REVISTA KRONOS

Perceptions of peer-teaching strategy in the English major at a public university in Ecuador

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ABSTRACT The aim of this article is to identify the different perceptions of teachers, peer teachers and learners about the peer teaching strategy. Which in detail consists of the process in which students learn from each other, some benefits of this teaching strategy include developing students' collaboration and communication skills, building students' confidence, and the ability to take control of their own learning. Learners are more comfortable with collaborative work, working with their peers, making them able to interact, engage in reflection, and explore ideas more deeply than in a teacher-tutor-led environment. This research was developed under the principles of qualitative research because it focused on recollection of the perceptions of the peer teaching strategy of the participants in the English major at a public university in Ecuador, through the application of semi-structured interviews, of the studied subjects who fulfilled the roles of the English teacher, peer teachers and peer learners, throughout the application of the teaching strategy. The analysis of the data collected was thematic, it was concluded from this that both the tutor and the students developed team spirit and more empathetic relationships; increased psychological well-being, social competence, communication skills, and self-esteem; higher performance and higher productivity in terms of better learning outcomes and English development. Overall, peer teaching had a positive impact and taking when it was aimed at students, as well as increased participation and skills of peer teachers and learners.

KEYWORDS Peer teaching, English development, teaching strategy, collaborative work.

Percepciones de la estrategia de enseñanza entre pares en la carrera de Inglés en una universidad pública del Ecuador

RESUMEN El objetivo de este artículo es identificar las diferentes percepciones de docentes, docentes pares y aprendices pares acerca de la estrategia enseñanza entre pares; que, en detalle, consiste en el proceso en el que los estudiantes aprenden unos de otros. Algunos beneficios de esta estrategia de enseñanza incluyen el desarrollo de las habilidades de trabajo colaborativo y comunicación de los estudiantes, fomentando la confianza de los estudiantes y su capacidad de tomar el control de su propio aprendizaje. Los alumnos se sienten más cómodos trabajando con sus compañeros, lo que permite interactuar, reflexionar y explorar ideas profundamente que en un entorno dirigido por un maestro-tutor. Esta investigación se desarrolló bajo los principios de la investigación cualitativa, ya que se centró en la recolección de las percepciones sobre la enseñanza entre pares desde el punto de vista de participantes de la carrera de inglés en una universidad pública del Ecuador, a través de la aplicación de entrevistas semiestructuradas, a los mismos, quienes cumplieron los roles del docente de inglés, pares docentes y aprendices pares, a lo largo de la aplicación de la estrategia. El análisis de los datos recolectados fue temático, se concluyó que tanto el tutor como los estudiantes desarrollaron un espíritu de equipo y relaciones más empáticas; mayor bienestar psicológico, competencia social, habilidades de comunicativas y se desarrolló su autoestima; se promovió mayor rendimiento y mayor productividad en términos de mejores resultados de aprendizaje y desarrollo del inglés. En general, la enseñanza entre compañeros tuvo un impacto positivo en los estudiantes, así como una mayor participación y habilidades de los compañeros docentes y los alumnos.

PALABRAS CLAVE Enseñanza entre pares, desarrollo del inglés, estrategia de enseñanza, trabajo colaborativo.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, teaching English is considered a challenge for foreign language educators. As a consequence, society has been transitioning to new methodologies and approaches that have risen to fulfill the students' needs, which is the case of peer teaching. Peer teaching is an instructional technique that has been used by teachers worldwide to successfully engage, exercise, and deepen student learning (Johnson, 2015).

As Coenen (2002) suggests, a peer teaching program can be applied in English learning classrooms to engage the learners during lessons and the production of activities that allows for open discussions outside the classroom. Thus, contributing to the learning relationship, student-peer and having as a result a better understanding of general knowledge. The flexibility of the strategy allows for the application of the same during short sessions after classes. The teacher within the development of peer teaching assumes the role of facilitator and assessor of the peer teachers. In addition to the benefits of this strategy for English teaching, it is considered a way of helping students of EFL to learn efficiently, improve their performance in the language, achieve the level of proficiency needed by the teachers, and gain remarkable marks. That might be the reason why researchers such as Adil and Ali (2018), Grubbs (2009), Kavanoz and Yüksel (2010), Sunggingwati (2018) have carried out studies on peer teaching.

