Developing Students' Interpersonal Speaking Skills in the Language Classroom

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Abstract

Interpersonal speaking is a fundamental skill for language learners as they progress toward higher proficiency levels. This skill extends beyond memorizing keywords or rehearsing scripted dialogues. It requires learners to engage in spontaneous interactions, negotiate meaning, and respond dynamically in real time (Burns, 2016). In an increasingly interconnected world, these skills are crucial not only for linguistic development but also for fostering intercultural competence and preparing students to actively participate in diverse communities. This mixed-methods action research study investigates the impact of daily, proficiency-based interpersonal speaking practice on students' development of interpersonal communication skills in the world language classroom. Quantitative data were collected using the Interpersonal Listening and Speaking component of the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) exam to measure student growth. This standardized assessment provided a reliable means of tracking progress over time and evaluating the effects of targeted instructional strategies. In addition, qualitative data from student reflections and classroom observations offered insights into learners' perceptions, engagement, and evolving communicative abilities. Together, these data sources revealed that a strong relationship existed between consistent, intentional practice and improved communicative competence in the interpersonal mode.

Keywords: *Interpersonal speaking skills, Interpersonal mode of communication, proficiency-based strategies, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected global landscape, the ability to communicate effectively across cultures has become a vital skill. While English remains the

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world's lingua franca, equipping students to communicate in another language is essential (Doehla, 2015). The world language classroom plays a crucial role in developing these communication abilities, particularly by enhancing students' interpersonal speaking skills. Unlike mere language acquisition, which too often focuses primarily on grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, interpersonal speaking emphasizes the dynamic exchange of ideas, emotions, and cultural nuances during real-time interactions (Brown & Lee, 2015). This aspect of language learning is pivotal for fostering genuine linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence (Prasad, 2013; Ahsanul, 2019; Thornbury, 2016). To better understand and improve these skills in my classroom, I have chosen to engage in Action Research (AR), a method of systematic inquiry that allows educators to investigate and reflect on their practices in real-time. AR is particularly well-suited to this investigation because it enables educators to examine the impact of instructional strategies within their own teaching contexts, bridge theory and practice, and make data-informed adjustments that directly support student learning. By focusing on real-time challenges and outcomes, AR can ensure that the research remains both relevant and immediately applicable to the classroom environment.

Despite its recognized importance in language proficiency, traditional language instruction continues to prioritize reading and writing skills while neglecting interpersonal speaking (Burns, 2016). This persistent imbalance may stem from several factors, including the challenges of assessing spontaneous spoken interaction, the comfort of teaching to standardized tests that emphasize literacy-based skills, and a lack of sufficient training or support for teachers to implement communicative methodologies effectively. As a result, even with increased attention to interpersonal speaking in standards and frameworks, it remains underdeveloped in many classrooms. This imbalance can lead to theoretically knowledgeable students who need more proficiency in authentic communicative situations (Nation & Newton, 2020). Smith (2004) emphasizes the critical role of speaking skills in language education, asserting that the primary goal of effective speaking instruction is to improve fluency and enhance learners' overall communicative competence. Smith argues that speaking skills should be integrated with listening, reading, and writing practices to provide a well-rounded language learning experience, as speaking is central to meaningful communication and interaction. This practice underscores the need for a shift in language instruction to prioritize interpersonal speaking skills, which require students to create, negotiate, and interact in a meaningful way (Burns, 2016).

With the advent of proficiency-based instruction and the publication of the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages by the National Standards Collaborative Board (NSCB, 2015), the focus has shifted to developing communicative competence through the three modes of communication: Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational. This new emphasis fosters students' ability to interact with cultural competence, which is “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Byram, 1997). This paradigm shift places interpersonal speaking skills at the core of language studies in the classroom, where most students are likely to use the language on a daily basis. Over the past several decades, language education has undergone a paradigm shift. Whereas traditional instruction emphasized the mastery of grammatical forms and accuracy through methods like grammar-translation (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), the focus has shifted from language forms and grammatical accuracy to learners' ability to use the language in meaningful contexts and for real-world purposes (Hancock et al., 2023) across all three modes of communication. However, research has noted a

notable gap in the development of interpersonal speaking skills among students (Hancock et al., 2023).

While there is a strong emphasis on the Interpretive and Presentational modes of communication in the classroom, teachers often face challenges in effectively facilitating students' growth in interpersonal speaking. These include the complexity of spoken interaction, language anxiety, cultural context sensitivity, balancing fluency, accuracy, and complexity, limited application of discourse analysis, inadequate textbook materials, and difficulties in integrating technology effectively (Burns, 2016). Additionally, students' perceptions of interpersonal speaking and their motivation to use speaking strategies in the classroom play a significant role in the development of their interpersonal speaking proficiency. For example, a student who finds interpersonal speaking intimidating due to fear of making mistakes or being judged by peers may avoid participating in class discussions or speaking activities (Smith, 2004; Burns, 2016; Ratih, 2016). These challenges underscore the need for a more targeted approach to improve students' interpersonal speaking skills, enabling them to engage in meaningful conversations and thereby bridge the gap in their overall language proficiency. In today's globally interconnected and culturally diverse world, interpersonal communication is not merely an academic skill but a cornerstone of global citizenship.

As emphasized in ACTFL's World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (ACTFL, 2017), interpersonal communication, especially when infused with intercultural competence, prepares students to interact with empathy, openness, and respect across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Developing these skills empowers learners to participate actively in multilingual communities, collaborate in international contexts, and navigate real-world social interactions with sensitivity and confidence. One effective approach to fostering these competencies is the use of proficiency-based interpersonal speaking strategies, which are instructional practices grounded in ACTFL proficiency levels that engage students in spontaneous, real-time communication tasks tailored to their developmental stage. These strategies prioritize negotiation of meaning, personal expression, and culturally appropriate interaction. Thus, strengthening students' interpersonal speaking proficiency through such targeted strategies is essential not only for their linguistic development but also for preparing them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected global society.

The present study employs a mixed-methods action research approach to investigate proficiency-based instructional strategies aimed at enhancing students' interpersonal speaking skills, addressing a gap in instructional practice identified by researchers such as Burns (2016), Ratih (2016), and Smith (2004). By methodically scrutinizing and refining these instructional strategies, educators can improve their approaches to promote and develop effective interpersonal speaking in the language classroom (Efron & Ravid, 2019; Mertler, 2024). This study investigates the effect of these strategies on students' interpersonal speaking proficiency levels and aims to understand students' perceptions of these strategies. It is of particular mention that the research questions that steer this investigation are of extreme importance, as they set the stage for surfacing crucial insights into the effectiveness of these strategies.

