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ESL Learners' Perspectives of Using Oral Feedback to Develop Speaking Proficiency at Michigan State University

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Abstract

Speaking is a demanding skill for learners speaking English as a Second Language (ESL) particularly for international students studying in U.S. universities. This study investigates the challenges faced by ESL students at Michigan State University (MSU) where academic success and social integration depend heavily on oral communication. It also explores their perceptions of oral corrective feedback (OCF) in developing speaking proficiency. Forty-eight international students filled a survey followed by in-depth interviews with six participants. The survey examined learners' attitudes toward different types, timing, and methods of oral feedback while the interviews provided qualitative insights into participants' personal experiences with oral communication and corrective practices. The findings revealed persistent challenges in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, as well as psychological barriers such as anxiety and low confidence. Students expressed concern that the fluency-oriented approach in U.S. content courses often overlooked accuracy potentially leading to fossilization of errors. Regarding OCF, students strongly favor teacher-led feedback that was explicit, constructive, and reinforced through repetition. They preferred delayed correction in fluency-based tasks but immediate intervention during accuracy-focused activities. In addition, they viewed feedback as highly effective when private and supportive to avoid embarrassment while peer correction elicited mixed reactions. The main strategies participants shared to improve their oral proficiency included rehearsing presentations, reading and watching movies, keeping a vocabulary notebook, talking to native and non-native English speakers, and using technology to self-correct pronunciation and grammar mistakes in the absence of teacher and peer feedback. These findings have important implications for ESL instruction and mainstream university teaching to better support international students' oral proficiency and long-term academic success.

Keywords: ESL, oral corrective feedback, speaking proficiency, fluency, accuracy.

Introduction

Speaking is often considered one of the most challenging skills for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL), especially when they are international students studying in the United States. Unlike reading or writing, speaking requires learners to produce language in real time while managing pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and anxiety. Despite many years of formal instruction, ESL learners often report difficulties expressing themselves fluently and accurately, mainly in academic and professional contexts. In U.S. university settings, while content-based courses may prioritize subject knowledge over language form, students are nonetheless expected to participate effectively in spoken communication. The ability to speak well is essential not only for academic achievement but also for participation in social, professional, and global communication settings.

Fluency and Accuracy in ESL Speaking

Most students tend to value both fluency and accuracy in their speaking development although many prioritize accuracy and receiving corrective feedback. They hence desire linguistic precision believing that grammar-focused feedback enhances overall language competence (Agudo, 2015; Ha a & Nguyen, 2021). While students recognize the importance of speaking accurately, they also want opportunities to express themselves fluently and without interruption (Ha & Murray, 2023). Learners appreciate feedback that supports self-correction and balances error awareness with uninterrupted speech (Kaivanpanah et al., 2015). Fluency can be improved through repetition of tasks by helping learners internalize language structures (Baleghizadeh & Derakhshesh, 2012). Even in immersive settings, challenges persist when accuracy and fluency are not both addressed by teachers (Hu & AlSaqqaf, 2023).

Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Proficiency

Several linguistic, environmental, and psychological factors influence ESL speaking ability. Linguistic challenges include limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and lack of speaking practice (Hu & AlSaqqaf, 2023; Islam & Stapa, 2023). The students' native language (L1) also plays a crucial role in their L2 speaking proficiency. In contexts where English is not used outside the classroom, learners struggle with fluency and spontaneous speech (Abdalla & Mustafa, 2015). For instance, at private universities in Bangladesh, students got an average IELTS band score of 5, indicating limited competence in spoken English despite being in an English-only academic context (Islam & Stapa, 2023). Another factor includes environmental constraints such as socioeconomic limitations, teacher competence, and outdated methods, hence, reducing students' motivation and opportunities for oral practices (Nuraini, 2016; Ortiz-Gómez, 2023). Moreover, in China, for example, students were constrained by large class sizes and exam-driven instruction, which limited their participation in authentic oral activities (Xie, 2020). Speaking has also been marginalized in school assessments and curricula leaving learners unprepared for real-life communication (Ibna Seraj & Habil, 2021).

