From Fear to Fluency: Transforming Speaking Confidence Through Challenge-Based Learning in Foreign Language Education

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ABSTRACT

Foreign language communication among beginning learners is often constrained by speaking anxiety, fear of pronunciation errors, and heavy reliance on memorised dialogue. This study examines the implementation of ¡BUEN PROVECHO!, a Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) intervention designed for Basic Spanish Communication I. Using a five-week mixed-methods design, the study involved 216 undergraduate learners at CEFR A1 level from four class groups (A, B, C, and D). The intervention was organised through the Engage, Investigate, and Act phases and culminated in restaurant-based communication simulations. Data were drawn from pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, written and video reflections, microteaching records, and course-performance data. Post-intervention evidence indicated improved speaking confidence, stronger participation in authentic communication tasks, and positive perceptions of collaborative learning. Course results also showed high completion and strong overall performance among participants. Qualitative reflections further suggested growth in self-monitoring, willingness to speak, and practical use of basic Spanish expressions in contextualised situations. Overall, the findings suggest that a structured CBL approach supported by collaborative digital tools and staged rehearsal activities can help reduce anxiety and strengthen beginner learners' communicative confidence in foreign language classrooms.

Keywords: Challenge-Based Learning; Foreign Language Anxiety; Authentic Communication; Experiential Learning; Student Agency; Immersive Pedagogy.

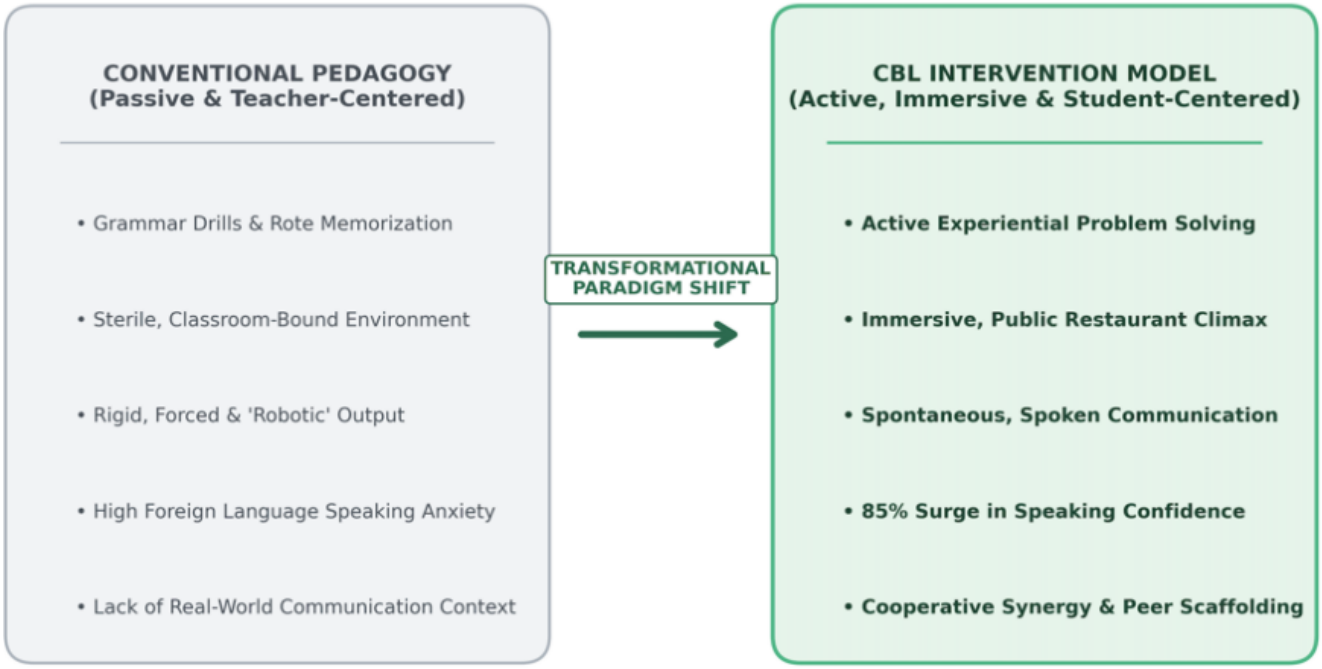
INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate in a foreign language is increasingly important in higher education, particularly for programmes that aim to prepare graduates for multilingual and intercultural contexts. However, novice learners often encounter a persistent gap between classroom knowledge and spontaneous oral use. In introductory foreign-language courses, students may recognise vocabulary and grammar patterns but still hesitate to speak because of pronunciation anxiety, fear of error, and limited experience using the language in authentic situations.

This gap is especially visible in basic language courses that rely heavily on memorised dialogues and controlled classroom drills. Although such practices may support early vocabulary recall, they do not always prepare learners to respond flexibly in real interaction. As a result, students may perform adequately in written or scripted tasks while remaining uncertain when required to communicate orally in a less predictable environment.

To address these limitations, the ¡BUEN PROVECHO! pedagogical innovation was designed as a Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) intervention for Basic Spanish Communication I. The project sought to move students from passive rehearsal of textbook dialogues towards purposeful language use through collaborative preparation, guided rehearsal, and simulated restaurant communication tasks.

Figure 1 Paradigm Shift in Language Education



Problem Statement

A recurring problem in introductory foreign-language instruction is the mismatch between declarative knowledge and communicative performance. Students may be able to identify grammar rules, memorise expressions, and complete written exercises, yet still struggle to use the language confidently in spontaneous interaction. This issue is particularly relevant in speaking-focused courses, where affective factors and limited opportunities for authentic practice can restrict oral development.

Over-Reliance on Mechanical Memorization and the "Robotic" Production Trap

Conventional foreign language instructional methodologies historically overemphasize rote grammar memorization, sterile verb conjugation drills, and artificial classroom-bound exercises. Because basic-level learners operate with highly restricted vocabulary banks, they routinely resort to memorizing static, pre-packaged textbook dialogues. Consequently, when thrust into situations requiring active, spontaneous verbal interaction, their speech lacks natural phonetic intonation and syntactic flexibility, producing unnaturally rigid, forced, and highly "robotic" linguistic outputs (Martinez, Torres, & Wang, 2021). This pedagogical reliance on rote retention fails to train the cognitive-linguistic reflexes necessary for dynamic sentence construction and real-time situational adaptation.

Conventional Pedagogy CBL Intervention Model

[Grammar Drills & Memorization] [Active Experiential Problem Solving]

| |

Robotic, Rigid Verbal Output Surge in Communicative Confidence

and High Speaking Anxiety and Spontaneous A1 Speech Production

The Affective Filter: Speaking Anxiety and the Psychological "Mental Barrier"

Among novice learners, speaking anxiety can function as a substantial barrier to participation. Fear of mispronunciation, embarrassment, and negative evaluation may reduce willingness to speak even when learners

possess the necessary vocabulary or grammatical knowledge. In this context, instructional design needs to address not only linguistic content but also the emotional conditions that enable students to practise and take risks in the target language.

Classroom Detachment, Cultural Dissociation, and Ecological Vulnerability

Traditional educational environments operate within sterile, controlled lecture rooms that fail to expose students to the unpredictable auditory and social complexities of the real world. Basic-level language students typically struggle to transfer classroom knowledge to ecological environments where they must navigate physical distractions, ambient restaurant chatter, and background noises. Furthermore, static curricula often divorce language from its essential cultural landscape, leaving students structurally unprepared to handle authentic cultural nuances such as Hispanic dining etiquette and polite greeting protocols (*Saludos y Cortesía*). In the absence of a safe, facilitator-guided space that scaffolds real-world communicative resilience, students cannot build the psychomotor control or self-regulation needed for successful intercultural socialization (Chen & Lee, 2023; Garcia & Silva, 2024).

Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) as the Curricular Solution

In response to these challenges, the ¡BUEN PROVECHO! innovation adopts Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) as its organising framework. The model combines authentic tasks, collaborative inquiry, guided rehearsal, and public performance in order to reduce speaking apprehension and strengthen communicative confidence. Rather than treating language as a set of isolated grammar items, the intervention positions it as a tool for solving a realistic communication challenge.

Through collaborative, digital script co-creation, students are empowered to take full ownership of their learning. Furthermore, by transitioning the educator's role from an authoritarian transmitter of grammar into an empathetic facilitator, the framework establishes a supportive emotional harbor. Leveraging low-stakes, iterative microteaching rehearsals (30-to-60-second classroom simulations), the model allows students to safely "fail in practice" and build phonetic fluency before executing their final unscripted, immersive simulations in physical, public restaurants

Research Objectives

This study is outlined based on three main objectives:

1. To evaluate the extent to which the Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) framework helps reduce speaking anxiety and psychological barriers among novice foreign-language learners.
2. To examine the development of learners' cognitive, psychomotor, and affective competencies through immersive communicative tasks situated in restaurant-service scenarios.
3. To assess students' academic performance and the pedagogical value of collaborative digital platforms in supporting authentic foreign-language learning.

Research Questions

1. How does the implementation of the three-phase Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) framework influence speaking anxiety and psychological barriers among novice learners of Spanish as a foreign language?
2. In what ways do immersive communication tasks in restaurant-service contexts support the development of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective competencies at CEFR A1 level?
3. What patterns of academic performance were observed during the intervention, and how did collaborative digital platforms support the implementation of authentic language learning?

Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) Framework

Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) serves as the primary instructional engine and structural backbone of this pedagogical model. Moving beyond traditional project-based learning, CBL shifts the instructional focus from

passive information reception to active, collaborative problem-solving centered on a real-world, high-stakes challenge. The educational journey is structured across three cyclical, progressive phases:

1. Engage: This phase triggers cognitive and emotional preparation. Students are confronted with an authentic "Big Idea" such as navigating real-world intercultural communication and narrow it down to a concrete, actionable challenge: executing a natural, unscripted Spanish conversation within a physical public restaurant.

2. Investigate: To bridge the immediate linguistic and cultural gaps, students conduct deep-dive collaborative research. Instead of passively digesting lecture slides, they actively research vocabulary, practice phonetic pronunciations, and co-write customized conversational scripts using authentic media resources.

3. Act: The model culminates in concrete action. Students translate their researched script structures into active communication, executing and recording unscripted, spontaneous simulations in real restaurant settings while managing environmental noise, physical distractions, and cognitive pressure.

Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb)

To ensure that linguistic skills are deeply internalized rather than temporarily memorized, the framework aligns directly with Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. Kolb posits that cognitive mastery is a dynamic process wherein knowledge is continuously created and refined through the transformation of direct, concrete experience.

In this intervention, the conventional rote-learning model is replaced with an iterative loop of action, observation, and adjustment. Students watch authentic native Spanish dialogues (*Reflective Observation*), collaboratively draft and restructure functional communication scripts (*Abstract Conceptualization*), practice in low-stakes classroom microteaching sessions (*Active Experimentation*), and ultimately perform in physical public restaurants (*Concrete Experience*). This experiential loop forces students to physically coordinate vocal articulation, intonation, gestures, and situational adaptation, ensuring that the target language becomes a living tool for social transaction.

Humanistic Learning Theory (Rogers & Maslow)

Recognizing that foreign language speaking anxiety (FLA) is a severe affective bottleneck that can paralyze student oral production, the model utilizes Humanistic Learning Theory as an emotional safeguard. Grounded in the instructional philosophies of Rogers and Maslow, this pillar asserts that intellectual growth and linguistic risk-taking can only flourish when a learner’s fundamental psychological and emotional safety is guaranteed.

The instructor actively dismantles the traditional, anxiety-inducing "lecturer as authority" dynamic, transitioning instead into an empathetic facilitator, motivator, and emotional guide. To actively lower the students' affective filter, the framework establishes a supportive, non-judgmental "safe space". This is practically operationalized by granting student groups complete autonomy to select their physical simulation locations, co-write their dialogue paths, and designate their specific team roles (e.g., waiter, customer, or cashier) based on their individual comfort levels. This intentional decentralization of authority shifts the emotional landscape from fear of public failure to intrinsic motivation and creative curiosity (*divertida*).

Cooperative Learning and Peer Scaffolding

Language acquisition is inherently social; thus, the framework integrates Cooperative Learning principles to foster collaborative accountability and peer-driven growth. Rather than working in isolation, students are organized into structured, cooperative teams where they must collectively plan narrative flows, negotiate tasks, and resolve logistical and creative conflicts.

A pivotal mechanism within this cooperative structure is the organic emergence of peer mentoring. Within each team, linguistically stronger or more socially confident peers voluntarily scaffold more anxious classmates. This

peer-to-peer coaching plays a critical role in refining phonetic pronunciation, practicing dialogue cues, and building collective confidence prior to the final public recording. By structuring cooperative interdependence, the model ensures that the final communication video is not an individual test, but the successful culmination of shared, supportive group dynamics.

Digital Technology Integration

To support 21st-century learning environments, the framework leverages digital platforms as sustainable tools to foster student agency and extend learning beyond the classroom. By integrating collaborative, open-source technology, the intervention establishes an asynchronous, continuous learning ecosystem.

Students utilize cloud-based platforms like Google Docs for real-time, synchronous script co-creation and iterative peer-editing. Communication and rapid feedback loops are maintained dynamically via WhatsApp, while video conferencing tools like Google Meet facilitate virtual rehearsals and pronunciation reviews outside of formal lecture hours. Finally, YouTube is leveraged as a permanent repository for student video portfolios, transforming their final restaurant simulations and "Behind the Scenes" footage into a public, reusable archive. This digital ecosystem empowers students to take complete ownership of their cognitive development, converting digital tools into active catalysts for collaborative linguistic mastery

Figure 2 Language Learning Pedagogical Pillars



METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Participant Cohort

This study employed a five-week mixed-methods design to examine the implementation of the ¡BUEN PROVECHO! Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) intervention in the Basic Spanish Communication I course. The article focuses on a cohort of 216 students from four classes (Groups A, B, C, and D) who participated in the intervention. Data were drawn from post-intervention questionnaire responses, written reflections, group video submissions, and course-performance records.

Methodological Data Triangulation Framework

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, the study used methodological triangulation by combining questionnaire data, qualitative reflections, video-based artefacts, and course-grade analytics. The quantitative component focused on students' perceived confidence, engagement, and views of the learning activities, while the qualitative component captured reflective accounts of difficulties, strategies, collaboration, and perceived growth during the project.

1. The questionnaire component focused on students' perceived confidence in speaking Spanish, their engagement with the task, and their views on the usefulness of authentic, challenge-based activities.

2. Qualitative data were collected through two forms of reflection.

    - First, students produced individual written reflections describing their emotional responses, perceived language development, difficulties, and strategies used during the project.

    - Second, group-produced videos and behind-the-scenes recordings were reviewed to identify evidence of collaboration, rehearsal practices, pronunciation monitoring, and the gradual shift from memorised delivery to more contextualised communication.

3. Academic achievement was examined through course-performance records and grade analytics to determine whether the intervention coincided with satisfactory completion and strong overall performance in the course.

