

RELIGACIÓN

R E V I S T A

Exploring the effects of competitive and collaborative speaking activities in EFL students' motivation and self-efficacy

Explorando los efectos de las actividades competitivas y de habla colaborativa en la motivación y autoeficacia de los estudiantes de EFL

Stephanie Carolina Morocho Tipán, Juanita Catalina Argudo-Serrano

Abstract

Competition and collaboration are widely used strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes to increase meaningful learning and students' engagement. In this sense, this study aimed to examine the effects of competitive and collaborative speaking activities on the motivation and self-efficacy of EFL learners. For this, a descriptive scope through a systematic review has been made, with research from 2020 to 2025. Initially, 120 articles were found through database searching. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 20 articles remained for study. The main findings were that research indicates notable differences in motivation and self-efficacy responses between students engaged in collaborative versus competitive activities in the EFL classroom, particularly regarding speaking tasks. Results show that in competitive settings, students may experience heightened motivation driven by the desire to outperform peers; however, this can sometimes lead to anxiety and fear of failure, which may negatively impact self-efficacy for some learners. On the contrary, students participating in collaborative activities often report higher levels of intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. In conclusion, the literature showed a preference for collaborative learning, giving that it gives less anxiety to students than competitive strategies, increasing their benefits.

Keywords: Learning; Competition; Collaboration; Motivation.

Stephanie Carolina Morocho Tipán

Catholic University of Cuenca | Cuenca | Ecuador | stephanie.morocho.61@est.ucacue.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3479-9862>

Juanita Catalina Argudo-Serrano

Catholic University of Cuenca | Cuenca | Ecuador | juanita.argudo@ucacue.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3337-7803>

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Resumen

La competencia y la colaboración son estrategias muy utilizadas en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) para aumentar el aprendizaje significativo y el compromiso de los estudiantes. Este estudio tenía como objetivo examinar los efectos de las actividades de expresión oral competitivas y colaborativas sobre la motivación y la autoeficacia de los estudiantes de EFL. Se ha realizado un alcance descriptivo a través de una revisión sistemática, contando con investigaciones desde 2020 hasta 2025. Inicialmente, se encontraron 120 artículos a través de la búsqueda en bases de datos. Luego de revisar los criterios de inclusión y exclusión, quedaron 20 artículos por estudiar. Las principales conclusiones fueron que las investigaciones indican diferencias notables en las respuestas de motivación y autoeficacia entre los estudiantes que se involucran en actividades colaborativas frente a los que participan en actividades competitivas en el aula de EFL, sobre todo en lo respectivo a las tareas de expresión oral. En los entornos competitivos, los estudiantes pueden experimentar una mayor motivación impulsada por el deseo de superar a sus compañeros; sin embargo, esto a veces puede conducir a la ansiedad y el miedo al fracaso, lo que puede afectar negativamente a la autoeficacia de algunos estudiantes. Por el contrario, aquellos que se involucran en actividades colaborativas suelen manifestar mayores niveles de motivación intrínseca y autoeficacia. En conclusión, la bibliografía muestra una preferencia por el aprendizaje colaborativo, ya que provoca menos ansiedad a los estudiantes que las estrategias competitivas, lo que aumenta sus beneficios. Palabras clave: Aprendizaje; Competición; Colaboración; Motivación.

Introduction

Competition and collaboration are widely used strategies in EFL classes to increase meaningful learning and students' engagement (Aliabadi & Weisi, 2023). Collaboration and competition are often challenging activities that require students to further their oral communication skills, so these two strategies influence motivation and self-efficacy that affect their willingness to participate in speaking tasks, thus leading to successes or failures in learning the language (Bandura, 1997; Dörnyei, 2005).

Bandura (1997), describes self-efficacy as a person's belief that one can achieve a specific result. This theory is pivotal to understanding how students direct their efforts toward tasks in EFL because self-efficacy deals with motivation, persistence, and resilience. Self-efficacious students would take on tasks that challenge their abilities with certainty and confidence, whereas, on the contrary, students who perceive themselves as not having sufficient skills would have avoidance and anxiety tendencies toward any tasks (Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

Motivation is a determining factor in learning EFL. Students who are motivated are willing to take an active role in their work, stick it out through difficulties, and reach their learning goals. As Dörnyei (2001), a leading expert in motivation in second language acquisition, observed, motivation should be seen as a complex and developing process, not as a fixed characteristic. In this regard, teachers must utilize pedagogical strategies which, doubtful though it may be, are conducive to strengthening both intrinsic motivation- being simply what it is, to include personal interest and satisfaction and extrinsic motivation: rewards and recognition in their EFL students.

