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MENTORING WITH SPEAKER'S BOX AND SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH
LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Descripción de Autoría:

El presente trabajo de investigación tiene como objetivo analizar la factibilidad y la contribución percibida de una intervención de mentoría grupal integrada mediante el uso de la Speaker's Box para desarrollar y fortalecer el speaking y las habilidades blandas en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). La investigación destaca el potencial de esta estrategia didáctica para promover el desarrollo de la confianza al hablar, la comunicación efectiva y el trabajo en equipo, al tiempo que crea oportunidades significativas para la práctica del speaking en un entorno colaborativo. A través de un enfoque de métodos mixtos, el estudio examina cómo la implementación de desafíos comunicativos mediante la Speaker's Box favorece un aprendizaje dinámico, participativo y significativo, contribuyendo al desarrollo de futuros docentes de inglés.

Declaración de Autoría:

Yo, Darwin Adrian Zambrano Franco, con documento de identidad 131555089-5, declaro que soy autor original y Jhonny Saulo Alberto Villafuerte Holguin con documento de identidad 130579907-2, declaro que soy el coautor en calidad de tutor del trabajo de investigación titulación **"Mentoring with speaker's box and soft skill development in English language learners"**, Este trabajo es resultado del esfuerzo intelectual y no sido copiados ni plagiado en ninguna de sus partes.

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CERTIFICO

En calidad de docente tutor(a) de la Facultad de Educación, Turismo, Artes y Humanidades de la Universidad Laica "Eloy Alfaro" de Manabí, CERTIFICO:

Haber dirigido, revisado y aprobado preliminarmente el Trabajo de Integración Curricular bajo la autoría del estudiante ZAMBRANO FRANCO DARWIN ADRIAN, legalmente matriculado en la carrera de PEDAGOGÍA DE LOS IDIOMAS NACIONALES Y EXTRANJEROS, período académico 2026-2027(1), cumpliendo el total de **384 horas**, cuyo tema del proyecto o núcleo problémico es *"MENTORING WITH SPEAKER'S BOX AND SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS"*

La presente investigación ha sido desarrollada en apego al cumplimiento de los requisitos académicos exigidos por el Reglamento de Régimen Académico y en concordancia con los lineamientos internos de la opción de titulación en mención, reuniendo y cumpliendo con los méritos académicos, científicos y formales, y la originalidad del mismo, requisitos suficientes para ser sometida a la evaluación del tribunal de titulación que designe la autoridad competente.

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Lo certifico,


VILLAFUERTE HOLGUIN JHONNY SAULO ALBERTO
Docente Tutor

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Mentoring with Speaker's Box and soft-skills development for English language learners

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Resumen

La mentoría es ampliamente reconocida como esencial para mejorar el desarrollo profesional en todos los campos del conocimiento. Este estudio tiene como objetivo examinar la viabilidad y la contribución percibida de una intervención de mentoría grupal integrada utilizando Speaker's Box para crear oportunidades para que los futuros profesores de inglés practiquen la confianza al hablar, la comunicación efectiva y el trabajo en equipo. La recopilación de datos utiliza un enfoque de investigación de métodos mixtos. Los participantes son 44 estudiantes universitarios, y los instrumentos de recopilación de datos son una encuesta, un cuestionario a escala Likert y observaciones directas. Los resultados permiten identificar la confianza, el trabajo en equipo y las habilidades de comunicación de los participantes en el uso de la lengua extranjera. Como resultado, presenta una intervención educativa que utiliza los retos que ofrece la Speaker's Box (SB). Concluyó que la Speaker's Box contribuye positivamente al desarrollo de las habilidades blandas de los participantes mediante un entorno de aprendizaje dinámico, participativo y significativo en la clase de EFL.

Palabras clave: comunicación efectiva, confianza, mentoría, Speaker' Box, trabajo en equipo.

Abstract

Mentoring is widely recognized as essential for enhancing professional development across all fields of knowledge. This study aims to examine the feasibility and perceived contribution of an embedded group-mentoring intervention using Speaker's Box to create opportunities for preservice EFL teachers to practice speaking confidence, effective communication, and teamwork. The data collection uses a mixed-methods research approach. The participants are 44 university students, and the data-collection instruments are a survey, a Likert-scale questionnaire, and direct observations. The results allow for the identification of participants' confidence, teamwork, and communication skills in using EFL. As a result, it presents an educational intervention that uses challenges provided by the Speaker's Box (SB). It concluded that the Speaker's Box contributes positively to the development of participants' soft skills through a dynamic, participatory, and meaningful learning environment in the EFL class.

Keywords: effective communication, confidence, mentoring, Speaker' Box, teamwork.

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills remain a challenge for preservice EFL teachers, especially in the university context, where students need to communicate effectively in academic and social environments. Because speaking involves pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension, many students avoid oral participation for fear of making mistakes, significantly limiting their communicative interaction and teamwork inside or outside the classroom (Pinza-Tapia et al., 2021). In addition, Glasson (2026) notes that speaking requires students to organize their ideas and produce language quickly while interacting with others. As a result, many students have difficulty speaking in EFL due to a lack of confidence in expressing themselves.

Moreover, studies show that improving students' awareness of key soft skills, including creative problem-solving, effective communication, stress management, and teamwork, leads to statistically significant improvements, with notable increases in confidence and the perceived importance of teamwork (López-Serrano et al., 2025). Effective communication involves expressing ideas clearly while listening and responding appropriately, thereby encouraging interpersonal relationships and social interaction (Cîrțiță-Buzoianu et al., 2022). Confidence plays a crucial role in learning English as a foreign language because it helps students' willingness to communicate and participate in speaking interactions (Yang & Lian, 2023). Similarly, Teamwork promotes cooperation, knowledge sharing, and collaborative learning to achieve common goals and solve problems jointly (Campbell et al., 2025).

According to Prado et al. (2026), soft skills are essential competencies for facing current educational and professional challenges.