Quantitative Data

Pre- & Post-CBL Questionnaires

Anxiety & confidence scales

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/ \

/ STUDENT \

/ TRANSFOR- \

/ MATION \

/ \

Qualitative Data ---------- Academic Analytics

Written & Video Reflections MySIS Grade Distribution

(Linguistic & Affective) (Cognitive Achievement)

Formative Pilot and Rehearsal Control (Microteaching)

To reduce performance anxiety and provide structured preparation before the public restaurant simulation, the intervention included a microteaching phase. Prior to the final task, student groups completed short rehearsal simulations in class, allowing them to test pronunciation, timing, role distribution, and interaction flow. This phase functioned as formative practice rather than as a separate intervention, and it provided a safer environment for feedback and revision before the authentic task.

The intervention was implemented over five weeks with 216 students enrolled in Basic Spanish Communication I across four classes (Groups A, B, C, and D). The learning process was organised into the three core phases of Challenge-Based Learning: Engage, Investigate, and Act.

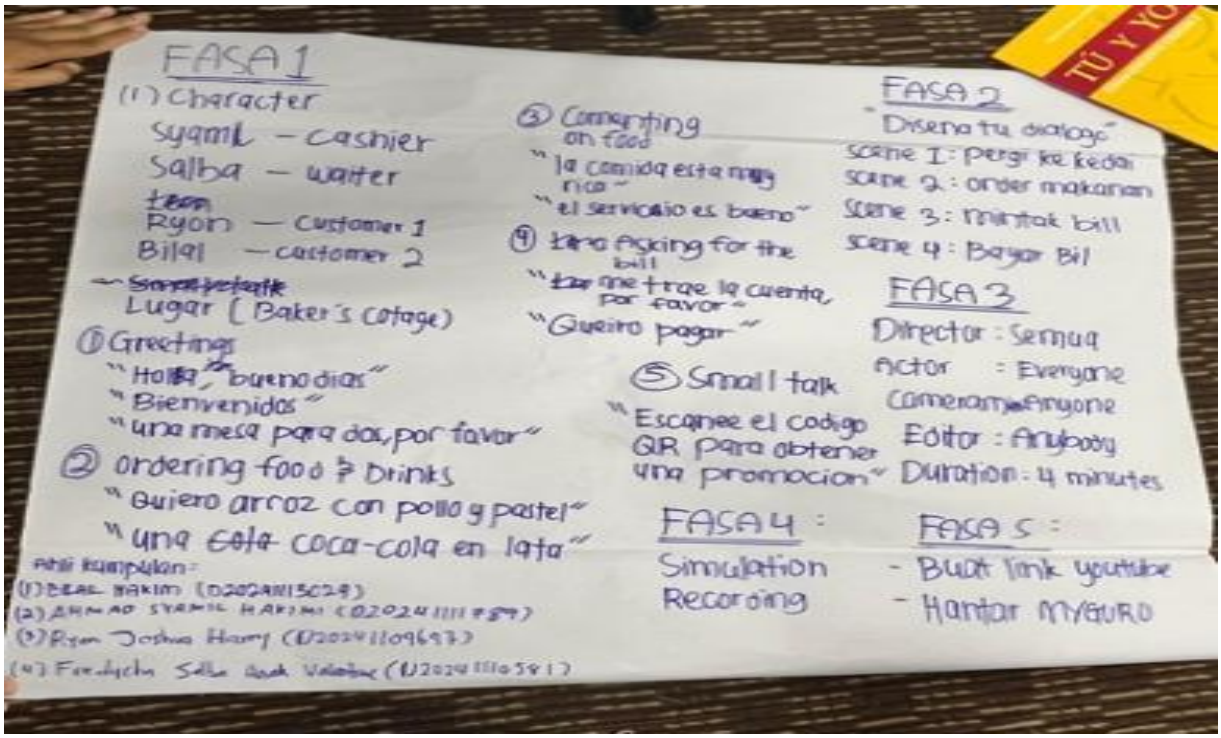
Phase 1: ENGAGE (Understanding the Challenge & Mental Preparation)

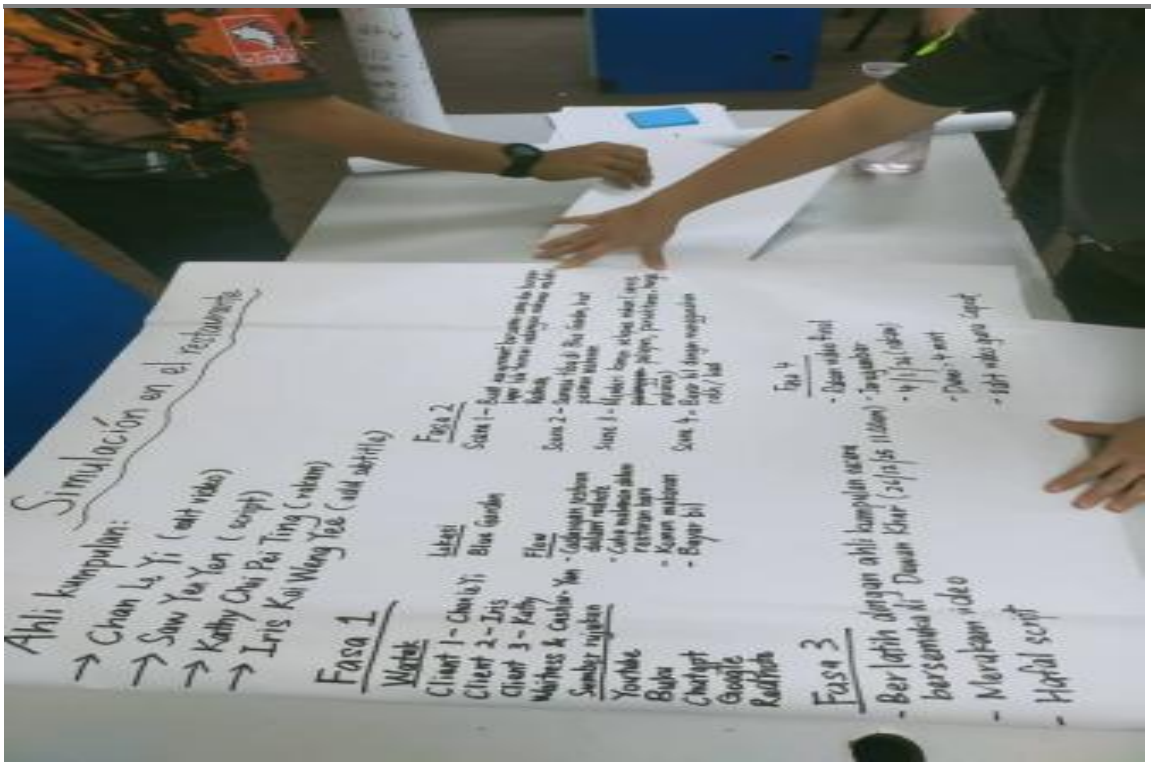
In the Engage phase, students were introduced to the communication challenge and encouraged to anticipate the linguistic, interpersonal, and emotional demands of the restaurant simulation. Activities in this phase included brainstorming likely expressions, identifying communicative roles, discussing common fears about speaking, and analysing model interactions in order to build initial familiarity with the task.

