

Integrating sports into language teaching methodology
Integración del deporte en la metodología de enseñanza de idiomas

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#### **Abstract**

Introduction: The teaching of English as a foreign language has evolved to incorporate approaches that integrate linguistic development with intercultural and socio-emotional aspects. In this context, collaborative physical activities emerge as a strategy that promotes meaningful learning.

Objective: The objective of this research was to determine the impact of collaborative physical activities on motivation and the development of intercultural competence in students' learning English as a foreign language.

Methodology: A quantitative approach was employed with an explanatory quasi-experimental design. The sample consisted of 60 basic education students divided into a control group and an experimental group. Pretests and posttests were applied, and data analysis included descriptive and inferential statistics, using the Student's t-test and effect size through Cohen's d statistic.

Results: The results showed statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest of the experimental group in levels of motivation and intercultural competence. The control group did not present relevant changes. The effect size indicated a considerable magnitude of the intervention's impact.

Discussion: The findings aligned with previous studies that highlight the effectiveness of collaborative learning and the use of physical movement to foster motivation and communicative skills in English, as well as the development of intercultural competence in diverse school settings.

Conclusions: Collaborative physical activities proved to be an effective pedagogical strategy for improving motivation and strengthening intercultural competence in English language teaching. Their application contributes to the design of more inclusive, dynamic, and contextualized educational practices.

# **Keywords**

Collaborative; sports; didactics; english; linguistics.

## Resumen

Introducción: La enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera ha evolucionado para incorporar enfoques que integren el desarrollo lingüístico con aspectos interculturales y socioemocionales. En este contexto, las actividades físicas cola-borativas emergen como una estrategia que pro-mueve aprendizajes signi-ficativos.

Objetivo: El objetivo de esta investigación fue de-terminar el impacto de las actividades físicas colabo-rativas en la motivación y el desarrollo de la compe-tencia intercultural en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Metodología: Se empleó un enfoque cuantitativo con diseño cuasi-experimental de tipo explicativo. La muestra fue de 60 estu-diantes de educación bási-ca divididos en grupo con-trol y grupo experimental. Se aplicaron pretest y postest, y el análisis de datos incluyó estadística descriptiva e inferencial, utilizando la prueba t de Student y el tamaño del efecto mediante el estadís-tico de Cohen's d.

Resultados: Los resultados mostraron diferencias estadísticamente significa-tivas entre el pretest y el postest del grupo experi-mental en los niveles de motivación y competencia intercultural. El grupo control no presentó cam-bios relevantes. El tamaño del efecto indicó una mag-nitud considerable del impacto de la intervención.

Discusión: Los hallazgos coincidieron con estudios previos que destacan la eficacia del aprendizaje colaborativo y el uso del movimiento corporal para fomentar la motivación y habilidades comunicativas en inglés, así como el desa-rrollo de la competencia intercultural en entornos escolares diversos.

Conclusiones: Las activida-des físicas colaborativas demostraron ser una estra-tegia pedagógica efectiva para mejorar la motivación y fortalecer la competencia intercultural en la ense-ñanza del inglés. Su aplica-ción aporta al diseño de prácticas educativas más inclusivas, dinámicas y contextualizadas.

## Palabras clave

Colaborativo; deportes; didáctica; inglés; lingüística.





#### Introduction

In the contemporary educational context, marked by globalization and increasing cultural diversity, the teaching of English as a foreign language has evolved beyond mere linguistic instruction (Romero et al., 2020). Today, the importance of developing intercultural and socio-emotional competencies that enable students to interact effectively in multicultural environments is recognized (Santana & Cely, 2021). This comprehensive approach aims to shape global citizens capable of communicating and collaborating in diverse contexts. In this regard, the development of such competencies should not be limited to the traditional classroom or exclusively verbal strategies. On the contrary, there is a need for active and integrative methodologies that connect the body, mind, and language, with physical education serving as a potential space for this purpose.

In this context, several studies have shown that physical education, when directed toward linguistic objectives, can be an effective means to enhance communicative skills in English. A commonly cited example is the implementation of commands in English during physical activities, such as "Run to the left" or "Pass the ball to your teammate," which facilitates the comprehension and retention of vocabulary and grammatical structures (Freire et al., 2025). Moreover, formative feedback in English during these activities contributes to increased student confidence and communicative competence (Cosar & Orhan, 2019). However, these studies tend to focus on specific contexts and do not delve into the long-term sustainability of these effects or their applicability across different educational levels, highlighting the need for more systematic and comparative research.

