



**STUDENT-CENTERED COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCIES  
ACTIVIDADES COMUNICATIVAS CENTRADAS EN EL ESTUDIANTE PARA EL  
DESARROLLO DE COMPETENCIAS LINGÜÍSTICAS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The development of English language skills among students was affected by the shift from face-to-face classes to synchronous and asynchronous learning due to the limitations of traditional pedagogical approaches adapted to virtual modalities. In the virtual environment, teachers tended to assign written activities, resulting in a neglect of oral skills. Communicative competence depends on contextualized learning experiences that integrate the following dimensions: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discursive, and strategic. Thus, an English teacher of an A2+ level group at a Language Center decided to conduct action research to help students regain their English language skills through student-centered communicative activities such as presentations, role-playing, and conversations. These activities provide opportunities to practice the language in real-life situations. The study was conducted over one semester, and two questionnaires were administered, one at the beginning and one at the end of the course. The results were triangulated with the scores from oral and written exams. They suggest that using student-centered communicative activities in an English as a foreign language class promotes the improvement of the four language skills.

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**RESUMEN**

**Palabras clave:**

expresión oral, redacción,  
competencia comunicativa,  
investigación-acción, aprendizaje  
del inglés post-pandemia

The development of English language skills among students was affected by the shift from face-to-face classes to synchronous and asynchronous learning due to the limitations of traditional pedagogical approaches adapted to virtual modalities. In the virtual environment, teachers tended to assign written activities, resulting in a neglect of oral skills. Communicative competence depends on contextualized learning experiences that integrate the following dimensions: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discursive, and strategic. Thus, an English teacher of an A2+ level group at a Language Center decided to conduct action research to help students regain their English language skills through student-centered communicative activities such as presentations, role-playing, and conversations. These activities provide opportunities to practice the language in real-life situations. The study was

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## **Introduction**

The shift from in-person classes to online classes in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic led both students and teachers to continue their education in a new format; however, both groups lacked the digital and pedagogical skills necessary to function effectively in that format. This situation required teachers to make substantial changes to the activities they carried out in the classroom.

The teaching and learning methods that had prevailed up to that point were not suitable for the new approach; instead, students were required to demonstrate a willingness to learn, and the situations presented in class had to be relevant to this purpose. It was necessary for the activities to be organized in a way that fostered knowledge construction; this can be achieved by pacing the delivery of knowledge, while also taking into account the affective dimension of learning (Porlán, 2020). Although the 2021 study by Rojas and García on blended learning and the effect of gamification is not directly related to learning, it showed that teaching during the pandemic relied primarily on providing explanations, while neglecting the development of communicative competence. This practice resulted in limited language development, leading to poor performance.

When in-person classes resumed, students at the Language Center demonstrated language skills below what was expected for their respective English proficiency levels and reported difficulty keeping up with the pace of in-person classes. This showed that online or distance education had not achieved its stated objectives (Quintero et al., 2022). After that period of online learning, teachers returned to using communicative activities for individualized tasks that promote motivation and support learning (Littlewood, 2011).

The recovery of language skills in post-pandemic contexts is a research area of international interest; however, a search in Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar using the terms “communicative competence,” “action research,” and “post-pandemic English learning” yielded only five articles on these topics. Therefore, there is little literature on action research in language centers at public universities in Latin America, particularly in Mexico. A study by Godwin-Jones (2021) found that the lockdown period spurred the use of digital technologies, leading to gaps in speech development.

Hernández-Méndez and Caballero-Álvarez (2019) found that language centers at public universities in Mexico face challenges stemming from the diverse student body they serve and the discontinuity in students’ learning trajectories, since this is non-formal education. An action research study conducted with 180 Turkish high school students at the pre-intermediate level found that the systematic use of incomplete information activities and structured conversations increased their oral fluency (Tavil, 2010). Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) studied the transition from online to in-person learning in Indonesia and concluded that students who had taken more semesters of online classes exhibited higher levels of communication anxiety and lower fluency in in-person classes.

