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The Impact of Active Learning on EFL Learners' Communicative Competence: A Focus on Collaborative and Experiential Approaches

El impacto del aprendizaje activo en la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera: un enfoque basado en enfoques colaborativos y experienciales.

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Resumen

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar el impacto del aprendizaje activo en el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, mediante la implementación de enfoques colaborativos y experienciales. La investigación se sustentó en un diseño cuasi-experimental con enfoque mixto, aplicado a una muestra intencional de 120 estudiantes universitarios divididos en grupo control y grupo experimental. A lo largo de un semestre académico, el grupo experimental participó en actividades didácticas basadas en trabajo cooperativo, resolución de problemas reales, dramatizaciones, simulaciones y aprendizaje basado en proyectos, mientras que el grupo control siguió una metodología tradicional centrada en la transmisión de contenidos. Los datos se recolectaron a través de pruebas estandarizadas de competencia comunicativa (oral y escrita), diarios reflexivos de los estudiantes y entrevistas semiestructuradas a docentes. Los hallazgos revelan mejoras estadísticamente significativas ($p < 0.05$) en la fluidez, coherencia, interacción y adecuación lingüística de los estudiantes expuestos al aprendizaje activo. Asimismo, se evidenció un incremento en la autonomía, motivación y participación activa en el proceso formativo. Estos resultados sugieren que los enfoques colaborativos y experienciales, al promover contextos auténticos de uso del idioma, potencian no solo el desarrollo lingüístico sino también habilidades sociales esenciales para la competencia comunicativa. El estudio destaca la necesidad de replantear las prácticas pedagógicas en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, orientándolas hacia modelos centrados en el estudiante y en la construcción activa del conocimiento.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje Activo, Competencia, Inglés, Lengua Extranjera, Colaborativo, Idiomas.



Abstract

This study aimed to examine the effect of active learning on the enhancement of communicative skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students by employing collaborative and experiential methodologies. The study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design, utilizing a purposive sample of 120 university students categorized into a control group and an experimental group. Throughout an academic semester, the experimental group participated in instructional activities based on collaborative work, real-world problem-solving, dramatizations, simulations, and project-based learning, whereas the control group adhered to a conventional methodology centered on content delivery. Data were gathered using standardized communicative competency assessments (both oral and written), students' reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews with educators. The results demonstrated statistically significant enhancements ($p < 0.05$) in the fluency, coherence, interaction, and language appropriateness of students engaged in active learning. Furthermore, an enhancement in autonomy, motivation, and active engagement in the learning process was noted. The findings indicate that collaborative and experiential methods, by fostering genuine situations for language application, improve both linguistic proficiency and vital social skills necessary for communicative competence. The study emphasizes the necessity to reevaluate pedagogical approaches in foreign language instruction, directing them towards student-centered models that prioritize the active development of knowledge.

Keywords: Active Learning, Communicative Competence, EFL Learners, Collaborative Approaches, Experiential Learning, Language Education, Student-centered Instruction.



Introduction

1. Putting the topic in context

Active learning, which combines collaborative and experiential elements, has been shown to be a good way to help students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) improve their communication skills (Baldemar López-Hidalgo, 2025). This method encourages people to take part, makes them less nervous about talking to others, and makes them more fluent by simulating real conversations (Calderón-Delgado & Atencio-González, 2023). Active approaches have helped make learning environments in Latin America more real and relevant (Chica-Esquivia, 2025).

2. Review of the Literature

Project-Based Learning (PBL) and other methods have been shown to help people improve their speaking and writing skills in English (Velásquez-Rodas, 2025). In Iran, active learning made people far more inclined to talk and helped them improve their oral EFL skills (Azizi, Namaziandost, & Ashkani, 2022). The use of active techniques with ICTs in hybrid settings improved oral skills (López-Hidalgo, 2025). In recent decades, there has been an increasing interest in using active learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, especially with the advent of collaborative, experiential, and technology-based methods. Recent research shows that traditional models of content transmission are not enough to promote the full development of communicative competence in EFL settings. This shows the need for student-centered strategies that include interaction, problem-solving, and building knowledge together.

In this setting, collaborative learning has been demonstrated to greatly improve students' cognitive and communication skills by creating situations where they are involved (Bernal Párraga et al., 2025). These methods help with not only language fluency and accuracy, but also social skills including cooperation, empathy, and self-control (Bernal Parraga et al., 2024). Gamification, for example, has become a useful teaching method for getting students to be more motivated and involved in English classrooms. This has led to big changes in how often they use the language on their own (Jara Chiriboga et al., 2025).

