Using Group Discussion as a Strategy to Promote Speaking Fluency in the Ecuadorian University EFL Classroom: Students' Benefits and Teachers' Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Speaking fluently is one of the greatest challenges faced by second language learners. However, most students find it difficult to achieve this fluency and even tend not to practice their speech because it does not sound as natural as intended. The purpose of this study is to gather the experiences of different university lecturers and to know whether the use of group discussion has benefited students' speaking fluency. It will be conducted using a qualitative approach. The participants were five lecturers belonging to the same public university, who were chosen by the purposive sample. The data were obtained through a semi-structured interview applied to the five participants, assuring them that all the information provided in the interview would remain anonymous. The analysis of the data was done through thematic coding because it allowed identifying the ideas that were linked and creating a theme for the analysis. The data obtained were analyzed according to the different research questions, which referred to the benefits of the strategy, their opinion as teachers, and the challenges of applying it. The information given by the participants showed that there are certain challenges when applying this strategy. However, the data obtained corroborated that this strategy does benefit the student's fluency.

Keywords: group discussion; speaking; fluency; communicative activities

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Usando Discusión en Grupo como Estrategia para Promover la Fluidez del Habla en el Aula Universitaria Ecuatoriana de inglés Como Lengua Extranjera (EFL): Beneficios para los Estudiantes y Desafíos para los Profesores

RESUMEN

Hablar con fluidez es uno de los mayores desafíos que enfrentan los estudiantes de un segundo idioma. Sin embargo, la mayoría de los estudiantes encuentran difícil alcanzar esta fluidez e incluso tienden a no practicar su discurso porque no suena tan natural como se pretende. El propósito de este estudio es recopilar las experiencias de diferentes docentes universitarios y conocer si el uso de la discusión en grupo ha beneficiado la fluidez del habla de los estudiantes. Se llevará a cabo utilizando un enfoque cualitativo. Los participantes fueron cinco docentes pertenecientes a la misma universidad pública, que fueron elegidos por muestra intencionada. Los datos se obtuvieron a través de una entrevista semiestructurada aplicada a los cinco participantes, asegurándoles que toda la información proporcionada en la entrevista permanecería anónima. El análisis de los datos se realizó a través de codificación temática porque permitió identificar las ideas que estaban vinculadas y crear un tema para el análisis. Los datos obtenidos se analizaron de acuerdo con las diferentes preguntas de investigación, que se referían a los beneficios de la estrategia, su opinión como docentes y los desafíos de aplicarla. La información proporcionada por los participantes mostró que hay ciertos desafíos al aplicar esta estrategia. Sin embargo, los datos obtenidos corroboraron que esta estrategia sí beneficia la fluidez de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: discusión en grupo; hablar; fluidez; actividades comunicativas

INTRODUCTION

English is a universal language that is widely known and spoken by about 1.5 billion native and non-native speakers (Statista, 2022). English is currently a language with a great impact on society in different fields such as politics, science, economics, technology, engineering, and education. English is important because it not only plays a role as a communication tool, but it can also make it easier for us to adapt to the environment and work in the present and future (Nishanthi, 2018).

While it is true that learning a new language involves four fundamental skills (speaking, reading, writing, listening), a language mostly involves speaking and listening. In this sense, Srinivas (2019) stated that speaking is the most important skill among all the four language skills to communicate well in this global world. However, one of the most difficult skills language learners' faces is speaking, because they must deal with being judged in real-life situations (Bueno, Madrid, & McLaren, 2006; Brown & Yule, 1983).

The TOEFL test results taken in Ecuador showed that Ecuadorian students' proficiency in English is from medium to low, and oral proficiency was rated as weak or basic and that only 5% of the participants were from Manabí (British Council, 2015). Thus, demonstrating that the oral skills of Ecuadorian students are underdeveloped. On the other hand, this test does not emphasize the sub-skills of speaking. It is for this reason that in a previous study made by Allah and Abdulla (2021), stated that discussion activities are an excellent way to practice fluency and improve students' confidence in speaking skills, and this can be considered a key factor that leads learners to interact successfully in the classroom. In addition, Putri (2019) stated that within these activities, discussion groups help to initiate communication because they encourage students to share their different points of view about real situations and they need to do it face to face.

