

Impact of the “Speaking Corners” microlearning on the oral confidence and motivation of future English teachers

Impacto del microaprendizaje “Speaking Corners” en la confianza oral y motivación de futuros docentes de inglés

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Abstract:

This study explored the effects of a microlearning Speaking Corners intervention to understand deeply the oral confidence and motivation of pre-service EFL teachers while getting ready for taking the B2 First exam. A mixed-methods design was employed, consisting of a quasi-experimental pre-/post-test survey with a thematic analysis of qualitative responses. The participants were sixth-semester students enrolled in three university classes of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages (PINE) major, in Ecuador. Quantitatively, confidence improved across all three classes, and knowledge of exam structure rose in two classes. Perceived usefulness of microlearning increased notably in one class. Qualitative results showed that participants went from having a vague understanding to a clear understanding, used exam strategies more, felt less anxious, and were more motivated. The findings showed that peer-led and reward-supported microlearning sequences are effective in improving exam preparedness and maintaining engagement. The research provides a practical and cost-effective pedagogical framework for high-stakes EFL speaking instruction, with ramifications for teacher education and exam preparation settings.

Keywords: Microlearning, second language learning, oral communication, motivation, teaching methods.

Resumen:

Este estudio exploró los efectos de una intervención de microaprendizaje *Speaking Corners* para comprender en profundidad la confianza oral y la motivación de futuros docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en su preparación para rendir el examen B2 First. Se empleó un diseño mixto, consistente en un pre-/post-test cuasi-experimental con encuesta y un análisis temático de las respuestas cualitativas. Los participantes fueron estudiantes de sexto semestre matriculados en tres cursos universitarios del programa de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros (PINE) en Ecuador. En términos cuantitativos, la confianza mejoró en las tres clases, el conocimiento de la estructura del examen aumentó en dos clases y la percepción de la utilidad del microaprendizaje aumentó de forma notable en una clase. Los resultados cualitativos evidenciaron que los estudiantes pasaron de tener una comprensión vaga a una comprensión clara, utilizaron más estrategias de examen, redujeron su ansiedad y se sintieron más motivados. Los hallazgos demostraron que las secuencias de microaprendizaje dirigidas por pares y apoyadas con recompensas son eficaces para mejorar la preparación para el examen y mantener el compromiso. La investigación aporta un marco pedagógico práctico y rentable para la enseñanza de la expresión oral en contextos de alta exigencia, con implicaciones para la formación docente y la preparación de exámenes.

Palabras clave: Microaprendizaje, aprendizaje de una segunda lengua, comunicación oral, motivación, métodos de enseñanza.

1. Introduction

Microlearning has emerged as a potent pedagogical strategy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and second language acquisition contexts; this is due to the delivery of focused “capsules” that reduce excessive cognitive demands for learners. According to Cognitive Load Theory, this segmentation frees working memory resources for relevant processing; consequently, learners find it easier to internalize complex linguistic structures (Susilana et al., 2022). Research conducted by Sweller (2008) supports this by highlighting that cognitive overload can hinder learning, whereas appropriately designed instruction can help optimize cognitive resources, ultimately leading to better retention and understanding of educational material.

Pre-service English teachers often report uncertainty about speaking-exam task requirements, limited strategic repertoires under time pressure, and low confidence when transferring classroom speaking to exam-like conditions. Speaking/test anxiety remains a robust barrier to achievement in additional-language learning, with recent meta-analytic work confirming negative links between anxiety and performance (Chen, 2025). Because the Cambridge B2 First Speaking test specifies fixed task formats and analytic criteria, explicit familiarity with these demands is a reasonable preparatory goal (Cambridge English, 2025). In addition, feedback-rich, bite-sized practice is defensible: quasi-experimental comparisons of immediate versus delayed feedback report advantages for engagement, willingness to participate, and outcomes relative to no-feedback conditions (Mai, 2025; Qun, 2025). Finally, recent reviews indicate that microlearning formats can enhance English-speaking outcomes in higher-education contexts, supporting short, focused tasks such as “Speaking Corners” (Monib et al., 2025; Prasittichok & Smithsarakarn, 2024).

Moreover, as Fitria (2022) states, recent applications that focus only on critical grammar points, vocabulary items, and test-taking strategies have demonstrated microlearning’s

capacity to optimize study time and avoid overwhelming learners. This focused approach aligns with the findings of Sathiyaseelan et al. (2024), who noted that targeted microlearning modules enhance student engagement and make language acquisition more efficient.

