e-TEALS

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Scope of the Journal

This e-journal is sponsored by **CETAPS** (Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies) with a view to providing a forum for the publication of papers which reflect the wide range of scientific perspectives included within the study of English. *e-TEALS* is a peer reviewed journal which specialises in the didactics of English as a second or foreign language, and which seeks to reflect the latest research in the field. The editors welcome articles that describe classroom-based research, reflecting a wide range of scientific perspectives included in the study of English, such as pedagogical innovation, preparation of materials, curricular studies, assessment practices, intercultural studies, approaches to teacher training and other areas of applied language studies. Classroom-based research could either take the form of original research articles on the teaching and assessment of English, or could report studies carried out by teachers investigating their own teaching in their own classrooms. The journal is supported by the Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto and the Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa.

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Submitted articles should be clearly and coherently written so that they are internally consistent and accessible to our readership with a balance between theory and practice in all submissions. All descriptions of practice should be related to underlying theoretical principles. We are interested in receiving articles that describe carefully planned and executed classroom-based action research, provided that the project is designed to throw light on a topic which is in itself of interest to our readers.

Articles must demonstrate an awareness of other, recent work carried out in the area and have relevance to teachers working in varied contexts. Articles should contain no more than 15 references, with a heavy bias towards publications since the year 2000.

Articles should be between 4,000 words and 4,500 words in length. It is not possible to accept articles over 4,500 words long. Please give a word count at the end of your article. Word counts should include tables and appendices but may exclude the abstract and the list of works cited.

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[revised and adapted from the ELTJ guidelines]

e-TEALS

An **e**-journal of **T**eacher **E**ducation and **A**pplied **L**anguage **S**tudies

Introduction
Carolyn Leslie and Rima Prakash | NOVA FCSH - CETAPS

This combined 2021/22 edition of e-TEALS features five articles, all of which have classroom-based research in common. This research methodology plays a vital role in informing and enhancing the practice of teaching English as a foreign language. Through systematic observation, data collection and analysis, educators can gain valuable insights into effective teaching methodologies and learners needs, enabling them to adapt their instructional strategies to better meet the diverse needs of their learners.

The first article by Ana Rita Faustino deals with corrective feedback of learners in the third cycle of basic education. Using a questionnaire, she shows that although both teachers and students value error correction, they hold different views on how corrective feedback should be given, with students favouring immediate explicit correction, and teachers favouring prompts or recasts, thereby encouraging learners to self-correct.

Joana Louro, working with learners in secondary education, explores the development of critical thinking and visual literacy with learners in secondary education. Using images to provoke critical reflection, she shows that learners are able to think critically on some but not all topics and suggests that more time needs to be spent in classrooms analysing and interpreting images.

While the next three articles deal with oral interaction, the contexts discussed vary. In the third article, Elsa Vilela-Filipe discusses methods for motivating adult learners, enrolled in extra-curricular language classes in a Portuguese university, to take part in speaking activities. Using questionnaires and interviews, she identifies specific factors that influence the learners levels of anxiety and motivation and explores strategies to promote learners' willingness to engage orally in classes. Francisco Faustino again discusses peer interaction in the

classroom, this time with learners in the third cycle and secondary education. He focuses on how to help learners overcome their inhibitions when speaking but concludes that simply engaging learners in interaction activities on their own cannot overcome learners' reticence to speak. In the last article, Carolyn Leslie analyses peer interaction amongst learners in primary English education and shows how they are able to mutually support each other's language production. The article finishes by discussing implications for the classroom such as the types of tasks that can be used, classroom management, learner pairings and assessment of oral interaction.

We thank all who have contributed to this volume.

Portuguese English as a Foreign Language Learners and Teachers' Beliefs in relation to Corrective Feedback

Ana Rita Rufino Faustino | ISCAL – IPL

Abstract

This study investigated the beliefs English as a Foreign Language (EFL) 9th grade learners (n=166) and teachers (n=5) hold about corrective feedback (CF). The participants completed a Likert-scale questionnaire that dealt with the necessity, frequency and timing of error correction, types of errors and their correction, effectiveness of CF strategies and who was responsible for the CF. The results revealed that both learners and teachers believe in the importance of CF. While learners expressed a preference for immediate CF, their teachers prefer correcting after the learner's turn. Both groups believe that errors that hinder communication and those related to grammar and vocabulary should be corrected most often. Learners perceive explicit corrections and recasts as the most effective strategies, whereas teachers favor recasts and prompts. Learners regard the teacher as the main source of CF, followed by self-correction, while teachers opt for promoting self-correction, but also provide CF themselves and resort to peer feedback.

1 INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

CF, defined as "responses to learner utterances containing an error" (Ellis, 2006, p. 28), is an everyday practice for language teachers. In each lesson, learners produce erroneous spoken output and teachers have to make an instant decision about whether to correct the error, when to do so, which errors to prioritize, how to correct them and who should correct. SLA research has shown strong support for the effectiveness of CF (Lyster et al., 2013; Pawlak, 2014), and teacher guides have extensively addressed the issue of error correction, although there is still a degree of caution regarding its implementation. Teachers themselves often fear they may be correcting too much or in a less subtle way, or breaking the communicative flow. This is, therefore, an area of interest for both language teachers and L2 acquisition researchers, and studies on the topic may contribute to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

By observing teacher-student interaction in French immersion classrooms, Lyster & Ranta (1997) identified six CF types that have been largely used by researchers to refer to the ways in which feedback can be provided:

(i) *explicit correction*, when the teacher overtly supplies the correct form, making clear that an error has occurred:

> *St: Last weekend I go to the cinema with my friends.*

> *T: You should say "I went to the cinema with my friends."*

(ii) *recast*, when the teacher reformulates the learner's utterance, correcting the error:

> *St: Last weekend I go to the cinema with my friends.*

> *T: Oh, you went to the cinema with your friends.*

(iii) *clarification request*, i.e., an indication by the teacher that the learner needs to repeat or reformulate his or her utterance:

St: Last weekend I go to the cinema with my friends.

T: Pardon? Can you repeat?

(iv) *metalinguistic feedback,* when the teacher comments on the student's utterance, relying on grammatical terminology so as to make him or her aware of the error and thus promoting self-correction:

St: Last weekend I go to the cinema with my friends.

T: What happens to the verb if you're talking about the past?

(v) *elicitation,* when the teacher directly asks the learner to self-correct, either by asking a question, by leading the student to complete their own sentence or by asking for a reformulation:

St: Last weekend I go to the cinema with my friends.

T: Last weekend, I...

(vi) *repetition,* when the teacher repeats the erroneous utterance, often emphasizing the error by adjusting intonation:

St: Last weekend I go to the cinema with my friends.

T: I go?

Research has shown strong support for the effectiveness of CF in foreign language (FL) learning (Lyster et al., 2013; Pawlak, 2014) and it has established itself as a key component in form-focused instruction. According to several metanalyses (e.g. Li, 2010; Lyster et al., 2013), classroom-based studies consistently confirm that providing oral CF is significantly more effective than providing no CF. Additionally, learners receiving CF in the form of prompts (clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition) or explicit correction tend to show more gains on some measures when compared to learners receiving recasts.

However, the results are varied. As the body of research has accumulated, it has become evident that CF and its effect on acquisition is mediated by different

factors, such as the nature of the target feature, the instructional context and individual factors. For example, the effectiveness of CF may depend upon learners' receptivity to the CF (Sheen, 2007), and mismatches between learners' and teachers' beliefs may play a role in the process. Beliefs about CF refer to the opinions and attitudes learners and teachers hold about how useful CF can be and how it can be implemented in the classroom, and have been recognized as a relevant factor in the learning process in terms of learner motivation and learner achievement (e.g. Dörnyei, 2005; Tanaka, 2004). Several studies have concluded that learners wish to be corrected more often than teachers deem necessary (e.g. Ancker, 2000; Schulz, 2001). For example, in relation to the question of whether teachers should correct every error learners make, 76% of ESL students answered "yes", as opposed to only 25% of teachers in Ancker's (2000) study, which investigated teachers and students' perceptions in 15 countries during a period of 4 years. The study involved EFL learners of different age groups. The most frequent reason for wishing to be corrected constantly given by learners was the importance of speaking English accurately, whereas teachers feared the negative impact of CF on students' motivation.

Therefore, teachers opt not to correct all mistakes (e.g. Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005), instead using delayed correction (e.g. Tomczyk, 2013) or implicit CF-strategies such as recasts (e.g. Bell, 2005). For example, Park (2010), who investigated the beliefs of 160 low-intermediate to advanced ESL learners and 18 ESL teachers about oral CF, reported that 52% (M=3.43) of students agreed with immediate correction even if it interrupted their speech, whereas only 11% (M=2.33) of teachers gave the same answer. The student participants in Lee (2013), who investigated advanced-level ESL learners' (n=60) beliefs, also stated they would like the most frequent errors in their oral production to be corrected all the time (M=4.42).

In her study, which involved 457 post-secondary FL teachers, Bell (2005) and Lee (2013) found a mean score of 4.43 out of 5 of learners who preferred the teacher to tell them what the error was and provide the correct form immediately. Scores

for explicit correction and recast were considerably higher than those for prompts, which seems to indicate that the learners that took part in the study wanted to be provided with the correct form, either implicitly or explicitly. Similarly, 64% of learners in Park's study (2010) rated explicit correction as "effective" or "very effective" and it was the favourite strategy in the correction of all types of error (grammatical, phonological and lexical) among 258 EFL learners in the study conducted by Fadilah et al., (2017). Roothooft & Breeze (2016) investigated the opinions of 395 learners (282 secondary school students and 113 adult students) and 46 teachers (half employed at secondary schools, half working at private language academies). The researchers found that students rated explicit correction more positively than their teachers, as more than 70% of students found it "effective" or "very effective", whereas only about 20% of teachers shared their opinion.

Regarding the question of who should be responsible for the provision of CF, Park (2010) found that 91% of learners and 94% of teachers agree or strongly agree that the teacher should correct students' errors. Self-correction also seemed to be valued by the participants in this study (71% of learners and 89% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed), although opinions were divided regarding peer-correction (46% of learners and 44% of teachers strongly agreed or strongly agreed). Although there is scant attention in the literature concerning teachers' beliefs about who should do the correcting, the student teacher participants (n=55) in Agudo's study (2014) did not show strong support for peer correction, with only 33% stating that it was more effective than teacher correction and 37% stating that it caused less anxiety than teacher correction. The teachers in this study believed in the value of self-correction – 78% agreed that learners should be prompted to self-correct.

The present study investigates EFL learners and teachers' beliefs about oral CF. There are various reasons why this research is important. Firstly, the success of CF may be mediated by preferences and expectations about its frequency, timing, the corrective strategy used, and who does the correcting, as well as the specific errors being addressed. Secondly, examining the beliefs of both learners and teachers enables us to identify disparities that may significantly affect

students' motivation to learn the language. Finally, understanding these beliefs provides essential insights into whether students and teachers' perceptions align with research outcomes regarding the effectiveness of CF. With these considerations in mind, the current study addressed the following research question:

Are there any differences between teachers' and students' perceptions of CF practices as far as frequency, timing, type of error, corrective strategy and who provides correction are concerned?

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Context and Participants

Seven classes of 9th Grade students (n=166) and their teachers (n=5) took part in the study, which took place in a state school in the Setúbal district. Eighty-four male students (51%) and eighty-two female students (49%) participated in the study. The average age of the students was fourteen years old and, for the majority (96%), their L1 was Portuguese. Most of the students (76%) reported that they had been learning English for more than 6 years or between 4 and 6 years (24%), which suggests that they started English lessons in primary school. Besides English, all the participants reported learning French as an FL. Five percent were also learning Spanish and 5% another FL. Lessons followed the curricular guidelines provided by the Portuguese Ministry of Education (Direção Geral da Educação, 2018), and had 135 minutes of English lessons per week, divided between one 90-minute lesson and one 45-minute lesson. As a whole, the classes could be said to represent an intermediate level of proficiency in English, or B1, according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001), although they also comprised of quite a few students who could be placed either above or below this proficiency level.

The five participating teachers were experienced EFL professionals who had taught English for eleven to thirty years, mainly in a state school context. All the teacher participants also taught another FL: three German, and two French.

2.2 Design and Procedure

Two questionnaires were designed to explore learners' and teachers' beliefs in relation to CF – one with twenty-five closed questions for learners (Appendix A) and another with thirty-two closed questions for teachers, (Appendix B). Both employed a Likert-scale and included an open-ended field called "Observations". In the first section, the questionnaire items were organized into five categories: necessity and frequency of error correction (i.e., should oral mistakes always, sometimes or never be corrected?), timing of error correction (i.e., as soon as the error occurs even if it interrupts the student's speaking, after the student finishes speaking, after the activity, at the end of class, in a lesson devoted to addressing the most frequent errors), types of errors (i.e., errors that interfere with communication, errors that do not interfere with communication, frequent errors, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation errors) and their correction, effectiveness of CF strategies (no correction, recast, prompts) and who corrects (the teacher, classmates, students themselves). In the first and second categories, necessity and frequency of error correction, and timing of error correction, students and teachers were asked to rate each item on a 6-point scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". As for the third, types of errors, a 5-point scale was used, from "never" to "always". The effectiveness of CF strategies, the fourth category, was rated by participants on a 4-point scale, from "very ineffective" to "very effective". The teachers' questionnaire included an additional category in which they were asked to rate on a 5-point scale, from "never" to "always", how often they use each strategy in their teaching practice. Finally, in the last category, which investigated opinions on who should be responsible for the provision of CF, participants' degree of agreement was rated on a 6-point scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly

agree". Examples were given to guide learners' and teacher's answers. The second section of the questionnaire collected participants' demographic information: gender, native language, length of English learning/ teaching and other languages mastered/ studied.

The questionnaire was informally piloted with a group of 9th-grade students and administered to students and teachers face-to-face. They were informed that the survey was anonymous and their participation voluntary. The participants were asked to read the general instructions, which gave some insight about the general aim of the study, and filled in the questionnaire in approximately twenty minutes.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Necessity and frequency of error correction

In the first category of the questionnaire, learners and teachers were asked to rate three statements to answer the question "Should oral errors be corrected?". As shown in Figure 1, on a 5-point scale, the learners 'mean rating for the statement "I like my English teacher to always correct my errors" was 4.20. No students strongly agreed and only one student agreed with the statement "I think the English teacher should never correct my errors" (M=1.42).
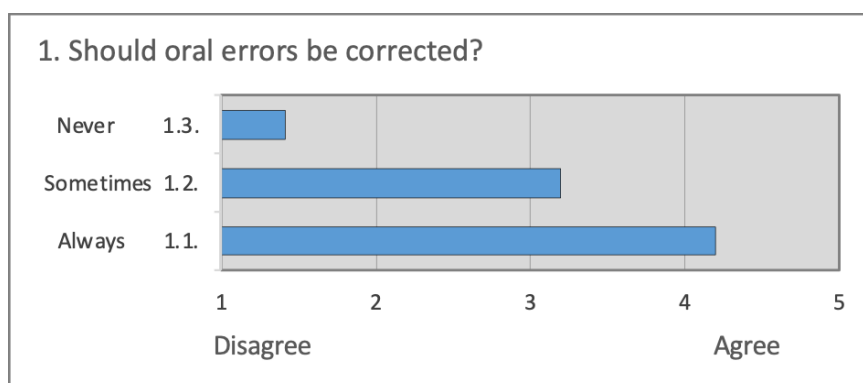
1. Should oral errors be corrected?

Never 1.3.	
Sometimes 1.2.	
Always 1.1.	

1 Disagree ... 5 Agree

Figure 1. Students' mean responses on the necessity and frequency of error correction (N=166)

Their teachers also recognized the importance of oral CF, despite being somewhat more cautious regarding how often it should be provided. As shown in Figure 2, the mean score for the statement "Students' errors should always be corrected" was 3.20. For the other two statements included in this category, "Students' errors should sometimes be corrected" and "Students' errors should never be corrected", a mean of 3.60 and 1.40 was found, respectively.
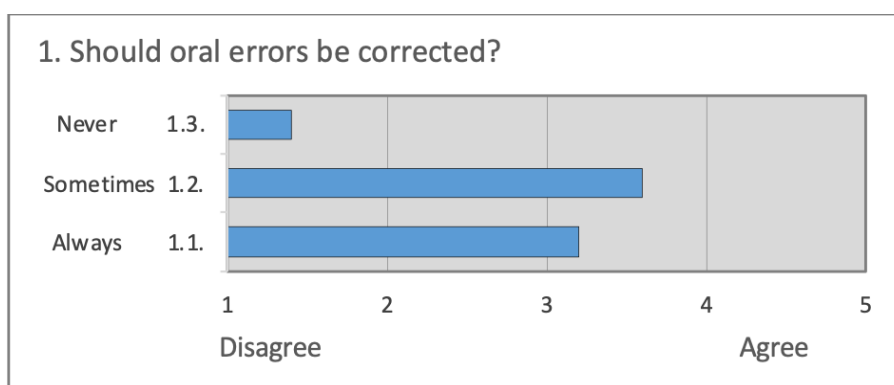
Figure 2. Teachers' mean responses on the necessity and frequency of error correction (N=5)

As far as the necessity and frequency of CF is concerned, the results suggest that the learners that participated in this study strongly believe in the importance of CF and express a wish to have their oral errors systematically corrected by their teachers. These results are in line with previous studies that showed that language learners acknowledge the usefulness of CF and expect to be corrected (e.g. Ancker, 2000; Brown, 2009; Park, 2010; Schulz, 2001).

Results suggest that the necessity for error correction is perceived more strongly by students than by their teachers, although both seem to agree on the usefulness of CF. Several comments left by students in an open question at the end of the questionnaire called "Observações" (*Observations*) confirm that there was a general wish among students to be corrected as often as possible:

Errors should always be corrected.

Teachers should always correct errors so that students don't make them again and to facilitate language learning.

I want to be corrected in order to improve and learn more.

I love English and would like the teacher to correct me as much as possible so that I can speak English fluently.

In my opinion errors should always be corrected, because if no one corrects them and we don't realize we made a mistake, we will keep doing it and that's not good.

As shown in the examples above, taken from the students' questionnaires, three students use the word "always", another the phrase "as much as possible" and another student clearly stated her wish to be corrected. Three students referred to the importance they believe oral correction has in their learning or in achieving fluency and another student considered that CF plays a role in preventing the occurrence of future errors.

Loewen et al., (2009), for example, found that FL learners relied on learning grammar rules and, when compared to second language (SL) learners, had fewer opportunities to use the target language (TL) outside the classroom context, which might promote a favourable attitude toward grammar and CF. The students participating in our study were not immersed in the TL and the opportunities to use English in authentic communication were limited, which might contribute to their wish to receive constant correction.

The participating teachers also showed positive beliefs towards CF, despite being more cautious regarding the frequency of its provision:

Corrective feedback is important, but we must take into account the balance between the need to correct oral errors and the encouragement to practice oral fluency.

The teacher must take into account the group in question. Constantly correcting students individually in front of the class in beginners' classes may discourage students from participating. In the intermediate level classes, from my experience, the students seem to be more comfortable with corrections and these can be an important contribution to the improvement of oral production.

These comments show that, while teachers also regard CF as a useful tool, they are aware that its positive impact is mediated by several factors. The participating teachers highlight the importance of correcting while also maintaining a classroom environment that motivates students to participate orally. Another relevant factor mentioned in the comments section is that CF provision is necessarily different according to the students' proficiency level. The comments written by the participating teachers are illustrative of the several decisions a teacher has to make as far as the correction of students' mistakes is concerned.

3.2 Timing of error correction

The second category is related to the timing of error correction and it includes 5 statements to be rated by the participants. The learners' and teachers' mean responses regarding the timing of CF are shown in Figure 3 and 4, respectively. "As soon as the student stops speaking" has the highest mean among students, 3.71, followed by "As soon as they occur", with 3.31. "At the end of the lesson" received the lowest mean score from students (M=1.80). Their teachers believe that the most fitting time for the provision of CF was either "As soon as the

student stops speaking", with a mean of 3.40, or "At the end of the activity", also with a mean of 3.40. In contrast to their students, teachers did not favor the option of correcting the errors "As soon as they occur" (M=2.20). The option of correcting "In a specific lesson" is the least popular among the teachers in this study (M=2.00).
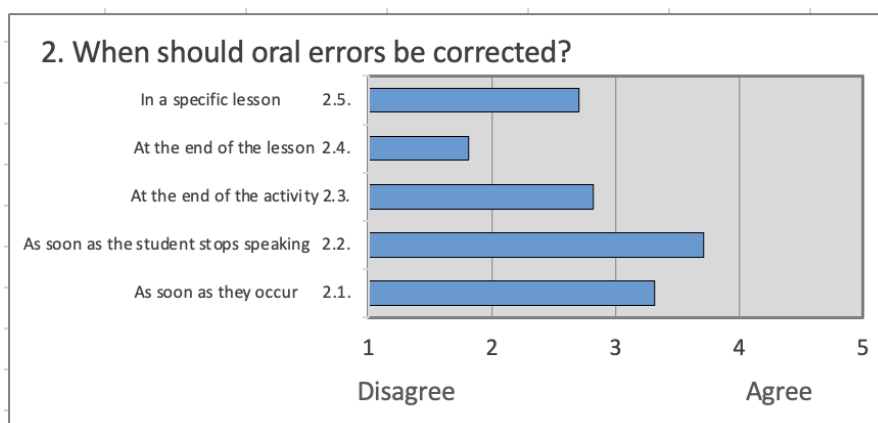
Figure 3. Students' mean responses on the timing of error correction (N= 166)

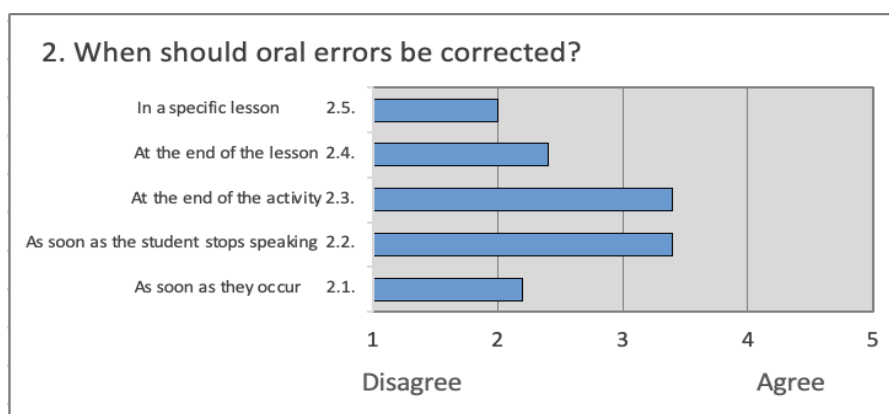*Figure 4. Teachers' mean responses on the timing of error correction (N=5)*

Regarding the timing of CF, the students that participated in this study regarded immediate correction as a positive practice, believing that their errors should be corrected either at the end of their turn or even as soon as the error was made. The same pattern was found by Davis (2003), Park (2010) and Tasdemir &

Arslan (2018), for example. These perceptions can also be found in some statements that the students noted in the questionnaire:

> I think that spoken errors should be immediately corrected so that in the next exercise we don't make the same mistakes.

> In short, I think that when students make oral errors the teacher should correct them when the student finishes speaking so as not to disturb and interrupt the student, but correcting the student so that he or she can try to correct them next time.

The teachers in this study approach the question of CF timing with care, being less certain of the option of correcting errors as soon as they occur. Being more aware of the diverse aspects that are involved in classroom interaction, in particular of the role affective factors play, teachers may fear that constant correction of every error may inhibit learners or hinder communication. Several teacher guides advise teachers to deal with immediate and constant correction with caution (e.g. Edge, 1989; Harmer, 2007; Hedge, 2000; Scrivener, 2005), for the same reasons, particularly if the context is a communicative activity, as opposed to an activity which aims at developing accuracy. The advice on the topic given in teacher guides may be one of the factors that help shape teachers' CF responses (Ellis, 2017). Furthermore, teachers' beliefs about CF may have their origin in their experiences as trainee teachers, during in-service training or in the classroom context (Borg, 2011).