Competitive speaking activities not only provide objective assessments of performance but also reward individual success, thereby enhancing self-efficacy, as an individual grows in his or

her belief of being capable of performing well in speaking, if the actions taken toward that goal contribute to success (Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, it can put pressure on them to perform, heightening anxiety for some learners and undermining motivation (Horwitz, 1986). On the other hand, collaborative speaking tasks endorse Bandura's (1997), concept of social modeling in the sense that such tasks allow these students to witness and learn from their peers' successes, which enhances self-efficacy (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Dörnyei, 2001). Such diluting of the fear of failure meant by giving applause to a group is understood in that success belongs to an entire group, and students believe they have emotional support (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Dörnyei, 2001).

Vygotsky (1978), emphasized social interaction and cultural environment in shaping cognition. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is key to the theory, which represents the distance between what learners can realize by themselves and what they can do with support or cooperation. Peer activities participate in EFL learning, where students work together to address linguistic problems, improving speaking ability. Cooperative activities, which are often peer learning, mediate processes within a ZPD. The more advanced or confident might become mentors to their less advanced peers, thereby accomplishing growth for both partners. Such exchanges could not only nurture the linguistic competence of both but also present support and recognition to each other (Chaiklin, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Competition can also indirectly stimulate growth since learners are pushed to their limits to become aware of their ZPD with support (Chaiklin, 2003).

Together, Bandura (1997); Dörnyei (2001; 2005) and Vygotsky (1978), provided the basis for a strong framework for examining the impact of competitive and collaborative activities on EFL learners. Further, these theories provide an exciting interplay whereby strategies in this research are motivators of self-efficacy, allowing EFL teachers to derive comprehensive insight and frame balanced and effective learning environments. Thus, this framework connects cognitive and emotional domains that provide credence to evidence-based intervention efforts aimed at promoting holistic language learning.

Self-efficacy and motivation are the two most significant factors influencing students' performance and their language skills development in EFL. Previous studies have shown that competition and collaboration play an important role in these two aspects. While competition has been found to improve certain parts of a student's performance, it has been shown to increase anxiety and lessen students' willingness to participate in speaking activities (Abdel El-Hallim & Abdalla, 2019; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). In contrast, collaborative learning is based on a lot of social interaction and teamwork to solve problems; it helps develop motivation and self-confidence, according to Vygotsky (1978). The Vygotskian conception of the ZPD says that the best way for learners to thrive is by growing with others within their potential growth zone, particularly in language learning.

Despite various studies exploring the specific impacts on motivation and self-efficacy, greater synthesis and understanding of these effects remain limited within the context of EFL classrooms

(Apridayani et al., 2023; Bailey et al., 2023). Recent studies (Afzalimir & Safa, 2021; Bećirović et al., 2022; Zambrano et al., 2019), have given insight into competition and cooperation's influences on motivation and self-efficacy, but there are still gaps in the literature. For example, Afzalimir and Safa's (2021), research on EFL learners revealed that cooperative and competitive learning were indeed able to shape speaking abilities and self-confidence, with the former performing more favorably on the axes of anxiety reduction and self-confidence enhancement. However, further research is required to determine how these activities specifically affect motivation and self-efficacy in diverse EFL contexts and to explore potential variations in outcomes based on factors such as language proficiency level, age, and cultural background (Syzenko & Diachkova, 2020). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the effects of competitive and collaborative speaking activities on EFL students' motivation and self-efficacy, to fill these gaps and provide valuable information for pedagogical practice.

Literature review

Recent studies have shown that motivation and self-efficacy play a notable role in learning a second language, particularly in EFL classrooms (Luo et al., 2024). Self-efficacy and motivation are vital determiners of language learning (Wang & Sung, 2020). Research (Al-Jamili et al., 2024; Luo et al., 2024; Naderi & Moafian, 2023; Sadeghi et al., 2022; Waluyo & Balazon, 2024), emphasizes the primary role of self-efficacy in student motivation and achievement across many academic fields. Basileo and Otto (2024), confirmed that self-efficacy has a strong influence on academic results, mostly mediated by autonomous motivation. This study showed that assistance provided to students by the teacher is very important in solving the psychological needs of students. Emotionally and psychologically supportive teachers build confidence and resilience in students (Wang & Sung, 2020).

