

Peer-correction as a Strategy to Improve Teenagers' Speaking Skills in Foreign Language Learning

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Tania Luna López

Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León,
México

tania.lunalpz@uanl.edu.mx

ORCID: 0000-0001-8998-6352

Óscar Manuel Narvárez Trejo

Universidad Veracruzana, México

onarvaez@uv.mx

ORCID: 0000-0003-3259-2787

Elizabeth Alvarado Martínez

Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León,
México

elizalv@yahoo.com.mx

ORCID: 0000-0002-3849-5809

Abstract

Recently, educators have faced significant changes in the classroom. Teachers are seen as mediators between students and educational environments, while students play an active role in their learning process. This study on the use of peer correction strategies consists of students giving and receiving feedback on the mistakes made when speaking English in class. These strategies can be implemented in the classroom to improve their autonomy, interaction and participation. In this qualitative study, classroom observations and a focus group were carried out. Eight adolescent students from an educational institute in Mexico participated. The results show aspects related to the way in which students apply these strategies in their learning process and how they feel about it. Most expressed feeling in a comfortable environment when applying peer correction strategies in the classroom.

Key words: speaking skills; peer-correction strategies; peer feedback.

La corrección en pares como estrategia para mejorar producción oral de los adolescentes en el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras

Resumen

Recientemente, los educadores han enfrentado cambios significativos en el aula. Los docentes son vistos como mediadores entre los estudiantes y los entornos educativos, mientras que los alumnos desempeñan un papel activo en su proceso de aprendizaje. Este estudio explora el uso de estrategias de corrección por pares, consistentes en que los estudiantes den y reciban retroalimentación sobre los errores cometidos al hablar inglés en clase. Estas estrategias se puede implementar en el aula para mejorar su autonomía, interacción y participación. En este estudio cualitativo se llevaron a cabo observaciones en el aula y un grupo focal. Participaron ocho estudiantes adolescentes de un instituto educativo en México. Los resultados muestran aspectos relacionados con la forma en que los alumnos aplican estas estrategias en su proceso de aprendizaje y cómo se sienten al respecto. La mayoría expresó sentirse en un ambiente cómodo al aplicar estrategias de corrección entre pares en el aula.

Palabras clave: habilidades de expresión oral; estrategias de corrección de pares; retroalimentación en parejas.

Peer-correction as a strategy to improve teenagers' speaking skills in foreign language learning

Introduction

A language learning process is a complex experience in itself as it involves many steps: pre-production, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency (Krashen & Terrell, 1993), and it might be a challenge for teenage learners who have not taken any previous English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses or do not have background knowledge to develop oral production skills. To help learners to develop their speaking skills is a challenge for many English language teachers as well because some of the strategies they employ during the lessons do not engage learners in speaking activities. Based on personal experience working with learners from 12 to 18 years old at one educational institute in Mexico, some of them have never been immersed in contexts where English as a foreign language was the most important means of communication. They seemed uncomfortable during the first lessons because for many of them it was their first experience with an only English approach. For this reason, those learners should have some classroom assistance when learning English as a new and foreign language.

EFL teachers are not the only one who can guide learners to succeed in the language learning process, and to learn how to speak a foreign language. Working in pairs and using peer-correction strategies is an effective option to enhance speaking students' skills since it is a social constructive activity and helps students become autonomous, analytical, and critical (Ramírez & Guillén, 2018).

For some learners the teacher's feedback may be unsuccessful. Some of the problems that are common among these learners are: fear to ask their teacher for uncertainties, lack of self-confidence, little or no teacher's attention or fear of making mistakes and their

classmates making fun of them. Since peer correcting is basically needed for speaking performance, the use of peer-correction strategies might improve EFL learners' speaking skills. Learners may reduce anxiety when it is their friends who correct their errors rather than their teacher (Botha, 1987; Gudu, 2015).

However, the use of peer-correction strategies does not contribute or favor all learners. Some learners believe that different sorts of feedback are situationally in/appropriate for them, according to Schiffman and Kanuk's (2004) model (cognitive component). The decision to carry out specific learning strategies should be guided by all participants' consideration about the learners' feelings (cognitive component) and their negative emotions. As a result, teachers should prevent hurting their learners' feelings and avoid emotional discomfort. Specifically for those students who are thought to be shy and may be harmed by critique, as well as specific feedback given to the entire class.

To be corrected by a pair is sometimes misunderstood. Many learners believe that this practice is going to guarantee them to improve their speaking skills by just listening and repeating what their peer corrects them to say. Both students involved in peer-correction, require of some instruction on doing so, at the very least, to be familiar with the lesson themes to be covered. Teacher training to apply and monitor the correct use of these strategies is essential. Classroom time should not be limited to increase learners' proficiency in speaking skills, the purpose of developing daily life skills, capability, initiative, autonomy, responsibility, and collaborative work has to be planned as well.

It was noticed that some teenage language learners are not able to produce almost anything orally during the first English classes at one educational institute in the north of Mexico. Most of these EFL beginner learners do not feel confident using the target language since it is probably the first time they are having an experience with a foreign language and they do not know how to react. Some of those learners tend to struggle with their exams, they do not understand their teachers' tasks, their oral production is practically null, and they can never follow through in class. For these reasons, they cannot achieve the learning competences that are expected from an A1 level student according to the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFRL). That is why this study considers learners' emotions towards an English basic level A1 course through the use and practice of peer-correction strategies in everyday classes to improve learners' speaking skills.

