Effectiveness of cooperative learning as a method to improve fluency in english communication

Efectividad del aprendizaje cooperativo como método para mejorar la fluidez en la comunicación en inglés

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ABSTRACT

It was analyzed the effectiveness of cooperative learning by applying the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy, for the verbal fluency in English in the eighth-grade students of Pedro Fermín Cevallos School located in the Manta city, Ecuador. The methodology that was carried out had a quantitative, descriptive, non-experimental and field approach. The data collection technique was an observation rubric for group work and a Student´s fluency rubric, which were applied to the 54 students within the target population. The results indicate that 40.74% of the students work favorably in pairs, considering this cooperative learning technique useful for learning since everyone contributes significantly to the group. On the other hand, regarding verbal fluency, 38.89% of students are on the "Needs to improve" scale, meaning that this ability is still being developed among the target population. To respond to the data found, a didactic plan is proposed to promote learning through collaborative work.

Keywords: cooperative learning, verbal fluency, think-pair-share, learning strategy, didactic planning.

RESUMEN

Se analizó la eficacia del aprendizaje cooperativo aplicando la estrategia "Think-Pair-Share", para la fluidez verbal del inglés en los estudiantes de octavo grado de la escuela Pedro Fermín Cevallos localizado en la ciudad de Manta, Ecuador. La metodología que se llevó a cabo tuvo un enfoque cuantitativo, descriptivo, no experimental y de campo. La recolección de datos se hizo con un registro de observación para trabajos grupales y una rúbrica de fluidez de los estudiantes, instrumentos que fueron aplicados a la población objeto de estudio, conformada por 54 estudiantes. Los resultados refieren que el 40,74% de los educandos trabajan favorablemente en parejas, considerando útil esta técnica de aprendizaje cooperativo para aprender, ya que, todos contribuyen de manera significativa en el grupo. Respecto a la fluidez verbal, el 38,89% de alumnos se encuentran en la escala "Necesita mejorar", lo que significa que esta habilidad aún está en desarrollo entre la población en estudio. Para dar respuesta a la situación encontrada se propone un plan didáctico para promover el aprendizaje a través del trabajo colaborativo.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje cooperativo, fluidez verbal, pensar-emparejar-compartir, estrategia de aprendizaje, plan didáctico.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's education has a new vision of teaching-learning, sustained on the present and future needs of society. When assessing these new requirements, the acquisition of a foreign language is seen as a necessity in the current scenario of globalization, as one of the ways to strengthen man's preparation in the social, scientific and technological spheres.

It is understood that English, as a language has the most active and influential role today, in various fields such as economic, academic, scientific, among others. To reinforce previous approaches, Niño (2013) indicates that the scientific community has accepted English as a lingua franca.

On the other hand, Alday and Romero (2016) they point out that globalization has consolidated English as a universal language in the business world. In addition, Freire (2016) He states that knowledge and mastery of that language increases the chances of finding work in less time. Based on this, it is argued that the mastery of English as a foreign language has become a linguistic competence that allows an individual to integrate effectively and efficiently in a globalized world (Cerda, 2018).

The current paradigm changes in education that have been occurring gradually due to the imperatives of globalized reality are promoting a teaching-learning process supported by dynamic, innovative and motivating methodologies, as part of the training of students. Theoretical advances in education point towards meaningful and cooperative learning, moving away from traditional educational forms centered on teachers as the main figure. This practice constitutes an ideal scenario, allowing the formation of a large network where it is possible, under the guidance of the teacher, to create groups to meet, socialize, collaborate, and share common interests.

It is assumed that teaching a foreign language or second language it is a commitment for the teacher, for this reason, motivating strategies must be used to get the student's attention, in addition to the fact that meaningful learning must be present. In this circumstance, cooperative learning becomes a valuable tool to implement teaching-learning strategies and to create conducive environments that allow training activities to be carried out effectively in pairs, small groups or

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throughout the class, through the interaction and cooperation of students (Julio y Vega, 2019).

