

Peer-Tutoring to Foster Spoken Fluency in Computer-Mediated Tasks

La tutoría entre pares para fomentar la fluidez oral en tareas mediadas por computador

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Tutoria por pares para promover a fluência oral em tarefas por meio de computador

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ABSTRACT. Twelve 14-to-15-year-old students participated in this investigation. The participants faced difficulties to speak fluently in an L2 and they evinced different levels of proficiency. Therefore, it was planned to assess the effects of peer tutoring and computer-mediated tasks on students' spoken fluency. Differences among learners were the starting point of this research and, consequently, peer tutoring was the strategy proposed. The benefits from collaborating in small groups are supported by previous studies. Tutors learned by teaching, while tutees had more time for individualized instructions. Along with peer tutoring, oral tasks and computer-mediated instructions ornamented this intervention. Qualitative data from learning logs, video recordings, rubric for assessing spoken fluency and a final semi-structured interview pointed to the effectiveness of this inquiry. The results suggest that learners increased self-confidence, enhanced spoken fluency, and improved the outcomes of tasks. Some of these results are also found in similar local and international investigations. What this paper adds is the use of computer-based conferencing as an additional tool for student-student interaction in distance, as well as the improvement of young learners' spoken fluency at a high school level.

Keywords: peer tutoring; spoken fluency; computer-mediated tasks; L1; L2.

RESUMEN. Doce estudiantes de 14 a 15 años de edad participaron en esta investigación. Ellos mostraron dificultad para hablar con fluidez en inglés además de diferentes niveles de competencia. Por lo tanto, se planeó evaluar los efectos de la tutoría entre pares y las tareas mediadas por computador en la fluidez oral de los estudiantes. Las diferencias entre los aprendices fueron el punto de partida de esta investigación y, en consecuencia, la tutoría entre pares fue la estrategia propuesta. Estudios previos confirman los beneficios de colaborar en grupos pequeños. Los tutores aprenden enseñando mientras que los estudiantes reciben más tiempo de enseñanza casi personalizada. Junto con esta estrategia, las tareas orales y la enseñanza mediada por computador condujeron esta intervención. Los datos de diarios de aprendizaje, videos, rúbrica para evaluar fluidez oral y una entrevista semiestructurada mostraron la efectividad de esta investigación. Los resultados sugieren que los aprendices aumentaron la confianza en sí mismos, la fluidez oral, y mejoraron los resultados de las tareas. Algunos de estos resultados también se encuentran en investigaciones locales e internacionales. Lo que añade este trabajo es el uso de computadores como una herramienta para la interacción estudiante-estudiante a distancia, así como el mejoramiento de la fluidez oral de los estudiantes de secundaria.

Palabras clave: tutoría entre pares; fluidez oral; tareas mediadas por computador; L1; L2.

RESUMO. Doze estudantes de 14 a 15 anos participaram desta pesquisa. Os participantes enfrentaram dificuldades para falar fluentemente na L2 e evidenciaram diferentes níveis de proficiência. No entanto, o planejado era avaliar os efeitos da tutoria por pares e das tarefas por meio de computador na fluência oral dos estudantes. As diferenças entre os estudantes foram o ponto de partida desta pesquisa e, conseqüentemente, a tutoria por pares foi a estratégia proposta. Os benefícios da colaboração em pequenos grupos foram sustentados em estudos anteriores. Os orientadores aprenderam ao ensinar, enquanto os orientados tiveram mais tempo para instruções individualizadas. Junto com a tutoria por pares, tarefas orais e instruções por meio de computador complementaram essa intervenção. Dados qualitativos dos registros educacionais, gravações em vídeos, rubricas para avaliação da fluência oral e uma entrevista final semiestructurada apontaram para a efetividade desta investigação. Os resultados sugerem que os estudantes aumentaram sua autoconfiança, aprimoraram a fluência oral e melhoraram as resoluções das tarefas. Alguns desses resultados também podem ser encontrados em pesquisas locais e internacionais similares. O que este artigo acrescenta é o uso de encontros através do computador como uma ferramenta adicional para a interação à distância de estudantes, bem como o aperfeiçoamento da fluência oral de jovens estudantes do Ensino Médio.

Palavras-chave: fluência oral; L1; L2; tarefas por meio de computador; tutoria por pares.

Introduction

This study aimed at determining the possible influence of peer tutoring on students' spoken fluency when performing computer-mediated tasks. Learners in the present study had different levels of proficiency when performing oral tasks in English that created a multi-level classroom. Benson and Nunan (2005) claimed that research has sought to answer why learners with similar cognitive capacities, under similar conditions, achieve different levels of proficiency or why learners become diverse while they are engaged in second languages. The authors distinguish psychological factors such as motivation, affect and learning strategies, as well as some social factors regarding the classroom and self-instruction. These differences in the classrooms, however, should not be seen as impediments for learners to benefit from their performances.

Particularly in the case of multilevel classrooms, peer tutoring can occur on an incidental basis as a willingness of high achievers to help others, providing teachers with a powerful strategy for extending the instructional influence (Vincent, 1999). In this situation, the teacher is present for help, with the added benefit that there are tutors available for immediate company.