Along the same lines, cooperative or collaborative learning, based on positive interdependence and individual responsibility, has proven effective in foreign language instruction (Castro & Méndez, 2021; Romero et al., 2020). In particular, the "jigsaw" technique promotes collaboration and reduces competitive attitudes, resulting in improved academic performance and student self-esteem (Aronson, 2021; Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Nevertheless, although the benefits are well documented, there is limited discussion on the implementation challenges in classrooms with high cultural diversity or students with low language proficiency, which restricts its broader application.

Furthermore, intercultural competence is an essential skill in 21st-century education, as it enables students to interact effectively in diverse cultural contexts (Hernández et al., 2023). Consequently, incorporating activities that promote understanding and respect for other cultures in English instruction is necessary for the formation of global citizens (Martínez, 2020). In this regard, using traditional games from different cultures in physical education classes, for example, can be a powerful tool for fostering intercultural awareness and empathy among students (Añazco et al., 2025). However, evidence is still limited regarding the specific impact of these types of activities on the development of intercultural competence, indicating the need for more rigorous research in various educational settings.

Within the context of Ecuador, the Ministry of Education has promoted cooperative learning in physical education as part of curriculum enhancement, recognizing its potential to improve coexistence and peer knowledge (Pacheco et al., 2022). These initiatives aim to develop socio-emotional competencies and promote an inclusive and respectful school environment. Moreover, Bermejo et al. (2021) noted that this learning style not only enhances student performance but also motivates and strengthens peer bonds, resulting in more meaningful knowledge acquisition for all.

Additionally, Taufiq et al. (2019) studied student responses within the context of English language education using the Total Physical Response (TPR) technique. They found that this method allowed students to better perceive and interpret knowledge, which aligns with the findings of Khakim & Anwar (2020), who reported that the methodology benefited their sample due to the dynamism, motivation, and teamwork it fostered during English class sessions.

However, despite the evidence supporting the integration of collaborative physical activities in English instruction, there is still a lack of research specifically exploring their simultaneous impact on language learning motivation and the development of intercultural competence, particularly in Latin American educational contexts. In this sense, the Ecuadorian context represents an understudied scenario, where cultural dynamics, traditional pedagogical approaches, and institutional limitations pose unique challenges. Therefore, this study aims to determine the impact of collaborative physical activities on English





learning motivation and intercultural competence among secondary school students in Ecuador, seeking to provide empirical evidence supporting the implementation of integrated pedagogical strategies that promote meaningful and contextualized English learning.

#### Method

This research was framed within a quantitative approach, which allowed for the measurement of the impact of a pedagogical intervention based on collaborative physical activities on students' motivation and intercultural competence in English. According to Hernández et al. (2014), the quantitative approach aims to collect data to test hypotheses based on numerical measurement and statistical analysis. The research design was quasi-experimental with a pretest-posttest structure, involving a control group and an experimental group without random assignment, as institutional conditions did not allow for the reorganization of the natural groups established by school administration. Ethical considerations were also taken into account, particularly the importance of not altering students' usual academic environment, prioritizing respect for the pre-established pedagogical organization. For these reasons, a quasi-experimental design was chosen; although it does not allow full control over all variables, it does enable the observation of significant changes resulting from the intervention under real educational conditions.

The scope of the research was explanatory, as it not only described phenomena but also sought to establish cause-effect relationships between the independent variable (collaborative physical activities) and the dependent variables (motivation and intercultural competence in English). This aligns with what Bisquerra (2009) stated regarding studies that aim to understand the reasons behind observed phenomena in real-world contexts.

## **Participants**

The population consisted of second-year high school students (equivalent to 11th grade) from a public educational institution in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador, during the 2023–2024 academic year. In total, the population comprised 118 students distributed across four class sections.