Consequently, an intervention was designed and implemented to improve students’ language performance through student-centered communicative activities. The study was conducted at the Orizaba Language Center, which is part of the University of Veracruz. The activities carried out included conversations, presentations, role-playing, and the “Find Someone Who” game; these provided opportunities for both semi-controlled and free practice to develop language skills.

The main objective of the research was to demonstrate the effectiveness of conversations, role-playing, and presentations on the performance of English learners.

The second objective was to determine the impact of designing activities based on students' tastes, preferences, and needs on their performance. Consequently, three research questions emerged for this study:

Question 1: How effective are conversations, role-playing, and presentations in improving the performance of English learners?

Question 2: What impact does designing activities based on students' interests, preferences, and needs have on their academic performance?

Question 3: What impact do communicative activities have on the recovery of language skills?

### ***Conceptual Framework***

#### *Communicative competence and the recovery of skills*

Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a model that integrates four components of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discursive, and strategic; it also encompasses the appropriate use of language in different contexts. Bachman (1990) proposed that context should be taken into account in the development of communicative competence; in this way, language users can determine the most appropriate way to use the language in each situation. This skill can be reacquired through the zone of proximal development and scaffolding proposed by Vygotsky (1978).

Ellis and Shintani (2014) argue that grammatical competence should be developed through structured input activities that enable students to practice grammar by understanding meaning in authentic contexts, following a specific grammatical pattern. This is based on VanPatten's (2004) theory of input processing, which has been shown to be more effective than traditional exercises.

Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) argue that the development of phonological competence requires a communicative approach to pronunciation that combines auditory recognition tasks, guided practice, and production in communicative contexts. These researchers question traditional pronunciation exercises that are isolated from context and propose using relevant communicative situations to achieve intelligibility rather than a native accent.

#### *Student-Centered Communication Activities*

In 2020, Nation and Macalister proposed four key aspects of a balanced curriculum for language teaching activities (comprehensible input, language production, fluency, and form). That is, including an equal percentage of activities from each of these areas to foster the comprehensive development of communicative competence; this contrasts with previous approaches that emphasize grammar.

Littlewood (2011) argues that communicative activities motivate students and therefore support the language learning process. The development of productive skills, such as speaking and writing, takes place in the classroom (Rojas, 2020) because these are skills that require teacher supervision; furthermore, the classroom is considered a safe space where feedback is provided to facilitate learning (Harmer, 2007).

Role-playing activities allow students to take on and act out one of the roles provided by the teacher; they must write a dialogue and present it in class (Harmer, 2015; Holmes, 2004; Scrivener, 2005). These conversations enable meaningful dialogue among students, during which they can discuss communication situations typical of both school and non-school contexts, as well as their families, tastes, and preferences (Newton & Nation, 2020).

The "Find Someone Who" activity focuses on asking and receiving information in a structured way, enabling second-language acquisition (Hummel, 2021) through

repetitive practice. Presentations allow students to work individually or in groups, and the teacher assigns a topic that students develop independently or collaboratively using the resources available to them (Mardiningrum & Ramadhani, 2022); they also help develop writing skills, vocabulary acquisition, and oral communication (Alkaff, 2013; Miles, 2009).

### *Sociocultural Theory and Scaffolding in Post-Pandemic Recovery*

The sociocultural theory of learning has provided a solid theoretical framework that demonstrates how activities are social practices that reproduce cultural contexts—that is, they are not isolated tasks and mediate language learning; this theory is based on the work of Vygotsky (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In the post-pandemic context, this framework is important because it provides a structure for the gradual recovery of skills that have been affected by social isolation and the lack of in-person interaction.