The adoption of new technologies has also changed the way we learn. Recent research shows how chatbots, virtual assistants, and adaptive platforms that allow for real-time interactive practice can



help personalize language learning (Jara Chiriboga et al., 2025; Padilla Chicaiza et al., 2025). When used with active methods, these technologies make them more effective at improving communication skills by creating immersive environments and giving quick feedback.

Digital resources that support student-centered teaching methods have also been shown to help students learn in a meaningful way from an early age, especially when they are taught critical reading, text comprehension, and oral production in the same setting (Torres Illescas et al., 2024). This way of talking about teaching methods has also proved important for helping students understand and express themselves better in language and literature, especially when they work together and use personalized techniques (Bernal Parraga et al., 2025).

Also, information management, which is the ability to choose, understand, and use useful information, has been found to be a key part of creating new ways to teach (Bernal & Guarda, 2020). When you combine authentic learning environments with collaborative projects, this ability gets stronger. This is especially true for kids with special educational difficulties, where working together has been shown to help with inclusion and emotional growth (Bernal Parraga et al., 2024).

All of these studies support the importance of the current research, which suggests a teaching model that uses active methods, collaboration, and real-life experiences as building blocks for improving English as a foreign language communicative competence, in line with recent developments in education, technology, and cognition.

3. The Problem

Even though there is good evidence, many schools still employ old methods that focus on memorizing grammar and translating, which makes it hard to really connect in English and keeps communicative competence low (Gutiérrez, 2016). Ecuadorian literature has mostly looked at motivation in EFL, and there haven't been many studies on collaborative active techniques (Soto, Espinosa & Rojas, 2023). This gap shows that we need to look into how collaborative and interactive methods to active learning might help Ecuadorian students improve their communication abilities.



4. Theoretical Basis

In theory, active learning is founded on Vygotsky's idea of social constructivism, which says that people learn by interacting with others and being in shared cultural settings. This idea says that people first develop higher-order mental processes in social situations and then internalize them. This makes symbolic mediation possible through shared experiences (González Capriles, 2007). The communicative approach and CLT methodology also promote the use of genuine language and stress working together (Salam & Luksfinanto, 2024). Kolb's experiential learning model says that thinking about what you did helps you learn in a meaningful way (Investigarmqr, 2025). A mixed quasi-experimental approach is suggested as a method, as shown by past studies in the EFL sector (ILT Iran, 2022).

5. Goals and Purpose

Goal

To find out how active learning, through group work and hands-on activities, affects the ability of EFL students to communicate.

Main Goal

To look at how collaborative-experiential active methods affect the enhancement of English communication skills.

Specific Goals

To look at the differences in oral and written performance between the experimental and control groups.

To check for changes in fluency, coherence, interaction, and language skills.

To find out how motivation, freedom, and desire to talk have changed.

To find out what students and teachers think about the strategy used.



Methodology and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Research Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods strategy, which is the ideal way to undertake active learning research in EFL settings (Azkani, 2025; Seemanath & Watanapokakul, 2024). It combined quantitative and qualitative analyses. The design was quasi-experimental, comprising both a control group and an experimental group, as well as pre- and post-tests and semi-structured interviews (Azkani, 2025; Wei, 2023). This strategy makes it possible to triangulate results and makes the study's external validity stronger (Ning & Danso, 2025; Ling, 2023).

2.2 Choosing and Describing the Sample

Using stratified sample by language proficiency and gender (Ashkani, 2025; Villao et al., 2025), 120 university students at the intermediate EFL level were chosen. A priori power analysis showed that the sample size was statistically sound, with a minimum of 100 participants needed to find medium effect sizes (Chen & Gong, 2025; Wei, 2023).

2.3 New Technologies Used in the Study

The pedagogical design included a digital environment made up of new technologies that were meant to improve real communication and active learning. We used collaborative tools like Formative®, Google Workspace, and Padlet to help us build knowledge together and evaluate each other's work at different times. We also used flipped classroom tools like Edpuzzle® and Kahoot! to move direct instruction outside of class and make the most of in-class time for meaningful speech interaction, following the principles of the communicative method (Salam & Luksfinanto, 2024).