In line with the recommendations found in teacher guides, the teachers that participated in the study prefer correcting at the end of the student's turn or at the end of the activity. This may be a way of encouraging oral participation in the classroom, making the learner feel at ease to express his or her own ideas freely, without feeling judged. This particular aspect was addressed by two of the participating teachers in the "Observations" section of the questionnaire:

It seems important to me to be careful not to interrupt the student in the middle of a sentence, so that the correction does not become counterproductive. However, we should also not wait too long before correcting, otherwise the student will no longer be able to associate the correct form with the error.

Usually, I prefer to wait until the student has finished speaking, so that he or she does not forget what he or she is going to say and feels that there is enough space to practice speaking.

3.3 Types of errors

The statements in the third category asked learners and teachers about the frequency with which different types of errors should be corrected. As shown in Figure 5, all error types received quite high mean scores among students, especially grammar (M=4.58) and vocabulary (M=4.58) mistakes, followed by errors that interfere with communication (M=4.37). The lowest mean score among students was found in the responses to question 3.2. "Errors that do not interfere with communication", but students still believed that CF should be provided for these mistakes (M=3.36).
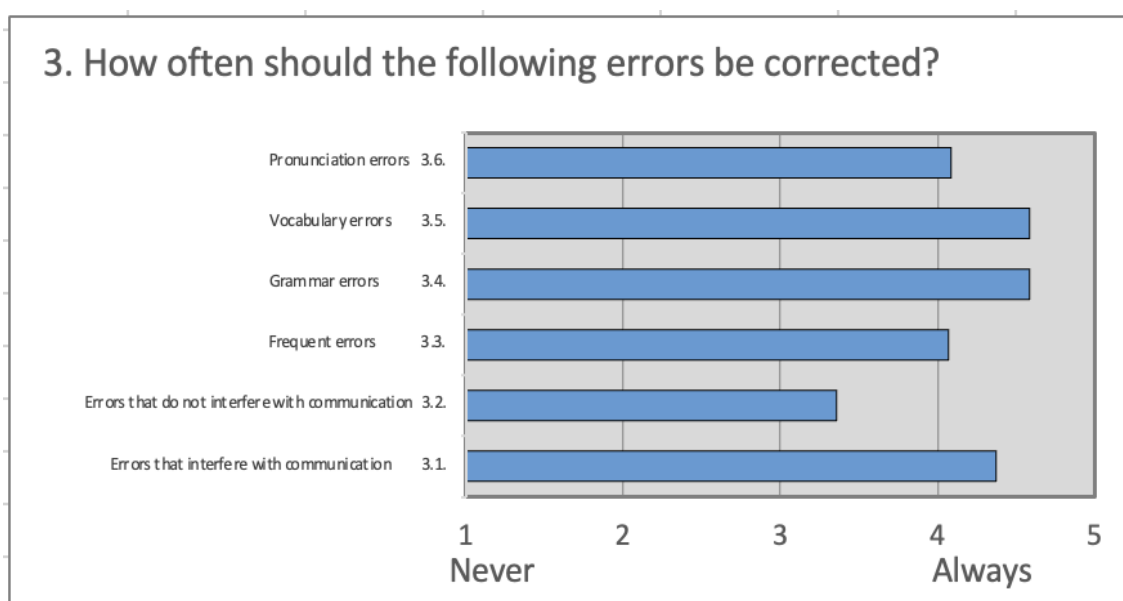
Figure 5. Students' mean responses on the correction of different types of errors (N=166)

The mean scores for the teachers' answers regarding how often different types of errors should be corrected are shown in Figure 6. In the teachers' opinion, errors that interfere with communication should always be corrected (M=5), and high means were also found for grammar (M=4.20) and vocabulary (M=4.20) errors. Similar to students, teachers consider that errors that do not interfere with communication should be given less priority in the frequency of oral CF, but that correction should, nevertheless, be provided to a considerable extent (M=3.40).
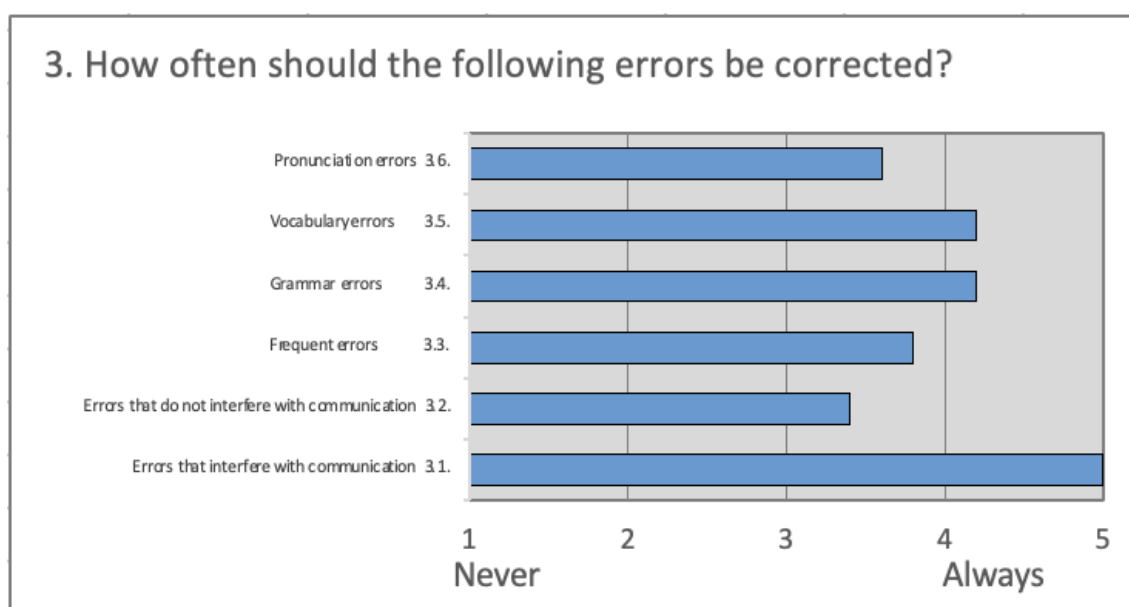
Figure 6. Teachers' mean responses on the correction of different types of errors (N=5)

When asked about correction of different types of errors, students and teachers agreed that errors that interfere with communication should always be corrected. Although information regarding the desired correction by students and teachers of different types of errors is scarce in the literature, the same pattern was found by Park (2010).

All grammar and vocabulary errors should also be corrected at all times, in the students' opinion. However, teachers believe that those errors that hinder

communication should be given priority. These results reveal that although teachers do not treat all the errors that occur, they consistently provide CF on errors that cause misunderstanding. As discussed in section 3.1., teachers must strike a balance between offering CF and promoting oral production and interaction while also managing time constraints in classes. Jean & Simard (2011) also found that, when looking at types of errors, errors which impede communication were also thought to be more important than grammar errors by the participating teachers.

The results, particularly those of the students, corroborate the stated wish to be corrected all the time. One of the comments left by the students in the questionnaire clearly expresses this opinion:

> In conclusion, I think it is essential for the teacher to correct our mistakes regardless of the type of mistake.

This contrasts, for example, with the results found by Jean & Simard (2011), as half of the participating learners in their study estimated that oral errors should be corrected only when they interfere with communication.

Another comment written by one of the students in the present study reinforces the perceived importance of error correction. The learner makes reference to two types of errors he or she considers particularly worthy of correction, and presents an argument in favor of immediate correction, which, as discussed above, is generally approved by the students:

> Any type of error should be corrected immediately, otherwise it doesn't have as much effect and the student forgets about it. Grammatical and pronunciation errors, which are the most common, are the errors that should be given the most attention.

Interestingly, in his own words, this student refers to the importance of not delaying a correction, fearing such CF may lack effectiveness. This relates to the concept of "window of opportunity" (Doughty, 2001), according to which immediate

CF prompts leaners to carry out a cognitive comparison between their output and the TL form, which may promote the development of linguistic competence.

3.4 Effectiveness of CF strategies

The fourth category in the questionnaire aimed at investigating learners' and teachers' beliefs on the effectiveness of different CF strategies. An example of a classroom interaction between a student and a teacher was used (cf. Appendix A and B) to illustrate the different reactions that the teacher can have to a student's oral error: (4.1.) no CF; (4.2.) explicit correction; (4.3.) recast; (4.4.) clarification request; (4.5.) metalinguistic feedback; (4.6.) elicitation; or (4.7.) repetition.

Figure 7 illustrates the mean responses of students as far as the CF types are concerned. Explicit correction (M=4.33) had the highest mean score among students, followed by recasts (M=3.86). Regarding prompts, clarification requests had a mean of 3.46, metalinguistic feedback 3.17, elicitation 3.11 and repetition 2.83. No CF provision had the lowest mean score among learners (M=1.39).
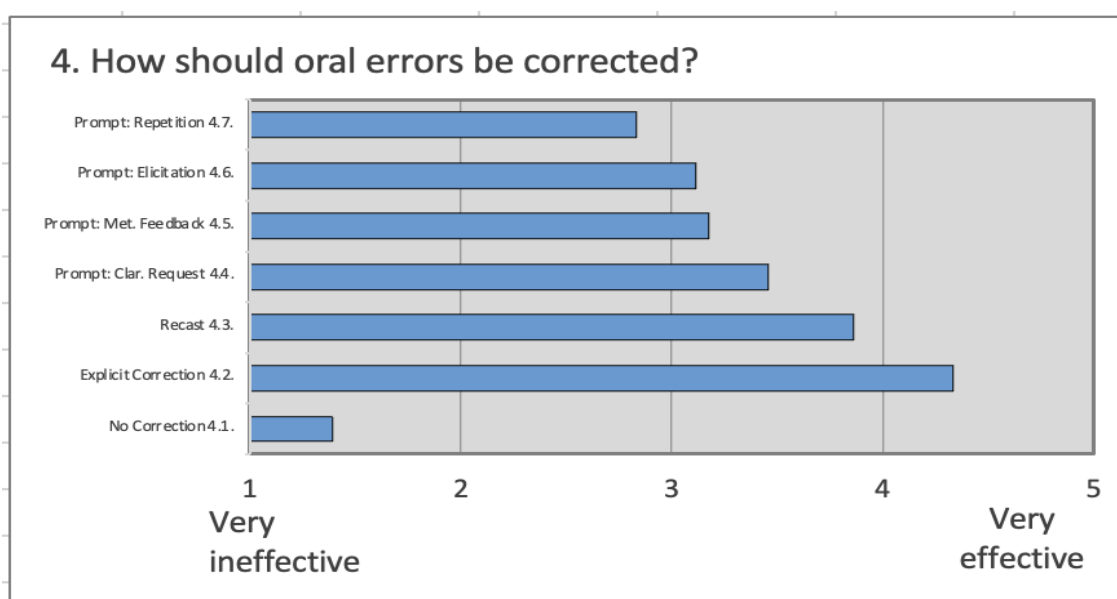
Figure 7. Students' mean responses on the effectiveness of different CF strategies (N=166)

As far as the teachers were concerned, recast and prompts in the form of metalinguistic feedback had the highest mean score, 3.60, followed by prompts in the form of elicitation (M=3.40). No correction also had the lowest mean score among teachers (M=1.40), but it was followed by explicit correction (M=2.40), which shows a contrast between the teachers' and the students' beliefs. Figure 8 shows the mean responses of the teachers regarding effectiveness of the CF strategies.

4. How should oral errors be corrected?
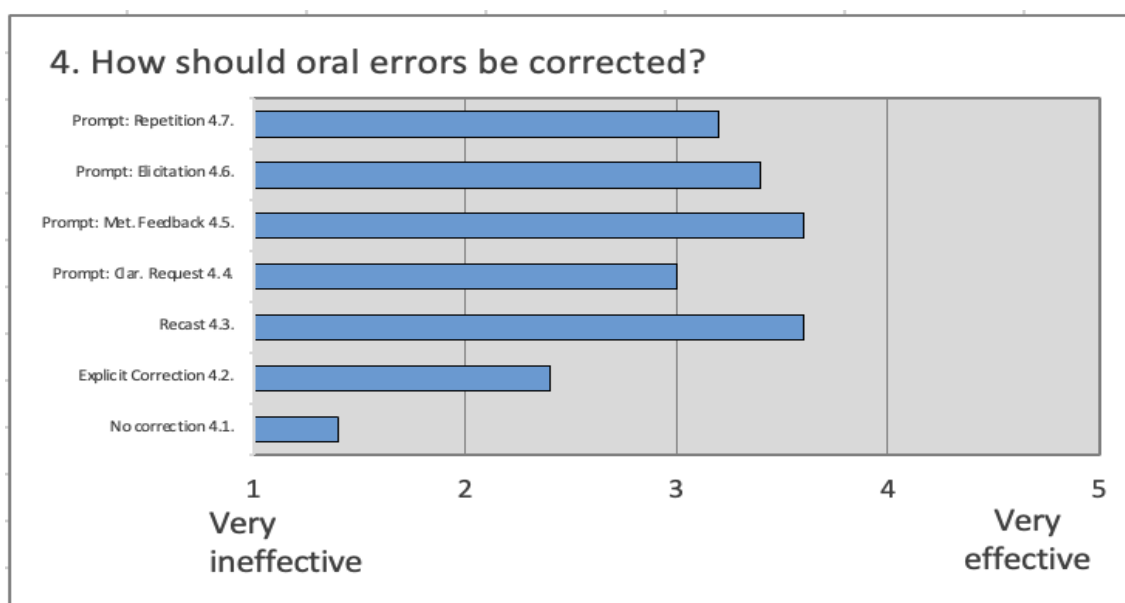
Figure 8. Teachers' mean responses on the effectiveness of different CF strategies (N=5)

When asked how often they used each CF strategy in their lessons, as illustrated in Figure 9, the teachers answered that they relied preferably on the prompt strategies of metalinguistic feedback (M=3.60) and elicitation (M=3.60) and on the recast (M=3.40). Not providing a correction was the option the teachers stated they used least often in the classroom (M=2.00), followed by explicit correction (M=2.40).

Figure 9. Teachers' mean responses on the frequency of provision of the different CF strategies (N=5)

Regarding the perceived effectiveness of the different CF strategies, not surprisingly, students and teachers agree that no correction is the least effective action. As for CF strategies, opinions diverge. For example, explicit correction is the students' favorite strategy, but it is at the same time the one least favored by the teachers. This is a strategy which makes it clear that an error has occurred and provides the correct form. Although there has been little research on students' favorite CF types, other studies also found that explicit correction is perceived as very effective by learners (e.g. Lee, 2013; Park, 2010; Roothooft & Breeze, 2016).

The possibility exists that the students' opinions may be influenced by the grammar-based instruction that is still prevalent in some EFL classrooms, in which achieving grammatical accuracy is one of the main goals. The participants' previous educational experiences may also play a role as a mediating factor on their beliefs about CF and grammar instruction (see Loewen et al., 2009). Additionally, the students may expect their teacher to have superior knowledge and, therefore, be a more appropriate source for CF. On the other hand, the teachers in this study do

not regard explicit correction as a very effective strategy. The same pattern emerged in Cathcart & Olsen (1976), Roothooft (2018) and Roothooft & Breeze (2016). This might be related to the teachers' concern with promoting oral participation and a positive learning environment. In addition, methodologists such as Harmer (2007) and Scrivener (2005) favor CF techniques that indicate that an error has occurred over those which provide the target form without creating opportunities for self-correction. Another aspect which teacher guides give considerable relevance to is building a good rapport with students, which Harmer (2007, p. 100) states "is dependent on listening to students' views and attempts with respect, and intervening (i.e. for correction) in an appropriate and constructive way". In a section devoted to establishing rapport, the author refers to correcting students as a "delicate event", due to the risk of being too critical and demotivating students. Despite having completed their initial training long ago, the participating teachers take part in training sessions and/ or conferences regularly and are aware of the role affective factors play in learning and of the recent advice given by methodologists. Taking this into account, they might fear that providing a correction which clearly states an error has occurred might be counterproductive when it comes to encouraging oral participation.

In contrast, recasts seem to be validated by both teachers and students. The students in this study rated recast as their second favorite strategy. The results seem to indicate that these students wish to be told, either implicitly or explicitly, what the correct form is. Once again, previous classroom experiences may play a role in the students' opinions of this CF type. Research has identified recasts as the most widely used CF strategy in several contexts (e.g. Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen, 2001; Lyster & Mori, 2006; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Additionally, as Kartchava (2016) points out, the familiarity with recasts may have its origin not only in the classroom context, but also in the students' L1 acquisition experiences, considering that recasts are used by parents to clarify the meaning or address the truth-value of statements. However, research outcomes regarding the effectiveness of recasts have shown that they may be less effective than prompts because it is not always

evident to learners that they are being corrected and they are not provided with an opportunity to modify their output (Lyster et al., 2013).

Prompts seem to be positively regarded by the teachers that participated in the study, in particular metalinguistic feedback. This suggests that these EFL professionals believe in the pedagogic benefits of providing learners with the opportunity to self-correct, a result that echoed that of Agudo (2014). This practice is also in line with the recommendations given by several teacher guides in the direction of prioritizing output-prompting strategies. This also reflects a general principle adopted in these works, i.e. that "people learn more by doing things themselves rather than being told about them" (Scrivener, 2005, p. 3). Although these strategies are perceived by the students as less effective than explicit correction, they still recognize their importance, as the following comments written by the students illustrate:

Students should try to correct their mistakes, but if necessary the teacher should help, but not say the correct answer right away.

I think students have to have the willpower to correct their mistakes.

The teachers' answers to the question that investigated how often they used each CF strategy in their lessons also reveal that they tend to give students the chance to correct their own errors by signaling that an error has occurred through a prompt, preferably metalinguistic feedback or elicitation. Besides using output-prompting feedback, the teachers also employ input-providing strategies, but show a preference for recasts instead of the explicit correction.

3.5 Who provides CF

The last category asked learners and teachers about who should be in charge of providing CF. As shown in Figure 10, the teacher as the provider of CF received the highest mean score among learners (M=4.60). Learners expressed a

preference for self-correction (M=3.37) when compared to peer-correction (M=2.63).

5. Who should do the correcting?

Myself	5.3.
My classmates	5.2.
The teacher	5.1.

1 — Very ineffective ... 5 — Very effective
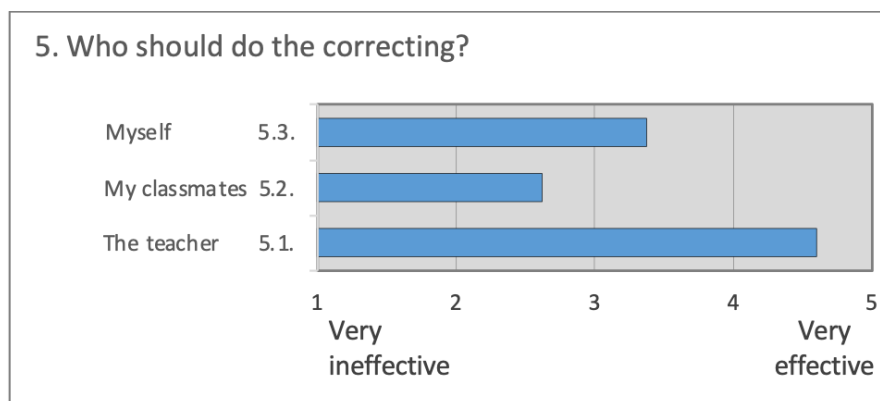
Figure 10. Students' mean responses on the provider of error correction (N=166)

Figure 11 illustrates the mean scores of teachers' on who should provide CF. The teachers recognized the importance of self-correction (M=3.80) and also the role of the teacher in giving CF (M=3.60). Peer-correction also received the lowest mean among the teachers in this study (M=3.20).

6. Who should do the correcting?

The student	5.3.
Other students	5.2.
The teacher	5.1.

1 — Very ineffective ... 5 — Very effective

Figure 11. Teachers' mean responses on the provider of error correction (N=5)

Taking into account the learners' strong wish to be corrected, preferably soon after the error is made, it comes as no surprise that they choose the teacher as their main source of correction. In fact, when asked about the effectiveness of the different CF strategies, the students preferred explicit correction and recasts,

two strategies that, although distinct in terms of explicitness, are both input-providing. Therefore, students seem to expect their teacher to provide them with the correct form, a belief that was also identified by previous research (e.g. Brown, 2009; Park, 2010; Schulz, 2001).

Teaching practices such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) strive to motivate students to adopt an active role as far as their own learning is concerned and to regard their teacher as a facilitator, rather than as a knowledge-transmitter (Harmer, 2007). Nevertheless, the instructional setting, previous learning experiences and a restricted exposure to the TL, which comes with limited opportunities for language use, may still contribute to the learners' primary reliance on their teacher to obtain CF. In fact, the school in which the research was conducted is located in a town which, despite being relatively near the capital, does not offer many opportunities to use English in meaningful interactions outside the classr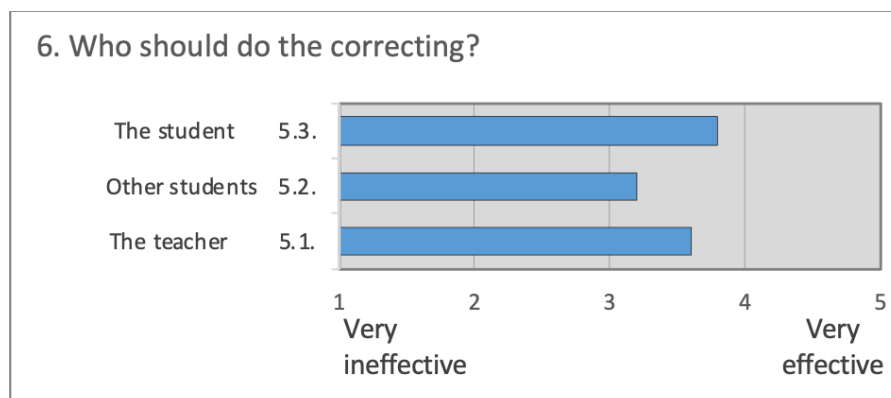oom, since it does not attract many tourists and is not home to international companies, which might invite the use of English as a means of communication. Furthermore, certain constraints such as the size of the classes and their heterogeneity in terms of proficiency level often make it hard to provide learners with abundant opportunities for oral production and interaction. In this context, it seems that students still value their English teacher as the main CF provider, illustrated by this comment left by a student:

> Usually, I think the teacher should correct us, since they have more experience with the topic.

The teachers' opinions are more divided as they attribute less importance to the teacher as a CF provider. This belief may be informed by Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research that has provided evidence on the benefits of encouraging the learner to self-correct (e.g. Lyster, 2004; Lyster & Saito, 2010). Moreover, teacher guides, which almost invariably advocate a more learner-centered approach, advise teachers to create conditions for self-correction (Edge, 1989; Harmer, 2007; Hedge, 2000; Scrivener, 2005). This aspect is mentioned by one of the participating teachers in the following comment:

I think it is helpful to try to get the student to arrive at the correct form on their own, especially in the case of vocabulary and grammatical structures that have already been covered in previous lessons or years.

Another option to engage learners in the process of providing CF is peer correction. This is, nonetheless, the least favorite CF provider for both students and teachers. The students in the present study did not consider peer feedback to be an effective CF option, which reinforces the role of the teacher as the main feedback provider, in the students' opinion. It is possible that, given their role as fellow learners, students do not consider their classmates a reliable learning source and thus fear their corrections may not be accurate. Additionally, students may feel uncomfortable when being corrected by their peers or even when correcting them (Yoshida, 2010). The following comments give us an insight into the reasons behind the participants' choices regarding peer correction:

If our classmates correct us, they may mislead us.

The students in my class should not correct me without the teacher's permission and only if I get the question wrong, because they may not have the required knowledge.