Some interventions performed by teachers concerning these aspects include constructive feedback, instilling a growth mindset in students, and creating a supportive classroom environment, enabling students to cope with common language learning issues like anxiety or fear of failing. This assistance developed self-efficacy and thus will encourage students to persist in completing language tasks (Wang & Sung, 2020). Teachers who support their learners to build on their successes and to overcome attempts can contribute prominently toward enhancing the learners' emotional and psychological well-being, as this improves motivation and academic performance (Liu & Zhou, 2024).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highly emphasized social interaction and scaffolding during learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood et al., 1976). In this manner, these theories worked together in that social functions in the ZPD and collaborative or competitive tasks can be set up to foster maximum cognitive and emotional growth (Chaiklin, 2003).

The Role of Collaboration in Motivating EFL Learners

According to Kasumi and Xhemaili (2023), collaborative practices reduce anxiety and regulate emotions; above all, they can enhance motivation in second language learners and in general any other discipline. In this sense, it facilitates joint ownership and contributes to participation in EFL classes. Ongoing conversation becomes the motivational environment through solving the problem tasks. Teachers can create a motivational climate by allowing learners to express themselves and work together. Collaboration combats speaking anxiety and subsequently lends confidence to young EFL learners (Bicen & Amini, 2024).

Cooperative learning has not only the ability to motivate and improve various EFL learning achievements but characteristics of that nature come with their own inherent drawbacks (Bećirović et al., 2022). Cooperation can motivate students; however, time management is often lacking. Poor training in group management practices and teaching can further hinder cooperative learning (Zhang et al., 2023). Such studies indicated an increasing awareness of the relevance the notions of competition and cooperation have come to bear on each other; they indicate, however, the need for more investigation into how these dynamics correlate in various EFL settings.

However, gender variations in perceptions of collaboration have been noted; for example, in contrast to male students who reported lower perceptions on all factors, female students believe that professors give greater possibilities for expression, discussion, and teamwork and that classrooms encourage cooperation (Kasumi & Xhemaili, 2023).

The Impact of Competition on Motivation

When learning a second language, competition may have a detrimental impact on students by making them ambivalent and driven to achieve, which makes it challenging for them to compete with other students in learning environments that weren't available to them when they were studying their mother tongues (Cong-Lem & Nguyen, 2024; Li & Pei, 2024; Murphy et al., 2020; Wu & Forbes, 2023). According to Li et al. (2022), class competition was found to enhance school achievement through increased engagement while at the same time negating its effects by raising learning anxiety. Such findings illustrated the need to maintain a balance so that motivating competitive activities are run with the least amount of obligatory emotional barriers, particularly in second language learning contexts where anxiety poses a disablement for communication and participation.

As noticed by Ma and Chen (2024), in both education and the workplace, competition is an unavoidable social setting that reflects people's perceptions of how much they like it. Competitive attitudes are influenced by both external environmental influences and stable personal attributes, with self-efficacy playing a significant role (Mildawani et al., 2022). Very competitive people are more likely to put in more work and do better (Eber et al., 2021). Consequently, the association between task motivation and self-efficacy in school students is commonly mediated by competitive

attitudes. Additionally, the competitive environment influences behavior and thought processes and frequently contributes to success (Ma & Chen, 2024).

Comparative Studies on Competition and Collaboration in EFL Contexts

Some studies (Afzalimir & Safa, 2021; Wongvorachan, 2023) have compared competition and cooperation by their influence on learner performance in the EFL context. Wongvorachan (2023), maintained that cooperation among students should be favored over competition; the combination would induce better engagement and motivation for students to study. These previous studies recommend that competitive prompts embedded in cooperative events such as intergroup competitions would increase the payoffs presented. It is also presented that both types of strategies can increase extrinsic motivation (Gómez & Lago, 2024; Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2025; Hülshoff & Jucks, 2024; Jodoi et al., 2021; Liu, 2024; Sadeghi et al., 2022; Scotland, 2022; Yan et al., 2024), and intrinsic motivation (Haile et al., 2024; Rezai et al., 2025) while generating more engagement in students (Alzoubi, 2024; Huang & Macgilchrist, 2024; Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024).

Additionally, Afzalimir and Safa (2021), maintained that cooperative learning is more effective in supporting improvements in speaking capability and self-confidence, especially among less proficient learners. In this way, learning competition could slightly enhance someone's ability to speak a foreign language but would not raise his or her self-esteem. Therefore, an atmosphere of motivational support is essential for the effective application of this strategy (Jeon & Lee, 2023). Similarly, research suggests that self-regulated learning (SRL) is a critical factor that encourages student engagement in cooperative and competitive settings, using self-efficacy as a foundation (Brenner, 2022).