1. In what ways do proficiency-based interpersonal speaking strategies impact students' development of interpersonal speaking skills?
2. What are students' perceptions of the interpersonal speaking strategies used in the classroom, and how do the strategies or the perceptions of the strategies affect their proficiency levels?

The study aims to provide actionable insights for educators by exploring these questions. These insights have the potential to significantly enhance the teachers' ability to cultivate practical interpersonal communication skills within the language classroom by providing a more clearly understood set of proficiency-based interpersonal speaking strategies for instructional use. The potential impact of this study on language education is significant, as it can guide educators in fostering a more comprehensive and practical language learning experience, thereby enhancing students' proficiency in interpersonal speaking.

Literature Review

Interpersonal speaking, the ability to effectively communicate in interactive, spontaneous conversations, negotiate meaning, and respond to others in real-time, is essential for language acquisition and should be an integral part of daily language instruction. This skill is central to language acquisition as it reflects a learner's ability to use language dynamically in social interactions (Yashima et al., 2004). Language teaching methodologies such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) prioritize Interpersonal Speaking to cultivate communicative competence that extends beyond mere grammatical accuracy (Farid, 2015; Skehan, 1996). This literature review synthesizes significant research findings on effective strategies for enhancing interpersonal speaking skills within language classrooms, focusing on approaches, including CLT, Task-Based instruction, and Proficiency-Based instruction. These approaches were selected for their emphasis on authentic communication, learner interaction, and alignment with current proficiency-oriented standards, all of which are central to the goals of this study.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a prominent approach in language education that emphasizes communication and interaction as the primary objectives of language learning. This method prioritizes learner-centered instruction, real-life communication tasks, the significance of interaction in the learning process, and a focus on meaning rather than form (Ahsanul, 2019). Thornbury (2016) asserts that proficiency in a language encompasses more than mere grammatical understanding; it necessitates a transition from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction. Prasad (2013) highlights a departure from traditional language teaching methods, which heavily emphasized grammar and translation, towards CLT, which focuses on the ability to communicate effectively in real-world situations. The CLT approach fosters interactive and student-centered learning, where communication serves the goal and the means of learning the language. Farid (2015) notes that CLT cultivates a learner-centered environment wherein authentic communication tasks are integral to the language learning process. The research further indicates that employing CLT can lead to improved fluency, greater learner confidence, and increased motivation, as students are given meaningful opportunities to use the target language in real-world contexts.

Similarly, Radić-Bojanić (2020) discusses the effectiveness of CLT in enhancing active student participation and meaningful interaction, both of which are crucial for developing interpersonal speaking skills. Richards (2005) emphasizes that CLT facilitates a learner-centered atmosphere where students engage in authentic communication tasks, such as role-plays and discussions, to refine their interpersonal speaking abilities. These tasks often involve using authentic materials, which are materials used in real-life situations and not specifically created for language learning purposes. Rathih (2016) examined the impact of CLT on stu-

dents' speaking proficiency in ESL/EFL contexts. The findings indicated that students instructed through CLT exhibited significant advancements in speaking capabilities compared to those who received traditional instruction. Rathih attributes this progress to CLT's interactive and communicative essence, which affords students greater opportunities to practice speaking in meaningful contexts. The approach promotes active student engagement, real-life communication practice, and the utilization of authentic materials. Ratih argues that these components are instrumental in helping students develop confidence and fluency in speaking, which are critical aspects of communicative competence. Despite its advantages, educators encounter challenges in implementing CLT, including large class sizes, diverse student proficiency levels, limited resources, inadequate teacher training, and resistance from some educators accustomed to traditional teaching methods (Ahsanul, 2019; Prasad, 2013; Thornbury, 2016; Ratih, 2016).

Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an instructional approach that emphasizes using meaningful tasks to drive language learning, focusing on practical communication rather than isolated grammar drills. Skehan (1996) highlights that TBLT encourages students to engage in real-world tasks, which fosters more authentic language use and interaction. Tasks are designed to promote fluency, accuracy, and complexity in language use, which are crucial for interpersonal communication. Moore (2018) further elaborates on how TBLT encourages students to engage in problem-solving and decision-making tasks that mirror authentic communication situations, thereby enhancing their speaking proficiency. This approach is especially beneficial for developing interpersonal speaking skills, as it promotes active participation and negotiation of meaning in various communicative contexts. Farid (2015) and Hancock, Adams, and Kissau (2023) further emphasize that TBLT significantly improves learners' communicative competence and confidence when paired with adequate classroom speaking time and tailored to proficiency levels.

Proficiency-Based Instruction

Proficiency-based instruction is a learner-centered approach that tailors language tasks to students' current skill levels, facilitating gradual improvement in their communicative abilities. It focuses on aligning teaching practices with students' current proficiency levels to maximize language development. Hancock, Adams, and Kissau (2023) emphasize that this approach fosters communicative competence by ensuring that students are continuously challenged yet capable of succeeding. Proficiency-based instruction aligns with functional theories of language (Shrum & Glisan, 2000), prioritizing the practical use of language in real-life contexts and stressing that language learning is most effective when taught within meaningful contexts and used to accomplish real-world communicative functions. It integrates language functions, such as requesting, apologizing, suggesting, and agreeing/disagreeing, into its framework, ensuring students develop practical communication skills aligned with real-life scenarios. These language functions are essential components of functional theories, which view language as a tool for achieving specific communicative purposes. In Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), tasks are designed to activate these functions, allowing learners to practice the language in contextually appropriate ways (Skehan, 1996; Moore, 2018). By focusing on these functions, proficiency-based instruction improves linguistic accuracy and enhances the learners' ability to navigate various social interactions effectively. By integrating proficiency-based instruction with func-

tional theories, educators can ensure that learners not only develop linguistic accuracy but also gain the ability to use language effectively across diverse contexts. This approach also allows for the incorporation of visual aids and extended speaking practice, further enhancing learners' language proficiency and confidence in real-world communication (Farid, 2015; Richards, 2005).

