

Fostering Critical Digital Literacy Through Podcasting, Collaborative Work, and Oral Interaction

Fomentando la Literacidad Digital Crítica a través de Podcasting, Trabajo Colaborativo e Interacción Oral

Promover a literacia digital crítica através de podcasting, trabalho colaborativo e interação oral

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Abstract

Introduction: Mastering a second or foreign language, especially oral communication, is complex and challenging, influenced by external pressures as seen in Colombia's education and language policy reforms, which compel teachers and institutions to address how to develop language skills with students. **Objective:** To explore how collaborative podcast development, as a critical digital literacy practice, can improve grade 11 students' oral and critical interaction in English. **Methodology:** Conducted in a public school, the research employs a qualitative approach within a case study methodology. Although quantitative techniques like checklists and questionnaires were used for data collection, the study maintains a qualitative design. Through semi-structured interviews with a subgroup of five students, participants reflect on their experiences of collaborative learning and interaction in English while constructing a podcast. Data was analyzed using a triangulation method. **Findings:** Thematic analysis revealed that collaborative podcast development promoted English oral interaction among participants, fostering collaboration, exchange of thoughts and feelings, and increased language confidence. **Discussion and Conclusions:** The study advocates for a reexamination of digital practices in the classroom to promote English oral interaction from a critical perspective. It recommends collaborative podcast development as a digital practice to enhance oral interaction, empowering students to use English in social and academic contexts.

Keywords: Collaborative learning; Critical digital literacies; English teaching; English oral interaction; Podcasting.

Resumen

Introducción: El dominio de una segunda lengua o lengua extranjera, especialmente la comunicación oral, es complejo y desafiante, influenciado por presiones externas como se observa en las reformas de la política educativa y lingüística de Colombia, que obligan a docentes e instituciones a abordar con los estudiantes la forma de desarrollar las competencias lingüísticas. **Objetivo:** Explorar cómo el desarrollo colaborativo de podcasts, como práctica crítica de alfabetización digital, puede mejorar la interacción oral y crítica en inglés de estudiantes de grado 11. **Metodología:** Llevada a cabo en una escuela pública, la investigación emplea un enfoque cualitativo dentro de una metodología de estudio de caso. Aunque se utilizaron técnicas cuantitativas como listas de control y cuestionarios para la recogida de datos, el estudio mantiene un diseño cualitativo. A través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con un subgrupo de cinco estudiantes, los participantes reflexionan sobre sus experiencias de aprendizaje colaborativo e interacción en inglés mientras construyen un podcast. Los datos se analizaron mediante un método de triangulación. **Resultados:** El análisis temático reveló que el desarrollo colaborativo de podcasts promovió la interacción oral en inglés entre los participantes, fomentando la colaboración, el intercambio de pensamientos y sentimientos, y el aumento de la confianza en el idioma. **Discusión y conclusiones:** El estudio aboga por reexaminar las prácticas digitales en el aula para promover la interacción oral en inglés desde una perspectiva crítica. Recomienda el desarrollo colaborativo de podcasts como práctica digital para mejorar la interacción oral, capacitando a los estudiantes para utilizar el inglés en contextos sociales y académicos.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza y aprendizaje del inglés; Interacción oral en inglés; Podcast; Prácticas colaborativas; Literacidades digitales críticas.

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Resumo

Introdução: O domínio de um segundo idioma ou de um idioma estrangeiro, especialmente a comunicação oral, é complexo e desafiador, influenciado por pressões externas, como visto nas reformas da política educacional e linguística da Colômbia, que forçam os professores e as instituições a abordar com os alunos como desenvolver habilidades linguísticas. **Objetivo:** explorar como o desenvolvimento de podcast colaborativo, como uma prática crítica de alfabetização digital, pode melhorar a interação oral e crítica dos alunos da 11ª série em inglês. **Metodologia:** conduzida em uma escola pública, a pesquisa emprega uma abordagem qualitativa dentro de uma metodologia de estudo de caso. Embora técnicas quantitativas, como listas de verificação e questionários, tenham sido usadas para a coleta de dados, o estudo mantém um projeto qualitativo. Por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com um subgrupo de cinco alunos, os participantes refletiram sobre suas experiências de aprendizado colaborativo e interação em inglês durante a construção de um podcast. Os dados foram analisados usando um método de triangulação. **Resultados:** a análise temática revelou que o desenvolvimento de podcasts colaborativos promoveu a interação oral em inglês entre os participantes, incentivando a colaboração, o compartilhamento de pensamentos e sentimentos e o aumento da confiança no idioma. **Discussão e conclusões:** O estudo defende o reexame das práticas digitais em sala de aula para promover a interação oral em inglês a partir de uma perspectiva crítica. Ele recomenda o desenvolvimento colaborativo de podcasts como uma prática digital para aprimorar a interação oral, capacitando os alunos a usar o inglês em contextos sociais e acadêmicos.

Palavras-chave: Ensino e aprendizagem de inglês; interação oral em inglês; podcast; práticas colaborativas; letramentos digitais críticos.