Peer tutoring is an organized instructional method in which one learner tutors another in material in which the tutor is an "expert" and the tutee is a "novice" (Gordon, 2005). This definition has been adapted for the purpose of this study since, for instance, tutors in this investigation do not need to be experts in what they are tutoring, but they can be in the process of learning the material. In fact, Gillespie and Lerner (2008) argued that tutors do not need to be experts on the subject matter that is being worked on, or on grammar and correctness, but they do need to be experts in setting an appropriate environment for association and engaging with tutees.

Hence, peer tutoring should be conceived as collaboration among learners in order to achieve a common goal—usually the completion of an assignment or the answer of a question. This collaboration is evident, for example, with the "willingness to listen to others' ideas, suggestions, and opinions so that they can be discussed and integrated

into further actions, such as decisions about how to complete a task” (Beatty, 2010, p. 109).

As peer tutoring might emerge spontaneously as a means of collaboration, research has shown that structured tutoring is more effective (Gordon, 2005; Topping, Buchs, Duran, & Keer, 2017). Garringer and McRae (2008) emphasized on four steps to build a practical peer-tutoring program: considerations for the program, participant selection, training peer mentors, and choosing match activities. In the first step, clear goals and a well-organized plan of action that have an impact on the identified students’ needs are set. In the second step, the selection of participants, including mentors and mentees who are motivated and capable of providing help to their classmates, takes place. In the third step, before the program begins and tutors instruct other learners, they should gain some training from teachers. In the last step, the authors recommend that the selected activities for the tutoring sessions promote friendship and trust, build developmental skills, and help tutees establish stronger bonds within the school environment.

The present study sought to grant learners a central role through which they could work in small groups and help one another by alternating roles as listeners and speakers. This exchange of information might benefit high achievers and low achievers in their intention to master a second language since the former might reinforce their own learning by teaching, while the latter receive more time for individualized learning, repetition, and correction.

Peer tutoring has proven to succeed with cross-age learners, students with disabilities, minorities, exceptional learners, among others. Doman and Bidal (2016) explored the experiences of peer tutors when instructing a group of undergraduate in Macau, China. Data collected from focus groups and individual interviews demonstrated that peer tutors gained confidence and expertise in teaching when assuming a coaching role. Peer tutors reported that building a relationship between tutors and tutees was imperative to attain the goals of peer teaching since this kind of tutoring might be demotivating due to trainees’ early negative responses.

With the use of computers, Evans and Moore (2013) developed a web-based peer-tutoring system called Online Peer-Assisted Learning.

In this inquiry, undergraduate participants were asked to solve problems regarding topics related to class, and the learners who showed competency by answering the problem correctly were given the opportunity to teach it. The participants reported that the insights of others helped them open their minds, and that they confirmed or deepened their own understanding by teaching others.

Contreras (2013) analyzed the effects of the collaborative and self-directed speaking tasks on ten undergraduates' spoken fluency. The results suggest that affective factors such as confidence and motivation are essential for students to speak fluently. Additionally, working collaboratively makes learners find ways to express their ideas more easily since peers help them shape language needed to accomplish communicative goals.

In the present investigation, learners evinced problems regarding their acquisition of L2, especially in their development of spoken fluency. One of the goals of learning an additional language is to use it naturally. In doing so, Nation (2007) claimed that four strands should be considered with an equal share of the class time, as well as the learners' equivalent efforts: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. Meaning-focused input refers to the development of receptive skills, listening and reading; meaning-focused output is about how learners bring their thoughts to life by using speaking and writing skills. Regarding the third strand, learners must give deliberate attention to language features such as pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. The fourth strand, fluency development, is maybe one of the most controversial in terms of what it involves, since, sometimes; its definition is narrowed to speaking smoothly and rapidly without undue hesitations and pauses (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005).

Defining *fluency* is demanding and, thus, measuring it is challenging. Segalowitz (2010) distinguishes three notions of fluency—namely, utterance fluency, cognitive fluency, and perceived fluency. Utterance fluency can be measured objectively in a sample of speech by taking into account aspects such as words or syllables spoken per second or minute; use of short and long pauses and fillers such as *uhs* and *uhms*; repetitions, reformulations, and false starts (when speakers start to say

something, stop, and start again using a different wording or idea); and the average number of words or syllables between pauses (Leonard, 2015). The second notion, cognitive fluency, cannot be measured directly like utterance fluency, since it deals with the speaker's ability to efficiently plan and execute his speech, including content, vocabulary, and grammatical form. Regarding this second notion of fluency, Willis (2003) claims that "we make judgements of others on the basis of the language they use and the way they use it" (p. 19). That is, the perception of being a fluent speaker is based on others' ability to use a range of language forms and choose whatever seems appropriate to the circumstances. Thirdly, *perceived fluency* is defined as the impression that listeners have of a speaker's fluency or a speech sample (Jong, Steinel, Florijn, Schoonen, & Hulstijn, 2013). Features such as speech rate and pauses, vocabulary, pronunciation, use of grammar, along with the perceived quality of interaction, are considered to quantify this listener's impression.

In this investigation, thus, fluency is measured by using the parameters in the notion of perceived fluency and taking into account the descriptors for A1 and A2 learners described by the Council of Europe (2001).

Since research suggests that spoken fluency progresses due to continuous exposure to language use and 25% of class time and effort should be devoted to this characteristic of language (Nation, 2007), peer tutoring in computer-mediated tasks emerged as a strategy that involves additional time for peer interaction based on real-life settings that emphasize on meaning rather than form.