Student Interactions

Student interactions in the language classroom are fundamental to building both communicative competence and confidence in language use. Ding (2021) explores the role of teacher-student interactions in developing interpersonal communication skills in EFL classrooms. The study identifies key strategies such as scaffolding, providing constructive feedback, and creating a supportive classroom environment. These strategies are shown to enhance student engagement and motivation, which are critical for developing interpersonal speaking skills. Ding (2021) emphasizes that these interactions, whether teacher-student or peer-to-peer, provide essential opportunities for practicing language in authentic contexts. Such interactions facilitate the negotiation of meaning, where students learn to clarify and respond, enhancing their fluency and ability to use language functions effectively. Additionally, Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) note that positive interaction dynamics reduce anxiety, increasing students' willingness to communicate and participate actively in language learning. These interactions are further enriched by task-based activities, which provide a comprehensive learning environment and solidify language acquisition. The cumulative effect of these interactions is a more engaged classroom, where language skills are developed in a natural and supportive environment, ultimately leading to greater language proficiency and communicative success. Learners are more likely to take risks, participate actively, and gradually build communicative competence.

Visual Support

Visual aids are crucial in language learning as they provide contextual support, reduce anxiety, and make communication tasks more engaging (Richards, 2005; Farid, 2015). These aids, including images, videos, and interactive slides, enhance understanding and prompt more in-depth discussions, which is especially beneficial for lower-proficiency learners (Ding, 2021). Farid (2015) and Richards (2005) emphasize that the functional approach, when combined with visual aids and structured speaking practice, helps students internalize language patterns and use them spontaneously in communication, thereby bridging the gap between language theory and practical use (Burns, 2016; Ratih, 2016; Smith, 2004). Chat Mats are visual aids that provide students with structured language support during conversations in the world language classroom. These Chat Mats typically include sentence starters, essential vocabulary, and conversation prompts to help learners engage confidently in dialogues. They provide structured prompts, vocabulary, and phrases to facilitate speaking practice in the target language. They aim to make language learning more interactive by encouraging students to engage in meaningful dialogues, reducing anxiety, and fostering more active participation. In online learning environments, visual aids like virtual whiteboards and video prompts are essential for maintaining engagement and facilitating real-time communication (Bachelor, 2023). Visual aids also support understanding complex tasks, making TBLT more effective in developing speaking skills (Moore, 2018). Visual aids are particularly effective in scaffolding learning and ensuring that all students, regardless of proficiency level, can engage meaningfully in speaking activities.

Speaking Time

Structured and consistent speaking practice, especially when supplemented with visual aids and interactive tasks, ensures that all students can participate meaningfully, fostering a more inclusive and effective language learning environment. This dedicated speaking time in the language classroom is critical in enhancing students' fluency, confidence, and overall communicative competence. Richards (2005) and Farid (2015) highlight that providing ample opportunities for speaking practice allows learners to apply language structures in real-time, solidifying their understanding and boosting their ability to engage in spontaneous conversation. This strategy is particularly effective in methodologies like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), where speaking activities are central to the learning process (Skehan, 1996; Moore, 2018). Additionally, integrating extended speaking time in proficiency-based instruction aligns with students' language levels, promoting gradual and sustained improvement in their interpersonal speaking skills (Hancock et al., 2023). Such a comprehensive approach enhances fluency and equips students with the confidence to communicate effectively in real-world scenarios.

Goal Setting and Reflection

Goal setting and reflection are powerful tools for enhancing speaking skills in language learning. Schunk and Zimmerman (2008) emphasize that setting clear, specific goals provides learners with direction and motivation, which is essential for consistent improvement in speaking proficiency. Lee and Mori (2021) further explain that reflective practices, such as journaling and self-assessment, allow learners to evaluate their speaking performances critically, recognize areas needing improvement, and adjust their strategies accordingly. This combination of goal setting and reflection promotes self-regulated learning, leading to more effective and sustained progress in speaking skills. Moreover, regular reflection has the potential to help learners internalize their successes and challenges, making them more proactive in seeking opportunities to practice and refine their speaking abilities.

Speaking Evaluation

Assessing speaking skills in the language classroom is a complex process that requires evaluating various aspects of communication, including fluency, accuracy, and the ability to interact meaningfully. Cox and Malone (2018) stress the importance of using assessments like the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL), designed to measure proficiency in real-world contexts in all three modes of communication. Tiu et al. (2023) add that incorporating continuous feedback and interactive activities into assessments helps capture a more accurate picture of students' oral proficiency.

While these strategies are intended to ensure that assessments not only gauge students' current abilities but also inform instructional practices, a persistent gap remains between what the literature suggests should result—effective, accurate, and confident interpersonal communication—and what students are often actually able to demonstrate. This discrepancy underscores the need for further investigation into how well-aligned assessments and instructional strategies translate into communicative competence in practice. Moreover, using tools that align with recognized standards, such as the ACTFL guidelines, provides consistency and reliability in measuring students' communicative skills. This holistic approach to assessment supports the development of speaking skills essential for effective lan-

guage use in various settings. Addressing the gap between expected and actual communicative performance is central to the present study, which explores how proficiency-based interpersonal speaking strategies can better support students' growth in real-world communication.

Thus, as the growing body of literature on effective instructional approaches to the development of communicative competence lays out, developing interpersonal speaking skills in the language classroom requires a multifaceted approach that integrates ample speaking time, interactive tasks, and visual aids. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) are approaches that have been proven to effectively promote real-time communication, allowing students to practice language in meaningful contexts (Richards, 2005; Farid, 2015; Skehan, 1996). Proficiency-based instruction further tailors these experiences to individual learner levels, enhancing communicative competence. Using visual aids and structured speaking opportunities boosts fluency and builds the confidence necessary for effective real-world communication. Tools like the ACTFL AAPPL exam provide valid measures of communicative competence, while visual aids and ample speaking time support students in practicing and refining their skills. However, these elements do not always guarantee a dynamic learning environment or measurable gains in communicative competence. This study seeks to examine how, and under what conditions, these tools and strategies can effectively bridge the gap between theoretical best practices and actual student performance in interpersonal speaking.