INTRODUCTION

The mastery of a second or foreign language implies the ability to communicate orally in a variety of everyday situations (Pawlak, 2018). However, it can be one of the most difficult skills to develop when learning a language. Tarone (2005), for example, states that the ability to produce oral language “is the most complex and difficult to master” (p. 485), whereas Burns and Seidelhofer (2010) comment that “learning to speak, whether in a first or another language, involves developing subtle and detailed knowledge about why, how, when to communicate, and complex skills for producing and managing interaction, such as asking a question or obtaining a turn” (p. 197). Perhaps the major challenge learners face when mastering a second or foreign language relates to the fact that the initiative to learn a language often comes from external agents or only as a condition exerted to fulfill the goals proposed by language policies or governmental programs. This is the case in many countries worldwide and Colombia in particular.

Colombia’s recent trade discussions with the United States, as well as with nations in Europe, Asia, and the Americas, coupled with its admission to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), have necessitated the adoption of multiple economic and political reforms by the government. Thus, English enters into arena as the language needed to respond to these reforms. Therefore, according to Peláez-Henao and Usma (2017), English teaching and learning in Colombia is associated with international agendas and globalization processes.

Recent policy documents and reform agendas in Colombia underscore that the country’s current educational and language policies focus on new accountability measures, adopting international standards, acknowledging the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) exams as a global indicator of education quality, and promoting English as an international language throughout the educational system. These reforms align with global education agreements and respond to international economic and political pressures (Flores et al., 2022; Peláez-Henao, 2021; De Francesco & Guaschino, 2020; Peláez-Henao & Usma, 2017).

Thus, under the above scenario, the teaching and learning of the English language have become an issue of greater importance for all educational institutions around the country. To address international standards, government officials have introduced a wide range of education and foreign language policies. These initiatives include the National Program of Bilingualism 2004-2019 (PNB), the National Program for the Strengthening of Foreign Languages 2010-2014 (PFDCLE), the National Law of Bilingualism 1651 in 2013, the National English Program 2015-2025 (PNI: Colombia Very Well 2015-2025), and the more recent Bilingual Colombia 2014-2018 (CB). These programs and policies highlight the central government’s commitment to enhancing and regulating foreign language education and certification processes to increase the country’s attractiveness to foreign investment amid economic globalization, transnational policymaking, and international competitiveness (Peláez-Henao & Usma 2017).

In spite of government efforts, recent studies (Peláez-Henao et al., 2024; Peláez et al., 2022; Flores et al., 2022; Roldán & Peláez-Henao, 2017) indicate that these policies have either failed to achieve their expected results or have only benefited a small percentage of the population, excluding the vast majority. In cases where benefits have been seen, they have primarily favored the economically advantaged, with the majority of the population, particularly those in lower economic strata (Usma, 2009; Peláez-Henao & Usma, 2017; Peláez-Henao, 2024), remaining unaffected by these policies. According to these studies, one of the reasons for failing in results is attributed to the fact that schools and teachers are not trained with tools that can help them achieve English communicative competence such as digital technologies.



Teachers at all levels of education play a crucial role as implementers of educational policies. According to Pawlak (2011), learners are primarily motivated to acquire a foreign language by their ability to engage in successful oral communication. Institutions worldwide, including those in Colombia, have embraced digital technologies like podcasts to enhance communicative competence and foster alternative forms of knowledge acquisition (Castrillón-Ángel, 2020).

Ramirez (2024) and Hamid et al. (2024) asserts that podcasts facilitate learning, interaction, skill development, and task engagement, contributing to specific learning objectives. A project titled "It is time to speak English" was initiated in Envigado, Antioquia, Colombia, focusing on enhancing communicative competence among ninth to eleventh-grade students. Despite efforts, students face challenges interacting in English, citing limited language proficiency, fear of ridicule, and insufficient resources for collaboration. Therefore, this research aimed to explore how the collaborative development of podcasts as a critical digital literacy practice could enhance 11th graders to interact orally and critically in the English language.

Conceptual framework

English oral interaction and communicative competence as collaborative practices.

Considering interaction as a fundamental part of communication in learning a foreign language in EFL classes, this research focused its major attention on English oral interaction and communicative competence as collaborative practices. Effective oral communication is a vital component of language learning, particularly in the case of English, which is used as a global lingua franca in many contexts. Developing communicative competence in English involves not only mastering the language itself but also learning to interact effectively with others in a collaborative manner. To do so, learners need to acquire not only the linguistic knowledge and skills necessary to express themselves accurately and fluently but also the social and pragmatic skills that enable them to use language appropriately and effectively in different contexts. This requires active engagement in various communicative tasks that promote interaction, negotiation, and collaboration among learners, and that encourage the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills as well.

According to Brown (2000), interaction turns into a cooperative chance for two or more people to share ideas, feelings, or thoughts, which has a mutually beneficial effect. It means that students during these exchanges of collaborative moments are sharing and exploring meaningful experiences that help them explore their linguistic resources, leading to a mutual effect on each other. Therefore, oral interaction, as a part of the communicative process, plays an important role within the classroom, considering that students explore some language sources through imagination, teamwork discussion, and the interchange of knowledge among them (Pawlak, 2018).

