



**Facultad de
Ciencias Sociales y Humanísticas**

PROYECTO DE TITULACIÓN

PEER FEEDBACK OF READING ALOUD TO IMPROVE SPEAKING FLUENCY

Thesis presented to Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral to fulfill the requirements for the

ESPOL

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Marco Aquino

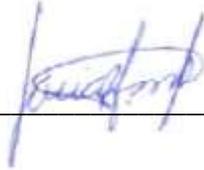
Dedication

I would like to thank God for giving us the chance to conclude this thesis in the middle of a pandemic without any inconveniences. He has allowed me to reach this wonderful moment in my life.

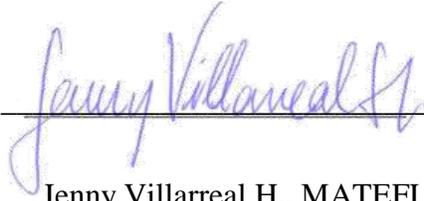
I would like to dedicate this achievement to my family, especially to my beloved wife who has been supporting me since day one, even though when I did not believe in myself she was always there for me having faith, giving me the strength and support that I needed in that special moment she has been by my side throughout all these years. So, this is part of her achievement too. To my little daughters who were very young when I started this program and they could not understand that their dad has to be gone for few days, it was heartbreaking. To my parents who always wanted the best for me and they tried to do everything that was on their hands in order to make it possible.

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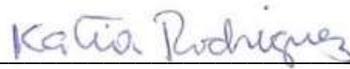
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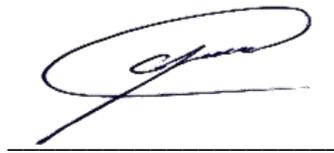
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marco Aquino', is written above a solid horizontal line.

Marco Aquino

Abstract

Students in a public higher institution had problems with their speaking skills specifically in their fluency. This study proposed the application of peer feedback to help students overcome their limitations in speaking. There were 51 participants. They were assigned to the experimental (N=27) and control group (N=24). Data was collected through quantitative (pre and posttests, a Likert scale survey, and a checklist) and qualitative instruments (learning logs and field notes). Quantitative results indicate that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the posttest. The p value indicated that the data is statistically significant meaning that the application of peer feedback of students recording (of their reading out loud) impacts students' fluency. Cohen's $d = 1.04$ confirms a large impact of the strategy for learning. The analysis by components of the rubric reiterates that fluency was the item that increased the most. These results were confirmed by students' opinion about peer feedback. Qualitative data revealed there were some limitations though. Some that were mentioned were: students' limitations in using the language, and their lack of vocabulary knowledge. Other EFL teachers may be interested in reading this thesis to improve their students' fluency or other aspects of speaking.

Keywords: peer feedback, speaking skills, fluency, reading aloud

Resumen

Los estudiantes de una institución pública de educación superior presentaban problemas con sus habilidades orales en inglés específicamente en su fluidez. Este estudio propone la aplicación de retroalimentación de pares para ayudar a los estudiantes a superar sus limitaciones en la destreza oral. En este estudio participaron 51 estudiantes. Fueron asignados en dos grupos, experimental (N=27) y control (N=24). Los datos se recogieron a través de instrumentos cuantitativos (pruebas previas y posteriores, una encuesta con temas en escala de Likert y una hoja de cotejo) y cualitativos (diarios de aprendizaje y notas de campo). Resultados cuantitativos indican que el grupo experimental superó al grupo control en la prueba posterior. El valor p refleja que los datos son estadísticamente significativos lo que significa que la aplicación de retroalimentación de pares en las grabaciones de los estudiantes (de las lecturas) tiene un impacto en la fluidez de los estudiantes. El valor Cohen $d=1,04$ confirma un gran impacto de la estrategia en el aprendizaje. El análisis por componentes de la rúbrica reitera que la fluidez en el habla fue el ítem que más mejoró. Estos resultados fueron confirmados por la opinión de los estudiantes sobre la retroalimentación de pares. Los datos cualitativos revelan que hubo algunas limitaciones. Entre ellas, los participantes reportaron: sus problemas en el uso del idioma y su falta de conocimiento de vocabulario. Otros docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera pueden estar interesados en leer esta tesis para mejorar la fluidez de sus estudiantes o algún otro aspecto de la habilidad oral.

Palabras clave: retroalimentación de pares, destrezas orales, fluidez, lectura en voz alta

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A report of the World Bank indicates that formal education is not promising. Results are lower than expected. International tests given to Ecuadorian students in fourth and six grade placed students in a low band in L1 (Spanish) subjects like: reading, science, and math (Flotts et al., 2016). This low results impact students' later academic performance in higher education.

Regarding English, Ecuador as a country has a low proficiency of English. This has been reported by the Education First reports (EF, 2019). This low proficiency has also been observed in classes. Despite the importance of English for students' professional development, they are not advancing according to set standards.

A challenging skill for students to develop is speaking. This skill involves several cognitive and communication skills that happen simultaneously. Class time is not enough for students to improve in this language ability. In classes, students do not participate orally as expected. Authors have reported several problems in EFL students when they speak: anxiety, fear to make errors, lack of vocabulary, among others. This is also a problem because local authorities have set standards for teachers and students in English (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2012). Wang (2014) conducted a descriptive study to report the problem Chinese students have when they speak. The main problem reported was hesitations and pausing to search for appropriate words. The author remarked that those problems affect the listeners and interfere in the conversation. For Hughes (2002), other problems are hesitations, false-starts,

and insufficient grammar knowledge. Standards do not only require reaching proficiency levels, improving teaching practices, but also adding technology in the lessons.