Language proficiency refers not only to grammatical proficiency but also to communicative proficiency. Vygotsky (1978) states that this skill can be developed through the zone of proximal development, where the teacher acts as a mediator who provides scaffolding so that students can make more progress than they could on their own. The zone of proximal development refers to the progress a person can make with the help and effective guidance of someone who has more knowledge; scaffolding is the temporary, structured support provided to a student to help them develop or regain language skills.

### *Project- and Task-Based Learning*

Benefits of PBL have been documented in English language teaching contexts; one such study was conducted by Stoller in 2006, in which students from two classes—one using traditional instruction and the other using PBL—were compared. The results showed that in projects (which can include role-playing, presentations, or conversations), students were more motivated, vocabulary retention increased, and more complex metacognitive skills were developed. This is linked to the constructivist theory of learning, which states that knowledge is constructed when students have meaningful and socially situated experiences.

Another quasi-experimental study conducted at a public elementary school in Greece with sixth-grade students revealed that the use of PBL in learning helped to: a) improve language skills; b) develop critical thinking, collaboration, and autonomy (Fragoulis, 2009). Fragoulis argues that it also changes the traditional dynamic, making students active participants in their own learning.

In English courses for college students, it was found that interdisciplinary projects foster the development of both language proficiency and subject-specific knowledge (Simpson, 2011). The same study emphasizes the impact of pedagogical scaffolding in structuring projects through short lessons focused on specific competencies, a continuous process of formative feedback, and opportunities to reflect on how learning takes place.

## **Method**

This study is an action research project focused on improving English language proficiency through communicative activities such as presentations, conversations, and role-playing, as well as the “find someone who” activity. Students were required to complete a series of projects, which could take the form of conversations, presentations on topics that interested them, or role-playing exercises based on real-life situations. In

addition, the framework was implemented through the “Find Someone Who” activity, which requires students to use the language both orally and in writing. To carry out the projects, topics were assigned that took into account the participants’ interests, with a variety of scenarios for presentations, role-playing exercises, and discussions

According to Burns (2010), action research consists of four phases: the planning phase, the implementation-observation phase, the reflection phase on the collected data, and the process review phase. During the planning phase, the activities to be implemented were selected based on the students’ language needs; in addition, the students’ preferences regarding classroom activities were taken into account. In this phase, the results of Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 3 were analyzed, and a sequence of communicative activities was designed in line with the course curriculum and the identified areas of need. During the implementation phase, the selected activities were carried out, and the participants’ involvement and performance were observed. During the reflection phase, qualitative data from the questionnaires and qualitative data from the exams were triangulated to assess the impact of the intervention. Finally, during the review phase of the process, necessary adjustments to the instructional design were identified for future implementations.

Only one action-reflection cycle was completed because the work took place after the midterm exams and before the final exams, which allowed for only one cycle to be completed. However, it is worth noting that a brief reflection on the effectiveness of the selected activities took place each time an activity was implemented in the classroom.

The study was conducted with an Intermediate Level 2 group, corresponding to level A2+, using a non-probabilistic, convenience sample, which facilitated access and continuity of follow-up. The participants were eight students, all women between the ages of 20 and 38 (two 20-year-olds, one 21-year-old, three 22-year-olds, one 34-year-old, and one 38-year-old). The course was held every week for 5 hours on Fridays. All of them began their studies in February 2020; they had attended in-person classes for a month and a half when, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they were forced to continue their education remotely. This is shown in Table 1, which presents the levels they studied at through in-person, synchronous, and asynchronous classes. A crucial methodological aspect was this change, which made it possible to analyze the impact of the transition from in-person to online instruction and back to in-person instruction with regard to language skills.