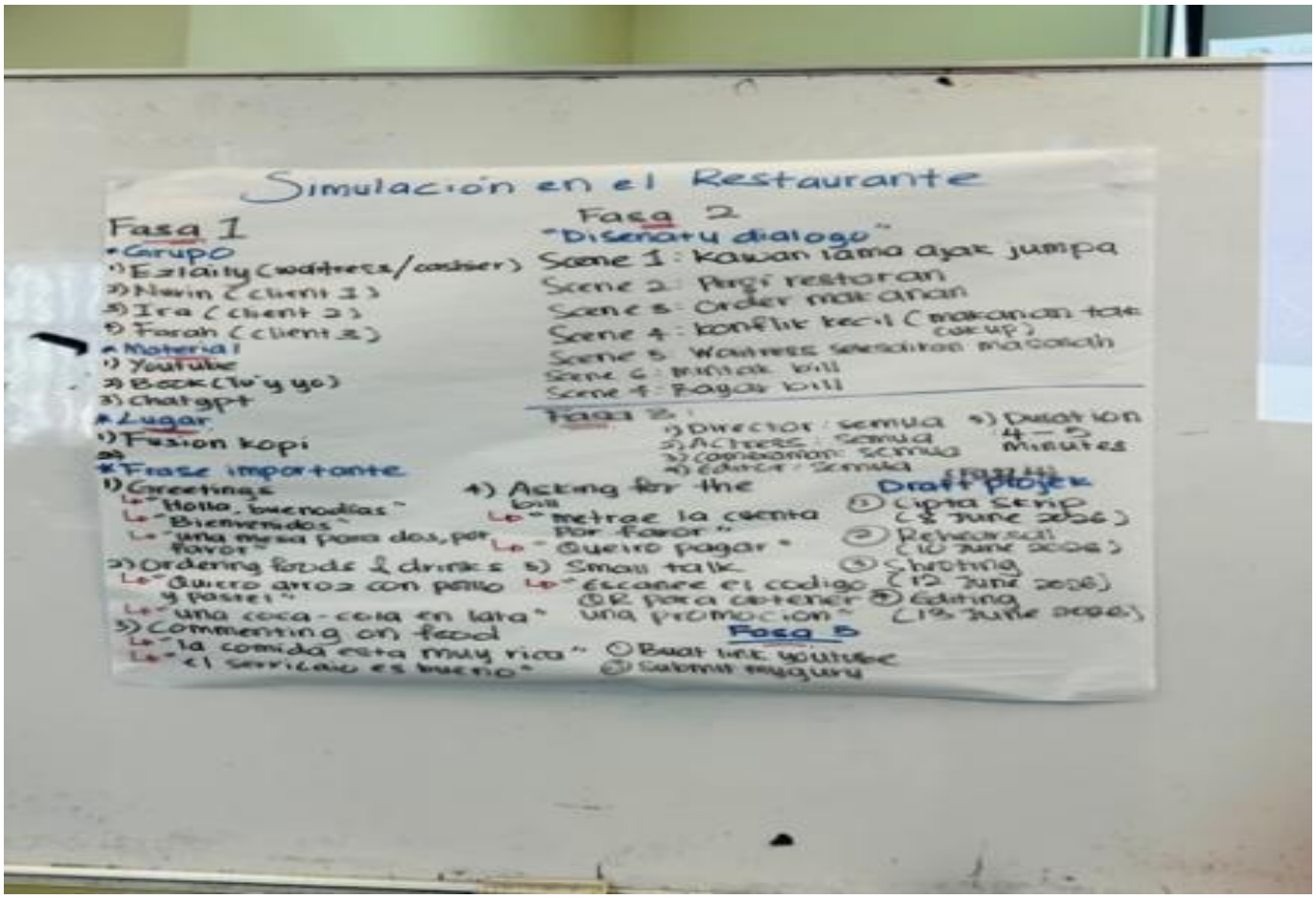
The "Challenge Understanding Sheet": Students actively brainstorm and map out the communication challenge, identifying the real-world roles they will play and the essential expressions required.

Creating a Safe Space: By exposing students to authentic native restaurant videos, open discussions are held regarding their fears of making pronunciation mistakes, shifting their mindset from fear to curiosity.

Figure 3 The Challenge Understanding Sheet and presenting the ouput







Phase 2: INVESTIGATE (Bridging the Gap & Collaborative Synergy)

The Investigate phase focused on collaborative inquiry and language preparation. Students worked with authentic and course-based resources to identify relevant vocabulary, expressions, and interaction patterns for restaurant communication. They also co-developed scripts and speaking prompts through shared digital platforms, which enabled peer feedback and revision beyond scheduled class time.

Utilizing Authentic Resources: Students explore authentic materials to master highly functional A1-level verbs (querer, pedir, tomar, pagar).

Digital Collaboration and Peer Mentoring: Students take full ownership by utilizing digital platforms (Google Docs) to synchronously co-write their scripts. "Peer mentoring" occurs naturally as more confident students help hesitant group members.

The utilization of digital platforms to gather functional vocabulary and synchronously co-write communicative narratives builds upon the pedagogical principles highlighted by Authors (2017). Their research affirmed that integrating digital storytelling and multimedia tools significantly boosts students' lexical acquisition and retention, creating a robust foundation for the scriptwriting phase of this project. Cultural Integration: Students investigate "Hispanic Cultural Vision", learning authentic social etiquette (Saludos y Cortesía).

Figure 5 Team Collaboration



	Camarera: Muy bien su pedido llegara en un momento. Gracias.
5	**Camarera:** Aqui esta su comida. Mi Goreng y Kuey Teow Goreng. Buen provecho. **Cliente 1:** Gracias. **Camarera:** Aqui estan las bebidas te o ais y te helado. Esta completo el pedido. **Cliente 1:** Si todo esta completo. Gracias. **Cliente 2:** Mmm el mi goreng esta delicioso. Vale la pena. **Cliente 1:** El kuey teow goreng tambien esta delicioso y la porcion es grande. Estoy muy satisfecha.
6	**Cajera:** Buenas tardes. Que numero de mesa senorita. **Cliente 2:** Mesa numero seis. **Cajera:** Mi Goreng RM6 Kuey Teow Goreng RM8 Te o ais RM3 Te helado RM3 El total es RM20. Desea pagar en efectivo o con QR. **Cliente 1:** Pago con QR. **Cajera:** Muy bien. (Despues del pago) La comida estuvo rica. **Cliente 2:** Si estuvo muy rica. Insya Allah volveremos otra vez.