In addition to Brown's perspective, other authors view interaction as a face-to-face process that can involve both verbal and nonverbal communication, such as through spoken or written words, touch, eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures (Robinson, 1994). Verbal interaction can particularly be beneficial for students, as it can boost their confidence and help them feel more secure when expressing their ideas to others. As a result, oral interaction creates a motivational space that allows students to explore their ideas more freely and feel more confident in their learning environment. Furthermore, by encouraging interpersonal communication and collaborative work, students can interact more closely with one another and create new spaces for producing materials that help enhance their communicative competence in English.



Other than interaction, the concept of communicative competence is crucial in this study. Communicative competence has been defined in different ways over the years. Hymes (1966) saw it as the ability to choose the appropriate verbal and nonverbal means and to consider the specific speaking situation, while the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) defined it as the knowledge and ability to use a language to act in specific contexts (Council of Europe, 2002, p.9). More recent studies have expanded the concept of communicative competence to include skills beyond language use. Savignon (2018), for example, argues that communicative competence requires the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts. This appropriate and particularized context is built through interaction and collaborative work, making communicative competence a collaborative construction between individuals according to the needs of each context.

Pelaez-Henao et al. (2024) advocate for an expanded concept of communicative competence that goes beyond mere linguistic proficiency to include a deeper understanding of interculturality. This approach emphasizes students recognizing themselves in their shared humanity while appreciating the diverse cultural tapestry of humanity. By intertwining English Language Teaching (ELT) with interculturality, educators can cultivate empathy, respect, and a profound appreciation for our interconnected world. This pedagogical approach enables students to transcend political boundaries, embrace cultural diversity, and envision a future where intercultural understanding is central to global cooperation, promoting peace and harmony. Particularly in Colombia's current context, ELT can serve as a beacon of hope, guiding society towards inclusivity and interconnectedness. As such, ELT plays a crucial role in shaping a more inclusive and interconnected society, fostering a deeper understanding of our shared humanity and cultural diversity.

Construction of Podcasts as a collaborative practice.

Collaborative work is an organized and synchronized activity that involves developing and maintaining a shared understanding of a problem or task at hand (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995). According to Dillenbourg (1999), participants engage in collaborative work by working together, negotiating, and sharing meaningful ideas to attain a common objective. Nevertheless, engaging in collaborative work demands a high level of responsibility, maturity, and creativity, making it more suitable for higher-grade students (Bruffee, 1987). For successful collaboration, learners must share a common goal and have a clear understanding of their roles as leaders in the task or project. One innovative way to engage students in collaborative work is through podcasts, which can provide insight into the needs and contexts of everyone, create stories that enhance students' learning, and encourage them to question their communicative competence (Karlgrén, 2022).

Numerous research studies have recognized the potential of podcasting and have established compelling evidence that podcasts can significantly enhance language learners' skills, particularly in developing their speaking ability (Ashton-Hay & Brookes, 2011). Furthermore, Braun (2007) emphasizes that like blogs, podcasts provide language learners with an opportunity to connect with a broad audience and share their personal experiences and preferences. Podcasts can be created and used for a specific purpose, tailored to the user's needs. Collaborative work can be done to promote oral interaction in the classroom, allowing students to freely explore and apply their English communicative competence (Díez & Richters, 2020).

According to Schmidt (2008), podcasts give students quick access to real language resources and give them the chance to socialize with new people, both of which can help students learn new information and become more motivated to learn a language. Similarly, McCartney (2006) argues that podcasts serve as a unique resource for language learners, offering authentic oral language materials that have been previously overlooked in favor of text-based activities.



When constructing podcasts as a collaborative work strategy, all participants involved must have clarity on their roles (Castrillón-Angel, 2020). The teacher should act as a mediator, ensuring a peaceful environment where errors are seen as elements of the learning process (Bligh et al., 2018). Participants should also support one another to promote collaborative learning within the academic community, where knowledge arises from each participant's contribution. The relationship between communicative competence and collaborative work is a challenge that requires further investigation.

While collaborative work among students presents valuable opportunities for skill development, the notion of podcasts as a cure-all solution overlooks significant challenges. Despite the perceived benefits, many individuals lack internet access, and educational institutions often fail to equip students with critical digital literacy skills. Robinson et al. (2020) argue that unequal access to technology and a lack of critical evaluation skills exacerbate educational and social disparities in the digital age. Moreover, Martins et al. (2024) suggest that the excessive focus on digital media overlooks essential aspects of learning, such as analytical skills and the ability to discern reliable information. Educators must address these issues by not only acknowledging the limitations of digital access but also by prioritizing the development of critical thinking skills in students.