From here it can be affirmed that this type of activity is a method that has shown excellent results in the teaching-learning process (Kagan & McGroarty, 1993), as it has the potential to arouse students' interest and motivation. According to Juarez, Rasskin and Mendo (2019), "Cooperative Learning (CL) is an active methodology in which students work in small groups to maximize their learning, favoring the development of their social competence" (p.201), whereas Vázquez, Méndez and Mendoza (2015) believe that this is a joint construction of knowledge mediated by the interaction of team members, emphasizing active participation, individual and collective responsibility, reflective dialogue and communication, to achieve a common goal. For their part, Johnson and Johnson (2014) assure that the contributions of cooperative learning are so important that it is considered a methodological tool capable of responding to the different needs of individuals in the century XXI.

On the other hand, Namaziandost, Homayouni and Rahmani (2020) report that "if cooperative learning is applied correctly, with work groups of students studying together and not competing with each other, learning would be successful and productive." (p.11).

In essence, the contributions of the cited authors suggest that cooperative learning is based on the collective construction of knowledge, through the stimulation of the participation of all members of the group. The promotion of the participation of all members of the group is oriented towards the achievement of objectives of common interest. In this way, the teacher acts as a facilitator and a figure that guides the student's learning process in the classroom.

This is how the teachers of the century XXI, especially those who teach English, have cooperative learning at their fingertips. That means that Cooperative Learning (CL) is a pedagogical practice that, when used correctly, can invaluably favor the acquisition of tools designed for students to learn in a meaningful way, and at the same time, the teacher can respond to the needs of students by promoting the participation of all and contributing to the acquisition of academic and social skills in English.

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In this sense, it is necessary to define one of the many ways to bring Cooperative Learning to the classroom. The "Think-Pair-Share" strategy was selected for this study, based on students reading a text, initially individually and then in pairs or small groups. At the end, everyone participates in a plenary discussion in the classroom. With this, students will express their views and reflect on their own learning (Tayo & Hernández, 2017).

Ángel and Cárdenas (2021), emphasize that this technique is useful for the cognitive development of the student, facilitating their participation in school activities through skills such as "thinking, analyzing and sharing an idea with a classmate and when the student feels ready, finally share that idea with the group" (p.29).

At the same time, these last authors declare that this technique favors the confidence and security that individuals develop to carry out the proposed activity, first individually and in pairs, and then as a complete group, allowing a significant advantage in strengthening the "interaction, fluency, pronunciation, intonation; that is, oral expression in general" (p.30). therefore, Think-Pair-Share constitutes a strategy that fits the theme and purpose of this study, trying to estimate the effectiveness of cooperative learning and, therefore, contribute positively to the verbal and oral fluency of students in the English language.

By using this strategy, students have to read or listen to a story, reflect on their own ideas, and then in pairs compare their answers after that, they would share and discuss with the rest of the participants in a plenary session.

These activities are monitored by their tutor and the actions are recorded in an observation rubric, to measure the frequency of the actions and the fluency when interacting, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of cooperative learning in the class. At this point, it is essential to emphasize that learning English as a second language goes beyond being a requirement for students because it is a subject that integrates the curriculum of the Ecuadorian educational system and is of great relevance in today's globalized society.

Based on this, Brito (2021) underlines that "Cooperative learning will strengthen the learning of a second language, allowing students to master the use of speaking and

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listening skills during the learning process, taking into account that these are the most difficult for students to acquire" (p.25). In this regard, Díaz and Suárez (2011) and Cuitiño, Díaz, and Otárola (2019), have stated that, if students develop the ability to hear in a foreign language and pronounce it correctly, then they will have a greater ability to read and write it, but also to improve the grammatical patterns, pronunciation, and basic vocabulary of the language.