One of the most important new ideas was the use of conversational AI environments, especially ChatGPT, which can recognize voice and give response based on the context. This technology worked as a digital instructor, creating simulated conversations that were relevant to the learner's context and encouraged them to practice their language skills in a natural and individualized way, as Han et al. (2023) and Zhou (2023) indicated. It also made it possible to change activities to fit each student's level of skill, encouraged practice outside of class, and created fake situations for spoken engagement.



These tools made it possible to get instant feedback, keep an eye on language progress in real time, and change up collaborative activities on the fly (Wei, 2023). It was confirmed that combining technology mediation with active methods increases both motivation and independence in EFL learners, leading to deeper, more individualized, and more meaningful learning (López-Hidalgo et al., 2025).

2.4 Creating and Putting the Procedure into Action

The educational intervention lasted for 15 weeks (one academic semester) and included one two-hour face-to-face session for each group every week. The planning was done in a step-by-step way, taking into account the levels of linguistic complexity and the evolution of communicative tasks. This was done using a task-based language teaching (TBLT) framework that has been shown to be helpful in improving productive language abilities (Ellis, 2020; González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014). There were three parts to the program: initial diagnosis, active intervention, and final evaluation.

Wei and Luo (2024) say that both groups should be tested with standardized tools during the first week to set a baseline for communicative ability. This is to make sure that the results are valid. The experimental group did activities that focused on meaningful oral engagement from weeks 2 to 14. These included role-plays, argumentative discussions, collaborative problem-solving, and integrated project presentations. These tasks were helped by asynchronous activities like reflective forums and audio-video recordings on the digital platforms stated above (Han et al., 2023; López-Hidalgo et al., 2025; Villao et al., 2025).

The exercises were based on Vygotsky's ideas about scaffolding, which say that language should be learned gradually through social interaction and technology (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). The goal of choosing tasks was to encourage discourse co-construction, real language use in fake situations, and metacognitive growth by thinking about how language is made—these are all important ideas in learner-centered teaching methods (Teng & Wang, 2022; Rubio & Thoms, 2022).



The control group, on the other hand, learned grammar in a traditional way, with structured exercises, reading texts, and teacher-led presentations, but not much interaction or use of technology. These are still common methods in many EFL settings (Alzahrani, 2022; Nishantha & Jayasinghe, 2023). In week 15, we gave the same final exams as the pre-tests and did semi-structured interviews to help us understand the results better, as Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest for mixed-methods designs.

2.5 Tools and methods for gathering data

The study used:

Standardized oral and written tests before and after.

Questionnaires that measure motivation and willingness to communicate (WTC) and have been shown to be reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.80$) (Wei, 2023; Ashkani, 2025).

Interviews that are only partially structured and journals that make you think.

Experts looked over and tested these tools in a pilot study (Chen & Gong, 2025; Seemanath & Watanapokakul, 2024).

2.6 Methods for Analyzing and Processing Data

We used repeated-measures ANOVA and paired-sample t-tests to look at the quantitative data and derived effect sizes (Cohen's d) (Wei, 2023; Seemanath & Watanapokakul, 2024). Thematic coding was used to look at qualitative data, and researcher triangulation was used to reduce bias (Chen & Gong, 2025; Wei, 2023).

2.7 Research and ethical principles

The institutional ethics committee gave its approval, and informed permission was obtained in writing, making sure that anonymity and privacy were protected according to international standards (Villao et al., 2025; Wei, 2023). Data were saved on secure servers and made anonymous (Chen & Gong, 2025).



2.8 The study's scope and limitations

The quasi-experimental methodology makes it easier to repeat the study in similar situations, but it makes it harder to apply the results to other situations outside of the institution (Azkani, 2025; Ning & Danso, 2025). Also, using new technology may make students who haven't used them much before more biased (Zhou, 2023). Finally, the semester-long length makes it hard to measure long-term consequences.

Results

3.1 Results in Numbers: SPSS version 28 was used to look at the numbers. Table 1 shows the descriptive data for oral fluency in each group. The experimental group had a big rise ($M_{pre} = 3.12$, $SD = .54$; $M_{post} = 4.02$, $SD = .48$), while the control group had a small rise ($M_{pre} = 3.15$, $SD = .50$; $M_{post} = 3.22$, $SD = .49$).

