Exploring English Foreign Language Students' Beliefs about Culture-based

Conversation Clubs: A descriptive Case Study

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Abstracto

Este estudio examina las creencias de los estudiantes de la Universidad de Córdoba en Colombia sobre las actividades de fluidez oral facilitadas por los Asistentes de Enseñanza de Inglés (sus siglas en inglés ETA) en el Programa Fulbright de Asistentes de Enseñanza de Inglés. El objetivo del estudio es entender cómo estas actividades influyen en el compromiso, la motivación y la confianza de los estudiantes en el aprendizaje del inglés. La investigación es una ampliación de estudios anteriores en esta área, que se han centrado principalmente en otros contextos culturales. Los investigadores recogieron datos mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas y observaciones grabadas en las que se dejaban notas en los protocolos. De los datos surgieron cuatro temas: (a) un enfoque de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje centrado en el alumno, (b) la necesidad de mejorar la fluidez oral y las destrezas del habla, (c) la conciencia cultural y (d) el compromiso, la motivación y la confianza de los estudiantes. El estudio fundamenta que la percepción que tienen los estudiantes de los clubes de conversación en inglés desempeña un papel crucial en el desarrollo de su fluidez oral, y que el compromiso, la motivación y la confianza de los estudiantes son factores clave que determinan su asistencia y participación continuada en estos clubes. Además, el estudio destaca la importancia de una actividad de conversación voluntaria y libre de ansiedad, así como la trascendencia de la conciencia cultural en el desarrollo de las destrezas orales.

Palabras clave: Creencias de los estudiantes, Club de conversación, Contextos culturales globales, Aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras.

Abstracto

This study examines the beliefs of students at the University of Cordoba in Colombia about oral fluency activities facilitated by English Teaching Assistants (ETA) in the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program. The study aims to understand how these activities impact students' engagement, motivation, and confidence in learning English. The research is an expansion of previous studies in this area, which have primarily focused on other cultural contexts. The researchers collected data through Semi-structured interviews and recorded observations where notes were left in the protocols. Four themes emerged from the data in (a) a learner-centered approach to teaching and learning, (b) the need for improvement in oral fluency and speaking skills, (c) cultural awareness and (d) student engagement, motivation, and confidence. The study funded that students' perception of English conversation clubs played a crucial role in the development of their oral fluency, and that students' engagement, motivation, and confidence are key factors that determine their continued attendance and participation in these clubs. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of a voluntary and anxiety-free speaking activity, as well as the significance of cultural awareness in the development of speaking skills.

Keywords: Students' beliefs, Conversation Club, Global cultural contexts, Foreign Language Learning.

Table of Content

Introduction

Colombia has a strong international academic and research presence that promote foreign language learning and culture through cooperation exchanges (Ministerio de Educacion, 2018). Different research and academic programs facilitate these exchanges. For example, the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program (ETA), in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education and ICETEX, allows for Colombia universities to host American English assistants who foster English language instruction at the Post-Secondary and/or Tertiary levels. The three organizations' major belief is that Colombian citizens and native speakers "benefit from the intensive cross-cultural interaction and international educational and/or research opportunities provided at the host institution." (Fulbright Colombia, 2022, para. 1).

According to its website, "[Fulbright] is a network of professional and academic leaders present in 160 countries that generate knowledge, promote mutual understanding among nations, and improve lives around the world by responding to global challenges" (Fulbright Colombia, 2022, para.2). An English teaching assistant is an educational professional who are assigned to specific academic institutions according to their profiles and the specific needs of foreign higher education institutions. "They help to prepare teaching materials, coordinate with teachers, assist students with particular topics, take attendance, and help to ensure a safe and calm learning environment."(What is An English Teaching Assistant? | Definition, Career, and Overview, 2022). ETAS is assigned as foreign language teaching assistants for up to 30 hours of academic responsibilities, including participation in 20 hours of lessons and class activities (i.e., communicative activities and open conversation clubs). The number of English teaching assistants in

Colombia has increased since the 1970s due to the universities' interest in strengthening English language teaching, learning, and culture.

The University of Cordoba has been hosting Fulbright grantees for 12 years (Fulbright Management Report, 2018). These exchange agreements enable the ETA to direct conversation groups on the University of Cordoba campus, which is the ideal setting for delving into various parts of one's own culture. When learners and English Teaching Assistants (ETA) meet for the first time, they may bring with them different expectations, similar to when they enter with a teacher. Brindley (1984) stated, "it is not only about the learning process in general, but also about what is to be learned in a particular course and how it is to be learned" (p. 95). One of the key elements is that since the students and ETA engage with the culture, these information exchanges are advantageous for both parties. Additionally, the student learns a foreign language better because of ETA, which also helps them understand their second language culture, in this case, Spanish.

The relationship between language and culture is dynamic. First, language is an important part of the culture. It is "the primary vehicle by which a culture transmits its beliefs, values, and norms" (Sun, 2013, p.1). Second, culture is the basis and one of the most important attributes of language and exerts great influence on the language. Culture forms beliefs, transmit ideas, and shares knowledge about customs and values. All of these characteristics "are communicated through language, which is an integral part of the culture" (Taga, 1999, p.105).

The above background suggests the need to explore students' beliefs about oral fluency activities facilitated by English Teaching Assistants (ETA). Such research will be an expansion of the work that has already been done in this area in other global cultural contexts. Even though several studies have looked into students' beliefs about learning a

foreign language in various nations (Riyadini 2021; Mosquera et al. 2021; Wesely 2012; Buyung,2020), little is known about students' beliefs about culture-based conversation clubs as communicative activities for enhancing oral fluency foreign language in the department of Cordoba. Conversation clubs are a common tool to help students improve their language skills. These are run by the ETA and involve students getting together to discuss a topic in a foreign language. This helps to improve oral fluency, which is defined as "a performance phenomenon, a skill that is exercised in real-time" (Schmidt, 1992, P.22) where it extends to expressions and responses in real time. These clubs can be very effective as they help students learn while having fun.

