



PechaKucha as a Strategy to Enhance Speaking Skills and Critical Thinking in EFL Contexts

Carlos Cazco-Maldonado¹, Erick Pacheco-Delgado²

¹ Yachay Tech University, Urcuquí, Ecuador

²Yachay Tech University, Urcuquí, Ecuador

Abstract

This study addresses challenges faced by intermediate English students at an Ecuadorean public university in developing effective speaking skills, particularly in spontaneous communication. Many students, despite meeting course requirements, struggle with fluency, improvisation, and communicative sub-skills essential for confident speaking. This research examines the use of PechaKucha presentations as a critical thinking strategy to enhance speaking proficiency and explore student perceptions of this innovative method. The primary objective was to implement PechaKucha presentations using intermediate topics and vocabulary, evaluating their impact on students' speaking skills and attitudes toward the strategy. This dual focus aimed to measure both language improvement and learner engagement. The study employed a mixed-methods approach involving about 50 intermediate-level students who actively participated and gave informed consent. The intervention required students to prepare and deliver PechaKucha presentations, consisting of 20 slides that advance every 20 seconds, encouraging concise and clear communication supported by visual content. Data collection techniques included surveys, interviews, peer and teacher evaluations, and video recordings. Quantitative data, such as presentation scores and survey results, were statistically analysed, while qualitative data from interviews and reflections were examined to understand participants' experiences. Findings revealed significant improvements in fluency, clarity, vocabulary use, and confidence. Students reported strong engagement and motivation, appreciating the fast-paced, visually-driven format that promotes preparation and focused content selection. The communicative approach strategy fostered critical thinking by requiring strategic organization of ideas within strict time limits. Additionally, opportunities for peer feedback and self-reflection were valued, contributing to ongoing skill development. The method's visual emphasis and pacing helped maintain audience attention and made presentations memorable. In conclusion, integrating PechaKucha presentations into intermediate English instruction enhances oral proficiency, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. This method actively involves students in meaningful language practice, better preparing them for real-world English communication. The study's insights offer valuable contributions to language education with social, scientific, and economic benefits, empowering students with improved communication abilities to support academic success and future employment opportunities. Results will be shared with the academic community to encourage broader adoption and further investigation of PechaKucha's educational potential.

Keywords: peer and teacher evaluation, speaking fluency, intermediate-level learners, critical thinking, Ecuador



1. INTRODUCTION

In Ecuador, English language education faces multiple systemic constraints—such as limited instructional time, scarce resources, and high student-to-teacher ratios—yet innovative strategies continue to emerge [17]. Integrating tasks like PechaKucha into regular curricula can respond to those challenges by offering a structured yet flexible format for students to practice oral skills meaningfully, even within tight schedules.

Developing oral proficiency continues to be one of the greatest challenges in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Students often succeed in grammar and vocabulary exercises but struggle with fluency, confidence, and meaningful interaction. In Ecuadorian higher education, this challenge is particularly pressing as students are required to achieve communicative competence that allows them to participate in academic and professional contexts.

Traditional approaches to oral production, such as memorized dialogues or unstructured presentations, often fail to engage learners or promote authentic communication [5]. Instead, they can create anxiety and limit opportunities for developing spontaneity, fluency, and critical thinking. Within this scenario, educators must design learning environments that go beyond linguistic accuracy to foster communicative effectiveness, creativity, and student autonomy.

One promising communicative approach strategy is PechaKucha, a presentation style where students prepare 20 slides, each displayed for 20 seconds, resulting in a concise six-minute, forty-second presentation. This format, originally created for design professionals in Japan (Klein & Dytham, 2003), has been adapted for educational contexts around the world. Its strict timing and visual emphasis encourage presenters to focus on clarity, organize ideas logically, and connect language to meaningful content.

This article describes the application of PechaKucha in an EFL university classroom in Ecuador. Rather than focusing on final results, the purpose here is to illustrate the pedagogical rationale, methodological design, and activity development process. In doing so, it highlights how structured yet creative speaking tasks can provide students with opportunities for authentic language use and deeper engagement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

One distinctive feature of the PechaKucha format is the exclusive use of images rather than text on slides. This visual emphasis aligns with research on dual coding theory [18] and multimedia learning [16], which suggest that visual and verbal channels reinforce comprehension when carefully balanced. In language learning, visuals provide scaffolding that supports idea generation and helps learners recall vocabulary in meaningful contexts [2].