Mentoring is presented as an educational strategy that supports students' academic and emotional management through spaces for interaction and guidance. It contributes to strengthening interpersonal and emotional competencies, promoting greater participation and confidence among students (Lluch et al., 2021). Additionally, integrating mentoring processes with communicative activities can benefit the learning environment by making it more dynamic, participatory, and motivating. Therefore, dynamic, participatory strategies are needed to strengthen both oral and soft skills among EFL students. In addition, there are many studies concerning communicative competence in EFL. It is necessary to explore didactic materials that support the strengthening of soft skills in classrooms.

Previous studies have examined mentoring, speaking practices, and peer-supported language processes. However, limited research has conceptualized the Speaker's Box as a structural group-mentoring protocol that can be adapted using learners' interest data and mapped onto observable soft-skill indicators, clarifying their contribution to EFL teachers.

Considering this problem, the present research proposes an educational intervention consisting of mentoring using the Speaker's Box strategy to provide participants with opportunities to practice soft skills in an EFL class, thereby supporting preservice teachers in strengthening their communication, confidence, and teamwork skills in the university context. In addition, the educational intervention also incorporates activities such as flashcards, role-plays, storytelling, tongue-twisters, and problem-solving in an English-language environment. The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What topics did participants prefer for the Speaker's Box activities?

RQ2. How was an embedded group-mentoring intervention using Speaker's Box designed and adapted during the implementation?

RQ3. What patterns related to speaking confidence, effective communication, and teamwork were observed during the intervention sessions?

RQ4. How did participants' post-intervention perceptions converge with or diverge from classroom observations?

This study aims to examine the feasibility and perceived contribution of an embedded group-mentoring intervention using Speaker's Box to create opportunities for preservice EFL teachers to practice speaking confidence, effective communication, and teamwork, and to clarify how the intervention contributes to the development of soft skills in preservice teachers.

The hypotheses to be studied are:

Ho: There is no relationship between preservice teachers' perceptions of soft skills after the intervention.

Ha: There is relationship between preservice teachers' perceptions of soft skills after the intervention.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Mentoring as relational and pedagogical support for EFL learning

Mentoring is an academic and personal accompaniment strategy that facilitates a student's adaptation to new educational contexts and guides their academic and personal development. For Aguilar Aguilar & Manzano Soto (2018), mentoring "is the support received by the student, who enters a new educational environment for the first time, having to face academic, social, and personal aspects" (p. 258). This definition helps scholars understand that mentoring is not limited to academic performance but also encompasses emotional and social aspects integral to students' soft skills. More recently, several authors agree that mentoring strengthens students' orientation and motivation within the educational process.

Lluch et al. (2021) explained that mentoring strengthens interpersonal and emotional competencies through constant interaction between mentor and student. From this perspective, they also explained that mentoring contributes to students' emotional well-being by providing spaces where they can freely express their academic and personal needs.

Mentoring is an educational strategy that supports students' academic, emotional, and social development by fostering relationships between mentors and mentees. In addition, it strengthens the interpersonal skills necessary to face the academic and professional challenges of the current context (Kryucheva & Tolstoukhova, 2021, p. 114).

Mentoring plays a significant role in education, as it not only strengthens learning but also students' personal and social competencies. In more recent research, Gonçalves et al. (2025) state that mentoring improves academic engagement.

Mentoring encompasses different approaches that adapt to students' academic, personal, and professional needs, and each mentoring model varies according to its objectives and educational context (Nuis et al., 2023). They are: (a) *Traditional Mentoring*: It focuses on a one-on-one relationship between an experienced mentor and a mentee that requires academic guidance. Loosveld et al. (2022) explain that traditional mentoring is characterized by an individualized mentor-mentee relationship built on trust, reflection, and continuous guidance, which supports professional growth of interpersonal competencies such as communication, self-confidence, and collaboration. (b) *Peer Mentoring*: It occurs when a group of students has diverse experiences, and they themselves support other peers within the same educational environment. This demonstrates that peer mentoring favors an inclusive and participatory educational environment. (c) *Group Mentoring*: It develops when a mentor works simultaneously with several students, allowing students to strengthen their social and communication skills. In this sense, Ferrando-Rocher & Marini (2021) highlight that collaborative dynamics favor interaction of transversal competences. (d) *E-Mentoring or Virtual Mentoring*: It uses digital platforms to facilitate mentor-mentee accompaniment. That

is why, in this sense, Meneses and Medina (2021) explain that "information and communication technologies help students to learn, as well as allow pedagogues in these areas to teach, in such a way that it is attractive and efficient" (p. 111). E-mentoring represents an innovative alternative within today's education due to the growth of digital environments and online learning. Mentoring is an essential tool in today's education, as it strengthens not only academic performance but also students' emotional and social well-being. In addition, mentoring takes various forms that address students' educational needs.

2.2 Speaking Skills and willingness to communicate

Speaking skills are among the fundamental competencies in English language learning because they enable effective oral communication across academic and social contexts. For Oviedo Guado & Mena Mayorga (2021), speaking is a relevant skill allowing students to interact authentically and meaningfully in real contexts. This emphasizes that speaking involves not only pronouncing words correctly but also expressing ideas, emotions, and opinions clearly.

Speaking in a second language is not merely the articulation of words; it is a dynamic interaction involving fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, negotiation of meaning, and sociocultural competence. Glasson (2026) affirms that oral communication requires learners to process information rapidly while simultaneously monitoring grammar, vocabulary, and interactional strategies. They argue that oral production requires simultaneous linguistic planning and control. In other words, the student must think, organize, and produce language quickly.

Kamaliah and Rahmati (2025) state that speaking is a fundamental skill to achieve communicative competence in English. Students develop stronger skills when they actively participate in authentic interaction contexts. This idea is understood as a defense of the communicative approach, in which learning is strengthened through language.

On the other hand, Pinza-Tapia et al. (2021) speak of it as the most complex skill to master. They explain the need to combine pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and listening comprehension simultaneously.