Methodology

This action research adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative data from pre-and post-tests to determine the efficacy of Interpersonal Speaking strategies alongside qualitative insights from student reflections. The aim is to investigate the role and the impact that these speaking interventions play as students develop interpersonal speaking proficiency. The strategies investigated include Function-based Daily Speaking Time utilizing Visual Aids, Communicative Language Teaching, and Task-based approaches embedded in Proficiency-based language instruction (Richards, 2005; Farid, 2015; Shrum et al., 2000; Skehan, 1996; Moore, 2018; Tiu et al., 2023; Hancock et al., 2023). The research design includes educator-led classroom interventions and ongoing formative assessments, allowing instructional strategies to be adjusted in response to student performance. In addition, both teacher and student reflective practices are incorporated: teachers engage in reflective journaling to evaluate the effectiveness of their methods, while students reflect on their speaking experiences and progress through guided prompts. These elements work together to support iterative improvements, informed by classroom observations and a combination of formative and summative data. This cyclical research design allows for continuous refinement of teacher-designed and implemented speaking strategies, based on real-time student feedback and observed language performance.

Participant Demographics

Thirty-five (35) students, ranging from 9th grade to 11th grade, from a Spanish 2 Honor course participated in the study. The sample consisted of 18 females and 17 males aged 15 to 17. Of the thirty-five (35) students, twenty-four (24) were Native English speakers, four (4) were Heritage Spanish speakers, and seven (7) were Native Spanish Speakers. Based on the New York State Revised Standards for Learning Languages (OBEWL, 2021), the performance indicator targeted at the Spanish 2H course is Intermediate-Low, which focuses on fostering students'

ability to interact and exchange information by creating simple sentences and asking follow-up questions (Table 1).

Table 1

2021 NYS Revised Standards for Learning Language

NYS Revised Standards for Learning Languages: Standard 2		
Interpersonal Communication Learners interact and negotiate meaning in spontaneous, spoken, visual, or written communication to exchange information and express feelings, preferences, and opinions.		
Interpersonal Speaking Performance Indicator **Intermediate Low**		
How can I exchange information in conversations?	How can I meet personal needs or address situations in conversations?	How can I express feelings, react to, and support preferences and opinions in conversations?
Exchange information in conversations on familiar topics, **create** simple sentences and **ask appropriate follow-up questions**.	**Interact** with others to meet basic personal needs in familiar situations, **creating** simple sentences and **asking appropriate follow-up questions**.	**Exchange** preferences, feelings, or opinions on familiar topics, **create** simple sentences, and **ask appropriate follow-up questions**.

Instruments

The Interpretive Listening and Speaking (ILS) section of the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) exam form B, which targets the Intermediate proficiency range up to Advanced Low, was administered as pre- and post-tests at the beginning and end of the school year to measure changes in students' ILS levels (Appendix A). According to the AAPPL Score Report, a score Below N4 means that the ILS is a Novice-Low to Novice-Mid on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, an N4 reflects Novice-High, an I1 reflects Intermediate-Low, an I2 to I4 reflects Intermediate-Mid, and an I5 reflects Intermediate-High, and A1 reflects Advanced-Low proficiency range (Appendix A). It is essential to emphasize that students actively participated in the research process by engaging in daily speaking activities, providing regular feedback through reflections and surveys, and contributing insights during classroom discussions. Their input not only informed instructional adjustments but also played a key role in evaluating the effectiveness of the speaking strategies implemented throughout the study. The pre-test AAPPL Score Report provided to students included the student score, a description of the score, and a strategy to level up (Appendix A). Students reflected on their pre-test performance and set goals to enhance their ILS level based on the speaking strategies provided by the AAPPL score report. The teacher analyzed the exam results to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention strategies, which were based on the speaking strategies to level up provided by AAPPL. Additionally, students reflected on their performance after each in-class summative performance assessment, which offered them insights into their personal experiences, challenges, and perceived improvements in their Interpersonal speaking abilities. Over the course of the academic year, approximately four in-class summative performance assessments were administered, one per quarter, providing regular checkpoints for both skill development and self-reflection.

Procedures

Participants were thoroughly briefed on the study's purpose and procedures prior to its commencement. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, their parents or legal guardians, and the administration. Ethical considerations were paramount, ensuring the integrity and trustworthiness of the research. While all students were required to fulfill course requirements, they were made aware of their rights and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants understood their involvement was voluntary, with the option to withdraw without repercussions. Data confidentiality was maintained through the anonymization of information using identifiers.

Using the AAPPL strategies to level up, Function-based Daily Speaking Practice was designed to align with real-life communicative scenarios and implemented daily for 3 to 5 minutes, primarily in pairs. The main functions were to exchange and interact using simple sentences, asking follow-up questions or clarification, and providing details using connectors and sequencing words. Students had to participate actively in the daily practice, use the startup questions to start the conversation, use Spanish during the whole speaking conversation, use the sentence starters and expressions provided, self-correct when needed, use appropriate time frame, ask follow-up questions, add more details, ask for clarification, use connectors and sequencing words. Visual aids such as simple questions to start a conversation, sentence starters, reactions and follow-up expressions, targeted vocabulary using digital Chat Mats, and authentic resources, enhanced these speaking practices in the classroom. In addition, the Interpersonal Speaking Practice slide deck, alongside vocabulary practice games, Quizlet, and Gimkit vocabulary sets, were provided to students both in and outside of class.

The Chat Mats included conversation starters, communicative language chunks, sentence starters, reactions, and level-up expressions in the target language (Appendix B). During these practices, students were encouraged to assume leadership roles, facilitate conversations, actively listen, and utilize recommended speaking strategies to improve their interpersonal speaking abilities. The complexity of the practice sessions increased as students gained confidence and expanded their linguistic repertoire. Formative interpersonal speaking sessions took place every two weeks, providing frequent opportunities for skill development and targeted feedback. Summative sessions were administered approximately once per quarter. Peer feedback sessions and self-reflections followed each formative and summative interpersonal speaking session, providing students with constructive criticism to foster self-awareness and improvement. To lower students' affective filter, no grades or explicit corrections were provided during speaking practice (Lesiana, Jaya, & Pratiwi, 2024; Ratih, 2016).

Data Analysis

This mixed-methods action research study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the impact of proficiency-based interpersonal speaking strategies on students' development of communicative competence. Quantitative data were gathered through pre- and post-assessments using the Interpersonal Listening and Speaking (ILS) component of the ACTFL AAPPL exam. A paired t-test was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the interpersonal speaking strategies. This statistical test was appropriate for evaluating whether the observed changes in speaking proficiency were statistically significant. The analysis also included the calculation of 95% confidence intervals and effect size measures to estimate the range and strength of the observed gains. A null hypothesis was

established stating that there would be no significant difference in students' interpersonal speaking scores before and after the intervention. Statistical analysis was conducted using Google Sheets, and results from this test are reported in the Results section.