1. Problem statement

It has been identified that some teenage language learners from a public middle school in the north of Mexico are not able to communicate when they start attending the earliest English lessons. Most of these learners might feel uncomfortable during the classes since they do not feel confident to speak in a language that is not their mother tongue which might become a barrier for learners' performance in the classroom. In most cases, learners learn new languages through very traditional strategies; the teacher is always in front of the class, and s/he explains, corrects and guides almost all the learning process of a student. Sometimes learners do not know another possible option when they look for help when trying to improve their learning skills. It is important for teachers to allow learners know that they can be corrected and helped in different ways such as working with someone else different from the teacher so that they can develop their personal sense of autonomy.

Working in pairs and using peer-correction strategies is an effective option to enhance speaking students' skills since it is a social constructive activity and helps students become autonomous, analytical, and critical (Ramírez & Guillén, 2018). The use of peer-correction strategies might improve EFL learners' speaking skills by reducing anxiety when it is their friends who correct their errors rather than their teacher (Botha, 1987; Gudu, 2015). Therefore, the aim of the study is to find out advantages and disadvantages of the use of peer-correction strategies for learners from a basic level A1 course at one educational institute in Mexico.

Speaking, the second skill of language after listening, requires a lot of practice to develop as a competence and it also includes the way of pronouncing the sounds accurately. It is considered a direct tool to the listener whether s/he understands speakers' pronunciation or not (Segura, 2012). Based on this opinion, this educational study seeks to use peer-correction as a means to improve learners' speaking skills based on the following specific objectives, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages.

The objectives of the study are to find out if Basic Level A1 English teenage learners at one educational institute in Mexico are able to use peer-correction strategies to improve their English speaking skills to achieve speaking competencies that are expected to their level. As well as finding out advantages and disadvantages of the use of peer-correction strategies. Therefore, the teacher of the course will contribute to provide learners ways to feel comfortable to speak English.

Some teenage Mexican learners face the problem of not achieving the expected learning level A1 according to the CEFRL because of confidence issues and factors related to their security and self-esteem. It is relevant to investigate if peer-correction strategies are a real helpful assistance to improve EFL learners' oral production skills. It is also important to do some research about how students can be helped when they are trying to learn English as a foreign language.

Nowadays, teachers are identified as assistants, guides, counselors and group process managers (Tribble, 1996) and they are no longer the only person responsible for correcting learners' work. Teachers and learners are encouraged to focus on discovering ideas, drafting, working collaboratively, and sharing successes (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005), so they should be encouraged to interact not only with the teacher but with the classmates too. Learners can be now a vital part of the correcting process and not only the conventional one; that is, the teacher correcting them. By working in pairs with a classmate or their facilitator as a peer, learners might not feel their mistake as a bad thing; they are most likely going to understand why they made it. Learners should be able to correct themselves without feeling guilty or that someone is going to scold them. They should develop the feeling that it is all right to make mistakes.

2. Theoretical foundation

For some teenage learners of English to accomplish speaking a foreign language already is a challenge since it requires a big effort and constant practice. We cannot plan what we actually are going to speak all the time. Different from reading or writing, speaking happens in real time; usually the person we are talking to is expecting an answer from us. We cannot edit or revise what you want to say (Bailey, 2005). Oral communication involves two or more people in negotiating meanings, and it is always related to the context in which it occurs (O'Malley, 1999). For some English learners, speaking English in real time, negotiating meanings, managing the conversation, and speaking spontaneously are the challenging issues when learning English as a foreign language. Being able to speak becomes one important goal to achieve when learning a foreign language.

When teaching and learning a foreign language, pronunciation is essential, and it is a vital part of the language teaching process. Feeling confident in pronouncing words in a foreign language allows learners to interact with other speakers, which is crucial for the linguistic development and as we know, bad and poor pronunciation can sometimes interfere with our communication process. Good pronunciation comes with clear oral

understanding of ideas and poor pronunciation causes problems in the process of communicating, no matter how much knowledge about vocabulary or grammar the speaker has. It is one of our responsibilities as teachers to prepare learners with meaningful and contextual situations to be ready for the real world.

There are some different points of view about what the main factors that affect the speaking abilities of learners are. Fauzan (2016) have studied the enhancement of the speaking ability of EFL Learners. In his study, it is mentioned that some learners struggle speaking in English due to reluctance, hesitation, fear of making mistakes, or lack of vocabulary. In some cases, learners prefer not to speak in English because they are afraid of making mistakes because their friends may make fun of them. Learners tend to be anxious because the teacher always gives correction and feedback on their mistakes immediately and sometimes learners do not even finish their participations.

Learners might feel immersed in the process of acquiring a foreign language by practicing these peer strategies. Studies of feedback and correction have been focusing specifically on the writing skill; these kinds of research have not covered very much around the speaking skill. Peer-correction strategies can be used as a way to transmit more confidence to learners because it encourages them to participate by deciding if the output they are giving to their pair is correct or not (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994).

Hyland and Hyland (2006) pointed out that giving feedback to learners has been recognized as one of the most important EFL writing teacher's tasks. It can be given in the form of "written commentary, error correction, teacher-student conferencing, or peer discussion" (p. 15). Working with a peer provides good opportunities for EFL learners to improve language skills in small groups, they are less afraid to speak and they are able to understand what the others are saying as well as making themselves understood (Gunning, 2008). In some cases, learners feel so frightened that they cannot think clearly, and they are unable to say a single word.

There are other authors who have contributed to the study of peer-correction strategies: Hagège's (2003) findings are that correction is more efficient when it is done with the help of a peer, as well as Tost (2013), who evaluated the feasibility and impact of partner reading out aloud to improve English pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary. Her findings indicated that peer- oral reading interventions done by other learners, was effective in improving their levels of reading, pronunciation and fluency.