English is a compulsory subject for university students; however, they have a notable deficiency in fluency when expressing their thoughts in English. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to gather the experiences of different university lecturers and to know whether the use of group discussion has benefited students' speaking fluency. To achieve this purpose, it was necessary to carry out scientific tasks such as: (a) search for literature review; (b) interview lecturers to know their experiences; (c) make a qualitative analysis of the information obtained.

Literature Review

Speaking Skill

The main function of language is to communicate with meaning and fluency, so the ability to speak is the primary channel for conveying all kinds of information. This criterion means that speaking, long before writing or reading, is the first stage in language learning, whether it is a second or foreign language (Namaziandost, Hashemifardnia, & Shafiee, 2019). According to Srinivas (2019), the ability to speak plays a crucial role in communication, people try to learn this skill in order to communicate well with the whole community all over the world. Moreover, speaking is a "the process of sharing thoughts and ideas with others in an oral form" (Lestari, 2018, p.7).

Hymes (2001) mentioned that once deciding on one of the six basic units to observe (speech community, situation, event, act, style, or way of speaking) a researcher can proceed to analyze it using the S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G. tool developed by Hymes. This tool helps the researcher to analyze the way people speak. This acronym means:

S. Means the Situation, which includes both the scene and the setting. It is the place where the activities take place and the general scene in which they are part of.

P. Refers to the Participants involved. It includes the people present and the roles they play, or the relationships they have with other participants.

E. Refers to the Ends or objectives of the communication.

A. Acts, or speech acts, include both form and content. That is, any action can be considered a communicative action if it conveys meaning to the participants.

K. This means Key or the tone of the speech. How the speech sounds or is pronounced.

I. It is the instrumentality or channel through which communication flows.

N. The communication norms or rules that guide the speech and its interpretation may reveal meaning.

G. Refers to cultural or traditional genres of speech, such as proverbs apologies, prayers, small talk, problem talk, etc.

This tool is closely connected to the six communication units, and can be used to assess each unit, allowing the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how people communicate. To do this, it is not necessary to use all the units and tools each time communication is analyzed; it is enough to use

those that are necessary for the researcher. For instance, if the researcher wants to know something about the situation, participants, and norms of communication, he should focus on the "S.P.N." components of S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G.

Torky (2006) defined speaking as the way in which humans produce or create auditory signals designed to elicit different verbal responses from the receiver/listener. Sounds are combined in a systematic way to create meaningful sentences according to specific language principles, allowing both the speaker and the listener to exchange and decode the message orally. According to Bashir, Azeem, & Dogar (2011), "Speaking is a productive skill in the oral mode. It is like the other skill; it is more complicated than it first appears and involves more than just pronouncing words." (p.38).

Speaking Fluency

The previous section shows the components of speaking ability and how it is conceived by different authors. Now it is introduced to fluency, which is one of the essential components of speaking. It is understood that fluency and accuracy are always together as far as speaking is concerned, however, this empirical study only focuses on the fluency of speaking.

In addition to that, Gamba (2017) stated that fluency refers to the use of language similar or equal to that of native speakers in oral communication. Likewise, Guevara and Flores (2020) see fluency as a specific characteristic that measures and defines the learner's ability to express him/herself freely with the phonology, syntax, and amount of vocabulary characteristic of a native speaker. Nevertheless, Skehan (2009) defined fluency as the ability to result from the speech at normal speed without pausing. Along his line, Albino (2017) expressed that fluency is closely linked to the message being communicated rather than grammatical excellence in the message.