**Table 1**  
*Levels offered in-person and online*

| <b>Year</b>   | <b>2020</b>               | <b>2020</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> |
|---------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Period</b> | F-J                       | A-D         | F-J         | A-D         | F-J         |
| <b>Level</b>  | B 1                       | B 2         | B 3         | I 1         | I2          |
| <b>Format</b> | In-person<br>(1.5 months) | Remotely    | Remotely    | Remotely    | In-person   |

*Note. Compiled by the author based on records from the Orizaba Language Center. F: February; J: June; A: August; D: December; B: Basic; I: Intermediate.*

On the one hand, this shift from in-person classes to distance learning forced teachers to develop new skills in order to continue teaching and learning English; although each teacher developed these skills to varying degrees, they managed to ensure the continuity of education. In addition, the participants took one and a half months of in-person classes and three and a half semesters of distance learning.

### **Data Collection Tools**

Three questionnaires were administered: Questionnaire 1 was administered at the beginning of the semester to determine each student's needs regarding their English language performance in previous courses; Questionnaire 2 was administered three weeks after the first, with the aim of identifying the areas in which the participants most wanted and needed to improve; and Questionnaire 3 was administered at the end of the semester to assess the improvement in the study participants' performance. In addition, two written exams were administered—one midterm and one final—as well as two oral exams—one midterm and one final. These assessments are marked as required in the language center.

A combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions was used in the three questionnaires; these collected information from the students that was related to the subject of the study. Questionnaire 1 focused on identifying the needs of the students after they had taken classes online for nearly two years; this was an exploratory survey that measured the perceptions and needs of the study participants (Burns, 2010; Dörnyei, 2007).

Questionnaire 2 contained 10 Likert-scale questions and 14 open-ended questions designed to identify the types of skills and activities that the students enjoyed, in order to use this information as a basis for implementing the study; it was administered three weeks after the first questionnaire.

Regarding the content validity of the questionnaires, they were reviewed by two faculty members with experience in applied linguistics research, who verified the clarity of the items and their relevance to the study's objectives. The oral exams were graded using an institutional rubric that includes five criteria: a) fluency (0–4 points); b) completion of the task (0–4 points); c) grammar (0–4 points); d) vocabulary and pronunciation (0–4 points); e) evaluation of the interlocutor (0–4 points), for a total of 20 points. The written exams were graded according to the institutional rubric, which takes into account grammar, vocabulary, content, and language use.

Oral exams are graded with the assistance of another teacher; that is, the regular teacher serves as the interviewer, and the teacher who grades the exam serves as the grader. The respondent can award up to 4 points, while the evaluator has up to 16 points to award. This ensures consistency in grading and prevents bias on the part of the instructor.

Questionnaire 3 gathered information about the results of the implementation, as well as the participants' opinions regarding the activities used and their performance in the language. There is a question at the end that focuses on determining the effectiveness of the classroom activities in improving student performance; this information helps eliminate subjectivity in qualitative studies (Dörnyei, 2007). The data from the three questionnaires were analyzed using content analysis, and the categories identified were triangulated to assess performance before and after the intervention.

### **Communication Activities Implemented**

Role-playing is done in teams, with each student assigned a role to play. Based on that role, they must engage in a dialogue related to the given situation. Like conversations, role-playing promotes collaborative work and helps correct vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical errors.

The activities mentioned above allow learners to practice the language in real-life situations, since they can pretend to be someone else or react as themselves because these activities are part of everyday life (Harmer in Spratt, 2008; Gower et al., 1983).

“Find Someone Who” allows students to practice the grammar and vocabulary presented in class in a controlled setting and encourages them to practice new structures (Hummel, 2021). The activity is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on automating questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no.” In this phase, students must ask their classmates the questions they have; when someone answers “yes,” they write that person’s name on the question and move on to the next one. Once all the questions have been asked, phase two begins. In this exercise, students report the information they have gathered using affirmative or negative sentences; this allows them to practice the different types of sentences in the language in a controlled manner.

The activities carried out were based on the participants’ responses to the questionnaires. These activities included presentations, discussions, role-playing, and “find someone who” exercises; presentations were assigned weekly, as were discussions or role-playing exercises, and the “find someone who” activity was conducted four times.