The practice of peer-correction strategies in the classroom provides both teachers and learners with some important benefits. Learners become autonomous and less dependent on their teachers. EFL learners consider it is worth using this strategy for their

own progress and it gives them an opportunity to express their thoughts. “Learners’ active participation in the correction activity provides a more supportive atmosphere as the feedback received from classmates is less threatening, and as a result of these the authoritative role of the teacher is no more reinforced” (Pishghadam & Kermanshahi, 2011, p. 218).

Interactions between two or more learners can be more original and reliable than teacher response which makes the class enjoyable, and learners tend to cooperate and participate more. The rest of the classmates are more involved in the lesson as well. Many learners are used to being corrected by the teacher when learning how to communicate correctly by using the target language.

2.1 EFL Speaking skills

For some teenage EFL learners, to be able to speak English as a foreign language is a challenge since it implies a big effort and constant practice. We cannot plan what we actually are going to speak all the time. Different from reading or writing, speaking happens in real time; usually the person we are talking to is expecting an answer from us. We cannot edit or revise what you want to say (Bailey, 2005). When an individual is trying to communicate, the participation of two or more people is necessary for information exchange. It usually has to do with the conditions where the communication process is carried out (O’ Malley, 1999).

For some EFL learners, managing to speak spontaneously in real time to exchange information and follow a conversation, might be a real challenging issue when learning a new language. To be able to speak without thinking for a long time to sound similar to a native speaker is one important goal to achieve when learning English as a foreign language. According to Hymes (1992) a good EFL speaker has a good command of four specific areas a) Linguistic competence: having good pronunciation, knowledge of grammatical rules and vast vocabulary background. b) Discourse competence: making him or herself understands coherently and cohesively, having a good management of conversation. c) Sociolinguistic competence: knowing how to express effectively and appropriately according to the context where the individual is, and d) Strategic competence: which is the ability to recognize and repair communication breakdowns before, during, or after they occur.

2.2 Peer feedback

The popularity of providing peer feedback started rising in the 70s with the growth of approaches where learners play a more relevant role in their educational learning development. According to Ahangari (2014), the process of assisting learners through more than one different draft in order to provide feedback and suggest during this process rather than at the end of it, stimulates learners' learning process, since they feel immersed in the process of acquiring a foreign language. Studies of feedback and correction have been focusing specifically on writing skills, these kinds of research have not focused on the speaking skill.

Feedback can be defined as any kind of information that learners receive about their performance during their learning process, it can be corrective or non-corrective (Kerr, 2017). When feedback focuses a learner's attention on errors, then it is called corrective, whereas it is called non-corrective when the teacher praises the learner's performance instead of correcting it. "Feedback can also be described as the performance of a peer of learners who benefit from hearing each other's feedback" (Havranek, 2002, p. 259).

If learners collaborate, they feel motivated as active contributors in their own learning experiences and in the communicative process at the same time. Hyland and Hyland (2006) pointed out that giving feedback to ESL learners has been recognized as one of the most important writing teacher's tasks. "It can be given in the form of written commentary, error correction, teacher-learner conferencing, or peer discussion" (p. 15). The use of this strategy in EFL contexts is a complement tool, which can be used to foster learners' oral production as they have different options when being corrected.

Working with a peer provides good opportunities for EFL learners to improve language skills, in small groups, they are less afraid to speak and they are able to understand what the others are saying and well as making themselves understood. (Gunning, 2008, p. 510)

Under certain circumstances learners feel so frightened that they cannot think clearly, and they are unable to say a single word. This allows us to understand that the implementation of peer-feedback is another good option when making learners confident to be part of the learning process and stop feeling uncertain about their role in this process.

2.3 Peer-correction strategies

Many authors have contributed to the study of peer-correction strategies and their benefits to help learners feel comfortable when learning how to speak a new language. Haggèe (2003) suggested that corrections could be more helpful when they are done with the assistance of another person, in this case a peer classmate. Tost (2013) evaluated the positive impact that a learner, who is struggling to pronounce correctly, has by paying attention to a classmate who speaks correctly in English, reading out aloud to promote his/her own pronunciation. She found out that if another classmate corrects a student repeatedly, it is going to contribute to encourage their reading skills, pronunciation and fluency in a positive way. Although it might be a good and useful tool for some learners during their learning experiences, some of them are highly resistant to be corrected by another person other than their teacher since they feel nobody else knows better than the teacher does (British Council, 2019). Some other learners have the feeling that their classmates are not going to help them or that they are going to be ignored, so they rather have their teacher's corrections instead of peer-corrections.

The practice of peer-correction strategies in the classroom gives both teachers and learners some important benefits. Learners become autonomous and less dependent on their teachers, and they start to acquire a sense of learning commitment, which shows them that their opinion is considered by others. "Learners' active participation in the correction activity provides a more supportive atmosphere as the feedback received from classmates is less threatening, and as a result of these the authoritative role of the teacher is no more reinforced" (Pishghadam & Kermanshahi, 2011, p. 218).

According to Zeng (2006), self and peer-correction entrust learners to check, evaluate, and edit their own products in order to improve them, since these strategies help learners to identify misspellings, grammatical errors or any other mistake found in the products. Peer-correction helps learners to understand their classmates' point of view about their works, with this, learners give and receive feedback from each other creating a real learning environment.