On the other hand, Fillmore (1979, p.93) considered fluent speakers:

a. Have the ability to speak with few pauses.

b. Can build utterances coherently, cohesively, and semantically.

c. Can choose the correct expressions according to the context.

d. Are creative and imaginative

Azizah (2018) stated that, fluency is the ready and expressive use of language. Surely, the best option to achieve it is to let the speech "flow" naturally, and then assume that this speech exceeds the expected;

some aspects of grammar, phonetics or discourse, mention that fluency of speech can be defined as the ability to convey the communicative intent, through the correct channels of the message, without hesitation, pauses or interruptions that distort the message intended to be communicated.

Sánchez (2019) suggested that "fluency is one of the essential elements of oral proficiency. Fluency encompasses learners' effective use of acquired language" (p.8). In addition, fluency also encompassed the way in which learners of a target language can use that language, showing confidence in terms of intonation, rhythm, unnatural pauses, and hesitations, in order for the listener to understand the message the other person is trying to convey (Ismayanti, 2017).

However, it should be noted that the demand for fluency in speaking is a major problem for foreign language learners. That is, speaking fluently is an important goal that involves confidence and language proficiency for any foreign language learner.

Communicative Language Teaching Approach

Communication is the main reason for learning a language, and therefore, this approach uses interaction as both the means and the interaction as both a means and an end goal in language learning. The communicative approach, has special importance since communication, together with the activity that arises from it, is the basis of the teaching-learning process (Castro, Parra, & Calzadilla, 2018). Communicative language teaching (CLT) is a set of principles and objectives whose purpose is to teach a language using classroom activities that best facilitate language learning by developing communicative competence (Richards, 2006).

The methodological principles of CLT are developing communication in a real context; tolerating learner errors while producing communication; providing feedback to improve accuracy and fluency. These principles should guide language teaching and classroom activities. (Oviedo & Mena, 2021).

Communicative Competence

Therefore, to develop the communicative approach, it is necessary to introduce communicative competence. This competence allows the user to develop in a real context and to use appropriate channels.

Communicative competence is the ability to achieve communication objectives in a socially appropriate manner (Kiessling & Fabry, 2021). It seeks the benefit of all by influencing the other person's behavior

and the context in which it takes place. It requires preparation and willingness to communicate through verbal and non-verbal behavior. It selects and applies appropriate skills through different synchronized and adequately controlled processes. Communicative competence can be acquired through repeated-reflective practice and experience.

Armijos (2018) stated that communicative competence is the ability that people have to interact in society. Competencies are made up of three essential characteristics: the first is in charge of grammatical, lexical, phonological, and orthographic aspects, in other words, the knowledge and ability to produce messages (linguistic competence). The second focuses on the use of language in the social context, considering the norms of behavior, gestures, and accents (sociolinguistic competence). The third involves linguistic understanding, cohesion, and coherence i.e., discourse and function (strategic competence).

Communicative Activities

One of the ways educators can help students use English as a means of communication is to use appropriate techniques that match students' characteristics when teaching speaking. Communicative activities are activities that encourage and enable student participation while talking with and listening to other students.

Oradee (2012) stated that language activities are important factors in language teaching for communication, not only because they help to create interaction in the language classroom but also because it motivates learners to establish good relationships with the teacher. In this sense, it promotes a suitable environment for learning. In this sense, Milal and Jannatul (2020) stated that every communicative activity must have three elementary characteristics. First, the processes focus on meaning rather than structural rules. Second, the activities are authentic, in the sense that they are likely to occur during actual communication activities. Third, the activities allow and encourage students' active participation in the class.

To apply the CLT methodology, teachers must select the most appropriate activities to the needs of the students. Solis (2022) mentioned that focus groups are one of the most accepted and applied activities when using CLT because it involved learners in real situations while interacting with each other and

sharing information. In addition, there are other communicative activities that can be used such as role-playing, survey, interview, exchange of opinions, etc.

Discussion Strategy

Previously, the discussion was mentioned as one of the activities that foster communication and since this study focuses on communication through activity, it is necessary to include a section that shows the characteristics of this strategy and its relation to the development of students' communicative competence.