Qualitative data were analyzed separately from the quantitative findings and consisted of student reflections, peer feedback, and teacher observations. A thematic analysis approach was employed to identify patterns across students' reflections following both formative and summative speaking tasks. These reflections were coded inductively to capture emerging themes related to students' perceptions of their growth, confidence, challenges, and willingness to engage in interpersonal communication. Thematic findings were then compared and triangulated with quantitative trends to offer a deeper understanding of how students experienced the speaking strategies in practice. The integration of these two data sources enabled a more holistic analysis, connecting measured proficiency gains with students' reported experiences. This approach provided both breadth and depth in evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies in fostering interpersonal speaking development.

Results

The quantitative data results revealed a significant difference between the AAPPL Pre-Test Score (M=1.86, SD=4.18, N=35) and the Post-Test (M=3.20, SD=4.22, N=35). The mean difference in proficiency gains (M=1.34, SD=0.35, N=35) was significantly greater than zero, with (t (35)= 3.84), two-tailed (p=0.001), indicating that the strategies were effective in enhancing students' speaking proficiency. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected as the probability of the observed difference in proficiency levels occurring without implementing the strategies was minimal. The 95% Confidence Level for mean proficiency gain is (0.63, 2.05) with an ILS proficiency gain that ranges from an average increase of 1 level to a maximum of 2 levels. While the quantitative data support the overall effectiveness of the strategies, it is important to note that student growth was also influenced by individual factors such as students' perceptions and motivation to apply the strategies. The qualitative analysis of student reflections further supported these findings, revealing an increase in students' confidence and willingness to engage in spontaneous conversation. Furthermore, students who used the strategies demonstrated improvements in their speaking skills. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data provided a holistic understanding of the student's development in interpersonal speaking proficiency, with AAPPL scores validating positive trends observed in student reflections and classroom interactions.

The AAPPL Pre-test showed that nine (9) students were below Novice-Mid, fourteen (14) students were at Novice-Mid, four (4) students were at Intermediate-Low, five (5) students were at Intermediate-Mid, and three (3) students were at Intermediate-High. After the use of the strategies, two (2) students were below Novice-Mid, seven (7) students were at Novice-Mid, sixteen (16) students were at Intermediate-Low, three (3) students were at Intermediate-Mid, five (5) students were at Intermediate-High, and two (2) students were at Advanced-Low ILS abilities (Table 2, Figure 1).

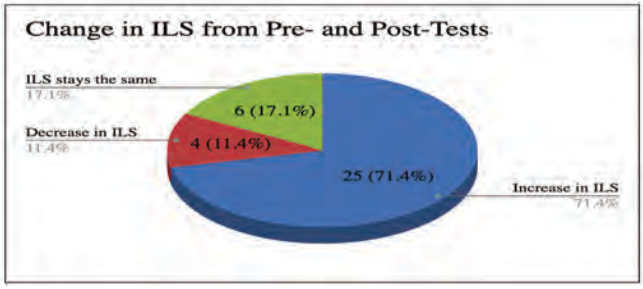
Table 2

Number of Students AAPPL Pre and Post-Tests

ACTFL Proficiency GuidelinesA	APPL Score	# of students Pre-Test	# of students Post-Test
Novice Low-Mid	Below N4	9	2
Novice High	N4	14	7
Intermediate Low	I1	4	6
Intermediate Mid			
	I2	0	6
	I3	0	4
	I4	5	3
Intermediate High	I5	3	5
Advanced Low	A1	0	2

Figure 1

Number of Students AAPPL Pre and Post-Tests



These results indicate that eight (8) students increased their ILS by one level, seven (7) students by two (2) levels, five (5) students by three (3) levels, four (4) students by four (4) levels, and one (1) student by five (5) levels. Notwithstanding, four (4) students went down 1, 2, 3, and 5 levels, one at each level, respectively (Table 3, Figure 2).

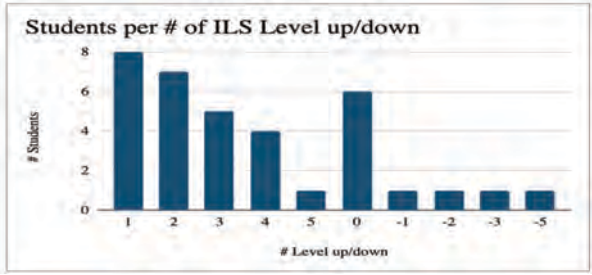
Table 3

Number of ILS Levels/Number of students

# of ILS Level up/down	# Students
1	8
2	7
3	5
4	4
5	1
0	6
-1	1
-2	1
-3	1
-5	1

Figure 2

Number of Students per Number of ILS Level up/down



The AAPPL Post-Test results showed that 25 students (71%) showed an increase in their ILS proficiency, four (4) students (11%) showed a decrease in their ILS, and six (6) students (17%) did not show any change in ILS from the Pre-Test to the Post-Test (Table 4, Figure 3).

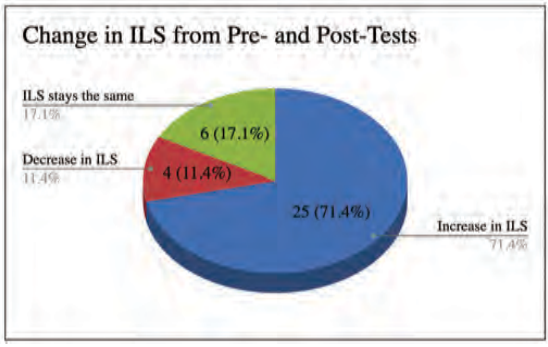
Table 4

Change in ILS from Pre- to Post-Test

Change in ILS	# of students	% of students
Increase in ILS	25	71%
Decrease in ILS	4	11%
ILS stays the same	6	17%

Figure 3

Change in ILS from Pre- to Post-Test



The AAPPL exam results demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in students' interpersonal speaking proficiency, with average scores increasing from 1.86 to 3.20 on a 5-point proficiency scale. This 1.34-point gain corresponds to a growth of approximately one to two proficiency levels. A paired-samples *t*-test confirmed that the observed gains were unlikely to have occurred by chance ($p = .001$), thereby supporting the effectiveness of the implemented pro-

ficiency-based interpersonal speaking strategies. These results suggest that consistent, targeted speaking practice, paired with aligned instructional supports, can lead to measurable growth in students' real-world communicative abilities.