Therefore, this study sought to examine the effects of competitive and collaborative speaking activities on the motivation and self-efficacy of EFL learners by integrating two principal theories, Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), Dörnyei's framework of second language motivation (Dörnyei, 2005) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Using a systematic review of scientific databases, 20 articles were analyzed from ScienceDirect, Redalyc, and Scielo to synthesize and provide greater insight into how these learning strategies impact EFL learners concerning varying responses in motivation and levels of self-efficacy based on context and educational needs.

Considering the previous statements, the research questions were as follows: What has been reported about the effects of competitive speaking activities on EFL learners' motivation and self-efficacy? What has been reported about the effects of collaborative speaking activities on EFL learners' motivation and self-efficacy? And what differences in motivation and self-efficacy responses are reported between students involved in collaborative speaking activities versus competitive speaking activities in the EFL classroom? Finally, the study aimed to provide an overview of how competitive and collaborative speaking activities may influence these two important aspects of language learning, giving findings that may benefit EFL educators.

Method

The research has a descriptive scope, which means, in terms of Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2018), that it does not intend to have a causal-effect overview, but it tries to present the information as it is shown at the moment it is observed. Similarly, it includes the different qualities of the research that is being studied.

This investigation is a systematic review, which is described as a methodical comprehension of a certain subject based on the information gathered from primary research studies to integrate the material (Norris & Ortega, 2006). The publications were looked up in scholarly databases, including ScienceDirect, Redalyc, and Scielo, to make sure the necessary information regarding the impact of competitive versus collaborative classroom speaking activities on EFL students was accurate. Additionally, collaborative classroom, competitive classroom, EFL, motivation, and self-efficacy were the key terms and their permutations that were utilized to locate the relevant research sites.

The inclusion criteria were that the researches were (1) published from 2020 to 2025; (2) published in free-access journals; (3) published in English or Spanish; (4) peer-reviewed articles (papers). For this reason, the exclusion criteria were that the publications were (1) published in or before 2019; (2) accessed through payment; (3) published in languages that were not English or Spanish; and (4) were theses, letters to editors, or other kinds of publications.

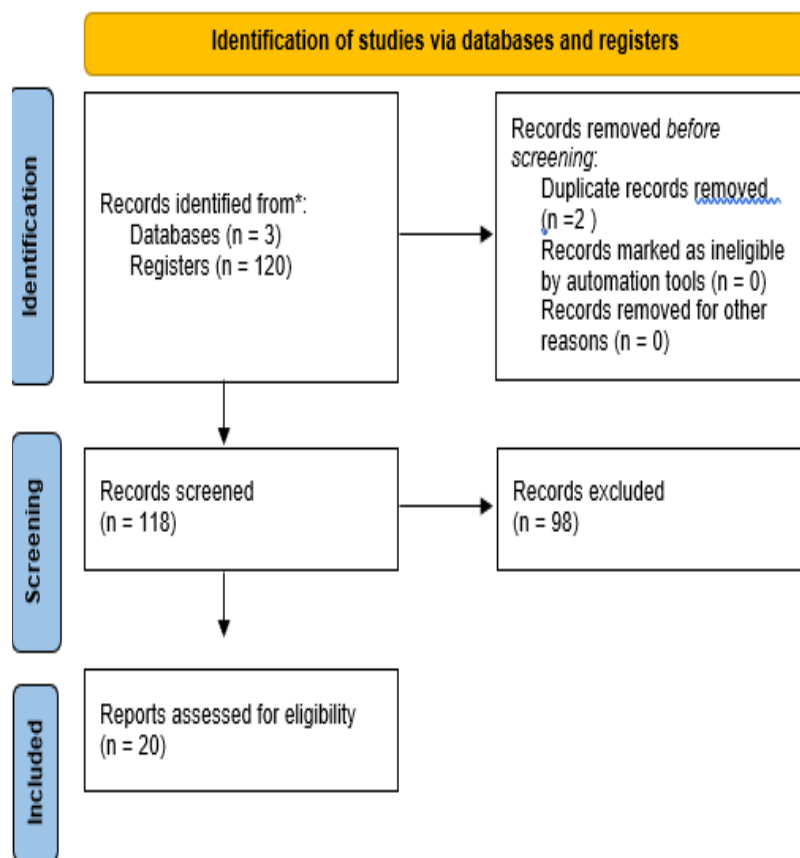
To conduct the analysis, first, the different databases were consulted through the introduction of the different terms and permutations; then, duplicated articles were removed. After that, the different exclusion criteria were applied. The abstract and key terms of each article were read to make the final exclusion. Finally, the last list was done in an Excel sheet.

Results and discussion

In this section, the literature review findings will be discussed concerning the study questions, which explore the impact and differences between collaborative and competitive speaking activities in EFL students' motivation and self-efficacy.