Moreover, psychological factors include low confidence, language anxiety, and fear of mistakes (Bouzar, 2019). Speaking anxiety remains a persistent issue in ESL classrooms. Zhu and Wang (2019) and Zhang and Rahimi (2014) confirm that students believe OCF is essential for improving their speaking skills even when it often causes anxiety. Learners stressed that their anxiety emerged from fear of making mistakes, public correction, or peer judgment (Humphries, 2011; Anthony & Wilang, 2023). Some students struggle with unrealistic beliefs about the importance of pronunciation in language learning. Humphries (2011) found that many learners expect to speak perfectly or sound like native speakers, which leads to frustration and self-criticism. Additionally, how students and teachers view pronunciation can also affect speaking success. Ortiz-Gómez (2023) clarified that in Costa Rica, many English teachers believed British or American accents were the standard to aim for. Some teachers felt their accent impeded communication during professional exchanges namely when they feared being judged. This is referred to as native-speakerism which can negatively affect both teachers and learners by setting unrealistic expectations. Hence, it's important to incorporate oral communication into school assessments and curricula to ensure that speaking is focused on in both teaching and learning (Ibna Seraj & Habil, 2021).

Effective Ways to Improve Speaking

Many students employ several strategies to improve speaking proficiency. To manage anxiety, Humphries (2011) reports that learners who work with friends or in small groups experience less pressure and more encouragement. Preparation is another key strategy. Bialen (2025) describe how students benefit from rehearsing their responses, using self-talk, and mentally preparing before speaking in class. Accepting own mistakes as part of the learning process (Bialen, 2025) in addition to receiving constructive, private, and supportive feedback can avoid damaging learners' confidence (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014). Additionally, students can benefit from self-regulation strategies, including goal setting, self-monitoring, and reflection to enhance performance and autonomy through independent practice (Aregu, 2013). Self-correction and reflection through journals or class discussions promote awareness and independent improvement (Islam & Stapa, 2023). Class participation and motivation to develop oral skills can be improved in safe environments where fear and anxiety are low (Bouzar, 2019; Nuraini, 2016). Furthermore, curriculum design should integrate real-world tasks and authentic oral activities in assessments to ensure speaking is not overlooked (Ibna Seraj & Habil, 2021).

Students' Beliefs about Oral Corrective Feedback

Oral corrective feedback (OCF) has gained increasing attention in recent years. It refers to responses to spoken errors that aim to guide learners toward more accurate language use. Feedback can take various forms, ranging from explicit correction to more subtle prompts such as clarification requests (E.g. "Sorry?") or paralinguistic cues. Most ESL learners view oral corrective feedback as essential for speaking development. Students express appreciation for both teacher and peer feedback when it is constructive and promotes self-correction. Although teacher feedback is often viewed as more reliable, peer feedback is seen as less threatening and conducive to collaboration (Sato, 2013). Students generally express positive

attitudes toward oral corrective feedback regarding it as a valuable tool for developing language proficiency. However, many express concern about how feedback can interrupt their speaking, especially when it is frequent, abrupt, or delivered in front of others (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014). Students tend to prefer feedback that is timely, clear, and supportive. They respond well to feedback methods that promote autonomy and allow them to make their own corrections (Zhu & Wang, 2019). When correction is perceived as intrusive or overly frequent, it can be discouraging and may hinder speaking fluency (Agudo, 2015). Although students generally value the role of feedback in improving accuracy, they also emphasize the importance of maintaining a smooth flow of speech during communication (Ha & Murray, 2023; Kaivanpanah et al., 2015). Individual learner characteristics, such as personality, confidence, and anxiety, also influence their feedback preferences. Whereas advanced and motivated learners seek detailed correction to improve accuracy (Ha et al., 2021), more anxious students favor indirect or delayed feedback that protect their confidence (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014). In addition, beliefs about the type and timing of OCF vary significantly. In Chinese junior secondary classrooms, for instance. Students and teachers differed in their preferences for immediate versus delayed feedback, as well as in their views on whether feedback should be based on the severity of the error (Ye & Hu, 2023). According to Agudo (2015), feedback that considers learner preferences and emotional responses is more effective in supporting both fluency and accuracy.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

Despite a growing emphasis on English communication skills, ESL students continue to face substantial barriers in developing spoken proficiency. Although oral corrective feedback is recognized as a valuable tool, little is known about how students perceive the feedback they receive and whether it aligns with their learning preferences and needs to speak fluently and flawlessly. The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges that ESL students face at Michigan State University in improving their speaking skills and to investigate their beliefs about oral corrective feedback. The study seeks to understand the types and timing of feedback students find most effective in supporting their fluency and accuracy in addition to how they handle mistakes and anxiety. This research attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1. What are the challenges ESL learners' at MSU face in developing their speaking fluency and accuracy and their suggested practical solutions?