Additionally, incorporating Mayer’s Multimedia Learning principles, such as aligning coherent verbal and visual channels and segmenting content into manageable chunks, enables the enhancement of comprehension and retention for learners (Nie, 2023). This alignment is similarly supported by studies showing that multimedia elements can significantly improve learning performance across various educational contexts (Zhu et al., 2020). Together, these design considerations aim to ensure that microlearning modules align with cognitive limitations while fostering flexible learning environments in which learners can study and review material at their own pace.

Complementing cognitive strategies, it is worth mentioning that motivational dynamics play a central role in microlearning’s effectiveness as well. Based on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Laksanasut (2025) has shown that microlearning modules that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness significantly boost intrinsic motivation. The impact of autonomy on motivation has been extensively documented in various educational settings, indicating that when students feel in control of their learning, they are more likely to engage and persist (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Consequently, in practice, including game mechanics such as point systems, immediate feedback loops, and badge rewards operates both as behaviorist reinforcement and as a promoter for sustained engagement (Gorham et al., 2023; Laksanasut, 2025). Research by Qudsi (2024) supports this notion through their findings that gamified elements in educational tools significantly enhance learner motivation and engagement. This allows the assumption that

simulated Cambridge B2 First (formerly known as *First Certificate in English*, FCE) tasks within these capsules not only nurture a sense of mastery but, according to Barus and Bontisesari (2023), also strengthen learners' understanding through shared challenge experiences.

Linked to that, another key benefit of microlearning is its ability to increase familiarity with test formats and reduce negative washback effects. By using sessions designed around B2 First-style prompts with instant scoring, learners can better understand the exam structure, lower their anxiety, and become more test-wise, leading to noticeable performance improvements (Sankaranarayanan et al., 2023). This reduction in test anxiety is particularly relevant, as studies have shown that heightened test anxiety can negatively affect performance, inhibiting learners from showcasing their true capabilities (Myers et al., 2021). Gagné and Casademont (2024) highlight that by focusing on metalinguistic awareness and reflective practice, these modules help students recognize and correct their own mistakes, resulting in more accurate and fluent spoken responses.

Likewise, Prasittichok and Smithsarakarn (2024) emphasize that providing explicit scaffolding within these microlearning capsules keeps learners actively engaged. Such scaffolding is crucial, as Vygotsky Zone of Proximal Development suggests that learners achieve greater understanding with appropriate support (Gauvain, 2008). All of this can guide them to produce the high-quality responses they are expected to perform in a B2 First speaking exam. Finally, microlearning's on-demand accessibility via mobile platforms accommodates diverse study rhythms and leverages spaced repetition, which can be key to guaranteeing long-term retention (Zamata-Aguirre et al., 2023). This is why Luo (2022) claims that this anytime, anywhere model empowers learners to reinforce skills precisely when needed, underscoring microlearning's relevance in today's fast-paced educational environments. Furthermore, Viberg et al. (2020) highlighted technology-assisted strategies aimed at promoting self-regulated learning among language learners, positioning mobile microlearning as an effective tool

in developing essential language skills. The conceptual framework they provided suggests that mobile learning can effectively enhance learners' self-regulation, which is crucial in language acquisition contexts.

By putting together these cognitive, motivational, and practical strands, a microlearning "Speaking Corners" intervention—featuring immediate rewards and B2 First-style staging—offers a theoretically grounded approach to enhance EFL learners' performance, confidence, and engagement.

Pre-service English teachers in our setting report low speaking-exam confidence, limited familiarity with B2 First task formats and assessment criteria, and uneven uptake of task-specific strategies—factors that undermine exam readiness. Local coursework emphasizes general oral fluency but offers limited, time-bounded practice under exam-like conditions. Given evidence that short, focused, feedback-rich practice can reduce cognitive load and anxiety while enhancing strategy use, we piloted a microlearning "Speaking Corners" approach to target these barriers and examine its short-term impact on perceptions and exam preparedness.

In this study, we explore how a microlearning "Speaking Corners" approach, with instant rewards and B2 First-style stages, influences students' speaking skills, confidence, and test readiness. We aim to show how breaking practice into bite-sized steps, weaving in playful feedback loops, and offering anytime mobile access can make language learning feel more motivating and manageable. By testing this intervention in real university EFL classes, we demonstrate its power as a flexible, scalable solution that supports both teachers and learners across diverse contexts.