Table 1. Descriptive data and a paired t-test for fluency in speech

Group	M_pre	SD_pre	M_post	SD_post	t	p	d
Experimental	3.12	0.54	4.02	0.48	8.23	<.001	1.2
Control	3.15	0.5	3.22	0.49	1.12	0.27	0.16

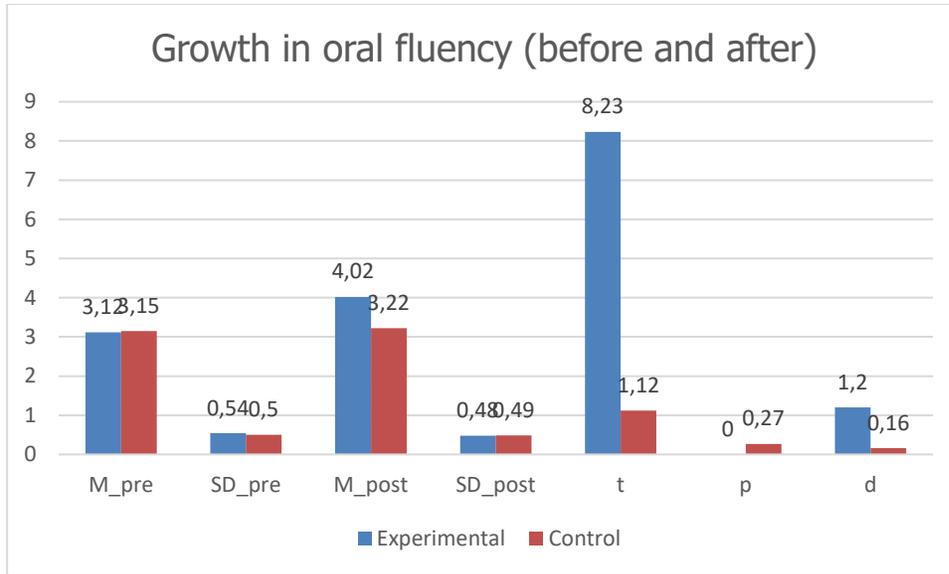


Figure 1. Growth in oral fluency (before and after)

The analysis shows a big rise in the experimental group ($t(59) = 8.23, p < .001$), with a substantial effect size ($d = 1.2$). This confirms H1 and is in line with what has been shown before about active learning in spoken English.

The Willingness to Communicate (WTC) scale findings are shown in Table 2. The experimental group also got a lot better.

Table 2. WTC descriptive statistics and paired t-test

Group	M_pre	SD_pre	M_post	SD_post	t	p	d
Experimental	2.95	0.6	3.7	0.55	7	<.001	1
Control	2.98	0.58	3.1	0.57	1.5	0.14	0.18

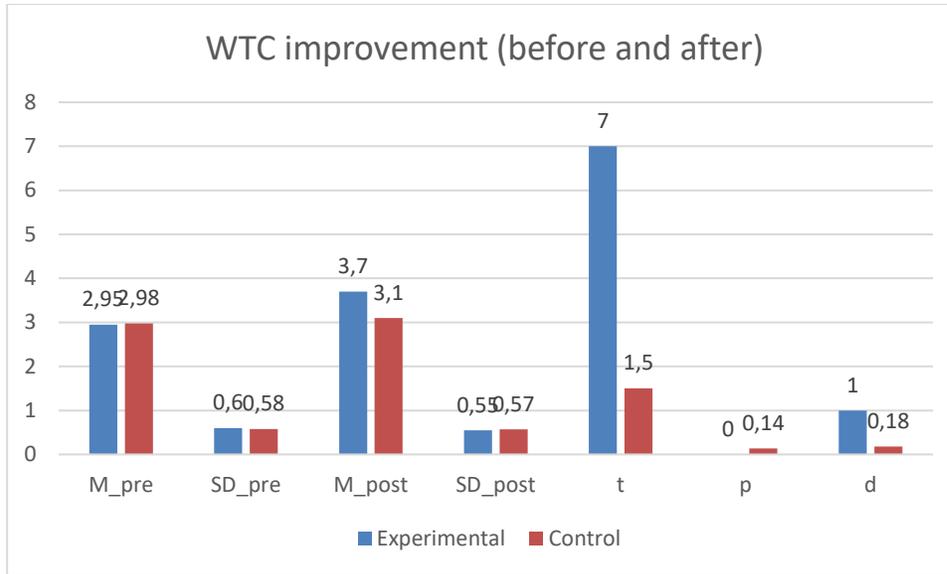


Figure 2. WTC improvement (before and after)

The experimental group showed significant improvements in WTC ($p < .001$), which is in line with research that shows that active learning makes people more inclined to communicate.