The qualitative data support the finding that the strategies used played a crucial role in the increase in ILS for the 25 students. Of the 35 students who participated, 29 students responded to the Post-test reflection survey. On average, 84% of the students stated that they use the strategies and the support materials every day or at least 2-3 times a week, 15% of them stated that they use the speaking strategies at least once a week or when they feel like it, and 1% stated that they never use the strategies (Table 5, Table 6, Figure 4, Figure 5). Students' self-reported frequency of use, combined with their reflection data, suggests that regular application of the strategies contributed to increased confidence, more spontaneous speaking, and greater engagement, factors that likely played a crucial role in the observed proficiency gains.

Table 5

Frequency of strategy used by students

Number of Students per Frequency of Strategy Use				
Strategies	**Every class**	**2-3 times a week**	**At least once a week/when I feel like it**	**Never**
I focused and participated in the speaking practice (check-in, daily speaking).	17	7	5	0
I used Spanish during the whole practice time.	17	9	3	0
I use sentence starters and expressions provided during the practice.	17	9	3	0
I added details and reacted to level-up.	13	10	6	0
I asked follow-up questions.	15	10	4	0
I self-corrected myself when I needed to.	20	7	2	0
I used the appropriate time frame (present, past).	15	13	1	0
I used the Interpersonal Practice Slides Deck to practice.	13	7	7	2
I used the vocabulary links provided to build my vocabulary.	14	7	6	2
I completed my classwork on time and studied to keep up with the class speaking practices.	13	11	5	0
Average	53%	31%	15%	1%

Figure 4

Frequency of strategy used by students

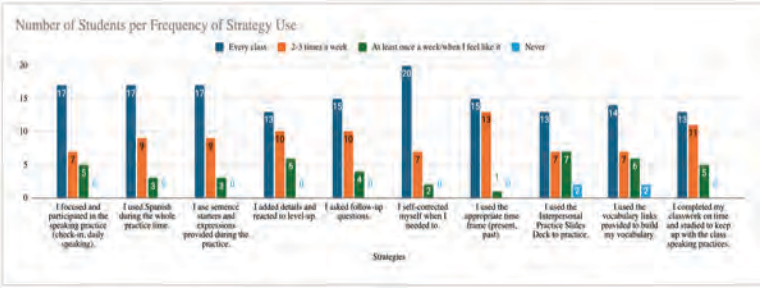


Table 6

Average frequency of strategy used by students

Frequency	Average Number of Students	% Number of Students
Every class	15.4	53%
2-3 times a week	9	31%
At least once a week/when I feel like it	4.2	15%
Never	0.4	1%

Figure 5

Percentage Number of Students per Frequency of Strategy Use

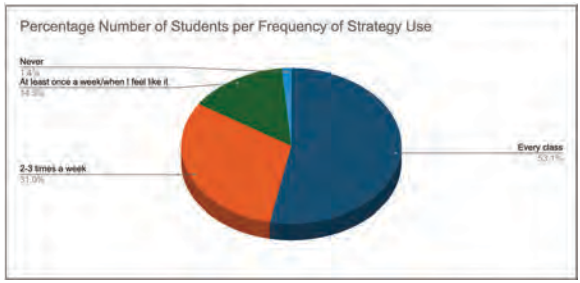


Table 7

Frequency of Strategy use by students with No Increase in ILS.

Participants	Strategy Use										
	I focused and participated in the speaking practice (check-in, daily speaking).	I used Spanish during the whole practice time.	I use sentence starters and expressions provided during the practice.	I added details and reacted to level-up.	I asked follow-up questions.	I self-corrected myself when I needed to.	I used the appropriate time frame (present, past).	I used the Interpersonal Practice Slides Deck to practice.	I used the vocabulary links provided to build my vocabulary.	I completed my classwork on time and studied to keep up with the class speaking practices.	What else do you think you could have done to improve your speaking? Why?
Student 7	Every class	2-3 times a week	Every class	Every class	2-3 times a week	Every class	2-3 times a week	At least once a week/when I feel like it	2-3 times a week	Every class	I think I could have probably focused a little more because I couldn't understand a question, I would get stressed and panic and then not understand so I think I just need to relax a little.
Student 9											
Student 21	Every class	2-3 times a week	Every class	Every class	Every class	Every class	Every class	Every class	Every class	2-3 times a week	Thinking about my answers more before I start
Student 22	Every class	Every class	Every class	Every class	Every class	Every class	Every class	Every class	2-3 times a week	At least once a week/when I feel like it	I think that I could've prepared myself not to get so nervous and tense up and speak out to the fullest of my capabilities.
Student 23											
Student 34	2-3 times a	2-3 times a	Every class	Every class	2-3 times a	Every class	Every class	Every class	Every class	2-3 times a	more vocab

However, six (6) students showed no changes in their ILS, even though most stated that they follow the strategies every day or two to three times a week. Nevertheless, four (4) of them (Student 7, Student 21, Student 22, and Student 34) mentioned their stress level and lack of preparation as an underlining factor in their performance. Since Student 23 did not fill out the reflection survey, there is no real insight into what might happened. However, one of the comments on the AAPPL score report was "Some responses were off-topic or off task" for Student 7, Student 21, and Student 24, which shed some light on their ILS score.

Table 8

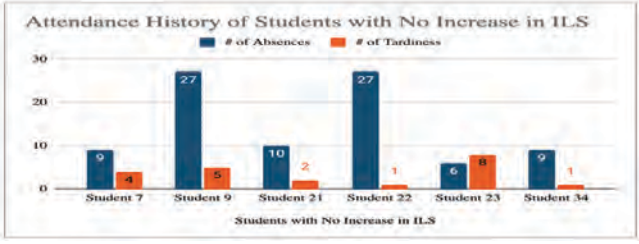
Number of Absences and Tardiness for Students with No Increase in ILS

Students with No Increase in ILS	# of Absences	# of Tardiness
Student 7	9	4
Student 9	27	5
Student 21	10	2
Student 22	27	1
Student 23	6	8
Student 34	9	1

In addition, two (2) of them, Student 9 and Student 22, have been absent for 27 days throughout the school year, according to their attendance report. Not being in class might have tremendously affected their speaking practice and partner interaction (Table 7, Table 8, Figure 9). It is worth noting that Student 9, despite being a native speaker, did not demonstrate noticeable growth in interpersonal speaking proficiency. His frequent absences, along with five recorded tardies, likely limited his participation in speaking activities and partner interactions. These findings underscore the importance of consistent classroom engagement, regardless of a student's background or proficiency level.