However, after reviewing the literature and previous local and international studies that tackle similar problems, the researcher identified that, while the positive effects of peer tutoring in a face-to-face classroom are well documented, studies of computer-mediated peer tutoring are less common. Consequently, the present study sought to fill the existing gap regarding the use of peer tutoring with the aid of computers to foster students' spoken fluency. The research question that guided this study was: In what ways does the participation in a peer tutoring strategy through computer-mediated tasks influence ninth grade students' spoken fluency?

Method

The present study was framed within an action research methodology (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). It took place at a school in Bogota, Colombia, with twelve ninth graders who voluntarily agreed to participate. An initial needs analysis stage (in which data was collected through a survey, a proficiency test, and observation of students' oral performances) identified a gap between high and low achievers.

Taking into consideration the results obtained in the needs analysis stage of this investigation, the respondents were classified into three levels (high, average, and low) as follows: four participants in the high level, two participants in the average level, and six participants in the low level. While four learners displayed aptitude toward learning English, others felt frustrated and experienced difficulties when performing orally—particularly in terms of spoken fluency.

To tackle the problem, peer tutoring was proposed, since the literature and previous investigations highlight the success of this strategy. Some local studies point at the effectiveness of peer tutoring in undergraduates' general achievements such as good grades, motivation, and their influence in their decisions to stop dropping out of college (Ariza & Viáfara, 2009; Nieto-Cruz, Cortés-Cárdenas, & Cárdenas-Beltrán, 2013). Viáfara (2014) explored the effects of peer tutoring with a group of university-level English learners. Fifteen advanced learners tutored their first-semester peers for three semesters. Data from surveys, journals, and interviews suggested that tutors obtained positive outcomes from this practice. Firstly, tutors reported that, by participating in the process of tutoring, their vocabulary was broadened and the provided feedback helped them improve their speaking in L2. Secondly, tutors came to accept and value their limitations and were motivated to find opportunities to gain more preparation.

Along with peer tutoring, tasks through a web-conferencing tool were planned in order to provide learners with meaningful opportunities to interact, negotiate and comprehend the meaning of language provided in the task input (Robinson, 2011a). Tasks invite learners to concentrate on spontaneous talk, that is, on meaning rather than on form (Willis & Willis, 2007), and provide conditions for fluency devel-

opment: time devoted to becoming familiar with the material worked, focus on conveying meaning, and time for practicing (Hinkel, 2017).

The pedagogical implementation of this research took place for a total of ten two-hour sessions. The lessons were framed within the task-based language learning methodology. Ellis (2006) advocated three phases that are given for a task to be executed: pre-, during- and post-task. In the “pre-task” phase, the topics were introduced through selected video, readings or pictures and students were explained the purpose and utility of the assignment, or worked on brainstorming, mind-maps, or guided questions in order to activate prior knowledge.

In the “during task” phase, students were given time to get in small groups of one peer tutor and two tutees and were allowed to use the previous materials to be ready to perform the tasks. In this phase, students’ performances were video-recorded once every three sessions. In the sessions, students were mainly presented the goals of the class and useful vocabulary and, then, peer tutors, and tutees got in small groups (three to four members). Each team consisting of at least one pupil who is high performing, one who is average performing, and one who is low performing, in order to be ready to complete the suggested tasks.

In the ‘post-task’ phase, students reflected on how the task was performed by using learning logs. In addition, this time was devoted to reviewing forms that seemed problematic to learners. Additionally, peer tutors watched the videos that tutees had previously recorded and evaluated their work using a checklist provided.

The sessions were developed with the aid of an online classroom platform called Blackboard Collaborate, published by Blackboard Inc. and intended to provide web-conferencing for distance teaching and learning. This software counts on characteristics found in common classrooms that allow users to share documents and presentations, chat, arrange students in small groups, and record the sessions on videos.

The content of this study was planned keeping in mind the school syllabus for ninth grade. The selection of attractive topics (including “Are you addicted to mobile phones,” “Your messy room,” “Phobias,” “A special meal”) that agreed with the students’ interests was the starting point of the sessions, as well as activities where participants behaved primarily as real-world language users (Ellis, 2003).

This implementation was developed in three stages: pre-, during, and post-implementation (Table 1).

Table 1. Instructional design

Implementation stage	Time allotted	Objectives	Instruments
Pre-	2 weeks	Identifying students' needs and proficiency level of L2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey • Proficiency questionnaire • First recording
During	8 weeks	<p>Week 1: Training peer tutors.</p> <p>Weeks 2–8: Observing students' performance while interacting in the activities (debates, simulations, role-plays).</p> <p>Analyzing if peer-tutoring strategy was helpful during the accomplishment of the tasks.</p> <p>Students' video recordings of their oral performances.</p> <p>Peer tutors' evaluation of tutees' work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning logs • Recordings • Peer tutors' assessment checklists
Post-	1 week	Collection of students' insights regarding the effects of peer tutoring on their spoken fluency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview

Source: Own elaboration.

In the first video recording, learners introduced themselves, expressed their likes, dislikes, and talked about their relatives. Learners' difficulties when interacting orally and their apparent lack of vocabulary or fluency during their performances influenced the researcher to set the general horizon of the research study. In this phase, the researcher sent consent letters to learners' parents and to the school principal in order to contextualize the subject under investigation and describe how the problem was going to be tackled.