This study addresses the persistent challenge of exam-oriented oral performance among pre-service English teachers, including low communicative confidence, limited familiarity with exam structure, and patchy uptake of effective task strategies. The main objective was to evaluate the impact of the microlearning "speaking corners" intervention on students' perceptions of confidence, enjoyment, and

usefulness among sixth-semester English teacher candidates. Using a pre–post design complemented by thematic analysis of open responses, we ask: How does the “Speaking

Corners” intervention influence oral confidence, enjoyment, and perceived usefulness, and what themes emerge in students’ reflections about their exam preparation experience?

2. Materials and methods

This section outlines the methodological framework used to evaluate the impact of the Speaking Corners pedagogical intervention on undergraduate learners’ speaking performance and perceptions in relation to the B2 First exam. It describes the overall design, participant population, instructional setting, and intervention procedures, as well as the instruments employed for data collection and the analytic techniques applied to both quantitative and qualitative strands. The purpose is to provide transparency regarding the processes followed and to ensure the replicability of findings.

2.1. Methodological Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the impact of the Speaking Corners pedagogical intervention on B2 First speaking performance and related learner perceptions. The quantitative component followed a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design without a control group, while the qualitative component adopted a thematic analysis approach to explore learners’ experiences in depth. Both components are integrated during the interpretation phase to allow triangulation of findings.

2.2. Population and Sampling

The population consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in the PINE program at a public university in Ecuador. Participants were distributed across three separate classes (Class 1, Class 2, and Class 3), all of which were at the B2.1 proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was used as all students present in the target classes during the intervention period were invited to participate. The final sample included students in Classes 1, 2, and 3 respectively, with matching pre-test and post-test data.

Students were eligible if they were enrolled in the target semester, attended the intervention, provided informed consent, and completed matched pre–post questionnaires using the same anonymous code; for the qualitative strand, at least one open-ended response post-intervention was required. Subscale scores were removed prior to analysis when records showed code mismatches, absence or withdrawal from students. Therefore, the final analytic sample was: Class 1= 18, Class 2= 15, Class 3= 18.

2.3. Setting

The intervention took place during regular class hours in university classrooms equipped with multimedia projectors, whiteboards, and movable desks to facilitate group activities. The Speaking Corners activity was integrated into the existing syllabus as part of the oral communication development component.

2.4. Intervention

The Speaking Corners intervention was designed to simulate B2 First Speaking exam conditions in a collaborative and interactive environment. Each class participated in structured speaking tasks aligned with official exam formats, rotating through different “corners” that targeted various exam parts. The intervention also incorporated microlearning principles, providing short, focused instructional segments followed by

immediate practice. No commercial or brand-specific materials were used; instead, tasks and prompts were created by the researchers to align with CEFR B2 descriptors and B2 First specifications.

2.5. Instruments and Measurements

The quantitative instrument was a Likert-scale questionnaire (1–5) ad hoc. administered before and after the intervention. This instrument was created by the researchers and two EFL specialists reviewed the items for clarity and content alignment prior to administration. This instrument measured five constructs:

1. Knowledge of exam structure (Know structure)
2. Confidence in speaking during exams (Confident speaking in exams)
3. Perceived usefulness of microlearning (Microlearning)
4. Perceived effectiveness of learning (Effective learning)
5. Perceived immediacy of benefits (Immediate reward)

Because the five outcomes were single-item Likert measures, internal consistency coefficients (e.g., Cronbach's α) are not applicable; these indices require multiple items per construct. All inferential analyses therefore focused on distribution-appropriate, non-parametric tests of pre-post change and between-class differences. Responses were recorded anonymously, with participants using unique nicknames to enable pre-/post-test matching. Initially, these data were organized and cleaned using Microsoft Excel and later on JASP v0.95.4.0 was used for coding.

The qualitative component was designed to capture students' subjective experiences, perceived learning shifts and mechanisms through which the microlearning intervention influenced their engagement. It consisted of four open-ended feedback questions before the intervention, acting as their baseline perceptions, and immediate post intervention reflections. All responses were collected through a digital survey and exported into Microsoft Excel for initial

organization and into Microsoft Word for manual thematic analysis.

2.6. Data Analysis

We adopted a convergent mixed-methods approach to examine learning changes and experiences during the intervention. Quantitative data (pre-post Likert items for five constructs across three classes) were used to estimate within-class change and effect sizes, while qualitative data (brief open-ended reflections/focus notes) captured students' perceptions of what changed, why, and how the activities supported that change. Both strands were analyzed separately using methods appropriate to their nature and then integrated to triangulate findings and explain patterns observed in the numbers.

