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Audience response systems for formative assessment purposes: The impact of individualised feedback on EFL student teachers' receptive skills

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the influence of individualised feedback on the performance of student teachers as EFL learners in oral and written comprehension of (1) the gist, (2) specific information, (3) inferences, and (4) misleading information. Forty-five student teachers were assessed before and after the application of the teaching method along six sessions. The experimental group performed receptive-skills activities based on the typology of their previous mistakes, while the control group did similar generic activities regardless of their mistakes. An in-built Audience Response System (ARS) website was employed for data collection. Both groups obtained similar results in reading, but the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in the listening skill, especially in avoiding misleading information. An exploratory analysis by gender hints at more positive effects of the intervention for women, but more information is required to clarify this and unravel the potential of ARS procedures for personalised formative assessment for language learning purposes.

KEYWORDS: English as a Foreign Language, receptive skills, computer assisted instruction, audience response systems, student teachers, individualised feedback.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Regardless of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogical approach, it is generally assumed that, given that "the acquisition of the components of language (...) is the result of obtaining comprehensible input" (Krashen et al., 2017, p. 2), the role of receptive skills (i.e. listening and reading) is indispensable not only to understand the messages that are received, but also to underpin the development of productive skills (i.e. speaking and writing). For this reason, the receptive mode of communication drives the efforts of multiple studies that aim to analyse the teaching approaches, the theories underlying each *modus operandi*, the agents involved in these practices, the long-used methodologies, and the new trends, as well as the materials that are used in different EFL teaching-learning procedures.

In this context, one of the promising lines of EFL research is the use of diagnostic data for learning purposes, which is known as formative assessment (Winstone & Boud, 2020). This type of evaluation can be materialised in the form of *feedback* if the collected information related to EFL expression or understanding is used and transmitted to learners with the aim of improving their performance. In fact, this teaching procedure has been shown to be one of the most productive means to boost students' learning across fields (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This feedback's efficacy, coupled with the possibilities of pedagogical individualisation offered by different technologies, pave the way for interesting EFL didactic procedures that need to be evaluated.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to assess the suitability of an EFL reading and listening teaching methodology used with 2nd-year student teachers from the Faculty of Education in Albacete (University of Castilla-La Mancha). This methodology was based on individualised feedback and involved the use of an Audience Response System (ARS) online teaching tool to collect and handle responses. This information was managed differently, depending on the group: the experimental group performed activities addressing their personal EFL oral and written comprehension flaws in previous tests, whereas the control group carried out comprehension activities not necessarily connected to their deficiencies. The procedure was founded on the error-based learning approach as a means to elaborate on the feedback activities for the pupils. This approach exploits the mistakes learners make by turning them into means to encourage their improvement (Darabi et al., 2018).

With this in mind, the study addresses the following research question: What is the effect of individualised feedback designed with the aid of ARS on student teachers' *performance* in EFL reading and listening skill tests? While gender differences will also be succinctly explored, the variability in sample distribution prevents this from being a central part of the piece of research.

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2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Receptive skills in L2 learning

A few decades ago, it was assumed that the mastery of a foreign language was mainly a matter of being able to produce it via speaking and writing (Nunan, 2002). Nevertheless, this neglect of the listening and reading skills is now widely rejected, as a consequence of the premises of the natural method (Krashen et al., 2017). Although many factors such as age and psychological, personal, and sociocultural aspects have their part in the process of language acquisition, input plays a prominent role in it (Gass & Mackey, 2015). As a matter of fact, extensive reading has been shown to enhance vocabulary learning, which, in turn, grounds the development of second language skills (Meganathan et al., 2019).