These comments echo those of the student participants in Chu (2013), who also believed that providing feedback is the teacher's, not the learners' role. While many students may not consider their peers a reliable learning source, research has shown that peer feedback may encourage an active reflection on the learners' own performance and that of their classmates (Sato & Lyster, 2012), which is believed to positively affect language knowledge (DeKeyser, 2007; Iwashita & Dao, 2021).

4 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To summarize, both students and teachers believe that students' oral errors should be corrected, with students in particular expressing a strong belief that their

errors should almost always receive correct feedback. As far as the timing of CF, results suggest that students prefer immediate feedback. Their teachers also regard this practice as effective, but prefer to correct after the student has stopped speaking or at the end of the activity. Regarding the types of errors, errors that interfere with communication, grammar errors and vocabulary errors are those that teachers believe that should most often be corrected. These types of errors are also those that students feel should most often receive CF. With reference to CF types, students and teachers agree that not providing a correction is the least effective strategy to adopt. Students prefer the provision of explicit correction or recasts, which shows that they want their teacher to provide them with the correct form. Teachers favour recasts as a way of providing CF with minimal interference in the communication, or prompts in the form of metalinguistic feedback, as a means of providing the student with hints that enable him or her to find the correct form. Finally, students regard the teacher as the person principally responsible of CF, followed by self-correction, whereas teachers opt for promoting self-correction, despite also providing CF themselves or resorting to peer feedback.

In interpreting the present results, one should, however, bear in mind that the tool used to investigate the beliefs may present some limitations, since questionnaires may not fully grasp what the respondents believe about CF. Although the questionnaire was informally piloted with a small group of 9th-grade students, the wording might have been unclear to some of the participants and, therefore, some questions might have been misunderstood. Questionnaires are, nevertheless, a very common tool to investigate such topics, since they allow for a large number of participants to be surveyed in a short period of time. Interviewing the participants individually would have been too time-consuming. To try to compensate for the lack of an individual interview, an open-ended section for comments was included so that students and teachers could express their opinions on the topic or explain why they agreed or disagreed with a particular item. Moreover, the number of teachers in this study is too small to generalize. Finally,

future studies on students and teachers' beliefs about CF should also investigate other nationalities, age groups, TLs and proficiency levels.

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APPENDIX A

Questionário – Feedback Corretivo

O presente questionário está a ser administrado no âmbito de um estudo sobre a correção da oralidade no ensino-aprendizagem da língua estrangeira em sala de aula.

As questões colocadas pretendem investigar perceções e crenças sobre o ensino-aprendizagem da língua estrangeira e os dados recolhidos serão utilizados para a elaboração de uma tese de Doutoramento em Linguística, área de especialidade de Linguística e Ensino de Língua, intitulada "Noticing and bridging the gap: o uso e efeito do feedback corretivo na aula de língua estrangeira".

Não se trata de um teste, pelo que não existem respostas certas ou erradas. Estamos interessados em conhecer a tua opinião pessoal. Por favor, responde da forma mais sincera possível, pois isso é indispensável para o sucesso da investigação.

Este é um questionário anónimo e, por isso, não deves escrever o teu nome.

Muito obrigada pela colaboração.

Ao longo do questionário irás encontrar algumas frases sobre a correção dos erros na oralidade na aula de língua estrangeira com as quais algumas pessoas concordam e outras discordam. Dá a tua opinião colocando um círculo na caixa que melhor indica o teu grau de concordância. Muito obrigada pela tua ajuda.

Por exemplo:

0. *Os alunos devem ter sempre trabalhos de casa para fazer.*

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

1. *Será que os erros orais dos alunos devem ser alvo de correção?*

    1.1. Gosto que o professor de Inglês corrija sempre os meus erros.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

    1.2. Gosto que o professor de Inglês corrija os meus erros às vezes.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

    1.3. Acho que o professor de Inglês nunca deve corrigir os meus erros.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

1

2. Os erros na oralidade, em geral, devem ser corrigidos...

2.1. Assim que ocorrem, mesmo que o professor tenha de interromper o que estou a dizer.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

2.2. Logo que eu acabe de falar.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

2.3. No final da atividade.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

2.4. No final da aula.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

2.5. Numa aula especificamente destinada à correção dos erros mais frequentes.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

2.6. E, em particular, os erros de gramática devem ser corrigidos...

Assim que ocorrem	Logo que eu acabe de falar	No final da atividade	No final da aula	Numa aula destinada à correção de erros

3. Com que frequência devem ser corrigidos os erros ...

3.1. Que interferem com a comunicação.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3.2. Que não interferem com a comunicação.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3.3. Comuns.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3.4. De gramática.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3.5. De vocabulário.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3.6. De pronúncia.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

2

4. De que forma é que os erros orais devem ser corrigidos?

> Diálogo em aula
>
> Professor: *Where did you go last weekend?*
>
> Aluno: *I go to the cinema with my friends.*

4.1. Professor: *What film did you see?*
(O professor continua o diálogo, não corrigindo o erro.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.2. Professor: *You should say "I went to the cinema with my friends".*
(O professor indica ao aluno que ocorreu um erro e fornece a forma correta.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.3. Professor: *I went to the cinema with my friends.*
(O professor reformula a frase do aluno, incorporando a correção do erro.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.4. Professor: *Can you repeat?*
(O professor pede ao aluno para repetir a frase.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.5. Professor: *What happens to the verb if you're talking about the past?*
(O professor dá uma pista sobre o erro do aluno, mas sem fornecer a forma correta.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.6. Professor: *Last weekend, I...*
(O professor solicita ao aluno que complete a sua frase e se autocorrija.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.7. Professor: *I go?*
(O professor repete o erro do aluno, usando a entoação para enfatizar o erro.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

5. Quem deve corrigir os meus erros orais?

5.1. O professor.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

5.2. Os meus colegas de turma.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

5.3. Eu próprio.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

3

Observações:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Informação pessoal

Por favor, coloca um círculo na caixa que se aplica à tua situação.

1. Género

Masculino	Feminino

2. Qual é a tua língua materna?

Português	Outra:

3. Há quantos anos estás a aprender Inglês?

1 a 3 anos	4 a 6 anos	Há mais de 6 anos

4. Que outras línguas estrangeiras estás a aprender?

Alemão	Espanhol	Francês	Outras:

Escola: _____ Ano/ Turma: _____ Data: _____

Muito obrigada pela colaboração!

Ana Rita Faustino

Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas - UNL

4

APPENDIX B

Questionário – Feedback Corretivo

O presente questionário está a ser administrado no âmbito de um estudo sobre a correção da oralidade no ensino-aprendizagem da língua estrangeira em sala de aula.

As questões colocadas pretendem investigar perceções e crenças sobre o ensino-aprendizagem da língua estrangeira e os dados recolhidos serão utilizados para a elaboração de uma tese de Doutoramento em Linguística, área de especialidade de Linguística e Ensino de Língua, intitulada "Noticing and bridging the gap: o uso e efeito do feedback corretivo na aula de língua estrangeira".

Não se trata de um teste, pelo que não existem respostas certas ou erradas. Estamos interessados em conhecer a sua opinião pessoal. Por favor, responda da forma mais sincera possível, pois isso é indispensável para o sucesso da investigação.

Este é um questionário anónimo e, por isso, não deve escrever o seu nome.

Muito obrigada pela colaboração.

Ao longo do questionário irá encontrar algumas frases sobre a correção dos erros na oralidade na aula de língua estrangeira com as quais algumas pessoas concordam e outras discordam. Dê a sua opinião colocando um círculo na caixa que melhor indica o seu grau de concordância. Muito obrigada pela sua ajuda.

Por exemplo:

0. *Os alunos devem ter sempre trabalhos de casa para fazer.*

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

1. *Será que os erros orais dos alunos devem ser alvo de correção?*

1.1. Os erros dos alunos devem ser sempre corrigidos.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

1.2. Os erros dos alunos devem ser corrigidos às vezes.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

1.3. Os erros dos alunos nunca devem ser corrigidos.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

1

2. **Os erros na oralidade, em geral, devem ser corrigidos...**

2.1. Assim que ocorrem, mesmo que o discurso do aluno seja interrompido.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

2.2. Logo que o aluno acabe de falar.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

2.3. No final da atividade.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

2.4. No final da aula.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

2.5. Numa aula especificamente destinada à correção dos erros mais frequentes.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

2.6. E, em particular, os erros de gramática devem ser corrigidos.

Assim que ocorrem	Logo que o aluno acabe de falar	No final da atividade	No final da aula	Numa aula destinada à correção de erros

3. **Com que frequência devem ser corrigidos os erros ...**

3.1. Que interferem com a comunicação.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3.2. Que não interferem com a comunicação.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3.3. Comuns.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3.4. De gramática.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3.5. De vocabulário.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3.6. De pronúncia.

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

2

4. **De que forma é que os erros orais devem ser corrigidos?**

Diálogo em aula	
Professor:	*Where did you go last weekend?*
Aluno:	*I go to the cinema with my friends.*

4.1. Professor: *What film did you see?*
(O professor continua o diálogo, não corrigindo o erro.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.2. Professor: *You should say "I went to the cinema with my friends".*
(O professor indica ao aluno que ocorreu um erro e fornece a forma correta.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.3. Professor: *I went to the cinema with my friends.*
(O professor reformula a frase do aluno, incorporando a correção do erro.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.4. Professor: *Can you repeat?*
(O professor pede ao aluno para repetir a frase.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.5. Professor: *What happens to the verb if you're talking about the past?*
(O professor dá uma pista sobre o erro do aluno, mas sem fornecer a forma correta.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.6. Professor: *Last weekend, I...*
(O professor solicita ao aluno que complete a sua frase e se autocorrija.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

4.7. Professor: *I go?*
(O professor repete o erro do aluno, usando a entoação para enfatizar o erro.)

Nada eficaz	Parcialmente eficaz	Eficaz	Muito eficaz

5. **Relativamente à sua prática letiva, com que frequência utiliza cada uma das seguintes estratégias de correção da oralidade?**

5.1. Professor: *What film did you see?*
(O professor continua o diálogo, não corrigindo o erro.)

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

5.2. Professor: *You should say "I went to the cinema with my friends".*
(O professor indica ao aluno que ocorreu um erro e fornece a forma correta.)

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

3

5.3. Professor: *I went to the cinema with my friends.*
(*O professor reformula a frase do aluno, incorporando a correção do erro.*)

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

5.4. Professor: *Can you repeat?*
(*O professor pede ao aluno para repetir a frase.*)

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

5.5. Professor: *What happens to the verb if you're talking about the past?*
(*O professor dá uma pista sobre o erro do aluno, mas sem fornecer a forma correta.*)

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

5.6. Professor: *Last weekend, I...*
(*O professor solicita ao aluno que complete a sua frase e se autocorrija.*)

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

5.7. Professor: *I go?*
(*O professor repete o erro do aluno, usando a entoação para enfatizar o erro.*)

Sempre	Frequentemente	Às vezes	Raramente	Nunca

6. Quem deve corrigir os erros orais dos alunos?

6.1. O professor.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

6.2. Os outros alunos.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

6.3. O próprio aluno.

Discordo completamente	Discordo	Discordo parcialmente	Concordo parcialmente	Concordo	Concordo completamente

Observações:

_____

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_____

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4

The Foreign Language Classroom as a Space for the development of Visual Literacy and Critical Thinking

Joana Louro | NOVA FCSH

Abstract

Images are part of our daily lives, whether in a professional, personal, or educational context. In the classroom, particularly in the foreign language classroom, their uses are virtually endless and can facilitate the development of visual literacy as well as critical thinking. To this end, teachers must place the image at the centre of their classes and not just use it as a merely decorative element. This article aims to understand how foreign language classes could help in the development of visual literacy and critical thinking. To this end, an action-research project was carried out during the teaching practice of a Master's degree in teaching English and Spanish in the third cycle and secondary education, in which the image was central and provided moments of reflection and criticism by the students during lessons in a secondary school near Lisbon, Portugal. Data was gathered from learners' classwork, and this was analysed using a series of descriptors related to visual literacy and critical thinking. This study shows that most students are visually literate and able to think critically about some topics, even though it is clear there is space for improvement. It is imperative to dedicate time to the analysis and interpretation of a variety of images (film posters, memes, photographs, pictures, and cartoons, among others) and to debate the various ideas and interpretations that may arise from them, bearing in mind learner motivation.

Keywords: visual literacy, critical thinking, pictures, action-research, foreign language teaching.

1. Introduction

Images surround us. We are constantly being bombarded by new images, both in public and private spheres, due to the advances of telecommunications. We see them in advertising, social networks, newspapers, on television and in magazines. Knowing how to find, interpret, evaluate, use and effectively create these images, that is, how to be visually literate (Lundy & Stephens, 2015) is therefore central for any citizen, especially students. They are the ones who are in continuous contact with the digital world, and who are exposed to new information and images full of new messages in an increasingly globalized world, characterized by excessive information, that is, by an infodemic (Martín et al., 2021)

In addition to knowing how to "read" the images we receive and deciphering their various layers, it is also imperative that 21st century students have tools that help them think critically. According to the *Perfil do Aluno à Saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória* (Direção Geral da Educação, 2017) an essential document for the organisation and articulation of the Portuguese education system, "critical thinking skills require observing, identifying, analysing and making sense of information, experiences and ideas and arguing from different premises and variables" (my translation).

Uniting critical thinking and visual literacy, two areas of particular interest in this article, is a significant strategy in preparing students for an increasingly demanding future and the foreign language classroom is a privileged space to do so, as the student is perceived as a social agent, a citizen with a series of tasks at hand that (s)he needs to accomplish within a particular environment and a concrete space for action (Council of Europe, 2001). Here, the student/citizen is helped by the teacher to reason, interpret, create, question and conceive hypotheses, using both the mother tongue and the foreign language, in order to be prepared for the challenges of the future, and does not act simply as a receiver of information.

Following the methodology of action research, this study intends to answer the question "How can foreign language classes help in the development of visual

literacy and critical thinking?". It begins by clarifying the concepts involved (visual literacy and critical thinking) before explaining and discussing methodology, results and conclusions. Also, why and how these two dimensions should be included in the classroom will be illustrated, providing examples of activities and didactic sequences.

2. Literature review

2.1 Visual Literacy

We often hear the word *literacy* applied to the most diverse contexts. According to Cassany (2015, p. 89), its most traditional definition encompasses, "all knowledge, skills and attitudes and values derived from the widespread, historical, individual and social use of the written code". Thinking of the social context, Cassany and Castellà (2010, p. 354), define it as " a wide range of knowledge, social practices, values and attitudes related to the social use of written texts in each community". However, the evolution of technological media has enhanced the development of this term, as well as its scope, given that new ways of reading, visualising, and searching for information have emerged. Currently, there is talk of digital literacy, media literacy and visual literacy, among others.

When mentioning this last term, we can say that currently visual literacy is the set of skills that allows the individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use and create images or any other means of visual communication (Lundy & Stephens, 2015), a definition that will be the basis of this study. That is, the literate citizen, in addition to knowing how to read and write, is able to ask him/herself about the messages (s)he receives, regardless of how they are communicated to him/her (Goldstein, 2016). In addition to being a receiver and consumer (Lundy & Stephens, 2015), the literate individual is also, in the words of the aforementioned authors, "a competent contributor to a body of shared knowledge and culture", the objective of which is, as has already been mentioned, to deconstruct the various meanings of what is presented to him. It is important to mention that the difficulties in "reading"

actively and critically the messages that come to us are a reality, not only for young people, but also adults (Bulger & Davidson, 2018), highlighting the importance of this competence in the classroom. In fact, it is essential to highlight that, although they were born in a digital age, the vast majority of adolescents do not have in their possession the tools necessary to identify the multiple meanings in images, largely due to the difficulties they have in determining the veracity of the information collected (Hargittai & Shaw, 2013, as cited in Kahne & Bowyer, 2019).

2.2 Critical Thinking

The concept of *critical thinking*, which is intrinsically linked to the previously discussed concept has been described by Scriven and Paul (1987) as:

> the intellectual process of actively conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. in its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. (Scriven & Paul, 1987, as cited by Xu, 2011, p.136)

Within the sphere of education, it is impossible not to relate the concept under analysis to the words of Bloom (1956, p.38), who describes critical thinking as "intellectual abilities and skills the student has or should have to choose and use the most appropriate tools and techniques to deal with new problems and situations that arise. According to the author, critical thinking involves 6 levels (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and, finally, evaluation), and learners should be able to use all these levels to gain knowledge in different spheres of their life (Bloom, 1956).

It is also important to highlight the concept of critical pedagogy, initially developed by Paulo Freire, which changed how society perceived teaching and the student's role. For Freire, the objective was to make the student aware of his/her own reality, in order to convert him/her into an agent of change and cultural production (Freire, 1967; 1970, as cited by Lacorte & Atienza, 2019). It is therefore essential that students deliberate (this is, critically think) on the relationship between a particular language and politics, ideology, culture, race, ethnicity or gender (Jiménez, 2017).

3.Methodology

This research was developed as an action research (AR) project, which can be defined as being "related to the ideas of 'reflective practice' and 'the teacher as researcher'. AR involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching contexts" (Burns, 2010, p.2). It also involves problematizing, questioning and inquiring (Ramos-Méndez & Sánchez-Quintana, 2018), in order to improve or learn more about a particular aspect that the teacher considers problematic, or that arouses his/her curiosity.

Thus, following the indications of theses authors, a cyclic process was followed in order to answer the research question "How can foreign language classes help in the development of students' visual literacy and critical thinking?". A possible issue to improve was identified and after a preliminary investigation, a specific intervention was planned. After implementing this in the classroom, data was recorded and analysed and finally, conclusions were drawn.

3.1 Context and data collection

The current study took place at the public school near Lisbon, Portugal, with four groups from the 10th grade, even though the results here will focus on only of

the classes, namely 10ºC. This group had 26 students (16 boys and 10 girls), mostly at B1/B2 level doing a Science and Technology course.

For data collection, various classroom activities such as project work, worksheets, debates, and exercises around the creation of images were used. The first activity, a project, was part of the 10th grade students' semestral assessment. Learners worked in small groups to complete an activity involving reading, critical analysis, and artistic creation. Each group read a text related to the theme of technology, analysed it together, created a meme in which they presented one or several topics referred to in the text in question and, finally, included a short comment explaining the reasons they had chosen that particular image.

The intention of this project was for learners to analyse a text, determine what was said, make some logical inferences, identify themes or central ideas and summarize the key points. Learners were required to create a meme, using images and appropriate words, as well as to strategically handle the digital tools to complete the project. Here, it was the students themselves who created their own images, their own memes, selecting the most appropriate images, as well as the most convenient words or phrases, for each text and the message they intended to convey. As explained earlier, being visually literate is not only associated with the skill to interpret and evaluate images, but also with being able to find, use and create them (Lundy, 2015).

The final products were evaluated and analysed according to a rubric elaborated jointly by the student-teacher and the cooperating teacher, the school-based mentor, who supervised the trainee teacher throughout the teaching practice. This data-collection tool centred on the following parameters: creativity (20%), relationship between the text and the meme (35%), design of the meme (20%), inclusion of a short comment (15%) and, finally, accuracy of grammar and spelling, and appropriacy of vocabulary for the comment and meme (10%). Each meme was then assessed for each parameter. Within each of the parameters related to critical thinking and visual literacy, several descriptors were established, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptors for the parameter "Relationship between text and meme"

Relation between the text and the meme 35%	70	56	42	28	14
	Students show they have fully understood the text, explicitly and/or implicitly. There is a clear and strong relation between the meme and the text.	Students show they have understood the text. There is a relation between the text and the meme.	Students show they have had some difficulties understanding the text. There is a small relation between the text and the meme.	Students show they haven't understood the text. The relation between the text and the meme is minimal.	The meme doesn't show any relation with the text.

plus weighting.

In the second classroom activity, learners had to analyse some cartoons related to some topics of the school curriculum. It was intended that students deliberated on a fundamental topic today, journalism and information sharing, and also developed oral interaction and discussion of their ideas, always keeping mutual respect in mind. Data was collected through worksheets with the questions *1) Describe the cartoon: what catches your attention first? What can you see? "Here I can see... / There is/are....", 2) Describe Every Contrast. Do you recognise sarcasm or Irony? Explain it. 3) What Issue or problem is depicted in the cartoon? 4) Do you agree with the cartoon? Why/ Why not?* In small groups, students analysed and discussed several cartoons. Here, the main objectives were two. One aim was to understand the extent to which students were able to a) describe an image, highlighting the aspects that made it ironic and sarcastic, b) associate a particular problem or

criticism to the image and c) reflect on it. On the other hand, it was crucial that students deliberated on some problems related to journalism and, consequently, its importance nowadays. Then, the students' answers were analysed through a set of descriptors referring to analytical and critical thinking skills and knowledge and critical understanding of the world based on the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (Council of Europe, 2018), presented in Table 5 in section 4.2.

The third classroom activity developed was based on Valentine's Day and Teen Dating Violence. The lesson started with a video (DayOneNY, 2018) where the love story between a young boy and a girl, both students, is portrayed. After the joy of the starting of the relationship, violence begins. The whole story is accompanied by the song "Walking on Sunshine", released by the group Katrina and the Waves in 1983, which is characterized by a cheerful rhythm and the presence of a message of happiness and love. It was precisely this duality of feelings that aroused students' attention to the video.

After an introduction where the group talked a little about Valentine's Day and what we usually associate with this day, the whole video was shown to the class so that the 21 students could complete an online worksheet individually on their mobile phones. The objective of this worksheet was to assess both the understanding of the video and its visual symbols. For that, the questions referred not only to the story portrayed in the video, to understand if the students had understood it, but also to the interpretation of the images and their symbolism, particularly the last two questions.

Finally, students carried out an activity to promote creativity, creating a post for the social network Instagram, to alert the school community and draw attention to the subject. To evaluate this work the descriptors for the use of telecommunications available in the *Companion volume* (Council of Europe, 2020) and Bowen's rubric for visual literacy competence (2017) were taken into account. The descriptors for using the phone and internet-based apps (Council of Europe, 2020), which can be seen in Table 2, proved to be important, since it was through

these two resources that this activity was carried out and disclosed. Therefore, it was essential to evaluate at what level (A2, B1, B2, etc.) students used these tools to reach the main objective: to create and share a picture.

Table 2: Descriptors for the use of telecommunications.

	Using telecommunications
C2	Can use telecommunications confidently and effectively for both personal and professional purposes, even if there is some interference or the caller has a less familiar accent.
C1	Can use telecommunications effectively for most professional or personal purposes.
B2	Can use telecommunications for a variety of personal and professional purposes, provided they can ask for clarification if the accent or terminology is unfamiliar. Can participate in extended casual conversation over the phone with a known person on a variety of topics.
B1	Can use telecommunications for everyday personal or professional purposes, provided they can ask for clarification from time to time. Can give important details over the (video) phone concerning an unexpected incident
	Can use telecommunications to have relatively simple but extended conversations with people they know personally. Can use telecommunications for routine messages and to obtain basic services.
A2	Can use telecommunications with their friends to exchange simple news, make plans and arrange to meet.
	Can, given repetition and clarifications, participate in a short, simple phone conversation with a known person on a predictable topic, e.g., arrival times, arrangements to meet. Can understand a simple message, confirm details of the message and pass it on by phone to other people concerned.
A1/ Pre-A1	No descriptors available.

Regarding visual literacy, the rubric developed by Bowen (2017) was chosen, since the visual literacy competency rubric (VLC), which can be analysed in Table 3, is very flexible and oriented, not only for the interpretation and critical analysis of

images, as well as for the use and creation of visual texts in solving different problems, that is, tasks, in different contexts (Bowen, 2017). The lower level is related to recognising representations of objects, things, people, etc. and the higher level goes deeper and concerns the capacity to understand and apply different visual rhetorical concepts. With these two sets of descriptors, it was possible to perceive the students' level of performance in both aspects.