Syukri, A., Halim, and Atikah (2021) claimed that discussion, in addition to enhancing communication skills, tends to improve learning, including cooperative learning and critical thinking. That is to say that discussion in the classroom is a suitable strategy that favors interaction, creating an environment in which everyone can communicate freely, improving their communication skills.

Rosadi, et al. (2020), stated that there are three main reasons to use discussion as a classroom strategy. First, discussion not only increases teacher-student verbal interaction, but also enhances student-student interaction within the classroom. Second, discussion, in addition to promoting interaction, also fosters meaningful learning through the content, skills, attitudes or processes that are being developed in the classroom. Third, discussion allows the student to adopt a more responsible and independent stance with respect to his or her learning.

Learning in a debate requires students to discuss a topic (Putri, 2019). This causes them to practice speaking as they try to give their opinions, thus encouraging vocabulary practice and pronunciation of words. Penny Ur (1998: 3), cited in Agarwati, stated that a discussion that works is, above all, one in which learners say as much as possible. Another characteristic of a successful discussion is that all participants speak at the same language level, that is, they use words that can be understood by everyone, from the speaker to the audience.

Group Discussion. Group discussion deserved a separate place because it is necessary to mention the intention of this activity, such as working in pairs or groups that encourage daily work among students. Thus, the discussion groups motivate students to share their experience in the language they are learning. Group discussions are an activity that usually involves a small group of students sitting

together to discuss their ideas/thoughts in a free and fluid manner, this activity is usually done face-to-face to generate instant ideas on the particular topic.

Group discussions are of great use and importance in the classroom, as they play a vital role in fostering creativity and reflective thinking among the members of the classroom. So, "Group discussion is where two or more students declare, present, explain and refuse their knowledge, experience, opinions and feelings" (Mutrofin et al., 2017, p.204). Group discussion facilitates students to exchange their knowledge and experiences together. Group discussion can be carried out in two ways, either through an online class or an offline (face-to-face) class. However, "group discussion in online discussion has limited interaction which makes students hardly develop interaction skills with other students" (Putri, 2019, p.3)

Offline group discussion is useful because it helps students socialize and practice with other students in real life. This practice helps students to carry out the discussion skill in real life (Tevdovska, 2016). Smith and MacGregor (1992) defined group discussion as "a broad array of teaching approaches in college settings which include discussions, both formal and informal, that encourage student dialogue with teachers and with each other". (p5)

Benefits of Group Discussion. In learning English as a foreign language, discussion group has an important impact since it gives students the opportunities to communicate with their teacher as in the lesson or with each other's when they work in groups. Allah & Abdulla (2021) stated that "Involve some enjoyable discussion activities into the classroom to give students a chance to participate their ideas, express their knowledge and interact with teachers and one another is enormously important for improving students' fluency in speaking skill, hence such strategies are reducing Teacher Talking Time" (p.1).

Hertz & Shachar (1984) stated that, implementing collaborative learning activities, such as a group discussion, not only benefits the teacher but also benefits the students because it creates an environment that encourages students to be more active learners in which they construct knowledge on their own rather than just receive knowledge. In addition, group discussions involve interaction tasks among students, helping them to develop their individual effort.

Discussion not only encourages critical thinking, but also prepares students for oral tests that will assess their ability to explain and give opinions in the language they are learning. Probably most important are the opportunities to produce the language that discussion can provide for the student. (Allah & Abdulla, 2021).

Previous Research on Group Discussion

Utami (2018) conducted a study with the objective of obtaining empirical evidence of the effect of the use of small group discussion technique on students' English oral presentation skills. It was quasi-experimental research of quantitative method. An oral test was applied to the sample of 60 students as a data collection instrument. The test results revealed that discussion as a classroom technique is effective in promoting classroom speaking. Therefore, the use of discussion groups helps to improve communication skills in students.