The purpose of this descriptive exploratory case study will be to explore students' beliefs about the culture-based conversation clubs led by English teaching assistants as a strategy for improving oral fluency and see how they apply this learner-centered activity in their classrooms. At this stage in the research process, oral fluency is described as "the ability to utilize language in real-time, to stress meanings, potentially by turning to more lexicalized systems" (Ellis, 2009, p. 475).

This proposal will be advantageous to obtain information on the impact of student-student communication on the acquisition of a foreign language of English in these extracurricular activities. It will be useful to determine the main factors of students' beliefs about oral fluency activities as culture-based conversation clubs led by ETA. Consequently, the present study seeks to fill a gap in locally situated research by answering the following questions:

- What are the current beliefs of the students in the English Licentiate program about the culture-based conversation clubs led by English teaching assistants as a strategy to foster oral fluency at Universidad de Córdoba?

- What successes (if any) have English Licentiate students experienced that have supported the effective implementation of culture-based conversation clubs?

The study of a description of the impact of culture-based conversation clubs is significant for several reasons. First, research already exists that defines the fundamental aspects of language learning. However, there are few studies that have focused on exploring learners' beliefs about oral fluency activities. Secondly, the primary beneficiaries will be foreign language curriculum leaders and foreign language teachers to implement the oral fluency strategy. Further that the results replicate the recommended approach derived from the results of this study. Third, it can contribute to the realization of Colombian educational policies. Current educational policies seek to develop Colombians' communicative competence in English. The results of this study can highlight actions that can lead to better English speakers.

The general structure of the study takes the form of five chapters. The first chapter paper is an introductory chapter. Chapter two begins with the theoretical concept of learners' beliefs about oral fluency activities. Afterward, the chapter third is a description of the methodology and the data collection, after their respective outcomes. Currently, in the teaching of English, this is used as a means to communicate effectively. The fourth section presents the finding of this study can develop the main characteristics of a conversation club in the institutions. Finally, chapter five is the analysis of the findings of this research where we give the recommendations and conclusions that emanate from this research.

Theoretical framework

The purpose of this descriptive exploratory case study will be to explore students' beliefs about the culture-based conversation clubs led by English teaching assistants as a strategy for improving oral fluency and see how they apply this learner-centered activity in their classrooms. This chapter is divided into two main parts: the conceptual framework and the literature review. The conceptual framework discusses the fundamental ideas supporting the study and aids in placing the primary keywords in perspective. Some of the papers on which this analysis is based are included in the literature review.

Conceptual Framework

Key concepts are offered in this part to contextualize the research issue covered in this study. the definition of these concepts provides the necessary information for an appropriate understanding.

Beliefs

According to new research, Cambridge Dictionary defines Beliefs as the feeling of being certain that something exists or is true. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Despite the different and related definitions of beliefs (Lee & Teo, 2011; Tarman, 2011), in this study, the authors conceived of the concept as the participants' personal truths about culture-based conversation clubs, which are affective in nature and includes their initial understandings or perceptions subjective to conceptual change (Lee & Teo, 2011). Focusing on our study, we found that there are many beliefs regarding various issues related to conversation clubs, ETA's, and the relationship they have with their effectiveness in the educational environment.

Beliefs About Learning

Teachers' beliefs appear to reflect longstanding attitudes, "common sense," and their experiences in education rather than research-based knowledge about learning and motivation. Because teachers' beliefs play a significant role in shaping their instructional behaviors, and thus what students learn, it is important to examine their characteristics, their content, and their expression. (Turner et al., 2009). Nuthall (2004) contends that teachers need "insight into the learning processes occurring in their students' minds and how their teaching interacts with those processes" (p. 276). Yet Kennedy notes that "teachers often feel that learning outcomes are unpredictable, mysterious and uncontrollable" (p. 528). It is very important for teachers to try to understand the beliefs that are created around teaching by students, in order to know how to work in the classroom. "Thus, teachers' beliefs about what is a positive learning environment may not necessarily involve beliefs about what is effective learning". Prawat (1992) contended that some strong beliefs about teaching and learning hindered teachers' adoption of constructivist, or learning-focused pedagogy. At least two different types of teacher beliefs support this argument. First, many teachers tend to consider both learners and content as fixed, rather than interactive and malleable. These teachers appear to believe that both development and individual differences, such as intelligence, limit their ability to teach the curriculum, so it must be adapted, by style or pace to "fit" students.

A corresponding belief is that teachers may assume that if something is taught (i.e., explained or demonstrated), it should be learned (Nuthall, 2004). If students do not learn, the problem is attributed to the inadequacy of the students' (stable) motivation, ability or persistence, but not to the instruction (Floden, 1996). Additionally, teachers may find classroom discussions impractical for diverse student groups or not an appropriate means of achieving desired student outcomes. The students' behavior was seen not as an indication of

problems with the learning process, but with their failure to promote the teaching process. Similarly, Putnam (1987) found that during tutoring, teachers appeared to move through a curriculum script, using activities and strategies for teaching, rather than use a diagnostic model through which teachers could form a model of students' understanding. According to the findings of this study, teachers may regard curriculum as fixed, adjust it to students through lessons and instructional tactics, and associate effective lesson navigation with student learning.

Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching

"Is the belief that qualified and committed teachers, given decision-making power, will do the right thing" (p. 20). Do the right thing" (p. 20). What constitutes the "right thing," of course, is a matter of judgment or opinion. As such, it is strongly influenced by a host of factors that are more endogenous to teaching, such as teachers' views of teaching and learning (Carlsen 1987; Smith and Neale 1989). The argument goes something like this: Teachers' views of teaching and learning influence their classroom practice. Currently, these beliefs support traditional practice, best characterized as a "transmission" approach to teaching and an "absorptionist" approach to learning. As Cohen (1988b) puts it, teachers traditionally are seen as "tellers of truth who inculcate knowledge in students" (p. 15). Students play a relatively passive role: They are "accumulators of material who listen, read, and perform prescribed exercises" (p. 15). These views of teaching and learning constitute an important obstacle in attempts to change normal patterns of classroom interaction (Cohen et al. 1990). The beliefs that teachers have will be fundamental at the moment of making decisions within the classroom and what to teach their students," teachers need to understand subject matter deeply and flexibly so that they can help students create useful cognitive maps, relate ideas

to one another, and address misconceptions. Teachers need to see how ideas connect across fields and to everyday life." (Shulman, 1987.)

Culture

"This definition underlines that culture is, on the one hand, the result of human actions and, on the other hand, has a direct impact on human action. This part of the definition of Kroeber and Kluckhohn makes it clear that a situation or action, due to the influence of culture on the perception, thinking, and evaluation of a person can be interpreted differently by two people with different cultural backgrounds" (Germ, 2022)**.** Culture is everything you have ever learned about how to communicate and how to think about things (Tannen, 1983). Acculturation refers to the process of cultural transfer from one group to another. All of these terms have relevance for the study of education since it is important to delineate which aspect of culture is being transmitted or transferred from one group to another, whether it be a cross-generational transmission or a cross-group transfer of knowledge, skills, values, or attitudes. The terms intercultural and multicultural also carry a connotation of cross-group transfer and, in some cases, a political connotation of redrawing cultural lines to include a more pluralistic combination of what had previously been considered separate groups. Arnove (2013) All of these words are based on the notion that education is more than just knowledge conveyance.

Oral fluency

Speaking fluency is the ability to speak with pauses, to talk with coherence, and order sentences according to the topic of the domain (Mogollón, 2019). Moreover, there seems to be a disagreement as regards the very nature of this phenomenon. As it was mentioned by Lennon (1990), the term fluency can stand for overall oral proficiency, as well as one of its components, namely temporal features of speech production (number of pruned syllables per

minute, distribution and duration of pauses, etc.). In such a case, the remaining components of proficient speech production are referred to as accuracy (Molenda, 2013). However, in this study, we will stick with Lennon's definition which mentions "oral fluency is the highest point on a scale that measures spoken command of a foreign language" (1990: 389; quoted in Rossiter 2009: 397). It means to speak clearly and coherently, that is, to understand the relationship and link between the phrases and words used in different topics; it can be concluded that a student needs to understand grammar, intonation, and the context in order to generate, develop, and communicate any idea with fluency.

Conversation Clubs

Speaking has become so ingrained in our culture that we take it for granted. Speaking is an action for exchanging ideas or information, as well as for effective communication. Oral expression is another type of language practice that can help students who are still fluent in improving their communication skills. "Oral expression is another type of language practice that can help students who are still fluent in improving their communication skills."(Hijrah & Umar, 2021.a). "Based on the interview given to the students by the researcher with the question above, majority of the student defined that English meeting club is a place to learn English in informal setting with other people. Some of the students assumed that English meeting club was a club that can increase the students' ability in learning English."(Hijrah & Umar, 2021.b) Joining an English communication club is one of the most effective ways for students to improve their speaking skills today. According to Yuliandasari (2015), "the benefit of joining the English club is that students will be able to participate." Activities vary according to the goals of the club, students will have the opportunity to be more competitive in the global field where English speaking is a fundamental and basic resource students will strengthen their listening and speaking skills.

Literature Review

With the inclusion of culture into language learning, students' beliefs of conversation clubs have a big impact on language learning as chances to increase oral fluency (Riyadini 2021; Mosquera et al. 2021; Wesely 2012). However, we realized that there hasn't been much study done on Cordoba, Colombia, during our investigation. This is a subject that needs more research from the viewpoints of both students and teachers because of the dynamic and ever-changing nature of education and the necessity to develop new teaching approaches. Additionally, students and instructors themselves are creating the need for additional research. Below, there is a description of five studies that are pertinent to the past and present state of the study's issue.

Hijrah (2021, p.4) conducted a study to learn how English meeting club students perceive themselves in order to improve their speaking abilities. speaking. This study focuses on how students see the English meeting club, which helps them improve their speaking skills. The act of speaking. Ten English department students are the subjects of this investigation. Interviews are used as a research tool in this qualitative approach of inquiry. The findings of the interviews revealed that the majority of the students thought well of their involvement in the English club. The pupils are adamant that the English club would assist them in developing their fluency in the language. students as well Students think that the English club may assist them in becoming competent speakers of the language. For people who require further instruction and practice in effective English speaking. Additionally, it could help them communicate English more effectively.