In the while-implementation stage, the researcher trained high achievers to assume the role of peer tutors during the online sessions devoting two forty-five-minute sessions to teaching and modeling as

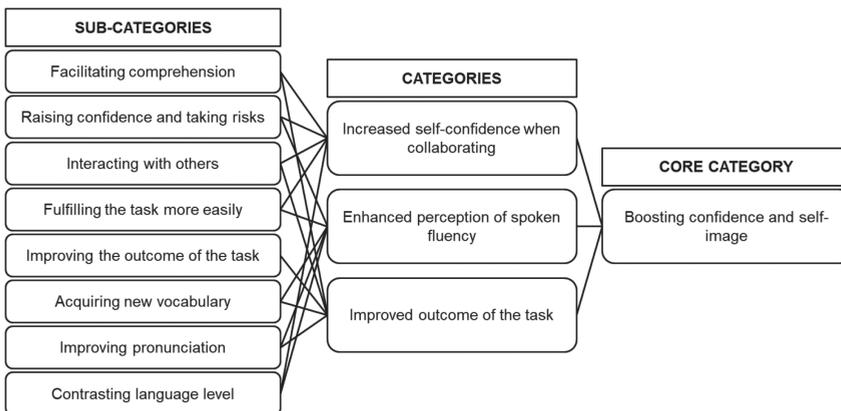
suggested by Spencer (2006). The researcher also observed students' performances and the appropriateness of the selected strategy to address the problem.

The post-implementation stage served for students to take part in a semi-structured interview with the researcher regarding their perceptions of the effects of peer tutoring on their spoken fluency. This phase was devoted to the analysis, validation and the interpretation of the data collected, and to sharing findings connected to the research question and the objectives. Data was organized in an Excel sheet, contrasted and cross-checked in order to establish differences and similarities that yield future categories. Triangulation of learning logs, video recordings, semi-structured interview, and a checklist ensured the validity and reliability of the data.

Results

Three categories that addressed the research question emerged from data analysis: increased self-confidence when collaborating, enhanced perception of spoken fluency, and improved outcome of tasks. Figure 1 shows the relationship among sub-categories that led to three main categories.

Figure 1. Category mapping: Outcomes of peer tutoring in computer-mediated tasks.



Source: Own elaboration.

Discussion of Categories

Increased self-confidence when collaborating

The analysis carried out by the researcher evinced a change in the learners' confidence toward their learning thanks to the implementation of peer tutoring. The participants acknowledged the increase of self-confidence when collaborating in tasks. Initially, some learners with low achievement experienced frustration and negative self-image when contrasting their performance to others' high achievement and constant participation. Group organization that included tutors and tutees might have led tutees to think that others were superior and, hence, be reluctant to take active part in discussions due to others' reaction to their performances. Observe the following answers in learning logs after the first session:

“Mis contribuciones en las discusiones grupales fueron malas porque soy el peor del grupo.” (My contributions in group discussions were bad because I am the worst in the group.) (Excerpt, Student H, Learning log 1)

“Mis aportes realmente fueron muy malos ya que no colaboré mucho en las discusiones.” (My contributions were very bad as I did not collaborate at all in the discussions.) (Excerpt, Student K, Learning log 1)

Learners feel frustration regarding language acquisition when contrasting their learning progress with that of their classmates. The quality of others' interventions, including a broad bank of vocabulary, comprehending the task with ease, understanding teacher's instructions, correct pronunciation, openness to work with others, are some of the reasons for tutees to feel nervous and avoid taking risks in group collaboration. The following excerpt indicates that, at this time, the students consider that they are to be taught by other learners and, thus, mainly assume roles as listeners.

“El trabajo en grupos me permite aprender sobre el inglés de los demás y que me enseñen a hablarlo un poco más.” (Working in groups allows me to learn from others' English and that they teach me to speak a little more) (Excerpt, Student G, Learning log 2)

Exposure to peer tutoring allowed learners to be aware of their leading roles in their own education. Early, in the third session, students assert that they perceive progress. As they advance, they now feel confident to make their voices heard. Interacting with others becomes a two-way process as they exchange the roles of listener and speaker in a richer discussion and decision-making.

“En esta clase mis contribuciones fueron buenas ya que escuché y pude ser escuchada.” (In this class my contributions were good as I listened and could be heard.) (Excerpt, Student K, Learning log 3)

Having the role of tutor can be perceived as a privilege. Accordingly, as self-confidence increases, one tutee reports the expectations concerning the scope of one’s personal contributions during the process of peer tutoring.

“Estar con compañeros que lograban entender el vocabulario facilitó mi desarrollo en las actividades, y considero que mis aportes también llegaron a ser de ayuda para otros.” (Being with colleagues who managed to understand the vocabulary facilitated my performance in the activities, and I consider that my contributions also helped others.) (Excerpt, Student D, Interview)

At the beginning of this project, peer tutors were selected based on their outstanding performances in the needs analysis stage. An evidence of progression and improved self-confidence is that tutees acknowledged that, although they lacked language mastery, they could help others. These students with low achievement experienced challenges in the development of the tasks, but they still considered their contributions could have benefited others. A teaching role arose almost naturally, as did a willingness to help others, to convey and negotiate meaning, or to improve the outcome of the task. Regarding the initial tutoring role they assumed, one participant reported:

“Me contribuyeron demasiado aquellos estudiantes de mayor nivel de inglés, ya que yo no tengo un buen nivel del idioma, pero puedo ayudar a los de menor nivel que yo.” (Students with a high level of English helped me a lot, since I do not have a good language level, but I can help those with a lower level.) (Excerpt, Student G, Interview)

At the end of the implementation, most of the participants agreed that peer tutoring helped them to be more confident and comfortable when preparing to perform orally. At this stage, mistakes were not seen as frustrating but as a means to make progress. Differences in language proficiency were not remarkable.