This paper aims to identify the teachers, peer teachers, and peer learners' perceptions of the usage, influence, benefits, and barriers of peer-teaching strategy in English Major at the Technical University of Cotopaxi, and respond to the following questions; What is the leadership development In Peer Teaching and learning?, How is peer teaching considered a strategy for level development? Why is ZPD considered a principle in the implementation of peer teaching? What are the main areas that need to be improved during the application of the strategy?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

PEER TEACHING

Peer teaching is a strategy that allows the process of teaching to have an interactive outlet for students to get the most out of the learning experience. As mentioned by Topping (2005) the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions. It involves people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learn themselves by so doing. Thus, relieving the pressure and the fear of being judged that exist when communicating difficulties to the teacher. According to Boud et. al (1999) this technique refers to the use of teaching and learning strategies in which students learn with and from each other without the immediate intervention of a teacher. Considering the benefit of its proportions, we can say that it serves as a multipurpose strategy that helps both teachers and students in the learning environment. As stated by Stigmar (2016) peer teaching has been invented to meet the dual requirement of improving teaching and learning quality while doing more with less. Apart from these benefits, it can also influence the development of social skills as well as collaboration in the process of learning and teaching while intertwining knowledge between peers. As described by Topping (2005) peer teaching contributes to the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions. It involves people from similar social

groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learn themselves by so doing.

Consequently, this strategy can also raise the performance of all students that have yet to better their academic performance. As it has been corroborated, peer teaching is used in remedial courses to cater to the needs of students who are unable to progress with the class in a normal classroom (Abu, 2011 as cited in Utha & Rinzin, 2019). That is why it has been proven by Burton that there are studies that have found clear and convincing proof that having students teach, individually tutor, or academically mentor each other can be an extremely effective tool for improving learning in the classroom.

PEER TEACHING AS A TEACHING STRATEGY

The process of learning has become one of the most meaningful interests within the acquisition of knowledge through teaching. So much so that it has become a goal to better this process and simultaneously improve student outcomes. But to follow through with this it is necessary to understand an overall conclusion resulting from a half-century of research that states that learning isn't just a one-way transfer of information to students and that the role of both parts of the teaching process is important within the learning-teaching process (Rusli, 2020). Therefore, students must have control of the learning process and their way of understanding while using socialization between students to have the positive input of various perspectives in an academic environment.

ADVANTAGES OF PEER TEACHING

This strategy can have a positive impact on students, mainly focused on emotional development and improvement in the educational process. Consequently, Al-Jbouri, et al. (2019) mentioned that from the learner's perceptions, the dominance over topics was greatly received due to the connection that was formed between experiences. Thus creating a dynamic where all students become active and invest more time to understand further on a topic (Stigmar, 2016). Consequently, it is important in peer teaching to provide a warm, non-threatening atmosphere where the tutee is habitually engaged and is unafraid to make mistakes, there is indeed tremendous potential (Rankin & Berman, 2018).

Being part of this process of learning as an approach that centers around learners is the essence of peer teaching run mainly by motivation as one of the benefits as seen in Burton's (2012) investigations of the younger students acting as peer learners were motivated and excited by the experience of being taught by older peers Within the same concept, Gordon (2005) said that in educational institutions in the exterior, students improved their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation regarding schooling, learning, and sometimes life itself.

DISADVANTAGES OF PEER TEACHING

Even though this teaching strategy is effective, there are some drawbacks that are stated in the literature that could interfere with the development of the teaching experience (Stigmar, 2016).