Avoiding text-heavy slides also reduces cognitive overload [20], forcing students to internalize content and rely on their own words rather than reading. This strategy develops organizational skills in English, as learners must plan transitions, connect ideas logically, and use cohesive devices to guide their speech [6].

Several studies underline the role of visuals in oral tasks. [10] found that learners who presented with images performed better in fluency and coherence than those using bullet-point slides. Similarly, [11] emphasized that visuals not only aid memory but also enhance confidence, as students can rely on imagery cues to sustain their talk.

In this sense, PechaKucha merges visual storytelling with communicative practice, helping learners construct meaning and sequence ideas effectively and develop their critical thinking in the target language.

Research on oral communication emphasizes the role of task-based learning [9], communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), and project-based learning (Beckett & Slater, 2020) as frameworks



for language development. Speaking is considered the most complex skill to master, as it integrates grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse management in real time [6].

Presentation-based pedagogies have gained attention in higher education as a means of integrating content knowledge and communication skills [12]. However, conventional presentations are often lengthy, lack focus, and allow students to rely heavily on text-heavy slides [19]. PechaKucha, by contrast, demands concision and visual storytelling, aligning with principles of multimedia learning [16] and cognitive load theory [20].

Studies in diverse contexts support PechaKucha's pedagogical potential. [13] found it fostered creativity and audience engagement. [4] emphasized its ability to improve critical thinking through the careful selection of visuals and concise arguments. In EFL contexts, PechaKucha tasks have been shown to encourage students to prepare, rehearse, and use target language more strategically (Zhang & Zou, 2020; [1]).

At the same time, integrating such methodologies and strategies resonates with current calls for 21st-century skills—including digital literacy, collaboration, and problem-solving (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). This positions PechaKucha not only as a language-learning tool but as a bridge between linguistic objectives and broader academic competencies.

3. METHODS AND INTERVENTION PROCESS

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study followed a classroom-based intervention design, focusing on implementation rather than outcomes. Approximately 50 intermediate-level EFL students at a public university in Ecuador participated over a six-week period.

Phases of Intervention

The intervention process was structured into four stages:

Orientation: Week 1

Introduction to the concept of PechaKucha.

Workshop on slide design principles (minimal text, strong visuals).

Practice with timing (20-second pacing).

Preparation: Week 2 and 3

Students selected culturally relevant topics (tourism, traditions, environmental issues).

Students were trained in the principle of using only images on slides. Workshops introduced concepts of visual literacy—choosing meaningful pictures, avoiding clutter, and ensuring cultural relevance. The rationale was explained: visuals serve as memory triggers and organizational scaffolds, not substitutes for text.

Language scaffolding activities: vocabulary lists, grammar reviews, and pronunciation drills.

Drafting and rehearsal sessions in groups, monitored by instructors.

Implementation: Week 4 and 5

Students presented PechaKucha projects in class.

During presentations, students relied exclusively on images to support their speech. This required them to plan and structure their discourse in English without depending on written prompts. Instructors observed that this constraint encouraged learners to rehearse more carefully, practice vocabulary, and develop smoother transitions.

Presentations were recorded for later review.



Peer feedback was collected using rubrics focusing on fluency, clarity, vocabulary use, and audience engagement.

Reflection: Week 6

Students completed self-assessment journals.

In post-presentation journals, students reported that presenting with images alone was initially challenging but ultimately helpful for organizing ideas and avoiding word-for-word reading. Several noted that images made their discourse “more natural” and “less memorized.”

Group discussions highlighted challenges (timing pressure, vocabulary gaps) and strategies (rehearsal, simplification of ideas).

Teachers documented classroom dynamics through observation logs.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

While this article does not focus on results, data sources included:

Classroom observations.

Peer and self-assessment rubrics.

Reflective journals.

Informal feedback discussions.