Some researchers have used reading to improve speaking. For example, Ninsuwan (2015) applied reading aloud in Thailand; Kim (2017) explored repeated reading aloud in Korea; Sedigheh, Fereidoon, and Masoomeh (2014) implemented reading aloud in Iran. Their participants were university students. They all reported positive results. Their studies were quantitative. These studies have not implemented peer-feedback.

According to Richards (2006), learning a language involves the creation of meaning, negotiation, interaction, feedback in collaboration with others. The others can be partners or native speakers. Feedback is a new way to improve language learning because students pay attention to the language characteristics. Thus, the implementation of peer feedback in this study.

Peer feedback to improve spoken fluency has been tested by researchers (Chekol, 2020; Stone, 2019). Chekol conducted a quasi-experimental study, participants were high school students. Stone (2019) tested dialogue journals to improve fluency in college students.

Participants of this study are university students. According to the regulations, they should demonstrate a B1 level, but due to the results in diagnostics tests and their low participation, their level may be A1-A2. This will be confirmed with a proficiency test.

Justification

In Ecuador, the national educational authorities have set standards for teachers and students (Ministerio de Educación, 2012). The standards are based on the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages. According to the standards, university students should start with B1 and finish their undergraduate studies demonstrating a B2 level.

However, international statistics indicate that the level of Ecuadorians is low (Education First, 2019). Moreover, speaking is twice much more used than reading and writing (Rivers, 1981, as cited in Florez, 1999).

Knowing the language means being able to apply the four language skills in different contexts. Students who are participants of this study have shown limited language use. The weakest skill is speaking. The standards indicate that students at this level should have “a good command of a broad range of language” to use it for different purposes and functions. They should be able to select a formulation to communicate in an appropriate style. They should know when to switch from formal to informal. They should keep a conversation even though the limitations that the student may have (Council of Europe, 2020; Richards, 2006).

Students have not reached the expected command of the language, range or topics. Thus, this was another motivation to conduct this topic. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles state that the focus should be given to the message and not the form which would be similar to say fluency rather than accuracy (Richards, 2006). However, the same author highlighted the integration of the different skills, due to they occur together in the real world. This justifies the use of reading and speaking though reading aloud and peer feedback. Students will listen to provide feedback.

Due to the condition of non-native speakers, teachers have to motivate students to use the language during classes. Wang (2014) pointed out teachers’ talking time in China, which is also a non-English speaking country, the researcher indicated that teachers speak more than

students. It is also advisable to expand the use of English outside educational boundaries. Thus, teachers should create the need of students to speak the language outside class hours. Moreover, Smith (2014) talked about time as a limitation. The author indicate that teachers should comply with a fix curriculum with leaves little time to plan individual speaking practices.

Richards (2006) posited “earlier views of language learning focused primarily on the mastery of grammatical competence” (p. 4). This may explain that students are used to focus on form or grammar structures rather than applying those functions orally. This also delineates the scope of the study. The language involves four skills. The focus of this study will be speaking. Additionally, students sometimes lack topics to talk about. That is the main reason of implementing reading aloud. It is expected that by reading they may incorporate new structures and vocabulary in their repertoire and this will impact their fluency. Thus, this study posits the following objectives:

General Objective:

Improve students’ spoken fluency.

Specific Objectives:

- Have students record their voices reading aloud the passages and provide peer-feedback.
- Determine if there is improvement in students’ fluency.
- Identify students’ difficulties during the process.

According to the objectives of this study, the following research questions are proposed:

Will students spoken fluency improve as result of peer feedback in student's recordings?

What are students' difficulties when reading aloud?

What are the challenges of providing feedback to peers?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This section is organized according to the main concepts of this research: speaking and the subskill of fluency, reading aloud, and peer feedback. For each concept, there is a review of several academic papers and books. Each paragraph includes a summary of theory and previous studies.

Speaking

“Communicative and whole language instructional approaches promote integration” of the four language skills to reflect natural use of them in real contexts (Florez, 1999, p. 2). The context guides the form and meaning of the conversation. In natural settings, it is spontaneous, open, and changing. Speaking, as a productive skill, can evidence language development and acquisition (Goh, 2007). It has a positive correlation with students’ academic and professional achievements (Saunders & O’Brien, 2006, as cited in Wang, 2014). It is an instructional skill as well as listening (Florez, 1999).

Richards (2006) and Harmer (2003) coincided that speaking involves several cognitive and communication skills. Wang (2014) added that speaking includes linguistic and affective factors. Wang (2006) highlighted that those skills happen simultaneously and in real time. Among the cognitive factors, authors mention conceptualization, formulation, and articulation (Levelt, 1989).

Conceptualization involves the information the speakers choose to give meaning to their utterances. Formulation is the word choice and the proper grammar use. Articulation is to

actually speak by using the mouth. These three cognitive factors happen at the same time. This makes it challenging to non-English speakers to communicate specially at the beginning levels (Levelt, 198; Wang, 2014).

The linguistic factors require students to use correct pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary (Bygate, 2005). Speaking with correct pronunciation makes the utterance intelligible. It means others understand what the speaker is saying (Goh, 2007). It also involves accurate use of stress and intonation. There are different types of stress according to the level: word or sentence. Intonation refers to the pitch and it determines if it is a question or a sentence. Inaccurate stress or intonation may cause misunderstandings in the communication.

On the other hand, Larsen-Freeman (2001) highlighted that EFL learners have difficulty in transferring their knowledge of grammar structure to their spoken language. They seem to write well or understand readings but they are unable to use that grammar in their oral communication. Florez (1999) pointed out that the linguistic competence should not be the focus because students should also know when and why they enter in a conversation which is part of the sociolinguistics competence.