VLC (Visual Literacy Competency)	Competency description
Capacity of recognition of representations	Aware that images represent objects, things, creatures, people, places and events in the world and that they may have assigned verbal identifiers.
Capacity of identification and narration	Understands that images can be used to illustrate a story about a particular moment, event, activity, sequence of events, or incidences or interactions.
Capacity of reading images	Understands how we read images to gain different perspectives of seeing the world. Recognizes how we bring our own ideas to images to make meaning.
Capacity to reuse, recreate, redistribute and to understand affective implications.	Can understand that the image projects a particular perspective with multiple meanings. Can critically interpret the image for information about context and its meaning. Can appropriate and reuse images to create own narratives and retell stories from a different perspective. Basic application of rhetorical concepts. Co-constructs meaning within the context.
Capacity to understand and apply visual rhetorical concepts	Can identify inter-textual references and interpret rhetorical concepts used to persuade the viewer. Can create new perspectives and new meanings. Can articulate and rationalize decisions about image selection and manipulation.

Table 3: Visual Literacy Competency rubric based on Bowen (2017)

4. Results

4.1 Project work – "Hey, have you seen this meme?"

For this activity, students had to create a meme based on the analysis of a previously chosen text. After the stipulated time, the students' final work was evaluated according to a rubric with several parameters (Table 4): Creativity, relationship between the text and the meme, design of the meme, whether a short

comment was included and, finally, assessment of the grammar, vocabulary, and spelling of both the comment and meme. Below is an example of an assessment table, in which the score assigned in the "Teacher" column corresponds to assessment of each parameter by the teacher. That is, for creativity, the teachers considered that this group's work was "Good", according to each descriptor. After the analysis of all student-generated materials, it was possible to conclude that learners achieved the proposed objectives and practically all obtained very satisfactory results.

Table 4: Example of 10ºC work evaluation

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Weak	Very Weak	Teacher
Creativity (20%)	50	45	35	25	15	45
Relation between the text and the meme (35%)	70	56	42	28	14	56
Design of the meme (20%)	50	45	35	25	15	45
Short comment included (15%)	20	18	14	12	6	20
Grammar, voc. and spelling (10%)	10	8	6	4	2	8
					Total Score	**174/200**

This project-work was guided mainly by two considerations: on the one hand, the text analysis, that is, the development of critical thinking, through the questioning (what is the intention of the author? What are the possible messages of the text?) and on the other, the creation of a meme, that is, the promotion of visual literacy, to the extent that there was the need to research, analyse, select and use the most appropriate image to transmit the intended message, meeting the previously mentioned definition of visual literacy. The students were able to fulfil these two major objectives, interpreting the selected texts and transmitting their messages through images, as exemplified in the following meme, developed by one of the groups.

Image 1: Example of one of the memes developed by the students.

4.2 Unit "The importance of journalism"

This unit focused mainly on the analysis of some cartoons with the help of some worksheets. At the end of the lesson, the trainee teacher collected the worksheets as well as the students' answers, and evaluated them according to a set of descriptors based on the scale of analysis and criticism of creative texts available in the *Companion volume* (Council of Europe, 2018). The results of the evaluation mentioned can be seen in detail in table 5.

Taking into consideration the descriptors and the analysis of the students' work, it is possible to conclude that the class had little difficulty interpreting an image. As shown in Table 5, students were either at an Intermediate or Advanced level. Regarding the description of the images, it is suggested that the lack of further details (referring to colours, shapes, expressions, etc.) was not a matter of inability, but a lack of effort. Concerning the identification of elements that convey irony and sarcasm, about 60% of the students in the class were able to recognize

various symbols that conveyed both. The remaining 40% corresponds to groups that developed their responses a little more and were able to not only identify the elements that conveyed these two characteristics, but also explain how the cartoon was sarcastic or ironic.

For example, one of the groups answered question 2 by saying "We recognise the man looking at the newspaper, while having no eyes, to be a symbol of irony, because a man with no eyes can't read".

The point at which the class stood out most was in the connection between the image and the problem/s represented, as well as its explanation. As shown in Table 5, about 90% of the students were able not only to associate the cartoon with one or more issues related to journalism, but also to explain this problem. For example, in answer to another ("What issue or problem is depicted in the cartoon?"), the students answered, "The issue described is that some people see journalism as something negative, because it allows people to know what is truly happening around the world".

Table 5: Results from the analysis of the 10ºC students' answers to the questions on the worksheets

10ºC – Unit "The importance of journalism" - cartoons		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Can describe the cartoon, by identifying some of its elements.	**Basic**							
Can relate the cartoon to a general topic.								
Can describe the cartoon, by identifying every element.	**Intermediate**	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Can identify some elements that portray irony and sarcasm.			x	x		x	x	x
Can associate the cartoon to one or more specific problems.								
Can describe the cartoon in detail, identifying its elements, forms, colours, etc.	**Advanced**							x
Can associate the cartoon to a specific problem and may be able to explain it.			x	x	x	x	x	x
Can reflect critically on the problem represented by the cartoon.		x						
Can explain how the cartoon is ironical and satirical.		x			x	x		

4.3 Unit "Am I really walking on sunshine" – Teen Dating Violence

Regarding the activity centred around the analysis of a video without dialogue and the creation of an Instagram post, it is possible to state that the class did not show great difficulties in the completion of the worksheet. Question 10 ("What elements represent their toxic relationship? Select two options") was where more students failed, but only because they did not select the two required options. In addition, it is important to explain that question 7 ("According to the video, the girl felt like she was...") raised a very interesting discussion. While the trainee teacher had considered the answer "drowning" to be correct, students argued that either answer was right, taking into account the entire video. That is, at the beginning of the relationship, the girl would feel as if she were "Walking on Sunshine", but as the story progresses, she will experience other emotions, such as feeling lost (as the labyrinth implies) and suffocated.

Analysing the overall performance of the students, most of the class showed some ability to "read" the images presented to them and relate them to the story told, as can be seen through the right answers in table 6, which are underlined. However, it is important to mention that this is only a small online exercise and that, although they were asked to do it individually, it is possible that one or another student completed it with help, either because they did not have a mobile phone, or due to difficulties with English.

Table 6: Questions and students' answers to the worksheet

Item	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
	At school	**At college**	**In the street**	**At a party**
1 – In the video you've just watched, the girl and boy met ...	19	1	0	0
	Shy and Quiet	**Confident and nice**	**Violent and aggressive**	**Nice and shy**
2 – The boy seemed...	0	18	2	0
	A cup of coffee	**A ring**	**A box of chocolates**	**A bouquet of flowers**
3 – One of the first presents the boy gave the girl was...	1	0	0	19

	True	False		
4-The boy respected all the girl's decisions	0	20		
	True	**False**		
5-At first, the boy sent her a text message with happy and loving emojis. However, as their relationship worsened, emojis became happier and happier.	0	20		
	A bouquet of flowers	**An apology**	**A teddy bear**	**Nothing**
6-What did he offer her after their fight?	16	0	0	4
	Walking on Sunshine	**Drowning**	**Suffocating**	**Lost**
7-According to the video, the girl felt like she was…	5	14	1	0
	A piece of jewellery	**Two tickets to a concert;**	**A bouquet of flowers**	**A smile**
8-In the last scene, the boy has…	0	0	19	1
	In the song lyrics	**In their clothes**	**In the first 30 seconds of it**	
9- Where is the irony of this video?	19	0	1	
	The octopus and its tentacles, dark and aggressive colours and angry emojis	**Their facial expressions, the maze, the colours and the happy emojis**	**The boy's arms, their facial expressions, long stairs and the maze**	**The octopus and its tentacles, the light colours and the long stairs**
10- What elements represent their toxic relationship? (you must select two options)	11+8	0	11+1	0

Finally, the class was asked to create a motto against Teen Dating Violence, as well as an Instagram post with the slogan previously created, which would later be shared online. The objectives of this last activity were related to the development of students' creativity, as well as to raise the awareness of this type of violence among the entire school community.

The results were analysed considering two criteria: the descriptors for the use of telecommunications, presented in the *Companion volume* (Council of Europe, 2018) and the rubric for the assessment of visual literacy proposed by

Bowen (2017). Thus, on the one hand, students were able to effectively handle new technologies in order to search for certain words, find images and create their final works, thus falling into level C1. On the other hand, students reused images in order to create their own narratives and retell their stories from a different perspective (Bowen, 2017), in this case in order to convey the same message, as is the case of image 2, where the background image is entirely linked to the message conveyed by the text, although in a somewhat simplified and generalized view of the situation (the "being" inside the cage in image 2 is a woman, but could also be a man). Thus, it is possible that students are visually literate when they have some time to deliberate on the subjects. However, it is also visible that they lack a little criticality, as they did not question the presence of the female figure. Are only women victims of violence? Why do we tend to forget the male figure in these types of discussions? It would have been interesting to debate these issues as well and lead students to question their own beliefs and realities.

Image 2: Instagram post about Teen Dating Violence

Almost all learners were able to articulate the decisions made about the selection and manipulation of the image, and the positioning of the remaining textual elements (Bowen, 2017). Below, some examples are shown (example *a* and

b) where this parameter was not met and the choice of the background image (an image of a couple who is happy and in love) was not the most appropriate taking into account the text and the message to be transmitted (referring to dating violence). Here, students were not critical in choosing their materials, emphasizing their difficulties in visual literacy and critical thinking. They would have benefited from a little more support and guidance from the teacher. Perhaps then the students would have realized their shortcomings and opted for other images.

Image 3: Examples *a)* and *b)*
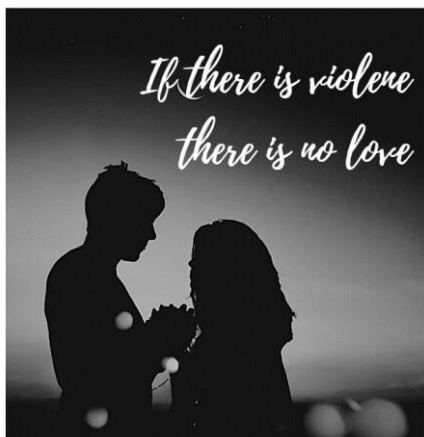
Finally, it should be noted that students were able to identify intertextual references and interpret rhetorical concepts used to persuade the viewer or construct a certain argument, as well as to create visual representations through an alternative perspective and new meanings (Bowen, 2017). Here, example *c)* stands out, as it portrays two characters from the series Euphoria, in which an abusive relationship is represented, to convey its message.

Image 4: example *c)*

With this lesson, it was possible to perceive the enthusiasm and dedication that students show when it comes to activities with visible consequences for them and for the community in which they live, demonstrating a link between motivation and the learners' performance. Many of these groups produced more than one publication or created more than one slogan and quickly sent them to the two teachers. After the required authorizations, students' creations were then posted on the Students' Association Instagram page.

By the end of these activities, it can be said that both visual literacy and critical thinking were developed. On the one hand, the reading of images was used as the central focus of the tasks, guiding the reasoning of the students and questioning their ideas. On the other hand, it also involved the significant creation of images with a certain purpose, and in agreement with the text that they should follow. Above all, there was time and willingness to analyse and discuss images, without these being just the starting point or an additional element. In these didactic sequences, the focus was placed on the image.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout this study, most of the activities developed focused on visual literacy and critical thinking, since the main aim of this article was to understand how foreign language classes could help in the development of these two aspects. Using photographs, pictures or memes, students had the opportunity to creatively

develop their abilities to "read" the images and to think critically on the most varied subjects.

The results of the various activities indicate, above all, a close relationship between students' motivation and their performance in accomplishing the visual literacy and critical thinking tasks proposed. When the students' demotivation towards the language and the topics addressed was perceived, manifested either by their body language and attitudes in the classroom (with their head lying on the table, for example), or by obvious comments, the results of the activities tended to be below the capacities of the students. In these cases, the students did not fully justify their answers, answering monosyllabically, focusing only on a general description, instead of looking for and noticing the details, and failing to accomplish the artistic creation activities proposed. Despite their intellectual abilities, the most demotivated and disinterested students ended up demonstrating few tools linked to visual literacy and critical thinking. As a teacher, this question is essential, since the choice of current and interesting topics, as well as unusual and dynamic activities, will most likely influence the performance of students.

Another factor that can influence students' motivation is their own perception of an ideal "I" (Arnold, 2019). If they consider that their ideal "I" does not include communication in the foreign language, students are less motivated to try to express themselves in the language they are learning. On the other hand, "if the learner of a language imagines speaking the language well to interact, this can provide the impetus to act and achieve what he wants." (Arnold, 2019, p. 32)

On the other hand, when students showed interest and motivation in the topics addressed, the results of the various activities were satisfactory. In the analysis and interpretation of cartoons, the students were at an intermediate/advanced level, providing several details, suggesting hypotheses in relation to the possible readings of the images, stating their opinions and making relationships between symbols and inferring meanings. Regarding textual interpretation and communication of information through the creation of images

(in this case, memes), most learners achieved the requested objectives and were able to effectively create a meme that would convey the necessary message. The same happened with the creation of an Instagram post, within the scope of Teen Dating Violence. Students were able to evaluate and choose the most appropriate image for the message they intended to convey, fulfilling the objectives of the activity based on the very definition of visual literacy. As stated by Arnold (2019, pp. 32-33), when it comes to "learning, more transcendental than the student's aptitude is the motivation to learn and this is particularly meaningful for the teachers because contrary to aptitude, motivation is something we can help improve."

Another significant conclusion of this action research is the need to focus on both visual literacy and critical thinking in the classroom. Despite being attracted by the image, students need space where they can deliberate and question the various messages that an image can transmit, with the support and guidance of the teacher. This process will be extremely useful to them in an increasingly demanding future. This study showed that there are numerous ways to work with an image and, at the same time, develop critical thinking.

Finally, it is important to mention the two major limitations of this research. First, and in order to gain the students' interest and attract their attention, perhaps it would have been beneficial to opt for other themes, more closely related to the students and their realities. Asking learners directly at the beginning of the school year what topics they would like to address or using a survey could be a good solution in the classroom.

Secondly, the study could have been improved using self-assessment tools, such as questionnaires, in order to understand how students assess their own abilities of visual literacy and critical thinking. In addition, it would have been interesting to evaluate their perceptions before and at the end of the school year, to understand their development.

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Strategies to motivate learners to engage in speaking and overcome anxiety: A case study

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Abstract

Anxiety and motivation are pivotal in foreign language learning success. Anxiety can have a negative effect on language learning by causing stress and inhibiting the ability to perform, while motivation plays a positive role by providing the drive and desire to learn and succeed. Research has shown that high levels of motivation can offset adverse effects of anxiety, making it easier for students to learn and perform well in a foreign language. Overall, the balance between anxiety and motivation is an important aspect of foreign language learning, and understanding how these factors interact can help educators and students to create a more effective and successful learning environment.

This study aimed to examine practical and effective methods for motivating tertiary-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to participate in speaking activities, by taking into account the complex relationship between motivation and anxiety in the foreign language learning context. The study used a combination of questionnaires and interviews to identify specific factors that influence students' level of anxiety and motivation in the language classroom, and explored strategies that may positively influence their willingness to engage in speaking activities.

The study reveals that students' motivation to improve their language skills is hindered by a lack of confidence and anxiety about expressing themselves orally. This reluctance, attributed mainly to fear of judgment from peers and teachers, is

often reinforced by a lack of oral practice. However, effective communication skills are vital for language development and cultivated through active engagement. Recognizing the emotional dimension, it was imperative to establish a supportive environment and introduce low-risk opportunities for practice and support. The implementation of these strategies yielded positive results, enhancing participants' experiences, boosting self-esteem, fostering engagement, and improving success in speaking activities.

Keywords | Anxiety, motivation, EFL, speaking, willingness-to-engage

1 INTRODUCTION

This study stemmed from firsthand observations of students enrolled in extracurricular language courses available to university students, staff, and the wider community. These courses offer two weekly, two-hour lessons per level, scheduled at the end of the workday. While many B2 and C1 students seeking the courses are confident in written communication, they harbour speaking apprehensions, particularly in group settings. The study implemented strategies aimed at boosting students' motivation to engage in speaking activities and address language anxiety. The goal was to promote a more active participation, ultimately enhancing their overall communication skills. In today's globalized world, where English is of paramount importance as the world's lingua franca, nurturing students' speaking skills is imperative to facilitate effective communication– a primary language function, emphasised by McDonough et al. (2013). Yet Horwitz et al. (1986) assert that anxiety is a significant obstacle to overcome, resulting in reduced willingness for oral activities. To address this, it is vital to gradually expose learners to English-speaking situations, building confidence and fostering connections in class that allow learners to feel at ease to engage in oral discourse and venture beyond their comfort zones. Motivation emerges as a pivotal factor of performance, with Dörnyei (2005) highlighting its crucial role in instigating and sustaining foreign language learning. However, it is often observed that students, although eager to improve their speaking abilities, frequently adopt passive roles during speaking activities. The reasons behind this lack of motivation or willingness to engage in speaking may be diverse. Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011) identify several demotivating factors, including teacher influence, reduced self-confidence, and the attitude of peers. Additionally, motivation may be influenced by task or topic, a lack of reward, anxiety, a lack of self-drive, or even the teacher's choice of teaching methods. Hence, understanding and addressing these motivational challenges is essential to encourage students to embrace a more active and engaging role. Therefore, this case study aimed to understand:

I.   What factors contribute to students' unwillingness to participate in speaking activities?

II.   How do the adopted teaching strategies impact anxiety and the motivation to speak?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Competence in communicating in a foreign language involves not only exposure and comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982), but also active interaction —both the means and the goal of foreign language learning. To promote proficiency, students must engage in oral interactions and communicate in the target language. Yet, teachers struggle with students' reluctance to participate orally in the target language.

Foreign language learning encompasses cognitive and affective components (Arnold & Brown, 1999). Affective factors —motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety— significantly impact language learning success. Motivation drives students' behaviour and dedication, while self-confidence empowers students to take risks. Conversely, anxiety can hinder effective language learning, especially in spoken communication. Rubio (2007) notes students' willingness to communicate in a foreign language is influenced by their level of self-confidence, tied to their assessment of competence and self-worth.

Anxiety significantly hinders the learning process (Brown, 2014; Dörnyei, 2005; Horwitz et al., 1986). Anxiety can be debilitative or facilitative, with high levels negatively affecting performance, particularly in speaking. Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced foreign language anxiety (FLA) as a complex concept encompassing more than just communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. It involves self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours linked to classroom language learning and arises from the unique nature of the language learning process. Initially, anxiety is a generalized negative emotional response in

language class, but it becomes specifically associated with the language class context if left unaddressed.

Motivation, according to Gardner (1985), can be instrumental (driven by social or economic goals) and integrative (connecting with the language community). While many students initially enroll in language courses due to instrumental motivation, long-term success hinges on integrative motivation. Self-determination theory (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) distinguishes intrinsic motivation, derived from inner satisfaction through enjoying the activity itself, fostering autonomy and competence, from extrinsic motivation, driven by external rewards and describes how it is often less effective in encouraging language learning.

The significance of interpersonal dynamics in the classroom was underscored by Stevick as early as 1980, highlighting that success in language learning depends more on human interactions than on teaching materials or linguistic analysis. Emotional states and connections formed in the learning environment, including interactions between students and between students and teachers, are crucial for promoting speaking ability. Dörnyei (2005) delves deeper into motivation through his theory of the L2 Motivational Self-system, emphasizing the role of the L2 learning experience, including the school context, study programme, chosen tasks, peer relationships, and teacher-student interactions. Harmer (2001) reinforces the importance of interpersonal dynamics, particularly the attitudes of peers and teachers in shaping students' motivation and fostering a positive learning environment. Harmer (2001) also emphasizes the importance of confidence in the teaching method to motivate both students and teachers, contributing to the overall success of the teaching and learning process.

Fostering a motivating learning atmosphere goes beyond creating a pleasant environment; it also involves providing opportunities for meaningful real-life activities that inspire students to actively participate (Thornbury, 2005). Additionally, offering opportunities for students to gradually overcome their fears and providing adequate feedback to improve their speaking skills are essential (Ölmezer-Öztürk & Öztürk, 2021). Sparking students' interest through topics that

resonate with them and facilitate exploration can further boost motivation (Harmer, 2001). In higher education, students seek an enriching experience that not only captivates them but also fosters interdependence and equips them with skills for the future.

In conclusion, the development of competence in communicating in a foreign language is intricate and multifaceted. Overcoming challenges such as students' reluctance to engage orally requires addressing affective factors, including motivation and anxiety. By understanding the complex interplay of these elements and fostering a positive learning environment through effective interpersonal dynamics, educators can create a motivating atmosphere that enhances students' language experience and help promote proficiency.

In practical application, various strategies, specifically speaking activities, were employed in the control group to help students overcome their reluctance to engage in speaking. These strategies were tailored taking into account affective factors as a driving force, reflecting the principles discussed above.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Implementation of strategies

This case study, inspired by Yin's (2009) approach to real-life situations, explores the use of various teaching strategies to help a small group of students overcome their fear of speaking in English and enhance their self-confidence. Specifically, it focused on 30 students aged 17 to 30, enrolled in two B2-level English classes in university extra-curricular language courses. The aim was to contribute to the broader understanding of this phenomena and encourage further exploration. Following Bergs' (2000), a mixed-methods approach was employed to investigate strategies designed to increase students' confidence in speaking a foreign language, including prepared and unprepared speaking moments.

3.1.1 Prepared speaking moments - Podcasts

Podcasts can be a valuable platform for less confident students, allowing them to express their ideas without the pressure of a vis-à-vis interaction while enhancing pronunciation skills (Sze, 2006) and were used in this research. The podcast challenge began at the semester's start. A class Padlet facilitated the recording and peer feedback. The initial task, which followed an early discussion aimed at getting to know the students and encouraging them to share their passions with the group, involved learners preparing a two-minute podcast discussing topics students were passionate about to increase motivation. Although peer feedback was requested, it was hoped that the absence of vis-à-vis interaction would reduce anxiety. The subsidiary goal was for students to understand, through self-listening, the significance of speed, intonation, and word stress in conveying messages. The second task involved creating vodcasts individually, in pairs, or groups, with video prompting a focus on paralinguistic features, eye contact, and body language.

3.1.2 Prepared speaking moments - Oral presentations in group

Oral presentations are effective tools for developing language skills in the EFL classroom (Thornbury, 2005). When performed in groups, students enhance communication skills, promoting meaningful interaction during the preparation stage, leading to content emergence (Nunan, 2004). Group work contributes to a friendlier classroom atmosphere, promoting positive relationships (Douglas, 2000), aligning with the Common European Framework's emphasis on productive activities such as oral presentations in academic and professional contexts (2020, p.60). Furthermore, oral presentations encompass not only spoken language but also body language, essential for conveying meaning and enhanced through practice (Burns & Claire, 2003).

In the current study program, students must give a group oral presentation at the end of the semester. To this end, in-class sessions focused on planning the oral presentation, including brainstorming topics, researching information, negotiating the topic and task, and making decisions on visual presentation.

To enhance their presentation skills, mini presentations on other group projects were held throughout the semester. These served as practice sessions, encouraging critical reflection, and helping students gradually overcome inhibitions (Thornbury, 2005). Standing in front of peers and delivering sustained speeches prepared students for real-life speaking situations in the workplace and academia.

3.2.2 – Unprepared speaking moments – Impromptu speeches

Burns (2016) emphasizes competent English speakers have to deal with complex processes and skills in real time, often without prior planning. Impromptu speeches, described by Lucas (2001), are spontaneous, requiring minimal formal preparation. Despite potential anxiety, Girardelli's (2017) study suggests engaging in improvised speech activities increases confidence, enhances speech organization skills, and increases awareness of non-verbal communication in delivering short speeches without extensive preparation.