Current leading researchers in speaking include Glasson (2026), who focuses on oral interaction, technology use, and language anxiety. AI-mediated interaction environments reduce speaking anxiety and increase learners' willingness to communicate because learners consider traditional classes as threatening (Yan & Singh, 2026). For the authors, technological environments can reduce the fear of speaking English. This is important since anxiety represents one of the main barriers to oral learning.

Lai (2026) infers that blended learning environments strengthen students' fluency and autonomy. Thus, he argues that technological integration creates more dynamic and participatory spaces for practicing speaking. In addition, Ironsi and Bostanci (2026) demonstrated that virtual assistants significantly increase oral participation in EFL students.

As mentioned, the ability to speak is one of the most important competencies for learning English as a foreign language. Oral production is a complex cognitive process that involves organizing ideas, selecting language, and pronouncing words. According to Glasson (2026), speech is produced through the simultaneous interaction of memory, grammar, vocabulary, and communicative strategies.

Based on the above, Tran et al. (2026) state that learners practicing a foreign language should organize their ideas while managing pronunciation, coherence, and vocabulary retrieval. This shows us that spontaneous speech requires cognitive speed and simultaneous linguistic control. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2026) affirm that oral production supports students' understanding of input and provides frequent opportunities for interaction.

According to Pinza-Tapia et al. (2021), many students are afraid of making mistakes when speaking English because they fear errors in oral participation, which reduces communicative confidence. Similarly, Yan and Singh (2026) explain that language anxiety is one of the main limitations of speaking. However, they affirm that the use of interactive technologies can stimulate student motivation and participation.

When students engage in critical-thinking activities, they achieve greater confidence, improved fluency, and better interactional competence through structured thinking before speaking (Jannah et al., 2026).

2.3 Soft skills: effective communication, confidence, and teamwork

Soft Skills are understood as the social, emotional, and communicative skills necessary to function adequately in academic and even work contexts. For Prado Ortega et al. (2026), soft skills include leadership, empathy, communication, teamwork, confidence, and problem-solving. These authors consider these skills indispensable for facing the challenges of the twenty-first century. Similarly, Doszhan & Karas (2026) state that soft skills encompass social interaction and emotional intelligence. Dadelo & Vinogradova-Zinkevič (2026) state that "Academic soft skills encompass communication, creativity, emotional regulation, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities that support both academic achievement and professional adaptation (p. 4).

Effective communication is considered one of the most essential soft skills in educational and professional contexts, as it enables people to express ideas clearly, listen actively, and interact appropriately with others. According to Mohammed & Ozdamli (2024), effective communication skills are one of the most in-demand competencies in higher education because they facilitate collaboration, interpersonal relationships, and employability. Emphasizing communication as a consistent identifier among the most valued competencies, this suggests that it should be intentionally integrated into university curricula to prepare students for the challenges that await them in the real world. For García-Chivita & Correa (2023), effective communication is among the most promoted soft skills in graduate programs, highlighting its relevance for professional success and lifelong learning. These findings show that educational institutions increasingly recognize communication as a key component for academic achievement and, in turn, social interaction. Carvalho (2026) asserts that many university students perceive a significant gap between the communication skills developed during their studies and those required in professional contexts. Evidence exists for the need to implement pedagogical strategies that promote communicative experiences, as communication is essential, allowing students to express ideas, argue critically, and actively participate in academic environments. Gonzáles-Rico & Lluch-Sintes (2024) found that the use of AI and personalized mentoring significantly strengthens communication competencies in university students. In a meta-analysis of communication skills assessment in higher education, Suhairom et al. (2024) concluded that communication skills influence academic performance, professional preparation, and students' overall growth.

Rosales-Márquez et al. (2024) argue that trust is an essential element for improving academic and digital competencies in higher education. Students with higher levels of confidence exhibit better adaptation and performance in educational environments, and confidence is a predictor of academic success at university. Likewise, Awidi & Klutsey (2025) analyzed the impact of online critical reflection on student motivation and confidence, concluding that reflective activities significantly favor students' academic confidence by allowing them to analyze their strengths and recognize their areas for improvement when they run critical reflection activities (Awidi & Klutsey, 2025). Anderson, et al. (2024) found that strengths-based teaching practices significantly increase the academic effectiveness and confidence of university students. On the other hand, McGowan, et al. (2023) demonstrated

that gamification strengthens students' confidence by creating safe environments where they can practice skills and learn from mistakes without fear of failure. This scientific evidence suggests that confidence is an indispensable condition for university learning, since students who believe in their abilities participate more frequently, take on more challenges, and face them more readily.

According to De Prada, Mareque, and Pino-Juste (2022), teamwork skills are essential for the academic, personal, and professional success of university students, stating that "teamwork skills are considered essential for personal, academic, and professional achievement" (p. 2). Likewise, Wang, Jiang, and Luo (2023) argue that collaborative learning significantly fosters teamwork by promoting interaction, participation, and knowledge sharing among students. From this perspective, Korit'áková et al. (2023) analyzed the effectiveness of team-based learning and concluded that this methodology increases communication, decision-making, and cooperation among university students.

Previous research has highlighted the relevance of mentoring, interactive speaking activities, and communication strategies in promoting both language competence and soft skills among English language learners. Although few studies specifically address the use of Mentoring with Speaker's Box, various studies on mentoring and speaking strategies provide a solid theoretical basis for the present study. In addition, a study conducted by Aguirre-Garzón (2022) explored the perceptions of language and practicing learners about mentoring in 41 countries. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers found that mentoring promotes collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and career growth. Participants highlighted that effective mentoring fosters supportive relationships and strengthens interpersonal competencies, which are considered essential soft skills in educational contexts. A study closely related to Speaker's Box was conducted by Erdiana et al. (2023), which investigated the use of the *Mystery Box Game* to improve the speaking skills of EFL students in Indonesia. Using a pre-experimental design with 25 high school students, the researchers found significant improvements in the students' oral performance after the intervention. The activity encouraged spontaneous oral production, active participation, and interaction among students. The authors concluded that box-based speaking activities can effectively improve oral competence, while also increasing students' confidence and engagement in classroom communication. Similarly, Hutagalung et al. (2024) examined the effectiveness of *Mystery Box Media* in improving the oral English proficiency of elementary school students. Through action research in the classroom, the findings revealed remarkable improvements in oral performance and student engagement across different instructional cycles. The study emphasized that interactive, game-based activities motivate students to speak more frequently and reduce resistance or fear of communicating in English.