The last linguistic factor is vocabulary. Nation (2001) argued that the knowledge of vocabulary is highly correlated to its use in spoken communication. The author sustained that if students have limited knowledge of words in L2, they can hardly produce it. This is a factor that impacts students' fluency (Levelt, 1989). The reason is that if students lack vocabulary they will stop their intervention to search for words in their limited repertoire.

Regarding affective factors, authors coincide that the most common are anxiety and self-restriction. Anxiety does not only refrain oral proficiency; it also impedes learning. Brown (2001) mentioned that EFL students fear making mistakes, being stupid or that others do not understand what they are saying. When students are anxious, they forget their knowledge of vocabulary (Zhang & Jia, 2006). Additionally, students become frustrated for “formulating and articulating speech under pressure” which in turn “can leave some learners feeling frustrated or unsuccessful if they are unable to generate a clear idea or adequately express what they want to say” (Smith, 2014, p. 233).

Trying to understand this situation, Richards (2006) shared that earlier good teaching habits included accurate production of sentences and avoiding making mistakes. Teachers in the past planned controlled activities which promoted correct use of the language and minimized mistakes. Currently, teachers should make sure to “develop a different view of learners’ errors” (p. 5). Smith (2014) observed that students at beginning level prefer accuracy to avoid making mistakes. They are more willing to use the language and the tools available at their level.

It is also important to determine how speaking should be addressed by teachers. Authors agreed that students need extended exposure of input either from listening or from reading before they can produce. They also highlighted that the practice should shift from controlled to free (Harmer, 2003; Richards, 2006). Florez (1999) asserted that skills and habits should be developed. Other skills include knowing when to take turns, rephrase, provide feedback or redirect.

Talking about a methodology to teach speaking, Wang (2014) sustained that it should involve: pre, while, post and extension activities. In the pre-activity, students are provided with authentic input, planning and support. In this stage, students plan their participation. The previous model is different from Willis and Willis (1996), who recommended three stages: input through modeling, rehearsal in groups, and performance in front of the class. In the same line, Florez (1999) added two other stages, and his plan includes: evaluation and extension. In the evaluation stage, students compare their work with a model provided by the teacher. Goh (2007) presented a sequence to improve fluency. It is made up of input activities, fluency activities, accuracy exercises, and repetitions. Liu (2006) suggested to prepare students for speaking activities and do not ask them to participate without having plan their oral task.

In order to assist students in getting ready for professional endeavors, classroom practice should aim to develop speaking skills like: reporting, negotiating, clarifying, and problem solving (Grognet, 1997, as cited in Florez, 1999). Others consider speaking as an automatic act of retrieving, performing, and operating the spoken language skills (Brumfit, 1984; Rehbein, 1987; Schmidt, 1992).

Fluency.

For Smith (2014), there is no consensus of what being fluent means. As a general definition, the author mentioned that it means to say many ideas and content fast. This author also sustained that the previous definition is an intuitive one. It refers to the flow of the utterances and if there are not many pauses or hesitations. In a review of definitions of EFL fluency, Nation (1989) maintained that it was the time of speech that is filled with words and

said it can be measured not only by the speed of the talk and the flow of the oral participation but also by the control of the language system.

Lennon (2000) added a new competence that involves transferring thinking to speech; and that thinking refers to a response to the listener. It means the speakers pay attention to the listener in order to create a message. Thus, the speaker focuses on the response in an interaction rather than in the process of producing correct forms. However, students at some point stop their intervention due to lack of vocabulary and prior knowledge of the topics which makes them unable to conceptualize their own thoughts (Smith, 2014). On the other hand, Pawley and Syder (1983) described it as “a native speaker’s ability to produce fluent stretches of discourse” (p. 91). This last definition does not refer to EFL.

Different from accuracy that focuses on the appropriate use of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation when speaking (Harmer, 2003; Richards, 2006; Wang, 2014). Yuan and Ellis (2003) summarized the previous definition into the application or observation of the language rules.

Problems with fluency may influence negatively in the speaker and in the communication itself (Wang, 2014). Skehan and Foster (1999) provided an explanation of probable problems with fluency. They stated that students pay more attention to accuracy and it does not leave much attentional capacity to focus on other areas like fluency.

Which activities promote fluency in the EFL class? Goh (2007) reported three types of activities that improve fluency: information-gap, problem solving, and social monologues. They have in common that students talk about the topic providing their own ideas. In these activities, the focus is not accuracy but meaning.

Another strategy to promote fluency is the 4/3/2 technique given by Maurice (1983). With this technique, students have to repeat the script three times. The 4/3/2 stands for the minutes they have to speak. So, they have to reduce the time of speaking in every practice. The rationale of this strategy is that students familiarize with the content which makes further repetitions faster and lower anxiety. Other researchers have tested the same technique with half of the time with positive results (Arevart & Nationa, 1991). Smith (2014) improved Maurice's strategy by adding a Bottom-up approach. For this author, fluency requires pressure to speak and a meaningful topic. A foundation principle to improve fluency is automaticity.

Lastly, repetition has shown to improve fluency and accuracy. Bygate and Samuda (2005) defined task repetition as "the repetition of the same or slightly altered task whether whole tasks, or parts of a task" (p. 43). They highlighted that it should be practical and that students should not see it as pointless. Benefits of repetitions are: they aid with cognitive loads and reduce mistakes. Ellis (2005) added that they improve fluency. Smith (2014) stated that when students repeat they improve their previous practice before they can become fluent in subsequent tasks.