In this regard, to understand the relevance of this study, it is essential to clarify that "fluency in a language means speaking easily, reasonably fast and without having to stop and pause a lot and acquiring fluency in a language can take many years" (Insider, 2020, cited in Campos, 2021). Thus, Cea and Ríos, (2017) in their work indicate that:

> Verbal fluency primarily measures the speed and ease of verbal production; It also evaluates readiness to initiate behavior in response to a novel task. It also evaluates language functions (naming, vocabulary size), response speed, mental organization and search strategies (p.5).

Taking into account these contributions, it can be said that this verbal fluency is only one aspect of a set of cognitive skills that allow its execution in verbal expression, and constitutes a key component in communicative competence, because speaking fluently helps the sender to express himself constantly and uninterruptedly, facilitating the receiver to understand the message in a relevant and effective way. Finally, the objective of this article was to analyze the effectiveness of cooperative learning by applying the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy for the development of verbal fluency in eighth grade students at Pedro Fermín Cevallos school located in the Manta, Ecuador, taking into account that in this institution students have difficulty expressing themselves in English, orally and fluently, showing little oral accuracy in terms of grammatical and lexical structures.

METODOLOGY

This research work is part of the quantitative approach, which according to Hernández, Fernández and Batista (2014) and the Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador (2016), aims to explain and predict the phenomena investigated by looking for regularities and causal relationships between the elements.

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A non-experimental design was used in a descriptive transactional way, with the main objective of describing the variables and analyzing their influence and interrelation in various groups or subgroups (Dzul, S/F).

As for the depth of the work, it was descriptive. In this aspect, the information was collected through the participant observation technique, obtaining relevant findings on the investigated topic. In this order of ideas, Arias (2006); Hurtado (2008) and Arias (2012) corroborate that within a study it is necessary to verify, validate and identify that the sources of information provide new knowledge and adequate support to the study. For the collection of information, an evaluation rubric validated by expert judgment was used as an instrument. The instrument responded to 4 dimensions: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and general fluency. Likewise, an observation register was implemented for group work.

The research population was made up of the 700 students of the educational center; The sample was intentional, composed of the 54 eighth grade students, whose profile was characterized by: first, being a student of a basic higher level and second, being an eighth-grade student.

Regarding the analysis of the information on the statistical treatment of the data, the computer program Microsoft Excel and the SPSS v25 software were used, which allowed the classification and ordering of the collected data. Details of the instruments used for data collection are shown in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Observation rubric for group work.

Group:		
Date:	Hour:	
Observer:		
Course:		
Signature:		
Observation Rating	**0**	**1**
Maintained communication is fluid.		
They are interested in the activity.		
Take prior knowledge into account.		
Control work time.		

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Make consensual decisions.		
Interact with other groups.		
Participation is distributed evenly.		
Dedicate time to carry out the assigned task in the subject.		
Take notes or keep some kind of record of the session.		
Ask the teacher when they have any doubts.		
Total		

Note. The table represents the elements of the modified instrument considering what was proposed by Iborra and Izquierdo (2010).
Source: Authors.

Table 2. Student´s fluency rubric.

Level 0 - Deficient	Level 1- needs improvement	Level 2 - meets expectations	Level 3 - Exceed expectations
(0,50 pts.)	(1,25 pts.)	(2 pts.)	(2,5 pts.)
Category Vocabulary:			
Use only simple expressions. Sometimes used an inappropriate vocabulary that prevents the student from responding appropriately.	Uses limited expressions. Make frequent mistakes in word choice. It does not try to use new words learned in class or to increase vocabulary and phrases.	Uses a variety of expressions learned in class. Making a few mistakes in word choice.	Use appropriate expressions and a wide variety of words learned in and out of class.
Total:			
Category: Grammar			
It uses only basic structures and makes frequent mistakes.	Use basic structures with errors.	Use a variety of sentence structures but make mistakes.	It uses many different structures depending on the context with grammatical errors.
Total:			
Category: Pronunciation			
Difficulties with pronunciation and intonation. The voice is too low to hear. Very difficult to understand.	Errors in pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation sometimes make it difficult to understand the student.	Pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation are almost clear and precise, but it is occasionally difficult to understand the enunciation.	Pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation are almost always clear and precise.
Total:			
Category: Overall fluency			
Speaking with a lot of hesitation (filler words) often interferes with communication.	Speaking with some hesitation (filler words), which sometimes interferes with communication.	Speaking with some hesitation (filler words) but does not interrupt the flow of the conversation.	Speaking softly with hesitation (filler words) and does not interrupt the flow of conversation. Speaks with confidence.
Total			