> The first impromptu speech activity required no prior preparation or structure. Students were tasked with delivering a one-minute speech on a randomly chosen topic card. The aim was for students to recognise that discomfort is a natural part of the process and that it diminishes through practice. They then analysed example impromptu speeches to understand structure and the importance of a strong opening. To foster empathy, a vital skill for intercultural speakers, students were also assigned the responsibility of selecting topics for their peers that would offer support rather than hinder their speeches. In the third activity, students delivered speeches on a common quote, and in the next challenge, they were requested to give a piece of advice to colleagues. This topic not only allowed for greater personalization, but also it was anticipated that speaking from a personal standpoint would help manage anxiety. For the final impromptu challenge, students gave a two-minute speech on teacher-selected topics that aligned with their interests. By this point, students had gained confidence through

repeated practice and developed stronger connections with peers.3.3 Group discussions

Nunan (2003) defines oral expression as conveying thoughts and emotions through language, especially when discussing controversial topics. This elicits emotional responses from participants with diverse perspectives, fostering active engagement and providing a platform for language practice, cultivating the ability to establish objective and respectful dialogue, both inside and outside the classroom. While teachers avoid discussing controversial topics due to their sensitive nature (Haynes, 2009), the Council of Europe (2016) stresses the importance of addressing these issues, particularly in higher education contexts that encourage mature and respectful debates, aligning with Burron's (2006) emphasis on their role in reinforcing critical thinking and cultivating more effective citizens. Byram (2008) advocates integrating real-world issues into English classes to promote intercultural communication skills and global citizenship. Students' interest in global issues and a desire to address them in the classroom (Oxfam, 2006) further supports this approach.

The initial group discussion, a class-wide discussion on crime and punishment in Portugal, followed a topic lesson on Crime and Punishment. It offered students an opportunity to present arguments publicly, however without a set structure. To enhance understanding of debate mechanics, a video introduced concepts such as motion, proposition, opposition, and debate structure. Students were then divided into two groups (for/against) and provided with a language handout to facilitate the discussion. The motion presented was: "The death penalty should be an option in more serious crimes." Students were asked to brainstorm arguments and examples while considering potential counterarguments from the opposing group.

The activity was based on Harvard Project Zero's Circle of Viewpoints (2015), which encourages students to consider a topic from various angles, brainstorming what different stakeholders might say about the issue in question, considering factors such as education, location, age, religion, and the political/social landscape. This

aimed to help students appreciate the multiple perspectives that any topic can generate and promote empathy for different opinions.

3.4 Research Tools

To assess attitudes towards speaking in English before and after the course, three methods of data collection were employed: an initial online questionnaire (Appendix A) to assess motivation and feelings towards speaking in English, student journals to record reflections after the oral activities, and semi-structured group interviews (Appendix B) conducted after the course had finished to provide further input. This approach allowed for a thorough examination of the strategies' effectiveness and a deeper understanding of students' motivation and attitudes.

The questionnaire, conducted through Google Forms, aimed to assess whether students in B2-level English classes experienced anxiety when speaking the target language, along with identifying potential influencing factors. All 30 students across two B2-level classes completed the questionnaire. However, due to time constraints, the implementation of strategies to address the identified issues was limited to one of the B2 classes, compromising 14 students. The online questionnaire had six sections with mostly closed-ended questions, following Dörnyei's (2010) approach of dividing questionnaires into sections for efficient data collection. The first section encouraged students to read the questions carefully and emphasised the importance of truthful answers. The second collected personal information to determine affiliation to the institution and ascertain the study cycle. The next explored students' exposure to English and their history of learning the language and the fourth section focused on self-perception of language skills and identification of weaknesses. The fifth section looked at motivation to study English and the choice of institution. The final section, inspired by the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986), aimed not to measure anxiety levels but rather to explore underlying causes of speech-related anxiety, as well as to understand students' motivations for engagement. Therefore,

the statements were divided into five categories: anxiety, social, confidence in abilities, motivation, and classroom environment issues for a comprehensive analysis (Appendix C). To avoid bias, statements were presented in a random order, and respondents rated them using a five-point Likert scale from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5).

Students were encouraged to journal their thoughts and feelings after oral activities to facilitate group discussions during the interview phase and promote self-awareness of anxiety and motivation changes throughout the course. The first occurred after an impromptu speech challenge in class to ensure learners understood the journaling task. While students had the freedom to reflect as they wished, they were asked some questions to prompt this first activity. Students were asked to reflect on their feelings when the activity was presented, when they had to stand in front of the class for a speech with limited preparation time, and their feelings at the conclusion of the task, considering how the activity could improve their speaking skills.

Group interviews, conducted at the end of the course, were divided into two one-hour sessions and aimed at gaining valuable insights into students' perspectives on speaking struggles, motivation for speaking, and the impact of the strategies implemented. Despite the B2 class compromising 14 students, only 12 out of participated, as two were unable to attend on any available date. The interview began with an introductory phase to welcome participants and clarify the purpose and procedure of the interview. The semi-structured interview used predetermined questions to guide the discussion towards the topic but allowed new questions to emerge as the participants shared their ideas. The set questions were open-ended, with the aim of encouraging reflection without restricting the participants' answers and were divided into three phases: engagement, exploration and exit questions. The engagement question established the topic, exploration questions collected data for investigation, and exit questions allowed an opportunity for participants to share pertinent information.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis involved two distinct phases. Firstly, quantitative data from the questionnaire was transformed into graphs and tables, providing information on the participants' motivations for studying English with Dörnyei's (2007) data reduction approach used to condense the Likert scale responses into three variables (Disagree, Neutral, Agree). The exclusion of neutral responses facilitated clearer comparisons between participants who disagreed and agreed with the statements, aiding interpretation, and statistical analysis. Secondly, qualitative data from the recorded interviews was transcribed and categorised, as shown in Figure 1, along with the data from the journals. This coding process helped identify and label relevant information, enhancing data comprehension.,
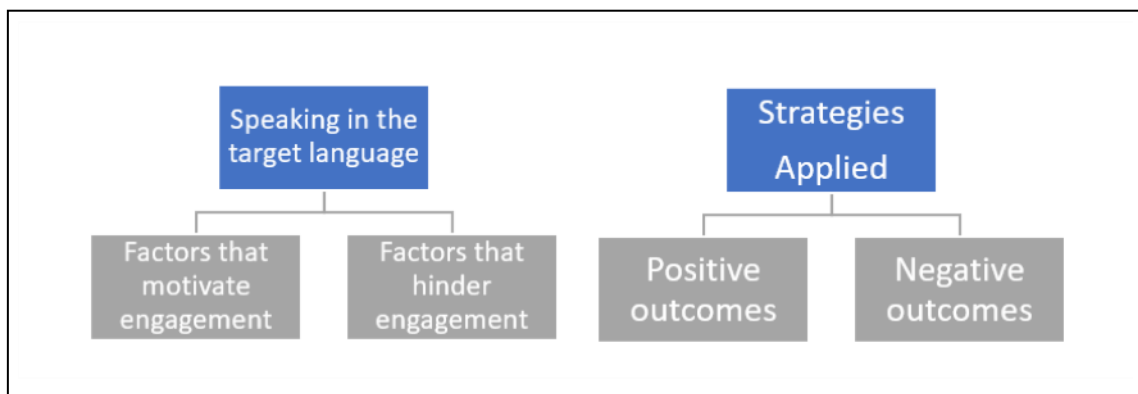
Figure 1: Group interview categories

4. RESULTS

In addressing Research Question 1 on factors contributing to students' unwillingness to participate in speaking activities, the analysis of various factors yielded crucial insights.

4.1 Exposure to the target language

Regarding exposure to the target language, the results from the questionnaire (Appendix B) revealed 90 percent of the respondents were Portuguese individuals who had undergone a minimum of five years of English education in school. Twenty

percent had experienced English-taught curricular units at university, reflecting a growing trend. A noteworthy finding was the significant number of respondents (36.7%) who identified English as the primary language in their workplace, underscoring its pivotal role in the globalized professional landscape. Additionally, more than 30 percent reported using English in social contexts, potentially influenced by a more diverse social environment. Notably, 50 percent had previously enrolled in private English lessons, possibly driven by concerns about their proficiency level or the perceived value of English for personal and professional growth. Among this group, half initially selected the Open Language Courses as their first option, while the remaining participants joined at a later stage, a choice attributed by over 35 percent to the institute's credibility.

4.2 Participants perception of their proficiency

It was clear that students feel more confident in their receptive skills than their productive skills. Despite Portugal ranking ninth in the EF English Proficiency Index (2022), indicating a high level of proficiency, the participants exhibit a significant lack of confidence in their oral skills. Among 30 respondents, 70 percent stated they were not confident, 26,6 percent were not very confident and only one expressed confidence in speaking abilities.

4.3 Motivation for English language learning

Concerning their motivation for furthering their studies of English, learners expressed a desire to enhance language competence for various reasons, including career advancement, effective communication, academic pursuits, and interest in the language. Findings indicated that motivation is predominantly instrumental and extrinsic, as participants desire to learn the language mainly for future employment goals. The absence of intrinsic motivation could explain hesitation in engaging in speaking activities, hindering active participation. When asked to state what their

top priority in language development was, seventy percent of the participants emphasised the importance of effective communication in real life situations, emphasizing the need for a syllabus that reflects this priority.

4.4 Attitudes towards speaking in English

Despite having substantial language exposure and proficiency, students often experience anxiety when communicating in English in the presence of others. The data from the questionnaire, complemented by insights from group interviews, suggest that this anxiety primarily arises from the fear of exposing their proficiency level rather than concerns about validation of opinions from both peers and teachers. Over 70 percent of the participants admitted to being reluctant to speak, citing fear of judgment from peers and of making mistakes as the main causes. Interestingly, some of the group interview participants expressed a similar apprehension when communicating in their mother tongue. It's worth noting that over time, with practice and growing familiarity with their peers, students found that this anxiety became more manageable. Several of the group interview participants specifically credited the improvements to the course, highlighting its positive impact on their willingness to participate in speaking activities.

4.5 Confidence in abilities

When assessing their confidence in their speaking abilities (see Table 1), over seventy percent revealed pronunciation insecurities, with an equal number expressing vocabulary and grammar concerns. These linguistic anxieties may discourage oral interaction. Furthermore, eighty percent noted that their lack of confidence results from insufficient speaking practice, underlining that students' anxiety about interacting with people in a foreign language partly stems from their prior learning experiences. Despite the crucial importance of speaking skills in learning a foreign language, learners often face limited opportunities to improve

them in the classroom due to a greater focus on teaching vocabulary and grammar, possibly influenced by coursebook constraints. Table 1: Attitude towards speaking in English |Confidence in abilities

Category	Questions	Disagree		Neutral	Agree	
		N	%	N	N	%
Confidence in Abilities (lack of self-confidence)	I feel insecure about my pronunciation.	5	16.6	2	23	76.6
	My confidence in speaking is low due to lack of previous practice.	4	13.3	2	24	80
	I feel insecure about my vocabulary and/or grammar knowledge.	1	3.3	6	23	76.6

4.6 Motivation to speak and factors influencing it

As can be seen in Table 2, although 83,3 percent expressed a desire to improve speaking skills, only 63,3 percent asserted actively engaging in English during activities. This implies learners may not fully grasp that interacting during activities presents a valuable opportunity to refine this skill. Additionally, 40 percent recognised that the topic choice influences their motivation for oral engagement. Although less than half considered this crucial, the result remains noteworthy. Stimulating students' motivation through topics aligned with their interests is crucial, as interest plays a key role in driving learning. Allowing students to choose topics can increase their responsibility to participate.

Table 2: Attitude towards speaking in English |Motivation

Category	Questions	Disagree		Neutral	Agree	
		N	%	N	N	%
Motivation	I make an effort to always speak in English during pair/group work.	3	10	8	19	63.3
	I am reluctant to orally engage if the topic is not interesting.	7	23.3	11	12	40
	I welcome all opportunities to develop my speaking skills.	1	3.3	4	25	83.3

The findings highlight the classroom environment as a pivotal factor in fostering oral participation (see Table 3). Over 86 percent considered class size crucial for oral engagement, inferring that larger class numbers hinder students from building strong peer connections, thereby making it challenging for them to feel at ease when speaking in class. As noted by 83,3 percent of the participants, a relaxed learning environment is paramount for increased participation. This is important, particularly considering that these classes are scheduled at the end of the workday, potentially when students experience fatigue and diminished motivation. Moreover, the questionnaire underscores the teacher-student relationship importance, with over 70 percent noting its significance. Thus, cultivating a strong rapport with students is imperative to elevate their motivation and stimulate greater oral engagement.

Table 3: Attitude towards speaking in English |Classroom environment issues

Category	Questions	Disagree		Neutral	Agree	
		N	%	N	N	%
Classroom environment issues	I orally participate more in classes where there is a more relaxed learning environment.	1	3.3	4	25	83.3
	My oral interaction is influenced by my relationship with my teacher.	3	10	5	22	73.3
	I feel more at ease to speak in smaller classes.	1	3.3	3	26	86.6

Analysing overall responses across the various parameters reveals the critical role of the classroom environment in motivating oral engagement. Additionally, it is evident that anxiety related to speaking the target language primarily arises from a lack of confidence in one's abilities. Fostering a positive environment with strong interrelationships emerges as a potential key to helping learners overcome anxiety and be more active participants.

4.7 Students 'views on strategies

In addressing Research Question 2 on the impact of the adopted teaching strategies on students' anxiety and motivation to speak, valuable insights were derived both from the journal entries and group interviews.

Regarding impromptu speeches, many students found the activity challenging due to limited preparation time and lack of prior reflection or interest in specific topics. Despite this, most embraced the challenge, recognizing benefits such as mirroring real-life conversations, organizing thoughts, and expanding vocabulary. Even a shy learner appreciated the opportunity and the safe environment to develop her

fluency. As communication is the goal of language learning, it was recognised that this exercise was important for language development. The activity in itself only reinforced the idea that other speaking moments, such as group oral presentations, are less stressful as there is time for preparation. Learners did, however, recognise that the anxiety associated with impromptu speeches diminished over time, leading to significant improvements in confidence and attitudes towards mistakes. In her journal entry, one learner described how her confidence "normalised", no longer perceiving a mistake "a crime". Another learner attributed her increased confidence to practice, reducing her fear of speaking in public. Additionally, speaking without prior preparations was noted as a method to manage emotions and improve delivery. Furthermore, the impact of weekly impromptu speeches and teacher's encouragement and reactions to mistakes, contributed to changing students' feelings about speaking in front of others. This supports the hypothesis that a supportive environment encourages students to step outside their comfort zones and engage more readily in speaking a foreign language. Creating a positive learning environment is crucial for maximizing engagement and willingness to tackle the challenge of speaking a foreign language while being mindful of individual limits to tailor the approach accordingly.

Podcast assignments proved valuable for students. Students recorded themselves multiple times, addressing organization, pronunciation, speed of delivery and vocabulary. Students acknowledged that this trial-and-error process led to improved speaking skills and enhanced their confidence. The first voice-only podcast was considered less challenging, allowing students to shield their nervousness, and read from a script. Although two learners opted for an unscripted speech, they still resorted to multiple recordings. These learners later shared their vodcast experience, recorded spontaneously to replicate a natural conversation between two individuals. They highlighted the importance of conducting the planning stage in English to practice more and avoid the cognitive burden of translating L1 thoughts into the target language. Essentially, podcast the activities empowered students by allowing them to choose topics, make decisions, and

develop language awareness, fostering an active and engaging learning experience.

Students valued participating in group discussions, citing educational values. They acknowledged that addressing controversial topics, where a single correct viewpoint is lacking, offers diverse perspectives on the same topic. This, in turn, helps cultivate respect for differing opinions, a crucial life skill. Furthermore, exposure to new perspectives prompted a reassessment of opinions. In terms of language development, students believed discussing unfamiliar topics enhanced vocabulary. The process of pinpointing precise words for effective arguments was challenging yet advantageous. Students also acknowledged the need for increased focus when dealing with new and more serious topics, indicating awareness of the complexities involved. Students highlighted the role of controversial discussions not only in fostering critical thinking but also in developing vocabulary. One learner advocated for this approach to be adopted more widely, emphasizing its ability to develop valuable critical thinking skills applicable in academic and professional contexts. An interesting point emerged during the group interview, where learners noted the emotional aspect in discussing controversial issues, suggesting that the desire to express one's opinion, fuelled by adrenaline, often overcomes concerns about language barriers or anxiety, leading to increased motivation to speak. One learner added that, despite vocabulary issues and fear of being misunderstood, he felt compelled to speak, recognizing it as a valuable push to overcome his challenges. Another highlighted the effectiveness of controversial discussions in promoting oral interaction without the anxiety associated with formal assessment. The informal setting of group discussions allowed participants to focus on language improvement through practice rather than worrying about grades. Additionally, a participant with speaking insecurities, found comfort in the group discussion format.

The majority preferred group oral presentations for reasons like shared pressure, time for reorganising thoughts during others' presentations, peer support, additional oral practice during preparation and negotiating presentation. A learner,

working alone, missed the collaborative aspect of group work, emphasizing its importance in language courses for learning negotiation, debate, and effective communication. Collaborative efforts, as noted by a different learner, lead to richer perspectives and better results. The relevance of group work for real-life scenarios where teamwork is essential was highlighted by another participant. However, having to align topics with others was considered a drawback. If the majority selects an unfamiliar topic, extensive preparation becomes necessary. Discussing unfamiliar topics in real-time might be challenging, potentially causing stress, especially for those already struggling with foreign language speaking. Challenges in agreeing with all group members' input, potentially leading to disagreements, and negatively impacting presentations and group dynamics, were also mentioned. To address these issues, establishing clear communication and decision-making processes from the start is crucial. Despite challenges, group oral presentations significantly contribute to building language learners' confidence and reducing anxiety. Collaboration allows students to learn from each other, practice language skills, and receive valuable feedback. The group dynamic fosters a collaborative learning environment, enhancing teamwork and communication skills beyond the classroom.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study navigates the intricate landscape of language acquisition. Anxiety, identified by Brown (2014), Dörnyei (2005) and Horwitz et al. (1986), emerges as a formidable barrier, particularly in spoken communication. Rubio (2007) presents the vital link between students' willingness to communicate, self-confidence and perceived competence – a key facet. Harmer (2001) emphasizes the role of interpersonal dynamics, highlighting the impact of peers and teachers on motivation and a positive learning environment, echoed in Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self-system theory.

The strategies implemented, inspired by Thornbury (2005) and Ölmezer-Öztürk & Öztürk (2021), align with Harmer's (2001) emphasis on the importance of confidence in teaching methods for overall success. The study, which incorporates low-risk

opportunities and real-life discussions, reflects Thornbury's (2005) call for meaningful activities. It underlines the need to address anxiety, cultivate motivation and provide opportunities for the gradual improvement of skills - a multi-faceted approach advocated in the literature.

Ultimately, the impact of this study on participants' self-esteem and active participation emphasizes the importance of holistic approaches to creating confident communicators.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A | Online Questionnaire

Section 1 | Explanation

This questionnaire aims to understand the anxiety and motivation of the B2 English language learners at the Open Language Course in relation to speaking in English. **All your answers are very important**, therefore, **please read each part carefully and answer honestly**. Your input is much appreciated! Thank you for participating in this study.

Section 2 | Personal Information

2.1 Please provide full name.

2.2 E-mail

2.3 Nationality

   a) Portuguese

   b) Other

2.4 Please choose an option.

   o   A resident in Portugal

   o   On a student visa

   o   On a work visa

   o   Other

2.5 Age

   o   17-20

   o   21-25

   o   26-30

   o   Over 30

2.6 Affiliation to the institution

- o   Student at the University

- o   Former student at the university

- o   Employee at the University

- o   Erasmus student

- o   Research fellow

- o   Other

2.7 If a student at the university, what is your cycle of study?

- o   1st-Undergraduate

- o   2nd –Masters level

- o   3rd-Doctoral level

- o   Post-Doctoral

- o   Other

- o   Not applicable

Section 3 | Contact with language

3.1 How many years did you study English during your compulsory studies as a part of the curriculum (from 1st to 12th grade)?

3.2 Have you ever attended private English lessons/courses?

- o   Yes

- o   No

3.3 If yes, how many years?

- o 1-4

- o 5-10

- o Over 10

3.4 Were any of these at the Open Language Courses at the university?

- o Yes

- o No

3.5 Are any of your curriculum units taught in English or have been in the past?

- o Yes

- o No

3.6 If yes, please name curriculum units.

3.7 If you are already working, is English the language of communication?

- o Yes

- o No

3.8 How much do you contact with and/or use the English language in your social life (media, family, friends, peers, etc.)?

- o Less than 10%

- o 10% to 30%

- o 31% to 40%

- o 41% to 50%

- o Over 50%

Section 4 | Assessment of your English

4.1 How do you feel about your writing skills in English?

- Not confident (needs improvement)

- Somewhat confident (minor issues)

- Confident (at ease)

4.2 How do you feel about your speaking skills in English?

- Not confident (needs improvement)

- Somewhat confident (minor issues)

- Confident (at ease)

4.3 How do you feel about your reading skills in English?

- Not confident (needs improvement)

- Somewhat confident (minor issues)

- Confident (at ease)

4.4 How do you feel about your listening skills in English?

- Not confident (needs improvement)

- Somewhat confident (minor issues)

- Confident (at ease)

Section 5 | Interest in this course

5.1 Why did you choose to attend English lessons at the Open Language Courses?

- Credibility of the Institution

- By recommendation

- Convenience

- Price

5.2 What is your main reason to further develop your English proficiency?

- To apply for Erasmus.

- To add to my CV.

- To apply for a job outside Portugal.

- To apply for a course outside Portugal.

- To be able to communicate better with family/friends/colleagues.

- Because I am interested in the language.

- Because I believe it is necessary to communicate in this global era.

- Because I enjoy it.

- Because I need it for my future career.

- Because it is a requirement in my work place.

- For academic purposes.

- Other

5.3 What is your main priority in this course in terms of English language development?

- To acquire more vocabulary.

- To pronounce English correctly and intelligibly.

- To develop my writing skills.

- To better understand the content and underlying meaning in texts.

o To communicate effectively and appropriately in real life situations.

o To develop my grammar knowledge.

Section 6| Attitude towards speaking in English.

6.1 Please read each statement carefully and choose an option for each.

Neutral= nor agree, nor disagree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel nervous when speaking English in front of others.					
I worry about judgement from my peers.					
I feel insecure about my pronunciation.					
I make an effort to always speak in English during pair/group work.					
I orally participate more in classes where there is a more relaxed learning environment.					
I feel anxious about oral presentations in English.					
I shy away from orally engaging in class because I worry about making mistakes.					
I am reluctant to orally engage when the topic is not interesting or relevant.					
My confidence in speaking is low due to lack of previous practice.					
My oral interaction is influenced by my relationship with my teacher.					
I'd rather speak with a partner than in front pf the class.					
I feel others will not value my opinions or thoughts.					

I feel insecure about my vocabulary and/or grammar knowledge.					
I welcome all opportunities to develop my speaking skills.					
I feel more at ease to speak in smaller classes.					

Appendix B | Group Interview Questions

Engagement Question

1. Why is it important for you to learn English?

2. How do you feel about speaking in English in front of others?

Exploration questions

1. Why do you believe so many people struggle while speaking in front of others in English?

2. Which factors could influence learners' motivation to engage in speaking?

3. What are your thoughts in relation to the impromptu speech activities?

4. How did the podcast activities help you develop your speaking skills?

5. Do believe addressing controversial issues is important in an English lesson? How did this contribute to your engagement in speaking?

6. Did standing up to speak affect your motivation to engage? Was it positive in improving your speaking skills? Did the various seating arrangements promote speaking?

7. Did presenting your oral presentation as a group make you feel better about this assessment moment, or would you rather have done it alone?