To help students develop their communicative competence, teachers should link the grammatical development to communication. However, grammar should not be introduced in isolation. It should be discovered by the tasks provided. Developing the communicative competence also involves reflection, interaction, and negotiation (Richards, 2006). All of these can be achieved by providing peer feedback of students reading aloud.

Reading Aloud

Richards (2006) sustained that to demonstrate communicate language students should understand different types of texts, language use and organization, follow speech at different speed rates, and identify key information in a passage, among others. This author mentioned that teachers should induce students or have them discover the grammar rules. By reading aloud different texts students may discover grammar rules, acquire them unconsciously, and later transfer that implicit knowledge in their spoken production. Richards mentioned that learning is a cyclical process that integrates trial and error.

Reading in EFL has been considered as an interaction between the reader and the text. In order to understand the content, the reader needs knowledge of the vocabulary in the passage and the reader must have a prior knowledge of the content to comprehend it (Lenz, as cited in Ninsuwan, 2015). Krashen (2009) highlighted that students can learn vocabulary incidentally when they read. Knowing more vocabulary will let them express their ideas fluently.

This technique has also had positive results in native speakers in two-fold; first children improve comprehension and their motivation to read (Flesher et al, as cited in Ninsuwan, 2015). When students read aloud they notice that words are read in units not one by one. By reading, students also get meaning in context and can expand their repertoire lexicom (Dhaif, as cited in Ninsuwan, 2015).

Florez (1999) indicated that teachers should include in their lessons: imitative drills, intensive drills, responsive short replies, transactional dialogues, interpersonal dialogues, and extensive monologues. They were proposed to be practiced in pairs during speaking practices. None of them included reading aloud. These activities are independent of each other. There

should be an introduction of the practice to be used. Students should know the functions and the real context where they may use the lesson points. However, there should not be an overload of vocabulary or grammar forms because they can distract students from the speaking goal.

Wang (2014) concluded that before speaking students should “be helped sufficiently in knowledge” (p. 115). Thus, the recognition of same vocabulary and grammar impact students’ cognitive retention (Lewis, 1993) and accelerates the thinking process required when speaking (Goh, 2003). This builds automaticity which in turns deals with pressure and cognitive loads and favors speaking fluency. Goh (2007) recalls that language-focused tasks are necessary to improve performance in following similar exercises. Ellis (2002) confirmed that three stages are needed for students to improve accuracy in their speech: noticing, comparing, and integrating. The first helps students direct their attention to the characteristics of the language. In the second, students compare the structure of their mother tongue and the new language. In the last, students are expected to transfer the new characteristics they find into their speech. When they transfer, their fluency is likely to improve.

Feedback

Students need to analyze and assess their output to improve their language use (Lessard-Clouston, 2018). There are two types of assessment: Summative and Formative. Summative is the one that is done at the end of a period. It can also refer to proficiency tests or standard international tests that measure the knowledge of students in certain areas. On the other hand, formative assessment is conducted regularly during the learning process. This type of assessment can be taught to students by training them to provide feedback. If students start

providing themselves and others feedback, this will not only reduce teachers' loads of work but also will make students become responsible of their learning.

Nakata (2014) and other researchers (Lee, 2013; Li, 2010; Lyster, Sayto, & Sato, 2013, as cited in Nakata 2014) referred to feedback as information provided to students describing their performance. They agree that this report facilitates the learning of a new language that can be a second or foreign language. Wiggins (2012) added that formative assessment if followed not only by lots of feedback but also with several opportunities to use it, improves to a great extent students' performance and academic achievement. Hattie (2009) confirmed in his visible learning strategies that feedback has an impact on learning.

However, Wiggins (2012) differentiated advice, evaluation, and grades. He argued that they do not assist students in their learning or to reach goals. He pondered what the truth is about feedback. A different perspective is given by Ebersviller (2013) who uses peer-review, feedback, and evaluation interchangeably. Wiggins (2012) recalled Hattie (2009) and stated that after decades of research there is not a real or reliable definition of feedback. Therefore, in a general sense, for Wiggins feedback is a comment made after the performance. That comment has been called advice, praise, and evaluation but not feedback specifically. He ended that feedback should be measurable in terms of goals.

Thus, Wiggins (2012) analyzed comments in real life about personal goals, and professional tasks. This reflection made him compiled six components that effective feedback should observe: goal-referenced, tangible, transparent, actionable, user-friendly, timely, ongoing, and consistent. This means performance has to be clear to teachers and students. They both need to know how the quality work is described. In this regard, Nakata (2014)

researched the difference between time and delayed feedback. This author sustained that in prior studies there was not a difference found. It was mentioned that written feedback should be given and received immediately, though.

The Department of Education and Communities (2015) contributed to this topic by classifying the types of feedback. For this institution located in the state of New South Wales, there are several types of feedback: oral and written; during and after learning; evaluative and descriptive; informal and formal; peer and self-feedback. In this vein, Larsen-Freeman (2001) added *corrective feedback*. This can be given by the teacher and peers. When peers provide feedback, it builds cooperation. According to the Communicative Language Teaching approach stated by Richards (2006), there are new roles for students and teachers. Students have to be involved in their learning process. Teachers become facilitators. They should monitor and model.