The following PRISMA diagram details the steps involved in the data collection and analysis. (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram



Source: own elaboration

In this sense, as seen in Figure 1, a total of 120 articles were found, with two duplicates across databases. After a thorough review to identify duplicates, 118 articles remained to be screened. Each of the 118 articles was evaluated, and 98 articles were excluded based on the exclusion criteria, leaving 20 articles in the final analysis.

Table 1 presents that, from the different kinds of techniques and methods implemented, more than half of the studies ($n = 11$; 55%) implemented collaborative speaking activities, while the rest ($n = 9$; 45%) implemented competitive ones. It is important to mention that three studies (15%) used competitive activities inside a complex collaborative one. It can be interpreted, given these numbers, that collaborative speaking activities are generally favored in research.

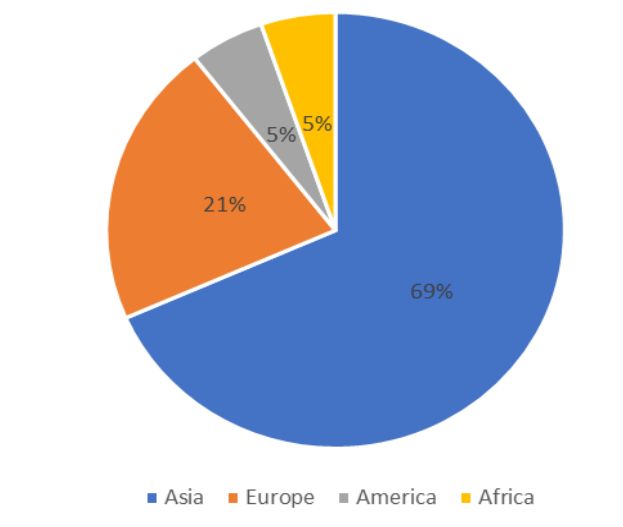
Table 1. Sources with Collaborative or Competitive Studies

Activities implemented	N	%
Collaborative	11	55
Competitive	6	30
Both activities	3	15
Total	20	100

Source: own elaboration

Figure 2 shows a geographical representation of the studies on competitive and collaborative learning within EFL classrooms.

Figure 2. Distribution of Studies per Continent



Source: own elaboration

As seen in figure 2, most of the studies have been noted to be in Asia (China, Vietnam, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Iran), but there are samples from Europe (Germany and Hungary), Africa (Ethiopia), and America (Mexico), which can give a different approach or perspective depending on the findings. In this sense, some aspects were divergent, but at the moment of the analysis, they have commonalities, given that they are all in EFL classes. Most of them were in a university context ($n=14$), while the others were done in high school ($n=4$) and language institutes ($n=2$). Even when this distribution does not explain anything *per se*, it gives a perspective on which countries and/or continents have more research about the investigation topic, having all of them focus on EFL and how competitive or collaborative learning impacts speaking skills (Murphy et al., 2020). It could be interpreted that these differences can be given for the Asian interest in commerce/trading with the rest of the world, while Europe commonly studies more than one language, and there are few studies in America and Africa because of a lack of resources or less interest in these topics, having a lower level of English comparing to the first two continents as Syzenko and Diachkova (2020), noticed in their study.

As mentioned before, a study indicates that self-regulated learning (SRL) is a key variable that promotes student participation in collaborative and competitive environments; these methods allow students to set objectives, keep track of their progress, and reflect on their performance, which is especially beneficial in the context of online learning (Apridayani et al., 2023). The findings of this study showed activity interventions in classroom settings ($n=4$; 20%), online environments ($n=3$; 15%), active learning approaches ($n=2$; 10%), flipped classroom models ($n=2$; 10%), immersive virtual reality strategies ($n=2$; 10%), and project-based learning methods ($n=1$; 5%).

Effects of Competitive Speaking Activities on EFL Learners' Motivation and Self-efficacy

In Table 2, the effects of competitive speaking tasks are summarized regarding motivation and self-efficacy, and the effects of competitive speaking tasks are categorized in regard to motivation and self-efficacy. Additionally, the table provides the number and percent of studies reporting various effects.