The study of Elsadig et al. (2019, p.10) looks into the role that English clubs have in encouraging speaking in the Saudi Arabian setting. It is assumed that Saudi university

students are excited about learning real English and that the English club, as a voluntary and anxiety-free speaking activity, aids Saudi university students in practicing English with delight. This study intends to highlight the benefits of starting an English club in order to promote speaking and educate university English professors about the value of doing so. According to the study's findings, the English club helps Saudi students overcome their fear of speaking the language and their boredom while also promoting critical thought and fun English practice. The English club fosters students' capacity for critical thought as well as their ability to persuade and argue. In order to create a realistic linguistic context in terms of the phonological aspect, she advises that the English club be run by native speakers and scheduled as an essential component of a course in the semester, not as an academic activity. The English club should also offer reinforcement classes on oral strategies and skills that help students communicate tactfully.

Another study Widuri et al. (2022), The goal of this research was to ascertain whether or not the speaking club aids students in speaking more effectively. The participants in this study were the students who joined Sixta Speaks Up, an English-speaking club founded by a group of forty students at the Vocational High School. To gather data, the author used questionnaires that were distributed to the students through a Google form. The results of this study show that most students who take part in speaking clubs considerably enhance their English-speaking abilities, including fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Speaking exercises can provide them more self-assurance while discussing views. The post-activities were utilized to assess the performance of the pupils. Second, the students' comments on the application were quite intriguing since the assessor had engaged them in the activity with a variety of engaging activities and subjects.

The next study was conducted by Muliani et al. (2017) the goal of this study is to detect and evaluate the impact of the English Club on the residential students' speaking abilities. Qualitative research was employed in this study. Through observation and interview, data were gathered. The students who resided in the STKIP Paracendekia N W Sumbawa dormitory are the focus of this study. The purpose of this study is to determine how to pique college students' interest in joining the English Club and to demonstrate to the readers how the English Club affects students' speaking abilities. As a result, according to the study's findings, 90% of the students who participated in the interviews reported that the English Club had a positive impact on their ability to speak English and that it had helped them learn a lot of new words. It also cost them extra money to continue honing their English language skills. The performance in the dorms twice a week demonstrated the dramatic difference between before and after the English Club, and the students' speaking abilities greatly improved.

Buyung (2020) study aims to examine how language communities are used to improve learners' speaking abilities as well as how learners react to language communities in terms of speaking English. To indicate how the linguistic community has responded to the learners' use of English while speaking, as well. This research is descriptive and qualitative. Through observation and interview, the data were gathered. The results lead us to the first conclusion that the English-speaking community's implementation is broken down into three phases: before, during, and after the activity. The purpose of the pre-activity is to get the students ready for the post-activity. Simple games or discussions were employed by the assessor during the pre-activities, and intriguing conversations about real-world issues affecting the learners were had during the support activities. The post-activities were utilized

to assess the performance of the pupils. Second, the students' comments on the application were really intriguing since the assessor had kept the activity's subjects and actions exciting so that the students were engaged. enthusiastic.

According to some of the research described above, there has been a lot of interest in investigating how learners' beliefs may affect many aspects of teaching and learning a foreign language. There is also several research that concentrate on examining the many factors that affect English language learners' beliefs in various circumstances. The significance of textbooks in the teaching and learning of the English language has piqued the interest of researchers. There is still more research needed, since the University of Cordoba's students' beliefs of culture-based conversation clubs conducted by English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) have not been thoroughly examined in the context of the studies discovered in various sources.

Methodology

The purpose of this exploratory case study will be to describe students' beliefs about the learner-centered activity of culture-based conversation clubs led by English teaching assistants at the University of Cordoba as a method for improving oral fluency in their classes. There are four key sections to this chapter. First, the kind of study in which the chosen research design is briefly discussed. Following the background and participants, the data collecting portion that focuses with the procedure is continued. Finally, the data analysis section which contains a description of the data analysis method used.

Type of study

Qualitative research is the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting non-numerical data, such as language. Qualitative research can be used to understand how an individual subjectively perceives and gives meaning to their reality. According Bryman, it usually emphasizes words rather than quantifycation in the collection and analysis of data. (2008, p. 366). A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. (Yin, 2003, p. 13).

According to the systematic approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), was chosen as the main method of data analysis due to its flexible and inductive approach. The theoretical underpinning of this particular analysis was positioned as "contextualist" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81).

This case study design helped us to find the answers to our research questions, as it is mainly used in the field of exploring students' beliefs about conversation clubs. In addition, this study is more oriented to describe the events in the interactions between students and

ETA's in the conversation clubs. We started by identifying the schedules that existed in order to make observations prior to the recordings for data collection. In this process, we were able to identify two students who actively participate and constantly attend. We then carried out 2 observations where these participants were present and 2 semi-structured interviews in the home of each one. This data provided us with a comprehensive background to assess students' opinions regarding the influence of culture-based conversation clubs on public university students, as well as their incorporation of tactics to connect with each other in order to improve oral fluency.

Research Context and Participants

The context is the University of Córdoba, on the coast of Colombia. The subjects of this study were a sample of 2 students who voluntarily joined a culture-based conversation club, approximately 30 students attend the clubs. There is also a Fulbright advisor and 1 advisor to observe the implementation of the club. The student population is mixed from different undergraduate programs offered by the university, from second to last semester. A percentage is part of the armed conflict and a minority belongs to indigenous groups.

Data Collection

This section focuses on the data collection procedure, which is a methodical way of accurately gathering data from numerous sources for the purpose of providing insights, such as testing a result. The research procedure goes from data collection to analysis and vice versa, until a comprehensive description is produced (Polkinghorne, 2005, p.143). The basic goal of data collection is to collect reliable data that can be examined and used as evidence

or to support decisions. In this qualitative study, interviews, observations and videotape were used.