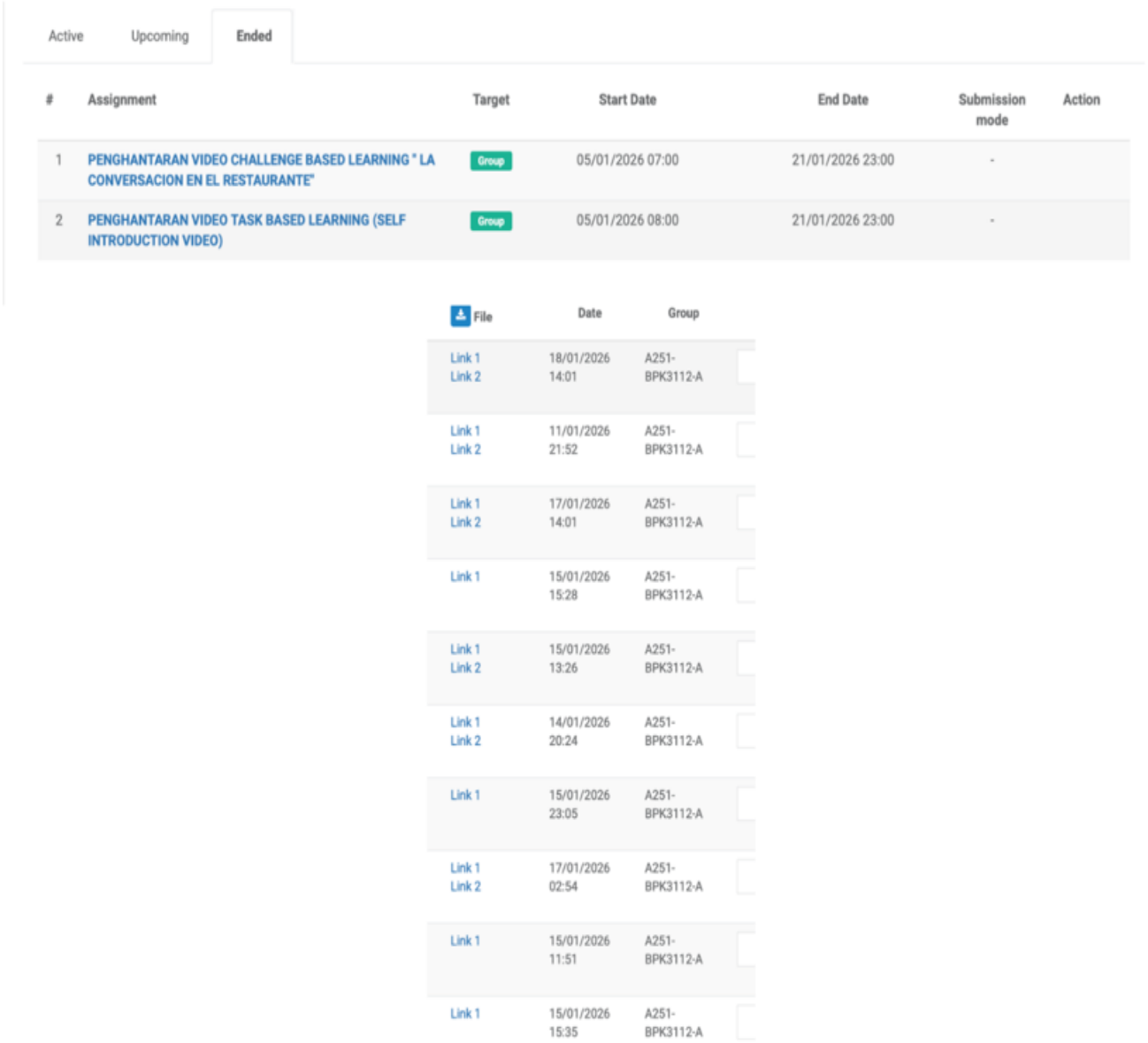
In Spanish

SCENE	DIALOG
1	**Cliente 1 (Husna):** Izah vamos a comer en Saddam. **Cliente 2 (Farizah):** Esta bien. Yo tambien tengo hambre. Vamos. **Cliente 1:** Si vamos.
2	**Cliente 1:** Hace mucho tiempo que no venimos aqui. **Cliente 2:** Si es verdad. Hay muchos cambios aqui.
3	**Cliente 1:** (Abre el menu) Hay muchas opciones de comida aqui. **Cliente 2:** Es cierto. (Levanta la mano) Senorita puede tomar nuestro pedido. **Camarera:** Si claro. Que desean pedir.
4	***Cliente 1:*** Senorita cual es el plato mas popular aqui. ***Camarera:*** Recomendamos el Mi Goreng y el Kuey Teow Goreng. A muchos clientes les gusta. ***Cliente 2:*** De acuerdo. Quiero pedir Mi Goreng y te o ais. ***Cliente 1:*** Yo quiero Kuey Teow Goreng y te helado.

Phase 3: ACT (Microteaching & Authentic Execution)

The Act phase involved the rehearsal and execution of the communication task. Students first completed microteaching rehearsals to practise short interactions, refine pronunciation, and improve the coherence of turn-taking. They then carried out the restaurant simulation task, which required them to apply the language they had prepared in a more realistic communicative setting.

Figure 6 Submission



Data Collection and Triangulation Analysis

Data collection combined quantitative and qualitative evidence. Questionnaire responses were used to describe students' perceptions of confidence, engagement, and the usefulness of the project. Written reflections and video artefacts were examined to identify recurring themes related to anxiety reduction, collaboration, rehearsal, and communicative development. Course-grade records were used as contextual evidence of academic attainment during the intervention period.

1. Details of the Triangulation Components

Empirical Questionnaires (Pre and Post): This quantitative metric specifically measured the affective impact of the Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) intervention. By tracking students' foreign language anxiety and psychological "mental barriers" before and after the project. This data serves as proof of the transition "From Fear to Fluency".

Document Evaluation (Written and Video Reflections): This qualitative component focused on metacognitive awareness and psychomotor growth.

- Written Reflections: Allowed students to critically assess linguistic strengths and emotional shifts, such as moving from robotic textbook memorization to spontaneous speech.
- Video Reflections: "Behind the Scenes" and final simulation videos visually documented the physical transition from initial hesitation to natural, confident communication and active peer collaboration.

"**MySIS Grading System Analysis:** Assessment data extracted from the MySIS grading system offered definitive quantitative proof of academic and cognitive attainment in the CBL project component.

2. Reliability of Instruments and the Role of the Pilot Study

The trustworthiness of the study was supported through data triangulation and through the inclusion of a structured rehearsal stage prior to the final performance task. Rather than claiming psychometric reliability from the triangulation itself, the study uses multiple data sources to cross-check patterns in students' reported experiences, observed practices, and course outcomes.

The Microteaching Phase acted as a pedagogical pilot for the final simulation. In this phase:

Students performed 30 to 60-second mini-simulations to test their scripts and pronunciation.

They watched their own playbacks to independently identify and tweak weaknesses before the actual restaurant simulation.

This rehearsal space allowed students to "fail in practice" to ensure they were resilient and reliable in their final execution.

FINDINGS

The findings indicate that the five-week ¡BUEN PROVECHO! intervention supported students' communicative development across affective, cognitive, and performance-related dimensions. Evidence from questionnaires, reflections, videos, and course records suggests that the CBL structure helped students move from hesitant, highly scripted participation towards more confident and purposeful oral interaction in Spanish.

Table 1 The Pedagogical, Empirical, and Theoretical Alignment of the ¡BUEN PROVECHO! CBL Framework

CBL Phase & Timeline	Linguistic & Learning Domains	Key Empirical Findings & Competencies	Theoretical Anchors & Frameworks
Phase 1: Engage *(Week 10)*	Affective *(Attitude Domain)*	• Surge in student speaking confidence post-intervention. • Successful dismantling of psychological "mental barriers" and foreign language speaking anxiety (FLA). • Transition from defensive communication fear to active curiosity.	• Humanistic Theory (Rogers & Maslow): Safe learning space and absolute student autonomy in physical location and restaurant role selection. • Cooperative Learning: Mutual peer scaffolding and collaborative peer support.
Phase 2: Investigate *(Week 11)*	Cognitive & Linguistic *(Knowledge Domain)*	• Active, functional mobilization of basic A1 action verbs (*querer, pedir, tomar, pagar*). • Advanced morphosyntactic awareness (correct gender concordance: *las bebidas* [fem.] / *el pollo* [masc.]). • Spontaneous sentence construction and syntactic assembly over rigid textbook memorization.	• Digital Technology Integration: Synchronous, cloud-based script co-creation and collaborative editing via Google Docs • Experiential Learning (Kolb): Reflective observation and abstract linguistic conceptualization through authentic native resources.