The literature showed that discussion groups are one of the communicative activities that not only promote informal speaking but also formal oral expression. One of its fundamental characteristics is to make students share their opinions, experiences, or emotions with their peers, and it also allows the student to feel self-confident when interacting with others. These affirmations have been supported by some research that mentions that group discussions are effective in stimulating students to speak in English making oral production improve significantly, furthermore, another study showed that group discussion is a good technique to promote oral expression in the classroom and that this activity helps to improve students' communicative skills.

Previous research has focused on Middle Eastern countries that promote the teaching of English through Group Discussion to stimulate speaking. In Ecuador, very few have been conducted, but the present study is a further contribution to the country. The present study, therefore, investigated the following questions:

1. What are the benefits of the use of Group Discussion as a strategy to improve students' speaking fluency in English according to Ecuadorian university lecturers?

2. What is the opinion of Ecuadorian university lecturers on the use of group discussion as a strategy to improve speaking fluency?

3. What are the challenges to use Group Discussion as a teaching strategy according to Ecuadorian university lecturers?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study applied an exploratory methodology and was developed with the qualitative method because it allows an understanding of human behavior from the informant's perspective, in addition to the fact that the data were collected through interviews. Therefore, the data were analyzed thematically from the informants' descriptions and are presented in the informant's language (Minichiello, 1990). In this sense, the study demonstrated the different participants' opinions according to their field experience.

The purpose of this study is to gather the experiences of different university lecturers and to know whether the use of group discussion has benefited students' speaking fluency, for which this study was employed a qualitative approach, "is a form of social action that emphasizes how people interpret and make sense of their experiences in order to understand the social reality of individuals; it is exploratory and seeks to explain "how" and "why" a given social phenomenon, or program, functions as it does in a particular context" (Kumar, 2018, p.2). This method has been chosen because the research was based on the experiences and opinions of university lecturers who have worked with this type of educational strategy; therefore, it adapts to the type of data obtained.

Participants and Sampling Procedure

The research participants are those who have the ability to transmit the information that the researcher needs to answer the research question (Creswell, 2012). With that in mind, five Ecuadorian university lecturers participated in this study. All the lecturers belong to the same public university in the city of Chone. All of them have at least five years of university experience, three of them are men and the other three are women, and they also have the experience of having worked with focus groups in their classes.

The participants were chosen because of the experience they have and because they could provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, the sample is purposive, because this technique allows the researcher to decide which characteristics should be met when choosing the members of the population to participate in the study (Dudovskiy, 2022).

Instrument

The instrument used was the interview (see appendix B) because it allows the researcher to understand the world from the point of view of the research subjects (Kvale, 1996). But specifically, the semi-structured interview because as Magaldi and Berler (2020) mentioned, this type of instrument is generally based on a guide and usually focuses on the main theme or proposition of the instrument, besides the interviewer follows the list of questions, but may deviate from the guide when deemed appropriate. The flexible structure of this type of interview allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the respondent's answers to seek more information. Besides, semi-structured interviews allow informants the freedom to express their opinions on their terms, which is why this type of interview was used instead of another.

The interview consisted of ten open-ended questions aligned to the research topic, allowing the respondent to speak in depth, i.e., freely, or openly about the particular case. The instrument was validated by four experts who have knowledge in research and English language teaching, and among their considerations regarding the instrument they suggested the reformulation of a single question, therefore everything was accepted and approved according to their expertise. The interview questions and the participants' responses covered several topics, including (a) teaching speaking skill; (b) the benefits of using discussion groups; (c) their opinion about teaching with group discussions; and (d) the challenges and how to overcome them when using this strategy.

Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions and to know about the university lecturer's experience with the use of discussion groups, an interview was conducted and then transcribed in its entirety. To preserve the anonymity of the participants, their names were replaced by letters and numbers, i.e., to talk about university lecturers one was assigned (P1), lecturer two (P2), and so on in ascending order up to university lecturer five (P5).