The topics were based on the curriculum, the textbook, and the students’ interests and preferences, which were mentioned in the questionnaires and during class. Table 2 shows the schedule of activities, which includes both the activities carried out and the questionnaires and exams. The timeline shows how often each activity was carried out during the study period.

The exams used were the midterm and final exams, both oral and written; furthermore, they are based on the topics covered in the syllabus and the textbook. The intervention was implemented after this period in order to establish a baseline for their language proficiency.

**Table 2**  
*Schedule of Activities*

| Activity /           | Month | FEBRUAR |   |   |   | MARCH |   |   |   | APRIL |   |   |   | MAY |   |   |   | JUNE |   |   |
|----------------------|-------|---------|---|---|---|-------|---|---|---|-------|---|---|---|-----|---|---|---|------|---|---|
|                      | Week  | 1       | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1     | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4    | 1 | 2 |
| Quiz 1               |       |         |   |   | ■ |       |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |
| Questionnaire 2      |       |         |   |   |   |       |   | ■ |   |       |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |
| Questionnaire 3      |       |         |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |
| Midterm Written Exam |       |         |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |       |   | ■ |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |
| Final Written Exam   |       |         |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |
| Midterm Oral Exam    |       |         |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |       |   | ■ |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |
| Final Oral Exam      |       |         |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |
| Presentations        |       |         |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |
| Conversations        |       |         |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |
| Role-playing game    |       |         |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |
| “Find someone who”   |       |         |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |       |   |   |   |     |   |   |   |      |   |   |

**Data Analysis**

The data obtained from instruments such as questionnaires and tests were triangulated; this triangulation contributed to the study’s reliability and validity. This ensures that each instrument measures the construct for which it was designed, thereby preventing any influence from the researcher, external factors, or errors (Dawson, 2007). The results of both oral exams made it possible to demonstrate their relationship to the participants’ comments. Figure 1 shows how the different instruments compared; data analysis was conducted by triangulating Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2 with the final written exam, the final oral exam, and Questionnaire 3.

The qualitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using content analysis, in which the information was classified into emerging categories that arose inductively

from the participants' responses. These responses were compared with the exam results to achieve data triangulation (the written midterm exam and oral midterm exam were triangulated with the written final exam, oral final exam, and Questionnaire 3; additionally, the oral final exam and written final exam were triangulated with Questionnaire 3).

**Figure 1**  
*Data Analysis*



The study yielded both qualitative and quantitative data; the former came from the questionnaires, and the latter from the written and oral exams. Next, the results of the midterm oral exam were compared with those of the final oral exam; the same analysis was applied to the written exam scores.

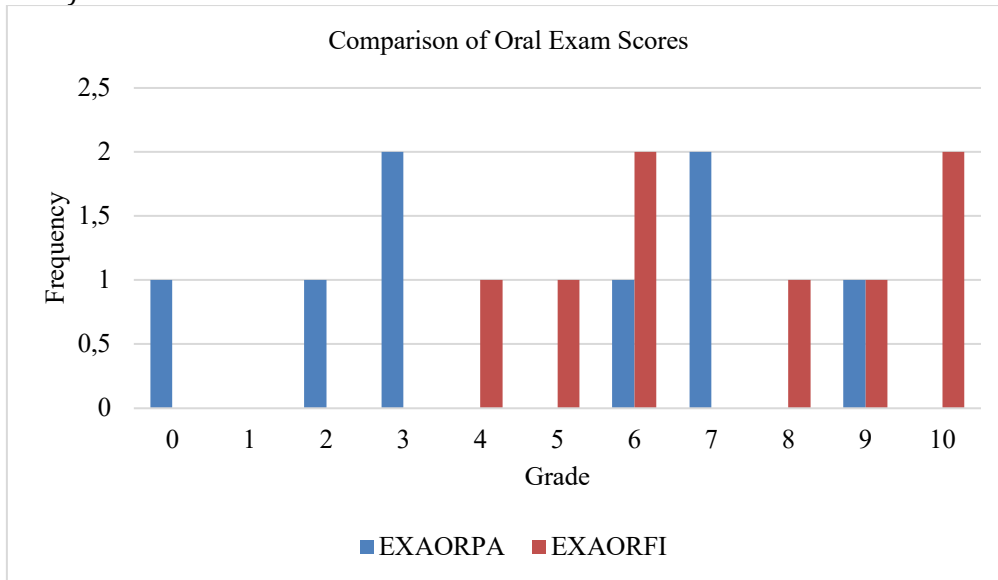
The qualitative data collected from the three questionnaires were analyzed, and categories emerged from the information provided by the participants; first, the comments from questionnaires 1 and 2 were analyzed and the responses were compared with those from questionnaire 3, and these responses were then compared with the test results.