Table 2. Effects of Competitive Speaking Activities on Motivation and Self-efficacy (summary)

Effect on motivation	Number and percentage*	Studies	Effect on self-efficacy	Number and percentage*	Studies
Increases extrinsic motivation because of a sense of achievement and recognition	3 (15%)	Gómez & Lago (2024); Jodoi et al. (2021); Sadeghi et al. (2022).	Boosts self-efficacy, making students feel more confident in their abilities.	3 (15%)	Al-Jamili et al. (2024); Li & Pei (2024); Waluyo & Balazon (2024).
Enhances goal-setting to outperform peers	2 (10%)	Cong-Lem & Nguyen (2024); Gómez & Lago (2024).	Improves performance beliefs in their capacity to succeed in future tasks	3 (15%)	Al-Jamili et al. (2024); Li & Pei (2024); Wu & Forbes (2023).
Creates a sense of urgency (also given anxiety) pushing learners to perform better and keep themselves motivated	4 (20%)	Al-Jamili et al. (2024); Gómez & Lago (2024); Jodoi et al. (2021); Waluyo & Balazon (2024).	Increases perceived competence in speaking, enhancing their self-efficacy	5 (25%)	Al-Jamili et al. (2024); Gómez & Lago (2024); Naderi & Moafian (2023); Sadeghi et al. (2022); Waluyo & Balazon (2024).
Fosters peer comparisons by continuous observation, creating an environment of hard work between all of them	2 (10%)	Al-Jamili et al. (2024); Naderi & Moafian (2023).	Promotes resilience when failure is present, developing persistence when facing challenges, boosting self-efficacy	2 (10%)	Cong-Lem & Nguyen (2024); Waluyo & Balazon (2024).
Promotes enjoyment and engagement, fostering motivation to keep practicing	2 (10%)	Al-Jamili et al. (2024); Li & Pei (2024); Naderi & Moafian (2023); Sadeghi et al. (2022); Waluyo & Balazon (2024).	Mastery experiences or increased the idea of future success based on the previous experience	2 (10%)	Cong-Lem & Nguyen (2024); Li & Pei (2024).

Source: own elaboration

Note: in percentage based on the twenty (20) studies included. Also, articles that are counted in more than one category are showed with an*.

Particularly, competitive activities have been reported to enhance student engagement and performance (Al-Jamili et al., 2024). According to Al-Jamili et al. (2024), students exposed to game-based competitive activities showed greater improvements in their speaking skills than

those subjected to more traditional teaching styles. The study emphasizes the impact of game-based learning, often in conjunction with competitive elements, on oral excellence among ESL students. This competitive environment can direct to increased participation rates, as pupils are more probable to take risks in their language use to outperform their peers (Cong-Lem & Nguyen, 2024). Furthermore, the adrenaline associated with competition can create a dynamic atmosphere that encourages spontaneity and creativity in speech production, ultimately enriching the overall learning experience (Naderi & Moafian, 2023; Sadeghi et al., 2022).

On the negative side, it is reported that it can cause anxiety to those who are playing, particularly those who lose the game (Waluyo & Balazon, 2024). The pressure to compete has been described as impeding students' concentration and overall enjoyment, with those who happen to value emotional reactions more than getting jobs done being affected in varying degrees (see Tables 2 and 4).

Overall, competitive activities were found to cultivate student engagement and participation, yet they also introduce challenges, such as increased anxiety for some learners (Al-Jamili et al., 2024). While engagement, in this case, has at first increased due to competitive activities, it could be seen that, for a time, the effects of anxiety on language learning can be somewhat prejudicial, particularly for students who have trouble with performance anxiety. While competition proficiency engages students positively, the adverse effect of anxiety has also been reported in various studies (Li & Pei, 2024; Waluyo & Balazon, 2024). This agrees with conclusions from previous researches, such as Jodoi et al. (2021), that showed that combining competition and anxiety is unfavorable to learning outcomes, especially for language tasks that require higher levels of fluency.

Effects of Collaborative Speaking Activities on EFL Learners' Motivation and Self-Efficacy

Table 3 provides a summary of the effects of collaborative speaking activities on motivation and self-efficacy.

Table 3. Effects of Collaborative Speaking Activities on Motivation and Self-Efficacy (summary)

Effect on motivation	%	Studies	Effect on self-efficacy	%	Studies
Increased engagement	6 (30%)	Alzoubi (2024); Apridayani et al. (2023); Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025); Rahmanu & Molnár (2024); Rezai et al. (2025); Yan et al. (2024).	Enhanced belief in abilities (expectations of succeeding together)	6 (30%)	Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025); Haile et al. (2024); Hülshoff & Jucks (2024); Rezai et al. (2025); Liu (2024); Yan et al. (2024).