Quantitative Procedure

Data were screened for pairing integrity (ID match), valid range (Likert 1–5), and ties/zeros in pre-post differences. For each class, we summarized medians [Q1, Q3] at Pre and Post and computed change scores ($\Delta = \text{Post} - \text{Pre}$) for descriptive reporting. Inferentially, we ran Wilcoxon signed-rank tests (two-tailed) within each class and report the test statistic (W), exact p, and the matched rank-biserial correlation (r_{rb}) as the effect size. Because the Wilcoxon test excludes zero differences, n refers to the number of non-zero pairs used in each test. Analyses were conducted in Microsoft Excel and JASP v0.95.4.0

Qualitative Procedure

Qualitative data were also organized, cleaned and displayed in Microsoft Excel; this time classified by questions as a whole to obtain a different perspective about the implementation of the strategy. Data were manually coded using Microsoft Word and then later the resulting codes and themes were uploaded to the OpenAI system through ChatGPT 5o interface to triangulate them with the manually obtained data. In the end, five codes were obtained and analyzed making them match the quantitative results to gather significant highlight for the study based on the

students’ answers. Finally, a codebook-based thematic analysis was used, so discrepancies were resolved by negotiated consensus, and an audit trail documented coding decision

Finally, both strands of analysis were designed to address the same research objectives from complementary perspectives. Quantitative results provided measurable changes in learner

perceptions before and after the intervention, while qualitative findings offered deeper insight into students’ experiences and the factors influencing their engagement. The following section presents these results in an integrated structure, beginning with the quantitative analysis, followed by the qualitative themes, and concluding with a synthesis that informs the discussion.

3. Results

This section presents the findings of the study in two parts. First, the quantitative results derived from pre- and post-intervention survey data are reported, highlighting changes in students’ perceptions of short, focused tasks, peer-led learning, and the sense of immediate reward following the B2 First Speaking exam preparation activity. Figures and tables summarize the most relevant statistical outputs to facilitate interpretation.

The second part of this section presents themes emerging from students’ open-ended responses, illustrating how they experienced and interpreted the learning-corner-based microlearning approach. This dual presentation aims to provide both a measurable account of change and a richer, contextually grounded understanding of the intervention’s impact.

3.1. Overview of Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis was based on three paired datasets corresponding to Class 1, Class 2,

and Class 3. Each class completed a pre-test and a post-test measuring five constructs:

1. Know structure
2. Confident speaking in exams
3. Microlearning
4. Effective learning
5. Immediate reward

For each class we report median [Q1, Q3] at Pre and Post, the median of individual Δ (Post – Pre) [Q1, Q3], and Wilcoxon signed-rank results (W, exact p, matched rank-biserial correlation r_{rb}). Because Wilcoxon excludes ties, n denotes non-zero pairs used by the test. Analyses were performed in Microsoft Excel and JASP v0.18.x; wording/code scaffolding was assisted by ChatGPT-5o.

3.2. Results by Class

Table 1. Class 1 — Wilcoxon pre vs post (medians)
Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Variable	Pre Median [Q1,Q3]	Post Median [Q1,Q3]	Median Δ [Q1,Q3]	n	W	p (exact)	r_{rb}
Know structure	4.00 [3.00, 4.00]	4.50 [4.00, 5.00]	1.00 [0.00, 1.00]	12	0	.001	1.000
Confident speaking in exams	3.00 [3.00, 3.00]	4.00 [4.00, 4.00]	1.00 [0.00, 1.75]	12	0	.002	1.000
Microlearning	4.00 [4.00, 5.00]	4.00 [4.00, 4.00]	0.00 [0.00, 0.00]	7	14	1.000	0.000
Immediate reward	4.00 [3.00, 5.00]	4.00 [4.00, 4.75]	0.50 [0.00, 1.00]	12	18	.078	0.538
Effective learning	5.00 [4.00, 5.00]	4.50 [4.00, 5.00]	0.00 [0.00, 0.00]	8	18	1.000	0.000

Class 1 summary. Know structure and Confidence increased (W=0, p=.001 and p=.002; r_{rb} =1.00). Microlearning and Effective learning showed no change; Immediate reward showed only a non-significant trend.