Sultana (2009) suggests that errors are no longer considered as lack of knowledge rather it is seen as the result of natural development in language learning. During a correcting process, teachers act as learning facilitators who help learners to understand the error and allow learners themselves to be an active part of the correction process. The contribution of learners in their own correction process makes the classroom atmosphere more supportive and amiable (Rollinson, 2005). At the same time,

learners are developing their sense of autonomy, as they are responsible for building their own learning.

In teaching speaking, peer-correction is done when the teacher orally demands to a student to answer about something and s/he answers incorrectly, then the teacher designates another student to give the correct answer (Sultana, 2009). This situation might affect some students' self-esteem since they might feel offended in front of the entire class. Some others might feel that they are being compared with their classmate where they are proven inferior to them. For all the above, language teachers must be aware of the strategies that actually work for their learners when developing speaking skills and keeping them motivated at the same time.

Peer-correction then is favorable for learners to expand cognitive, social and emotional areas which contribute to develop speaking skills. On the other hand, this strategy does not have a uniform nature, and therefore the impact that it has on learners might vary; some issues might occur when peer-correction is not practiced in a correct manner. In this way, peer-correction must be done cautiously with an authentic sense of cooperation among all the participants otherwise, it is not going to be beneficial for learners.

2.4 Factors affecting EFL learners' oral production

There are some different points of view about what the main factors that affect speaking abilities of learners are. Fauzan (2014) Speaking Ability of EFL Learners. He mentioned that some learners struggle speaking in English due to, hesitation, unwillingness to participate, concern about making mistakes in front of their classmates, or lack of good grammar rules and vocabulary.

In some cases, EFL learners prefer not to employ English in the classroom because they feel worried about mistaking. They might think that situation is going to make their classmates make jokes about that. Some learners tend to feel anxious because the teacher always gives correction and feedback on their mistakes immediately and sometimes learners do not even finish their class participations. Ramírez & Guillén (2018) identified some contexts where teaching English is not a priority and the opportunities to practice the foreign language are limited. She stated that school is probably the only place where communicative activities take place when learning a new language.

There has been some research about which are the factors related to learners speaking improvement when learning a foreign language and what the different linguistics' and professors' perspectives are about the strategies that should be applied in the EFL the classroom

to promote learners' oral production. In some EFL classrooms, most of the time, Some more importance is given to writing and reading activities rather than speaking activities. Due to this, some learners only develop these two abilities since they are rarely exposed to the target language. For this reason, some learners might be very good at writing or reading in English, but when it is time to start speaking, they are found to be hesitant, shy and afraid since they have not acquired the practice to do it by themselves.

2.5 Learner's emotions present when learning a foreign language

It has been studied that emotional factors have a significant influence in learners' foreign languages learning experiences. Excitement, enjoyment of learning, entertainment, pride, fear, shame, boredom, admiration, satisfaction, envy, are some of the emotions usually expressed by learners in the classroom. Méndez (2015) claims that worry and anxiety were the most frequently feelings reported in learners when learning a foreign language. She pointed out that fear to the teacher's feedback was the most reported emotion by learners. She said that this negative emotion usually blocks learners and it does their interaction in class to happen less. Learners sometimes are afraid to make mistakes also because it results in their peers, mocking them and laughing at them which might be a disquieting experience for some of them.

Other authors have investigated how motivation plays a vital role in the process of acquiring a foreign language. According to Locke and Latham (2004), motivation influences people acquisition of skills and the confidence for pushing them to use this skill. Which is very similar to what Lai (2011) says:

Motivation refers to reasons that underlie behavior that is characterized by willingness and volition, it is animated by personal enjoyment, interest or pleasure, whereas extrinsic motivation is governed by reinforcement contingencies and it involves a constellation of closely related beliefs, perceptions, values, interests, and actions. (p. 2)

Communicating using a different language, particularly for lower-level learners is stressful, this situation makes learners feel under a constant pressure (Goh & Burns, 2012). They usually do this in public, in front of other people (classmates or teachers) who, most of the time, are only evaluating how well they perform. For some shy learners, corrective feedback from a teacher who highlights their mistakes during all lessons, might be a constant anxiety-generating situation.

When learners feel anxious, nervous and insecure about their speaking skills, they are not able to produce a single word (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014). It becomes very difficult for them to participate in class since they might think the less they say, the fewer mistakes they will make. With this scene, learners are not achieving the competences that are expected from their level. Therefore, teachers must be aware of the impact that corrective feedback has on some learners and adopt a roll in which they are flexible with the kind of correction activities to apply to their learners in order to try not to generate more anxiety but soften its effect.

2.6 Innovative and recent strategies used in EFL classrooms to improve learners' speaking skills

Many other authors have investigated different strategies that help to develop learners' speaking skills by giving learners the opportunity to identify which strategy works better for them. It is one of our responsibilities as teachers to prepare learners with meaningful and contextual situations to be ready for the real world. It is known that currently people are more exposed to a global environment in which both in working life and everyday life, it is required to speak more than one language. "The existence of internationally employment opportunities have heightened the need to communicate and to be understood" (Mitra et al., 2003, p. 2).

It has been affirmed that the Internet is the best discover of the XX century (Ašanin, 2015) and whit this, a huge variety of innovative and new methods and strategies to support the process of learning a foreign language has emerged. Marijana Ašanin (2015) found that the use of wikis and e tandems as tools of collaborative nature can help learners when learning a foreign language.

At recent times, most of the foreign language learners have access to Internet and learning multimedia tools, and they consider these platforms to be fast, clear and simple to use. It is important to recognize that if learners feel comfortable and familiar with what they are doing and the activities that they are carrying out, it is going to be easier for them to learn how to speak correctly in English.