Peer Feedback

Speaking is also an interactive process. Brown (2001) indicated that the information is produced, received and processed. Richards (2006) pointed out that one evidence of language learning is “paying attention to the language one hears (the input) and trying to incorporate new forms into one’s developing communicative competence” (p. 4). In this study, students have to record their voices and share the recording with their peers. They will listen to their peers’ recording, compare it with the one provided by the teacher (model), and provide feedback. Richards (2006) also mentioned that students should try, experiment different ways to say things, expand language resources, notice how the language is used, and “become

comfortable with listening to their peers” (p. 5). To this end, the classroom is a community where collaboration and sharing is expected.

Authors have also listed some benefits of different types of pair work, like peer feedback in this case. Benefits vary from: hearing the language, increasing individual’s participation, engaging, and developing fluency (Richards, 2006).

The Department of Education and Communities (2015) suggested that peer feedback is useful for ongoing work and the focus is improvement. The most relevant feature of this type of feedback is that students deepen on understanding and comprehension of the content and mechanics based on their learning goals. In addition, Gielen, Tops, Dochy, Onghena, and Smeets (as cited in Ebersviller, 2013) coincided that students develop more carefully their work when they know that peers will be reading it. Phielix, Prins, and Kirschner as well as Yang (as cited in Ebersviller, 2013) added that peer revision brings different perspectives to students’ work. This author also reported studies that proved peer work as a strategy that develops a better learning environment.

Nonetheless, if they are let alone to do this task, they will easily get distracted or not provide effective feedback. This implies that teachers are called to scaffold how to provide constructive feedback (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Students need explicit instructions on how to comment on peer’s work. Teachers can also use strategies like a sample form. These suggestions will benefit peers in two folds: Students will become accountable for providing feedback and they will know what it is expected from them. This fits Wiggins (2012) essentials of effective feedback. To train and scaffold students in providing feedback, a checklist was developed. It includes items they should focus. The teacher will provide a

model. Students will compare the recording against the model to provide feedback (Appendix 1).

Lastly, the assistance of peer students in the classroom facilitates the teacher's work: First, it enhances students' abilities to improve accuracy (Ebersviller, 2013); second, it raises students' awareness of mistakes (Department of Education and Communities, 2015), and finally, it reduces teachers' loads of revision. It is based on social interaction theories to build understandings on students (Farrah, 2012). Providing feedback to peers is also considered a learner-centered activity (Ministerio de Educación, 2016).

Technology to facilitate peer feedback

Twenty first century students are acquainted with technology and navigate it smoothly in constant basics. Educators should take advantage of this and involve learning activities using appropriate applications. There are several applications that have many resources to improve speaking. Some are Whatsapp, Padlet, and Podcast.

Squires (2014) reported that there is a high percentage of higher institutions faculty that are willing to adopt m-learning. The applications Whatsapp that this research proposes to use can be viewed from mobiles. Benefits outperform challenges: Most students own their own devices, they are available seven days anytime, and there is not an extra cost. In certain cities of Ecuador, there is free wi-fi, which makes connectivity available.

Researchers highlighted the benefits of mobile devices for effective learning. They mentioned that due to the availability, facilitators can provide feedback at any moment. The information can be stored and retrieved when students have the time and desire to get back to it (Lin, Shuying, Weili, & Xiaohan, 2011 as cited in Squires, 2014). Wang (2014) stated that

recording students' voices, they will have a record of their output, they can see their improvement, and get individualized corrective feedback.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

A mixed design quasi-experimental study will be implemented. It will include qualitative and quantitative instruments. As described by Bryman (2012), qualitative research usually emphasizes words. On the other hand, quantitative data gather information in terms of numbers. Both deal with theory, quantitative research tests theory whereas qualitative generates it. Therefore, they will be applied in this research to collect data (quantitative) and explain those results (qualitative). They will support each other.

Participants

In order to get students' demographic information, a survey was sent. It was developed on Google Forms. The link was sent to students' email addresses. They completed it online due to the pandemic situation. They study at a public university in the highland region of Ecuador. The sample consisted of 51 students. They were divided into two groups: experimental (N=27) and control (N=24).

Ages ranged from 19 to 26. The mode in age was 21. Regarding gender, there were more females (65%) than males (35%). Most of them attended the fourth semester (78%) of their main studies. The rest belonged to the fifth, sixth and seventh semester. There was one that reported to be Cuban. Most of the considered themselves to be mixed-race (85%), the remaining indicated they were indigenous (13%), Caucasian, and Afro-Ecuadorian. The 87% of this sample checked they were Catholic. Their social status was mainly middle class (72%) followed by low-income (28%). One of the students indicated he spoke Quichua.

Regarding their experience with English, they consider their level of English is intermediate (57%) and basic (43%). The skill they have most difficulty with is listening. Few students in this sample also reported difficulties with speaking, pronunciation, grammar tense, reading, writing. One student recognized they need to pay attention to understand. Another consider relevant to practice. There was a comment related to the pandemic situation and that it did not allow to practice speaking. A representative sample (31%) mentioned they have studied English from school. There were seven positive comments about learning English.

Participants were asked about technology they used in their classes. They all have at least one device for their classes (laptop: 67%; smartphone: 45%; desktop: 31%). There are some that checked having the three devices. There was one student that reported not to have internet access, all the others indicated they connected from home.

The sample was divided into the experimental (n=27) and control group (n=24). Results of the proficiency test determined that in the control group 25 students were beginners and two were at the intermediate level. On the other hand, the control group was made up of 19 beginners and five students were at the intermediate level. The teacher was assigned two courses. They were randomly assigned one course to be the experimental and the second to be the control group.

Instruments

The qualitative instruments will be field notes, and open-ended questions after students' practices (a type of learning logs). Quantitative data will be collected from a pre and posttest. These instruments will answer the following research questions:

1. Will students spoken fluency improve as result of peer feedback in student's recordings?
2. What are students' difficulties when reading aloud?
3. What are the challenges of providing feedback to peers?