METHODOLOGY

Paradigm, Approach, and Method

The research was situated within the qualitative paradigm, drawing on Guba and Lincoln's (1994) perspective, which defines a paradigm as a collection of fundamental beliefs addressing foundational principles. This framework outlines a worldview that defines the nature of the world, an individual's position within it, and potential relationships with the world and its components. According to this study, realities are various, illusive mental constructs that are based on social interactions and personal experience, as well as being local and particular. They are also contingent upon the individuals or groups who hold them, rather than being static entities. The researcher and the object of investigation are viewed as interactively linked, with "findings" created as the investigation unfolds. Social constructions are variable and personal, understood and refined through interaction between the investigator and respondents. These constructions are interpreted using conventional hermeneutical techniques and compared and contrasted through a dialectical interchange.

It adopted a qualitative approach within a case study methodology to explore a specific phenomenon with unique characteristics. Schoch (2020) defines case study research as involving a detailed analysis of a particular event, situation, organization, or social unit. Similarly, Yin (2018) notes the enduring interest in researching social structures in communities. Most social groups, including families, communities, or organizations, display varying degrees of social structure organization, with individuals or units arranging themselves informally. This methodological choice aligns with the study's aim to explore how collaborative work, focusing on developing podcasts, could encourage 11th graders to engage in English oral interactions actively. As learning a language like English aims to provide students with the necessary skills for social interactions, the methodology was deemed appropriate for studying language education and social interaction.

Participants and Data Techniques

The research was conducted in a public school in Envigado, Antioquia, Colombia, where one of the re-

searchers also served as an English teacher. At the time, there were five English teachers at the institution, with classroom sizes ranging from 32 to 36 students. The study focused on a group of 11th graders who all participated in the research by completing a checklist and constructing a podcasting project. Participant selection followed a deliberate sampling strategy (Marshall, 1996) to identify students capable of offering pertinent insights related to the research problem.

The first data collection technique implemented was the checklist. Participants took 20 minutes to respond to this technique. After this, they had three sections of 120 minutes for the construction of the podcast, which was worked in collaborative groups of three to five people. However, semi-structured interviews were only conducted with a subgroup of five students who collaborated on the podcasting project. According to Pinsonneault and Kraemer (1993), this technique is considered a “means for gathering information about the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a large group of people” (p. 77). Interviews can also assess needs, evaluate demand, and examine the impact (Salant & Dillman, 1994). This interview compared the knowledge gained by students during the construction of a podcast made through collaborative work. We organized the techniques considering the aim of the research.

Finally, students took a questionnaire that lasted 30 minutes to validate the knowledge and information provided during the development of the podcast. We gave a questionnaire to students to identify their perceptions and attitudes towards the following method. We choose this type of data collection tool because questionnaires “allow the teacher researcher to collect large amounts of data in a relatively short amount of time” (Burns, 1999, p. 63). The questionnaire permitted us to collect realistic information. This procedure involved ten questions. Questions 1 and 2 had the purpose of finding out students’ opinions when they practiced using oral English interaction. Questions 3 and 4 were included to discover collaborative learning, and questions 5 and 6 had the purpose of determining the characteristics of a podcast to promote oral interaction. Questions 7 and 8 were included to discover the student’s communicative competence, and the last two statements had the purpose of finding collaborative work among students while they were building the podcast.

Despite using quantitative techniques to collect information such as a checklist and questionnaire, we consider that such techniques do not give a quantitative design to this research nor could we call it mixed. However, as researchers we are not unaware of the validity and importance of these studies and the contributions to mixed methods. Authors such as Brannen (2005) and Johnson et al. (2007), incorporate a series of practical reasons for the “coexistence” of quantitative and qualitative methods: Both approaches have been used for several decades and learning has been done from both. In practice, various researchers have mixed them to different degrees. In their development, various studies that have been conceived under a quantitative or qualitative vision have had to resort to the other method to satisfactorily explain their results or complete the investigation.

In our case we incorporate quantitative techniques to verify convergence, confirmation or correspondence when contrasting quantitative and qualitative data, as well as to corroborate or not the results and discoveries for the sake of greater internal and external validity of the study. Using quantitative data, in this case, can help obtain varied, even divergent, views of the phenomenon or approach under study.

Data analysis.

To analyze the data, which comprised both quantitative and qualitative components, we initially utilized the coding technique to identify common information reported by students across the three instruments, a



process known as triangulation. Denzin (1970) defines triangulation as the combination of two or more theories, sources of data, or research methods in the study of a singular phenomenon. We applied this concept by triangulating five different categories: Oral Interaction, Podcast, Collaborative Learning, Communicative Competence, and Collaborative Work. Each category was analyzed in the context of podcast creation, which was the primary goal of the project and served as the main source for our analysis. As outlined in the methodology, some researchers also served as teachers at the institution, making them participants in the research. It is important to note that the semi-structured interviews, as a qualitative data complement, allowed us to engage in conversations with a subgroup of five students to further evaluate the findings presented here. Below, we detail the information gathered from each data technique.