This mixed evidence provides insights into how students experienced the strategy and how it shaped classroom interaction.

4. DISCUSSION

The application of PechaKucha in an EFL context offers several pedagogical advantages. First, the strict timing compels students to prioritize clarity and concision, addressing a common issue in learner presentations where excessive detail overshadows fluency [12]. Second, the visual emphasis aligns with principles of multimedia learning [16], reducing cognitive overload and reinforcing comprehension.

From a methodological standpoint, PechaKucha resonates with task-based language teaching [9], as it creates authentic communicative tasks with clear goals and outcomes. It also integrates elements of project-based learning (Beckett & Slater, 2020), since students research, collaborate, and present products to a real or simulated audience.

Importantly, this strategy supports learner autonomy and motivation. By giving students ownership of topic selection and product design, it fosters engagement and encourages them to see English as a tool for expression rather than an academic requirement.

Challenges include the initial anxiety caused by timing constraints and the need for careful scaffolding to ensure that students do not sacrifice accuracy for speed. Nonetheless, these challenges themselves create opportunities for metacognitive reflection and strategy development.

The decision to restrict slides to images only proved pedagogically significant. Traditional student presentations often become reading exercises, where learners depend on text-heavy slides and neglect fluency [12]. By contrast, the image-based constraint in PechaKucha shifted cognitive responsibility to the speaker, requiring them to:

Organize ideas in English before the presentation.

Use visuals as semantic cues to recall and connect concepts.

Focus on fluency and coherence rather than memorization.



This aligns with cognitive load theory [20], which posits that reducing redundant verbal input allows learners to allocate more attention to language production. It also resonates with multimodal learning research [15], where visual elements complement rather than duplicate verbal language.

Previous research in the Ecuadorian EFL context has demonstrated that critical thinking skills can be intentionally developed and practiced within ordinary classroom settings and regular semester timetables [8]. This provides a valuable precedent for incorporating innovative methodologies, such as PechaKucha, which aim not only to enhance speaking skills but also to foster higher-order thinking.

Importantly, this strategy supported learner autonomy. Students had to decide how to represent their arguments visually, which demanded not only language planning but also creativity and critical thinking. Instructors noted that image-only slides prompted more natural interaction with the audience, as learners looked outward rather than reading.

In sum, the exclusive use of images was not simply a stylistic choice, but a methodological tool that compelled learners to actively construct and deliver meaning in English, enhancing fluency, organization, and communicative confidence.

Ultimately, the discussion emphasizes that methodologies such as PechaKucha not only enhance linguistic outcomes but also nurture transferable skills—digital literacy, critical thinking, and confidence in public speaking.

5. CONCLUSION

PechaKucha represents a promising communicative approach strategy for enhancing oral communication in EFL contexts. The intervention described here illustrates how creative, structured, and reflective methodologies can transform classroom dynamics. While future research will focus on outcomes and measurable impacts, this article underscores the importance of methodological innovation in language teaching and the value of designing tasks that integrate linguistic goals with broader educational competencies.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

As this project is still in progress, the present article has focused primarily on the methodological design, activity development, and pedagogical rationale of using PechaKucha in EFL contexts. Based on the experience so far, several recommendations can be outlined:

Continue documenting the process: It is important to maintain systematic records of classroom observations, student reflections, and peer feedback to build a solid foundation for later analysis.

Refine scaffolding strategies: Since the exclusive use of images requires strong language organization, teachers should provide targeted support in discourse markers, transitions, and vocabulary expansion.

Promote visual literacy: Training students in how to select and interpret meaningful images is essential to ensure that visuals serve as effective scaffolds rather than distractions.

Encourage reflective practice: Incorporating student journals and peer discussions helps learners become more aware of their communicative strategies and progress.

Plan longitudinal evaluation: The project would benefit from a follow-up stage to evaluate whether skills developed through PechaKucha transfer to other academic or professional contexts.

Finally, it is important to note that final results, long-term impact, and continued application of this strategy will be presented in future articles and academic reports. This article therefore represents an initial step in a broader research agenda aimed at validating PechaKucha as a sustainable strategy for improving EFL oral communication.



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