Indeed, studies have revealed that one's receptive exposure to a foreign language correlates with one's proficiency in that language (De Cat, 2020) and that, conversely, once a certain level of competence is achieved, if input is not received for a long time, it tends to decline (Mickan et al., 2019). Therefore, as Verspoor et al. (2008) state, input is essential for both development and maintenance of a language. In this regard, despite their misleading name –receptive skills– listening and reading skills do not consist merely in passively *receiving* information. They require active handling of the elements of the oral or written text along with the ones stored in memory to recognize, select, and relate information to construct meaning (Harding et al., 2015; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

2.2. Comprehension processes

Oral and written comprehension are complex tasks for EFL learners. Particularly, they require the student, on the one hand, to decode information and process vocabulary and syntactic elements, and on the other, to put into practice metacognitive thinking (Yamashita, 2022). In this vein, it is estimated that metacognitive awareness accounts for almost 10% of listening comprehension ability (In'nami et al., 2022). Aryadoust (2020), who performed a review of comprehension subskills by analysing 192 publications, highlights that reading involves scanning, matching keywords, skimming, connecting, and speculating, among other tasks. By the same token, listening involves input meaning construction while relating the new information to the one stored in long-term memory (Rost, 2016; Vandergrift, 2015) as well as putting into practice skills of understanding general and specific information, acknowledging the text structure, connecting information, and so on (Aryadoust, 2020).

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Thus, learners use a wide range of strategies when they try to decode an oral or written source. These strategies are managed by a set of skills, allowing the individual to grasp different kinds of information by using different techniques (Manoli & Papadopoulou, 2012). As they operate within the frame of receptive skills, in order to avoid misunderstandings, they will henceforth be referred to as subskills. Leucht et al. (2010) and Ismayilli-Karakoc (2019) observe that most of the comprehension processes involved in written and oral texts understanding are analogous, and thus, use similar subskills. The latter (2019) identifies 10 subskills shared between reading and listening comprehension, including understanding main ideas and general information, understanding details and specific information, understanding the attitude and purpose of the source, inferring information, and summarizing messages, along with others.

These subskills are generally divided into two main groups according to the requested type of information: lower and higher comprehension subskills (Harding et al., 2015). Lower subskills comprise the recognition of words and the ability to identify basic combinations of words through grammar rules and structures. On the other hand, higher subskills encompass, among others, synthesizing information, avoiding incorrect interpretations, and making inferences (Srisang & Everatt, 2021). The former group is more closely related to bottom-up decoding processing and the latter to top-down interpreting processing (Grabe & Yamashita, 2022; Vandergrift, 2015). This study draws on the works of Aryadoust (2020), Hedgcock and Ferris (2018), Ismayilli-Karakoc (2019), Nunan (2002), Song (2008), and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR] (CE 2001, 2020), to focus on different kinds of subskills according to the type of information they aim to retrieve (Pérez-Segura et al., 2022). For practical reasons, only four of these have been selected. Whereas the first two have been chosen because they are the two most basic and common tasks in reading for information (i.e., skimming and scanning), the remaining two (i.e., inferring and managing distractors) have been selected due to their relevance as receptive strategies (CE, 2020) and their less-explored nature. Skimming, scanning, and inferring appear throughout most of the above-cited resources and are conceptualised in this work as follows:

- Understanding the gist (general information): this kind of information refers to the main ideas. Although it may not be explicitly articulated in many cases, it represents the essence and guiding thread of the text.

- Identifying concrete information (specific information): this type of information involves particular and fairly small portions of text, which are always explicitly stated along with the content.

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- Deducing implicit information (inference): this information is not explicit and must be created in the readers' minds by combining what they read with the background knowledge they have (Srisang & Everatt, 2021).

- Avoiding misleading information (finding the requested information by handling distractors or misleading pieces of texts appropriately): this variety of information comes into play in relation to the questions that are asked about the understanding of the text. It generally corresponds to explicit pieces of text, which are presented with subtle nuances that differ from the original ideas. As this kind of information is the most intricate of the four tasks, a simplistic example is presented to illustrate it: if a text asserts that *Ana, who was 62 two years ago, is planning to retire*, a question that requires avoiding misleading information would be *How old is Ana?*

The conceptualisation of foreign-language oral and written comprehension as constructs, made up of different components according to the nature of the information in the questions, presents important benefits in terms of diagnosis and teaching-learning process planning (Harding et al., 2015; Ismayilli-Karakoc, 2019). Indeed, assessing students in a more detailed fashion provides valuable information that can be useful for both teachers –to guide their pedagogical tasks– and learners –to acknowledge their mistakes and learn from them.