Table 2: Class 2 — Wilcoxon pre vs post (medians)
Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Variable	Pre Median [Q1,Q3]	Post Median [Q1,Q3]	Median Δ [Q1,Q3]	n	W	p (exact)	r _{rb}
Know structure	4.00 [4.00, 5.00]	5.00 [4.00, 5.00]	0.00 [0.00, 1.00]	6	3.5	.129	0.667
Confident speaking in exams	3.00 [2.00, 3.50]	4.00 [4.00, 4.00]	1.00 [0.00, 1.50]	10	0	.005	1.000
Microlearning	4.00 [3.50, 5.00]	4.00 [4.00, 5.00]	0.00 [0.00, 1.00]	9	15	.390	0.333
Immediate reward	4.00 [3.50, 5.00]	4.00 [4.00, 5.00]	0.00 [0.00, 0.50]	6	7	.520	0.333
Effective learning	5.00 [4.00, 5.00]	4.00 [4.00, 5.00]	0.00 [-0.50, 0.00]	7	15.5	.860	0.107

Class 2 summary. Only Confidence improved ($W=0$, $p=.005$; $r_{rb}=1.00$). The other constructs were not significant.

Table 3: Class 3 — Wilcoxon pre vs post (medians)
Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

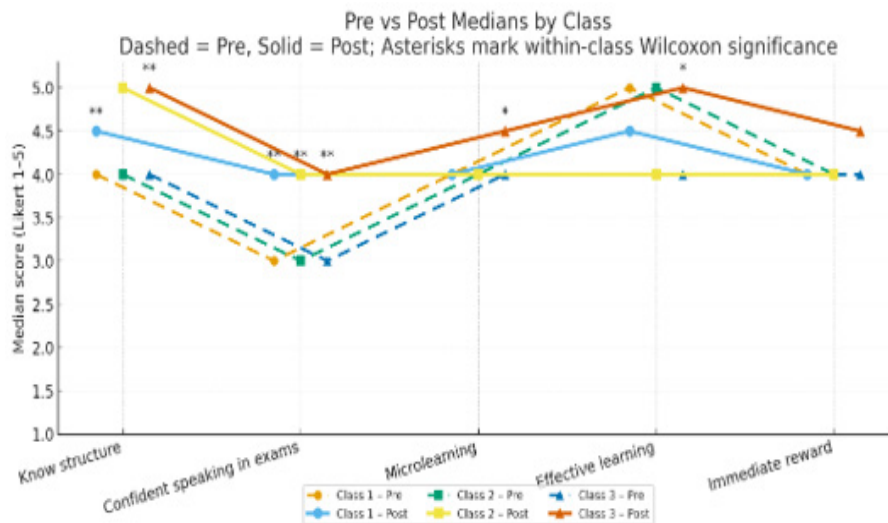
Variable	Pre Median [Q1,Q3]	Post Median [Q1,Q3]	Median Δ [Q1,Q3]	n	W	p (exact)	r _{rb}
Know structure	4.00 [3.00, 4.00]	5.00 [4.00, 5.00]	1.00 [0.00, 2.00]	12	0	.002	1.000
Confident speaking in exams	3.00 [2.00, 3.75]	4.00 [4.00, 4.00]	1.00 [0.00, 1.75]	11	3.5	.009	0.894
Microlearning	4.00 [4.00, 4.00]	4.50 [4.00, 5.00]	0.00 [0.00, 1.00]	9	4	.025	0.822
Immediate reward	4.00 [4.00, 5.00]	4.50 [4.00, 5.00]	0.00 [0.00, 0.75]	9	18	.608	0.200
Effective learning	4.00 [3.00, 5.00]	5.00 [4.00, 5.00]	0.00 [0.00, 1.00]	10	8	.044	0.709

Class 3 summary. Know structure and Confidence improved ($p=.002$, $p=.009$), Microlearning rose ($p=.025$), and Effective learning showed a small gain ($p=.044$). Immediate reward did not change.

3.3. Overall Trends

Across classes, the most consistent gains were in Confident speaking in exams (significant in all three classes). Know structure increased in Class 1 and Class 3 but not Class 2, indicating heterogeneity in how quickly exam-format

understanding consolidated. Microlearning improvements concentrated in Class 3, while Effective learning showed a small, localized gain only in that class. Immediate reward remained high with minimal pre-post change, consistent with a ceiling effect.

**Figure 1:** Aggregated view of median changes across all classes.
Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Taken together, the non-parametric results indicate targeted, meaningful gains aligned with the intervention: students consistently reported greater confidence to speak in exam conditions; knowledge of exam structure rose in two classes; and microlearning/ effective learning gains were most evident in Class 3, where implementation fidelity and engagement indicators were highest. The stability of immediate reward suggests a ceiling in perceived motivational boost, which is coherent with high Pre medians.

The next section will integrate these quantitative findings with qualitative data, exploring how students’ perceptions and experiences align with the numerical trends observed.