Interviews were used to collect data from a small group of subjects on a wide range of research topics. Given the time they used structured interviews. Structured interviews are comparable to a questionnaire, with the same questions in the same order for just two students and with open-ended responses to elicit data on their perspectives on the clubs, vital research information. Furthermore, they limit the possibility of a fixed set of possible responses. These took place in the student houses, since the times did not allow us to carry it out on the university campus.

Observation as a data collection method is classified as research that allowed us to obtain data on the fluidity of the participants. In addition, it requires us as researchers to immerse ourselves in the environment of the interviewees while they take notes and records. This data collection process can include observing, listening, contacting and recording the behavior and characteristics of the phenomenon. Given the specific schedules of the conversation clubs, we opted for structured observations given the predefined schedules. These were executed in study room number 6. These schedules are 1 hour long, as a sample only 30 minutes were recorded, in the two different sections.

Videotaping the club sessions was an essential aspect of the research instrument as it enabled the researcher to carefully observe the fluency of the students. The use of video recordings allowed for a more detailed analysis of the students' speech, as the expressions used by the participants could be paused and repeated for closer examination. The use of video recordings also provided a record of reality as it occurred, which helped to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected.

In a qualitative study, due to its flexibility and inductive approach, coding and sematic analysis were chosen as the main data analysis techniques, following the approach of Kearney (2001) and the systematic approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) respectively. The first coding analysis is based on the 5 levels of qualitative findings, where it evolves from the simplest data analysis to the most complex. After Braun and Clarle's (2006) sematic analysis of these theoretical foundations of this particular research, the theoretical background of this specific study was described as "contextualist." With the results of the data analysis "both reflecting reality and unpacking or unraveling the surface of reality." The study of interviews with the 2 students, 1 observation and the videotape that were the most effective data collection strategy that we chose, yielded several codes and themes, but the two that emerged as the most essential.

Ethical considerations have particular resonance due to the descriptive nature of the study process. Concerns about ethical issues become more relevant when conducting face-to-face interviews with vulnerable groups of participants, in this case from their homes. This can potentially stress participants in expressing their feelings during the sessions. In addition, when interactions in the two sections are to be recorded, confidentiality of the results of these investigations is paramount for record keeping. Ethical considerations have particular resonance because of the in-depth nature of the study process. Concerns about ethical issues become more relevant when conducting face-to-face interviews with a group of participants. Participants may be stressed by expressing their feelings or ideas during the session.

Findings

This section describes the results of an analysis of data collected in the study. The four major themes that emerged from the analysis are a learner-centered approach to teaching and learning, the need for improvement in oral fluency and speaking skills, cultural awareness, and student engagement, motivation, and confidence. We attempted to answer the following two questions: *What are the current beliefs of the students in the English Licentiate program about the culture-based conversation clubs led by English teaching assistants as a strategy to foster oral fluency at Universidad de Córdoba?* And *What successes (if any) have English Licentiate students experienced that have supported the effective implementation of culture-based conversation clubs?* What follows are the findings supported with interview and observation data. The two research participants will be referred to as P1 and P2.

A learner-centered approach to teaching and learning

Most participants indicated that that culture-based conversation clubs promote the learner-centered approach to teaching and learning (i.e., an approach that focuses on the needs, interests, and abilities of individual students). In both the classroom observation and the interview, the ETA gave participants the opportunity to choose their own topic for the class, and she provided resources and helps participants with whatever they need to make the class successful. From one of the observations, we found that the ETA introduced the topic of Christmas and its traditions and asks the students for their ideas and thoughts. Also, before she began the lesson, she gave candies to the class.

P2 commented:

Maybe it could help all the students in the university who are interested in English

and acquiring it as a second language, to improve their speaking and fluency while practicing with native speakers, so they can be aware of what they need to improve and work on it through time.

P1 went on to say, "in my opinion, the goal is to help learners to improve their English skills and to introduce them to a new culture."

The need for improvement in oral fluency and speaking skills

The findings of this study suggest that there is a need for improvement in oral fluency and speaking skills among the students participating in the culture-based conversation clubs. This need was identified through classroom observation, where it was "noted that the students had a high listening level but low oral fluency and speaking skills, with some of them speaking slowly and with fillers when trying to express an idea. This indicates an area where the students may require additional support".

The participants' interview also supports this finding, with both P1 and P2 noting improvements in their fluency and conversational skills as a result of their participation in the conversation clubs.

P2 specifically mentioned that "the biggest improve that I have noticed since I go to this clubs are in my fluency, I can speak faster and better in English. Also, I have learned a lot of things when ETAS and my partners correct my mistakes".

Also, P1 declared "The biggest improvement that I have noticed is my fluency and conversational skills".

This highlights the effectiveness of the culture-based conversation clubs in promoting the development of oral fluency and speaking skills among the students.

Cultural awareness

The finding of this study suggests that cultural awareness is promoted through the use of conversation clubs facilitated by English Teaching Assistants (ETA). The observation that "the ETA is sharing American traditions and the students are comparing them with local traditions, and they explain to her how local people celebrate those traditions". This could be seen as a way of promoting cultural awareness and understanding. Additionally, the participants' comments support this finding, with both P2 and P1 noting the usefulness of the ETA in helping them understand American culture and customs. P2 specifically noted the ETA's role in encouraging students to speak more during conversation clubs and helping them with vocabulary and expression.

P2 commented:

As I have noticed, their role has been to encourage students to speak more during conversation clubs, they ask questions and if students have trouble with some words, they help them and explain how they say it, or give students an easier way to say it.

P1 also emphasizes the importance of the ETA's role in helping students understand aspects of American culture that may not be easily accessible to them otherwise. Where P1 stated "This a crucial role because as native American people, they are really useful for us to understand many things that not everyone can reach us".