Note. The table presents the dimensions stipulated for the process of observing the mastery of fluency in English, taken and adapted from the Speaking Fluency

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Assessment Rubric, by the University of Oslo.
Source: Authors.

The observation rubric (table 1) was adapted from the study by Iborra and Izquierdo (2010) and allowed to verify the effectiveness of cooperative learning through the implementation of the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy, in which students carried out the proposed activity in groups. The activities were crossword puzzles, word searches, interviews, stop-hand and role plays, while they were observed and evaluated as a group through the record of observation rubrics where the observer noted the interactions made.

The observation rubric (Table 1) was adapted from the study by Iborra and Izquierdo (2010) and allowed to verify the effectiveness of cooperative learning through the implementation of the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy, in which students carried out the proposed activity in groups. The activities were crossword puzzles, word searches, interviews, stop-hand and role plays, while they were observed and evaluated as a group through the record of observation rubrics where the observer noted the interactions made.

On the other hand, the student´s fluency rubric (table 2) was designed to measure the verbal fluency of each student in the different activities practiced individually or in groups proposed by the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy. It should be noted that the results obtained were analyzed through the application of descriptive statistics, which allowed the researcher to perform statistical analysis to relate their variables, assuming that statistics is not an end, but a tool to evaluate data (Sabino, 2002).

RESULTS

When analyzing the results of the observation record of group work applied in this research, specifically with the effectiveness of the activities designed from Cooperative Learning in the verbal fluency of English in eighth-grade students of the Pedro Fermín Cevallos school, we have found what is described in table 3.

Table 3. *Observation scale for group work assessment to measure the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning.*

Scale	Ranges	fi	%
High	9 – 10	4	14,81
Medium	7 – 8	11	40,74
Low	5 – 6	5	18,52
Very low	< 4	7	25,93
Total		27	100

Note: The table shows the rating scale subdivided into four ranges.
Source: Authors.

The results show the distribution of grades in four categories regarding Cooperative Learning (table 3). It highlights the 14.81% that achieved ratings in the category "High", and 40.74% in the category "Medium"; Both indicate a significant level of proficiency and suggest the overall efficiency of the method, however, 18.52% obtained ratings in the "Low" category, raising concerns about implementation, while 25.93% were placed in the "Very low" category, suggesting the need for adjustments in the method to make it more effective.

Most of the groups established with the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy are on a "Medium" scale (grades 7-8), highlighting the effectiveness of this in the eighth-grade students of the aforementioned school. 40.74% show significant progress in terms of cooperative work, unlike 14.81% who show the high scale for the same work (Figure 1). From these values, we understand the effectiveness of cooperative work in activities designed with this method.
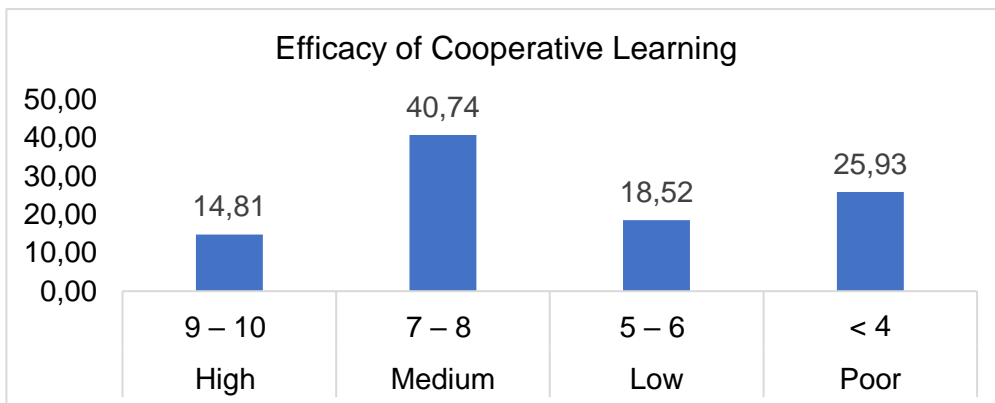
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Efficacy of Cooperative Learning