3.4. Overview of Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis was, on the other hand, organized by questions. This responds to the essence of the instruments used at the time of collecting the data and since this potentially enriches the outcomes of the gathered answers. Later, this whole dataset will be triangulated to obtain a broader vision of the results.

The resulting codes from this analysis were:

1. Knowledge of Exam
2. Strategies & Resources
3. Performance Awareness
4. Concerns & Barriers
5. Motivational Factors

Initially, this presents a different set of codes as the ones that were originally defined, and that is why they need to be further triangulated. Nonetheless, before matching them with the quantitative data, the researchers analyzed the obtained codes to gain a broader vision of the takeaways students may have attained after the intervention. This resulted in the following table that explains the codes, how many times students mentioned something related to it and the change that is evidenced according to the answers they wrote in the open-ended questions section.

The Ques1 corresponds to question number 1 in the survey both in the pre and post-tests, and the corresponding subsequent numbers for the following Ques. The numbers after each code are the times the word or representative phrase or utterances was brought to the answers by students.

Table 4: Qualitative analysis
Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Category	Pre-test (Ques1–Ques3)	Post-test (Ques1–Ques4)	Change
Knowledge of Exam	Structure awareness: 24 Task awareness: 12	Structure and task awareness: 29 (more detailed, accurate)	Growth from vague “4 parts” → detailed descriptions of each task
Strategies & Resources	Assessment focus (fluency, vocab, interaction): 9 Strategies/tips: 6	Useful phrases/vocab: 21 Strategies/tips: 20	Big increase in strategies and vocabulary use, tied to exam performance
Performance Awareness	Confidence mentions: 3	Confidence/fluency: 3 Metacognitive reflection: 3	New reflective dimension (linking learning to mistakes/progress)
Concerns & Barriers	Linguistic concerns: 36 (vocab, grammar, pronunciation, fluency) Nervousness/anxiety: 20 Understanding issues: 10 Interaction/fairness/time/ topic: 13	Very few concerns reported	Shift from fear and anxiety focus → to positive appraisal of strategies and clarity
Motivational Factors	Almost absent	Enjoyment & engagement: 8 (Q3), 20 (Q4)	Clear rise in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation
		Rewards & incentives: 21 (Q3) Knowledge gained/progress: 13 (Q3), 15 (Q4)	
		Peer learning/collaboration: 8 (Q2), 2 (Q4)	

3.5. Knowledge of exam

In the pre-test many participants had a superficial idea about the structure of the exam, limiting their responses to “four parts” or literally expressing lack of knowledge “actually almost nothing”. After the intervention, the answers turned to be more precise reflecting a clear understanding of each part of the exam. One student said, “Part 2 consists in comparing, not describing” while another mentioned “I learned how each part of the FCE B2 exam is structured and useful tips on how to answer”. This change in their answers in the post-test shows how the intervention helped students to go from a vague idea of the exam structure to a more explicit knowledge of it.

3.6. Strategies and resources

Before the intervention, references to strategies were limited and generic, usually focused on general aspects such as “fluency” or “interaction”. After participating in the Speaking Corners activity, students began highlighting specific linguistic resources and useful expressions. One student responded, “we have to use more advanced phrases to show that you have a B2 level”. Others valued the simple yet memorable concise tips: “They summarize the idea as short as possible, keeping this short and sweet”. Such comments reflect a significant increase in students’ appropriation of practical tools to improve their performance.

3.7. Performance awareness

In the pre-test, there were almost no mentions of confidence or metacognitive reflection instead there are mentions of fear of mistakes and fragile self-efficacy (see Concerns and Barriers). However, after the intervention, some students began linking their progress to recognizing mistakes and noticing personal improvement. One participant remarked “...compared with the exam I had in midterms to have the whole picture of my mistakes and what I can improve.” Such

responses demonstrate an emerging awareness of their own learning and performing processes.

3.8. Concerns and Barriers

Prior to the intervention, concerns were dominated by linguistic and affective barriers. Students frequently expressed anxiety: “I get very nervous and tend to forget what I know sometimes very simple words.” Other expressed “To be honest, my emotions, I think that if you do not feel comfortable with yourself during the FCE speaking exam you can fail.” They also worried about interaction and timing: “I have some concerns such as running out of things to say or hesitate while speaking and if my partners take too much time”. In contrast, by the post-test, these concerns had largely disappeared, giving way to more positive appraisals that focused on strategies learned during activities “Yes, there was motivation since after presenting I felt really proud of me as I was able to understand how to the different parts of the test work, so I have a clear idea how to improve my speaking.” Others appointed to confidence level increasing: “It felt rewarding to learn useful tips and see my progress in speaking with more confidence.”