Student engagement, motivation, and confidence

The observation revealed that students demonstrated a strong desire to participate and speak during the conversation clubs, indicating a high level of motivation and engagement. This suggests that the students were highly invested in the learning process

and were motivated to improve their oral fluency and speaking skills.

From the students' vantage point, p1 opined that "it has contributed a lot to my oral fluency providing me with such useful verbs and words that helped me to improve my English level". In conjunction with incorporating, P1 stated "It was introduced to the faculty through a group of English teaching assistant that is originally from the US. I was excited to be part of it because it was another tool to improve my English skills".

Additionally, both P1 and P2 reported experiencing improvements in their oral fluency and confidence in speaking English. This further supports the observation that the students are motivated and engaged in the learning process, and are making progress in their speaking skills.

P2 comented:

Initially, I was not very interested in the conversation club, but after seeing the potential of the club leaders, I realized it could be a great opportunity to improve my fluency and slang knowledge. The club has helped me greatly in this regard and I am now able to hold casual conversations with native English speakers without hesitation, sounding more natural.

Discussion

The results of this study contribute to the burgeoning body of literature that suggests that students' perception of English conversation clubs plays a vital role in the enhancement of their oral fluency. The findings of this study indicate that students' engagement, motivation, and self-assurance are pivotal determinants that influence their continued participation and attendance in such clubs. This concurs with the conclusions of prior research, such as Hijrah (2021) and Elsadig et al. (2019), which have also emphasized the significance of student engagement, motivation, and confidence in the development of oral fluency and speaking skills.

The utilization of English clubs and speaking activities, in conjunction with the involvement of native speakers, can provide a more authentic language context for learners. As highlighted by Widuri et al. (2022), speaking exercises can foster self-confidence in discussing points of view. Additionally, Muliani et al. (2017) found that English clubs can have a significant impact on students' speaking skills. By providing opportunities for learners to practice speaking in a realistic language context, they are able to improve their fluency and become more competent communicators.

This study underscores the importance of a voluntary and anxiety-free speaking activity. Studies such as Hijrah (2021) and Elsadig et al. (2019) have established that the implementation of English clubs as voluntary and anxiety-free speaking activities can ameliorate students' fluency and speaking skills. This is because students are more likely to participate in activities that they find engaging and in which they feel comfortable participating. When students are not compelled to participate and are not under stress, they tend to take a more active role in the class, speak more, and enhance their fluency in the language.

In the same vein, Muliani et al. (2017) established that the English Club had a positive impact on the residential students' speaking abilities. These studies underscore the importance of creating a positive perception of the culture of the target language, and how it relates to the students' culture. By making connections between the target language and the students' culture, it helps to establish a sense of relevance and motivation for the students, which in turn improves their engagement and participation in the learning process.

Correspondingly, the implementation of a learner-centered approach can also involve the integration of cultural awareness. As previously discussed, cultural awareness is essential in the development of speaking skills, as it can positively impact students' motivation, confidence, and engagement. By incorporating cultural awareness into a learner-centered approach, students are able to better connect the target language to their own culture, and thus, find more relevance and motivation in the learning process.

This study further corroborates the notion that cultural awareness is imperative for the enhancement of speaking skills. The students' perception of their culture, and the way it relates to the target language, plays a crucial role in their motivation, self-assurance, and engagement. This idea is fortified by the findings of Widuri et al. (2022) and Muliani et al. (2017), who have established that cultural awareness is vital in the development of oral fluency and speaking skills. Widuri et al. (2022) discovered that students who participate in speaking clubs can enhance their fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

In addition to the use of English clubs and speaking activities, providing reinforcement classes on oral strategies and skills is also imperative in a learner-centered approach. As advised by Muliani et al. (2017), reinforcement classes on oral strategies and

skills can help learners communicate tactfully. These booster classes can help students improve their oral skills and become more confident communicators.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study adds to the growing body of literature that suggests that students' perception of English conversation clubs plays a crucial role in the development of their oral fluency. The findings of this study reveal that students' engagement, motivation, and confidence are key factors that determine their continued attendance and participation in these clubs. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of a voluntary and anxiety-free speaking activity, as well as the significance of cultural awareness in the development of speaking skills.

The implementation of a learner-centered approach, which incorporates cultural awareness, can also be beneficial in the development of speaking skills. The utilization of English clubs and speaking activities, in conjunction with the involvement of native speakers, can provide a more authentic language context for learners. Additionally, providing reinforcement classes on oral strategies and skills is also imperative in a learner-centered approach.

As a supplement, these findings suggest that the students may need more support and practice in developing their oral fluency and speaking skills. It could be an indication that the teacher or instructor could focus on providing opportunities for the students to practice speaking, such as through group discussions, presentations, or other activities that involve verbal communication. Additionally, it could be helpful to provide feedback and guidance on areas such as fluency and filler word reduction.

The results of this study, along with the findings of prior research such as Hijrah (2021) and Elsadig et al. (2019), support the idea that a learner-centered approach, which integrates cultural awareness, can greatly enhance students' speaking skills. By providing opportunities for learners to practice speaking in a realistic language context, as well as fostering cultural awareness and understanding, students are able to improve their fluency and become more competent communicators.