Table 1.*Gathered information from data techniques.*

Category	Check List	Interview	Questionnaire
Oral Interaction	Before the creation of the podcast. 68.8% discussed their life experiences with their classmates and 31.2% did not	During the creation of the podcast. 90.3% of the students agreed to interact orally with their classmates about topics of their interest, however, 9.7% disagreed. 80.6% agreed to share their academic learning experiences with their peers orally, while 19.4% disagreed.	After the creation of the podcast. 96.4% of students enjoyed interacting orally with their classmates about topics of their interest and 3.6% did not. 89.3% enjoyed exchanging their learning experiences with their classmates orally and 10.7 did not.
Collaborative Learning	34.4% shared their learning outcomes and 65.6 did not.	71% of students identified some of the learning experiences of their classmates and 29% disagreed. 87.1% contributed ideas for the construction of a podcast, and 12.9% disagreed.	67.9% of students identified with some of the learning experiences of their classmates and 32, 1% did not. 92.9% were motivated to contribute ideas for the construction of a podcast and 7.1% did not.
Podcast	46.9% of the students knew what a podcast was, and 53.1 did not.	90.3% of students agreed that the creation of the podcast helped them to have new knowledge, 9.7% disagreed, 90.3% agreed that the creation of a podcast promotes oral interaction with classmates and 9.7% disagreed.	78.6% of students knew what the characteristics of the construction of a podcast were, and 21.4% did not. 71.4% were able to develop a podcast to promote oral interaction with their classmates and 28.6% did not.
Communicative Competence	4.4% of students used the English language to communicate their ideas and thoughts clearly and simply, and 65.6% did not.	87.1% of students were fair in communicating their ideas about their learning experiences easily and 12.9% completely disagreed. 90.3% were just explaining with simple concrete ideas in English, and 9.7% completely disagreed.	53.6% of students easily expressed ideas about their learning experiences and 46.4% did not. 71.4% used simple language to express concrete ideas in English, and 28.6% did not.
Collaborative Work	84.4% of students enjoyed teamwork, and 15.6% did not.	83.9% of students completely agreed that working in a team makes them feel more secure with their learning process, and 16.1% did not.	82.1% of students felt confident with their learning process while working in a team and 17.9% did not.



Category	Check List	Interview	Questionnaire
Oral Interaction	100% respected the opinions of their classmates.	80.6% agreed to help their classmates to structure their ideas in English, and 19.4% disagreed.	89.3% said that collaborative work allows them to interact with their classmates using the English language and 10.7% did not.

Findings

Developing Communicative Competence: A Journey Through Podcast Creation

The research’s findings highlight the transformative impact of a podcast creation project on 11th-grade students’ language skills and collaborative abilities. Initially, a significant portion of students engaged in basic oral interactions, but through the project, there was a remarkable increase in their willingness to communicate orally, discuss topics of interest, and share academic experiences. This shift indicates a positive evolution in their oral interaction skills and comfort level with the language. Additionally, the research fostered a collaborative learning environment where students actively contributed ideas, showcasing maturity and creativity in their collaborative efforts. Overall, the research not only enhanced students’ oral communication skills but also promoted meaningful interactions and shared learning experiences among them.

Oral Interaction

The findings reveal a substantial transformation in the level of oral interaction among the 11th graders as they progressed through the podcast creation process. Initially, before the creation of the podcast, a significant portion (68.8%) of the students engaged in discussions about their life experiences with their classmates, indicating a baseline level of interaction. This engagement in discussions about their life experiences with their classmates included simple dialogues, sharing personal information, discussing things students like doing in their free time, and recounting activities they did on their vacations. During the podcast creation phase, there was a remarkable increase in the willingness to interact orally. Specifically, 90.3% of the students agreed to discuss topics of interest orally, showcasing a substantial improvement. Additionally, 80.6% of the students were open to sharing their academic learning experiences orally, indicating a growing comfort in expressing themselves verbally. One student with limited English proficiency mentioned, “doing the podcast was good. We were relaxed. It was good because we prepared the things to say” (student 2).

This highlights the positive impact of the podcast project in creating a relaxed environment and providing structure for oral communication practice. After the completion of the podcast, the level of oral interaction further escalated. A striking 96.4% of students reported enjoying interacting orally with their classmates about topics of interest, reflecting a significant positive shift. Moreover, 89.3% of students expressed enjoyment in exchanging their learning experiences orally, highlighting a substantial increase in their willingness to engage in oral communication. One student expressed, “I like making podcast. It helps me practice English with classmates. I no speak English very good, but I like English more” (student 5). This sentiment underscores the positive impact of the podcast creation process on students’ engagement and attitude towards English.



Overall, these results demonstrate the profound impact of the podcast creation process on enhancing the students' oral interaction skills in English. The data indicates a clear progression from initial hesitancy to a strong inclination towards oral communication, underscoring the effectiveness of collaborative work centered on podcast development in stimulating active participation in oral interactions among 11th graders. Collaborative Learning

Collaborative Learning

The results of the collaborative learning process, through the creation of a podcast, indicate a positive impact on student engagement and motivation. During the podcast creation phase, 87.1% of the students actively contributed ideas for the construction of the podcast. This high level of participation highlights their ability to work together, negotiate, and share meaningful ideas (Dillenbourg, 1999). Despite being beginners in English language learning, the students demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the project, showcasing maturity and creativity in their collaborative efforts (Bruffee, 1987).