Figure 1. This figure shows the percentages obtained in the assessment scale referring to the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning through the observation rubric for group work.
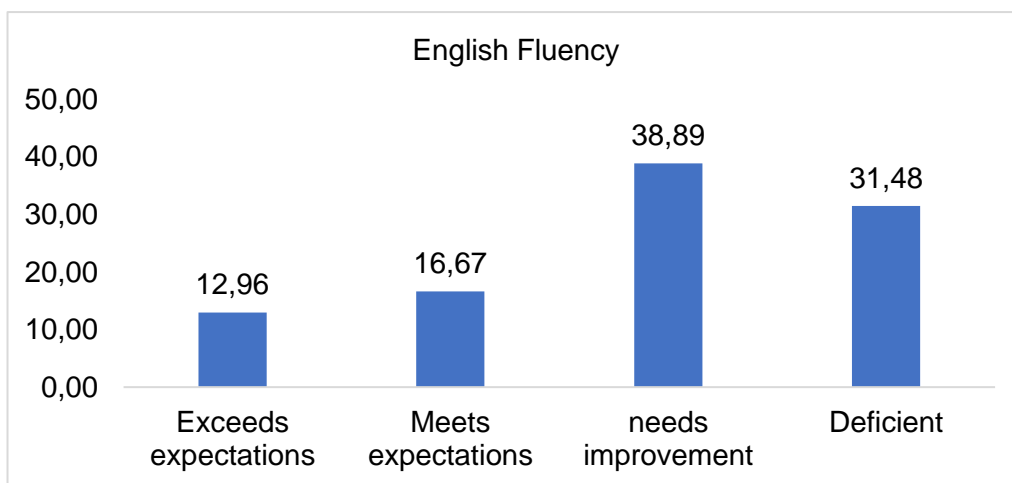**Source:** Authors.

Table 4 indicates that 12.96% of students exceed expectations in English fluency, while 16.67% meet them. On the other hand, 38.89% suggest the need to improve their fluency in English, and 31.48% reflect a deficiency in the fluency of that language. When analyzing these results, it can be concluded that they are good since they show a significant percentage of students who exceed expectations (12.96%) and meet the required standards (16.67%) in the fluency of the mentioned language. When these statistics are added, 29.63% are performing satisfactorily or even outstandingly in this regard, which is a positive development, despite the fact that the evaluation rubric highlights the need for improvements in the largest proportion of learners (Figure 2).

Table 4. *English Fluency in eighth-grade students at Pedro Fermín Cevallos school.*

Assessment scale	Ranges	fi	%
Exceeds expectations	9 – 10	7	12,96
Meets expectations	7 – 8	9	16,67
Needs improvement	5 – 6	21	38,89
Deficient	< 4	17	31,48
Total		54	100

Note. The table shows the evaluation scale.
Source: Authors.

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Note: This figure shows the percentages obtained in the assessment scale referring to fluency in English in students.
Figure 2. English Fluency.
Source: Authors.

DISCUSSION

Regarding the results obtained, it can be deduced that the application of Cooperative Learning was significant since, as shown in Table 3, 40.74% of the participants were placed on a medium scale (7-8/10 points), which means that for most of them, the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy is favorable for the development of cooperative skills.