Focusing on speaking performance, Prasetyo & Arini (2024) studied the impact of mentoring strategies on university students' speaking skills. Using a mixed-methods design, the study revealed significant improvements in student accuracy, fluency, and vocabulary after the mentoring-based intervention. Likewise, the interviews showed that the students experienced greater confidence and developed critical-thinking skills, highlighting the potential of mentoring as a strategy for improving oral communication. Another study conducted by Ayiz & Tauchid (2025) explored the effectiveness of the Peer Teaching Method in enhancing public speaking skills among EFL learners. The mixed-methods study found that peer-supported speaking activities significantly improved pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence while reducing public speaking anxiety. The authors concluded that collaborative speaking environments provide valuable opportunities for developing communication and teamwork skills.

3. METHODOLOGY

This exploratory pilot study adopted a pragmatic paradigm and an embedded mixed-methods pilot classroom intervention. It was developed under the pragmatic paradigm, integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods to obtain a broader understanding of the educational process under study. Therefore, this paradigm facilitates the integration of numerical data and participants' experiences, enabling interpretation of the contribution of the Speaker's Box strategy to strengthening Soft Skills: effective communication, confidence, and teamwork.

3.2. The sample

The research team invited 50 students from the 4th and 5th semesters to participate in the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Program for the 2025-2026 period. However, 44 students were overage for participation in all sessions of the pedagogical intervention. The sample was selected using convenience sampling, given participants' accessibility and willingness to take part in the intervention. 79,50% are female, and 20,50% are male. 38,6% attended the 4th semester and 61,4% to the 5th. semester.

Table 1. The sample

Semesters	Female	Male	Total
4th	13 (29,50%)	4 (9,00%)	17 (38,60%)
5th	22 (50,00%)	5 (11,00%)	27 (61,40%)
Total	35 (79,50%)	9 (20,50)	44 (100,00%)

This work adheres to APA ethical guidelines. Therefore, informed consent was obtained from each participant, and their identities are protected. The project leader is responsible for the safekeeping of all evidence and records generated in this study for seven years. After this period, the documentation will be destroyed. Participants may withdraw from the process at any time. All data may be used in other studies and for educational purposes. The commercialization of the results and evidence generated is strictly prohibited.

The research leader assumes the role of mentor. Other members of the research team handle logistics, administrative procedures, and data analysis. Participation does not affect the grades obtained in each semester. The pedagogical intervention takes place at the university facilities where the student group regularly attends. All activities in the pedagogical intervention are feasible because the necessary materials and resources are available. No pedagogical adaptations were implemented since none of the participants reported having any disability or specific educational need.

3.3. Instruments

The instruments used for data collection are:

Diagnostic survey. - The instrument administered to identify the participants' topics of greatest interest to design the pedagogic intervention. The survey consisted of 30 questions about students' potential areas of interest. Example: 1. My favorite way to relax after a tiring day. The answer alternatives ranged from 0 (min) to 4 (max). A panel of 3 professors in the fields of EFL instruction, educational research, and educational administration affiliated with the public university examined the instrument. Their main recommendations were to adapt the instrument's syntax to the Ecuadorian university context

and reduce the original 45 items to 30 in the final version. The reliability test using Cronbach's alpha reported a value of 0.910. It used a Google Form questionnaire, and its administration took place during EFL classes at university facilities for 10-12 minutes.

Likert-Scale Questionnaire. – The instrument aims to know the contributions of the pedagogic intervention using Speaker's Box toward soft skills practice: Two items for confidence, 6 items for effective communication, and three items for teamwork. Example for category confidence: 1. Using the Speaker's Box helps me feel more confident when speaking English. The alternatives for answers are five, ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree". A panel of 3 professors in the fields of EFL instruction, Educational Research, and Educational Administration affiliated with an Ecuadorian public university examined the instrument. Their main recommendations were to adapt the items to participants' cultural context and to check their syntax. The reliability test with Cronbach's alpha is 0.81, and McDonald's Omega is 0,84. It used a Google Form questionnaire, and its administration took place during EFL classes at university facilities for 8-10 minutes.

Class observation. - The instrument's goal is to determine the changes observed in participation, interaction between peers, confidence when speaking, collaboration, and adaptation of activities. In addition, it evaluates effective communication, confidence, and teamwork skills during the execution of the Speaking Box pedagogic intervention. The instrument used a scale ranging from correct to incorrect results. A panel of 3 professors in the fields of EFL instruction, educational research, and educational administration affiliated with the public university examined the instrument. Their recommendation was to train the observers in administering the instrument. The observations were administered by a researcher independent of the research team to maintain objectivity and reduce risks of personal interpretation. In addition, a double-coding process was performed. The research team collected 20 observations between August 2025 and February 2026 during the implementation of the pedagogical intervention.

3.4. Procedure

Stage 1. Selection of participants and procedures in a public university in the province of Manabi, Ecuador. Administration of a survey of interests conducted to identify the topics of students' greatest interest. Design of pedagogic intervention.