Nowadays, due to new generation learners' demands and necessities, there has been an adjustment in the traditional classroom context, where the teacher is usually the central part of learners' learning experience. Today more importance is given to learners to play the central role in their process of acquiring a foreign or a second language. Learners are now the fundamental part on their own learning experience by becoming autonomous and every time less dependent on the teacher.

Tseng and Chen (2019) investigated how to use online peer feedback using blogs in order to stimulate speaking production. In this study they identified that using videos and receiving correcting feedback from another person seems to bring benefits for improving the oral production. The implementation of this strategy helps learners not to feel afraid to receive peers' comments about their performance as none of the foreign language learners are in position to judge or criticize other's mistakes as all the participants are still learning the language.

It is also important to consider that this whole set of innovative actions to implement in the classroom require the teacher's supervision and monitoring as s/he is the person with more knowledge about the subject that is being learned. This person needs to be a good language officer in the class because s/he is the person who knows "how to conduct classroom discussions, sequence concepts, run lab sessions, and so on" (Sadler et al., 2013, p. 1044). The combination of a good implementation of peer-correction strategies and teacher's monitoring is going to have a beneficial impact in the improvement of EFL teenage learners' speaking skills.

These methodologies can be fun, and agreeable, simultaneously, both learners and teachers accomplish academic objectives. Foreign language teachers should choose activities that improve their learners' oral skills and maintain a strategic distance from the ones that are a waste of time. The learning process of a foreign language should be an inspiring and motivating process where learners consider that their objectives and interests are being taken into account.

3. Methodology

There are two types of research: quantitative, which focuses on analyzing data represented by numbers, graphs and percentage, and qualitative, which focuses on collecting participants' opinions, perceptions, beliefs and experiences. Based on the characteristics of this study, which seeks to investigate whether the use of peer-correction strategies improves teenage learners speaking skills as well as some advantages and disadvantages of their use, qualitative methodology was selected.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.3). Qualitative research instruments, such as interviews, focus groups, observations, among others, can be used as a tool to interpret opinions, emotions and feelings in order to interpret information that is not possible to interpret with numbers, Austin & Sutton (2014).

In 2018 an educational institute in the north of Mexico through its Department of Languages established to incorporate Foreign Language Courses into their learning curricula. These courses offer French and English to children from 6 to 11 years old and teenage learners from 12 to 18 years old.

The main objective of the Department of Languages is to graduate well prepared and informed learners able to communicate with others using English or French. The main objective of the foreign language courses of the Languages Department is to develop communication and cultural competence through two foreign languages other than the native one. English A1 basic level course lessons are held twice a week, on Monday and Wednesday from 3:00 to 5:00 PM. 6 months is the estimated time to conclude each level (A1, A2 and B1) according to the Common European framework of References for Languages (CEFR). Both courses are offered to students who are interested in learning to speak, read, write and understand English or French. The only requirement to enroll the course is to cover the monthly payment. There is an opportunity for students to skip a level of English by answering a placement test. If learners get 90 or more points, s/he is ready for the next level.

This course aims to prepare students to be able to communicate in a real-life context by using a different language and having a good domain of it. For this reason, it is necessary to incorporate into classes, activities to develop the four main learners' language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. Students are supposed to have a total amount of 80 real hours of learning, showing a progress in all areas throughout the duration of the foreign language courses. At the end of each course, students take a final test, which includes all the topics learned during the semester. If learners pass the test, they move to the next level, and they receive their diploma. If they do not, students have to repeat the course. Throughout the course, students work with "Skill Set" textbooks by Macmillan Education Publisher as a complement for the course syllabus.

It is important to mention that due to the pandemic and the current situation the entire world is living, both students and teachers have had to adapt to new ways of attending classes. During the last eight months, learners have been attending online classes which take place via Zoom, Google Meet, and even Skype. For these reasons, it has been a real challenge for all the teachers of the institute to readjust and modify traditional syllabus, classes and material for learners to continue with their studies. Very often, some learners are reluctant to this new way of learning. They might feel that it is not possible for them to learn through online lessons and they prefer face to face learning. On the other hand, some learners seem to be increasingly willing to continue with online classes since they enjoy including technology into their learning experience.

The participants selected for this study were a total of 8 students: 3 male and 5 female learners from A1 basic level course. This group of learners' age ranges from 11 to 15. All learners come from public middle school in Mexico. Learners enrolled in the course are usually older siblings who have both parents are professionals. For this reason, they can easily afford the classes and learners keep motivated and manage to end the whole course. Before initiating this study, all learners and parents were informed that a research would be conducted throughout the first level A1 classes to investigate the effectiveness of using peer-correction. All learners showed no objection to participate.

3.1 Data Collection

According to Seliger and Shohamy (1997) "several different methods are used in the same study in order to compile a more complete picture of the activity or event being described" (p. 122). For this reason, it was considered that the ideal means for data collection was a focus group with learners, and classroom observations.

The implementation of these instruments allows to collect extensive information about the emotions, opinions and other subjective aspects of those who seek for valuable information for this study and to obtain data related to the advantages and disadvantages of working in pairs as well as the fact of discovering if these strategies help students to improve their English speaking skills. In order to carry out these data collection instruments, specific work sheets were prepared for the focus group and the class observations, which make it possible to request and collect specific information. The virtual classroom observations were recorded and transcribed.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the way of life many people around the globe, the virtual world has become even more popular. Internet has grown enormously this year (Singh et al., 2018). Social, economic, political, educational, among many other contexts have reorganized their bases to virtual stages. Online schooling has arisen as an option to face-to-face classes and both learners and teachers have had to adapt quickly to this sudden and new learning system. Additionally, research contexts have also readapted their practices; researchers who rely on learner participants and on face-to-face interaction to collect data need to reconstruct their methodologies and adapt them to online settings. For these reasons, the implementation to collect data has done virtually using Zoom as the primary means to apply instruments and record the sessions.