2.3. Individualised feedback and metacognition

One of the common strategies to foster learning consists of giving feedback, which is "information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81) with the aim of bridging the gap between the goal (in instructional contexts, theoretical, procedural, performative, or attitudinal) and the actual level demonstrated by the learner (Ramaprasad, 1983). This information –explicit or implicit, quantitative or qualitative– may refer to an individual or to a group. Since the nature of the student's performance is inherently personal, it follows that such pedagogical information would be most valuable if it is individualised (personalised), and so it seems to be perceived by students (Walker et al., 2020).

In teaching-learning contexts, feedback can be seen as either externally provided or internally generated. Research has focused on the former, which in turn can (1) communicate whether the students' results are correct or not (outcome or verification feedback), or (2) supply more information about the students' current proficiency, the pedagogical goals, the way to

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close any gaps, the nature of the tasks, etc. (elaborative or cognitive feedback) (Harks et al., 2024). Thus, these two types of feedback show a clear connection with the two, opposite, main types of assessment: *summative* and *formative*. Whereas the former, as stated by Winstone and Boud (2020), is more focused on acknowledging the specific level of achievement of each student at the end of the teaching-learning process, the latter attempts to acknowledge learners' levels and use that information to improve. Although feedback is one of the most effective teaching procedures to promote students' learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and boost their motivation and engagement (Pan & Shao, 2020), not every kind is equally beneficial. Harks et al. (2014) as well as Van der Kleij et al. (2015) have found that process-oriented feedback (elaborative feedback) enhances metacognition and is regarded as more useful than the grade-oriented type (verification feedback). In fact, while outcome feedback just informs one of whether the results are correct or not, and thus "provides the least guidance about how to self-regulate", cognitive feedback helps students monitor their performance by enabling them to "recognize important cues (e.g., task features and cognitive activities they engage in while learning) and the relationships of those cues' values to performance" (Butler & Winne, 1995, pp. 252–253). The main differences between outcome and cognitive feedback are shown in Figure 1.

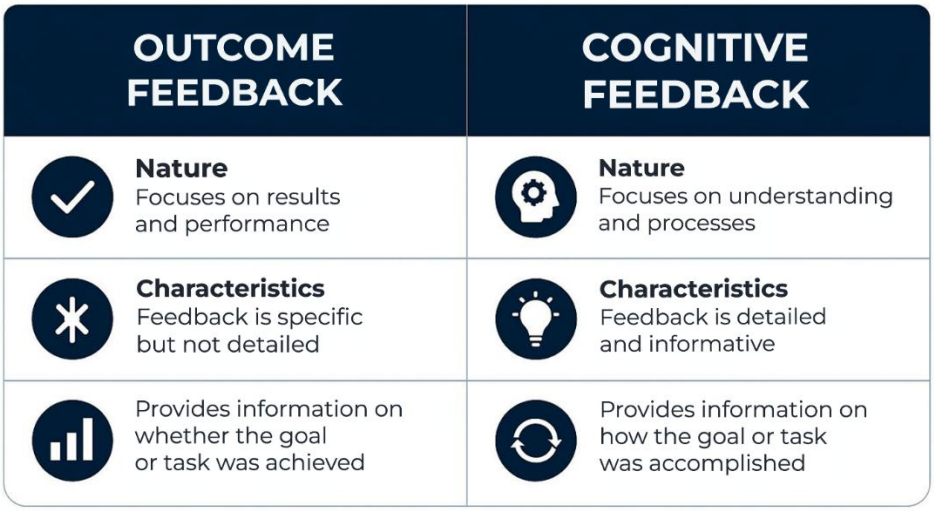

Figure 1. *Outcome vs. cognitive feedback.*

Source: Image generated by the authors using the prompt "Create an infographic comparing outcome vs. cognitive feedback", by Microsoft 365 Copilot, 2026 (https://copilot.microsoft.com).