Effect on motivation	%	Studies	Effect on self-efficacy	%	Studies
Development of a sense of belonging, fostering a sense of community, connecting peers with the learning process, and increasing extrinsic motivation	5 (25%)	Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025); Hülshoff & Jucks (2024); Liu (2024); Scotland (2022); Yan et al. (2024).	Improved task accomplishment	6 (30%)	Alzoubi (2024); Apridayani et al. (2023); Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025); Haile et al. (2024); Liu (2024); Yan et al. (2024).
Increased intrinsic motivation	3 (15%)	Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025); Haile et al. (2024); Rezai et al. (2025).	Mastery experiences or increased the idea of future success based on the previous experience	6 (30%)	Alzoubi (2024); Apridayani et al. (2023); Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025); Haile et al. (2024); Hülshoff & Jucks (2024); Liu (2024); Scotland (2022).
More autonomy	3 (15%)	Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025); Haile et al. (2024); Liu (2024).	Better problem-solving skills	4 (20%)	Alzoubi (2024); Huang & Macgilchrist (2024); Liu (2024); Rezai et al. (2025).
Positive peer influence	5 (25%)	Apridayani et al. (2023); Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025); Rahmanu & Molnár (2024); Rezai et al. (2025); Scotland (2022).	Reduced anxiety compared with individual work, reducing also fear of failure	5 (25%)	Apridayani et al. (2023); Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025); Haile et al. (2024); Rezai et al. (2025); Yan et al. (2024).

Source: own elaboration

Note: in percentage based on the twenty (20) studies included. Also, articles that are counted in more than one category are showed with an*.

In contrast to competitive activities, some literature reports that collaborative activities have been associated with language development and social interaction. In this sense, working in groups or pairs allows learners to share ideas and negotiate meanings while engaged in structured language practice (Rezai et al., 2025). Group collaboration has been said to have a favorable effect on self-efficacy and motivation of EFL learners during speaking activities. Students engaged in collaborative learning tended to show much motivation, especially in areas such as individual responsibility and interpersonal skills important for effective communication (Scotland, 2022). Furthermore, collaboration has a sense of community, fostering a higher willingness to take risks in their use of language (Alzoubi, 2024). In addition, collaborative-type activities help promote the development of critical thinking and listening skills, where students attend to each other's contributions to build meaningful dialogues (Scotland, 2022). Furthermore, the data suggest that there is a greater development in communication skills and interpersonal relationships in a supportive classroom environment when group work is shared (see Table 3).

Limitations of collaborative activities have, however, been reported, particularly in terms of group dynamic, having also a potentially unequal participation, which could have an impact on student motivation (see Tables 3 and 4).

The research suggested that cooperation among peers has an important effect on motivation and self-efficacy in EFL students participating in speaking activities. As established, collaborative activities were much more frequent in the analyzed studies since they offer significant benefits that contribute to language development and social interaction among students. By working together in pairs or small groups, learners can share ideas, negotiate meanings, and practice language in a supportive environment (Rezai et al., 2025). This is aligned with earlier evidence produced by different studies (Apridayani et al., 2023; Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2025; Haile et al., 2024; Rezai et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2024), of cooperative learning reducing anxiety and increasing self-confidence as contributors to second language proficiency development overall. In contrast, collaborative strategies, while not without challenges, such as unequal participation or group dynamics (Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024), generally have a more positive impact on language development and student motivation.

Comparative Effects Between Collaborative and Competitive Speaking Activities on EFL Learners' Motivation and Self-Efficacy

Table 4 outlines the comparative advantages and disadvantages of collaborative and competitive speaking activities.

Table 4. Reported Collaborative and Competitive Pros and Cons

Activities implemented	Pros	Cons	Sources
Collaborative	Language development and social interaction, supportive environment, sense of community and belonging, comfort with mistakes, promotion of active listening and critical thinking, enhanced communication skills, high intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy.	Dependency on group dynamics, potential unequal participation	Apridayani et al. (2023).
			Goodarzi & Namaziandost (2025).
			Liu (2024).
			Rahmanu & Molnár (2024).
			Rezai et al. (2025).
Competitive	Language development, enhanced engagement and performance, sense of urgency and excitement, pushing linguistic boundaries, increased participation rates, dynamic atmosphere, high extrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy.	Increased anxiety, fear of failure	Scotland (2022).
			Al-Jamili et al. (2024).
			Cong-Lem & Nguyen (2024).
			Jodoi et al. (2021).
			Naderi & Moafian (2023).
			Sadeghi et al. (2022).
			Waluyo & Balazon (2024).

Source: own elaboration

As seen in Table 4, the comparative analysis of collaborative and competitive activities in the EFL classroom shows that these approaches have various advantages and disadvantages. Their efficacy is truly context-driven since the particular characteristics of learners and classroom settings

should be taken into consideration. Collaborative activities attract social interaction, language development, and intrinsic motivation, but they can sometimes lead to unequal participation and group dynamics problems, while competitive activities may increase student engagement and performance but might also be a source of anxiety and can affect self-efficacy in some learners.