3.1.1 Online Classroom observation

In order to obtain first-hand information, classroom observations were selected. Sometimes people are not specific with the information they give in interviews. "Observation provides reality check" (Robson cited in Cohen et. al., 2007, p. 396). This means we could observe what really happens in the classroom and analyze this information to identify if the use of peer-correction strategies have a positive impact in EFL teenage learners' speaking skills. Narváez et al. (2017) stated that the data collected using observation is most of the time very precise.

To implement classroom observations properly, the researcher should design and prepare an observation guide which should include the time of observation, the date, the teacher and observer's name, notes, extra notes, among others. The researcher should focus on specific learners' behaviors, in order to know what specific aspects are going to be observed and include them in their observation sheets. "When researchers want to observe communicative features of students, they can use observation schemes" (Vidhiasi, 2018, p. 13).

When observing the class, the teacher/researcher should observe how people respond to unusual attitudes and concentrate on those situations. Potter (1996) defines observation as a technique on gathering data through direct contact with an object- usually another human being. The researcher observes behavior and documents it. According to Ghavifekr and Rosdy (2015) an effective supervision observation process consists of 3 main steps: pre-observation planning, observation implementation, and post-observation monitoring.

Classroom observations can be seen as a tool for researchers (teachers) to assess their performance and plan for their improvement (Barrogo, 2020). By applying this instrument, the researcher is going to be able to collect information related to the behavior, attitudes and perceptions of the participants. The data obtained with this instrument is going to be confirmed with a focus group with learners.

3.1.2 Online focus group

Since March 11, 2020 when the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 epidemic as a pandemic and the lockdown began, the virtual world has become even more popular. Internet has grown enormously this year (Singh et al., 2018). Social, economic, political, educational, among many other contexts have reorganized their bases to virtual stages. This situation has disrupted the way of life of many people around the globe.

Online schooling has arisen as an option to face-to-face classes and both learners and teachers have had to adapt quickly to this sudden and new learning system. Additionally, research contexts have also readapted their practices; researchers who rely on learner participants and on face-to-face interaction to collect data need to reconstruct their methodologies and adapt them to online settings. For these reasons, virtual platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet have been used as a tool to carry out the collect data instruments.

The accelerated development of the virtual world and different social network applications enable researchers to use virtual tools to obtain research participants' understanding of a social phenomenon of interest (Stancanelli, 2010). Focus groups have always been a common means of focusing on group interaction to collect valuable information for the investigator, they are common through qualitative researchers. With the sudden implementation of technology in the educational contexts, there is the opportunity to carry out focus groups through computer programs which facilitates online engagement and interaction between the participants to explore issues, attitudes and perceptions useful to find out if the implementation of peer-correction strategies is going to benefit EFL learners' speaking skills.

3.2 Research procedure

In order to carry out this research, it was necessary to design a classroom observation sheet which includes aspects related to learners' performance and emotions when practicing peer-correction in class, as well as a focus group. With the purpose of carrying out the classroom observations, it was first requested permission from learners' parents since all of them are minors. Parents were informed that the classes were going to be observed and recorded to carry out an investigation. All of them agreed through a signed letter.

During two online sessions, the observation sheet was used as a guide. Many important aspects associated with learners' emotions and performance when peer-correcting in class were noted. It was observed a third session in order to corroborate the information collected during the first two sessions. Most learners were willing to cooperate and participate, and the professor was always very supportive and kind. The data obtained through the observations was analyzed and the most common attitudes of learners when using peer-correction in the classroom were identified. Learners who could take part in the focus group were selected.

Eight learners participated in the discussion (online focus group). During this session, all learners were talking about questions related to the use of peer-correction strat-

egies in their English classes. They were very participative and willing to answer, even though some of them struggled with the Internet connection. Learners were asked to speak in Spanish during the focus group considering they are from a basic level of English and still do not have a good command of their speaking abilities using another language. The online discussion was recorded and then transcribed.

At the end of the entire process, through a qualitative data analysis, all the information collected was gathered and categorized. According to Lester et al. (2020) qualitative data analyses, in their broadest sense, give significance to a data collection with qualitative data encompassing a wide range of materials such as conversations, images, observations, interviews, among others. Qualitative data analysis might refer to a variety of things, depending on the methodology, theoretical perspective, research tradition, and/or field (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Information related to learners' opinion, and personal observations were taken from the transcriptions and notes obtained during the online observations. The data obtained was analyzed to contrast, look for similarities and obtain a general conclusion.

4. Findings and results

For each of these instruments, the data was analyzed and divided into 9 different categories (Table 1) in order to identify advantages and disadvantages of the use of peer-correction strategies during the A1 level classes of English at one educational institute in Mexico. The implementation of the data collections instruments was relevant to know how to help learners to achieve speaking competencies are expected to their level (A1) according to the CEFRL.

4.1 The use of peer-correction strategies

After three online class observations, there were identified some important aspects. It was first noticed the way in which the teacher uses peer-correction in the classes. Initially, she explains which activities are going to be developed during the session, this warm-up activity helps learners to follow the class and keep focused on the instructions. Before using peer-correction, the teacher explains the topic of the class and shows learners some examples of it. She previously prepared power points presentations in order to complement the syllabus content.