Exit question

1. Is there anything else you would like to add about foreign language anxiety or motivation to speak in English?

Appendix C |Sstatement Categories

Attitude towards speaking in English

Category	Questions	Corresponding number in questionnaire
Anxiety	I feel nervous when speaking English in front of others.	1
	I feel anxious about oral presentations in English.	6
	I'd rather speak with a partner than in front of the class.	11
Social (fear of judgement)	I worry about judgment from my peers.	2
	I shy away from orally engaging in class because I worry about making mistakes.	7
	I feel others will not value my opinions or thoughts.	12
Confidence in Abilities (lack of self-confidence)	I feel insecure about my pronunciation.	3
	My confidence in speaking is low due to lack of previous practice.	9
	I feel insecure about my vocabulary and/or grammar knowledge.	13
Motivation	I make an effort to always speak in English during pair/group work.	4
	I am reluctant to orally engage if the topic is not interesting.	8
	I welcome all opportunities to develop my speaking skills.	14
Classroom environment issues	I orally participate more in classes where there is a more relaxed learning environment.	5
	My oral interaction is influenced by my relationship with my teacher.	10
	I feel more at ease to speak in smaller classes.	15

Appendix D | Results of Questionnaire

Personal Information			
Category	Answers	Students	
		N	%
Age	17-20	5	16,7
	21-25	7	23,3
	26-30	7	23,3
	Over 30	11	36,7
Affiliation to Institution	Student	14	43,3
	Former Student	5	16,7
	Employee	1	3,3
	Erasmus	0	0
	Research fellow	2	6,7
	Other	9	30
Cycle of Study	1st-Undergraduate	7	23,3
	2nd-Masters level	8	26,7
	3rd-Doctoral level	2	6,7
	post-Doctoral	1	3,3
	Other	0	0
	Not applicable	12	40

Contact with language

Category	Answers	Students	
		N	%
Nationality	Portuguese	27	90
	Other	3	10
Years studied English from 1st to 12th year at school	Less than 5	4	13.3
	5–8	13	43.3
	More than 8	12	40
	Uncertain	1	3.3
Attended private English lessons	Yes	15	50
	No	15	50
Years attending private English lessons	1–4	13	86.7
	5–10	5	13.3
	Over 10	0	0
At the Open Languages Courses at University	Yes	9	50
	No	9	50
Are any of your curriculum, units taught in English?	Yes	6	20
	No	24	80
If you are already working, is English the language of communication?	Yes	11	36.7
	No	19	63.3
How much do you contact with and/or use the English language in your social life (media, family, friends, peers, etc.)?	Less than 10%	12	40
	10% to 30%	8	26.7
	31% to 40%	6	20
	41% to 50%	3	10
	More than 50%	1	3.3

Self-evaluation of language skills

Productive skills

4.1 How do you feel about your writing skills in English?
30 respostas

- Not confident (needs improvement)
- Somewhat confident (minor issues)
- Confident (at ease)

43,3%
53,3%

4.2 How do you feel about your speaking skills in English?
30 respostas

- Not confident (needs improvement)
- Somewhat confident (minor issues)
- Confident (at ease)

26,7%
70%
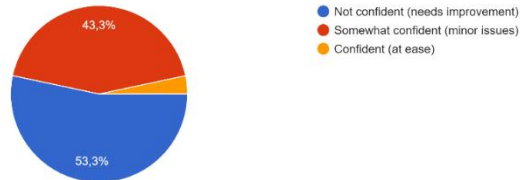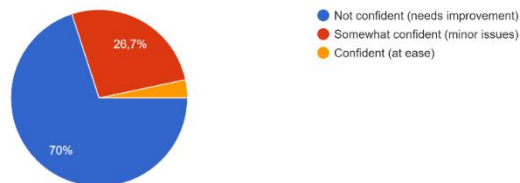
Receptive skills

4.3 How do you feel about your reading skills in English?
30 respostas

- Not confident (needs improvement)
- Somewhat confident (minor issues)
- Confident (at ease)

26,7%
10%
63,3%

4.4 How do you feel about your listening skills in English?
30 respostas

- Not confident (needs improvement)
- Somewhat confident (minor issues)
- Confident (at ease)

56,7%
18,7%
26,7%
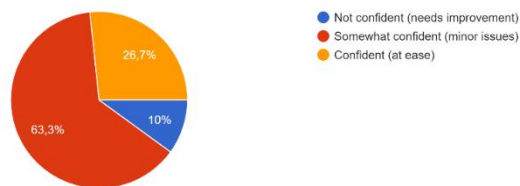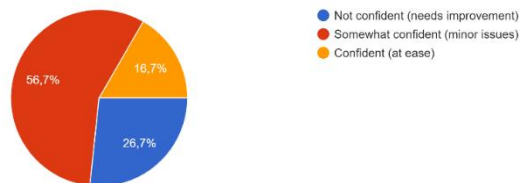
IV. Reasons for choosing the Open Language Courses

5.1 Why did you choose to attend English lessons at the Open Language Courses?
30 respostas

- Credibility of the Institution
- Recommendation
- Convenience
- Price
- By recommendation

23,3%
13,3%
26,7%
36,7%
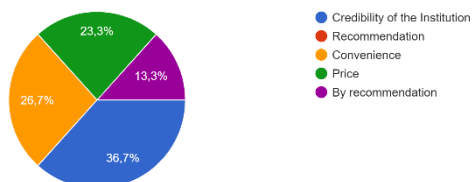
V. Reasons to further develop language proficiency

Category	Answers	Students	
		N	%
What is the main reason to further develop your proficiency?	Because I need for my future career	13	43.3
	To add to my CV	4	13.3
	To apply for a job outside Portugal	3	10
	Because it is a requirement in my workplace	2	6.7
	Because I believe it is necessary to communicate in this global era	5	16.7
	To be able to communicate better with family/Friends/colleagues	1	3.3
	For academic purposes	1	3.3
	To apply for Erasmus	0	0
	To apply to a course outside Portugal	0	0
	Because I enjoy it	1	3.3
	Because I am interested in the language	0	0

Other	0	0

VI. Main priority in developing proficiency

Category	Answers	Students	
		N	%
What is your main priority in this course in terms of English language development?	To communicate effectively and appropriately in real life situations	21	70
	To develop my writing skills	4	13.3
	To pronounce English correctly and intelligibility	2	6.7
	To develop my grammar knowledge	1	3.3
	To acquire more vocabulary	1	3.3
	To better understand the content and underlying meaning in texts	1	3.3

VII. Attitude towards speaking in English

Category	Questions	Disagree		Neutral	Agree	
		N	%	N	N	%
Anxiety	I feel nervous when speaking English in front of others.	3	10	4	23	76.6
	I feel anxious about oral presentations in English.	2	6.6	2	26	86.6
	I'd rather speak with a partner than in front of the class.	6	20	7	17	56.6
	I worry about judgment from my peers.	5	16.6	5	20	66.6

Category	Statement					
Social (fear of judgment)	I shy away from orally engaging in class because I worry about making mistakes.	7	23.3	9	14	46.6
	I feel others will not value my opinions or thoughts.	15	50	11	4	13.3
	I feel insecure about my pronunciation.	5	16.6	2	23	76.6
Confidence in Abilities (lack of self-confidence)	My confidence in speaking is low due to lack of previous practice.	4	13.3	2	24	80
	I feel insecure about my vocabulary and/or grammar knowledge.	1	3.3	6	23	76.6
Motivation	I make an effort to always speak in English during pair/group work.	3	10	8	19	63.3
	I am reluctant to orally engage if the topic is not interesting.	7	23.3	11	12	40
	I welcome all opportunities to develop my speaking skills.	1	3.3	4	25	83.3
Classroom environment issues	I orally participate more in classes where there is a more relaxed learning environment.	1	3.3	4	25	83.3
	My oral interaction is influenced by my relationship with my teacher.	3	10	5	22	73.3
	I feel more at ease to speak in smaller classes.	1	3.3	3	26	86.6

Oral Interaction activities in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom: Overcoming learners' speaking inhibitions
Francisco Brites Faustino | NOVA FCSH

Abstract

The state of anxiety that oral communication incites in English as a foreign language (EFL) student, can be considered to be one of the major factors in their reticence to speak using the target language. In a classroom where speaking activities are associated with anxiety and self-consciousness, it is necessary to understand how to combat these metaphorical adversaries of oral communication. In order to understand how to assist students in overcoming these inhibitions the question "How can peer oral interaction activities contribute to learners overcoming their speaking inhibitions?" was raised. The participants in this research project consisted of mixed-ability learners from Year 11 and Year 7 classes. These students participated in a series of spoken interaction activities wherein their behaviour and language skills were observed and analysed. The participants were then invited to answer questionnaires where their opinions on the activities, as well as language learning in general, were assessed. The resulting data indicates that students' speaking inhibitions were at their lowest when their degree of comfort amongst their peers was at its highest.

Keywords: Oral interaction; speaking inhibitions; communication anxiety; willingness to communicate; foreign language classrooms.

1 INTRODUCTION

English language learning poses a significant challenge for many Portuguese students in the 3rd Cycle of Basic Education and Secondary Education. Despite the increasing importance of global communication, some students exhibit hesitance and resistance in actively participating in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. This lack of engagement and reluctance to speak in the target language raises the need to understand the root causes of these inhibitions and find effective strategies to motivate students to overcome them and improve their language skills.

This research project took place during the 2021/2022 school year as part of my practicum. It consisted of an observation period, during which students were observed in class with their regular English teacher, followed by a teaching period in which I took over the duties of teaching the class. During the observation phase of this research project, a common trend emerged in the classroom, where students showed unwillingness to actively participate in various activities, preferring to respond only when prompted directly by the teacher. Students were reluctant to participate during brainstorming activities and tended to favour activities which allowed them to avoid using the language orally.   However, a positive shift was observed during a debate activity among Year 11 students, when previously reserved and unresponsive students began to actively share their opinions with others, indicating a change in behaviour when engaged in spoken interaction activities.

While EFL learners often receive substantial theoretical input, they lack opportunities to apply this knowledge in real-life situations. Thornbury (2005), as cited in Amiri et al., (2017, p. 120), highlights the need for practical language usage to complement grammar and vocabulary knowledge because students lack the opportunity to practice and use that knowledge outside of the classroom. Thus, it is essential for teachers to design lesson plans that incorporate current topics,

cater for students' interests in language and culture, and foster critical thinking and self-confidence.

The primary aim of this research project was to explore how incorporating spoken interaction activities in the EFL classroom could effectively reduce students' speaking inhibitions. By promoting a desire to speak English and providing a comfortable environment for students to express themselves, this study sought to enhance language learning and communication skills among students.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective communication is a crucial skill that empowers students to express themselves and engage in meaningful interactions. However, some students experience speaking inhibitions in EFL classroom, which can hinder their language development and participation. To combat this issue, it was essential to delve into the origins of these inhibitions and explore potential factors contributing to their development. This article examines various aspects, including learned traits, cultural backgrounds, communication anxiety, and motivation, to shed light on the complexity of speaking inhibitions in the EFL setting.

2.1 Learned Traits and Environmental Factors

Research suggests that students' speaking inhibitions are not inherent but rather learned traits that evolve throughout their development (McCroskey, 1977). As children, students do not naturally have difficulty engaging in spoken interactions, indicating that external factors play a pivotal role in shaping these inhibitions. Environmental factors, such as classroom dynamics and teaching approaches, can reinforce these inhibitions. Failing to understand how to get the most out of the English language classroom, may lead students to feel lost and unsupported by their teacher. This can inevitably lead to a disconnect between the learner and the subject, which leads to a loss of learning potential for the student.

2.2 Cultural Background as a Source

Wen and Clement (2003) and Wu (2019) highlight the cultural background as a potential source of speaking inhibitions for students. Specifically, Chinese learners have been observed to display a high level of "face-saving" mechanisms, wherein they avoid communication to protect their reputation (Wen & Clement, 2003, p.29). "Face," a concept introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987), refers to the public self-image that individuals seek to safeguard (Ginsburg et al., 2016). The fear of revealing language weaknesses may drive students to refrain from speaking, particularly in English, where they desire to appear as competent as their peers.

Additionally, Chinese learners often prefer a "submissive way of learning," wherein they view the teacher as an expert and expect a dominant teaching style (Wen & Clement, 2003, p.19). This preferred method of learning, which can be said to be similarly observed amongst Portuguese students, can create a dichotomy between the different teaching methods in their English language classes and other subjects, potentially affecting their willingness to participate in the EFL classroom.

2.3 Communication Anxiety as a Promoter of Speaking Inhibition

Anxiety is another significant contributor to students' speaking inhibitions. Hashemi (2011) defines anxiety as a state of apprehension indirectly associated with an object, and it is a widely examined variable in psychology and education. Language learners often experience second/foreign language anxiety, also known as "communication apprehension" (Horwitz et al., 1986, cited in Mak, 2009, p.203). The fear of real or potential communication with others can thus lead to a negative correlation between communication apprehension and willingness to communicate (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000).

Moreover, communication apprehension is a learned behaviour influenced by the expectations placed on the speaker. Positive reinforcement for successful

communication builds confidence, while consistent pushback over inaccuracies can lead to heightened apprehension. Anxiety poses a threat to students' flow potential, limiting their involvement in challenging lessons and hindering their learning (Brophy, 2004, p.11). Studies in Japanese EFL classrooms have also shown that anxiety inhibits students from initiating conversations, challenging teachers, and participating actively in the learning process (Maftoon & Ziafar, 2013, p.75).

2.4 Lack of Motivation as a Potential Cause

Motivation plays a vital role in students' willingness to engage in spoken interaction. Intrinsic motivation, driven by curiosity and interest, energizes learning, while extrinsic motivation focuses on external rewards (Deci, 1972; Deci & Ryan, 2013). For students to overcome speaking inhibitions, English language teachers must address learners' interests and future prospects. Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes that making language learning relevant to students' lives is essential to maintain intrinsic motivation (p.63).

Creating activities based on real-life situations and emphasizing the importance of the English language in modern society can motivate students to participate actively in the EFL classroom. Encouraging a sense of ownership and pride in producing quality work fosters intrinsic motivation (Jagger, 2013). By understanding students' needs and fostering positive reinforcement, teachers can help students overcome inhibitions and actively participate in language learning.

Effective spoken interaction is vital in interpersonal communication, and individuals' willingness to communicate orally varies across languages. Originally conceptualized for native language communication, the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) model explores the probability of engaging in communication when free to choose to do so. However, it has since been adapted to address second language contexts, highlighting the influence of various variables on language learners' communication behaviors.

2.5 Origins of the Willingness to Communicate Model

The concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) has gained attention as a crucial aspect of second language acquisition. It refers to learners' readiness to initiate discourse using the second language (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The early WTC model posited that perceived communicative competence and communicative apprehension were key variables influencing an individual's willingness to communicate in both L1 and L2. Furthermore, individuals' introversion/extroversion and self-esteem levels were found to play a role in determining their WTC.

MacIntyre et al., (1998) expanded the WTC model to encompass L2 language acquisition. It was observed that individuals experienced higher communication anxiety while speaking in a second language. MacIntyre et al.,'s (1998) heuristic model (Figure 1) divided WTC into six layers of variables. There is a focus on layers II and IV (Behavioural Intention and Motivational Propensities) in this research.
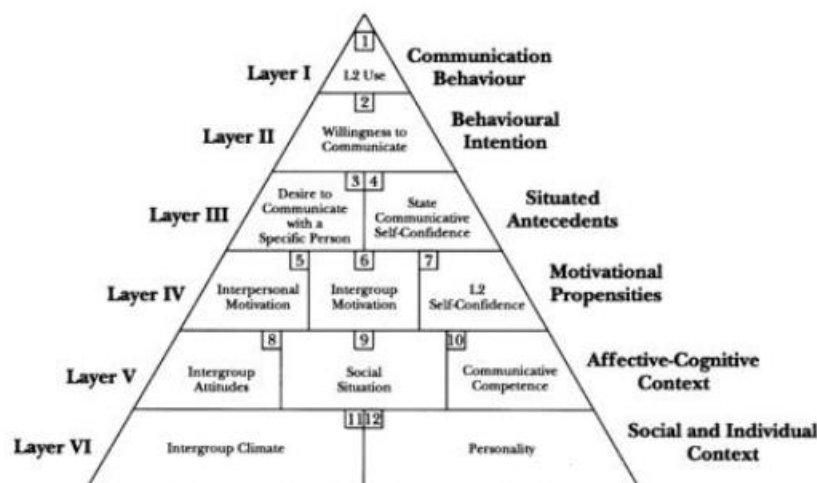

Figure 1: MacIntyre's Heuristic Model of Variables influencing WTC

Motivational Propensities are divided into interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation and L2 self-confidence. Interpersonal motivation encompasses three

clusters of variables: intergroup motivation, need for control, and affiliation. Learners' motivation is influenced by the desire to belong to a particular group and solidify their standing within it. Task-based activities have been found to promote intergroup motivation, allowing stronger students to motivate their peers to overcome speaking inhibitions.

Intergroup Motivation is based on the affective and cognitive contexts of intergroup interaction. Bloom's Taxonomy, which is a "multi-tiered model [for] classifying thinking" (Forehand, 2010, p.2), refers to the affective domain as being comprised of the emotional aspects of learning. As such, it focuses on learners' "feelings, values, motivations, attitudes and dispositions" (Jagger, 2013, p. 40). Therefore, in accordance with Bloom's taxonomy the promotion of positive emotional responses in students towards learning the target language is an imperative in EFL. Munezane (2015) builds on MacIntyre's definition of WTC, describing it as the motivating force that drives learners to actively seek opportunities to communicate in the foreign language. MacIntyre (2007) further asserts that WTC is a non-linguistic outcome of the language learning process, extending beyond mere verbal expression. It encompasses actions such as active class participation, which signifies learners' WTC in the L2 (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Kang and MacIntyre (cited in Cao, 2014, p. 790) emphasize the significance of WTC as a complex yet vital component of communicative language teaching and L2 pedagogy. It serves as a facilitator of instructed language learning, encouraging learners to engage actively in language tasks. Cao (2014) highlights the distinction between voluntary WTC behaviors and moments when learners feel "obliged" to answer teachers' questions in class. The former is found to yield more notable results in English language learning. Additionally, a positive attitude towards language tasks is correlated with higher WTC levels and increased L2 production (Cao, 2014, p. 791).

Once the literature was complete, it became possible to start testing whether oral interaction activities could, in fact, be used to reduce students' speaking inhibitions.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Context

This article is based on my teacher-training experience at a school cluster in the Greater Lisbon region during the 2021–2022 academic year. in a Year 11, and a Year 7 class. However, as the majority of the practical teaching experience took place with the year 11 students, the majority of the data gathered will refer to their experiences. Both groups studied English twice a week for a total of 100 minutes for the year 7 group and 150 minutes for the year 11 group. The observation period lasted between the months of September to January, while the teaching period lasted between January and May.

The Portuguese curriculum for Year 11 of secondary school expects students be able to "interact effectively in the English language, while actively participating in discussions within the topics covered, defending points of view and opinions, integrating their experience and mobilizing knowledge acquired in other disciplines" and "demonstrate the ability to connect information, while being able to synthesise it in a logical and coherent manner." (Ministério da Educação, 2018a, p. 10, my translation) The students in the Year 11 class were in the Sciences and Technologies field, with the students showing a preference for factual and objective information over literary analysis and discussion. All students were native Portuguese speakers, without any major special educational needs. Of the 25 students, the majority of the class appeared to meet the standard expected by the Aprendizagens Essenciais (Ministério da Educação, 2018a), and overall, the class was relatively homogenous in their skill level, with the stronger students helping their peers overcome their weaknesses. The students had no behavioural issues to report, yet their motivation levels and willingness to participate were low.

The Aprendizagens Essencias document for Year 7 students (Ministério da Educação, 2018b) indicates that students in this age group should be able to "[u]nderstand and trade ideas in predictable everyday situations; initiate, maintain

and finish a brief conversation" (p. 5, my translation). The 7E class was composed of a mixed level of students whose first language was Portuguese. This class had only 21 students, of which two had special educational needs which made their presence in the EFL classroom challenging. Of the remaining 19 students, one had less severe special educational needs and was able to participate in the lessons. There were no behavioural issues of note in the classroom, and students were mostly participative in class. Despite the setback suffered during the previous two years due to the pandemic, resulting in many of these students missing in-person English lesson during, many of the students in this classroom appeared to meet the standards set by the Aprendizagens Essenciais (Ministério da Educação, 2018b). While there were no students who could be considered to be far below their peers in language skill level, there were two students who stood out from their peers as being overall stronger and more engaged in class. Overall, students in the 7E class seemed capable of meeting expectations whilst showing good promise for growth.

3.2 Classroom Activities

This action research project aimed at answering the research question: "How can peer oral interaction activities contribute to learners overcoming their speaking inhibitions?" Therefore, the activities developed throughout this project were meant to provide students with the "informational limits" which Deci & Ryan (2013) indicate "provide informative structures around which people tend to experience greater choice," (p. 251) in the hope that learners demonstrated a marked improvement when given more control over their participations in class.

In each lesson, students were invited to participate in brainstorming sessions related to the topic of the class, covering concepts such as "advertising and consumerism" and "the world around us" in the case of Year 11 students (Moreira et al., 2003), and "types of houses" for Year 7 students, in accordance with the official curriculum document for this age group (Ministério da Educação, 2018b). In addition, each group of students in both age groups were asked to participate in

language interaction activities, designed to focus on assessing this skill, and their participation in it, more thoroughly.

The Year 11 students engaged in two focal language interaction activities. The first involved preparing a debate on the dangers of advertising, with two groups discussing the statement "Children should be shielded from advertising" and two groups debating "Targeted advertising is a breach of privacy." This approach aimed to enhance personal relevance in line with the findings of Amiri et al. (2017) and Jagger (2013). However, some students exhibited low participation due to personal feelings and skill levels. To address this, a new group discussion activity based on Scrivener (2011) was introduced, allowing students to practice spoken interaction in a more comfortable setting. The second, a jigsaw reading activity, focused on alternatives to animal testing, encouraging students to roleplay scientists developing a new product and collaborate in finding a suitable alternative to animal testing. In the end, they presented their chosen methods to the class.

The Year 7 students participated in a roleplay activity where they described their weekends to each other in pairs. This activity aimed to emphasize the importance of spoken interaction in boosting students' willingness to communicate in the classroom. Due to their young age and proficiency level, students were provided with a dialogue which served as a guide for recounting past events and reinforcing the use of the past simple tense.

3.3 Research Tools

In order to analyse whether speaking activities could be used to help reduce student's speaking inhibitions, it was important to consider which tools better met the criteria necessary to gather the appropriate data. As such, two sets of tools were designed. Initially, observation grids were considered a reliable tool to assess students' performance (i.e., their participation, fluency, grammatical accuracy and willingness to communicate with their peers) during each interaction activity. Yet, the tools proved somewhat unreliable in practice due to the large number of

students and my unfamiliarity with them. The criteria of the Willingness to Communicate model that were being analysed (i.e., willingness to communicate, motivational propensities and affective-cognitive context) depend highly on the self-perception of students. Therefore, it was necessary to assess their willingness to communicate in the L2 by making use of questionnaires to understand students' motivational propensities in the classroom. In the end, observation grids became an extra source of data that merely complemented the main tools.