All data were analyzed using thematic coding, which allows the recording or identifying ideas in the text that are linked by a common idea, thus allowing the indexing of the text into categories (Gibbs, 2007). The data obtained were coded and then categorized according to the linkage of the data among the different participants. The themes were formed according to the research questions so that the first

question dealing with benefits had two themes (a) benefits of teaching speaking, (b) agree that improve fluency; the second one referred to the opinions about the use of the strategy and its themes (a) using of group discussion, (b) frequency of use, (c) engaging students; the last question, emphasized the challenges of using the strategy, its themes (a) speaking challenges, (b) challenges of teaching with discussion groups, (c) overcoming challenges.

Ethical Considerations

Before being able to apply the instrument, it was necessary to create letters of ethical commitment between the researcher and the selected sample. These letters mentioned the use of the information provided, which would be strictly academic and investigative, whose purpose is to help the researcher to demonstrate the study proposal. The letters guaranteed the confidentiality of the participants and that under no circumstances would they be exposed or identified, i.e., their personal data such as names and place of work would be kept anonymous. After the participants gave their consent for the use of the information, the study could be developed.

Findings

This section shows the results obtained from the application of the instrument. The results were distributed according to the research questions. Therefore, this section is divided into three subsections, the first reflect research question one, the next is about research questions two, and then the last one reflects research question three.

Benefits of Using Group Discussion

Regarding the first research question: What are the benefits of the use of Group Discussion as a strategy to improve students' speaking fluency in English according to Ecuadorian university lecturers? The results of the interview were used to find out whether this activity is beneficial for the students' oral fluency. The data obtained are shown in Table 1

Table 1. Using Group Discussion

	Benefits of teaching speaking	Agree that it improve fluency
T1	Students actively participate in classes, and their skills are also demonstrated.	I agree with this strategy because it allows them to improve their fluency without worrying about mistakes, it also helps students not to feel embarrassed or nervous when they talk to each other.
T2	Students participate more in class and develop their productive skills as well.	I totally agree, this strategy help the students to improve the speaking fluency because they can express their ideas without any judgments, I think they feel free to talk about any topic
T3	Prevents communication problems, besides involvement in the classroom.	It is very important to use this strategy because it helps students improve fluency without judgment and they can talk as much as they want.
T4	Promote the student talking time	I agree with that because when students interact between them, they improve speaking, I think is because they feel that nobody is judgment.
T5	Encourages students to speak and speaking freely makes them feel comfortable.	I agree with this because it helps students a lot, but all aspects of the activity must be considered so that students can improve their fluency.

Table 1 shows that there are several benefits to applying this strategy, such as making the student an active participant in the class and demonstrating his or her communicative skills spontaneously. Therefore, the participants fully agree on the use of this strategy and its benefit for the class. Because when working with speaking the most important thing is that the students speak as much as possible so that, through practice, they improve their fluency.

Lecturer's Opinions about the Use of Group Discussion as a Strategy

In this case the participants were directed to answer the research question: What is the opinion of Ecuadorian university lecturers on the use of group discussion as a strategy to improve speaking fluency? The results of the interview were used to know the different opinions about this strategy. The data obtained are shown in Table 2

Table 2. Lecturers' views on group discussion

	Using group discussion	**Frequency of use**	**Engaging students**
T1	It is a good technique, it allows the student to be the center of the class, and it doesn't matter if you have a low level because the practice makes it better.	Once a week because we don't have enough hours for the class, but I have used it every day, Monday through Thursday in another program I teach.	I use controversial questions. Questions that make them talk a lot, so I always tell them that there is no right answer and that all answers are good, but they must support their ideas with arguments.
T2	Allows students to work with their peers and to talk as much as possible and more when a topic is chosen that they like because they develop many ideas.	I rarely use it in A2 because they don't have enough vocabulary, but I have used it with other levels, and I have gotten good results.	I tell them what topic they are going to discuss in the next class so they can look for information, and in this way, they feel more confident, and I have good results with my students.
T3	It is one of the best strategies that encourage students to talk. When they talk to their peers, they feel confident, however, the teacher must always monitor everything so that it develops in the best way.	I always use group discussions, because students always participate in them, nevertheless this strategy must be aligned with the lesson plan.	I ask them questions for them to answer as a group, I give them controversial topics and start a discussion.
T4	It is useful because students interact with their peers and talk more than when they are asked, but professors must always consider the topic because according to the topic is the interaction.	Sometimes, I mean once a week because the time is short, and they have to practice the other skills. I also use this strategy outside the classroom.	First, I introduce the topic making questions to them, what they like, what they do, etc. I always use controversial topics.
T5	It helps them to talk more when it is about a topic they like, so you can ask them to choose the topic to discuss.	Often, even when they have the opportunity to talk, I have them work in groups to do so in the form of a discussion.	Using realia, using topics they like, you have to make classes more dynamic, and practical for them.