These findings are similar to those of Ángel and Cárdenas (2021) and Muñoz (2021), who found positive results when integrating the TPS (Think-Pair-Share) to improve reading comprehension in students; and in attention to Ortega (2016); and Yánez-Valle, Moreno-Novillo, Chamorro-Ortega and Robalino-Araujo (2022), it is appropriate for them to also develop their thinking skills. But, in addition, Lascano (2021) adds that the TPS strategy is efficient in improving the development of oral and communication skills in A1-level English students.

Likewise, it should be noted that the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy not only promotes cooperation and critical thinking, but also fosters an inclusive and harmonious learning environment. When students are allowed to share and discuss ideas, diversity of thought is promoted and the contribution of each individual is valued, after which, greater commitment and motivation can be achieved in them, and consequently, improve their school performance.

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It should be noted that the percentage of students who did not reach the desired levels of fluency, possibly related to the low level of English proficiency reported by the EF Proficiency Index report, which indicates that Ecuador ranked 81st out of a total of 100 countries evaluated, considered as a "Very Low" level of English. with an average of 46.57, which is equivalent to an A1 level according to the Common European Framework (EF EPI, 2019). This situation, according to Oñate Ríos and Chiriboga Miño (2017) may be linked to the poor performance of the English teacher in the classroom, against which, it would be convenient to use didactic resources such as posters, books, magazines, clippings and multimedia resources such as Educaplay, Jclic Player, Jclic Author and Jclic Reports (Chicaiza, 2018). as they allow students to awaken interest in self-learning English inside and outside the classroom.

Proposal of Cooperative Learning Activities

To improve the teaching-learning of English with eighth-grade students at Pedro Fermín Cevallos school, a plan of activities is proposed from Cooperative Learning with the *Think Pair Share* (STP) strategy, considering that this allows to innovate the pedagogical practice and favor the development of critical thinking in schoolchildren. To perform TPS effectively and go according to cooperative learning, the following activities have been designed:

- Conference to guide teachers on Cooperative Learning and its impact on meaningful student learning and, in particular, English learning.
- Diagnostic fluency test to students to be able to compare the results later, and if necessary, add, change, and/or edit the activities, as well as adapt them to other particular cases if there is a need to replicate it in another group of students.
- Evaluation of the results through a pre-test and a post-test without changing the initial contents, with them the skills and cooperative interaction measured by the TPS strategy will be evaluated, and the strengths and weaknesses of this will be identified.

DIDACTIC PLAN

This proposal aims to improve the fluency of English in eighth-grade students at Pedro Fermín Cevallos School. It is a didactic plan based on curricular microplanning that establishes the National Curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education

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(2019), consists of lessons with their respective elements such as the didactic unit, duration, theme or content, learning activities, didactic, technological and bibliographic resources, and didactic strategies (table 5). It focuses on generating solution options and answers to the weaknesses found in students in English fluency.

Table 5. Didactic plan to improve English fluency.

Year: Eighth	Didactic unit: English	Duration: 80 minutes (40 minutes each session)	Period: 2
Unit: Learning Unit (AU): writing and orality in the English language			
Topic: Professions		Grammar: Verb To-Be	

Development of Knowledge			
Conceptual (How to know)	**Procedural (Knowing how o do)**	**Attitudinal (Know how to be)**	**Units of competence**
Understands the text message in both their native language and English.	Read the text loud. Identify grammatical structures and vocabulary related to professions. Exchange information. Express orally using simple language about familiar topics such as professions.	Value the importance of English for the good development in daily life. Shows interest in improving pronunciation in English. Assumes a constructive attitude within different work teams.	Has the ability to communicate adequately in English. Understands and pronounces a text in English coherently. Participates and works in teams.

Performance criteria:
EFL 4.3.1. Understand main ideas in short, simple texts about familiar topics. (Example: news about sports or famous people, descriptions, etc.).
EFL 4.2.6 Use the contributions of other students in class as models for their own using simple language to express ideas clearly, slowly and directly on a topic in a short oral presentation using grammar and vocabulary learned in class.