In EFL teaching, cognitive feedback can be language- or content-oriented, spoken or written; positive or negative; immediate or delayed; global –providing general information for improvement– or targeted –delivering information about specific items to be corrected; in the

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first or in the second language; private or public; computer-based to different degrees, or not computer-based at all; and so on (Alghannam, 2024). As stated, the common ground in every case is the attempt to enhance students' performance at the theoretical (knowledge), procedural (skill), or attitudinal (disposition) level by providing them with specific information. One of the key higher-order-executive-function mechanisms to apply this information to comprehension strategies is metacognition, which is knowledge about the nature of cognition –what it is and how it takes place (Yamashita, 2022). Thus, metacognition has two components: (1) knowledge or awareness, which may be "declarative (knowing what/that), procedural (knowing how), and conditional (knowing when/why) knowledge about person/self, task, and strategies" (Yamashita, 2022, p. 10), and 2) control or regulation, which includes planning, monitoring, and revising.

In EFL teaching, feedback has been adopted for different forms and purposes, and artificial intelligence systems have boosted its personalisation potentiality, particularly in reading and writing (Huang et al., 2023). At university level, Sun and Hwang (2023) analysed the effect of detailed cognitive diagnostic information –including reading skills descriptions and feedback about weak areas– on the EFL reading comprehension of Chinese undergraduate students. Their findings showed significant improvements among those who had received such information compared to those who had not. However, Bown (2017) contrasted the effect of verification and elaborative feedback on 113 Emirati university students' EFL reading comprehension and only found benefits for the latter in low-proficiency participants. On the other hand, Razagifard et al. (2011) detected significant improvement in reading comprehension in 60 Iranian 18-to-20-year-old upper-intermediate female students under a computer-mediated answer-until-correct feedback methodology, which makes students respond to questions by selecting among multiple-choice items until they choose the right option. Regarding EFL listening comprehension, Min et al. (2022) provided detailed cognitive diagnostic information and training, similar to Sun and Hwang (2023), to 240 first-year undergraduate students from China. They showed improvements in the listening skill and subskills –including understanding the gist and specific information– of intermediate effect size.

2.4. Computer-based feedback and EFL learning

As the utility of feedback as a tool to boost students' learning has become widely accepted, different software and devices have been put to its service over the last decades, and more prominently so with the ubiquity of artificial intelligence tools (Huang et al., 2023). Van der Kleij et al. (2015) have confirmed the suitability of computer-based tools to design and provide

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feedback. The results of their meta-analysis showed that effect sizes are larger at the level of university than of primary and secondary education, moderate in immediate and small in delayed feedback, and large in mathematics, moderate in science and social sciences, and small in languages. Furthermore, a recent meta-analysis on the effect of feedback in computer-assisted language learning showed that this type of feedback is more effective in the improvement of the oral skills than in the written ones (Saad-Mohamed, 2020). The effect size was reported according to Hedges' *g*, and it was of .41 in listening comprehension (small effect size), of .9 in speaking (medium-to-large effect size), of .03 in reading comprehension, and of .06 in writing (insignificant effect size).

In the present study, an Audience Response System (ARS) was employed. This system allows one to answer questions in real time with the aid of personal devices –whether they be clickers, smartphones, tablets, or computers. The use of ARS has shown positive results in the EFL teaching-learning process (Alghamdi & Shah, 2018). In general, this system involves the development of multiple-choice tests, which are particularly useful for the assessment of EFL receptive skills in comparison with gap-fill tasks because the latter also requires productive elements, while the former, if properly designed with distractors, is focused strictly on receptive knowledge and reduces the cognitive load of the task (March et al., 2021; O'Grady, 2021).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Design

The present quasi-experimental study is aimed at assessing the effectiveness of feedback in the development of EFL reading and listening skills. Performance is assessed and processed through an ARS, and, based on this information, externally-provided, private, individualised, cognitive –elaborative– written, content-oriented, delayed, targeted feedback is provided in the second language (EFL). At metacognitive level, this information will offer declarative knowledge about subskills comprehension so that students can regulate their interaction with the oral and written texts in terms of planning, monitoring, and revising.