“Aunque a veces me equivocaba, sabía que todos estábamos en el mismo nivel y que avanzamos juntos. Así que no hubo como ese miedo al qué dirán.” (Although sometimes I got it wrong, I knew that we were all at the same level and that we advanced together. So, there was no fear about what they will say.) (Excerpt, SB, Interview)

Many of the students' entries to logs provided enriching insights concerning their increased self-confidence during the implementation of this project. Therefore, in the interview, the participants were asked how self-confidence had influenced their oral performances. They responded that it led them to put aside embarrassment and perform the tasks with less pressure and more spontaneity that, consequently, fostered their spoken fluency.

Enhanced perception of spoken fluency

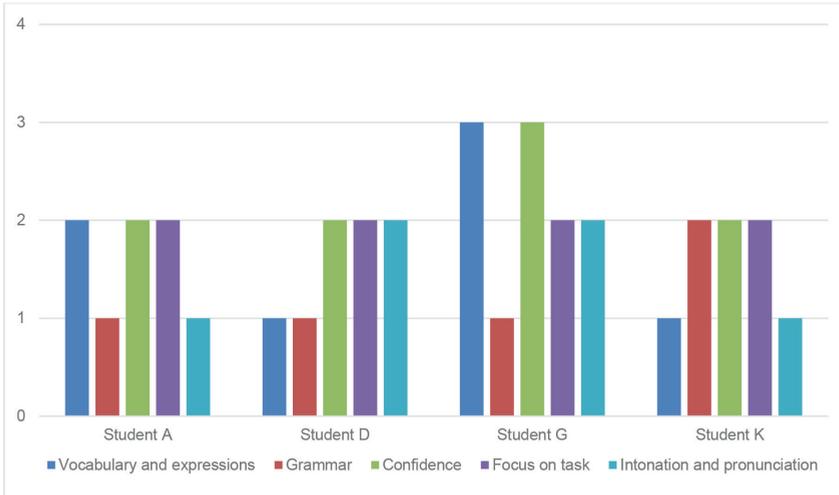
The second category that emerged from the analysis of data was the enhanced perception of spoken fluency. Regarding the previous category and the participants' intention to foster their fluency, one student reports an initial goal for the course.

“Poder hablar un poco más en inglés y no sólo unos segundos. Sin embargo, debo tener más confianza para no bloquearme a la hora de hacerlo frente a todos.” (Being able to speak more in English and not just for a few seconds. However, I must be more confident so that I do not hesitate in front of everyone.) (Excerpt, Student B, Learning log 1)

The rubric criteria used in this investigation to assess students' performances allowed the researcher to measure, to a certain extent, whether the participants had progressed in their spoken fluency, considering learners' vocabulary and expressions, grammar, confidence and hesitation, ability to focus on the task, intonation, and pronuncia-

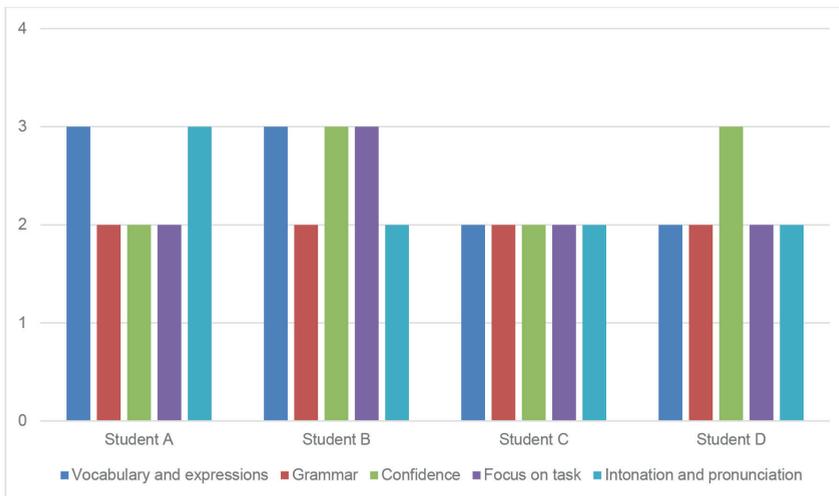
tion. This analysis reflects the participants' spoken fluency before and after the implementation of this project; thus, students who did not manage to video-record the first and/or the final performance were not considered. Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the tutees' initial and final spoken fluency respectively.

Figure 2. Tutees' initial spoken fluency



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 3. Tutees' final spoken fluency



Source: Own elaboration.

Through interaction with tutors and tutees, the participants in this study improved some aspects that influenced their spoken fluency. When comparing the results in Figure 2 and Figure 3, the use of a variety of new vocabulary and expressions is evinced in learners' performances. Tutees reported their perceptions regarding group work.

“El trabajo en grupos me ayudó mucho porque nos colaborábamos y entendimos el vocabulario.” (Working in groups helped me a lot since we worked together and understood the vocabulary.)
(Excerpt, Student A, Interview)

With new vocabulary, students felt that it was easier to make themselves understood in group discussion or when carrying out the tasks.