From this population, a non-probabilistic, purposive sample was selected based on accessibility and the willingness of school authorities to allow the pedagogical intervention. Two classes (n = 60) formed the final sample, with one assigned as the experimental group (n = 30) and the other as the control group (n = 30). Although this is a relatively small sample size for a quasi-experimental design, all available students from the authorized sections were included, limiting the possibility of expanding the sample. This condition represents a recognized limitation of the present study. No statistical power calculation was performed, which was taken into consideration when interpreting the generalizability of the results

The purposive sampling introduces potential bias, and therefore, the findings were analyzed with caution. Nevertheless, this sampling method was the only feasible option within the institutional context, given the restrictions on reorganizing class groups and the need to maintain the regular academic structure.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Students officially enrolled in the second year of high school.
- Attendance of 80% or higher during the intervention period.
- Informed consent signed by legal guardians.

#### Exclusion criteria:

- Students with physical conditions that prevented participation in moderate physical activity.
- Participation in parallel English language programs during the study period.
- Students with low reading comprehension in their native language, according to school records.
   This criterion responded to the need to ensure that participants had a minimum comprehension level to adequately carry out the English-language activities; however, it is acknowledged that





this condition was not evaluated using standardized tests, which constitutes a methodological limitation.

Of the four class sections that made up the total population (2A, 2B, 2C, and 2D), only two participated in the study. Section 2B was assigned as the experimental group, while 2C was designated as the control group. Each of these groups consisted of 30 students, for a total sample of 60 participants. Sections 2A and 2D, each with 29 students, did not take part in the intervention. In total, the population was composed of 118 students, of whom 50.8% actively participated in the study by being included in one of the two comparison groups.

#### **Procedure**

The research was carried out in three phases:

Phase 1: Initial diagnosis. A validated questionnaire was applied to measure students' motivation toward learning English and an intercultural competence scale adapted to the Ecuadorian educational context. Both instruments were administered as a pretest to the experimental and control groups under similar conditions, with institutional authorization and in the presence of the researcher.

Phase 2: Pedagogical intervention. The experimental group participated over eight weeks in weekly 90-minute sessions, designed to integrate collaborative physical activities with specific English as a Foreign Language (EFL) content. Each session included three to four structured activities, lasting approximately 20 to 25 minutes each, plus an initial warm-up and a reflective closing segment.

The activities implemented included team games (such as "Relay Commands" and "Vocabulary Ball"), role-playing dynamics (simulating everyday situations like shopping or traveling), traditional games from various cultures adapted to the target language, and playful communication tasks involving movement (e.g., a moving version of "Find Someone Who..." or object scavenger hunts following instructions in English).

Participants worked in teams of 5 to 6 students, strategically grouped to ensure diversity of abilities and foster positive interdependence. Each activity included clear instructions in English and a structured development protocol outlining linguistic objectives, timing, roles, materials, and success criteria.

To ensure fidelity of implementation, a methodological guide was created detailing the steps for each session. This guide was reviewed by a specialist in English didactics and a physical education teacher. Additionally, weekly supervision was conducted to verify adherence to the planned phases, use of English during activities, and active student participation.

Meanwhile, the control group continued with conventional English classes over the same period, focused on written tasks, grammar exercises, reading comprehension, and direct instruction, without the integration of physical or interactive dynamics.

Phase 3: Final evaluation. The same instruments from Phase 1 were reapplied to both groups to compare motivation and intercultural competence levels after the intervention.

Throughout the entire process, an ethical protocol was followed to ensure confidentiality, voluntariness, and respect for participants. The non-random selection of groups was due to institutional limitations related to the internal organization of the school, which did not allow for reconfiguring preassigned academic groups and schedules. From an ethical standpoint, it was deemed inappropriate to intervene in student group allocation, as this could disrupt the classroom environment, generate perceptions of inequality, or affect the usual pedagogical dynamics. The principle of non-maleficence was also prioritized by avoiding alterations to school routines or the imposition of activities that could cause discomfort to students or teachers. All physical activities were previously approved by the institution's physical education department to ensure appropriateness and safety.

The instruments used for data collection were:

Motivation Scale for English Learning (EMAI), adapted from Gardner's (2004) proposal and previously validated with Spanish-speaking populations in studies by López and Rivera (2019). For
this research, a semantic and contextual review was conducted with the support of two language
teaching experts, and a pilot test was carried out with 20 students with similar characteristics,
resulting in a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.87.





• Intercultural Competence Scale (ECI), based on Deardorff's (2006) model, with linguistic and cultural adaptation to the Ecuadorian context through expert judgment. This scale was also pilot-tested, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.83, indicating acceptable internal consistency for the study's purposes.

Both instruments consisted of items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), organized according to dimensions defined in the corresponding theoretical models.