To appraise the efficacy of the procedure, a pretest was administered in the first session and a posttest in the last (sixth) session. In the lessons in between, the students were divided into two groups. The students of the control group received four generic activities and had to choose and do two of them, while the students of the experimental group were provided with

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the same activities but had to do the two specified according to their mistakes in the previous session. Therefore, in the feedback section of each session, the experimental group performed activities related to mistakes they had made in the previous session, to reinforce their metacognition processes, while the control group did activities with no regard to their mistakes. The specification of the whole process will be provided in the *Instruments and procedures* section.

3.2. Participants

The study was performed in the Faculty of Education in Albacete of the University of Castilla-La Mancha. The participants were the students from the course English Language and English Language Teaching II, who had taken the course English Language and English Language Teaching I the previous academic year. English was the first foreign language for all of them, taught as a compulsory subject in primary and secondary education from grade 1 up to grade 12. From the standpoint of the development of proficiency in the target language, these two university courses provide speakers of Spanish as a mother tongue with English content of intermediate B1 level according to the CEFR (CE, 2020), which is, roughly speaking and with considerable variance among speakers, the proficiency they exhibit in class. The faculty members responsible for the course were willing to let the authors carry out their investigation during their sessions because the research and course objectives were aligned.

The final set of participants, ranging from 18 to 22 years old ($\bar{X}$ = 20.56, SD = 3.35), derived from the convenience sampling process detailed below and included 45 students: 22 students in the control group (14 women and 8 men), and 23 students in the experimental group (15 women and 8 men). The participants belonged to the four current primary education teacher groups, which encompass 190 students; however, it was deemed convenient that only those who had completed every session would be finally included in the research sample. Before the study, the nature of the investigation was carefully considered, and a detailed plan was devised to ensure that the participants were thoroughly informed about and freely consented to their involvement. The plan was validated by the Social Research Ethics Committee from the University of Castilla-La Mancha (reference code: CAU-632280-B1G9). The students received a document with all this information and details of the manner in which all the data, in compliance with data protection laws, would be handled. All the students enrolled in the English Language and English Language Teaching II course were invited to participate in the study, and those who agreed to the terms of the investigation signed their consent to take part in it.

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3.3. Instruments and procedures

This piece of research involved the use of written and oral texts both in the pre- and posttests and in the in-between sessions. Two procedures were followed to support the suitability of the instruments used to measure EFL comprehension in these groups. First, the texts were selected from a website of the British Council (https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/), an internationally acknowledged English learning institution that rates its contents according to the proficiency levels of the CEFR (CE, 2020). After that, the resources were assessed by four experts in the English teaching field. Although both these measures followed rigorous guidelines, it cannot be overlooked that the range of each EFL level (in this case, the B1 level) may encompass important differences within it. As the CEFR puts it, the institution itself "does not attempt to define interlevels, which are in principle and in fact of indefinite number" (CE, 2001, p. 17).

The investigation was conducted during six sessions of the English Language and English Language Teaching II course. As already stated, the first and last sessions were used as the pretest and the posttest respectively, while the four in-between sessions were devoted to the application of the procedure. Thus, on each of these days reading and listening activities were carried out. Students' answers were collected with an ARS resource named *Socrative* (https://www.socrative.com/), an online teaching tool particularly devised to host real-time tests in which the students answer the questions through their own personal devices. This platform stores the responses and presents the information neatly so that it can be easily analysed afterwards by the researcher in order to devise personalised feedback. After a brief introduction, due to its simple design and the participants' familiarity with information and communication technology, the experience unfolded without particular technical issues.