Figure 6

Number of Absences and Tardiness for Students with No Increase in ILS



Two of the four (4) students (Student 19 and Student 32) who demonstrated a decrease in their ILS throughout the year did not complete the survey, which could have explained their performance. While Student 4 was generally present and participated in the Speaking practice daily, her proficiency score went down by three levels. Student 4 stated that she did not understand some of the questions because she needed to recognize some words, which correlated with the inconsistency in regularly using the practice Slides and the vocabulary practice links. Student 11, on the other hand, did not add details, and some of his comments needed to be more on-topic according to the AAPPL Score Report, which is a requirement at this level (Table 7, Table 8, Figure 7).

Table 9

Students with a Decrease in ILS Frequency of Strategy use

Participants	Strategy Use										
	I focused and participated in the speaking practice (check-in, daily	I used Spanish during the whole practice time.	I use sentence starters and expressions provided during the practice.	I added details and reacted to level-up.	I asked follow-up questions.	I self-corrected myself when I needed to.	I used the appropriate time frame (present, past).	I used the Interpersonal Practice Slides Deck to practice.	I used the vocabulary links provided to build my vocabulary.	I completed my classwork on time and studied to keep up with the class	4) What else do you think you could have done to improve your speaking? Why?
Student 4	Every class	2-3 times a week	Every class	2-3 times a week	Every class	Every class	2-3 times a week	At least once a week/when I feel like it	2-3 times a week	Every class	I think that I could have studied more vocabulary to improve my speaking because there were some questions I was asked where I did not know some words.
Student 11	Every class	2-3 times a week	Every class	2-3 times a week	2-3 times a week	2-3 times a week	2-3 times a week	Every class	Every class	Every class	I believe I need to use more vocab words because I mainly used a few of the same one.
Student 19											
Student 32											

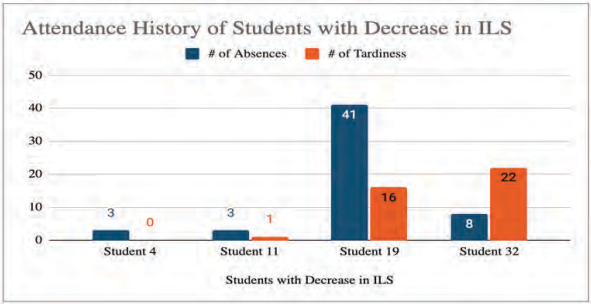
Table 10

Number of Absences and Tardiness for Students with a Decrease in ILS

Students with Decrease in ILS	# of Absences	# of Tardiness
Student 4	3	0
Student 11	3	1
Student 19	41	16
Student 32	8	22

Figure 7

Number of Absences and Tardiness for Students with a Decrease in ILS



Furthermore, attendance data show that Student 19 was absent 41 times and late 16 times. In addition to his 22 tardies, Student 32 refused to participate in class discussions and complete his classwork. He ended up failing the course. His performance and lack of motivation negatively affected his score (Table 9, Table 10, Figure 7). These two cases highlight that even native speakers, which both are, do not automatically succeed in interpersonal speaking tasks without consistent practice and participation.

The holistic approach of integrating quantitative data from the AAPPL exams with qualitative insights from student reflections provided a robust framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the speaking strategies. The correlation between improved AAPPL scores and positive student reflections indicates that the interventions successfully addressed the cognitive and affective dimensions of lan-

guage learning. While the findings from this study could be generalized due to the appropriate sample size of 35 students, and while student reflections added qualitative depth to the research, the subjective nature of self-reported data may introduce bias, as students' perceptions of their progress might only sometimes align with objective measures like AAPPL exam scores. Factors such as student absences and varying levels of intrinsic motivation to apply the strategies could also impact generalizability.

Conclusion

This action research study offers practical insights into developing interpersonal speaking skills in the world language classroom through the use of proficiency-based, communicative, and task-based strategies. Quantitative data revealed measurable gains in students' interpersonal proficiency, while qualitative data reflected increased confidence, motivation, and willingness to engage in spontaneous conversation. Together, these findings suggest that consistent, structured speaking practice, supported by visual aids, peer interaction, and reflection, can benefit all learners, regardless of linguistic background. This study highlights the importance of engaging students as active participants in the learning and research process. Through regular reflection and feedback, students helped refine instructional strategies, contributing to a collaborative environment that supported learner agency and informed teaching decisions.

Several key lessons emerged. First, chronic absenteeism, even among native speakers, limits communicative growth, underscoring the need for schools to address attendance issues. Second, while many students consistently used the speaking strategies, others required additional scaffolding and motivation. Third, peer feedback and structured reflection played a crucial role in building metacognitive awareness and encouraging communicative risk-taking.

Practically, this study presents a replicable model for educators, suggesting that professional development focused on strategy implementation could enhance classroom practice. At the departmental level, findings may inform more consistent expectations for interpersonal speaking and guide targeted interventions for students who are disengaged or frequently absent. Professionally, this research affirms the role of teacher-led inquiry in translating theory into practice. It demonstrates how iterative reflection and student input can drive instructional improvement. Future research might explore the long-term effects of these strategies across diverse proficiency levels and investigate how departments can support sustainable, student-centered practices. Ultimately, the most significant takeaway is that meaningful growth in interpersonal communication stems not just from exposure to strategies but from sustained engagement, thoughtful implementation, and shared responsibility between teachers and learners.

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Appendix A

This appendix includes samples of test forms and reports of the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL).