Methodological Strategies (Teaching-Learning)

Teacher and Student´s Teaching Learning Activities.	Resources: Didactic, Technological and Bibliographic	Evidence of achievements (Assessment)
Warm up activity • Read individually and in pairs a text about: VIP people and professions and underline the verb to be. • Write the answer to some questions about the text VIP people and Professions, using the verb to be.	**Warm up activity** • Sheets • Dictionary • Pencils • Pen • Highlighters	**Warm up activity** I.EFL*.4.11.1. Students can understand main ideas and other particularities in texts related to family issues. Students can identify in pairs or small groups the main idea and details of conversations in familiar contexts using contextual support. (Example: rules of a game, classroom instructions, etc.). They can also use contributions from other classmates as models for their own. I.EFL*.4.9.1. Students are able to use simple language to make descriptions and

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		comparisons, and to present everyday events (possessions, classroom objects, and routines in short, structured situations) while interacting with relative ease. (I.3, I.4, S.4)
• Compare their answers in pairs.		Students can express in small groups their knowledge about vocabulary (Brainstorming), and recognize the verb Ser and the professions underlined in the text.
		Students in pairs or small groups can convey information and ideas using the vocabulary of a video in conversation.

Presentation	**Presentation**	**Presentation**
• Reflect on eight questions that the teacher will ask you. "What do you think is the best Profession or Occupation? What does the actor do? Who is your favorite VIP? What profession do you like? What do you know about Mark Zuckerberg? Who is your favorite sportsman/sportswoman? What profession attracts your attention the most? What skills do these professions need? What profession would you like to be in the future? • In pairs play with a conversational cube using the "*Question Dice*" game. The dice will mark the eight questions individually reflected before. Students will take turns answering the questions using the verb "to be" to give their answers. **Wind up** • Answer the question: What profession would I like to be and why? (Students will be free to select how they will present their answers to the whole class (presentations, videos, etc.). • Students will think or write in response to a question or activity given by the teacher, then share their ideas in pairs or small groups, and finally present their final work in the total group.	• Board • Markers • Dictionary • Pencils • Sheets of paper/notebook useful material • Dice whit questions **Wind up** • Computer • Cellphone • Internet • Applications • Projector	Students can easily practice pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary in pairs or small groups. **Wind up** Convey information and ideas through expository slides using ICT tools.

Note: *EFL: English as a Foreign Language.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the Curriculum of the Levels of Compulsory Education: Basic General Education, designed by the Ministry of Education (2019).

As can be seen in the Didactic Plan, students are being encouraged to practice conversations between peers, reinforcing this discussion-cooperation strategy as suggested by Valverde (2013), indicating that the cooperative work of the members of the group allows each one to carry out the activities entrusted with the responsibility of achieving a common goal. Think-Pair-Share's cooperative discussion strategy focuses students on achieving a goal through their collaborative work. It is divided into 3 steps. Students think or write in response to a question or activity given by the teacher, then share their ideas in pairs or small groups to finally present their final work in the total group. (Abdurrahman, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

The "*Think-Pair-Share*" is a highly effective cooperative learning strategy for developing communication skills in English. Through conceptual, procedural and attitudinal activities, collaborative work is promoted in the classroom, strengthening the verbal fluency of students and stimulating critical thinking and problem solving.

The design of the proposed Didactic Plan focuses on improving English fluency through teamwork. Activities include creating short stories from joining simple sentences and using class-specific vocabulary. These activities promote the practical use of the language and encourage student collaboration and participation.

The evaluation is carried out through performance indicators that allow to determine the progress of the student in terms of fluency and ability to work in pairs and in teams or small groups. By orally sharing their stories with the whole group, students have the opportunity to practice and improve their verbal expression in a supportive environment, where positive feedback is also formulated.

This plan included activities to improve English fluency through teamwork, joining simple sentences, creating short stories and using a specific vocabulary of the class to finally be shared orally throughout the group.

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