However, a limitation acknowledged in the study is that no confirmatory factor analysis or advanced psychometric testing was conducted for the specific sample used. Additionally, some uncontrolled variables (such as students' socioeconomic status, prior experience with the English language, or level of exposure to English outside of school) may have influenced the results. These variables were not directly measured and represent a potential source of bias in interpreting the effects of the intervention.

# Data Analysis

The collected data were systematized in a spreadsheet and later analyzed using the statistical software SPSS v.27. Descriptive statistical tests (means, standard deviation) and inferential tests were applied, particularly Student's t-test for related samples (pretest and posttest within each group) and for independent samples (comparison between groups). A significance level of p < .05 was considered to determine statistically significant differences. In addition, effect size was calculated using Cohen's d statistic to assess the magnitude of the intervention's impact.

## **Results**

The main objective of this research was to determine the impact of collaborative physical activities on motivation and intercultural competence in learning English as a foreign language. Below are the results of the pretest and posttest administered to the control and experimental groups, using Likert-type scales.

# Results on motivation toward learning english

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and observed ranges for the variable motivation, both in the pretest and posttest, for the control and experimental groups.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and ranges for the variable intercultural competence

Group	Measurement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Control	Pretest	2.98	0.44	2.10 - 3.90
Control	Posttest	3.05	0.47	2.30 - 3.95
Experimental	Pretest	3.01	0.41	2.20 - 3.90
Experimental	Posttest	3.95	0.50	3.00 - 4.80

Note. Own elaboration.

Students in the experimental group showed a clear improvement in their intercultural competence after participating in the intervention, while the control group exhibited only minimal change.

## Statistical results: intragroup and intergroup comparison

Before applying parametric tests, normality was verified using the Shapiro–Wilk test for each group and variable. In all cases, the results were non-significant (p > .05), indicating that the data followed a normal distribution, thus allowing the use of t-tests.

Student's t-test for related samples was applied within each group. The results are presented in Table 2, along with the 95% confidence intervals for the mean differences.

Table 2. Paired samples t-test (pretest vs. Posttest)

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Group	Variable	t	df	р	95% CI of the Difference
Control	Motivation	1.12	29	0.271	[-0.05, 0.17]
Control	Intercultural Competence	1.33	29	0.193	[-0.04, 0.18]
Experimental	Motivation	7.54	29	0.000	[0.61, 1.05]
Experimental	Intercultural Competence	6.88	29	0.000	[0.65, 1.19]





Note. Own elaboration.

Only the experimental group showed highly significant differences between pretest and posttest in both variables (p < .001), with confidence intervals supporting the magnitude of the change.

Table 3. Independent Samples t-Test (Posttest)

Variable	t	df	р	Mean Difference	95% CI
Motivation	5.92	58	0.000	0.75	[0.49, 1.00]
Intercultural Competence	5.51	58	0.000	0.90	[0.57, 1.23]

Note. Own elaboration.

Both differences were statistically significant, suggesting that the intervention produced a measurable and relevant effect on both variables.

Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated for both intragroup and intergroup comparisons in the posttest, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Effect Size (Cohen's d)

Variable	Comparison	Cohen's d	Effect Size Magnitude
Motivation	Experimental (pre-post)	1.05	High
Intercultural Competence	Experimental (pre-post)	0.98	High
Motivation	Experimental vs Control (posttest)	0.89	High
Intercultural Competence	Experimental vs Control (posttest)	0.93	High

Note. Own elaboration.

Although the effect sizes are high, they remain within reasonable values. These results support not only the statistical significance of the intervention but also its practical relevance in school contexts.

# **Discussion**

The results of this study show that collaborative physical activities integrated into the teaching of English as a foreign language have a positive effect on both motivation and the development of intercultural competence among the students who participated in the intervention. These findings support the potential of active and integrative methodologies that promote more meaningful and contextualized learning.

However, these conclusions must be interpreted with caution. The quasi-experimental design used, which lacked random assignment and relied on a convenience sample, introduces certain limitations in the ability to directly attribute causality. Furthermore, the small sample size and its restriction to a single institution reduce the generalizability of the results to other educational contexts.

The increase in motivation levels observed in the experimental group aligns with the findings of Pacheco et al. (2022), who emphasize that incorporating movement and physical interaction enhances English learning by reducing anxiety and encouraging participation. Similarly, Romero et al. (2020) report that cooperative strategies increase students' interest in language learning. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these studies were conducted in different educational settings and levels, which should be considered when making comparisons.