Table 1. Data collection instruments analysis categories

Category	Description
The use of peer-correction strategies	In this category, it is described how the teacher of the course uses peer-correction strategies in class.
Interaction between the teacher and learners	This category describes how the interaction between the teacher and learners through the classes is.
Interaction between learners when working in peers	This category describes how the interaction between learners when working in peers during some classes is.
Learners' points of view Definition of peer – correction / peer feedback	In this fourth category some learners' points of view about using peer-correction through the classes is detailed.
Learners' feelings and emotions when speaking in English	This category explains how learners feel when their peer-correct their classmates as well as some learners' feelings and emotions when speaking in English are detailed.
Being corrected by the teacher	This section details how learners feel when a teacher corrects them in class.
Being corrected by a classmate	This category describes how learners feel when it is their peer who corrects them instead of the teacher.
Correcting a classmate	This penultimate category specifies how learners feel when they correct a classmate.
Advantages and disadvantages of the use of peer-correction strategies	Some advantages and disadvantages of the use of peer-correction strategies are discussed though this last category.

Source: designed by the authors.

During the classes, the teacher is constantly asking learners to talk and repeat what she says to improve their pronunciation and fluency. After having presented the topic, the teacher asks learners to work in peers to create a description of themselves through collaboration. Learners were supposed to write a brief description of themselves using the words learned that day. The teacher explains learners the importance of working with a classmate. She mentions that if someone does not remember how to say or write a word, they could ask their peer for help.

When learners were working in peers, through a Zoom video conference, some of them were truly afraid of start speaking in front of his/her peer, because she was a boy working with a girl or vice versa. When learners carried out activities in which they had to speak, they struggled. They seemed to have trouble trying to produce orally in English, they stumbled over their words, mispronounced some utterances, or simply remained silent.

This situation seems to be a key point when working in peers since all learners are teenagers. Some of them seemed to have a feeling of shame, which comes from being exposed to others. The feeling of exposure gives rise to a negative self-perception. In educational contexts, the coexistence of heterogeneous groups of young learners, who usually share many hours with other classmates brings with it latent conflicts (Kaplan et al., 2012).

On the other hand, some other learners seem to be excited working in peers. (6 out of 8 learners). When they found out that their peers have more knowledge about vocabulary or pronunciation, they trusted in their contributions and corrections in class. Besides, it was observed that some learners liked to work on peers, especially if they were girls on the same peer. When the participants of a peer were both girls, they seem motivated and enthusiastic to be working together. This scenario was previously examined. Rollinson (2005) declared that when learners contribute to their own correction process it makes the classroom atmosphere friendly.

4.2 Interaction between the teacher and learners

During the observations, it was observed that the teacher gave explicit and clear instructions and modeled the activities. Because of the observations were carried out via online, it was sometimes for learners, teacher, and observer to listen to the instructions clearly. For this reason, all learners had to repeat their participations. A relevant aspect was that while learners were working with their peers, the teacher gave them feedback about the instructions to address their attention to the ongoing activity. Initially, learners seemed to be confused with the explanation of their classmates about the activity they had to carry out, but when the teacher confirmed the instruction, they could work collaboratively with their classmates, suggesting and giving opinions about their peer's work. During the observations, it was identified that learners feel comfortable when they were corrected by the teacher, which has been formerly discussed in the Theoretical Foundation section. According to the British Council (2019) some learners are resistant to be corrected by another person other than the teacher since they feel nobody else knows better than the teacher does. A learner mentioned that the teacher "knows more than everybody in the class", for this reason he trusted his teacher's corrections.

4.3 Interaction between learners

Learners were committed to learning. Most of them were all the time verifying if they were carrying out the activities correctly, however, two learners were doing something else: chatting about cartoons or not talking with the cameras off. When learners were working in pairs, most of them seemed to be comfortable correcting and being corrected by their classmates. Although initially they seemed to be nervous about working with someone else. They were orally making suggestions to their peers, giving each other ideas about what words to include in their texts and how to pronounce those words.

4.4 Learners' points of view

It is important to know the learners' opinion about the use of this strategy to know if they can use this strategy as a tool to help them achieve speaking competences that are expected to their level. The majority of learners considered it is useful for them. Learners expressed that by correcting someone else's pronunciation they could compare their own with that of their peers and find their own errors. A participant mentioned "está bien que me corrijan para saber más".

Some learners stated that by listening to their classmates' pronunciation they could obtain ideas to improve their own pronunciation.

Most learners also mentioned that they felt comfortable when they are corrected by a classmate. However, a learner expressed he felt nervous when working with another learner who might be older. This situation made him feel uncomfortable and insecure about their performance during the activity. This fact was previously discussed in the theoretical foundation section. Gunning (2008) discusses that working with another classmate provides good opportunities for EFL learners to improve language skills in small groups, they are less afraid to speak.

4.5 Learners' feelings and emotions when speaking in English

It is relevant for this study to identify the emotions that learners have when they speak English in the classes in order to recognize which strategies can be useful for them to develop their oral' skills. Almost all learners mentioned they felt nervous when it is time to start speaking in the class because they do not know almost anything about the language, "cuando no lo sé decir bien, me pongo nervioso, pero cuando sé cómo decirlo, me

siento mejor”. This situation was discussed in previous chapters, Hagège (2003) stated that collaborative work strategies benefit to help learners feel comfortable when learning how to speak a new language and suggested that corrections could be more helpful when they are done with the assistance of a classmate. Besides, two participants expressed they felt happy and excited because they are learning a new language.