## **Results**

### ***Oral Exam Grades***

Figure 2 illustrates the scores on the midterm and final oral exams. An upward trend was observed in the average oral score (from  $M = 4.63$  to  $M = 7.25$ ); however, given the small sample size ( $n = 8$ ), it is not possible to establish statistical significance. However, this suggests that the activities implemented were effective in supporting improvements in the participants' performance.

**Figure 2**  
Comparison of Oral Exam Scores



Note. EXAORPA: Midterm oral exam; EXAORFI: Final oral exam.

Measures of central tendency and dispersion are presented in Table 3. The average score on the midterm oral exam was  $M = 4.63$ , and on the final oral exam,  $M = 7.25$ ; this confirms the effectiveness of oral activities in improving performance. The mean score for the midterm oral exam was  $\bar{x} = 4.50$ , and the mean score for the final oral exam was  $\bar{x} = 7.00$ , indicating that the score on the second exam was higher.

**Table 3**  
Analysis of Oral Exam Grades

| Measurement | Minimum value | Maximum value | Media | Median | Fashion | Standard deviation |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| EXAORPA     | 0             | 9             | 4.63  | 4.50   | 3rd     | 3,068              |
| EXAORFI     | 4             | 10            | 7.25  | 7.00   | 6th     | 2,315              |

Note. EXAORPA: Midterm Oral Exam Grade; EXAORFI: Final oral exam grade: <sup>‡</sup>: There are multiple modes, and the smallest value is displayed.

The standard deviation for the midterm oral exam was higher ( $\sigma = 3.068$ ), indicating that the scores were more widely dispersed around the mean of 4.63. In the case of the final oral exam, the standard deviation is lower ( $\sigma = 2.315$ ), indicating that the scores are closer to the mean of 7.25; consequently, this confirms that the activities have a positive influence on oral performance.

**Written Exam Scores**

Table 4 shows the distribution of scores on the written exam. The lowest score on the midterm written exam was 3 (12.5%), while on the final written exam it was 4 (12.5%). The highest score on the midterm written exam was 9 (12.5%), and on the final written exam it was 10 (12.5%).

**Table 4**  
*Written Exam Scores*

| Grade | EXAESPA fr | EXAESPA % | EXAESFI fr | EXAESFI % |
|-------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| 0     | 0          | 0         | 0          | 0         |
| 1     | 0          | 0         | 0          | 0         |
| 2     | 0          | 0         | 0          | 0         |
| 3     | 1          | 12.5      | 0          | 0         |
| 4     | 1          | 12.5      | 1          | 12.5      |
| 5     | 2          | 25.0      | 0          | 0         |
| 6     | 1          | 12.5      | 1          | 12.5      |
| 7     | 1          | 12.5      | 2          | 25.5      |
| 8     | 1          | 12.5      | 1          | 12.5      |
| 9     | 1          | 12.5      | 2          | 25.5      |
| 10    | 0          | 0         | 1          | 12.2      |
| Total | 8          | 100       | 8          | 100       |

Note. Created by the author. fr: Frequency; %: Percentage; EXAESPA: Midterm Written Exam Scores; EXAESFI: Final Written Exam Grades.