Manchishi & Mwanza (2016) also remarks that applying peer teaching may disclose disadvantages that may involve evaluation and progressive changes in the strategy. Re-

search conducted by Bulte et al. (2007) stated that there were still concerns regarding expert skills on the knowledge that a peer teacher may need at the moment of teaching, even though the strategy enhances social and cognitive unity. Furthermore, Burton (2012) claims that difficulties may present themselves when it comes to the control of the assigned groups due to respect between students in an informal outdoor classroom. Suggestions made by students were to receive training on ways of teaching for an effective group learning experience and guidance on tackling problems that happen when using the strategy (Benson & Ying, 2013). Another factor that can be counted as a disadvantage in regard to the teaching process is the procrastination and free-riding of groups of students to benefit from other groups' findings on the subject (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008). This creates setbacks in the relationships between peer learners when working in groups. This is a result of bigger groups that can't be identified easily or evaluated individually, which results in evaluating peers expressing unconformity with training for the role of an evaluator (Burton, 2012). Additional concerns are unclear, referring to the examination criteria and inadequate confidentiality within the assessment process (Hanrahan & Isaacs, 2001). This inconvenience can be improved by individualizing evaluations and providing feedback Torre et al. (2016). Peer teaching can take up a lot of time to get the process going until the tutor can see results. Teachers need to also spend additional time assembling the pairs of works (the peer teacher and the peer learner) and training them about the strategy. Finally, this strategy needs further requirements, continuous monitoring, and oversight, thus proving to be a constant procedure (Wagner & Gansemer-Topf, 2005).

ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT (ZPD)

Karimi-Aghdam (2017) states that a child picks up a lot of knowledge through social interaction with a knowledgeable instructor. The tutor could provide the student with verbal guidance or serve as an example of certain actions. This refers to the difference between what a learner can accomplish on their own and what they can do with support and encouragement from a knowledgeable partner.

Regarding the connection between ZPD and the process that the learners experience along with the evolution of their role during the implementation of peer teaching, the following traits can be highlighted (Fani & Ghaemi 2011).

- The presence of someone with more experience and expertise (peer teacher) enhances the process of learning acquisition of the learner (peer learner).
- Social interactions with a knowledgeable pair let the student practice and observe without the apprehension that they experience with their head teacher.
- To support the learner as they are guided through the principles of peer teaching, ZPD lets the instructor build a more competent peer.

METHODS

This research was developed following the principles of the qualitative approach. Chih-Pei & Chang (2017) define qualitative as a research method that collects and evaluates non-numerical data. In most cases, a small and non-representative sample is used to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences related to a particular situation that needs to be investigated. In that way, this approach allows recollecting the unknown perceptions on the usage of the peer teaching strategy of the group of participants from this study. All

the different stages of this project have been carried out, focusing on collecting data that would let the researchers interpret later on.

Phenomenological research is related to the search for the meaning of personal experiences and perceptions. Participants in phenomenological investigations must be encouraged to describe and explain their feelings, experiences, and thoughts about a particular phenomenon (Selvi, 2008). It has been shown that this particular research methodology allows the researcher in the education field to understand and study a phenomenon that happens in a particular context with a certain group of people. This research method has been chosen because it is needed to understand the lived experiences of each participant after the use of peer teaching, to show the participants' valuable input developed within different roles during the application of peer teaching.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

Regarding the sampling or strategy to select the participants' the lineal snowball strategy of sampling has been used to select the appropriate participant to be interviewed. Bhardwaj (2019) Snowball sampling, often referred to as chain-referral sampling, is a non-probability method that enables the researcher to find variables with distinctive properties, think of it as a referral approach that relies on the idea of like-minded attraction. The researcher selects a few appropriate primary data sources and uses them to uncover comparable variables for the study. Thus, all the chain of sampling belonged to the members of the Technical University of Cotopaxi.