RQ2. How do these ESL learners perceive the effectiveness of OCF in improving their oral proficiency?

Methods

This qualitative research is a case study aiming at exploring and understanding the ESL students' perceptions towards English speaking proficiency and their preferences regarding receiving oral corrective feedback at Michigan State University (Creswell, 2015). Participants were 48 students who were enrolled at MSU during the academic year 2024-2025 as

international students speaking English as a second language. Most participants (62.5%) were between 18 and 21 years old, followed by 12.5% aged 26-30, 8.3% aged 41 and above, 6.3% aged 31-35, 6.3% aged 36-40, and only 4.2% aged 22-25. In terms of academic level, 35.4% of the students were sophomores, 27.1% were freshmen, 16.7% were doctoral students, 12.5% were pursuing a master's degree, 6.3% were seniors, and only 2.1% were juniors (see Table 1). Additionally, the linguistic backgrounds of participants reflected considerable diversity. Japanese was the most frequently reported first language (35%), followed by Arabic (25%) and Hindi (20.4%). Spanish and Korean were each spoken by 6.3% of participants. Several other languages were each reported by a single respondent.

Table 1: ESL Students' Academic Level

Freshmen	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Master	Doctoral
27.1%	35.4%	2.1%	6.3%	12.5%	16.7%

Moreover, the qualitative data resulting from the semi-structured interviews with 6 ESL participants who filled the questionnaire explore their English language learning backgrounds, views on oral fluency and accuracy, as well as speaking anxiety they experienced in their home country and host institution, MSU. The six ESL students interviewed for this study were four females and two males aged between 18 and 35. Three females were Indian at the sophomore level with another Persian at the Master level whereas one Korean male was sophomore, and the other was Nigerian pursuing a doctoral degree (see Table 2).

Table 2: Interviewees' Academic Level and Origin

Sophomore	Master	Doctoral
3 Indian Females 1 Korean Male	1 Persian Female	1 Nigerian Male

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

The current study employed two data collection tools: the OCF Questionnaire for Students and Teachers and semi-structured interviews. The study data were collected between October and November 2024 during the researcher's stay at MSU as a Fulbright visiting scholar and after receiving the approval of the International Review Board (IRB). The data resulting from the questionnaire were interpreted using descriptive statistics while the interviews were analyzed through thematic coding. The anonymity and confidentiality were ensured to protect the subjects' privacy in this study.

The OCF Questionnaire for Students and Teachers was adapted from Ye and Hu (2024) and filled by 48 ESL international students at MSU. The questionnaire included the following sections: General Attitude toward OCF, OCF Timing, Output-Prompting OCF, Uptake, Input-Providing OCF, Peer OCF, Gravity of Errors, and Paralinguistic OCF. Three sections were added by the researcher: Speaking Accuracy including accuracy in pronunciation, application of grammar rules, and correct word choice, a demography section, and a final section encouraging students to take part in an individual interview by voluntarily typing

their email address. Each section included 3-6 items to be rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire aimed to uncover students' beliefs about receiving feedback on their speaking fluency and accuracy including the preferred provider whether teachers or peers, the timing of OCF i.e. immediately after the error or delayed, the severity of the error necessitating correction, and the use of cues and nonverbal feedback.

After the completion of the questionnaire by the 48 participants, 6 of them consented to be interviewed individually for 25-40 minutes. These semi-structured interviews were conducted online due to time constraints. Interview questions investigated the interviewees' exposure to the English language before joining MSU, their preferences for being corrected by teachers and/or peers, their major accuracy problems in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, the choice of OCF timing whether immediate or delayed, the use of cues and paralinguistic feedback, the necessity to correct errors based on their severity level, and ways they handle speaking anxiety.

Results

The students' responses resulting from the questionnaire and individual interviews are reported and analyzed here after.