Table 5 presents the measures of central tendency for the written exams. The average score on the midterm written exam was  $M = 5.75$ , and on the final written exam, it was  $M = 7.50$ , indicating that the intervention was effective in promoting optimal performance. The mean score on the midterm written exam was  $\bar{x} = 5.50$ , and the mean score on the final written exam was  $\bar{x} = 7.50$ .

Table 5 also shows that the standard deviation for the midterm written exam was  $\sigma = 1.984$  and for the final written exam was  $\sigma = 1.802$ ; in other words, the scores on the final written exam are closer to the mean, while the scores on the midterm written exam are farther from it.

**Table 5**  
*Analysis of Written Exam Scores*

| Measure ment | Minimum value | Maximum value | Media | Median | Fashion | Standard deviation |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|-------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| EXAESPA      | 3             | 9             | 5.75  | 5.50   | 4       | 1,984              |
| EXAESFI      | 4             | 10            | 7.50  | 7.50   | 7th     | 1,802              |

Note. EXAORPA: Midterm Oral Exam Grade; EXAORFI: Final oral exam grade: <sup>‡</sup>: There are multiple modes, and the smallest value is displayed.

### **Reading and Listening Comprehension**

Most of the comments made prior to the intervention indicated that reading proficiency was low; however, by the end of the semester, it had improved to a fair to good level. The results of the pre-study questionnaires indicated that the participants' listening comprehension was low and that they had difficulty understanding what was said to them; by the end of the semester, half of the participants reported that their listening comprehension was good.

### **Oral Production**

Preliminary comments indicated that fluency and a limited vocabulary hindered effective communication. The participants reported improvements in fluency, which is consistent with the increase in the fluency criterion of the oral rubric (midterm  $M = 1.875$ , final:  $M = 2.5$ ). With regard to vocabulary, they noted that they had learned more vocabulary, which led to an improvement in their oral production; furthermore, this is corroborated by the results of the final oral exam (midterm  $M = 1.625$ , final:  $M = 2.625$ ).

### **Written Work**

With regard to writing skills, most of the participants considered themselves to be at an intermediate level at the start of the program. However, this contrasts with the final results, which indicate that their level is average.

### **Communication**

With regard to communication, at the beginning of the semester, students' proficiency ranged from basic to low due to a lack of practice, vocabulary, and feedback from the instructor. Subsequently, the comments indicated an improvement in both speaking and writing, consistent with the results presented earlier.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of student-centered communication activities for the recovery of language skills in a post-pandemic context. The central thesis of this study—that communicative activities designed based on students' needs, tastes, and preferences are effective for language recovery—is supported by both quantitative and qualitative data.

The increase in the average score on the oral exam (from  $M = 4.63$  to  $M = 7.25$ , representing a 56.6% improvement) is consistent with the findings of Fragoulis (2009), who reported significant improvements in the language skills of Greek elementary school students following the systematic implementation of communicative projects. However, the effect size in the present study is smaller than that reported by Tavid (2010) with Turkish students, which could be explained by differences in the institutional context, the duration of the intervention (9 weeks versus one semester in Tavid's study), and the participants' initial proficiency level.

With regard to student-centered design, this study agrees with Simpson (2011) that structured pedagogical scaffolding, combined with formative feedback, is crucial for student progress in university settings. However, it differs from that study in that here the design of activities is explicitly based on the students' stated tastes and preferences as reported in questionnaires, which adds a dimension of student agency that is rarely documented in the literature on post-pandemic interventions.

Another significant finding is the improvement in auditory comprehension, which went from being rated as "poor" to "good" in 50% of the participants. It is worth noting that this study does not include direct measures of listening comprehension in the tests, but rather relies solely on self-reported perceptions, which constitutes a methodological limitation that should be taken into account when interpreting these results.