Phase 3: Act *(Weeks 12–14)*	Psychomotor & Communicative *(Skill Domain)*	• Exceptional ecological noise resilience and communication adaptability under real-world restaurant distractions. • Natural physical-linguistic coordination (harmonizing body language, facial expressions, and oral fluency). • Production of unscripted, natural conversation flows.	• Experiential Learning (Kolb): Active experimentation and concrete experience in ecological settings. • Peer Mentoring & Microteaching: Safe, iterative 30-to-60-second classroom rehearsal loops to "fail in practice" before public execution.

The Affective Dimension: Engagement Phase and Humanistic Empowerment

One of the clearest patterns in the data concerns the affective dimension of learning. Students' reflections frequently described nervousness at the beginning of the course, especially in relation to pronunciation, fear of making mistakes, and speaking in front of others. The Engage phase appears to have helped normalise these concerns by making them part of the learning conversation and by introducing the task in a scaffolded, collaborative manner.

This affective transformation is theoretically anchored in Rogers and Maslow's Humanistic Learning Theory, which posits that optimal cognitive growth occurs only when the learner's emotional well-being is safeguarded within a "safe space". By shifting the educator's role from an authoritative evaluator to an "emotional guide" and facilitator, the classroom was transformed into a supportive sanctuary. Furthermore, the pedagogical decision to grant students complete autonomy in choosing their physical simulation locations and specific restaurant roles (such as waiter, customer, or cashier) acted as a powerful catalyst for intrinsic motivation. Rather than feeling coerced, students experienced learning as *divertida* (fun) and personally meaningful.

The integration of Cooperative Learning further reinforced this safe space through mutual peer support. In their written reflections, students explicitly highlighted how collaborative synergy neutralized their fear of making pronunciation mistakes:

"Playing a role in a real restaurant made the learning much more meaningful...

Sometimes I felt nervous and afraid of making mistakes... but the teamwork

helped me gain confidence."

"The most memorable experience for me was completing the project assignment with my group members. At first, I found it difficult to use Spanish as I was still at a basic level. Through group discussions and practice together, I became more confident in speaking and using new vocabulary. It also made me more interested in continuing to learn Spanish."

We recorded our restaurant video in public space where most people come to the cafe to grab dinner. We overcome our fear of being judge by being shy together and be brave together.

Affective Transformation: Analysis of the Speaking Confidence Index

To examine the affective impact of the intervention, the study compared students' reported confidence before and after the CBL experience within the project dataset for the 216-student cohort. Across the relevant confidence-related items, the post-intervention responses indicated a substantial positive shift. In the innovation documentation associated with the project, this overall change is summarised as an 85% increase in speaking confidence; in the present article, the figure is treated as an aggregate indicator of positive affective change rather than as an inferential statistical claim.

Taken together, the questionnaire and reflective evidence suggest that students felt more willing to speak, more prepared to participate, and less intimidated by communicative risk after completing the intervention.

We recorded our restaurant video in public space where most people come to the cafe to grab dinner. We overcome our fear of being judge by being shy together and be brave together.

"The most memorable experience for me was the process of collaborating with my group members to complete the project assignment in Spanish, despite our differing levels of proficiency. This challenge pushed me to be bolder in using the language, even though I initially lacked confidence and was afraid of making mistakes. However, through discussions, continuous practice, and support from my peers and lecturer, I began to see improvement in my Spanish communication skills and comprehension. This assignment had a positive impact on me as it not only enhanced my language skills, but also taught me the importance of teamwork, time management, and the courage to step out of my comfort zone."

"The most memorable experience for me throughout the project assignment was collaborating with my group members to solve the given challenge in Spanish. This assignment had a positive impact on me as it enhanced my communication skills, self- confidence, and interest in continuing to learn Spanish more deeply."

These findings suggest that the combination of a supportive learning environment, peer collaboration, and structured rehearsal contributed to a meaningful reduction in speaking apprehension among many learners.

The Cognitive-Linguistic Dimension: Investigation Phase and Experiential Conceptualization

The Investigate phase supported a shift from memorising isolated expressions to using language more purposefully. Students drew on authentic resources, classroom materials, and peer discussion to prepare restaurant-related interactions, and the resulting scripts and performances showed evidence of functional vocabulary use, improved awareness of grammatical choices, and more context-sensitive dialogue construction.

This cognitive shift directly aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, specifically the stages of *Reflective Observation* and *Abstract Conceptualization*. By analyzing authentic multimedia materials (such as native Spanish restaurant videos, book and menus), students internalized structural linguistic templates. This was demonstrated by the students' ability to dynamically construct short, spontaneous sentences in real-time rather than relying on rigid memorized scripts:

1. Functional Vocabulary Application: Students successfully mobilized essential A1 action verbs such as *querer* (to want), *pedir* (to order), *tomar* (to take/drink), and *pagar* (to pay) in accurate physical restaurant contexts.

2. Practical Grammar Awareness: Qualitative script evaluations revealed advanced cognitive mastery over complex grammatical rules. Students successfully differentiated the copular verbs *ser* and *estar* in spontaneous speech (e.g., establishing permanent identity with *"soy Hakimi"* versus evaluating the temporary state of food with *"está rico"*).

3. Morphosyntactic Agreement: Students demonstrated strict adherence to gender concordance and grammatical gender markers, such as correctly pairing feminine and masculine nouns (e.g., *las bebidas* and *el pollo*).

Findings from post questionnaires.

"The most memorable experience for me was completing the project assignment with my group members. At first, I found it difficult to use Spanish as I was still at a basic level. Through group discussions and practice together, I became more confident in speaking and using new vocabulary. It also made me more interested in continuing to learn Spanish."

"The most memorable experience for me was preparing the simulation video project assignment in Spanish. At first, I found it difficult because I had to speak confidently and use correct sentences. However, after practicing with my group members, I began to understand how to construct sentences and pronounce words more accurately. This project had a significant impact on me as I became more confident in speaking

Spanish, bolder in stepping forward, and more collaborative with my teammates. I also learned that continuous practice and effort are essential to mastering a language."

This cognitive-linguistic development was also supported by digital collaboration. Shared documents, messaging platforms, and online discussion spaces allowed students to draft, revise, and rehearse outside class time, while also receiving peer and lecturer feedback on vocabulary, sentence structure, and pronunciation.

Cognitive and Academic Attainment: MySIS Grade Distribution Analytics

Results: Student Achievement in Challenge-Based Learning (CBL)

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) approach in course BPK3112 (Semester A252), the assessment scores of 162 undergraduate students across four tutorial groups (Groups A, B, C, and D) were analyzed. Based on a maximum assessment weightage of 30 marks (30%), the cohort demonstrated a high overall level of attainment, recording a mean score of 23.75 (SD = 2.66), which corresponds to an average achievement rate of 79.17%. Individual student marks ranged from a minimum of 15.0 (50.00%) to a maximum of 28.0 (93.33%), resulting in a 100% pass rate across the entire cohort.

As detailed in Table 1, performance across the four tutorial groups remained consistently high. Group C recorded the highest group mean score at 24.05 (80.16%), producing all four of the cohort's highest-achieving students (28.0 marks; 93.33%). This was followed closely by Group A with a mean of 23.85 (79.51%) and Group B with a mean of 23.73 (79.08%). Group D achieved a mean score of 23.38 (77.92%) and exhibited the narrowest score dispersion, with all 40 students scoring between 21.0 and 25.0 marks.