After the completion of the podcast, the motivation to contribute ideas remained high, with 92.9% of students expressing a willingness to participate in future projects. This indicates that the collaborative work experience not only engaged them in the current project but also inspired them to continue collaborating in similar endeavors. The students' enthusiasm for future projects suggests that the collaborative work experience was not only beneficial for their English language learning but also for their overall academic and personal development. A participant expressed, "doing the podcast with his classmate was nice because all classmates help and nobody was better than the others" (Student 3). This sentiment highlights the inclusive and supportive nature of the collaborative work environment, where all students were encouraged to contribute equally, fostering a sense of teamwork and equality among classmates.

These results highlight the effectiveness of using innovative approaches, such as podcasts, to engage students in collaborative work. By providing insight into the needs and contexts of everyone involved, creating stories that enhance learning, and encouraging students to question their communicative competence, podcasts offer a unique platform for collaborative learning. In this case, the podcast project successfully engaged beginner English language learners in collaborative work, promoting meaningful interactions and shared learning experiences. The role played by teachers in this process is crucial, as they act as facilitators and mediators, ensuring that the collaborative work environment is supportive and conducive to learning. Teachers provide guidance, feedback, and encouragement, helping students navigate the challenges of collaborative work and fostering a sense of teamwork and equality among classmates (Castrillón-Angel, 2020; Bligh et al., 2018).

Communicative competence

The study aimed to assess the development of communicative competence among 11th-grade students, beginners in English language learning, through their participation in a podcast creation project. Communicative competence, as defined by Hymes (1966), encompasses the ability to select appropriate verbal and nonverbal means in specific speaking situations. The analysis spanned three key moments: before, during, and after the podcast's creation.

Before the project commenced, a mere 4.4% of students could express their ideas and thoughts clear-



ly and simply in English, underscoring a substantial challenge for the majority, with 65.6% struggling to do so. This initial assessment clearly identified a critical need for enhanced communicative competence among the students. During the creation of the podcast, there was a remarkable improvement in communicative competence. 87.1% of students were able to communicate their ideas about their learning experiences easily, showing a significant enhancement in their ability to express themselves in English. Additionally, 90.3% of students were able to explain with simple, concrete ideas in English, indicating a substantial advancement in their language proficiency.

After the completion of the podcast project, there was a slight decline in the percentage of students who were able to express ideas about their learning experiences easily, with 53.6% achieving this. However, a majority of students (71.4%) were still able to use simple language to express concrete ideas in English, demonstrating a retained improvement in their communicative competence.

Overall, the results indicate a positive impact of the podcast creation project on the development of communicative competence among 11th-grade students. The project effectively facilitated their ability to communicate in English, providing them with a platform to practice and improve their language skills in a meaningful and engaging manner. This can be evident by the testimonies of two participants. Student 1: "Before, I don't speak much English, but after making the podcast, I feel I speak better. Now I can express my ideas better. I think the project really helped me improve." Student 4: "I had difficulties to talk about my learning experiences in English, but after doing the podcast, it became easier. Now, I can explain things more clearly using simple language. Doing the podcast help me a lot."

DISCUSSION

Unveiling the Transformative Power of Podcasting from a Critical Digital Literacy Perspective.

We acknowledge that podcasting contributes to oral interaction, collaborative work, and communicative competence. However, it is necessary to examine its scope, limitations, and risks through the lens of critical digital literacy. Authors such as Hinrichsen and Coombs (2014), and Aguilera and Pandya (2018) recognize that CDL remains a social practice in which the processes of writing and reading extend beyond mere encoding or decoding of graphemes to foster transformation and social empowerment. The authors emphasize that approaching podcasting development through a CDL perspective necessitates understanding reading and writing in digital environments as opportunities to navigate the web effectively and even advocate for the rights of the most vulnerable.

However, despite the considerable strides observed in collaborative work, oral interaction, and communicative competence among students in this research, the full spectrum of benefits associated with podcasting from a critical digital literacy (CDL) perspective remained somewhat obscured. As it was evident in the research, while the use of podcasting did facilitate an enhancement in English communication skills, it did not inherently offer an avenue for exploring the complexities of power dynamics within digital environments, fostering intercultural understanding, or nurturing the development of identities and social relationships.

Podcasting, viewed through a CDL lens, presents a unique opportunity to delve into deeper socio-cultural



tural aspects of digital literacy beyond language proficiency. It can serve as a platform for unpacking how power structures operate in online spaces, shedding light on issues of privilege, access, and representation (Castrillón - Ángel & Mora, 2021). Furthermore, engaging with diverse podcast content can broaden students' intercultural knowledge by exposing them to perspectives and experiences from different cultural backgrounds, fostering empathy and global citizenship (Ávila, 2021).

By embracing podcasting as a CDL practice, students and educators can redefine reading and writing not merely as exercises in decoding words, but as tools for transformation, empowerment, and social justice analysis, unfortunately, language policies that promote and regulate English Language Teaching in Colombia only centered efforts in language as a tool for competitiveness, and ignoring the intercultural competence as crucial for a better society (Pelaez-Henao et al., 2024).