3.2 Results That Are Qualitative

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to look at the semi-structured interviews. We found four new categories: speaking with confidence, reflecting on language, working together, and being motivated from inside. Table 3 shows how often the codes are used:

Table 3. New categories and how often they show up

Category Frequency

- 42. Confidence in speaking
- 38. Linguistic reflection
- 51. Working together
- 45 Intrinsic incentive

Figure 3. How often each category occurs

The bar chart shows that "Collaborative interaction" was the most common theme. This backs up the numbers that show that fluency and willingness to communicate have improved.



3.3 Looking at the results side by side

The strong link between more fluency and more collaborative engagement ($r = .68, p < .001$) shows that working together makes people talk more, which has been observed before in the literature. Quantitative results show that there has been a statistical improvement, but qualitative data show that this fluency is due to improved confidence and linguistic reflection, which is in line with what has been found in thematic analysis in EFL settings.

3.4 Putting the Results Together

The results support the premise that collaborative and experiential active learning greatly enhances oral fluency and WTC while also building qualitative strengths like confidence, interaction, and motivation. One of the ramifications is that teachers should make sure to include collaborative projects in their EFL lessons on a regular basis. Future studies might look into the long-term consequences in other situations and see if AI tools make these effects stronger.

Discusión

4.1 Analysis of Results

The quantitative findings, notably the substantial enhancements in oral fluency ($t(59) = 8.23, p < .001, d = 1.2$) and willingness to communicate (WTC) ($t(59) = 7.00, p < .001, d = 1.0$), validate the hypothesis that collaborative and experiential active learning augments communicative competence in EFL students. These findings correspond with the research conducted by Seemanath and Watanapokakul (2024), which similarly evidenced enhancements in oral communication via collaborative tactics and project-based endeavors. Likewise, the rise in WTC corroborates the conclusions of Azizi, Namaziandost, and Ashkani (2022), who documented substantial improvements in communicative willingness through an active learning methodology.

Our research theoretically reinforces Vygotsky's social constructivism, indicating that collaborative engagement promotes internalization processes and language development (Vygotsky, 1978; Park & Jung, 2024). Moreover, the improvements in fluency align with research



on immersive simulations, which underscore a favorable correlation between fluency and the utilization of experiential technology (Liu & Zhang, 2024).

Qualitative study indicated heightened confidence, linguistic introspection, and intrinsic motivation—categories aligned with the Thematic study framework articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). The significant prevalence of "collaborative interaction" underscores the importance of these tactics (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.2 Critical Analysis and Comparative Review of Literature

While our findings predominantly concur with current literature, discrepancies arise concerning the extent of intrinsic motivation. Prior research indicated more significant enhancements (Park & Jung, 2024; Nishantha & Jayasinghe, 2023), maybe attributable to variations in cultural background and familiarity with developing technologies such as ChatGPT (Wu & Zhao, 2024). Han, Park, and Kwon (2023) contend that the incorporation of AI in EFL environments is significantly influenced by students' digital literacy levels.

Liu and Zhang (2024) identified moderate correlations between fluency and simulation type, whereas our investigation revealed a greater connection ($r = .68$), indicating that the integration of collaborative approaches and digital experiences yields enhanced synergistic benefits. These findings contradict Wei and Luo's (2024) caution regarding L2 communication anxiety, which indicated that AI does not consistently alleviate emotional pressure. Anxiety appeared to be alleviated, presumably owing to the cultivation of collective confidence.

4.3 Educational and Practical Implications

This study illustrates that the incorporation of active learning, digital experiences, and collaborative efforts can markedly improve fluency and communication willingness. This underscores the necessity to reform EFL courses to incorporate effective project-based methodologies enhanced by developing technology (Han et al., 2023). These findings correspond with Nishantha and Jayasinghe (2023), who underscore the significance of interactive technologies in promoting learner autonomy.