TECHNIQUES AND INSTRUMENTS

To collect the data, two semi-structured interview guidelines were developed following the questions from the "Teacher Questionnaire" designed by Adil and Ali (2018) as the main data collection instruments. The first semi-structured interview was conducted with the EFL teacher who was in charge of monitoring the sessions where peer teaching was applied. The second one was directed toward the pre-service teacher, who faces the role of a peer teacher. Moreover, to collect the richest data from the students who were peer learners, a focus group was conducted on the five students who actively participated and assisted in all the peer-teaching sessions. Bohnsack (2004) mentions that a focus group is a research method that brings together a small group of people to answer questions in a moderated setting. The questions are intended to provide light on an interesting topic, and the group is selected based on predetermined demographic characteristics.

DATA ANALYSIS

This paper aims to identify the teachers, peer teachers, and peer learners' perceptions of usage, influence, benefits, and barriers of peer-teaching strategy in English Major at the Universidad Técnica del Cotopaxi. The process of data analysis was done through a thematic analysis. In-vitro coding was considered in the first instance. In this first phase, 177 Codes were obtained. The second coding process was debugging the codes to form categories and then themes presented below. The data analysis was carried out in Spanish since the evaluation instruments, both the interviews and the focus group with the teachers, the

Figure 1. Peer teaching as a strategy for the language development
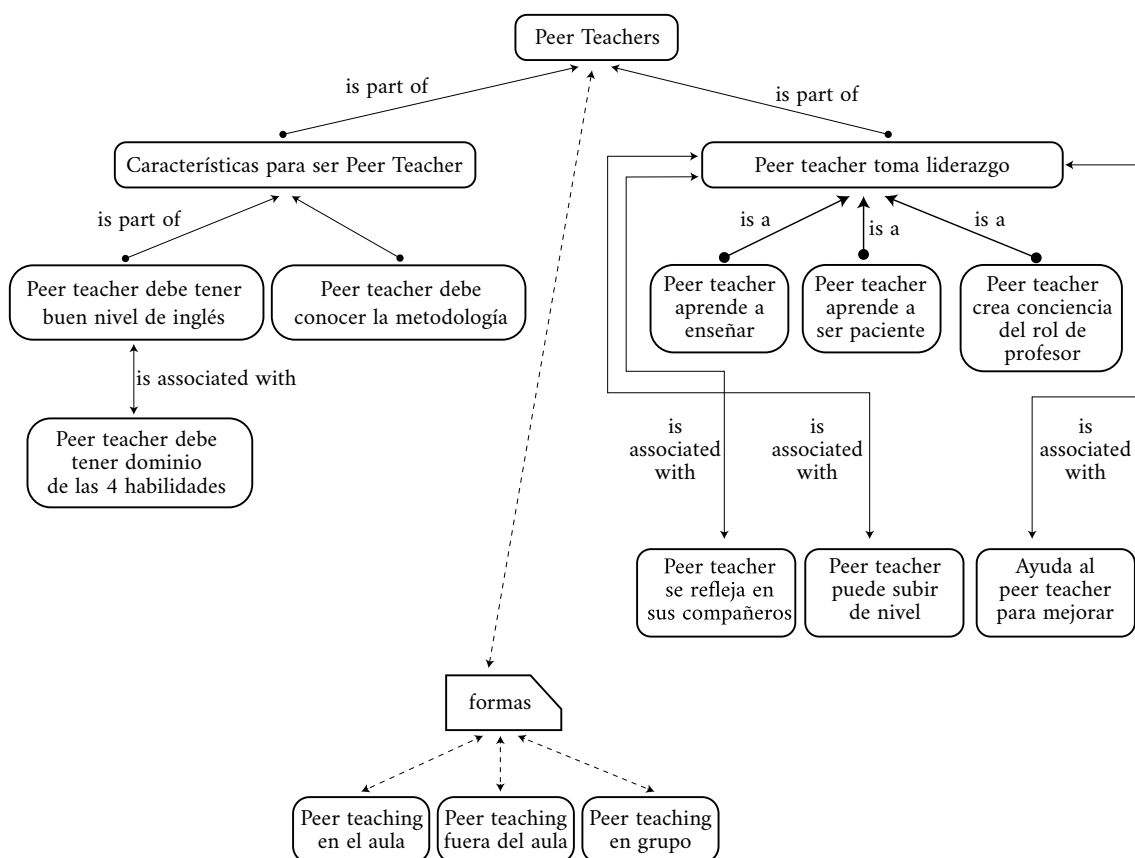
peer teachers, and the students, were carried out in Spanish as it is the participants' mother tongue. Data analysis was performed using Atlas.ti.