Comparative research on motivation and self-efficacy in EFL classrooms for both competitive and collaborative activities pointed to variations in student responses. Competitive activities have been linked with motivation through the desire to outperform peers; however, some studies may associate them with anxiety, which can impact self-efficacy (Haile et al., 2024). In contrast, learners participating in collaborative activities reported upper-levels of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2025; Yan et al., 2024). Further, the configuration of collaborative tasks permitted the recognition of individual contributions and progress, in turn, alleviating the performance pressure. Moreover, findings indicate that competition evokes immediate interest (Jodoi et al., 2021), while collaboration promotes ongoing motivation and confidence during language use (Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024) (see Table 4).

Although it was not the main focus of this research, a considerable portion of the literature reported on the effectiveness of gamification as a motivator in competitive and collaborative speaking contexts. It has been shown that strategies such as role-play, earning badges, and competitions on leaderboards motivated learners and enhanced their participation in speaking activities (Rezai et al., 2025). However, prior appropriate planning and balance between challenge and support are very critical, for poorly designed gamified interventions will not lead to pronounced positive outcomes if they do not consider the individual differences in learning, as shown in Jodoi et al. (2021).

While competitive strategies often serve to engage and motivate students within speaking classes, great caution should be applied to reduce possible anxiety and allow equal participation for all learners. Although collaborative learning will enhance the students' communication skills and create a positive climate in the classroom, the teacher's analysis of the group dynamics will become necessary for maintaining equal involvement from all members. However, Sadeghi et al. (2022), pointed out that one should handle such approaches firmly to avoid the dangers posed by anxiety or pressure, which could weaken their full efficacy. The studies highlighted the importance of a supportive environment that encourages risk-taking and provides emotional support since these factors have been found to promote the acquisition of languages (Rezai et al., 2025). Ultimately, while competition may stir excitement at the beginning (Jodoi et al., 2021), collaboration cultivates a greater sustained motivation and confidence in using a language among EFL learners (Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024).

Finally, this investigation examined the effects of competitive and collaborative speaking activities on EFL learners' motivation and self-efficacy, highlighting that collaborative activities foster greater confidence and sustained participation by reducing anxiety. In contrast, although competitive activities can increase initial participation, they can also generate stress that

negatively affects learning. These findings reinforce the importance of a balanced approach, in which competitive elements are integrated into collaborative structures to enhance learning and interaction in the classroom. Competition within a collaborative framework can improve motivation and performance, especially when group dynamics are strong (Naderi & Moafian, 2023). These results provide relevant evidence to the field of EFL teaching, highlighting the need to continue exploring pedagogical strategies that optimize motivation and the development of oral skills in second language learning contexts.

Conclusion

This research wanted to explore the impact of competitive and collaborative strategies in the context of EFL speaking skills, particularly considering self-efficacy and motivation based on a literature review. In this sense, the main findings showed that students increased their motivation in general based on these two approaches, having a better extrinsic motivation in competitive learning and a higher intrinsic motivation in collaborative learning. Furthermore, they both showed high self-efficacy because it tended to increase in the individual part of each type.

When making a comparison between the pros and cons of each type of strategy, it was noticed that the pros were higher than the cons in each kind of strategy. Even though the literature showed a preference for collaborative learning, given that it gives less anxiety to students than competitive strategies, increasing their benefits (Jodoi et al., 2021; Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024; Zambrano et al., 2019).

Ultimately, it is important to acknowledge that this review had an important limitation: the research landscape is dominantly oriented toward studies of other language skills rather than focused on speaking, and similarly, there are a limited number of available articles on this topic, making a gap in the literature. The lack of publications prevented serious analysis of cooperative and competitive strategies for speaking. Future studies should expand this research by examining how a balance between cooperation and competition in speaking tasks can be implemented with various learner profiles and educational settings.

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Authors

Stephanie Carolina Morocho Tipán. Is an architect currently pursuing a master's in teaching English as a Foreign Language. She works as an English teacher for upper elementary students at Unidad Educativa Bilingüe Hontanar in Quito, Ecuador.

Juanita Catalina Argudo-Serrano. Holds a bachelor's degree in TEFL, a Master's degree in English Language and Applied Linguistics, and a Ph.D. in Education. She is an Associate Professor at the Universidad of Cuenca and a teacher at the master's program at Universidad Católica de Cuenca. She is also a researcher at Universidad de Cuenca and collaborates on projects at different universities in Cuenca.

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