Ecuador	3.5	5.0	3.0	5.0
IN.1.	1	Language and literature	24	Jamaica	6.0	10.0	9	10
IN.2.	1	Nanotechnology	20	Mexico	7.0	9.0	8	10
IN.3.	1	Marketing and Business	30	Mexico	7.0	9.0	8	10
IN.4.	2	Tourism and business	25	Panamá	8.0	9.0	8	10
IN.5.	2	History, Social Studies	28	Canada	7.0	10.0	9	10

**Source:** Conversation club participants' register (2020).

In Graphic 3, it is possible to observe the changes in the participants' listening and speaking skills organized by sex. The analysis shows that both female and male students reached good performances using EFL.

**Graphic 3:** Participants' listening and speaking skills changes organized by the factor sex



**Note:** 1 = female, 2 = male.

**Resource:** Statistic analysis (Jan/2021).

The normality data series test shows all the series passed the test, except the Speaking Posttest series. The hypothesis test used the T-Student test with a *p-value* = 0.50.

**Table 4:** Normality tests

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	gl	Sig.	Statistic	gl	Sig.
Pretest-listening	,175	25	,046	,950	25	,250
Posttest-listening	,185	25	,027	,932	25	,095
Pretest-speaking	,204	25	,008	,931	25	,091
Posttest-speaking	,215	25	,004	,867	25	,004
a. Correction of the signification of Lilliefors						

**Table 5:** Related samples test

		Related differences					t	gl	Sig. (bilateral)
		Overage	Standard deviation	Error típ. of overage	95% Confidence interval for the difference				
					Inferior	Superior			
Par 1	Pretest Posttest	-1,90	,79687	,15937	-2,30893	-1,65107	-12,424	24	,000
Par 2	Pretest Posttest	-1,940	,68191	,13638	-2,22148	-1,65852	-14,225	24	,000

The T-student test using *p-value*= 0.050 reports the following results:

- a) For the listening variable. - The result of the p-value is  $0.000 < 0.050$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, which means a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results when managing the talk clubs.
- b) For the variable speaking. – The result of the p-value is  $0.000 < 0.050$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, stating that the difference between pretest and posttest is significant when managing conversation clubs.

## 5. Discussion

This work has approached social interaction in English as a foreign language through language practices stimulated and evaluated through computer means. In this sense, the authors argue that EFL students' main challenges are to put all their knowledge to use in natural and everyday spaces in the Anglo-Saxon culture. Furthermore, that learner's behavior is possibly related to the demonstrations of insecurity when entering diverse contexts unknown to them. Therefore, it is essential to use methodologies that help learners develop confidence from the foreign language practice, recognizing that listening and speaking skills are perhaps those that require an immediate response and greater concentration. Then, learners face situations characterized by more significant stress.

Thus, speaking skills coordinate fluency, pronunciation, intonation, and proper use of vocabulary from the literature review, but it is inferred all in a short time. In this sense, the authors agree with Manrique (2011) that the Conversation Club is a strategy capable of significantly increasing oral production in English students as a foreign language when they work with clear objectives.

This communicative process articulates the listening competence that demands foreign language learners to train their hearing capacity and recognize the various accents, registers, and intonations. At this point, the authors express their agreement with Ortega & Minchala (2018) when they affirm that teachers must develop their confidence before having progressed in their speaking and listening skills in English class.

In addition, authors ratify West (2018) concerning the contribution that active social makes in the exchange of opinions between the students who participate in a

discussion about diverse topics in the use of the foreign language. Thus, when students discuss their findings in small groups, socialization took place with the whole class. One of the most effective ways to create a transcendental shift from traditional teaching towards more meaningful and authentic teaching in the English class is by implementing active learning strategies and techniques (Orosz et al., 2018). The positive effects generated through this type of strategy and techniques in the classroom are multiple, empowering students to play a central and active role in this crucial language's teaching and learning process.

In countries like Ecuador, the use of active learning in classrooms will improve English education at the school level, since as we have analyzed, these strategies and techniques lead to a more memorable and profound learning experience for students, which in turn can improve their command of English and thus open doors to all the opportunities that mastery of this language offers. Besides, the authors declare agreement with the position of Deregözü & Kanburoğlu (2021) in concern to EFL teachers require to expose learners to diverse possibilities of linguistic practice to increase their confidence to improve their performances in international contexts.