Frequent Language errors

The OCF questionnaire, completed by 48 ESL students at Michigan State University during the 2024-2025 academic year, explored the learners' perspectives on oral corrective feedback. Most students highlighted the prevalence of language errors in ESL learning, with 89.6% identifying pronunciation difficulties as frequent, 87.5% pointing to grammar issues, and 83.4% acknowledging vocabulary mistakes. All respondents (100%) agreed that oral error correction helps students learn English, and 91.7% expressed a desire to receive such feedback themselves. However, fewer students supported the correction of less frequent (64.6%) or non-communicative (62.5%) errors. When asked whether all errors should be corrected, opinions varied, with a significant proportion expressing disagreement (37.5%). In terms of corrective responsibility, respondents strongly believed that teachers should intervene: 91.7% supported the correction of pronunciation errors, 89.6% favored addressing inappropriate language use, 87.5% favored grammar correction, and 85.5% emphasized vocabulary feedback.

Oral Feedback Timing and Techniques

The 48 participants' preferences for the timing of feedback varied by task type. In fluency-oriented tasks, students preferred delayed correction, with 77.1% favoring feedback after the activity and 68.8% supporting it at the end of class. For accuracy-based tasks, slightly higher percentages preferred feedback after class (79.2%), after the activity (79.1%), and at the end of class (81.3%). Regarding correction techniques, 64.6% supported teachers pausing to allow self-correction, and 72.9% favored teachers requesting repetition saying "sorry?", for instance, as an error indication, and 66.7% approved of implicit reformulations. 63.1% agreed

with using an emphatic tone to highlight errors; and 72.9% preferred indirect prompts to encourage awareness and revision. There was a high consensus on the importance of student repetition following correction. 93.8% of respondents believed students should repeat corrected forms and that teachers should facilitate this opportunity. Additionally, 95.9% believed repetition reinforces learning, and 85.4% stated it signals acquisition of the corrected item.

Peer versus Teacher Feedback

Peer correction was valued but less favored as highlighted by the responses in the questionnaire. Nearly 90% of participants appreciated observing correction of peers, and 79.2% supported mutual correction among students. Yet only 58.3% approved of teachers inviting peer correction during class. Although 79.2% wanted peers to correct them, 41.7% did not favor peer correction or were opposed. Regarding teacher feedback methods, students preferred clear and direct correction. A majority (89.6%) believed teachers should provide the correct form explicitly while 87.5% supported grammatical explanation. Additionally, 83.3% wanted teachers to explicitly indicate that an error had occurred. Feedback on newly learned material was especially valued (97.9%), along with corrections for errors caused by unfamiliarity or carelessness (both supported by 81.3%). The role of paralinguistic cues was also highlighted: 87.5% supported gestures or facial expressions used implicitly by instructors, 79.2% supported their explicit use, and 89.6% felt such cues were more effective when used with verbal feedback.

Fluency-Oriented Approach in Content-Based Courses

Based on the data resulting from the semi-structured interviews, many participants reported beginning English language exposure at a young age namely through school-based instruction which helped them develop their oral fluency before enrolling in MSU. For instance, the Nigerian student described English as the official language of instruction throughout Nigeria's educational system. He began learning English at age three, "We were colonized by England...so we use English as our official language....As long as you're literate, you should know how to speak English." However, he also highlighted that "There are people who go to school, finish elementary and even high school, but they can't speak English." Similarly, an Indian student noted her early exposure to English, "I studied in a "Christian missionary school where English was the first language....For almost 16 years of my life, it was necessary for me to learn English." Despite her formal education, she struggled with her accent which created initial communication barriers in the U.S.: "My accent was a major factor in my communication...I couldn't get the right words out at the right place." For the Persian student who moved to the United States at age ten, she started learning English informally through media consumption before joining formal schooling, "I was only learning the basics...I just learned English from watching cartoons and movies."