Stage 2. The pedagogic intervention phase was developed over 10 sessions, using The Speaker's Box as the main didactic strategy, with activities including Flashcards featuring questions and daily-life situations, role-plays, couple conversations, image-based storytelling, tongue twisters, and problem-solving activities. These activities were designed to promote students' speaking skills while simultaneously strengthening soft skills such as effective communication, confidence, and teamwork. The invitation to students was n=50; informed consent collected: n=46; diagnostic survey: n=46. Students' attendance is:

Session Begging: n= 50 students; 0 students missing

Session 1: n= 41 students; 9 students missing

Session 2: n= 44 students; 6 students missing

Session 3: n= 43 students; 7 students missing

Session 4: n= 35 students; 15 students missing

Session 5: n= 45 students; 5 students missing

Session 6: n= 46 students; 4 students missing

Session 7: n= 46 students; 4 students missing

Session 8: n= 45 students; 5 students missing

Session Ending: n= 46 students; 4 students missing

In addition, the administration of Qualitative observations was embedded during ten sessions.

Stage 3.

Administration of perception post-test Likert-Scale questionnaire to assess students' perceptions about their soft skills state at the end of the pedagogic intervention.

Stage 4. Data analysis was performed using QUAN diagnosis → intervention [qual observations] → QUAN post-intervention perceptions → integrated interpretation.

The process allowed the research team to identify patterns of soft skills studied.

Stage 5. Dissemination of the educational implications of using the Speaker' Box in mentoring processes to strengthen oral expression and soft skills in the context of teaching English as a foreign language.

4. RESULTS

The results obtained in this study are presented below.

4.1. Students' interest topics to practice using Speaker' Box

The Likert scale questionnaire shows students' interest in conversation topics for practicing using Speaker Box.

Table 2. Students' interest in conversation topics for speaking practice

Topics for speaking practice	0	1	2	3	4
1. My favorite way to relax after a tiring day	6.7%	10.3%	30.0%	50.0%	3.0%
2. How I know how to manage stress	13.3%	40.0%	23.3%	23.3%	0.0%
3. Habits I would like to change	6.7%	16.7%	43.3%	33.3%	0.0%
4. How music affects my mood	0%	22.3%	26.7%	50.0%	1.0%
5. Things that make an ordinary day special	6.7%	30.0%	26.7%	36.7%	0.0%
6. Things I can't live without	13.3%	33.3%	15.0%	33.3%	5.0%
7. What makes a place unforgettable	10.0%	30.0%	20.0%	40.0%	0.0%
8. Festivals I would love to experience	30.0%	20.0%	16.7%	33.3%	0.0%
9. A movie or series that everyone should see	20.0%	16.7%	26.7%	36.7%	0.0%
10. Why do you think some people have become famous?	20.0%	36.7%	10.0%	30.0%	3,3%
11. How could school be more interesting?	16.7%	20.0%	33.3%	30.0%	0.0%
12. My favorite way to learn new things	6.7%	20.0%	23.3%	50.0%	0.0%
13. What would you do if you won a million dollars?	3.3%	11.3%	20.0%	2,0%	63,3%
14. What makes a movie good?	3.3%	13.3%	20.0%	63.3%	0.0%
15. An actor or singer I admire	23.3%	16.7%	13.3%	46.7%	0.0%
16. What language would I like to learn after English?	3.3%	20.0%	10.0%	0,0%	66.7%

17. What's more important, studying or practicing?	3.3%	20.0%	33.3%	43.3%	0.0%
18. Does technology make us freer or more dependent?	9.0%	20.0%	20.0%	50.0%	1.0%
19. Does competition improve people?	10.0%	30.0%	26.7%	33.3%	0.0%
20. How can young people change the world?	13.3%	23.3%	20.0%	43.3%	0.0%
21. How will artificial intelligence change our jobs?	13.3%	23.3%	16.7%	46.7%	0.0%
22. What are the dangers of relying too much on technology?	13.3%	16.7%	13.3%	0.0%	56.7%
23. If I could have a superpower, what would it be?	13.3%	23.3%	20.0%	43.3%	0.0%
24. What hobby would I like to try in the future?	8.0%	20.0%	30.0%	40.0%	2.0%
25. What kind of books do I like to read (adventure, mystery, romance, etc.)	20.0%	23.3%	26.7%	30.0%	0.0%
26. What activities do you enjoy doing with friends?	3.3%	13.3%	30.0%	53.3%	0.0%
27. What kind of sports do I like to watch (even if I don't play them)	20.0%	30.0%	20.0%	30.0%	0.0%
28. What things distract me most easily	10.0%	33.3%	16.7%	40.0%	0.0%
29. What kind of activities make me lose track of time	11.3%	30.0%	20.0%	36.7%	2.0%
30. What small actions help the planet	6.7%	26.7%	23.3%	43.3%	0.0%

N=46.

The 3 topics with the highest scores:

First: 16. What language would I like to learn after English? 66.7%;

Second: 13. What would you do if you won a million dollars? 63.3%;

Third: 22. What are the dangers of relying too much on technology? 56.7%

4.2. Speaker's Box design proposal for mentoring structured sequences to strengthen students

Table 3 presents a proposed didactic intervention that integrates the Speaker's Box with soft skills, such as Speaker's communication, confidence, and teamwork, in English as a Foreign Language class.

Table 3. Proposal of Educational intervention for mentoring using Speaking Box

Title	Session aims	Methods & Strategies	Sequence	Material
Session of installation Participants: 50 students.	Research project set up	Mentoring	Greeting Project presentation agreements	Survey formulary