Pre and posttest

They will be samples from the First Certificate test. Exercise 2 will be considered exercise which asks students to describe pictures. They will be graded with the rubric of the same exam. The rubric will be adapted to the test. The rubric includes four components: Grammar and Vocabulary, Discourse Management, Pronunciation, and Interactive Communication (Cambridge, 2008). For the purpose of this study, interactive communication will not be considered. Instead, fluency was added. The researcher wanted to measure improvement in fluency. The bands go from excellent (10-9) to not so good (6 or fewer). These bands were required to determine whether students were improving or not. It is expected that students move from one band to the next. Additionally, another English teacher will grade the posttest to raise reliability and avoid bias. Even though the test was standardized, the researcher worked with the students during the intervention and that interaction may affect the grading of the posttest. Thus, it was necessary to have another teacher. This instrument will provide information of improvement or not in speaking as a whole and specifically in fluency.

Field notes

The teacher will complete field notes to identify students' difficulties during the process. The teacher will focus on behavior, performance, and reactions when students conduct the speaking practices. This will be observed and filled in during the process.

Learning logs

Students will complete two open-ended questions after their practices to determine the difficulties from their point of view. The questions will be: what are the difficulties I had during this practice? Is reading aloud helping me to speak more spontaneously? Why? Is my feedback appropriate? Why? (Appendix 4).

Survey

It was adapted from Wang (2014). It has 12 items. One item was split into two (speak with pauses and hesitate when I speak). Items 10-12 were added to fit this study. They ask students if they use peer feedback, if they listen to English and understand it. This will be taken at the beginning of the study to describe students' prior experience in speaking, reading aloud and peer feedback.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be recorded in an excel spreadsheet to get descriptive statistics. This information will be used to describe the results. They will be shown in tables and figures. Qualitative data will be categorized according to the answers provided by the participants to answer the research questions. Quotations will be used to exemplify the interpretation of the researcher.

Chapter 4

Findings

This study posed three research questions: Will students' spoken fluency improve as result of peer feedback in students' recordings? What are students' difficulties when reading aloud? And what are students' difficulties when reading aloud? Table 1 shows the summary of the descriptive statistics obtained from the experimental group (N=27). It includes the results of the pre and posttest results.

Table 1

Pre and posttest results

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>p</i> value	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Pretest	36	53	42.555	4.635	0.00	1.04
Posttest	39	60	47.888	5.521		

The descriptive statistics report an improvement from the pretest to the posttest in the minimum and maximum grade as well as in the mean. The standard deviation also increased but the dispersion is not very high and it does not differ much from the one on the pretest. The $p = 0.000$ means that the results are statistically significant and that they were due to the implementation of the strategy (peer feedback of students' recordings). Cohen's *d* is reported and it determines that there is a large impact for learning. These results answer positively

research question number one: Will students' spoken fluency improve as result of peer feedback in students' recordings?

To expand the interpretation of the results, there is an analysis by components of the rubric. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the pre and posttest for the constructs: grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, and fluency.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics by components of the rubric

Component	Pretest				Posttest				<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD		
Grammar and Vocabulary	6.00	10.00	7.11	0.97	6.00	10.00	7.93	0.99	0.00	0.83
Discourse Management	6.00	9.00	7.07	1	6.00	10.00	7.52	0.93	0.00	0.46
Pronunciation	15.00	25.00	18.50	2.49	17.00	26.00	21.18	2.84	0.00	1.00
Fluency	9.00	13.00	9.85	0.90	9.00	15.00	11.26	1.40	0.00	1.19

It can be observed in the table, that there was improvement in the Minimum grade of Pronunciation. The maximum grade improved in the posttest in the constructs of: discourse management, pronunciation, and fluency. The means of all constructs increased in the posttest. The *p* value of each component of the rubric indicates that the results are statistical significant. There is impact for learning in all constructs. The highest impact was on fluency and the

lowest on discourse management. This confirms that the application of peer feedback in students' recordings impacts their spoken fluency.

To raise the reliability of the results, a control group was included. Table 3 reports the results of the posttest of the experimental and control group.

Table 3

Comparison of the posttest results: Experimental and Control group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>p</i> value
Experimental	27	39	60	47.888	5.521	0.00
Control	24	32	57	40.71	5.988	

Results shown in table 3 determine that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the posttest. Even though, there were more intermediate students in the control group, the application of peer feedback of students' recordings proved to impact students' speaking. The $p=0.000$ confirms that the results are statistically significant.

Revising the field notes, it could be mentioned that at the beginning students were not very comfortable with the strategy, it seems they needed preparation. As time passed, students started to feel more comfortable. The topics of readings raised their interest. The readings had new and different vocabulary.

To answer research question 2 (What are students' difficulties when reading aloud?) a survey was applied at the beginning of the intervention. Students in the experimental group

(N=27) completed this survey. According to students' perspectives, they had problems with accuracy when they speak (pronunciation, grammar mistakes, and vocabulary) and fluency (pauses, and hesitation when they speak). They consider they are sometimes and often misunderstood by the listeners. Most students indicated they used reading aloud to practice speaking. They mentioned that they usually listen to English. Regarding understanding recordings, they reported that they seldom, sometimes and often do.