Moreover, there was a consensus among all interviewees that content courses at Michigan State University such as astronomy or economics, rarely focused on correcting linguistic errors. One student summarized this perspective by saying, "Since it's not an English class,

once the message is perfectly passed, you just overlook the mistake.” Another stated, “I’m in biomedical sciences. Our concern is the biomedical information not the language.” One interviewee clarified that even if students make pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary mistakes, teachers ignored them. “I don’t think teachers correct mistakes in like Business or philosophy classes. I haven’t seen anyone correct them. They just ask students to repeat what they said a lot of times when they don’t understand what they’re saying. Unless it’s like a writing class or an English class, they don’t correct students’ mistakes.” Another student added “I think it depends on the class. If it’s a language class, the teacher is supposed to correct the student’s mistakes so they can learn.” But “if it’s not a language class, it’s not necessary. If the teacher fixes the student’s mistakes, then the students can be embarrassed. They no longer want to answer questions or raise their hands.” “As long as you are understood, it’s okay,” one student remarked, “even if you make pronunciation or grammar mistakes.” Yet this tolerance also raised concerns. One student noted, “If students are not being corrected in subject courses, they’re going to make the same mistakes after graduation,” which could negatively affect the language development of international students who are not enrolled in ESL classes.

Ongoing Challenges in Speaking Accuracy and Practical Solutions

Regarding personal language development, students interviewed acknowledged both awareness and challenges in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Examples of pronunciation challenges were common across language groups. One Indian student observed difficulties with specific sounds: “Words that start with ‘th,’ like ‘thought’—I cannot pronounce it clearly. I say /t/ instead. I have an accent every single time.” A Korean student shared, “I have difficulty pronouncing ‘squirrel’—I say ‘scroll’ instead.” The same speaker noted the challenge of distinguishing between the ‘r’ and ‘l’ sounds, which is a known issue in Korean English phonology. Grammar challenges were similarly identified. Mistakes with tense, subject-verb agreement, and auxiliary verbs were frequently mentioned. As one student recalled, “Like, ‘Did you went to the park?’ instead of ‘Did you go to the park?’” Another added, “Sometimes I say, ‘She do something’ instead of ‘She does something.’” In terms of vocabulary, many students indicated that limited lexical knowledge occasionally hindered their ability to express themselves. One Indian student reflected, “I do make a lot of mistakes compared to when I’m writing...there are a lot of filler words which are not grammatically right, but they make sense in a conversation.” Another student added that certain words or phrases from British English conflicted with American equivalents: “In India, we say ‘lift’ but here it’s ‘elevator’; ‘dustbin’ instead of ‘trash can.’”

According to interview data, the strategies to improve speaking fluency and accuracy varied. To reduce anxiety when delivering a presentation, one participant explained “you should present it first to your supervisor and to your classmates. Smaller audience will have to hear you and then you make all the mistakes. They will correct you and then you keep rehearsing and finally feel more confident... At the end, you will be ready to present it to a larger audience.” Another student confessed that learning English was enhanced when she started “talking to different types of people. You should not only talk with international students. If you talk to English native students or professors, you’ll see that they have a better vocabulary

that they use on daily basis.” However, some participants clarified that “being friends with native students is not always possible seen the nature of students’ communities in U.S. universities.” Another student also stressed the potential to learn “a lot of English when communicating with others mainly when I observe them pronounce various English words.” She added that “You should not put yourself down by comparing yourself to others.” Each person learns the English language at his/her own pace because “people are different.” Additionally, several participants emphasized reading novels and maintaining vocabulary notebooks. One participant shared: “Whenever I come across a word I don’t know, I write it in my notebook and later look it up in the dictionary. That’s how I improve my speaking.” Some cultural factors also shaped views on language instruction. A student from India recalled that English was the only language allowed in her school, which significantly contributed to her fluency. She recommended this approach, suggesting that full immersion without breaks enhanced her language learning. Technology was also viewed as a valuable resource. One participant noted, “Now technology exists. You can search any word up instead of asking a friend or using a dictionary.” Yet, while tools are available, consistent use and the motivation to self-correct were seen as crucial. “You should put in more effort because there is no one to tell you what’s wrong. You need to find it yourself.”