The use of anonymous questionnaires has proven to be an invaluable tool when gathering data on personal feelings. When prompted to share their experiences under the safety of anonymity, students are more receptive to self-reflection and sharing their feelings more honestly. As such, for each spoken interaction activity, students were asked to fill in a questionnaire (appendices A-D) detailing their feelings towards the activity in general, how they felt they performed in it, and the reason behind that performance. At the end of the semester, the Year 11 students were given a final questionnaire (Appendix A) where they were asked to talk about spoken interaction in general and their feelings towards English language communication in class.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Year 11

During the preparation phase of the debate, the Year 11 students' participation was assessed, and it was found that 25% of students were highly participative, driving the planning phase forward. Conversely, a small subset of participants (15%) scored low in participation, relying on their classmates to encourage their engagement (Figure 2).
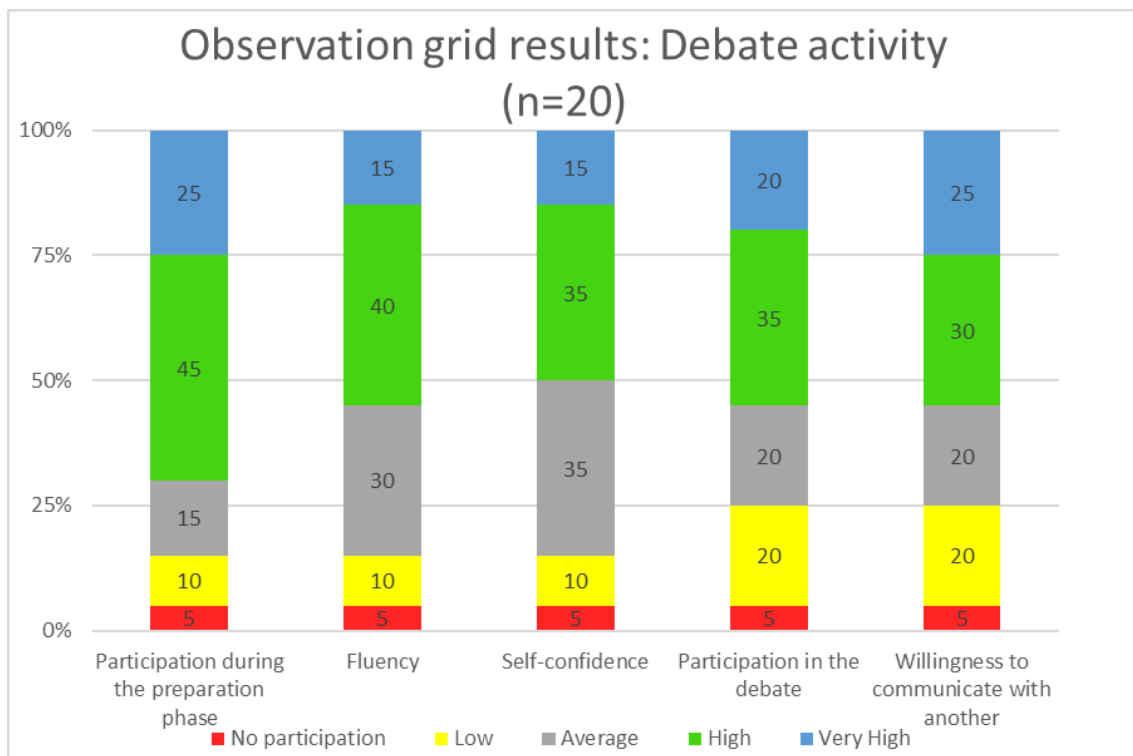
Figure 2: Results of the observation grid for the debate activity (n=20)

In terms of English language fluency, the majority of students exhibited a high level of fluency, (near C1 CEFR level) while speaking in English. Only 26% of students displayed low (A2) or very low (high A1) levels oral fluency (Figure 2).

Regarding students' impact on the development of the debate, 55% of students were considered to have had a highly positive influence on the activity.

The observation also focused on students' willingness to communicate. Approximately 55% of students demonstrated the ability to ask and answer questions beyond what they had prepared during the debate, indicating a quarter of the Year 11 class had a high level of communication apprehension that needed addressing in future activities.
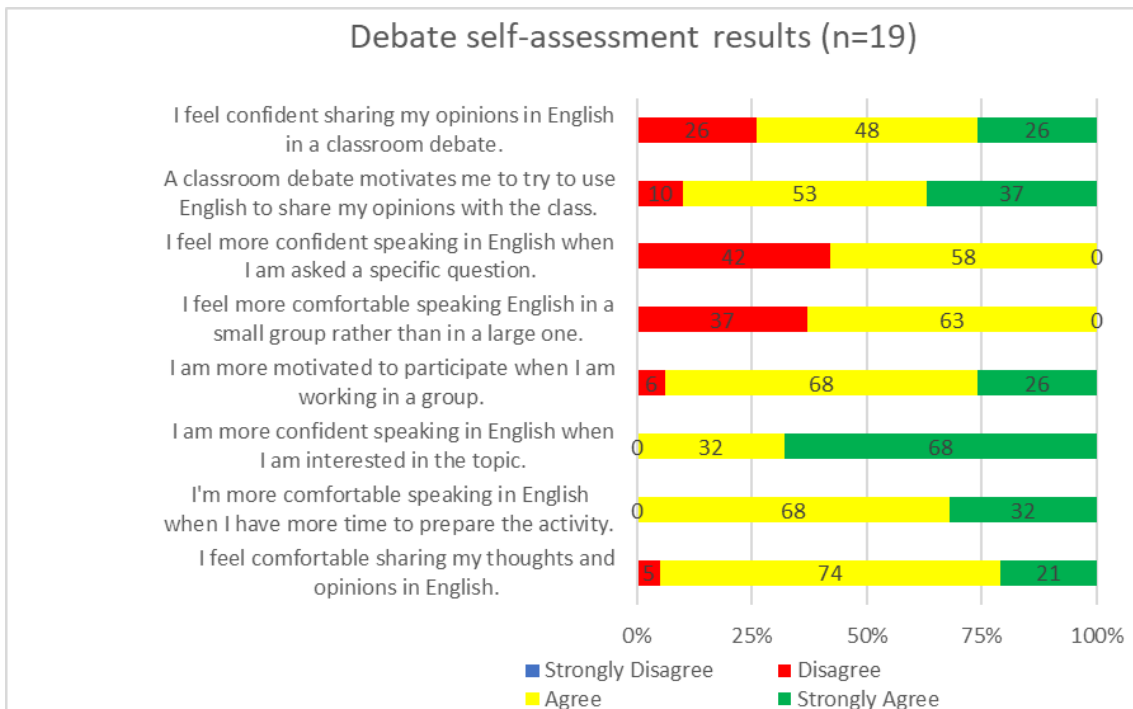
Figure 3: Debate questionnaire results (n=19)

After the debate activity, the year 11 students completed a questionnaire, with 95% expressing at least some level of comfort when using English to share their opinions (Figure 3). The majority (63%) preferred speaking in small groups, and 58% felt more confident when asked specific questions. An overwhelming 89% of students felt motivated to share their opinions in English during a classroom debate. However, around 26% still felt unconfident about sharing their opinions in such discussions (Figure 3).

Figure 4: Results of observation grid for group discussion activity

The group discussion activity assessed students' L2 use in vocabulary appropriacy, fluency and accuracy, topic development, social skills, and willingness to communicate with others. Approximately 64% of students maintained an appropriate level of English vocabulary during the discussion (Figure 4). The majority (60%) demonstrated an appropriate level of fluency, while 68% maintained a high level of grammatical accuracy (Figure 4).

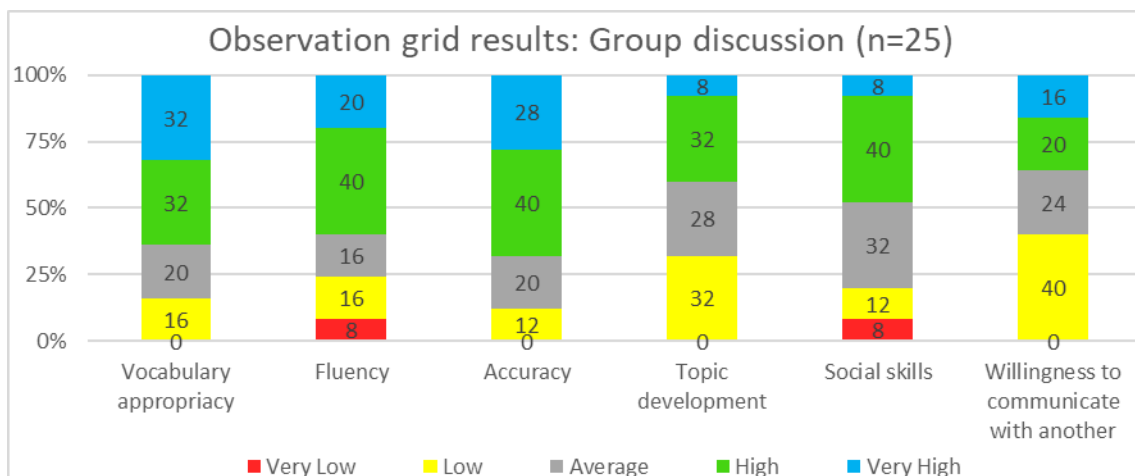Regarding topic development, 48% of students were capable of sharing their assigned information completely, while 28% encountered some difficulties in conveying information, resorting to Portuguese at times. Around 32% of students had low information sharing competences, relying mostly on Portuguese (Figure 4).

Assessment of social skills showed that 48% of students maintained a dialogue with their group, while 32% faded in and out of the discussion (Figure 4). A significant portion (36%) attempted to further the dialogue in their group, but 40% engaged minimally with one another.
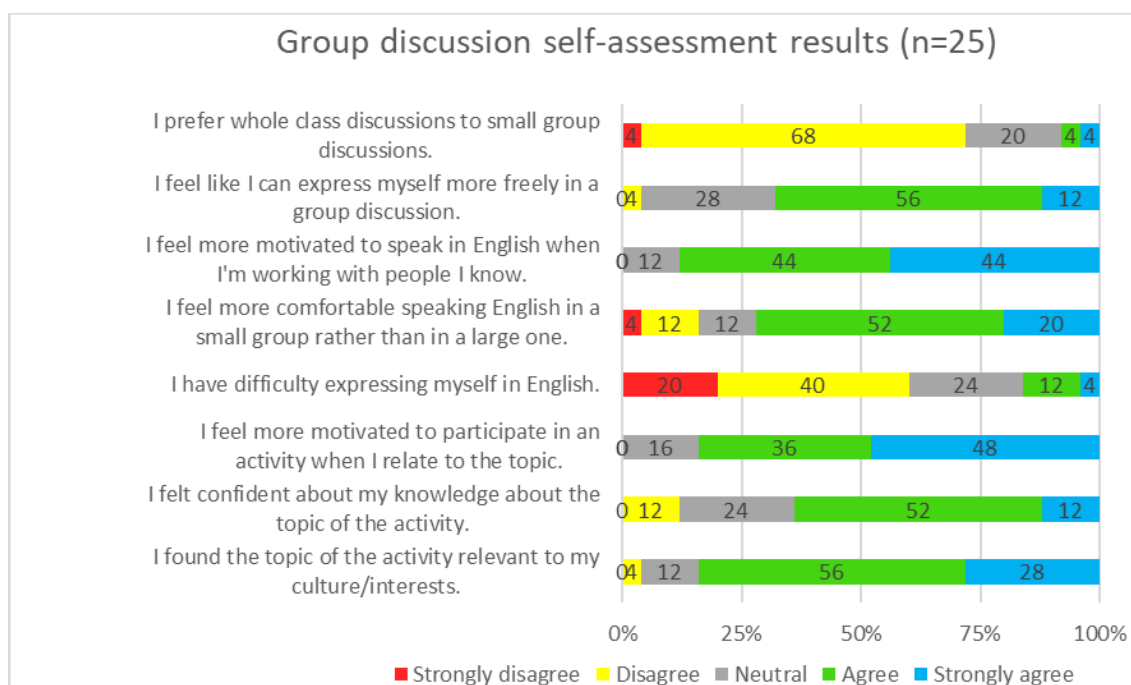
Figure 5: Group discussion self-assessment results (n=25)

After the group discussion activity, students filled in a self-assessment questionnaire (Appendix B). The majority (84%) found the activity's topic relevant

to their interests or Portuguese culture (Figure 5). Around 64% felt confident in their knowledge about the topic, and 84% were motivated to participate when the topic interested them (Figure 5). Additionally, 60% of students expressed comfort in expressing themselves in English, and 72% preferred smaller group discussions over whole-class discussions (Figure 5).

The questionnaire results showed that 42% of students preferred to speak only when the teacher asked them to, and 46% felt confident answering questions in class (Figure 6). A little over half of the students (54%) did not feel intimidated speaking English in the classroom. Additionally, 96% felt comfortable speaking English with all their classmates, and 89% felt motivated to improve their language skills when working with familiar peers (Figure 6). Most students (77%) were confident in their overall English language skills, and 50% felt confident expressing themselves in English (Figure 6). Furthermore, 62% believed that their English language skills influenced their participation in the English language class (Figure 6).
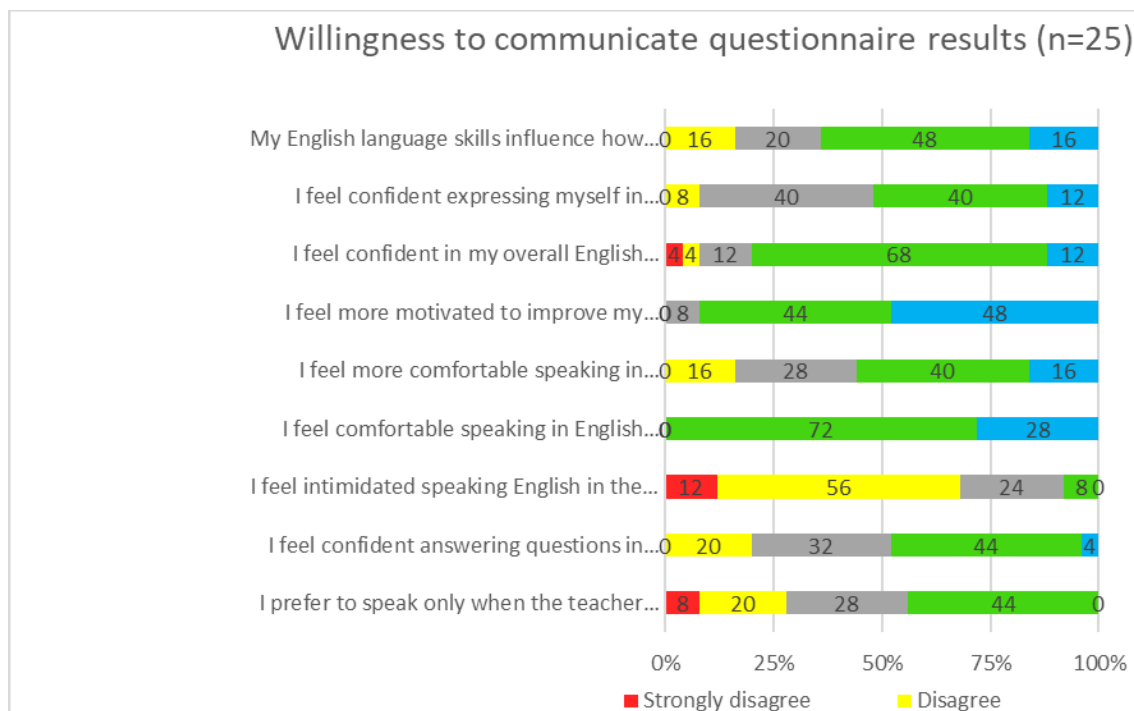
Figure 6: Willingness to communicate questionnaire results (n=25)
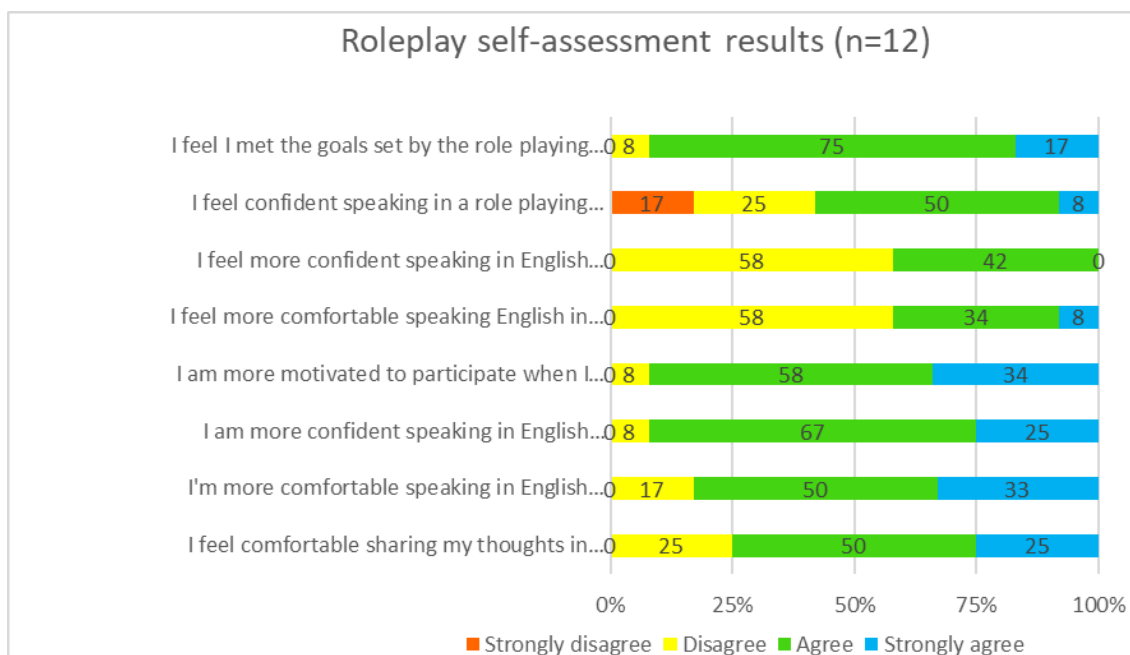
Figure 7: Roleplay self-assessment results.

4.2 Year 7

After the roleplay activity, the Year 7 students completed a self-assessment questionnaire. The majority (75%) felt comfortable sharing their thoughts in English (Figure 7). Around 83% were more confident speaking when they had more time to prepare, and 92% felt more motivated to participate when working in pairs (Figure 7). However, only 33% felt more comfortable speaking in English when working in pairs than in groups of 3-5 students (Figure 7).

Regarding answering specific questions, 58% felt less confident in their English-speaking skills. Approximately 58% felt confident in the roleplay activity, and 75% believed they had met the activity's goals (Figure 7).

5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research project was to explore how peer oral interaction activities could help students overcome their speaking inhibitions. In order to address this research question, the study incorporated MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) theory of using task-based activities to promote language learning in L2 learners

and how peer interaction facilitates overcoming reluctance to speak in the target language. The focus was on creating activities that required students to speak in the L2 as frequently as possible.

For the Year 11 group, particularly weak students were observed to be hesitant in participating in spoken interaction activities, requiring verbal prompts from the teacher. Some students attributed their lack of self-confidence when speaking to insufficient preparation time and their low English language proficiency. Despite this, it was possible to observe a minor improvement in students' English language skills from one task to another, which could be attributed to various factors associated with peer oral interaction activities.

The debate activity was the first attempt at addressing the research question, and it not only determined the viability of using such activities but also identified students who struggled the most with spoken interaction. The activity revealed that students who were reluctant to participate in class questions showed higher participation in peer interaction activities. This could be attributed to their feeling of comfort with peers, which reduced their fear of communicating in English. The study indicated that promoting a healthy and friendly classroom environment can significantly aid students in feeling comfortable interacting in the target language with their peers.

The use of the first language (L1) during the preparation phase of the debate was common, as some students resorted to the L1 to understand the task, focus on vocabulary and grammar, and enhance personal interaction with peers. While L1 use in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class is expected, it could be beneficial for weaker students to work at higher cognitive levels and feel more capable when collaborating using their L1. However, during the main debate, students engaged in meaningful target language communication, which supported the main goal of the research.

MacIntyre's model of Willingness to communicate emphasizes target language use as the ultimate goal, and the debate activity was assessed based on students'

willingness to communicate with others and in the target language. It was observed that students who were reticent to answer regular class questions showed higher participation in the debate, indicating that large group debate activities in a familiar and relaxed environment can reduce speaking inhibitions.

The group discussion activity, which followed the debate, aimed to provide Year 11 students with another opportunity for peer spoken interaction. The data collected from this activity revealed that students had difficulty maintaining fluent and accurate speech when presenting their own data, indicating the need for further promotion of language self-confidence through increased spoken interaction activities in the classroom.

The results of the group discussion also showed that students struggled with reading comprehension during the topic development assessment, which could be attributed to motivational propensities, behavioural intention, and situational antecedents. The activity promoted peer interaction, but the low L2 use may have been influenced by the novelty of the task and lack of time for preparation.

The final questionnaire indicated that a significant number of students preferred to speak only when prompted by the teacher, highlighting the role of the teacher as a motivator for some students. The feeling of belonging to a group of peers with similar English language skills contributed to higher motivation and willingness to communicate. Moreover, activities that involved working with friends and classmates were considered strong motivators for improving language skills.

The role play activity was designed taking into account that Year 7 students were of a lower proficiency level than their older counterparts, and Murphy's (1991) principle that working in a dyad makes for a less intimidating activity format for younger learners.

Despite their young age and the irregular English language levels between the different students in the classroom, they considered themselves relatively confident in their ability to share their thoughts in English. Similar to their older counterparts, the Year 7 students indicated that they, mostly, felt more

comfortable speaking in English when interested in the topic and given time to prepare the activity. Yet, unlike the Year 11 students, the Year 7 students seemed to tend to feel less confident speaking in English when asked a specific question.

As Murphy (1991) suggests, students answered that pair work activities served as good motivation for spoken interaction. This information should have set the precedent that pair work would be more favourable to the students than group work. Yet, a small number of students indicated being unable to meet the goal due to failing to understand what was expected of them in the activity. This could potentially stem from either external (the activity was poorly explained) or internal factors (the student was not paying attention when the activity was explained). It can be said that teaching younger students is a rather difficult challenge to beginner teachers. There is a level of care that must be taken when designing and conducting activities for these age groups. Taking the research question into consideration, and the reduced time spent with the Year 7 class, it is difficult to assess how successful peer interaction activities are in reducing speaking inhibitions with younger students. The lack of a group identity, which had been found in the Year 11 students, seemed to have hindered the intergroup motivation of the Year 7 class. At the same time, the low level of English language skills, in combination with the low level of maturity of the students made the interaction activity somewhat unsuccessful. It might then, be necessary to either take care when developing peer interaction activities with younger students, or have strong classroom management skills when conducting this type of activities with these age group.

The study showed that peer oral interaction activities can help reduce speaking inhibitions in students, especially when the activities are conducted in a familiar and supportive classroom environment. Large group debate activities were particularly successful in promoting spoken interaction and self-confidence in students. However, it was also evident that different age groups and proficiency levels may require tailored approaches and careful consideration when designing peer interaction activities.

6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study aimed to investigate how peer oral interaction activities could help learners overcome their speaking inhibitions. While the research provided valuable insights into student interaction in the English language classroom and the challenges they face, it became evident that peer oral interaction activities alone cannot entirely overcome the various barriers that contribute to students' speaking inhibitions.

Throughout the school year, students were given numerous opportunities to engage in spoken interaction, such as whole class discussions, brainstorming sessions, and select activities designed to promote oral communication. These activities offered valuable insights into students' strengths and weaknesses. Notably, Year 7 students, who had experienced disruptions due to the pandemic, faced considerable difficulties in this research project. While they expressed a desire to communicate in English, their language skills were limited, hindering their ability to surpass basic assignment requirements. This highlighted the importance of managing expectations and tailoring activities to suit students' language levels and interests.

Surprisingly, Year 11 students initially displayed reluctance to participate during the observation period. Their lack of motivation presented a challenge, as unmotivated students can influence others negatively. However, with persistent effort and exposure, these students gradually became more engaged in the EFL lessons, showcasing the transformative power of effective teaching and guidance.

The study shed light on the need to consider several elements when reducing students' inhibitions in the English language classroom. Students' relationships with the language, their perceived skill levels, and the classroom environment all played crucial roles. To foster a safe environment that encourages learning and participation, it is essential to establish trust between students and between students and teachers. Understanding students' difficulties and interests and

combining them with the curriculum can create meaningful tasks that motivate students to engage more actively.

A key lesson learned during this project was managing expectations regarding students' language skills. While educators strive to ignite a passion for learning the target language in all students, it is essential to acknowledge that some may view language classes merely as a requirement to pass. The study recognized the inherent challenges of addressing the diverse needs and motivations of learners.

Despite valuable findings, the study encountered constraints that affected the full potential of the research. Time limitations and the need to balance teaching with research impacted the number of spoken interaction activities conducted with the students. Ideally, more activities and questionnaires with control groups should have been included to provide a comprehensive study. Moreover, the questionnaires could have been more focused to track students' progress and changing motivations accurately.