Table 4

Results of the survey

When I speak, I	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
1. Make mistakes in my pronunciation.	0	1	16	10
2. Make mistakes in grammar when speaking.	0	5	10	12
3. Cannot remember some vocabulary when speaking.	0	7	18	2
4. Speak with pauses	0	8	11	8
5. Hesitate when I speak.	0	2	19	6
6. Use substitution words for those that I do not know.	1	13	4	9
7. Worry about making mistakes when talking in English.	1	4	5	17
8. Am misunderstood by my listeners.	4	2	18	3
9. Read aloud to practice speaking.	1	6	16	4
10. Provide feedback to my classmates.	6	10	5	6
11. Listen to English.	0	5	15	7
12. Understand when I listen to English recordings.	0	12	9	6

Another instrument applied to answer this question was the learning logs. They had four questions. Two of them were used to answer research question 2. The other two questions answered research question No. 3. Learning logs provided the perspective of the participants during the implementation of reading out loud. Participants were asked about the difficulties they had when reading out loud. They stated as main difficulty the pronunciation of new

words. They added that they did not know the meaning of some words and that made it difficult not only to pronounce them but also to understand the readings, one student wrote: *“it was difficult to read the words I did not know and I did not understand the reading very well”*. Another student mentioned *“I did not know how to pronounce some words and there were sections that I did not understand, so I did not know how I had to express them or the tone of voice I had to use.”*

There were some specific words the participants highlighted that they did not know how to pronounce: numbers and dates. However, they also recognized the benefits of the strategy. They mostly referred that by reading out loud they increased their vocabulary length and their pronunciation. An extract from the learning logs is: *“mainly the pronunciation of certain words, numbers... new vocabulary... there were words I did not know”*. One student indicated to have learned about the content of the texts: *“interesting things from different places and people... the readings were interesting”*.

To support the results of students’ point of view, this paragraph describes the difficulties observed by the researcher that were included in the field notes. The researcher coincided that students’ main difficulty was the lack of vocabulary. They also pronounced the words the way they considered it was correct. This ended up in a lot of hesitations and pauses while they read. Additionally, it was observed that they tended to misunderstand the readings.

Comparing the results of the three instruments (survey, learning logs, and field notes), it can be concluded that students’ main challenges in speaking when reading out loud are the lack of knowledge of the pronunciation of the words, and the lack of vocabulary. The lack of vocabulary also interferes with students’ understanding of the passages they are exposed to. At

the beginning students recognized they had problems with accuracy and fluency. During the process, and at the end of it, they recognized that the practice of reading out loud helped them not only in learning and recalling vocabulary but also in understanding the content of the texts.

To answer research question No. 3 (What are the challenges of providing feedback to peers?), results from the survey (table 4, item 10) indicated that more than a half of them (16) had not or had seldom provided feedback before. Data from the open-ended questions in the learning logs (Appendix 4) revealed students' perspectives when providing feedback and when receiving it. Students wrote in Spanish and their responses were translated into English by the researcher.

Regarding their perspectives when providing feedback, students were not confident because of their language limitations. They mentioned the following: did not know how to provide feedback, did not know the correct pronunciation or accent, and the words were new for both them (as students) and their peers. Due to these limitations, they referred to their feedback as not being concrete or precise. One student wrote *“my peer and I pronounced differently the same word, and that lower my comprehension of the text.”* The same point of view was shared by two other students. On the other hand, one student claimed *“It was not difficult because my partner understood English and I did not have to correct many things”*. Another student mentioned he learned how to pronounce words because he listened from the peer.

Students' perspectives about receiving feedback were all positive. They considered that their peer's feedback helped them because they knew they had to practice, improve their pronunciation, they realized their mistakes, and they could correct pronunciation mistakes.

One student stated “*my partner corrected and explained how I had to read. It was helpful because I learned better*”. Some of them added that the feedback of the teacher was also important because the teacher clarified their doubts. One student added “*I learned a lot.*”

Results from the field notes indicate that students’ biggest challenge to provide feedback is that they do not trust their peers’ feedback. At the beginning, they did not take it very seriously. The teacher also provided feedback. It was focused on the pronunciation and intonation of new words. Besides the pronunciation exercises, there were reading comprehension activities. Students used a checklist to provide feedback. Its use facilitated their work. They were explained how to use it. They kept improving in every reading. At the end, they were engaged and lost their fear to read out loud or in front of their peers.

Students used a checklist to provide feedback. They completed six checklists. For the purpose of this study, table 5 includes the results of the first, the middle and the last. Once they completed the feedback, they had to fill the checklist. They had nine items to which they had to mark Yes or No. Table 5 reports Yes answers.

Table 5
Results of the checklist

Items	First	Middle	Last
The recording is similar to the model.	25	25	25
Intonation is appropriate.	16	10	14
Sentence stress is correct.	15	14	19
Word stress is correct.	10	12	15

Punctuation is observed.	17	23	19
The recording is understandable.	21	21	19
I agree with the main idea reported in the oral summary.	24	23	22
The recording was sent on time.	24	21	24
My feedback is provided on time.	22	22	20

The sequence of this rubric indicates that students considered the recordings to be similar to the sample (the one the teacher recorded and students had to use to read the passages). It can be deduced that at the beginning they did not know how to assess intonation and that may explain the results of the checklist No. 3 and No. 6. The only item where there was a steady improvement was “word stress”; followed by “sentence stress”. In the other statements, there was not an important change, and most students agreed with each of them.

These results indicate that students were not confident to provide feedback. However, they agreed that it helped them to improve. The checklist was a tool that facilitated students to pay attention to what they were required to provide feedback, too. Results show that low students take advantage of higher level students; and, there is confusion with students at the same level.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

This study reports the impact of peer feedback of reading aloud to improve speaking fluency. Results indicate that there was an improvement due to the intervention. These positive results are similar to previous studies that used only reading aloud (Kim, 2017; Ninsuwan, 2015; Sedigheh et al., 2014). Similar positive results were found by Checkol (2020) and Stone (2019) who used peer feedback to improve spoken fluency but did not use reading aloud.