Therefore, teachers need to introduce podcasting to their students not only to enhance communicative competence but also as a means for students to negotiate their identities through digital media (Bacalja et al., 2021). This entails educating students on how information and the utilization of digital platforms can benefit some individuals while marginalizing others. Teachers must continually seek strategies to transition their learners from passive consumers to critically aware producers of content, enabling them to express their realities through creative language and enact transformative actions. As educators, it is our responsibility to steer students toward critical utilization and responsible engagement with the vast amount of information constantly exchanged and produced online (Barkley & Major, 2020).

Considering the aforementioned statements, the evolution of podcasting as a critical digital literacy (CDL) practice necessitates the thorough analysis, interrogation, and evaluation of prevailing societal norms and practices, whether they manifest in the digital realm and influence the physical world, or vice versa (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014). Consequently, podcast developers are compelled to assume an active role in reshaping their environments through their narratives, perceiving both written and spoken words as instruments for empowerment and societal transformation within the digital realm (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014). In this context, the advancement of podcasting as a CDL practice signifies the ability to adeptly utilize digital media in accordance with the ideologies inherent in digital texts, thereby striving towards a more equitable world. Consequently, participants emerge as discerning digital citizens equipped with ethical and moral values, capable of navigating the complexities of the digital landscape (Darvin, 2017).

From Tools to Skills: The Holistic Approach to Improving Oral English Interaction through Podcasting in Schools.

Throughout the research, the majority of students recognized that collaborating on a podcast improved their oral interaction skills, developed their communicative competence, enhanced their ability to work collaboratively, and promoted the use of podcasts in English classes. Many participants viewed collaborative podcast development as a valuable resource for improving their communicative competence, particularly in oral interaction.

Using Brown's (2000) definition of interaction as a mutually beneficial exchange of ideas, this project demonstrated that learners successfully engaged in collaborative learning while creating podcasts. This process enhanced their oral participation and active learning, with 80% of students expressing improved learning through podcast creation. This collaborative work also bolstered their communicative compe-



tence and motivation to create instructional materials in the classroom.

To effectively utilize the podcast construction process, students needed to employ various strategies, including collaborative work, face-to-face interaction, collaborative learning, note-taking of relevant information, and recording practice sessions. Despite having limited prior knowledge of podcasts at the project's start, many students showed significant progress in understanding the essential characteristics for successful podcast creation. Moreover, several students expressed a desire to continue creating podcasts independently, indicating a high level of engagement and commitment to the process. Regarding the widespread use of technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) tools by language instructors, it is crucial to consider how and why these tools are implemented. Hinrichsen and Coombs (2014) presented the competencies necessary for thriving in a digital world, emphasizing the importance of developing skills such as paying attention, critically consuming information, participating and collaborating, and being savvy online. These principles are instrumental in fostering digital literacy among individuals.

Paying attention involves filtering the vast amount of information available on the web, while developing a critical consumption of information means being able to discern between relevant and irrelevant information online. This skill is vital due to the internet's abundance of both reliable and misleading sources. The ability to differentiate between important and unimportant information is crucial for students and individuals conducting academic or informational searches online. The capacity to work in groups is often overlooked but can be easily facilitated through technology, contrary to the misconception that technology fosters individualism. Participating and collaborating are essential components that teachers can cultivate in students when using technology in the classroom. The study's findings revealed that 82.1% of students felt confident in their learning process when working in a group, and 89.3% stated that collaborative work enabled them to interact with classmates using English.

Finally, the intelligence in the network does not seek that the individual knows how to use or becomes an expert in the use of the web. With this ability, what is intended is that users become conscious that the actions of an individual (his/her texts) have effects and consequences in the digital world. Given this context, using scenarios and resources to disseminate information becomes a challenge. Creating expressions in the media and communicating with other people assertively according to the context and the reality of everyone becomes a pulsing need. In other words, with this ability, it is sought that users develop theoretical and solid foundations to use the web and digital tools in general. Thus, schools and teachers must fulfill what in the end should be the main purpose of education: help students to be critical thinkers.

Breaking the Barriers of Technological Inequality: The Imperative for Digital Inclusion in English Language Learning.

While this research highlights the positive impact of podcasting on students' communicative competence and collaborative skills, it also raises important questions about the digital divide. Those without access to digital tools are significantly disadvantaged in contemporary education systems. This issue prompts us to consider how virtuality, digitality, and the widespread use of technology can lead to exclusion and oppression. Statistics from a study cited by Floberg (2020) in The Guardian underscore this point, revealing that in the United States, approximately 22% of families do not have internet access at home, affecting over 4 million families with school-age children. Low-income and African-American households are disproportionately affected, with only 56% of households earning less than \$20,000 having home broadband internet. Racial disparities persist, with Black and Hispanic households lagging



behind white households in internet access, even after accounting for income differences. Furthermore, even among students with theoretical access to the internet, disparities exist, with 8% of households relying solely on mobile broadband. This reliance on mobile-only broadband is more prevalent among low-income and racialized communities, further exacerbating the digital divide.