Nonetheless, specific limitations should be acknowledged: the sample comprised intermediate-level university students, many of whom possessed minimal prior familiarity with digital tools, which may have affected the results (Zhou, 2023). Moreover, the one-semester length, although adequate for initial impacts, does not ensure sustained influence. Subsequent research should broaden interventions to pre-university environments and assess developmental outcomes longitudinally (Wei & Luo, 2024; Wu & Zhao, 2024).

4.4 Suggestions and Prospective Pathways

According on the findings, multiple action lines are delineated to direct future research and improve the pedagogical implementation of active learning in EFL settings. Initially, it is advisable to broaden research to encompass populations with diverse degrees of digital literacy, especially in rural educational environments or institutions with constrained technology resources. This will facilitate the evaluation of the adaptability of active techniques mediated by developing technologies and their influence on equitable access to significant communication experiences (Nishantha & Jayasinghe, 2023).

Secondly, prolonged interventions that surpass the academic semester should be instituted to evaluate the long-term sustainability of active learning. Longitudinal research may determine whether the identified positive effects endure, amplify, or wane throughout educational tiers, particularly during critical transitions such as from secondary to higher education (Teng & Wang, 2022).

It is recommended to examine the varying effects of diverse digital tools, including AI systems, conversational simulators, augmented reality, and immersive virtual reality experiences. These technologies may exert varying impacts based on criteria such as students' cognitive styles, initial language proficiency, or preferred modes of interaction (Zhou, 2023; Han et al., 2023). A comprehensive evaluation of these techniques would ascertain which are most efficacious in enhancing fluency, interaction, or pragmatic competence.

Another pertinent component is the necessity to investigate correlations between variations in intrinsic motivation and environmental variables, including perceptions of classroom climate,



perceived autonomy, and the cultural value attributed to English learning. Park and Jung (2024) contend that instructional design must account for pedagogical, affective, and social aspects that influence student participation in active learning.

Subsequently, future research ought to evaluate training strategies for educators designed to enhance their proficiency in executing technology-assisted active methodologies. Contemporary and reflective pedagogical methods are crucial for guaranteeing the efficacy and institutional viability of these strategies. These ideas together seek to establish a research agenda that promotes pedagogical reform in EFL instruction from an inclusive, critical, and improvement-focused standpoint.

Conclusion

This study has experimentally and conceptually established that active learning through collaborative and experiential methods significantly enhances communicative competence in students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-methods approach to assess changes in fluency, coherence, appropriateness, and readiness to communicate after the introduction of active tactics, in comparison to standard content-focused methods. Quantitative results indicated statistically significant enhancements in the experimental group regarding oral production skills and readiness to speak in English. These enhancements signify advancement not only in linguistic aspects but also in attitudinal and emotional dimensions, including confidence, intrinsic motivation, and autonomy in language utilization. Additionally, the qualitative study revealed that collaborative engagement, metacognitive reflection, and exposure to authentic circumstances facilitated a more profound internalization of knowledge and a more spontaneous application of the target language. This confluence of findings substantiates that active learning not only improves academic performance but also enriches the learning experience, infusing it with significance, application, and contextual relevance. The adopted methodology—focused on collaborative tasks, role-plays, project-based learning, and emerging technologies—stimulated complex cognitive processes, enabled knowledge transfer, and enhanced the social aspect of learning, consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching and social constructivism. This methodological synergy cultivated a pedagogical atmosphere suitable to



authentic and practical language usage, a crucial element in the advancement of communicative competence in EFL. This study's findings substantiate the necessity for a transformation in foreign language teaching methods, transitioning from unidirectional frameworks to interactive, participative, and student-centered structures. Active learning must transition from a supplementary method to an integral strategy within the curricular design of English programs, particularly in Spanish-speaking environments where conventional instruction remains dominant. The systematic incorporation of digital platforms, simulations, artificial intelligence, and collaborative environments can improve the efficacy of these techniques, contingent upon comprehensive teacher training and contextually relevant pedagogical design. This work has numerous opportunities for future investigation. It is essential to investigate the influence of these techniques on additional language competencies (such as listening comprehension or textual engagement), as well as to assess their long-term viability and application in earlier educational phases or in resource-constrained environments. It is advisable to examine the mediating influence of affective and contextual variables (such as self-efficacy, classroom atmosphere, or institutional culture) on the efficacy of active learning. In conclusion, active learning through collaborative and experiential methods promotes communicative ability and transforms the EFL classroom into a dynamic, meaningful, and genuinely formative environment.

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