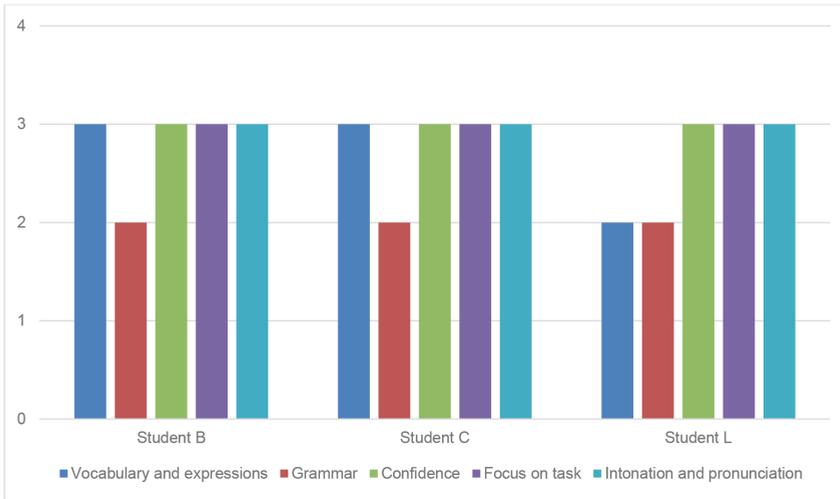
“Utilizamos las palabras que habíamos aprendido para dar a entender lo que pensamos.” (We used the words we had learned in order to explain what we thought.) (Excerpt, Student K, Interview)

As seen in Figure 4 and Figure 5, the following excerpt suggests that tutees' pronunciation was affected positively due to the presentations of others.

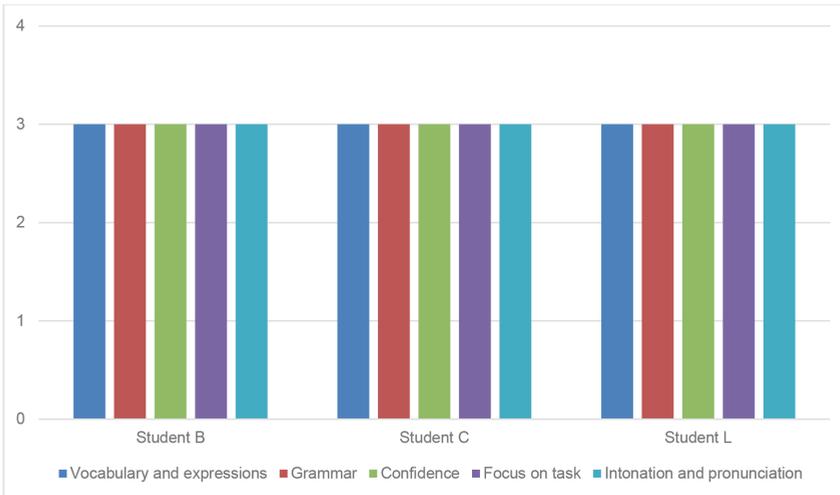
“Nuestra pronunciación mejoraba ya que, si uno presentaba, otro entendía la pronunciación de palabras que desconocía.” (Our pronunciation improved since, if one student performed orally, the others understood the pronunciation of unknown words.) (Excerpt, SD, Interview)

Conflicting with these statements, student G got a lower score in the last video in terms of vocabulary and confidence. However, this contradiction does not reflect stagnation; this might have been due to the different levels of complexity between the first and the last task. Therefore, although other tutees faced similar challenges at the end, they managed to overcome difficulties more efficiently.

On the other hand, tutors' spoken fluency also benefited from assuming a teaching role. Figure 4 and Figure 5 show their progress throughout the implementation of this project.

Figure 4. Tutors' initial spoken fluency

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 5. Tutors' final spoken fluency

Source: Own elaboration.

The graphs show improvement in the use of a variety of vocabulary and expressions, as well as grammar structures. Students' entries to learning logs suggest that one of the aspects that hindered their participations in tasks was the lack of vocabulary. See the following excerpt.

“Se me dificultó el vocabulario ya que no tenía conocimiento de algunas palabras para organizar las ideas.” (The vocabulary was difficult to me because I did not know some words to organize the ideas.) (Excerpt, Student B, Learning log 1)

Perhaps unconsciously, one tutor expresses the relation between fluency and vocabulary by setting a goal for next session.

“Mis objetivos para la próxima clase son mejorar mi fluidez y ampliar mucho más mi vocabulario.” (My objectives for next session are to improve my fluency and to increase my vocabulary.) (Excerpt, Student L, Learning log 3)

Regarding this issue, Hilton (2008) states that lexical competence has a fundamental role in spoken fluency and, therefore, should be taken into account in language teaching. In the following excerpt, one tutor reports that pronunciation was affected positively due to others' contributions.

“En ocasiones también me ayudó mucho escuchar la pronunciación de mis compañeros para beneficiarme.” (In some situations, I benefited a lot from hearing my colleagues' pronunciation.) (Excerpt, Student L, Interview)

In some situations, tutors were asked to read texts as a means to motivate tutees to take active part in tasks. The following excerpt suggests that tutors also benefited from this exercise.