Figure A1

AAPPL exam test forms for different grade levels

Grades	Novice to Intermediate	Intermediate to Advanced Low
Grades 5 - 8	Form A1	Form B1
Grades 9 - 12	Form A2	Form B2
Grades 3 - 4	Form E*	NA

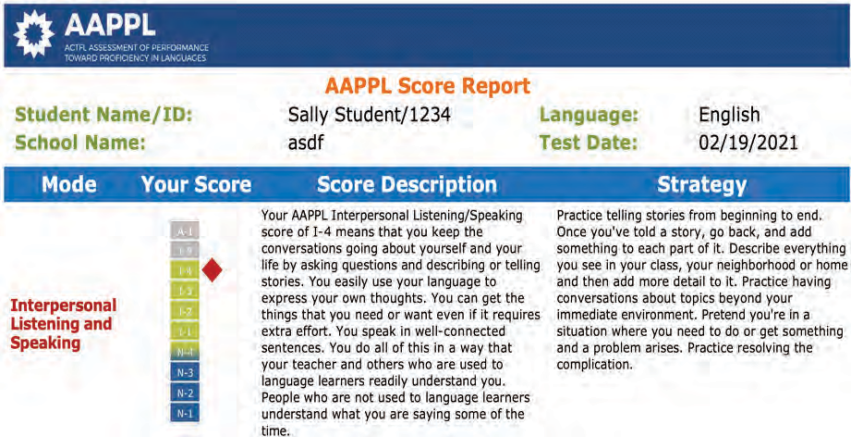
Figure A2

AAPPL Score Report Information aligned with the ACTFL Proficiency levels

ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES	ACTFL PERFORMANCE SCALE	AAPPL PERFORMANCE SCORE	FORM	
Advanced Low	Advanced	A-1		
Intermediate High		I-5		
Intermediate Mid		I-4		B
Intermediate Mid	Intermediate	I-3		
Intermediate Mid		I-2		
Intermediate Low		I-1	A and E	
Novice High		N-4		
Novice Mid	Novice	N-3		
Novice Mid		N-2		
Novice Low		N-1		

Figure A3

AAPPL Sample Score Report



APPENDIX B

Pedagogical resources

This appendix includes a selection of pedagogical materials used to support the development of interpersonal speaking proficiency. These resources were integrated into daily instruction and designed to align with ACTFL proficiency guidelines and the goals of communicative, task-based learning.

Figure B1

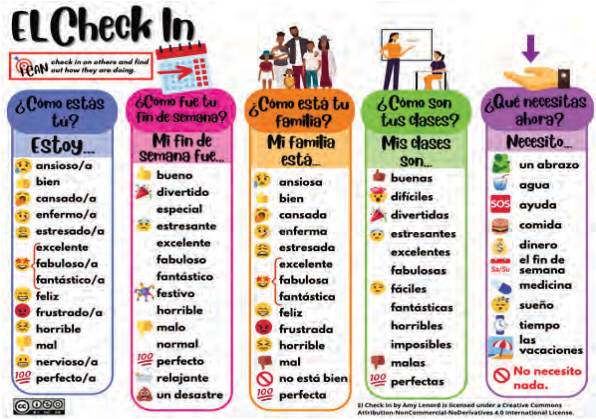
Chat Mats - Example 1

Figure B2

These Chat Mats offered visual language supports to aid students during interpersonal speaking activities. Designed to align with World-Readiness Standards and ACTFL proficiency descriptors, the chat mats featured thematic vocabulary, question structures, and conversation scaffolds to promote fluency, reduce anxiety, and support equitable participation for all learners.

Figure B3

Anchor and Aids Sample



These printable language visual supports, created by educator Amy Lenord, provided students with functional language supports for spontaneous interpersonal communication. Aligned with novice to intermediate proficiency levels, the mats offered sentence starters, rejoinders, and question stems that helped scaffold conversation and boost learner confidence during speaking tasks.

Figure B4

Sample Quizlet Vocabulary Set

This Quizlet set was designed to support students' independent study and review of thematic vocabulary introduced in class. It included terms and expressions aligned with interpersonal communication goals and offered multiple study modes (flashcards, matching, practice tests) to accommodate diverse learning preferences.

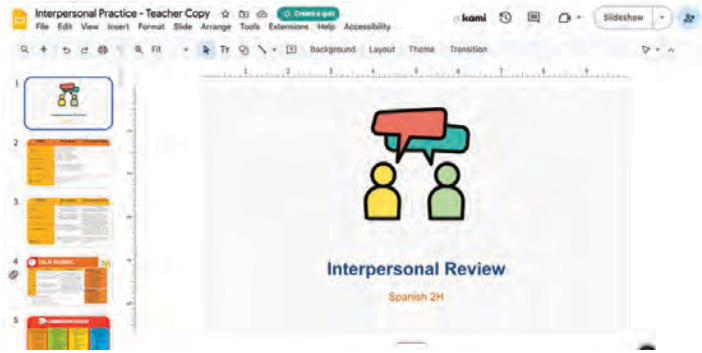
Figure B5

Sample Gimkit Vocabulary Set

This vocabulary list was uploaded to Gimkit to support students in acquiring high-frequency terms relevant to the interpersonal speaking themes of the unit. The interactive format provided students with repeated exposure and real-time feedback, helping to reinforce word recognition and usage in a low-stakes, engaging environment.

Figure B6

Interpersonal Practice Slide Deck



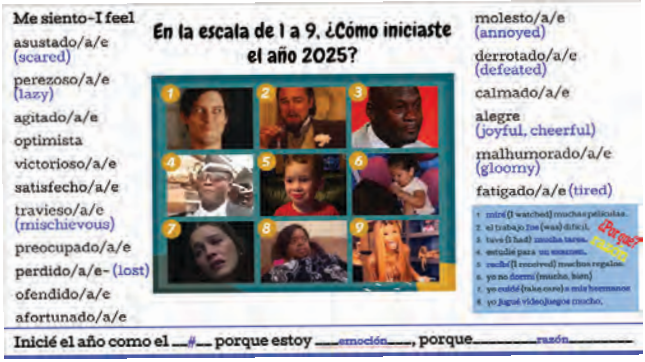
This instructional slide deck was used to introduce and reinforce key interpersonal speaking strategies. It included modeled dialogues, vocabulary support, proficiency-aligned sentence starters, and embedded practice prompts for partner work and whole-class interaction.

Figure B7

Daily Check-in - Sample 1

Figure B8

Daily Check-in - Sample 2



These daily check-in prompts were used at the start of class to encourage consistent interpersonal speaking practice. Typically completed in pairs or small groups, the prompts were aligned with thematic units and proficiency targets, helping students activate prior knowledge, build routine fluency, and engage in low-stakes, authentic conversation from the outset of each lesson.

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