4.6 Being corrected by the teacher

An important aspect to find out was learner’s feelings about being corrected by their teacher. The teacher is the authority in the classroom which is the reason why learners sometimes feel uncomfortable or scared of showing their work to her. Learners considered that when they were corrected by the teacher, they felt good and confident. They also commented that when the teacher corrected them, she gives them feedback, which helps them to understand more. “cuando me corrige el profesor me siento un poco más feliz porque sé que hay más probabilidad de que esté correcta la respuesta o palabra que se haya dicho mal”, expressed a participant.

Another aspect that learners declared was that even though having feedback from the teacher is crucial, it is good for them to receive feedback from another classmate as well. A student mentioned that the teacher “knows more than everybody in the class”, for this reason learners might feel frightened of being corrected by her. Therefore, using peer-correction is a good way of working with correction in the classroom to keep learners motivated and comfortable when speaking in English.

4.7 Being corrected by a classmate

Another important aspect to discover was learners’ opinions about being corrected by a classmate. Besides, two learners said they felt better when they are corrected by the teacher, because s/he is a professional who knows more about the current topic. They considered that it is better to have an additional perspective rather than only the one from the peer.

Additionally, learners’ attitudes and points of view about being corrected by another classmate were discussed. Most of the participants mentioned that when they were being corrected by their peers, they felt good and grateful because someone else is contributing to improve their works. Four of the learners expressed that they felt happy when another classmate corrects them. A learner pointed out that it is good to be

corrected because this is a normal and a natural thing. This statement has been already discussed by Sultana (2009) who suggested that errors are no longer considered as “lack of knowledge” rather they are seen as sign of natural development. During the observations it was noticed that that some learners were commenting and correcting on each other’s pronunciation when they knew how to do it and both learners; the corrected and the corrector one seemed happy and comfortable with this. It seemed that during the class; they feel good correcting their classmates, but in a session in pairs, they might feel nervous at first.

4.8 Correcting a classmate

It was considered important to find out how learners felt when they corrected a classmate’s pronunciation. Learners mentioned as they are learning how to speak properly in English, by listening and correcting someone else’s pronunciation or way to say a word, they could notice errors that their peers had made and that were also similar to their own mistakes. Moreover, some learners mentioned that by listening to their classmates’ correction they could remember the correct pronunciation or a word and never forget it. A learner mentioned “un compañero puede ayudarme a saber una palabra que no sé y así aprender su significado”. This idea has been previously discussed, Havranek (2002) stated that learners benefit from hearing each other’s feedback.

Another issue that a learner commented on was that by correcting a classmate they could be more autonomous, and they could learn to work together and learn together new meanings or ways to pronounce the word correctly. This participant mentioned “if you do not know a word, s/he can know it and can help you, and if he knows less than you, you can help him with that. We can help each other”. All participants seemed to trust in their classmates’ corrections.

4.9 Advantages and Disadvantages of the use of peer-correction strategies

All participants agreed it is good to work with a peer because if they do not know a word or how to pronounce it, they can ask another person in their class and find out it. They all expressed that a peer could help you learn more vocabulary and to improve your oral skills. One advantage of the use of peer-correction, according to Edge (1997), is that it encourages pair discussion and contributes to students’ oral fluency practice as they talk about the mistakes and try to reach a consensus among themselves.

6 out of 8 participants considered that there is not any disadvantage of the use of peer correction strategies to improve speaking skills in class. Working with a peer was preferred by the majority of the participants, which is similar to what Gunning (2008) said about working with a peer: “working in peers provides good opportunities for EFL learners to improve their oral skills, in small groups, they are less afraid to speak and they are able to understand what others are saying as well as making themselves understood.”

However, a learner mentioned that it could be a disadvantage if you ask to your peer about a word and s/he does not know it. Another learner mentioned that it's a disadvantage for him was to work with older people because he sometimes feels shy to work in this way and he could block and not continue working.

Conclusion

Peer-correction strategies might bring good opportunities to teenage learners who are in the process of learning a foreign language when it is properly applied. This strategy also allows learners to feel comfortable and free to express their thoughts without the pressure of being criticized or judged by others for the merely reason of making an error, which has been previously analyzed in the theoretical foundation section; learners' active participation in correction activities provides them a supportive atmosphere as the feedback received from classmates is less threatening than the teacher's Pishghadam and Kermanshahi (2011).

This study shows that there are some different factors which influence the learning process of a learner. Aspects such as, shame, hesitation, demotivation, concern about making mistakes in front of other people, or lack of basic grammar rules and vocabulary influence learners' development. Méndez (2015) claimed that these negative emotions usually block learners, and this makes their interaction in class to happen less. For these reasons it is important for teachers to know their learners background in order to have more options to help their students' foreign language learning process.

It was found that some Mexican teenage learners enjoy working in peers most of the time, especially if they are peers of both girls and both boys in the same peer. When it is time to correct, they trust in their peers' corrections, although they prefer to confirm these corrections with a professional of the subject, the teacher. Learners must be guided to seek their own growth as foreign language learners Bañuelos (2012). The combination of a good implementation of peer-correction strategies among learners and teacher's monitoring is going to have an impact in the improvement of EFL teenage learners'

speaking skills according to the European Framework of Reference for Languages in an educational institute in Mexico.

Additionally, it was detected that when learners feel motivated; they feel comfortable learning. Peer-correction might elicit motivation in learners as they are in a cooperation atmosphere. This idea has been discussed in previous sections; Locke and Latham (2004) stated that motivation influences people's acquisition of skills and the confidence for pushing them to use this skill. EFL teachers should transmit this learning strategies to learners so that they can be able to be less dependent of them and develop different learning habits, autonomy, critical and analytical sense.

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