The findings of this study have important implications for educators and language teachers. The results suggest that in order to effectively develop students' oral fluency, it is important to create an environment that is both voluntary and anxiety-free. Additionally, incorporating cultural awareness into instruction can be beneficial in motivating students to participate in the learning process. Furthermore, the results of the study suggest that English conversation clubs, along with reinforcement classes on oral strategies, can be effective in developing students' speaking skills.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1- Interview Protocol (P1)

A Protocol for a Semi-Structured Interview
Pedro P. Aguas (Personal communication, December 5, 2022)

Time of Interview: _____20 mins_____
Date: _____January, 10 2023_____
Research Site: _____Student´s house_____
Interviewer: _____Ivan Oviedo_____
Interviewees: _____ P1 _____
Researchers: _____Ivan Oviedo and Katheryn Acevedo_____

Research Questions:
1. Tell me about your current perceptions of English conversation clubs and how long you have attended the conversation clubs. I have been attending conversations club for a whole semester and a consider que that conversations club is a useful tool for us the learners because it makes you being in touch with the language.
2. What is your involvement with English conservations clubs? My involvement with conversations clubs is only as an active assistant and participant.
3. How were English conservation clubs introduced to the faculty and what was your initial reaction? It was introduced to the faculty through a group of English teaching assistant that is originally from the US. I was excited to be part of it because it was another tool to improve my English skills.
4. In your own words, what is the goal of English conversation clubs at your faculty? In my opinion, the goal is to help learners to improve their English skills and to introduce them to a new culture.
5. How does the university evaluate English conversation club implementation? How will you know if the implementation is successful? As far as I concert the university has not developed an evaluation method so far, in the other hand I know that the conversation club is been

successful because of the impact that it has had on my English level.
6. What is the biggest improvement that you have noticed since you attended English Conversation Clubs? The biggest improvement that I have noticed is my fluency and conversational skills.
7. How have English conversation clubs contributed or not contributed to your oral fluency in English? It has contributed a lot to my oral fluency providing me with such useful verbs and words that helped me to improve my English level.
8. What role has the ETAS played with English Conversation Club implementation at your faculty? This a crucial role because as native American people, they are really useful for us to understand many things that not everyone can reach us.
9. What could or should be done to make English conversation clubs more successful here? Maybe more conversation clubs with different schedules to make conversation clubs more accessible for any kind of student.

Appendix 2- Interview Protocol (P2)

A Protocol for a Semi-Structured Interview
Pedro P. Aguas (Personal communication, December 5, 2022)
Time of Interview: _____20 mins_____
Date: _____January, 15 2023_____
Research Site: _____Student´s house_____
Interviewer: _____Ivan Oviedo_____
Interviewees: _____P2_____
Researchers: _____Ivan Oviedo and Katheryn Acevedo_____

Research Questions:
1. Tell me about your current perceptions of English conversation clubs and how long you have attended the conversation clubs. I've been attending the conversations club for a short time, but I have noticed people there are really nice, polite and funny.
2. What is your involvement with English conservations clubs? When I first attended, I wasn't very interested, but then I saw potential with

the conversation club leaders and thought it would help me a lot to improve my fluency as well as my slang knowledge.

3. How were English conservation clubs introduced to the faculty and what was your initial reaction?

I wasn't aware enough when they first appeared, but casually one day I was free and I had the opportunity to go to one of them. When I realized that it was actually a conversation club, I felt it was amazing that our university was trying to help us improve our English.

4. In your own words, what is the goal of English conversation clubs at your faculty?

Maybe it could help all the students in the university who are interested in learning English and acquiring it as a second language, to improve their speaking and fluency while practicing with native speakers, so they can be aware of what they need to improve and work on it through time.

5. How does the university evaluate English conversation club implementation? How will you know if the implementation is successful?

Honestly, I have no idea how they are evaluated, but I will say that students will see their progress through tests or leaders will notice how students speak faster and have an extended vocabulary.

6. What is the biggest improvement that you have noticed since you attended English Conversation Clubs?

The biggest improve that I have noticed since I go to this clubs is in my fluency, I can speak faster and better in English. Also, I have learned a lot of things when ETAS and my partners correct my mistakes.

7. How have English conversation clubs contributed or not contributed to your oral fluency in English?

Of course, they have helped me, I consider that I could maintain casual talks with English speakers without having doubts about what I'm saying, and I'd sound more natural.

8. What role has the ETAS played with English Conversation Club implementation at your faculty?

As I have noticed, their role has been to encourage students to speak more during conversation clubs, they ask questions and if students have trouble with some words, they help them and explain how they say it, or give students an easier way to say it.

9. What could or should be done to make English conversation clubs more successful here?

Maybe scheduling more hours, because personally I have not been able to attend some because I'm not at the university at that time or I have classes.

Appendix 3- Observation Protocol

Observational Protocol 1
Pedro P. Aguas (Personal Communication, December 1, 2022)
Observer: __Ivan Oviedo_____
ETA Observed: _____Olive Jaramillo_____
Length of Observation: 30 minutes
Type of Observer: Complete observer.
Date: dec-14-22_____**Time of Observation**: 45 minutes
Research Site: _____Sala de studio 6_____
Conversation Club #: _____1 _
_____

Description (setting, people and their reactions, interpersonal relationship, and account of events –who, when, and what was done)	**Reflection** (Observer's personal feelings or impressions about the events and comments about these events)
- There are 11 participants in the current session. - At the beginning of the ETA bring to the session some candies for the students, and introduced the lesson, talking about Christmas and the traditions of this season. - The ETA asks the students for ideas or thoughts about the topic. - All the participants, participate actively and with a positive mood - The ETA share American traditions and the students compare it with local traditions, and they explain to her how local people, celebrate those traditions.	- I can notice, that the participants feel very comfortable with the ETA. - I can notice that most of the participants have a high listening level, but low oral fluency and speaking skill. - Some of them speak slowly and with fillers when trying to express an idea. - In general, they don't have confidence issues, quite the contrary, they show a desire to talk and participate.