Richards (2006) said that learning includes feedback in collaboration with others. This was implemented in this study as peer feedback. This author considers feedback improves language learning. This was evidenced in the positive results of this study.

Brown (2001) pointed out that students fear making mistakes and they fear that others do not understand what they are saying. Participants of this study reported those fears in the survey, too. Richards (2006) suggested that teachers should develop plans to consider mistakes as part of learning.

Speaking requires linguistic factors like pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary (Bygate, 2005). Participants of this study reported them in the survey. In the learning logs, the main difficulty reported was pronunciation of new words. This may be the influence of the way they were taught before as stated by Richards (2006). They also highlighted that this intervention helped them expand the vocabulary knowledge not only on the meaning but also on how the words are pronounce. For Nation (2001), vocabulary length is highly correlated to

spoken communication. Field notes reported that students' lack knowledge of vocabulary and they pronounced words the way they considered it was correct. These limitations ended up in hesitations and pauses when they read.

Another point to consider is the fact explained by Harmer (2003) and Richards (2006). They sustained that students need extended exposure of input. In this intervention, students practiced reading and did some comprehension exercises before they actually recorded their voices. This is supported by Goh (2007) who concluded that to raise fluency students should be exposed to input, and repetitions for fluency and accuracy. Repetitions may have aided students with cognitive loads and reduce mistakes (Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Ellis, 2005; Smith, 2014).

There are several limitations in Ecuador for teaching and learning English. Smith (2014) referred to time. Wang (2014) added that teachers' talk more than students. Other limitations regard the feelings that speaking in L2 bring with it; for example: hesitations, false-starts, insufficient grammar knowledge (Hughes, 2002); and pausing to search for appropriate words (Wang, 2014). These limitations were reported by the students in their learning logs. They considered they could not provide feedback because they did not know to pronounce the words. They even mentioned that they did not understand the passage and that made them unaware of the intonation of sentences or which word they have to stress

Besides improving students' fluency, reading aloud may have helped students to understand the passages, the use of the language in context and its organization (Richards, 2006). Lenz (as cited in Ninsuwan, 2015) stated that to understand texts readers need to know the vocabulary and make use of their prior knowledge of the topic. Krashed (2009) pointed out

that students learn vocabulary incidentally when they read. This was not only reported by students in their learning logs but it was also observed and reported by the researcher in the field notes.

Regarding feedback, Wiggins (2012) stated that feedback should be clear to teachers in students. In order to assist students to provide feedback a checklist was created. It was noticed in the field notes that they facilitated students to provide feedback. At the beginning, students did not feel confident to provide feedback, but with practice they started to change that feeling. Findings of the checklist indicate that with time they learned how to use it and assess their peers better.

Richards (2006) mentioned that the CLT approach brought new roles for teachers and students. Students are active participants in their learning and teachers, as facilitators, monitor and model learning. These roles were applied in this intervention. Students, through the use of a checklist, provided feedback to their peers. The teacher facilitated the training sessions on how to read aloud and how to use the checklist to provide feedback. Results indicated that students valued the feedback of their peers. It is important to mention that students can not do it alone, the teacher has to scaffold the process (Ministerio de Educación, 2016).

Another consideration can be that when students will be evaluated by others they develop their work more carefully (Gielen et al., as cited in Ebersviller, 2013). It was noticed in this intervention that students with a lower proficiency level gained from students that had a higher proficiency level. Students at the same level did not share the same point of view and relied on the teacher's feedback.

In order to reduce the gap between what is required by the Ministry of Education (2012) and students' actual proficiency level, the application of peer feedback seems to be an alternative form to upgrade students' EFL learning in short time. This study was conducted within the frame of two months and the impact for learning was large (Cohen's $d= 1.04$)

Findings of this study coincide with what has been reported by authors in previous studies. They also shed light to new researchers. It is recommended to apply peer feedback to improve other skills. It is also recommended to expand the time of implementation to one term or a school year for more consistent results.

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Appendix 1

Checklist for students to provide feedback

Dear Students,

This checklist will help you in providing feedback to your peers. This is not graded.

	Yes	No	What do you suggest to improve?
The recording is similar to the model.			
Intonation is appropriate.			
Sentence stress is correct.			
Word stress is correct.			
Punctuation is observed.			
The recording is understandable.			
I agree with the main idea reported in the oral summary.			
The recording was sent on time.			
My feedback is provided on time.			

Appendix 3

Rubric for the pre and posttest.

<i>Grammar and Vocabulary</i>	Excellent 10-9	Very good 8	Good (7)	Not so good (6-fewer)
The speaker uses grammatical forms with control (simple tense, past tense).				
The speaker uses a range of appropriate vocabulary taught in previous courses.				
<i>Discourse management</i>				
The content of the answer is appropriate for the task.				
The content is not well organized.				
<i>Pronunciation</i>				
The answer is understood.				
The intonation is appropriate.				
Sentence stress is correct.				
Word stress is correct.				
Individual sounds are correctly produced.				
<i>Fluency</i>				
The speech flows with not many pauses.				
There is not hesitation.				
The content is not repetitive.				

Adapted from Cambridge (2008).

Appendix 4

Learning Logs.

Students answered these questions in Spanish. They completed this form during the intervention.

What are the difficulties I had during this practice?

Is reading aloud helping me to speak more spontaneously? Why?

Is my feedback appropriate? Why?