Interviewees’ Perspectives on Speaking Proficiency and Oral Feedback

Participants commonly emphasized the importance of achieving both fluency and accuracy in their English-speaking skills. One student explained that while casual conversations could tolerate minor mistakes, professional communication required a higher level of correctness. She expressed a goal of being “95% fluent” in formal contexts. Another student echoed this sentiment, stating, “I like both. I want to be fluent and speak correctly.” These perspectives highlight the dual goals international students hold: to communicate efficiently in social settings and to demonstrate linguistic competence in academic or professional environments. The data indicate that students are aware of the functional differences between fluency and accuracy and aim to adapt their speech accordingly. Their reflections also suggest that achieving this balance requires ongoing feedback, practice and a supportive learning environment. Moreover, students expressed a strong preference for constructive feedback especially when it was delivered in a private or non-embarrassing manner. One participant stated that public correction could be uncomfortable and preferred individualized feedback. Although some participants appreciated the flexibility of American classrooms, they also desired more structured correction to address persistent errors. The feedback preferences reported suggest a need for context-sensitive correction practices that balance learner comfort with opportunities for improvement.

Discussion and Conclusion

The answers to the 2 research questions are discussed below.

RQ1: What are the challenges ESL learners' at MSU face in developing their speaking fluency and accuracy and suggested practical solutions?

The results of this study demonstrate that ESL students at MSU continue to face significant challenges in developing oral proficiency despite prior exposure to English in schools in their hometown. Survey responses revealed that over 80% of participants acknowledged common difficulties in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary especially in spontaneous speech. Interviews further illustrated how some students struggled with specific phonemes such as “th” and with contrasts like /r/ and /l/ in addition to persistent grammatical errors such as subject-verb disagreement. Vocabulary limitations, including confusion between British and American English usage, were also highlighted as barriers to effective communication. Although participants were exposed to English early at school, they emphasized that these challenges remained even after enrolling in MSU. This suggests that spontaneous oral production is highly demanding. Learners also expressed concern that in U.S. content-based courses, where fluency is prioritized over accuracy, the absence of corrective feedback could result in fossilization of errors. Their experiences in university content courses often lacked focused language support, leading some to worry about missed opportunities for language development. Participants also shared some practical strategies to improve their speaking proficiency by reading novels and consulting the dictionary to look up unfamiliar words. Rehearsing newly learned vocabulary and grammatical structures while trying to articulate various English sounds correctly was highlighted as a main strategy for effective and accurate communication. Participants also demonstrated strong initiative in using self-regulated learning strategies such as rehearsing multiple times their presentations before actual delivery in the classroom to decrease anxiety and maximize performance. Additionally, oral practices with speakers of English whether native or international students can enhance their oral proficiency besides using technology mainly for self-correction in the absence of teacher and peer feedback.

These findings are consistent with the literature reviewed earlier, where several studies identified similar obstacles to oral proficiency. Hu and AlSaqqaf (2023) and Islam and Stapa (2023) emphasized that limited vocabulary and poor pronunciation remain pervasive difficulties among ESL learners. The ongoing influence of learners' first language and regional English variations echoes observations by Ortiz-Gómez (2023), who highlighted how sociolinguistic and phonological backgrounds interfere with the acquisition of target-like forms. Similarly, the prevalence of speaking anxiety identified in this study parallels the concerns raised by Humphries (2011) and Anthony and Wilang (2023) who stressed that fear of mistakes and public correction inhibit learners' willingness to communicate. Although participants valued fluency and smooth communication in content-based courses (Ha & Murray, 2023), they expressed their concerns about the fluency-focused orientation of U.S. content courses which can raise the risk of fossilized errors in higher education. Moreover, the importance of rehearsing responses and presentations as highlighted by most participants to maximize performance is aligned with the findings of Bialen (2025) in addition to engaging in independent practice to reduce anxiety as cited by Aregu (2013). These results provide a detailed answer to the first research question.

RQ2: How do these ESL learners perceive the effectiveness of OCF in improving their oral proficiency?