The procedure will be described in the following lines. Hereafter, unless otherwise stated, it must be assumed that all the details of the practice refer to both skills, which were addressed concurrently following identical processes. Figure 2 may be helpful to illustrate the process more comprehensibly.

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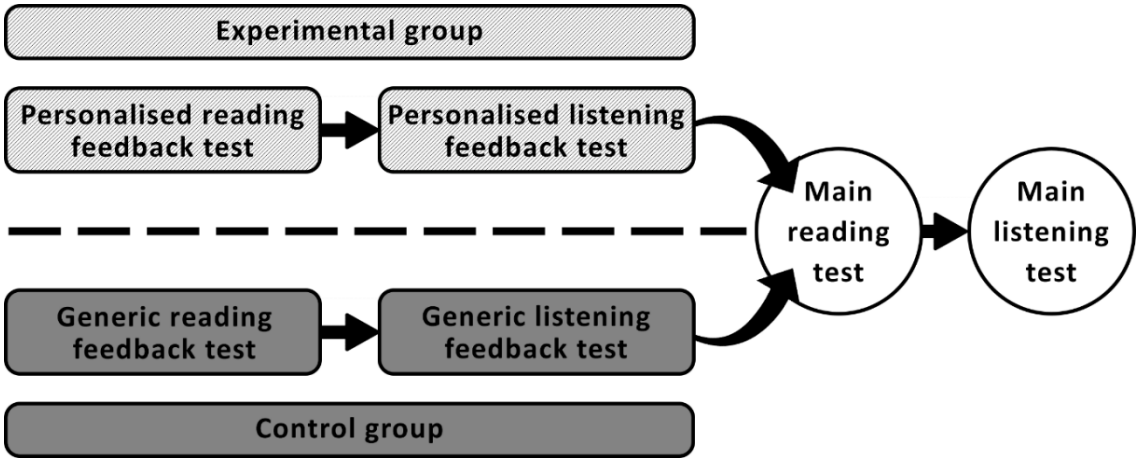

Figure 2. *Description of the research procedure.*

In every session (including the pre- and the posttests), the participants carried out both a reading and a listening test (henceforth these formal tests will be called *main tests*, as reflected in Figure 1) and a personalised reading and a listening feedback test (from this point forward these resources will be referred to as *feedback tests*). The length of the main tests was similar: the reading tests ranged from 275 to 300 words and the listening files ranged from 1 min 50 s to 2 min 30 s and fluctuated in length, averaging 300 words. The nature of the feedback tests will be discussed when these tests are introduced.

To establish the kinds of questions for the main tests, the works of Nunan (2002), Aryadoust (2020), Ismayilli-Karakoc (2019), and the CEFR (CE, 2001, 2020) were studied. The results of this analysis allowed us to constitute four different subskills for both the reading and listening skills as they appear in Table 1 (Authors, 2022). Every main test included two questions of each type, adding up to eight multiple-choice questions with three options per test. Appendix 1 includes a sample reading main test with the questions labelled according to their typology. It must be noted that this labelling was not included in the copy the students received to perform the task.

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Subskills	***Reading subskills***	***Listening subskills***
Understanding the gist (GI)	General Information (RGI)	General Information (LGI)
Identifying concrete information (SI)	Specific Information (RSI)	Specific Information (LSI)
Deducing implicit information (II)	Inferring Information (RII)	Inferring information (LII)
Comprehending the requested information and avoiding distractors or misleading information (IM/D)	Avoiding information matching (RIM)	Distractors (LD)

Table 1. General, reading, and listening subskills.

Before taking the main tests, in every session, students also worked on a short text and a short audio clip with activities (feedback tests). The texts for the reading feedback tests were also obtained from the English learning section of the British Council website, whereas the audio files for the listening feedback tests were retrieved from the English Listening Lesson Library Online (ELLLO) (https://elllo.org/). The length of these written sources averaged about 100 words, whereas the oral sources, of about 45 seconds long, had an average length of 120 words. They also included a set of four blocks of short activities for each skill, according to the typology shown in Table 1 (one block per subskill). General and inferring information questions were open-ended, whereas specific and avoid-information-matching questions were close-ended and dichotomous (True/False).