3.9. Motivational Factors

While motivational aspects were almost absent in the pre-test, the post-test revealed that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were highly present after the intervention. Students highlighted extrinsic rewards such as “The candy,” “The prizes were good” and intrinsic motivators tied to learning and collaboration: “It was rewarding because of the knowledge I learned doing my part and the knowledge presented for my classmates.” They also emphasized peer learning: “Each one was an expert in their presentation. They were able to explain each topic very well.” Most students expressed a clear willingness to repeat the experience: “Yes, I’d like more lessons like this because they are interactive, helpful, and focus on real exam skills.”

4. Discussion

4.1. What the data indicate in relation to the objectives

The non-parametric, within-class analyses show a consistent increase in Confidence across the three classes, alongside gains in Know structure in Classes 1 and 3. Microlearning and Effective learning improved primarily in Class 3, while Immediate reward remained high with minimal change—suggesting a ceiling effect. These patterns mirror the median shifts displayed in Figure 1 and the Wilcoxon results in Tables 1–3, indicating that the intervention most robustly enhanced students’ readiness to speak under exam conditions and their understanding of exam format, with additional, class-specific improvements in practice-oriented learning.

Qualitative reflections converge with these findings. Students describe clearer awareness of what exam tasks require (e.g., “compare, not describe” in Part 2), increased use of concise B2-level phrases and tips, and a stronger sense of preparedness when performing speaking tasks. They also attribute their progress to brief, targeted activities that they could immediately apply—consistent with the microlearning emphasis—while noting that motivation/reward was already high from the outset. Together, the quantitative gains and qualitative accounts meet the study’s objectives by evidencing measurable improvements in exam-relevant confidence and structure knowledge, and by explaining how the intervention supported those changes through focused, practical guidance.

4.2. Comparison with prior research

The results also support the principles of Cognitive Load Theory. Students often described the Speaking Corners as “short and sweet” or “less overwhelming,” which confirms the idea that breaking tasks into smaller segments reduces unnecessary load and allows working memory to focus on essential processing (Sweller, 2008; Susilana et al., 2022). Their references

to improved focus, quicker understanding, and stronger recall mirror previous microlearning studies that demonstrate how concise learning capsules raise engagement and effectiveness in language acquisition (Fitria, 2022; Sathiyaseelan et al., 2024).

In addition, the preference for short, multimodal input immediately followed by practice reflects Multimedia Learning principles. The separation and coordination of verbal and visual channels, as outlined by Mayer, have been shown to improve comprehension and retention (Nie, 2023; Zhu et al., 2020).

In this study, such design choices did not just support general engagement but also prepared students more directly for exam tasks—helping them become more strategic in their phrasing, transitions between parts, and the way they approached interactive discussions.

The peer-led format also fits with sociocultural ideas about how people learn. Students regard their peers as “experts” who render strategies memorable, aligning with the principles of scaffolded mediation in the Zone of Proximal Development (Gauvain, 2008) and corroborated by findings of sustained engagement when microlearning integrates explicit scaffolding (Prasittichok & Smithsarakarn, 2024). Furthermore, the development of performance awareness (identifying errors and correlating strategies with progress) corresponds with research on technology-enhanced self-regulation in mobile and microlearning environments (Viberg et al., 2020; Luo, 2022; Zamata-Aguirre et al., 2023).

Finally, the motivational profile that emerges post-intervention—characterized by intrinsic satisfaction (pride, progress) and subtle extrinsic cues (tokens, recognition)—aligns with SDT: the design promotes autonomy (student-led corners), competence (immediate success signals), and relatedness (peer collaboration) (Ryan & Deci,

2000; Laksanasut, 2025). Reports indicating that short reward cycles maintain engagement align with recent research on gamified elements in educational contexts (Gorham et al., 2023; Qudsi, 2024). These comparisons indicate that the intervention is theoretically aligned with the literature discussed in the Introduction.

4.3. What is new in this study

It shows that microlearning mapped 1:1 to B2 First Speaking parts yields exam-specific readiness gains, not only general engagement—extending microlearning results into a high-stakes, task-bound domain (Fitria, 2022; Sathiyaseelan et al., 2024; Nie, 2023; Zhu et al., 2020).

It documents how a peer-led micro-format operates as distributed scaffolding, converting exam demands into memorable, reusable strategies and phrases (consistent with Gauvain, 2008; Prasittichok & Smithsarakarn, 2024).