Limitations are not only issues to access and use of digital or virtual resources. As Zallio (2023) argued, the development of skills for the construction and management of virtuality or digitality also has a significant impact on teachers. The authors showed in their study that teachers who have made a transition or adaptation of digital tools within their pedagogical practices have not had enough time or motivation to make these transformations. For them, “while most teachers regularly use computers in their personal and professional lives, there is a gap between personal use and classroom use” (p.55).

In Colombia, according to UNESCO (2020), the digital divide is a significant challenge for education, particularly in impoverished regions. While the country has made significant strides in expanding access to technology and internet connectivity, disparities persist between urban and rural areas, as well as between affluent and low-income families. A lack of access to technology and reliable internet connectivity has contributed to a widening achievement gap between students in urban areas and those in rural regions, as well as between wealthy and low-income students. This has been particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced schools to rely heavily on remote learning. In many impoverished areas, students lack the technology and internet access necessary to participate in virtual learning, leading to significant learning loss and exacerbating existing inequalities. The digital gap in Colombia underscores the urgent need to address inequities in education and expand access to technology and internet connectivity, particularly in marginalized communities.

Analyzing this phenomenon in the Colombian context, the Covid 19 pandemic, specifically during the year 2020, evidenced the educational inequalities that the use of virtuality and digitality can generate. It was evident how those institutions, mostly private, had technological tools to deal with this situation. However, the schools that did not have access to these tools, mostly the public, were the most negatively affected by this situation. Cases of students receiving classes from the trees to get an internet signal were evidenced (Díaz, 2020). Added to this accessibility limitation, academic deterioration was also evident in the academic population. According to the report carried out by Semana, an academic dropout of 43,3% was evidenced; Likewise, according to infobae, the academic delay generated by Covid 19 in this population could be equivalent to 2 years of academic setback (Semana, 2022).

With this context in mind, a crucial question arises: What challenges does contemporary education face? The findings indicate that the collaborative creation of podcasts allows learners to engage with a digital environment where they are central to their own learning process. This practice exemplifies how educators can effectively interact with their students. However, it also highlights the need for innovation in the learning process, with teachers playing a crucial role in updating their strategies to adapt to new environments where students learn. Yet, we must question and critique elements of education, which have historically been accessible only to the wealthiest in society. Our challenge as educators is to find ways to use technological tools to ensure equal and fair access, thus avoiding exclusion. Consequently, further research can be conducted to explore each of the aspects discussed in this work, adding depth to this line of inquiry.



CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore how collaborative podcast development, as a critical digital literacy practice, could enhance 11th graders' oral and critical interaction in English. By drawing on critical perspectives, the problem statement highlighted how language policies in Colombia have prioritized English for instrumental purposes, focusing on its competitiveness while neglecting its potential for intercultural and critical use in digital literacy. To achieve this objective, a qualitative study was conducted in a public school, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. Through semi-structured interviews with a subgroup of five students, participants reflected on their experiences of collaborative learning and interaction in English while constructing a podcast.

The findings illustrate the positive impact of the podcast project, creating a relaxed environment and offering structure for oral communication practice. Post-podcast completion, there was a noticeable increase in oral interaction. These results highlight the significant influence of the podcast creation process on improving students' oral interaction skills in English. Regarding collaborative learning, it is evident that the students not only engaged in constructing the podcast project but also expressed a desire to continue collaborating on similar projects. Their enthusiasm for future endeavors suggests that the collaborative experience was beneficial not only for their English language learning but also for their overall academic and personal growth. Additionally, the project positively influenced the development of communicative competence, effectively enhancing their ability to communicate in English through meaningful and engaging practice.

This paper finally discussed podcasting from a Critical Digital Literacy Perspective (CDL), emphasizing the importance of understanding reading and writing in digital environments as tools for effective web navigation and advocacy for vulnerable populations. Despite initial limited knowledge of podcasts, many students made significant progress in understanding the essential characteristics for successful podcast creation. However, the research also highlights the digital divide as a major challenge for education, particularly in impoverished regions.

Efforts to expand access to technology and internet connectivity have not fully bridged disparities between urban and rural areas, or affluent and low-income families. The shift towards remote learning during the pandemic has further emphasized the lack of access to technology and internet in many impoverished areas, leading to significant learning loss and widening achievement gaps. This situation underscores the urgent need to address these inequities and expand access to technology and internet connectivity, especially in marginalized communities, which requires awareness and action from educational stakeholders and the community at large.

While this paper explores the intricacies of oral interaction and collaborative learning in English Language Teaching and Learning from a critical perspective, it is important to recognize its limitations. The research was confined to a single public school with a restricted number of students, and the data collection was also limited. Therefore, more extensive and diverse studies are needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted realities and facets of English communicative competence. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative approaches in this research presents another limitation. Future studies should contemplate employing quantitative methods and include larger sample sizes across various institutions to enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

Conflict of interest statement

We declare that this submitted work does not represent any conflict of interest between us, the journal, the publishing entity, and the financing entities.



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