In retrospect, this project proved to be a transformative experience, enabling growth as a teacher and providing valuable insights into student dynamics. While there is much to learn, it laid the foundation for becoming a more effective educator. The desire to improve as a teacher took precedence over the researcher's ambition, yet the project was deemed successful in fostering personal and professional development. Although more research may lie ahead, for now, the focus remains on refining teaching skills and positively impacting students' language learning journeys.

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Appendix A

Debate self-assessment

Answer each question honestly to assess how you feel you performed in the Dangers of Advertising debate.

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and opinions in English.				
2. I'm more comfortable speaking in English when I have more time to prepare the activity.				
3. I am more confident speaking in English when I am interested in the topic.				
4. I am more motivated to participate when I am working in a group.				
5. I feel more comfortable speaking English in a small group rather than a large one.				
6. I feel more confident speaking in English when I am asked a specific question				
7. A classroom debate motivates me to try to use English to share my opinions with the class.				
8. I feel confident sharing my opinions in English in a classroom debate.				

9.   In your own words, explain why you chose that particular answer in the previous question.

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Appendix B

Group discussion self-assessment

Answer each question honestly to assess how you feel you performed in the Alternatives to Animal testing group discussion.

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I found the topic of the activity relevant to my culture/interests.				
2. I felt confident about my knowledge about the topic of the activity.				
3. I feel more motivated to participate in an activity when I relate to the topic.				
4. I have difficulty expressing myself in English.				
5. I feel more comfortable speaking English in a small group rather than a large one.				
6. I feel more motivated to speak in English when I am working with people I know.				
7. I feel like I can express myself more freely in a group discussion.				
8. I prefer whole class discussions to small group discussions.				

9. In your own words, explain why you chose that particular answer in the previous question.

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Appendix C

Willingness to Communicate

Answer each question honestly to assess how you feel you performed this school year

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I prefer to speak only when the teacher asks me to.				
2. I feel confident answering questions in class.				
3. I feel intimidated speaking English in the classroom.				

4. In your own words, explain your answer to the previous question.

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Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
5. I feel comfortable speaking in English with all my classmates.				
6. I feel more comfortable speaking in English when working with people with a similar language level as my own.				
7. I feel more motivated to improve my English-speaking skills when working with people I am familiar with.				
8. I feel confident in my overall English language skills.				
9. I feel confident expressing myself in English.				

10. My English language skills influence how much I try to speak in the English language class.				

11. In your own words, explain your answer to the previous question.

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Appendix D

Roleplay: Self-Assessment

Answer each question honestly to assess how you feel you performed in the

Roleplay: My Weekend activity.

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts in English.				
2. I'm more comfortable speaking in English when I have more time to prepare the activity.				
3. I am more confident speaking in English when I am interested in the topic.				
4. I am more motivated to participate when I am working in a pair.				
5. I feel more comfortable speaking English in pairs than in groups of 3-5 students.				
6. I feel more confident speaking in English when I am asked a specific question.				
7. I feel confident speaking in a role-playing activity.				
8. I feel I met the goals set by the roleplay activity.				

9. In your own words, explain why you chose that particular answer in the

previous question.

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Now you're talking! Peer interaction in primary English education
Carolyn E. Leslie | CETAPS - NOVA FCSH

Abstract

Although teachers may be reticent to encourage children in primary education to talk to their partners for fear of losing control in the classroom, oral interaction has been proven to be essential in teaching learners *how* to interact and use the language. This study illustrates how oral interaction activities with learners in a Grade 4 primary English classroom in an English as a foreign language classroom in Portugal were able to support each other's language production. A total of 18 pre-A1 learners were recorded taking part in a spot-the-difference information gap activity. Recordings were transcribed and analysed qualitatively for learning opportunities. Results show that more able learners were able to scaffold their less-able peers, that learners listened to their partners and responded appropriately and were on task. In addition they supplied each other with vocabulary, co-constructed utterances and modelled language. In spite of the occasional use of L1 principally for social interaction and to manage the task, the task itself was carried out in the target language. The paper finishes by discussing implications for the classroom, such as which tasks can be used, how learners can be paired, how the classroom can be managed and how assessment can be conducted.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children have an innate drive to connect to people and communicate meaning through speech, and this "instinct for interaction and talk" is an aptitude Halliwell (1992, p. 8) suggests should be harnessed by teachers. When they start learning a foreign language, children want to use it to show their teacher and parents what they have learned, and this is important in motivating young learners, who want immediate results. However, although teachers may ask learners to produce language via short oral presentations, or may briefly interact with individual learners themselves, many lack the confidence to implement peer oral interaction in the classroom. Some worry that learners may repeat and reinforce errors, others worry about noise levels and others still that learners will use too much L1 or go off-task. Notwithstanding, research has proven the value of oral interaction in the learning process, and the purpose of this article is to highlight the advantages of peer interaction for learning in the primary English classroom, and suggest how teachers can best implement it in their lessons. It starts by giving a brief overview of the theory related to the topic and goes on to give examples of how peer interaction amongst children in primary English education can create learning opportunities. It concludes by discussing the practical implications of introducing peer interaction in the classroom.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: PEER INTERACTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Oral interaction, which can be defined as "the spoken language that takes place between two or more people and … is the type of speaking and listening that occurs in real time" (Oliver & Philp, 2014, p.5), is a key skill in the teaching and learning of a foreign language. It involves listening to a partner, responding appropriately and turn taking. Interaction provides an occasion for learners to "grapple with the target language at a more challenging level" (Philp et al., 2008, p.12), and in an EFL context, where there may be few opportunities to use the target language outside formal education, interaction in the classroom could be learners' only chance to use

spoken language communicatively. Primary learners however are initially unable to interact, except in well-rehearsed situations, and speaking begins with the production of rhymes, tongue-twisters and songs. However, over time, learners can move onto interacting using chunks of language with their teacher and colleagues. This prefabricated language is stored as a single unit (Kersten, 2015), thereby making retrieval more economical. More mechanical activities involving repetition of these chunks are necessary in the early stages of learning to enable learners to memorise language, but as they gain a greater range of vocabulary and grammatical structures, more challenging oral tasks will allow them to recombine these to create their own utterances, developing new language competence (Kersten, 2015).

Peer interaction involves learners interacting with each other, which greatly increases learner talking time and is more symmetrical, as it gives learners the opportunity to interact with others at a similar level of cognitive and social development, benefiting them socially, academically and culturally (Oliver & Philp, 2014). This type of interaction also allows peers to adopt new conversational roles (Philp et al., 2014). For example, peers can help their partners produce language, or correct them, functions they would never use when interacting with a teacher. Shyer students often feel more at ease when speaking to a classmate, meaning they are more likely to take risks with language, and increased talking time can make speech more automatic, thereby improving fluency (Oliver & Philp, 2014). Teachers who promote peer interaction create more learner-centred classrooms promoting learner autonomy, and as learners enjoy talking to their classmates, peer interaction could promote learner motivation.

From a cognitive perspective, research shows that during oral interaction, learners are exposed to the meaningful comprehensible input necessary to acquire language (Krashen, 1985). Long, (1981, 1996) suggests that when there is a breakdown in communication, the use of clarification requests, comprehension and confirmation checks, repetition and positive or negative feedback, known as negotiation for meaning (NfM), pushes learners to produce more accurate output

leading to learning. Although most research on the use of interactional strategies has been carried out on adults, studies have shown how primary learners are also able to negotiate for meaning. Oliver (2009) showed that, when compared to adults, 8-13 year old learners in an English as a second language (ESL) setting negotiated for meaning, but used fewer confirmation checks and other repetition, that is, they were more concerned in making meaning clear for themselves than their partner, and attributed this to the egocentric nature of the age group. More recently, in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting, Lázaro-Ibarrola and Azpilicueta-Martínez (2015) working with 7-8 year old learners showed that although these learners did use interaction strategies, the overall number used was much lower than that reported for older learners, which the authors attributed to their very low level of proficiency and the scarcity of interaction opportunities in the EFL context. On the other hand, García- Mayo and Lázaro-Ibarrola (2015), showed how 8-9 year old EFL learners negotiated more and used L1 less frequently than 10-11 year olds, which they attributed to the more positive attitude of the younger group, who tried harder and were more willing to participate.

Swain (1995), points to the importance of output, and believes that interaction affords learners an occasion to actively engage with language, requiring them to focus more carefully on grammatical processing, thereby developing their syntax and morphology. It is also believed that as learners actively engage with language during interaction "they have to work out how the target language system 'works' when they need it to express what they want to say and when they want to make sense to others." (Oliver & Philp, 2014, p.33). Interaction also gives them the opportunity to experiment with new language and receive either positive or negative feedback from their partner. Other researchers believe that interaction is necessary for learning, with some believing that learning does not occur through interaction, but that interaction *is* learning (Swain & Lapkin, 1998).

From a socio-cognitive perspective, researchers believe that learning takes place through social interaction, and that the new language learners manifest while interacting with others is eventually internalised, so learners can use these new

forms and functions autonomously. The help learners receive from a stronger student or the teacher to produce language is termed scaffolding, (Wood et al., 1976), and studies have shown how young learners are capable of scaffolding each other's language production during interaction (Gagné & Parks, 2013; Oliver et al., 2017).Unskilled learners require the support of a more capable other through scaffolding, and evidence suggests that primary learners are capable of scaffolding each other's language production during interaction. Oliver et al., (2017) working with 5-8 and 9-12 year old English as an additional language (EAL) learners, reported that both age groups were able to support language learning, not only by negotiating for meaning, but also by asking and answering each other's questions, and co-constructing utterances. Pinter (2007) showed how a spot-the-difference oral task offered multiple benefits to the two 10-year-old EFL learners involved, who were able to support one another's language production through questions, answers, and translation, and who reported feeling more relaxed and confident about using English. Although it is true that the studies consider a variety of age groups in diverse learning contexts, they serve to illustrate the fact that interaction does play a role in children's language learning.

This section considered the theoretical background related to the rationale for using peer interaction. The following section presents examples of peer interaction in primary classrooms in Portugal, and demonstrates how interaction could promote language learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

In Portugal, primary education spans 4 years of formal education, from the ages of 6 to 10. In state schools, English is compulsory from year 3 and is taught by specialist English teachers. Learners study at least 2 hours of English per week although learners in private schools often have more contact with the language. Teachers follow curricular recommendations set out in a Ministry of Education document (Direção Geral de Educação, 2018), which highlights the need for a focus

on both spoken production and spoken interaction in the primary English classroom.

The following examples of peer interaction were recorded in two 4th year classes with learners in the 9-10 age group in a private school in Lisbon, where learners studied English for 2 hours per week. A total of 36 pre-A1 learners completed 3 spot-the-difference activities designed to reflect classwork, and in all 3 tasks the objective was to find 6 differences. Learners were not provided with any specific language to use, although the tasks were modelled by the English teacher and the researcher. All students completed the task simultaneously as a normal part of class work, but only 3 randomly-chosen pairs per group were taped. Recordings were then transcribed and analysed qualitatively for opportunities for learning.

4. RESULTS

Excerpt 1 below shows two learners interacting in the first spot-the-difference task involving two different pictures of monsters, used to practise the vocabulary of parts of the body. Values in brackets refer to pauses in seconds.

Excerpt 1

Turn	Student	
1	A	It's your turn
2	B	My monster (4.0). *Como é que se diz (.) in Inglês olhos*? [How do you say eyes in English?]
3	A	What?
4	B	*Olhos in Inglês*? [eyes in English?]
5	A	Yes
6	B	Eyes. My monster...
7	A	Have
8	B	one have eyes. One have
9	A	(3.0). My monster have one eyes.
10	B	OK, no different.
11	A	It is not different (2.0).OK this is my turn. My monster (...) have a one arm. One arm.
12	B	My monster han one arm
13	A	OK it is not different. My monster, ai it is your turn
14	B	My monster (3.0) er (3.0) *como é que se diz cabelo in Inglês*? [How do you say hair in English?]
15	A	Did you help me? What is cabelo in English? OK? *Percebeste*? (2.0) *Va, diz isso.* [Do you understand? Go on, say it]
16	B	*Mas como é que se diz*? [But how do you say it?]

17	A	It is hair
18	B	(2.0) My monster (6.0) han (mutual laughter)
19	A	My monster **have**
20	B	My monster have hair.

In this excerpt we can see how learner B repeatedly requests assistance from learner A, who acts as a language expert. As well as supplying the vocabulary B needs to complete his turns, A co-constructs B's utterance in turn 7 by supplying the verb B needs to complete his sentence. In turn 19, A is successful in correcting B's pronunciation of the verb in turn 18 (although the form is incorrect) and in turn 14, when B asks 'How do you say hair in English?' rather than providing the answer, she prompts him with a translation of his question, encouraging him to use the target language. Even though B's attention is focused on meaning rather than form, and he fails to ask the questions in English, he is able to produce a comprehensible utterance about his monster in turn 20. In this way learner A is able to assist B to take part in the interaction through scaffolding, and the language used in the task could be internalised by B who may be able to use it independently in the future. Simultaneously, the occasion to produce output on A's part could provide her with an opportunity for language development. We can also see the fun learners have during this interaction. In turn 6, learner B requires help with the word 'have' to complete his turn. In turn 12 he again has problems with the verb and the 6 second pause before his failed attempt to produce the verb in turn 18 results in mutual laughter.

Excerpt 2 shows learners taking part in another spot-the-difference task, this one based on food vocabulary.

Excerpt 2

Turn	Student	
1	C	(8.0)There is, there are (2.0) three tomatoes in my table.
2	D	In my table there are two tomatoes.
3	C	*Ponhas so tu* ? [Do you just want to note it?](4.0). *Es tu, es tu*[It's you, it's you]
4	D	In my table two cakes
5	C	Oh in my table there is one cake. *Tu es mais gordinha* (laughs) [You're fatter].
6	D	In my table there is one chicken
7	C	Oh in my table there is one chicken
8	D	In my table there is ...
9	C	Two cola? One?
10	D	Cheese
11	C	In my table there is, there is one cheese
12	D	In my table there is one bunch the three bananas. *Un cacho de três bananas.* [A bunch of three bananas].

Here were can see how learner C in turn 1 self corrects and how she suggests vocabulary to enable learner D to continue his utterance in turn 9, although this suggestion is rejected in turn 10. It also shows how learner D supports his partner's learning in turn 12 by using translation to give proactive assistance. Finally it again illustrates how learners can have fun during peer interaction, illustrated by learner C's use of humour in turn 5.

Finally excerpt 3 again shows learner interaction focusing on vocabulary of parts of the body.

Excerpt 3

Turn	Student	
14	E	(4.0) My monster...my monster has got aiiiiii
15	F	has got...
16	E	has got one mouth
17	F	Yes (3.0) *Está quase tudo igual dos meus* [It's almost all the same as mine] Have you found six differences?
18	R	No, *nem se quer encontramos uma.* [No, we haven't even found one]
19	F	OK, keep going then
20	R	My monster it's two feets
21	F	(4.0) yes
22	E	(Laughs)
23	F	Ah (2.0) my monster it's two foot
24	E	feet. *Deves dizer* feet [You should say feet]
25	F	My monster has got two feet
26	E	Yes. *Uma, uma,*[one, one] my monster has...has got ... has got one...nose.
27	F	

In this sequence, learner E has difficulty completing her utterance in turn 14, but the use of prompting by learner F in turn 15, where he repeats 'has got', gives E thinking time and allows her to continue and finish her utterance in turn 16. Then in turn 25, F explicitly corrects E's inaccurate use of foot to express the plural form, which learner E incorporates into her sentence in turn 27. In this excerpt we can also see how interaction provides a space for learners to experiment with language and try out different forms, which may eventually lead to learning. In turns 14 and 15 both learners use the correct verbal form 'has got'. However in turns 21 and 24 both use 'it's' before both resorting to the correct form again in turns 26 and 27, which they then continue to use through the dialogue.

The introduction to this article mentioned that teachers are often wary of using peer interaction as they fear learners will go off-task, use L1 instead of the target language and repeat errors. However, we can see from these 3 excerpts that not only did learners work collaboratively, were on task and took relevant turns, but that more capable learners could perform the role of language expert, scaffolding the language learning of a weaker colleague. If we look carefully at the use of L1, we can see that the L1 was used when learners requested help, commented on task management (for example to talk about turn-taking), for social interaction and to

proactively help a partner through translation. The task itself however was carried out in English and this is in line with findings of other researchers who have reported the use of L1 in oral tasks to manage the task, focus attention on language and to interact personally (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Although learners output was not always accurate, the interaction provided them with an occasion to recall key vocabulary, experiment with language, learn from their mistakes, communicate meaning, make language their own, and to have fun, all of which facilitate language learning.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

5.1 Tasks for the classroom

Before peer interaction takes place, teachers need to ensure the activities planned are meaningful, age appropriate and require interaction. Simply sitting children side by side and asking them to interact will not be successful if they have no reason to do so. This means the activities ideally need to have an information gap so children have a real need to exchange information. Asking two children to find out what colour their pencils/pens/ pencil cases are will lead to interaction, but this is not meaningful if learners can see what colour they are without asking. Instead, give each learner two identical pictures with these items, ask them to colour the first without letting their partner see, then get them to ask each other and complete the second blank picture using their partners' colours. This way there is a real need to ask, and a game-type quality to the activity, making it much more realistic and fun. Obviously the interaction here will be quite mechanical, but this type of oral repetition is what beginners need to remember both concept and language (Dunn, 2013). However, with time, learners should have the opportunity to use language more freely, to form their own utterances and make their own meaning, as this will facilitate the development of communication strategies and further language learning. Some examples of information gap activities for young learners, moving from more controlled to those which give freer practice are:

a) Grid activities. The grids in this type of activity, one for each student, consist of a number of boxes which contain different, incomplete information (which could be as simple as a number or letter). Learners can then ask 'What's in A2?' etc. and use this information to complete their grid. Figure 1 below shows an example of a grid activity used to practise ordinal numbers and months.

Student A				
	1	2	3	4
A	8/6	12/11		
B		2/2	4/7	
C			3/8	6/10

Student B				
	1	2	3	4
A			1/5	10/3
B	11/1			21/9
C	23/4	30/12		

Figure 1. A grid activity to practise ordinal numbers and months

b) Mingling activities. Here learners stand up and mingle, asking and answering questions, as they would while doing a survey. Some could then be asked to share their findings with the class.

c) Role-play. Scripted role plays such as interviews or a conversation in a café can be useful to automatize language chunks and recall vocabulary. However, giving learners the opportunity to create their own language through semi-scripted role-plays (where they can use a framework but introduce their own ideas), or a role-play which involves using language spontaneously, provides a greater opportunity for learners to make sense of language.

d) Spot-the-difference activities. Here learners' pictures are almost the same, but there are a number of differences which they need to identify without looking at each other's images. The images should be clear, simple and not include too many differences.

e) Picture dictation. Learners each have a different image, for example they might both have drawn a picture of a friend or their bedroom. They then sit back to back and take turns to describe their picture, which their partner attempts to draw.

5.2 Classroom management

As stated at the beginning of this article, young children have a natural aptitude for talk and interaction. When they begin learning a foreign language they expect to use the language, and can quickly become demotivated when they realise they can say very little. So including interaction activities in the classroom not only leads to language learning, but satisfies the need of both parents and children for tangible outcomes.

Crucial for successful classroom interaction is a supportive atmosphere where learners are not afraid of making mistakes, and where learners are given positive feedback for effort and completion of tasks. Shim et al., (2013), working with middle school students showed that a more positive classroom peer climate led to learners engaging in more help seeking from their partners, as did the learners in the 3 excerpts above.

Classroom management of such tasks is key to success. Teachers should start by introducing the task and explaining both the real-life purpose (finding all 6 differences in the spot-the-difference activity) and the language learning purpose (to practice their speaking and communication in English). By helping children understand the learning objective of an activity, practitioners can raise children's language awareness, leading to more effective learning (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015).

Teachers need to give instructions in a clear, simple fashion and aim to give short chunks of instructions, otherwise children's attention may wander. The activity should be demonstrated with the teacher and a strong student, then again with two students, and instructions checked. Children also need to be reminded of the rules

of pairwork and these could be displayed on the classroom wall. Appropriate rules would be:

I.   Help each other

II.   If your partner can't help, put up your hand and the teacher will help

III.   Use spy voices (Voice charts to illustrate this are readily available to download from the internet and put on your classroom wall).

IV.   Take turns and listen to your partner

A final step would be to elicit the necessary language and write this on the board. Only then will any necessary materials be distributed and learners paired up. During the task itself, teachers should monitor learner interaction and be prepared to intervene if students need additional scaffolding. As they monitor, teachers may hear children making mistakes. This needs to be handled sensitively as the teacher's objective is to encourage learners to communicate, and motivate them to do so. Depending on the type of error, teachers can either ignore it, make a mental note to address the problem in another class, or indicate the language on the board for discussion after the task. Positive reinforcement both during and at the end of the activity is important, both of content and language. For example if the activity is a board game with questions to ask a partner, the teacher should first address what information the learners discovered about their partner(s) and then praise what was good about language use or highlight areas for improvement. It is also important that the teacher asks a few pairs to perform the activity for their peers to finish off the task. Another important consideration is how long the activity will take. Too long and children's interest will wane, too short and they will not get enough practice, so aim for a maximum of 7-10 minutes, depending on the activity.

5.3 Learner Pairings

How learners are paired is another important consideration and should be addressed at the lesson planning stage, as pairing two weaker students or two rowdy students may not results in effective interaction. A study on the ability of learners in primary education in the UK to carry out science reasoning tasks when divided into friendship pairings versus acquaintance pairings (Kutnick & Kington, 2005) showed that girl friendship pairings performed best. Conversely, boy friendship pairings performed worst, with pairings consisting of boy and girl acquaintances performing at mid-levels. When considering teacher versus self-selected pairings in the young EFL classroom, García Mayo and Imaz Agirre (2018) have shown learnings in teacher pairings are more on task than those in self-selected pairings. However, although such results may provide some guidelines, which pairings work best in class is ultimately a decision for the teacher and one which needs to be constantly monitored during interaction activities. Some possible combinations could be weaker and stronger students, or more boisterous boys with quieter girls. This might involve students temporarily moving from one seat to another, but should not require that furniture be moved.

5.4. Assessment of peer interaction

The most effective way to assess peer interaction is to use an observation grid to systematically record attitudes and oral skills, preferably using task-specific criteria. As tasks are short, it is impossible to assess every student at the same time, so the teacher should focus on 2 or 3 pairs as the class carries out an interaction task, moving closer to these pairs to unobtrusively complete the grid. An example grid is given in Appendix A. Explaining these success criteria with learners using age-appropriate language would also be beneficial and later, when learners were familiar with the criteria, they could self-assess using a simplified version.

6 CONCLUSION

Halliwell (1992, p. 11) says language is 'a fundamental part of being human' used to interact with others, but denied the opportunity to use it, learners struggle to communicate orally. Although peer interaction can be difficult to manage initially, once learners become accustomed to the rules associated with these activities, their implementation is much simpler. As we have seen above, not only are teachers concerns over how learners perform during interaction largely unfounded, but we have also seen how learners can act like the teacher to support each other's learning. Interaction is important for learners to practice language they already know, but as mentioned by Hatch (1978), it is also through interaction that language develops, and denying learners the opportunity to interact will lead to less effective learning and could result in demotivation. This is not to say that peer interaction is always successful, and teachers need to carefully monitor the relationships between learners in interaction and develop cohesion between pairs of learners and the group as a whole (Ehrman & Dornyei, 1998). The rewards in terms of learning and motivation however far outweigh any initial constraints.

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Appendix A. An observation grid to assess peer oral interaction

Complete the grid with +, +/- or –

Name	Willing to participate On task	Uses English to convey meaning	Listens to partner and takes turns	Uses acceptable pronunciation	Is appropriately fluent (i.e. lack of frequent, long pauses)	Uses appropriate vocabulary	Completes the task

e-TEALS