“Mi fluidez oral aumentó un poco por el hecho de leer textos. A medida que participaba, podía mejorar la pronunciación.” (My oral fluency increased a little by reading texts. As I took part, I could improve pronunciation.) (Excerpt, Student B, Interview)

“Percibo una mejora significativa en mi fluidez oral al leer textos.” (I notice a meaningful improvement in my oral fluency by reading texts.) (Excerpt, Student L, Interview)

Generally, tutees and tutors' spoken fluency benefited from taking active part in tasks. The constant comparisons of data between the different instruments used in this project evinced improvement due to the quality of the participants' interventions in more and more complex tasks.

Improved outcome of tasks

The third category arises since students improved the outcomes of the tasks in which they participated by committing to working in groups. Developing trust with others led the participants of this study to set goals that are related to assuming compromise with the group. Students were acquainted that the responsibility for the results also depended on factors such as individual practice at home, discipline, willingness to cooperate with others, and personality (Sánchez, 2012).

“Hoy me causó dificultad hablar con personas que no conocía. Es más difícil hacer algo con desconocidos por la timidez. Al menos con un amigo el ambiente se vuelve agradable.” (Today, it was difficult for me to talk to people I did not know. It is more difficult to do something with strangers because I'm shy. At least with a friend the atmosphere becomes pleasant.) (Excerpt, Student B, Learning log 1)

“Alguna cosa que puedo hacer para mejorar el trabajo con mis compañeros es estudiar y comprometerme con el grupo.” (Something I can do to improve work with my classmates is to study and commit to working in groups.) (Student K, Learning log 1)

After getting used to working with new classmates, one key factor that helped learners focus on tasks was comprehending what they were expected to do. One of the advantages of peer tutoring is that students receive more time for individualized learning and active helping and supporting (Topping, 2001). Peer tutors assisted tutees in this aspect, since students being tutored could ask questions and receive repetition to ensure understanding. The following excerpts illustrate this assertion.

“En las discusiones grupales de hoy yo trataba de aclarar las dudas de mis compañeros.” (In- group discussions today, I tried to answer the doubts of my colleagues.) (Excerpt, Student C, Learning log 3)

“En la actividad de hoy tuve claridad a la hora de saber lo que estaba hablando.” (In today's activity I clearly knew what I was talking about.) (Excerpt, Student D, Learning log 3)

Similarly, the following excerpts suggest that peer tutoring helped learners increase the vocabulary used in the performances and, so, improve the quality of the tasks.

“En el trabajo en grupos, el vocabulario de unos complementa al de otros, haciendo mucho más rico el aprendizaje y la calidad del trabajo.” (In-group work, the vocabulary of some students complements others', enriching learning and the quality of tasks.) (Excerpt, Student L, Interview)

“El trabajo en grupos me ayudó a mejorar el vocabulario y la forma de expresarme.” (Working in groups helped me improve my vocabulary and how to express myself.) (Excerpt, Student F, Learning log 2)

In terms of enriching discussions and making decisions, one tutor reports that peer tutoring brought a wide variety of viewpoints that improved the results of tasks.

“Trabajar con otros amplió la gama de respuestas, puesto que cada persona tenía un punto de vista diferente, fue mayor la cantidad de ideas por lo mismo.” (Working with others widened the range of responses, since each person had a different point of view; it brought a greater amount of ideas.) (Excerpt, Student L, Interview)

By taking part in-group discussions, learners could elaborate their ideas and add complexity to tasks.

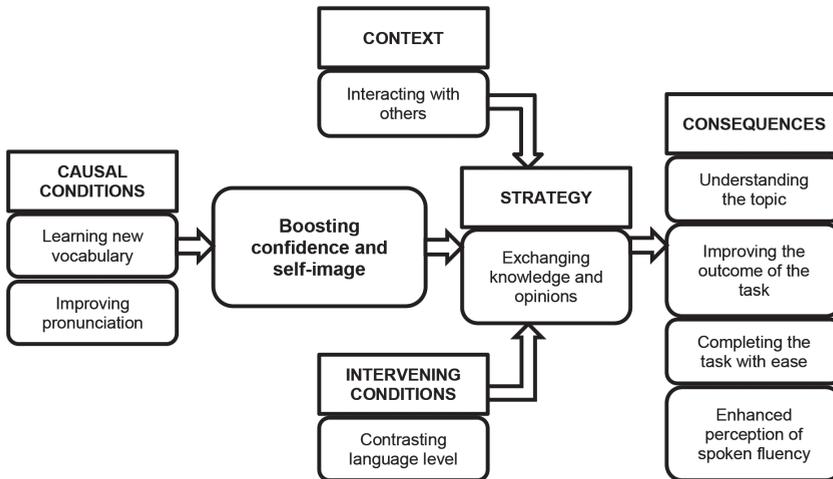
“Yo aportaba ideas y recopilaba las de los demás para así poder formar frases un poco mejor elaboradas.” (I brought ideas and compiled those of others so we could make thorough sentences.) (Excerpt, Student B, Learning log 3)

Peer tutoring was found to be effective and meaningful for students as a result of the participants' own attempts to approach working in groups (Oxford, 2003).

Core Category: Boosting Confidence and Self-Image

The core category established in this study was *boosting confidence and self-image*. Its interrelationship with the other categories is portrayed in Figure 6, using a coding paradigm.

Figure 6. Coding paradigm that illustrates the emergence of the core category *boosting confidence and self-image*



Source: Own elaboration.