The lower standard deviation on the final exams ( $\sigma = 2.315$  for the oral exam and  $\sigma = 1.802$  for the written exam, compared to  $\sigma = 3.068$  and  $\sigma = 1.984$  on the midterms, respectively) suggests greater consistency in performance at the end of the intervention. This phenomenon could be interpreted as a positive leveling effect attributable to gradual scaffolding and systematic feedback, consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) principles of the zone of proximal development and with Littlewood's (2011) findings on the motivational role of communicative activities.

The difference in performance before and after the intervention is evident in the scores obtained on written exams; performance is understood to be the measure of learning. Furthermore, these results show that the proper selection and implementation of classroom activities, combined with the use of appropriate assessment methods, can

help students make progress in their mastery of the language. The current study compares the participants' performance on written exams (midterm and final), which demonstrates the effectiveness of the activities used in the classroom for developing language skills and, consequently, the improvement in the performance of all participants.

Implementing classroom activities is crucial for language teaching and learning; as a result, performance improves because students are consistently exposed to the language during class. In addition, while the participants were in class, they were required to continue using English to give their weekly presentations—which involved reading, listening, speaking (Miles, 2009), and writing—using whatever resources were available to them (Mardiningrum & Ramadhani, 2022).

In terms of implications for curriculum planning at the Language Center, the results suggest that systematically incorporating an assessment of needs and preferences at the beginning of the course can significantly improve the relevance of the activities and, consequently, student performance. For teachers in other contexts, the following is recommended: a) use needs assessments before designing communicative activities; 2) incorporate oral and written production activities in a balanced manner, following the balanced curriculum proposed by Nation and Macalister (2020); and 3) establish mechanisms for ongoing feedback that allow activities to be adjusted based on the group's progress.

## **Conclusions**

With regard to research question 1 (“How effective are conversations, role-playing, and presentations in improving the performance of English learners?”), the results confirm their effectiveness. The oral score increased from  $M = 4.63$  to  $M = 7.25$  (a 56.6% improvement), and the written score increased from  $M = 5.75$  to  $M = 7.50$  (a 30.4% improvement). These findings are consistent with those of Harmer (2015) and Scrivener (2005), who argue that oral activities promote the actual use of the language.

With regard to research question 2 (“What impact does designing activities based on students' tastes, preferences, and needs have on their academic performance?”), the study shows that this impact was transformative and positive. The participants' perception of their communicative competence improved across all skills. This supports Kyriacou's (2007) arguments regarding effective teaching and Scrivener's (2005) views on the role of activities in language learning.

With regard to research question 3 (“What impact do communicative activities have on the recovery of language skills?”), the study shows that student-centered communicative activities are effective tools for the recovery of language skills during the transition back to in-person learning. This recovery manifested itself in a comprehensive manner, combining linguistic knowledge with the ability to use it according to context, as Bachman (1990) notes, and through the gradual scaffolding proposed by Vygotsky (1978).

The main conclusion of this study is that the implementation of communicative activities—such as conversations, role-playing, and presentations—designed based on students' tastes, preferences, and needs is effective in improving English proficiency and restoring language skills in post-pandemic contexts.

## **Limitations**

This study has limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting its findings. First, the sample size ( $n = 8$ ) is small and non-probabilistic, which limits the

generalizability of the results to other contexts. Future studies should include groups with greater diversity in terms of gender and institutional context.

Second, only one action-research cycle was completed, which makes it impossible to analyze how the results evolved over successive cycles. Third, the scale used is intended for institutional use; however, no evidence of external psychometric validation is reported, which constitutes a limitation of this study.

Furthermore, the improvement in auditory comprehension was documented solely through self-reported perceptions and not through standardized instruments. Finally, the absence of a control group makes it impossible to attribute the improvements exclusively to the intervention; moreover, it must be considered that the return to in-person learning may in itself have contributed to the recovery of skills (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020), which limits the possibility of attributing the observed effects exclusively to the intervention implemented.

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