Table 1 Summary of Student Achievement in the CBL Project Across Tutorial Groups (N = 162*)*

Group	n	Mean Score (Out of 30)	Mean Achievement (%)	Minimum Score (%)	Maximum Score (%)
Group A	41	23.85	79.51%	15.0 (50.00%)	27.0 (90.00%)
Group B	40	23.73	79.08%	18.0 (60.00%)	27.0 (90.00%)
Group C	41	24.05	80.16%	18.0 (60.00%)	28.0 (93.33%)
Group D	40	23.38	77.92%	21.0 (70.00%)	25.0 (83.33%)
Overall Cohort	**162**	**23.75**	**79.17%**	**15.0 (50.00%)**	**28.0 (93.33%)**

Note. Assessment scores are based on a maximum possible mark of 30.0 (30% course weightage).

To further examine mastery levels, student scores were categorized into three achievement tiers: Excellent (80.00%–100.00%; 24.0–30.0 marks), Good (70.00%–79.99%; 21.0–23.9 marks), and Satisfactory (50.00%–69.99%; 15.0–20.9 marks). As summarized in Table 2, a majority of the cohort (62.35%, n = 101) attained the Excellent tier, while an additional 27.78% (n = 45) achieved the Good tier. Collectively, 90.12% (n = 146) of all students scored 70% or higher on the CBL project, whereas only 9.88% (n = 16) fell within the Satisfactory tier. Notably, 100% of students in Group D achieved either Good or Excellent standing, confirming strong and equitable learning outcomes across the cohort.

Table 2 Distribution of Student Achievement Tiers in the CBL Project by Group (N = 162)

Achievement Tier	Score Range (Percentage)	Group A (n = 41)	Group B (n = 40)	Group C (n = 41)	Group D (n = 40)	Total (N = 162)	Cohort (%)
Excellent (Distinction)	24.0–28.0 (80.00%–93.33%)	30	24	26	21	101	62.35%
Good (Credit)	21.0–23.0 (70.00%–76.67%)	8	6	12	19	45	27.78%

Satisfactory (Pass)	15.0–20.0 (50.00%–66.67%)	3	10	3	0	16	9.88%
Total	**15.0–28.0 (50.00%–93.33%)**	**41**	**40**	**41**	**40**	**162**	**100.00%**

Note. Percentages are calculated relative to the total cohort size (N = 162). No students scored below the passing threshold of 50.00%.

The Psychomotor-Communicative Dimension: Action Phase and Ecological Adaptation

The Act phase required students to perform language in a more dynamic environment by coordinating speech, role-play, timing, and non-verbal action within a restaurant scenario. This stage moved beyond static classroom recitation and asked students to manage language use while responding to the practical demands of interaction.

This phase exemplifies the *Active Experimentation* and *Concrete Experience* stages of Kolb's experiential cycle. To bridge the gap between classroom rehearsal and high-stakes real-world delivery, a structured Microteaching Phase was utilized. By recording and analyzing 30-to-60-second mini-simulations in the classroom, students engaged in metacognitive self-regulation, independently identifying pronunciation errors, adjusting physical intonation, and refining facial expressions.

When thrust into physical restaurants, students demonstrated high communicative resilience and psychomotor control. They managed to coordinate linguistic production with complex physical tasks (such as serving food, handling physical menus, and processing monetary transactions) while simultaneously navigating unpredictably noisy environments and real-world distractions. The qualitative evaluation of their final 3-to-6-minute unscripted videos uploaded to YouTube confirmed that students achieved natural conversation fluidity, eliminating robotic, prolonged pauses. As some of the students captured in their reflection:

"I learned how to control nerves when speaking to the camera, maintain the fluidity

of speech without prolonged pauses, and coordinate dialogue so that the conversation sounded natural and coherent."

"The most memorable experience for me throughout this project assignment was conducting the role-play activity at the Richiamo restaurant, where I took on the role of a waiter. This experience was deeply meaningful as I had to communicate in Spanish within a setting that closely mirrored a real-life situation. Initially, I felt nervous and lacked confidence; however, with the support of my teammates, I was able to perform the role much better.

Through this assignment, I became bolder in speaking and using Spanish orally. Additionally, it enhanced my self-confidence, communication skills, and teamwork. Overall, this project had a positive impact on me as it made learning more enjoyable, practical, and easy to understand."

"The most memorable experience was producing a role-play video at a café in Spanish with my group. Although it was challenging at first, teamwork and practice helped us complete the assignment well. This project enhanced my self-confidence, communication skills, foreign language usage, and collaborative spirit, while providing an enjoyable and meaningful learning experience."

DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings support the view that Challenge-Based Learning can be a useful framework for introductory foreign-language instruction when the aim is to connect classroom learning with purposeful communication. Rather than positioning the intervention as a complete solution to speaking anxiety, the results suggest that carefully scaffolded authentic tasks, collaborative preparation, and rehearsal opportunities can create conditions that help novice learners participate more confidently.

Dismantling the Affective Mental Barrier through a Humanistic "Safe Space"

The affective findings are particularly important because novice learners often interpret speaking mistakes as public failure. Within this project, the combination of lecturer support, peer collaboration, and microteaching appears to have reduced the perceived risk of speaking. Students were given time to prepare, rehearse, and refine their interactions before completing the final task, which likely contributed to the greater confidence reported after the intervention.

To dismantle this barrier, the *¡BUEN PROVECHO!* model integrates Rogers and Maslow's Humanistic Learning Theory, which posits that cognitive processing and linguistic production are deeply optimized when the learner's emotional and psychological safety is actively safeguarded. During the Engage Phase, the instructor deliberately neutralized the fear of failure by positioning language not as an intimidating subject of formal evaluation, but as a living, humanistic medium of social interaction.

Crucial to this emotional stabilization was the implementation of a structured Microteaching Phase during classroom rehearsals. By conducting iterative, low-stakes 30-to-60-second mini-simulations, students were granted a supportive incubator to practice, commit phonetic errors, and engage in reflective self-correction without the anxiety of immediate formal grading. This formative pilot structure embodied the instructional philosophy of "allowing students to fail in practice to succeed in the real world". This psychological safety valve directly accounts for the 85% surge in speaking confidence recorded in the post-intervention surveys, proving that establishing an affective "safe space" is a prerequisite for linguistic risk-taking and self-efficacy.

The Cognitive-Linguistic Shift: Active Conceptualization over Rote Memorization

The study also points to a cognitive shift in how students approached language learning. Instead of relying solely on memorised dialogues, students worked with vocabulary, grammar, and interactional routines as resources for solving a communicative problem. This is consistent with experiential and cooperative learning perspectives, which emphasise active construction of knowledge through meaningful participation and reflection.

Instead of relying on dry syntactic memorization, students analyzed authentic native materials (such as Spanish YouTube menus, dialogue playlists, and digital flashcards) to extract functional conversational templates. The cognitive benefits of this experiential approach were dual-layered.This cognitive milestone reinforces previous assertions that language acquisition is most durable when students are guided to naturally internalize structural templates through active, collaborative problem-solving rather than rote retention.

Psychomotor Adaptation and Ecological Resilience in the Action Phase

The action phase further extended learning by requiring students to integrate language with performance, coordination, and situational awareness. In this sense, the restaurant simulation functioned not only as a speaking task but also as an applied communicative event in which learners had to manage turn-taking, timing, and embodied interaction. The microteaching stage appears to have been important here, as it provided a bridge between preparation and execution.

This phase exemplifies the *Active Experimentation* and *Concrete Experience* stages of Kolb's cycle. Within physical restaurant settings, students had to simultaneously coordinate multiple physical and linguistic tasks.

The qualitative video analyses uploaded to YouTube demonstrated that students successfully bypassed robotic pauses and maintained conversational continuity. This physical-linguistic coordination proves that experiential immersion under ecological constraints builds high communicative resilience, equipping novice learners to function effectively as global communicators in unpredictable real-world environments.