Appendix 4- Matrix based on Kearney's and Saldana's 5-step method for coding

Observation

Verbatim Transcripts from the observation	Code	Category	Themes
The ETA is bringing candies to the class which could be seen as a way of creating a positive and comfortable learning environment.	Receiving students with candies	Lesson Introduction	A learner-centered approach to teaching and learning
The ETA is introducing the topic of Christmas and its traditions and asks the students for their ideas and thoughts. This could be seen as a way of engaging the students and promoting active participation.	Engaging students in lesson delivery	Lesson Introduction	A learner-centered approach to teaching and learning
The observation that the participants feel very comfortable with the ETA, which could be seen as a positive sign of a good teacher-student relationship.	Responding to the ETA's presence in the classroom	The relationship between the ETA and the students	Positive Interpersonal classroom dynamics
The observation that the students have a high listening level, but low oral fluency and speaking skills, with some of them speaking slowly and with fillers when trying to express an idea. This could be seen as an indication of an area where the students need more support.	The student's level of oral fluency and speaking skills	Foreign language competency	The need for improvement in oral fluency and speaking skills
The ETA is sharing American traditions and the students are comparing them with local traditions, and	Utilizing demonstrations as an instructional strategy	Lesson presentation, exploration, and practice	Cultural awareness

they explain to her how local people celebrate those traditions. This could be seen as a way of promoting cultural awareness and understanding.			
The observation that the students don't have confidence issues and instead show a desire to talk and participate. This could be seen as a positive sign of student motivation.	The student's attitude toward participating and speaking	Affective factors in foreign language learning	Student engagement, motivation, and confidence

Interview (P1)

Verbatim Transcripts from the interview (P1)	Code	Category	Theme
I have been attending the conversations club for a whole semester and consider the conversations club is a useful tool for us learners because it makes us in touch with the language.	Attendance of conversation clubs	Experience with culture-based conversation clubs	The perceived usefulness of conversation clubs
My involvement with conversations clubs is only as an active assistant and participant.	Initial attitude about attending conversation club sessions	Active participation	The perceived usefulness of the conversation club
It was introduced to the faculty through a	Getting to know the ETA's	Student motivation	Potential opportunity for

group of English teaching assistant that is originally from the US. I was excited to be part of it because it was another tool to improve my English skills.			improvement
In my opinion, the goal is to help learners to improve their English skills and to introduce them to a new culture.	Opportunity to learn	Student motivation	A learner-centered approach to teaching and learning
As far as I concert the university has not developed an evaluation method so far, in the other hand I know that the conversation club is been successful because of the impact that it has had on my English level.	no knowledge of the evaluation	Personal evaluation	Evaluation
The biggest improvement that I have noticed is my fluency and conversational skills.	The student´s level of fluency and speaking skill.	Foreign language competency	The need for improvement in oral fluency and speaking skills

It has contributed a lot to my oral fluency providing me with such useful verbs and words that helped me to improve my English level.	Improvement of the fluency	Foreign language compentecy	The need for improvement in oral fluency and speaking skills
This a crucial role because as native American people, they are really useful for us to understand many things that not everyone can reach us.	student who realized the powerlessness of the cultural	Student motivation	Cultural awareness
Maybe more conversation clubs with different schedules to make conversation clubs more accessible for any kind of student.	Accessibility	Student motivation	Student engagement, motivation, and confidence

Interview (P2)

Verbatim transcript from the interview (P2)	Code	Category	Theme
I've been attending the conversations club for a short time, but I have noticed	Attendance of conversation clubs	Experience with culture-based conversation clubs	The perceived usefulness of conversation clubs

people there are really nice, polite, and funny			
When I first attended, I wasn't very interested, but then I saw potential with the conversation club leaders and thought it would help me a lot to improve my fluency as well as my slang knowledge.	Initial attitude about attending conversation club sessions	Active participation	The perceived usefulness of the conversation club
I wasn't aware enough when they first appeared, but casually one day I was free and I had the opportunity to go to one of them. When I realized that it was actually a conversation club, I felt it was amazing that our university was trying to help us improve our English.	Getting to know the ETA's	Student motivation	Potential opportunity for improvement
Maybe it could help all the students in the university who are interested in English and acquiring it as a second language, to improve their speaking and fluency while practicing with native speakers, so	Opportunity to learn	Student motivation	A learner-centered approach to teaching and learning

they can be aware of what they need to improve and work on it through time.			
Honestly, I have no idea how they are evaluated, but I will say that students will see their progress through tests or leaders will notice how students speak faster and have an extended vocabulary	no knowledge of the evaluation	Personal evaluation	Evaluation
The biggest improve that I have noticed since I go to this clubs is in my fluency, I can speak faster and better in English. Also, I have learned a lot of things when ETAS and my partners correct my mistakes.	The student´s level of fluency and speaking skill.	Foreign language competency	The need for improvement in oral fluency and speaking skills
Of course, they have helped me, I consider that I could maintain casual talks with English speakers without having doubts about what I'm saying, and I'd sound more natural.	Improvement of the fluency	Foreign language compentecy	The need for improvement in oral fluency and speaking skills

As I have noticed, their role has been to encourage students to speak more during conversation clubs, they ask questions and if students have trouble with some words, they help them and explain how they say it, or give students an easier way to say it.	student who realized the powerlessness of the cultural	Student motivation	Cultural awareness
Maybe scheduling more hours, because personally I have not been able to attend some because I'm not at the university at that time or I have classes.	Accessibility	Student motivation	Student engagement, motivation, and confidence