It characterizes a dual motivational shift—*intrinsic pride/progress* coupled with *minimal extrinsic incentives*—consistent with SDT and practically relevant for low-cost, scalable EFL exam preparation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Laksanasut, 2025; Gorham et al., 2023; Qudsi, 2024).

4.4. Anomalies and uneven confidence

Different classes have all rates at which confidence grows. The data suggests that confidence is a construct that evolves gradually and likely requires additional cycles and performance-oriented feedback to become established, whereas knowledge and strategies undergo rapid changes. Detectability may be compromised by small, paired samples, fluctuations in baseline dispersion, and minor adjustments in dose or cadence (time per corner, group composition). This pattern aligns with research indicating that enhancements in procedural knowledge (e.g., test familiarity and reflective practice; Sankaranarayanan et al., 2023; Myers et al., 2021; Gagné & Casademont, 2024) often surpass advancements in alleviating test anxiety and stabilizing self-belief. Finally, the use of single-item indicators precluded calculation of internal

consistency metrics (α/ω). Future work should consider multi-item subscales to enable reliability estimation and latent-level modeling.

4.5. Pedagogical implications

For exam-oriented speaking instruction, the data support embedding microlearning “corners” that:

- Make the moves of each part clear (for example, “compare” vs. “describe” in Part 2) and give model B2 phrases that are related to the rubric.
- Use peer explanations to make strategy talk more common and share helpful ways to say things.
- Give each mini-task feedback right away and a 30-second reflection to help students become more aware of how well they are doing.
- Use small rewards to get things moving without getting in the way of what students want to do.
- If one wants to build confidence, it’s best to do cycles over and over.

4.6. Future research requirements

Future studies should augment self-reports with independent performance evaluations (e.g., examiner-style rubrics for B2 First Speaking) to establish if perceptual enhancements lead to quantifiable proficiency advancements. Systematic comparisons between microlearning and traditional preparation would elucidate the additional advantages. Longitudinal designs can investigate maintenance and transfer, while dosage studies can evaluate the quantity and duration of interventions required for confidence stabilization. Using specialized software (like MAXQDA) with intercoder agreement can make the qualitative side more reliable when connecting strategy talk to performance later on.

4.7. Take-home message

In summary, the data indicate that microlearning-based Speaking Corners clarify exam demands, compress strategy acquisition, and energize motivation in B2 First Speaking exam preparation. The approach is feasible and scalable in teacher-

education contexts; with repeated cycles and performance-focused feedback, it has strong potential to transform perceptual gains into robust, demonstrable improvements in speaking performance.

5. Conclusions

This study achieved its objectives by demonstrating that a microlearning Speaking Corners intervention, grounded in established theoretical frameworks, enhanced learners’ exam preparedness, motivation, and strategic utilization. The integration of Cognitive Load Theory, Multimedia Learning, Self-Determination Theory, and scaffolding principles created a strong framework for designing brief, focused, and engaging tasks that enhanced comprehension and performance. The quantitative findings demonstrated a notable improvement in learners’ understanding of the exam structure and their attitudes towards microlearning. Qualitative findings indicated that learners transitioned from a nebulous understanding of the subject matter to a more explicit comprehension, utilizing specific strategies and demonstrating heightened motivation to learn.

This is a new project because it uses microlearning to help students get ready for the B2 First Speaking exam, as it shows that segmented, peer-led, and

reward-based formats can help them get ready for certain tasks. This contribution enhances current research by elucidating the mechanisms through which distributed scaffolding and immediate reinforcement cultivate strategic competence and sustained engagement in exam-oriented EFL contexts.

The findings have substantial ramifications for the domain, as they illustrate a scalable and economical methodology for teacher training initiatives and examination preparation courses. Further research should include independent performance metrics to validate perceptual enhancements, as well as longitudinal and comparative methodologies to assess sustainability, transferability, and the relative advantages of microlearning compared to traditional preparation methods. The Speaking Corners model is a good and theoretically sound way to teach high-stakes speaking and do research in EFL.

6. Recommendations

Although not mandatory, it is advisable that future research include examiner-based performance assessments to determine whether perceptual gains translate into measurable proficiency. Longitudinal designs could further clarify the durability of motivational and strategic benefits, as well as their transfer to other high-stakes contexts. Comparative studies

with traditional preparation methods would help establish the relative effectiveness and efficiency of microlearning interventions, while the use of qualitative software with intercoder agreement is recommended to enhance the reliability of thematic analysis and deepen the connection between strategy use and performance.

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