Discussion

Throughout this project, illustration has been made of the procedures carried out to address ninth grade learners' difficulties speaking fluently in a L2. Data analysis suggests that peer tutoring and computer-mediated tasks encouraged students in three important aspects of learning: increased self-confidence when collaborating enhanced perception of spoken fluency and willingness to improve the outcomes of

tasks. No previous research that combined these constructs to address young learners' lack of spoken fluency was found; therefore, the results of this study convey implications for current pedagogy and future research interventions regarding payoffs and pitfalls found, specifically in relation to the EFL context in Colombia.

Doman and Bidal's (2016) investigation confirmed the self-confidence that tutors and tutees reported in the present study and allowed them to feel that their spoken fluency had improved. The participants in Doman and Bidal's research concluded that building a relationship between tutors and tutees was necessary for the goals of peer teaching to be attained. The present study supports this affirmation since peer tutoring displayed positive results when interpersonal relationships were fostered, students remained open to accept others' points of views and assumed positive attitudes toward collaboration. Similar results emerged in Viafara's (2014) study where tutors reported that, by participating in the process of tutoring, their vocabulary was broadened, and constant feedback helped them improve their speaking in L2.

Regarding the use of tasks and online learning environments to foster spoken fluency, Castiblanco (2014) investigated the effects of Task-fluency Discussions in Second Life on eight A2 undergraduates. The participants needed to improve oral fluency and gain more motivation in virtual learning spaces since they were required to take part in a blended course. The results suggested that students increased awareness of learning strategies, self-effort to speak fluently, and self-perception of being a fluent language user. Similarly, the present study reports that oral tasks foster spoken fluency when they are held using computers.

Peer tutoring can be a powerful strategy to extend the influence of instructions and increased opportunities for students to respond in small groups (Mitchell, 2004). One special recommendation is that teachers do not forget that, even when tutors and tutees are collaborating in groups, positive student-teacher relationship needs to keep on developing. That is, teachers must be present for immediate support, as they have guiding and motivating roles in classrooms.

Peer tutoring can be a time-consuming strategy for teachers, as well as an additional workload for students. Since learners already have the responsibility of their own learning, researchers must consider a plan for alternating roles so that all participants can train and be trained.

Regarding the use of tasks, the ascending degree of difficulty suggested in this research study might have hindered some of the students' progress. Even though the intervention yielded positive outcomes, in one particular case, anxiety and hesitation were highly manifested. For future research, it is recommended that the difficulty of tasks correspond with learners' abilities to perform naturally.

This study showed some limitations, the scheduled timeline being the most noticeable one. Due to curriculum and teachers' greater concentration on formal aspects of language, the intervention of this research intended to bring an additional space for students to interact orally in English. It was held using an online collaborative classroom that allowed the participants to attend the sessions from home. Although most participants joined the meetings, sometimes it was difficult to schedule a meeting that matched students' availability. Additionally, the participants had not attended online lessons before this project. Then, in using computers, it is advisable that teachers anticipate learners' comprehension about how to access the sessions or software compatibility in order to guarantee their participation.

One of the most salient behaviors that hindered students' speaking performances was their initial reluctance to work in groups with strangers. It is recommended to choose match activities that promote friendship and trust so that students establish stronger bonds within the learning environment. However, when a friendly atmosphere among learners is built, especially in same-age tutoring, teachers must ensure that some students do not go off task as they are working with their new friends. Future research should consider the steps Carreño (2014) suggests for establishing an online learning community in which teachers and students' abilities become known.

Future research should take into account the complexity of tasks since, for instance, a decreasing level of difficulty in the activities will yield unreliable high results. In this sense, Robinson (2011b) recommends that tasks be sequenced for learners from simple to complex so that they approximate the demands of real-world needs. Varying the complexity of tasks affects language acquisition and learners' performances outside the language classroom.

Additionally, future research must consider some conditions for fluency development. Hinkel (2017) states that fluency is related to

spontaneity and thus, in measuring its progress, researchers must comply with certain guidelines that guarantee natural performances. First, students must be familiar with the material worked, that is, no unfamiliar vocabulary or grammatical constructions. Second, the focus of tasks should be on conveying meaning. Third, the participants should be encouraged to perform tasks at a faster than usual speed. Fourth, there should be quantity of practice.

Although future research focuses on exploring the effects of any strategy on students' spoken fluency, it is recommended that the four strands suggested by Nation (2007) are devoted equal class time and learners' efforts.

Conclusions

The analysis of data collected highlighted three benefits of the intervention of this project: increased self-confidence, enhanced spoken fluency, improved outcomes of tasks. These findings suggest that the initial differences in learners' achievements were not a weakness, but they became the means for students to accomplish the goal of their learning.

For the researcher, this investigation represents the satisfying outcome that could be developed thanks to the rapport provided by previous studies and authors whose contributions in the fields of peer tutoring, task-based learning, computer-mediated instructions and spoken fluency are valuable and remain valid for language teaching. Lots of work in the ESL field permitted the researcher to identify a gap in research, especially at the local level. Since no previous exploration that addressed young learners' spoken fluency in L2 using the selected strategies was found, this study represents a starting point for future research willing to transfer findings to different settings.

This investigation is useful for acknowledging and emphasizing on the importance of helping learners speak naturally, foster language proficiency by instructing others, and improve affective factors such as motivation and confidence.

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