As it is shown in table 2, the opinions about the use of this strategy are positive, in addition to mentioning that they use it frequently, but the level of the students, the lesson planning of the class, and the topic to be treated must be considered in order to achieve active participation of the class.

Challenges Faced by Ecuadorian University Lecturers when using Group Discussion in the Classroom

The last research question was: What are the challenges to use group discussion as a teaching strategy according to Ecuadorian university lecturers? The results of the interview were used to explore the challenges that teachers face when using focus groups in the classroom. The data obtained are shown in Table 3

Table 3. Challenges for Ecuadorian university lecturers

	Speaking challenges	Challenges of teaching with discussion groups	Overcoming challenges
T1	Working with limits or conditions that do not give way to considering the student's values as part of their academic learning.	Sometimes students do not like to be moved from one group to another, but each group should have a balance of different levels of students so that everyone can develop their skills.	Be strong as a teacher and randomly distribute students so that everyone can develop their skills.
T2	Sometimes students don't want to speak or they don't have the confidence to express their ideas. Students are afraid of getting bad scores because of mistakes when speaking.	Students feel that they cannot speak in English or perhaps they feel that they are not able to discuss a topic and sometimes when they are giving an argument they block because they cannot find the exact word to express their ideas.	Tell them the topic from one day to the next so that they can look for enough information, also remind them that they can make mistakes is not wrong and feel free to argue what they think.
T3	Elicit students to speak, find a strategy to make them talk.	Assign groups with weak and strong students, also enabling each student to intervene in his or her own time.	Monitoring students' work, mixing the student according to the different levels, and asking them questions to help each other.

T4	Make them speak more in the language they are learning rather than in their mother tongue.	When students do not like the topic, they are not excited to participate	I look for strategies or techniques to catch their attention and create a good learning environment, with interesting topics.
T5	Making them feel comfortable to talk and express their thoughts.	Lack of vocabulary when discussing ideas, sometimes they are a bit shy when they interact with me instead of with their peers.	Make them feel good, and according to the level I choose the best topic for them and encourage them to speak, also the atmosphere is important to overcome the challenges.

Table 3 shows that there are different challenges in developing students' speaking, such as avoiding unnecessary use of the mother tongue in classes or getting them to speak in activities. On the other hand, there are the challenges of using discussion groups, which are similar to those of speaking, one difference is when students do not want to leave their groups to participate with other classmates, and another difference is when the student does not have the necessary knowledge to talk about a specific topic. Participants overcome these challenges by creating safe spaces for the whole class and working together with all students to have the necessary knowledge to be able to participate as effectively as possible.

DISCUSSION

Benefits of Using Group Discussion

With the result of the interview applied to the different participants, similarities were found in some previous studies, one of them was made by Setiadi (2012), who mentions that one of the benefits of discussion groups is that it stimulates students' interest in their oral performance for good accuracy and fluency. This is also mentioned by different participants of the study, in addition to the fact that this strategy motivates students to speak and develop their productive skills.

With this strategy, students can express what they feel, and what they think not only in their working group but also with the whole class. This strategy also helps them to search in depth for the necessary information about the topic being developed. The previous study done by Bohari (2018) showed that

group discussion helps students to share their feelings, ideas, and opinions in their groups, in addition, they learned to share information about the concept and discuss the given topic.