### **5.1 Acceptance of conversation club participants as language practice**

The information collected shows that the participants, once the educational intervention has finished, declare that they are comfortable working on this type of language practice. Thus, conversation clubs are a suitable and accepted space for students and teachers to interact in language practices focused on developing listening and speaking skills. In this way, authors ratify the position of Trudy (2004) regarding that this method is a discursive component that allows the construction of coherent expressions with potential use to repair the errors when using the foreign language from a metacognitive and intercommunicating process. The research found that CC practices allowed the participants to express their opinions clearly and fluently. It provided contact with native English speakers with which communication skills to put into practice from an international perspective. The conversation sessions helped the participants consolidate their knowledge and skills of the EFL by having fruitful conversations with course colleagues and international guests attending the conversation clubs.

Results are far from the affirmations of (Gary, 2001) when he maintains that the conversation club by itself is a practice that indeed contributes to the improvement of the level of mastery of the participants. At this point, the practices carried out in this research showed that the conversation club only improves the knowledge of those participants who have a legitimate interest in overcoming their mistakes when speaking English. The other possibility is that those who do not have the motivation to improve a listening position without actively participating in the dialogues or decide to stop attending the sessions. Likewise, the conversation club by itself does not guarantee changes in the improvement of auditory skills and speaks when the participants do not have aptitudes for self-learning in non-formal processes and demand the student's dedication from their self-correction.

## **5.2 Conversation club during the pandemic**

The news media is a resource that has allowed people to maintain contact with other people in real-time during the pandemic. This project, in the context of the pandemic, adjusted moving from phase-to-face classes to online education. Similarly, the conversation club sessions in the framework of this educational research used teleconference applications. The practices carried out were limited by the internet availability of the participants and the time differences in the countries where the participants and guests live. However, these are situations to overcome with the availability of the participants.

After year 1 of the pandemic, people have become more familiar with the teleconference applications. Conversation clubs create a learning environment that allows participants to activate self-regulation of positive and negative emotions that emerge in discussions on controversial and significant topics for participants. Mastering the nerves and developing the ability to express ideas clearly, opinions and feelings is an opportunity for growth as a person and contributes to enhancing professional skills. However, the effort of the participants is required to activate the metacognitive process of correction and self-regulation.

Students in this case mostly know the importance of acquiring a new language but do not feel the confidence to face the complexities to achieve mastery of the EFL. It may be related to a weakened students' self-esteem. Here, the authors recommend that teachers encourage students' participation during the conversation's times. In addition, teachers should participate more practically, emphasizing oral expression to feel motivated to learn English.

## **5.3 Conversation club and cultural and diversity**

Teaching English as a foreign language can contribute to the reaffirmation of the own identity and the cultural identification of each person and the group.

In line with the statements Alvarez (2019), faced with the challenge of generating spaces for the exchange of practical information where reflection and transformation of people regarding intrinsic cultural awareness or interculturality stimulated, the CC can form working groups that achieve the recognition and acceptance of the characteristics of other cultural groups different from their own.

Therefore, teachers can stimulate reflection and explore students' perceptions in conventional classes, but through this meeting space from horizontal dialogue in which the practice of intercultural competencies and openness to differences are encouraged.

## **6. Recommendations**

The interaction that the Conversation club promotes as an EFL practice also contributes to developing soft skills in the participants who use it to acquire a foreign language (Ploj et al., 2021). Besides, the researcher team recommends using CC because it contributes to social diversity as an efficient and positive way within the construction of more peaceful,



equitable, and progressive societies. Thus, it is necessary to facilitate active learning strategies to promote the empowerment of students in the process of building their knowledge and enhances the ability to learn autonomously (Ortega et al., 2020).

## 7. Conclusions

The results achieved both in bibliographic review and empirical part of this study; the authors declare the fulfillment of the objective presented in the introduction section. It concluded that 75% of the participants improved the listening competence when doing the conversation clubs. Besides, it showed that participants' speaking skills increased 80%, activating their metacognitive abilities for self-correction and regulation. It also allowed participants to overcome mistakes they made when speaking the EFL at the level of pronunciation, use of textual translations from Spanish to English, recording according to the conversation, and intonation to express their ideas and feelings in a more precise and natural way.

This study presents a contribution to the innovation of the use of video conferencing systems in foreign language online education practices. Here, the emerging of the CC online becomes an efficient and more natural learning option. Thus, teachers can work the CC English or any other foreign language. The study's limitations are related to the small number of participants, so it is not possible to generalize the results. However, the results demonstrate the possibility of using conversation clubs to innovate language practices both in the university context and in secondary education.

## Acknowledgements

- a. This work is subscribed to the project "Comprensión lectora y escritura académica. LEA: Cambiando vidas" of the University Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí, Ecuador.
- b. This work is subscribed to the Ecuador and Colombia Project "Hacia la construcción de la ciudadanía global" en las Facultades de Ciencias de la Educación de las Universidades colombianas UCEVA y CESMAG, y Universidad ecuatoriana ULEAM.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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