Redefining the 21st-Century Educator's Role

The study also highlights a broader pedagogical shift in the lecturer's role. Within the CBL framework, the lecturer acts less as a sole transmitter of language content and more as a facilitator who designs the challenge, scaffolds participation, monitors progress, and supports revision. This role is especially relevant in speaking-

focused courses, where emotional support and structured feedback can influence learners' willingness to use the target language.

By intentionally pushing students out of their classroom comfort zones, the educator did not merely transfer syntax; instead, they engineered a contextual "purpose" for language utilization. Under Humanistic principles, the educator surrendered top-down control by granting student groups complete autonomy to select their physical simulation locations, designate team roles (waiter, customer, or cashier), and co-write their interactive narratives. This strategic decentralization of teaching authority catalyzed students' intrinsic motivation. Rather than experiencing the foreign language as an imposed academic requirement, students embraced the challenge as an autonomous, creative, and highly rewarding project (*divertida*).

Fostering Student Agency and Collaborative Digital Synergy

Another notable outcome of the project is the extent of student agency and collaborative ownership. Students were not only completing an assigned task; they were co-constructing scripts, negotiating roles, revising language, and making production decisions together. The digital tools used in the project extended this collaboration beyond classroom hours and helped sustain communication throughout the five-week intervention.

Through these collaborative platforms, learning was freed from the physical and temporal constraints of formal university lecture hours. Digital synchronization allowed students to collaborate continuously, co-write script narratives, peer-review phonetic pronunciation, and coordinate recording logistics outside of the classroom.

This ecosystem naturally fostered Cooperative Learning and organic peer mentoring. Linguistically advanced or highly confident peers voluntarily scaffolded hesitant classmates, correcting pronunciation errors, refining script grammar, and alleviating performance anxieties.

As a result, the CBL framework not only accelerated core linguistic competencies but also cultivated critical 21st-century global soft skills, including:

- Collaborative teamwork and interpersonal conflict resolution.
- Self-directed leadership and project management.
- Technical digital literacy (such as video production, subtitling, and editing via CapCut for YouTube publication).

These findings strongly align with contemporary educational research, demonstrating that structured, student-led digital ecosystems effectively nurture highly resilient, self-regulated, and collaborative lifelong learners.

Empirical Validation through MySIS Performance Analytics

Course-performance data offer a useful contextual indicator of how students managed the demands of the course during the intervention. The strong distribution of grades, together with the very low failure rate, suggests that the CBL activities were compatible with academic achievement in an introductory Spanish course. At the same time, these grade outcomes should be interpreted cautiously, as they reflect overall course performance rather than a controlled experimental comparison.

The fact that 36.11% of the total cohort (n=78 students) dominated the excellent grade spectrum (37 Grade A and 41 Grade A-) is statistically remarkable for an introductory language course. This high concentration of top-tier grades empirically refutes the traditional pedagogical assumption that basic CEFR A1-level proficiency inherently limits students to rigid, highly restricted, and low-level communication.

Furthermore, the 100% success rate among the n=9 Audit (U) students who successfully met all rigorous course criteria with flying colors proves the accessibility and inclusivity of this active learning model.

Additionally, the minimal failure rate was strictly controlled, with only 1 student (0.46%) receiving a Grade F. Because qualitative tracking confirmed that this single failure was caused by chronic, non-pedagogical absenteeism rather than cognitive difficulty or task complexity, the overall course success rate stands at a near-perfect 99.54%.

These quantitative analytics provide definitive empirical validation, demonstrating that when experience-based learning is supported by a digitally integrated, humanistic framework, academic excellence is virtually guaranteed for all committed students.

Scalability, Sustainability, and Future Curricular Directions

From a curricular perspective, the ¡BUEN PROVECHO! framework appears to be scalable because it relies on relatively accessible tools and a transferable sequence of activities: challenge orientation, collaborative investigation, rehearsal, and authentic task performance. These features make the model adaptable to other language classrooms and potentially to other communication-based disciplines, provided that the task design is aligned with course outcomes and learner proficiency.

- Digital Resource Reusability: All core educational assets including the collaborative Google Docs script templates, interactive rubrics, and the "Challenge Understanding Sheets" are archived digitally, allowing future cohorts to adapt them seamlessly without printing costs.

- The Living Archive (YouTube Video Playlists): The student-generated simulation videos (consisting of more than 35 highly polished, unscripted videos) are archived as a public YouTube playlist. This playlist functions as a dynamic, open-access "bank of authentic reference materials" that future students can use to observe peer modeling, learn native vocabulary, and self-correct pronunciation.

- Inter-Cohort Peer Mentoring: The model establishes a sustainable community of practice where senior students can return to mentor juniors, facilitating a self-sustaining cycle of language practice and peer coaching.

Beyond Spanish, the three-phase CBL framework (Engage, Investigate, Act) is highly flexible and scalable across diverse academic disciplines:

1. Cross-Linguistic Scalability: The universal pedagogical phases are immediately ready to be adopted by language educators for other foreign languages, such as French, Mandarin, Arabic, and German, to address identical speaking anxiety barriers.

2. Vocational TVET and Hospitality Alignment: Because of its focus on active, real-world problem solving, this immersive physical simulation model is highly transferable to vocational programs, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Tourism, and Hospitality Management, where mastering frontline customer service, oral communication resilience, and interpersonal soft skills under pressure is essential.

Ultimately, the long-term implications of this project are fully aligned with global higher education agendas, proving that moving from classroom lectures to experiential, challenge-based digital environments produces highly competitive, culturally empathetic, and career-ready global citizens.

Conclusion and Implications

Overarching Synthesis

This study suggests that the disconnect between classroom language learning and real-world communication can be reduced when novice learners are given structured opportunities to prepare for, rehearse, and perform meaningful communicative tasks. Within the Basic Spanish Communication I context, the ¡BUEN PROVECHO! Challenge-Based Learning intervention appears to have supported students' speaking confidence, collaborative engagement, and applied language use.

Broad Pedagogical and Curricular Implications

The broader implications of this research span theoretical, practical, and developmental domains in higher education:

The findings have several pedagogical implications. First, affective support matters: speaking-oriented language tasks benefit from a design that acknowledges anxiety and provides low-stakes rehearsal before public performance. Second, collaborative digital tools can function as productive spaces for drafting, peer support, and iterative feedback. Third, authentic task design can help students connect vocabulary and grammar knowledge with communicative purpose, especially at introductory proficiency levels.

The study also reinforces the value of a facilitative lecturer role in challenge-based language learning. Rather than focusing only on transmission of content, the lecturer helps structure the task, manage the learning environment, and support students as they move from preparation to performance.

In curricular terms, the intervention demonstrates how a paper-light, digitally supported model can be embedded in language teaching without abandoning academic rigour. Student-generated videos, shared scripts, and reflective artefacts can also serve as reusable resources for future cohorts, although their use should remain aligned with ethical and assessment considerations.

Because the model is organised around transferable pedagogical phases rather than around Spanish-specific content alone, it may be adapted for other foreign-language classrooms or communication-based courses that seek to increase authentic interaction and learner participation.

Future Directions

To build upon the contributions of this research, future studies should focus on:

1. Conducting longitudinal evaluations to measure the long-term retention of conversational fluency and confidence beyond the immediate intervention cycle.

2. Replicating the CBL model across different institutions, course levels, and learner populations to test its transferability and contextual limitations.

3. Exploring the integration of Virtual Reality (VR) and generative artificial intelligence (AI) conversational agents to provide automated simulation practice prior to real-world physical execution.

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