Lecturer's Opinions about the use of Group Discussion as a Strategy

Working in similar educational contexts can lead people to share similar but not the same experiences. When working with the speaking skill, which invites student participation, it is normal for some students to be shy or to forget or confuse words out of nervousness, but thanks to this strategy students do not feel under pressure to speak with their peers instead of with the whole class, as mentioned by several participants. As well as in a previous study done by Wahyurianto (2018) on the use of group discussion to improve speaking fluency where the results showed that students were happy during the lesson in group discussion, because they did not learn something under strict conditions or under pressure.

When using a teaching strategy such as discussion groups, it is important to make students active participants in the activity and there is no better way to do this than with something they know or like. Based on this, better results are obtained when students know what they are talking about or are passionate about expressing their idea because it is about something they like. Therefore, it is advisable to share with them about the possible topics to develop the discussion and choose the most suitable for them. Similarly, Bohari (2019) in his study on improving speaking skills through small group discussions mentioned that students should be asked to participate in selecting the best topic for discussion so that they can develop the activity in the best possible way.

Challenges Faced by Ecuadorian University Lecturers when using Group Discussion in the Classroom

There are a variety of challenges in teaching a foreign language such as English, and even more so when it is intended for fluent speakers. Among the challenges that the participants of the study have been able to appreciate, there is the creation of a learning atmosphere in which the students can express themselves freely without feeling ashamed to say what they think, and the university lecturer has created an environment of trust and respect among all members of the classroom. A previous study by Bohari (2019) showed that when a good learning atmosphere is created, students are not bored or embarrassed to share their ideas or thoughts not only with the discussion group but also with the whole class.

Likewise, there are other challenges such as creating materials that are sufficiently attractive to catch the attention of students or the permanent monitoring that the lecturer must perform to ensure that the activity is developed in the best possible way and to give the necessary help to the student as needed. In addition, there is also the challenge of the distribution of the members of the groups, although it is true that most students have greater affinity with certain classmates, but for the strategy to have better results the heterogeneous distribution is necessary and in this way all participants can help each other while actively participating in the strategy. In a similar study done by Utami (2018) where the effectiveness of group discussion on speaking skills was researched, it was shown that when the teacher monitors the student and heterogeneously distributes the members of the groups the activity develops in such a way that the student's fluency level increases as well as the confidence to express what he/she thinks.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study focused on gathering the experiences of different lecturers regarding the use of discussion groups. In addition, the study aimed to demonstrate whether the use of this technique has benefited students' oral fluency based on these experiences. Concerning the research results and the discussion above, it can be said that English teachers and educational authorities will benefit from these results because they represent a great source of information for the academic community.

According to the data collected, it is confirmed that discussion groups are indeed an activity that benefits student fluency and aids in the development of student critical thinking and decision-making. Teachers could apply discussion groups in their classes to promote oral expression in the classroom; thus, this strategy fosters students' critical thinking through responses focused on current societal issues. On the other hand, learning new vocabulary and correct use of grammatical structures is immersed in the development of oral expression.

It also involves considering the situations that arise during and after the class, for example, the learning outcomes, and the type of products generated in the student consequently. For instance, the heterogeneous distribution of the members of the discussion group is an elementary factor to consider in this activity, because it is better to have different types of students so that all of them participate than to have a group made up of passive students who do not take initiative. Another aspect is the feedback

we give as teachers, i.e., in this type of activity it should be subtle but effective, for example, it is said that they did a very good job and that (if it is the case) their mistakes were minimal.

Recommendations

For future research, this study suggests adding students as research participants to learn from their perspective how it was to work with this strategy and look for new ways to apply it or redesign the way it applies and get everyone to acquire more knowledge or improve their fluency through it.

In addition, existing studies on the use of this strategy and how to do it in the right way to obtain the expected results should be considered. Furthermore, it is necessary to propose current or controversial topics in order to attract the attention of the students.

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