Regarding intercultural competence, the data show significant improvements in the experimental group, particularly in areas related to cultural sensitivity and willingness to interact in diverse contexts. This result is consistent with Botet (2021), who highlights the value of the intercultural approach in foreign language education as a tool to strengthen values of respect and coexistence. Despite this consistency, it should be acknowledged that the results may have been influenced by factors such as student enthusiasm for participating in an innovative methodology or the constant presence of the research team.

Moreover, the articulation between the area of Physical Education and English learning, as proposed by Freire et al. (2025), is also supported by the findings of this study. Collaborative games and physical





dynamics appear to have created real communication scenarios that encouraged the spontaneous use of the language. However, it cannot be ruled out that part of the observed effect may be due to increased teacher contact or greater exposure to English, rather than the specific nature of the intervention itself.

There is also alignment between the methodological approach of this research and experiences such as those reported by Bermejo et al. (2021), who observed improvements in oral expression and group interaction through cooperative learning techniques at the higher education level. Similarly, Martínez (2020) highlights how collaborative work fosters essential social skills for functioning in culturally diverse environments. While these findings support the relevance of the approach used, it is important to note that they were obtained under different institutional conditions, which limits direct comparison.

The use of the body and movement as a pedagogical resource is also related to the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach, which has shown benefits for vocabulary retention in beginner-level students (Khakim & Anwar, 2020; Taufiq et al., 2019). Although this study does not directly align with TPR methodology, it shares some of its principles, particularly the idea of "learning by doing." Nonetheless, further research is needed to clearly define which types of physical activity are most effective in achieving linguistic or intercultural objectives.

In the Latin American context, the experience of Añazco et al. (2025) provides evidence in favor of integrating curricular content through active methodologies. Their study, conducted in rural areas, highlights the potential for generating meaningful learning through the connection between culture, language, and movement. Even so, the rural setting of their research and the sociocultural characteristics of their sample differ from the urban context in which the present study was conducted.

In conclusion, while the results presented here support the idea that collaborative physical activities can enhance motivation and intercultural competence in the English classroom, it is necessary to acknowledge that certain variables were not controlled and may have influenced the outcomes—such as socioeconomic status, prior experience with the language, or students' initial interest. Additionally, the potential influence of the Hawthorne effect cannot be dismissed, given the novelty of the intervention and the direct supervision by the research team.

#### **Conclusions**

This research allowed us to observe that the implementation of collaborative physical activities in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom had a positive effect on students' motivation and on the development of their intercultural competence. The collected data showed notable improvements in the experimental group, both descriptively and inferentially, suggesting a possible favorable influence of the intervention.

A statistically significant increase in motivation toward learning English was identified in the experimental group, associated with the incorporation of group dynamics, bodily movement, and playful elements in language instruction. This result suggests that active methodologies can help improve classroom climate and stimulate greater student interest, especially in contexts where traditional approaches prevail.

Similarly, a significant improvement in the experimental group's intercultural competence was recorded, evidenced by greater openness to cultural dialogue, empathy, and appreciation of diversity. These findings highlight the potential of approaches that integrate cognitive, social, and affective dimensions in EFL teaching.

However, it is necessary to interpret these conclusions with caution due to several characteristics of the study. The methodological design was quasi-experimental without random assignment, and the sample was selected by convenience from a single institution. Furthermore, certain external variables (such as prior English proficiency or socioeconomic conditions) were not controlled and may have influenced the results. Therefore, the evidence found does not allow for definitive causal relationships to be established but rather suggests trends that require further validation.





In this regard, it is recommended that future studies replicate this type of intervention in diverse contexts and under more rigorous methodological conditions, incorporating larger samples, greater experimental control, and analysis of contextual variables. This would help verify the robustness of the observed effects and adapt the strategies to different school realities.

Additionally, it is suggested to further explore methodologies such as cooperative learning and the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach at various educational levels—particularly in rural or culturally diverse settings, where physical and collaborative components may have an even greater impact.

As a future line of work, the design and validation of integrated didactic materials is proposed (materials that combine bodily movement, group work, and intercultural competence in the EFL classroom) promoting a more inclusive, meaningful education aligned with the challenges of the 21st century.

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