Session 1: Sharing Personal Experiences through Speaker's box. Participants: 41 students.	To reduce students' anxiety when speaking English. To promote basic oral interaction through guided questions.	Mentoring communicative Language Teaching. Pair Work.	1. Warm-up: Simple greeting questions. 2. Introduction of flashcards with questions/situations. 3. Students answer from their desks individually. 4. Pair work: students practice questions with a partner. 5. Feedback.	Speaker' box Flashcards with questions and situations. Evaluation: checklist.
Session 2: Things that define me: Sharing Personal Interests and Experiences. Participants: 44 students.	To increase confidence through repetition and interaction To encourage communication with different classmates	Mentoring for cooperative learning. Mentoring for speaking drills with variation.	1. Warm-up: Simple personal questions. 2. Students work in pairs asking/answering questions. 3. Partner rotation every 3–5 minutes. 4. Introduction of more dynamic or interesting questions. 5. Feedback.	Question cards of personal questions. Evaluation: Observation checklist.
Session 3: Everyday Problems solving: Real-life Role Play. Participants: 43 students.	To develop confidence in simulated contexts. To enhance problem-solving through communication.	Mentoring and roleplay. Task-based learning.	1. Warm-up: Discussion of common situations. 2. Explanation of roleplay activity. 3. Students work in groups and receive scenarios. 4. Preparation time. 5. Roleplay Presentation. 6. Feedback.	Situation Cards. Evaluation: Rubric (fluency, interaction, use of English, teamwork).
Session 4: Creating Memorable Stories. Participants: 35 students.	Practice fluency and creativity in speaking. To develop narrative skills.	Mentoring and visual-based learning. Storytelling.	1. Warm-up: Describe a simple image. 2. Students receive images. 3. Individual or pair story creation. 4. Oral story telling 1. Feedback.	Printed images. Flashcards. Evaluation: Fluency and coherence rubric.
Session 5: Speaking under pressure Challenges. Participants: 45 students.	To reinforce pronunciation and spelling. To increase attention and quick thinking.	Mentoring and gamification. Mentoring for competitive learning.	1. Warm-up: Review alphabet sounds. 2. Explanation of spelling competition. 3. Students compete in pairs. 4. Elimination rounds or scoring system, and feedback.	Word list. Evaluation: Frequency of Participation.
Session 6: Fluency through Tongue Twisters. Participants: 46 students.	To work pronunciation and fluency. To work confidence	Repetition drills. Mentoring for playful learning.	1. Warm-up: Simple pronunciation practice. 2. Introduction of tongue twisters. 3. Group repetition. 4. Individual attempts. 5. Speed challenge. Feedback.	Tongue twister cards. Evaluation: Pronunciation test. Levels of confidence when speaking.

Session 7: Technology and Education. Participants: 46 students.	To argument speaking skills. Practice listening and interaction.	Group al mentoring. Critical thinking.	1. Warm-up: Opinion questions. 2. Presentation of discussion topics. 3. Group discussion. 4. Sharing opinions with the class. 5. Feedback.	Conversation cards. Evaluation: Rubric (argumentation, interaction, fluency).
Session 8: The Speaker's Box Challenge. Participants: 45 students.	To integrate all speaking skills developed. To show fluency and confidence in speech.	Group mentoring. Task-based learning.	1. Warm-up: Quick speaking activity 2. Rotation through activities (role-play, questions, tongue twisters) 3. Group challenges 4. Final presentations 1. Reflection	Mixed cards (questions, tongue twisters). Evaluation: Final rubric (fluency, confidence, interaction, teamwork). Comparison with initial performance.
Session of closing Participants: 46 students.	Determining progress in soft skills.	Mentoring	Greeting Administration of the final evaluation	Likert-Scale questionnaire

The research member who assumes the role of mentor in the pedagogical intervention is the leader of the research who was trained in individual and group mentoring. Mentees are EFL teacher trainees in the 4th and 5th semesters. The feedback was collected after each lesson. They were in group mentoring. The evolution of participants was monitored using a daily book.

The Speaker's Box is a prompt-based pedagogical tool used to randomly select communicative challenges for learners at different levels of difficulty using soft skills situations. Challenges include questions, Images, problems to solve, scenarios, and linguistic challenges that can be solved individually, in pairs, or small groups. The soft skills worked on are communication, teamwork, and confidence. Mentors used the mentees' conversation topic preferences to design the pedagogic intervention.

4.3. Preservice teachers' soft skills state during the pedagogical intervention

A hybrid deductive-inductive thematic analysis was conducted. Deductive codes were derived from the constructs speaking confidence, effective communication, and teamwork skills. Two researchers independently coded the observations to find evidence of motivation, activity adaptation, attendance continuity, and perceived task difficulty. See Table 4.

Category 1: Confidence. - Participates despite making mistakes, suggesting a greater tolerance for communicative risk thanks to mentorship guidance. The code is "reduced fear of error."

Category 2: Effective Communication. - Presents ideas in a clear and understandable sequence because of mentorship support. The code is "Organization of ideas."

Category 3: Teamwork. - Distributes and fulfills roles in collaborative work activities. The code is "Role coordination."

All categories use the subcategories direct & strong, direct, and indirect.

Table 4. Pedagogical intervention weakness and strengths

SESSIONS	EVIDENCE	CATEGORIES & SUBCATEGORIES
1st Session: Flash Card with questions and situations (couple)	From the beginning, the students showed some insecurity when expressing themselves in English, so it was proposed that they speak from their desks to gain a little more confidence. However, when working in pairs, their participation increased. Students of Fifth-semester students showed greater fluidity, although there were occasions when concentration was lacking, and confidence was limited. This session allowed participants to break the ice and foster a basic level of participation. Something that was not anticipated is that, from this session onwards, fifth-semester students would no longer attend.	Confidence : direct Effective communication : direct. Confidence : direct.
2nd Session: Personal questions with partner change.	In this session, changing partners was key, encouraging interaction with different classmates and promoting the of effective communication. Students began to show greater openness and confidence when answering personal questions, progressively reducing the fear of making mistakes. However, there was also low interest in the resolution of the activity, making it seem boring; this led to changes to the activities, making them more dynamic and covering varied topics.	Effective communication : direct. Confidence : direct
3rd Session: Role-play based on situations or problems	Students show more confidence in speaking. They accepted the roles and faced simulated situations, which strengthened both their oral expression and their problem-solving skills. In addition, teamwork became more evident.	Confidence : direct. Teamwork: direct. Effective communication: direct & strong. Teamwork: direct & strong.
4th Session: Image-based storytelling.	Students demonstrated good fluency. Although grammatical errors still existed, communication was more spontaneous. It shows a increase in confidence when speaking in front of others, as well as better structure of ideas.	Effective communication : direct & strong. Confidence : direct. Effective communication : Direct & strong.
5th Session: Word spelling.	This activity, being a bit competitive since it was conducted as a competition between 2 students, allowed us to reinforce pronunciation and attention to detail. Although it was more structured, it contributed to individual confidence by engaging quickly and accurately.	Effective communication : Direct. Confidence : direct.
6th Session: Tongue twister.	The students participated enthusiastically, which generated a relaxed and motivating atmosphere. This session was key to reducing anxiety when speaking and losing embarrassment when reading the tongue twister. Most students used to make mistakes and thus they had better pronunciation and fluency in a playful way.	Confidence : direct. Effective communication : direct.