The first network obtained from the data was related to the characteristics and the importance of leadership in peer teaching (see Figure 1).

The first overarching theme obtained from the data is leadership development in peer teaching and learning. Two themes are developing leadership: the abilities learned by the peer teacher and their reflections. Here, the peer teacher learns how to teach and becomes aware of the role of the teacher. Peer teachers reflect that with this strategy, they can reflect on their peers, learn to become more patient, support their peers, and in general, acquire more experience as teachers. The second theme deals with the role of the per teacher and what he needs to know and develop. For instance, peer teachers must know the methodology applied in class, need to master the language skills, and must be aware of the things that need to be improved. Finally, the peer teacher must understand that he is a facilitator in this process and, therefore, has to develop teaching skills such as classroom management, assessment, methodology, and organization (see Table 1).

The second overarching theme obtained from the data is peer teaching as a strategy for language development. There are two themes-interactive learning and student-centered learning. Peer teachers, teachers, and peer learners coincided that the classes were interactive with activities that included games, videos, and presentations. Additionally, the class environment was good, and the students were most of the time motivated. The participants mentioned that the class was developed in pairs and groups, the classes were understandable, and the students helped each other, especially those with low levels. As corroborated by Utha & Rinzin (2019) students feel more comfortable in the absence of the teacher and communication can be done fearlessly in comparison to the traditional manner directed to a teacher.

Table 1. Peer teaching as a strategy for the language development

Overarching Theme	Theme	Sub-Themes	Categories
Leadership development in peer teaching and learning	Developing leadership	Abilities to be learned	Peer teacher learns to teach.
			Peer teacher learns to be patient.
			Peer teacher becomes aware of the role of the teacher.
		Reflection	Peer teacher reflects on his peers.
			Peer teacher takes leadership
			Peer teacher supports his peers
			Peer teacher acquires experience
	Peer teacher Role	Need to know or develop	Peer teacher must know the methodology.
			Peer teacher must master the 4 skills.
			Peer teacher must have confidence
			Become aware of what needs to be improved
			Peer teacher must be a facilitator
			Must develop teaching skills, organization, classroom management, assessment.

Additionally, the peer teachers offered feedback, and there was significant progress in their language skills development. Peer learners informed the researchers that during the classes, they were not afraid to ask questions or express their opinions because the teacher was willing to answer all the questions they had. Learners were fearless in making mistakes in front of their peers. In general, it was a good experience focused on the student's learning (see Table 2).

The third overarching theme is ZPD as a central component in learning. Two themes are the construction of meaning working with ZPD and cooperative learning. Regarding the construction of meaning, participants manifested that they learn from each other, the strong students help the weak students, and therefore, there is meaningful learning. In these classes, the interaction was the key. There was a rapport between teachers and learners. As Rezaee & Azizi, (2012) said that ZPD highlights the difference between a learner's ability to solve problems on his own and his ability to do so while also getting help, which can be referred to as developmental level. Vygotsky's theory on the nature of human development between learning and development is clearly reflected in the ZPD concept.

Additionally, the concept of ZPD was presented in the whole process. Peer teachers worked as the more capable peers to help their peers. In this sense, peer teachers became the facilitators of knowledge, creating a space for interaction, personal growth, reflection, monitoring, and learning.