Based on the questionnaire data, nearly all ESL students strongly consider oral corrective feedback an essential element of second language learning. Teacher- feedback was the most desirable form of correction, particularly when it targets errors that impede communication or involve material students have recently studied. While learners recognize the value of peer feedback and indirect strategies, there remains a clear preference for correction that is timely, explicit, and delivered by the instructor. This affirms the central role of the teacher as a linguistic authority and feedback facilitator in ESL contexts. Regarding feedback timing, students confirmed it depends on the nature of the activity. In fluency tasks, delayed correction is preferred to preserve communicative flow, whereas in accuracy-focused tasks, learners support more immediate intervention. These Learners' receptiveness to indirect cues—such as rising intonation, gestures, and strategic pauses—indicates an openness to subtle, non-disruptive forms of guidance. The data also reflect a clear learner awareness regarding the types of errors that need correction. Feedback should target errors stemming from anxiety, unfamiliarity, or frequency whereas minor or rare mistakes are less likely to be prioritized by students. This suggests that learners appreciate feedback that is relevant and instructionally beneficial ultimately contributing to their long-term development of speaking fluency and accuracy. The strong support for repetition following correction further highlights the pedagogical value of active engagement with the corrected form as a reinforcement strategy. The participants interviewed for this study strongly confirmed that language mistakes whether related to pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary, are generally neglected by teachers in content-based courses. In these courses, instructors' aim is to deliver the content rather than focus on language accuracy. The prevailing pedagogical approach at university appears to prioritize fluency and comprehensibility over correctness. All interviewees welcomed constructive feedback mainly provided by the teacher in a private and constructive manner to protect their confidence.

The results above align closely with existing study findings. Agudo (2015) noted that learners appreciate feedback that balances accuracy with autonomy and supports self-correction in addition to being constructive as stressed by Sato (2013). The preference for selective and meaningful correction parallels the findings by Agudo (2015) who argued that not all errors require intervention, only those that are frequent or communicatively significant. Learners' discomfort with public correction reflects the findings of Zhang and Rahimi (2014), who showed that abrupt or frequent interruption increases anxiety. Similarly, students' emphasis on task-sensitive timing echoes Ye and Hu (2023), who found that students distinguish between immediate and delayed feedback depending on error type and activity focus. Finally, the strong endorsement of repetition as a reinforcement strategy mirrors Bagherzadeh and Derakhshesh (2012), who demonstrated the value of rehearsal for consolidating oral accuracy. It's noteworthy mentioning that speaking skill in general is overlooked in curricula and assessment, which echoed the findings in Ibna Seraj and Habil (2021). These insights provide a comprehensive response to the second research question by clarifying not only

learners' preferences but also their rationale for favoring certain feedback approaches over others.

Conclusion

Speaking is often the skill ESL learners find most difficult to master. Unlike reading or writing, speaking requires immediate thinking, clear pronunciation, and confidence—all in real time. In several studies, fluency and accuracy have emerged as two critical components that ESL learners struggle to balance. This study explored the challenges ESL students face in developing oral proficiency and investigated their perceptions of oral corrective feedback at Michigan State University. The findings from both the survey and interviews reveal that international students continue to struggle with core linguistic features such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, alongside psychological barriers such as anxiety and low confidence. These challenges persist even after years of prior instruction, underscoring the difficulty of producing accurate and fluent speech in spontaneous academic and professional contexts. Additionally, students expressed concern that the fluency-oriented approach in U.S. content-based courses can leave fossilized errors unaddressed. Participants consistently emphasized the vital role of teacher-led feedback, valuing explicit correction, grammatical explanation, and opportunities for repetition as essential for reinforcing learning. At the same time, they demonstrated sensitivity to the timing and manner of feedback delivery preferring delayed correction during fluency activities and more immediate intervention in accuracy-based tasks. Learners also voiced clear preferences for private, constructive correction that protects their confidence while showing mixed attitudes toward peer feedback. These perspectives highlight the dual need for correction strategies that are pedagogically effective and emotionally supportive. Ultimately, developing ESL students' oral proficiency requires more than exposure to communicative environments. It demands intentional, balanced, and respectful feedback practices that foster long-term development of both fluency and accuracy.

Practical Implications

For educators and curriculum designers, the study findings suggest that oral corrective feedback should be integrated more systematically not only in ESL but also in mainstream university courses. Teachers should adopt flexible strategies that adjust feedback timing to the type of task, provide explicit correction when necessary, and allow for repetition to reinforce learning. Sensitivity to learners' emotional needs is equally important, as private and supportive correction helps reduce anxiety and promotes class participation. Universities may also consider training instructors delivering content-based courses to provide language-related support, ensuring that communicative competence develops alongside subject knowledge. By aligning pedagogical practices with learners' expressed preferences, educators can better equip international students with the oral proficiency required to succeed academically, socially, and professionally. Researchers, on the other hand, can conduct a study on a larger sample size of students enrolled in various universities to ensure the generalizability of results regarding the use of OCF to improve learners' speaking fluency and accuracy.

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