7th Session: Discussion of situations.	In this session, with the integration again of the fifth-semester students, a higher level of argumentation was evident . The students showed significant progress in effective communication, defending their ideas, and listening to their peers ; however, their confidence was slightly lower than in the first session.	Effective communication : direct. Teamwork: directa. Confidence : direct.
8th Session: Problem Solving and Challenges (Roleplay; Questions and Tongue Twisters).	In the final session, the fourth-semester students showed clear progress in confidence. Actively participating in the proposed challenges , combining the skills that were acquired throughout the sessions. Greater fluency, better teamwork, and a more confident attitude towards their classmates when speaking in English were evidenced.	Confidence : direct. Teamwork: direct. Effective communication: direct. Teamwork: direct & strong.

The evidence suggests favorable changes in participants' speaking engagements. It was noted that their participation revealed insecurity, fear of making mistakes, and a request to practice speaking in safe spaces.

4.4. Thematic Analysis:

The activities that elicited the most positive responses were those that incorporated real or simulated situations, controlled competition, and involved problem-solving. In contrast, repetitive personal questions generated less interest and, therefore, reduced participation. Thus, after the pedagogical intervention, students demonstrated more spontaneous communication, a greater willingness to assume roles, and a greater ability to meet communication challenges.

Greater confidence was observed after gradual exposure, working with peers, and learning to manage errors. They demonstrated greater fluency, better organization of ideas, pronunciation, argumentation, and listening skills.

Teamwork was particularly evident during role-plays, problem-solving activities, and the final challenges.

4.5. Preservice teachers' soft skills perceptions state post pedagogical intervention

Table 6. Preservice teachers' post-intervention perceptions about their soft skills

Categories	1	2	3	4	5
A. Confidence					
1. Using the Speaker's Box helps me feel more confident when speaking English.	11,7%	0,0%	32,3%	17,6%	38,2%
2. The activities I did helped me overcome my fear or embarrassment about speaking English in front of others. (Confidence)	14,7%	2,9%	29,4%	14,7%	38,2%

B. Effective communication					
3. Role play activities helped me practice real communication situations. (Fluidity)	8,8%	5,8%	14,7%	35,2%	35,2%
4. Tongue Twisters improve my pronunciation and fluency when speaking. (Pronunciation)	14,7%	5,8%	14,7%	35,2%	29,4%
5. The Discussion of Situations activities helped me to express my ideas and opinions in English. (Expression)	14,7%	0,0%	20,5%	26,2%	38,2%
6. Storytelling made learning and speaking English more dynamic and interesting. (Motivation)	14,7%	2,9%	20,5%	20,5%	41,1%
7. The Speaker's Box helped me to better organize my ideas before speaking. (Organization of ideas)	11,7%	0,0%	29,4%	17,6%	41,1%
8. I feel that I can now communicate more fluently than before starting these activities. (Fluidity)	8,8%	5,8%	32,3%	20,5%	32,1%
C. Teamwork					
9. Do you prefer to do oral expression activities (Role Play, Tongue Twisters, Storytelling, Discussion) in a group setting? 47,0%.	8,8%	11,7%	11,7%	20,5%	47,0%
10. Do you prefer to do oral expression activities (Role Play, Tongue Twisters, Storytelling, Discussion) individually? Individual work	14,7%	20,5%	20,5%	11,7%	32,3%
11. The activities were varied and kept my interest throughout the sessions. (Motivation)	14,7%	0%	20,5%	26,4%	38,2%

The results show that participants perceive Speaking Box activities as beneficial for strengthening their soft skills.

4.6. QUAN analysis of the pedagogical intervention

Construct	Quantitative results	Qualitative evidence	Relationship	Meta-inference
Confidence	55.8% selected agree/strongly agree	Greater voluntary participation from intermediate sessions onwards	Partial convergence	Participants perceived greater trust, and observations showed greater willingness, but there was no objective pre-post measurement.
Effective communication	64.6% favorable	Greater spontaneity, argumentation, and listening skills	Complementarity	The observations explain which communicative components were most visible.

Construct	Quantitative results	Qualitative evidence	Relationship	Meta-inference
Teamwork	67.5% favorable to group work	Clear coordination from session 3 onwards	Convergence	Group preference coincided with collaborative patterns.

4.7. Examination of Hypothesis

The results of Fisher–Freeman–Halton for an 11×5 table, estimating the exact value by 1,000,000 Monte Carlo simulations.

Ho: There is no relationship between preservice teachers' perceptions of soft skills after the intervention.

Ha: There is a relationship between preservice teachers' perceptions of soft skills after the intervention.

The result $p \approx 0.530$. The null hypothesis is not rejected. No statistically significant differences were found between the response distributions of the Likert-Scale categories and the different items analyzed.

5. DISCUSSION

This research indicates that mentoring supported by the Speaker' Box strategy contributed to innovative speaking practice, articulating situations that build students' confidence, effective communication, and teamwork in university English as a foreign language (EFL) class. Classroom observations showed that students progressed from limited participation in the initial sessions to more natural interaction and a greater willingness to communicate in English by the end of the intervention. An increase in public speaking confidence and an improvement in effective communication were observed as students gradually progressed from insecurity and fear of making mistakes to more active and natural participation in oral activities. Furthermore, role-playing, storytelling, tongue twisters, and problem-solving activities provided continuous opportunities to practice English in a safe and supportive environment, reducing speaking anxiety and motivating students to express their ideas with greater confidence. In the final sessions, students spoke more fluently, demonstrated a greater willingness to participate, and interacted with their peers with greater confidence.