The peer learners expressed many positive feelings, such as empathy, positive influence, comfort, motivation, happiness, and respect. They also did not feel nervous about participating in class or afraid. They did not feel frustrated because they did not understand something. After all, the peer teacher always supported them. Those feelings helped them create a cooperative network in class. As Wagner & Gansemer-Topf (2005) recalled in their investigation about the benefits of peer teaching, peer learners receive direct interaction from their peer teachers, which means they get individualized learning. In that sense, peer teachers reinforce their own process of learning by instructing their peers in an environment full of opportunities to learn without feeling pressure (see Table 3).

Table 2. ʑᴘᴅ as a central component in the process of learning

Overarching Theme	Theme	Sub-Themes	Categories
Peer teaching as a strategy for the language development	Interactive learning	Interactive Classes	Active activities with games, videos, and presentation
			Good environment
			Students are motivated
	Student-centered	Class development	Teaching in groups and pairs
			Students help each other
			There is a significant progress
			Understandable classes
			Cooperative learning
			Help students with low level.
			Offer feedback
		Peer learners' Perceptions	Not afraid of asking questions.
			Not afraid of making mistakes.
			Answer students' needs
			Positive experience
			Can express their opinions

Table 3. Areas of improvement

Overarching Theme	Theme	Sub-Themes	Categories
ZPD as a central component in the process of learning		Construction of meaning	Learn from each other.
			Meaningful Learning
			Weak and strong students work together
			Help students develop their language skills.
	zpd and the construction of meaning		Rapport
			Interaction is the key
		Work with the zpd	More capable peer
			Peer interaction
			Peer teacher as a facilitator
			Peer teacher reflects on his peers.
			Personal growth
			Teachers promote interaction
			Reflection
			Peer teacher guides students
			Teachers monitors
	Cooperative learning	Positive feelings	Empathy
			Do not feel afraid of participating
			Does not feel nervous
			Respect for peers and teachers
			Do not feel frustrated
			Feel motivated and happy
			Positive influence
			Feel more comfortable
		Good results	Better results
			Better use of the language
			Better understanding
			Better listening and speaking
			Better relationship among peers

Table 4.

Overarching Theme	Theme	Sub-Themes	Categories
Areas of improvement	Plan for improvement	Barriers	Peer teachers were afraid, worried, and nervous at the beginning
			Level of students
			Difficult to participate and work online
			Some students do not take it seriously
			No previous teaching experience
		Improvement	Need more training.
			Qualitative assessment
			Search about the methodology
			Material according to the level
			Reinforce knowledge

The final overarching theme is areas for improvement. Peer teaching could help preservice teachers and students grow and become better teachers. There were some barriers that peer teachers had to overcome, such as feeling afraid, worried, or nervous at the beginning of the project, this was due to their lack of experience in teaching. Peer teachers find it difficult to criticize their classmates. Given their inexperience and anxiety about making mistakes that can harm their peer learners, it would appear impossible for them to rate them based just on their effort (McKenna & French, 2011).

Participants also believed that it was difficult to participate and work online. Some students do not take the classes seriously because their teachers are also their peers. Saying this, an improvement plan is a must. Students need to be trained in this methodology, how to manage the class, how to assess, what materials to bring to class, etc. Furthermore, most importantly, to know what to do and to become aware of the benefits of peer teaching and learning. This strategy needs continuous monitoring and oversight by the main tutor or teacher in charge of the implementation of the strategy, thus proving constant evidence of progress (Lim, 2014) (see Table 4).

CONCLUSIONS

Students responded positively to activities that were done based on the peer teaching strategy, taking into consideration conventional forms of teaching. This strategy has caused students a positive engagement and an increase in participation within the academic environment, creating a positive relationship with learning the English language. Although this strategy is focused on learning, it also enforces awareness in students regarding their capabilities and skills to have a better learning experience. Regarding the peer teacher, the awareness of their role was evident due to the control of emotions that was needed for a more controlled academic environment. When it came to peer learners, the positive effect of peer teaching was evident when interactive activities were applied along with feedback. In the learning environment, the awareness of the different skills of peer teachers and peer learners also benefitted this experience. Overall, peer teaching was a strategy that benefitted the three parts: the teacher, peer teacher, and peer learner.

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