Regarding effective communication, this was more evident among fourth-semester students than among fifth-semester students because the fourth-semester group participated continuously throughout almost the entire intervention, allowing them to practice the communicative activities and receive ongoing feedback. As a result, they demonstrated greater interaction, collaboration, and natural participation during the challenges, while the fifth-semester students stood out primarily for their argumentation skills when they returned to the activities. Similarly, teamwork was one of the soft skills that the pedagogical intervention worked on. In addition, most of the Speaker' Box activities required students to work collaboratively in pairs or groups, promoting the exchange of ideas, mutual support, and joint decision-making while communicating in English. Observations showed that collaboration increased progressively from the third session onward, peaking in the final session, when students solved the challenges in a coordinated manner. These results were also consistent with the perception questionnaire, in which group work received a good acceptance.

These findings align with previous studies on mentoring and strategies based on communicative activities. Aguirre-Garzón (2022) demonstrated that mentoring strengthens collaboration, communication, and problem-solving through supportive mentor-student relationships. Similarly, Erdiana et al. (2023) and Hutagalung et al. (2024) found that Mystery Box-based activities increase participation, improve oral performance, and reduce anxiety when speaking English by creating dynamic and interactive environments. Likewise, Prasetyo and Arini (2024) showed that mentoring-based interventions promote fluency, vocabulary, confidence, and critical thinking, while Ayiz and Tauchid (2025) concluded that collaborative oral expression activities strengthen pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and teamwork. Taken together, these investigations support the results obtained in this study, which show that the combination of mentoring and Speaker' Box is a valid strategy for innovating EFL instruction.

The main achievement of this research was to determine the possible contributions of the mentoring process, combined with the Speaker' Box strategy, to strengthening speaking practice and soft skills. Students demonstrated increased confidence when speaking in front of others, more effective communication through greater participation and interaction, and outstanding teamwork during collaborative activities. Furthermore, the intervention created a dynamic and safe learning environment that helped reduce anxiety when speaking in English and encouraged active participation.

Despite this, some unexpected results were also identified. In the second session, certain activities elicited limited motivation because the proposed topics were insufficiently related to the students' interests. Therefore, it was necessary to redesign the activities and incorporate more engaging and meaningful topics.

Based on the results obtained, it is recommended that the Speaker' Box strategy be implemented continuously in English classes, using topics related to students' interests and modeling each activity beforehand with clear examples to facilitate understanding and increase participation. It is also important to balance the number of activities per session and ensure consistent participant attendance to maximize the intervention's impact. For future research, it is suggested that the program's duration be extended, a larger sample size be included, and the questionnaires be supplemented with interviews or other qualitative instruments to further explore how Speaker' Box can innovate EFL speaking practices.

The participants' recommendations suggest that the Speaker's Box methodology was well-received and contributed to effective communication, confidence, and teamwork skills in the English classroom. Most students described the strategy as dynamic, motivating, and effective, with comments such as "Very dynamic!", "Excellent!", and "Amazing!". However, participants suggested that the teacher model each activity with clear examples before the students began the oral tasks, as this would reduce confusion and increase confidence in participating. Others indicated that certain instructions or options were unclear, underscoring the need for more explicit guidance. In addition, one student noted that including too many activities in a single session could negatively affect learning, suggesting that the pace of lessons should be adjusted to allow sufficient time for interaction, reflection, and collaborative practice. Overall, these recommendations indicate that the methodology could be strengthened through clearer instructions, teacher modeling, and a more balanced sequence of activities.

The results showed no statistically significant relationship between academic semester and the development of soft skills. Although at the beginning of the intervention upper-semester students demonstrated greater confidence and fluency in English communication, these differences diminished as the sessions progressed. The evidence suggests that the research team inferred that students reached better levels of effective communication, confidence, and teamwork. This suggests that the development of these skills was more

related to active participation in the activities implemented through the Speaker' Box and the mentoring process than to the academic semester to which the participants belonged.

Considering the findings of this study, it can be suggested to include the use of Speaker' Box as an integral part of English lessons giving opportunities to use effective communication, confidence, and teamwork skills.

Additionally, it is essential to pay attention to selecting activity topics based on students' needs and interests, as this encourages their motivation and active participation in the process. Moreover, it can be useful to implement these activities gradually, beginning with guided ones and moving to more spontaneous ones to increase confidence in English-speaking.

6. CONCLUSION

The authors declare that the research aims have been fulfilled: to present the Speaker's Box as a structured, adaptable, and pedagogically viable model of group mentoring to promote opportunities for communication and collaboration in the initial training of EFL teachers. The mentoring process enabled the research team to improve speaking performance and enhance the interpersonal skills required in academic and professional life. Participants reported good participation and acceptance of the pedagogy. Thus, the intervention appeared to support speaking practice and contribute to students' soft-skill development. However, there were some limitations of the study. Firstly, the intervention lasted for just ten mentoring sessions and had a limited sample size, which does not allow generalization of the findings for other educational settings.

In terms of educational implications, this study demonstrates that the Speaker Box is an innovative teaching method that may be applied in mentoring programs to develop not only oral communication skills but also soft skills for teaching English as a foreign language simultaneously. It is suggested that further research should focus on implementing this method in longer-term interventions with different samples, comparing it with other communicative strategies, and examining its long-term effects.

To conclude, the Speaker's Box proved to be a valuable didactic tool that can encourage students' participation and collaboration and promote more student-centered learning.

Finally, future research should focus on increasing the time of the implementation of the activity, working with different and larger groups of participants, as well as investigating the influence of the activity on other soft skills like leadership, creativity, and critical thinking, and comparing it with other teaching techniques.

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