The questions on both the main tests and the feedback tests were identical for the experimental and the control groups. In the main tests, all the students were requested to answer all the questions, while in the feedback tests, due to time constraints, they were supposed to do just two out of the four blocks of activities. The difference between groups stemmed from (1) the criterion of selection for these two blocks of tasks, and (2) the specific formation of question types in the experimental group. In relation to the former (1), for the members of the experimental group, the two subskills in which they, individually, had made more mistakes in the previous main tests informed the two blocks of activities they would do in the feedback tests in the following session. On the other hand, the students of the control group did the two blocks of activities they chose, regardless of their mistakes (see Figure 3 to observe a sample of the feedback activities for the reading skill). Furthermore, although the feedback tests were the same for both groups, the individuals in the experimental one had each block of activities named according to the kind of subskill it addressed (as reflected in Figure 3), and the specific sections to be completed were highlighted. These differences, coupled with the fact that at the

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beginning of the study (and throughout it) the experimental group was instructed in the typology of questions, would presumably favour these students' metacognitive awareness.

An example of the reading skill will serve to illustrate the link between the main and the feedback tests. Appendix 1 will be the reference for the former and Figure 3 the sample of the latter. If a student from the experimental group wrongly answered questions 1, 2 (labelled as general information questions) and 5 (categorised as an avoid-information-matching question) of the main test, in the following session they had to do the feedback test blocks of activities related to general information and avoid information matching, as highlighted in Figure 3. The selection criteria for those cases in which students made a similar number of mistakes in more than two skills established that the more basic typologies (general and specific information questions) prevailed over the others. However, if a student from the control group failed to answer the same questions of the main test correctly, the following day two out of the four different feedback blocks of activities would have to be chosen according to their will.

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Until the discovery of Lake Turcana's stone tools, the oldest examples of this technology were the Oldowan tools from Tanzania, which date from about 2.6 million years ago. Scientists don't know exactly who made the tools from this latest find. But they think that it might have been a species called Australopithecus afarensis. This surprised the researchers because they didn't think that these ape-like species were particularly smart. Dr Ignacio de la Torre, from University College London's Institute of Archaeology, described this as "a game-changing" find. "It's the most important discovery of the last 50 years," he told BBC News.

GENERAL INFORMATION	**SPECIFIC INFORMATION**
What is the new find the text discusses?	Do you think that the archaeologists thought the Australopithecus afarensis were able to do what they did? Answer Yes/No and underline in black the words from the text that support your answer.
INFERRING	**AVOID INFORMATION MATCHING**
Why does Dr. de la Torre say that their discovery is a 'game-changing' find?	Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)? Underline in blue/red the evidence you find. - Oldowan tools are the oldest tools found so far. - The specialists are sure that the tools were made by the Australopithecus afarensis.

CONTROL GROUP

Until the discovery of Lake Turcana's stone tools, the oldest examples of this technology were the Oldowan tools from Tanzania, which date from about 2.6 million years ago. Scientists don't know exactly who made the tools from this latest find. But they think that it might have been a species called Australopithecus afarensis. This surprised the researchers because they didn't think that these ape-like species were particularly smart. Dr Ignacio de la Torre, from University College London's Institute of Archaeology, described this as "a game-changing" find. "It's the most important discovery of the last 50 years," he told BBC News.

ACTIVITY 1	**ACTIVITY 2**
What is the new find the text discusses?	Do you think that the archaeologists thought the Australopithecus afarensis were able to do what they did? Answer Yes/No and underline in black the words from the text that support your answer.
ACTIVITY 3	**ACTIVITY 4**
Why does Dr. de la Torre say that their discovery is a 'game-changing' find?	Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)? Underline in blue/red the evidence you find. - Oldowan tools are the oldest tools found so far. - The specialists are sure that the tools were made by the Australopithecus afarensis.

Figure 3. *Sample of feedback reading activities for the experimental and control groups.*

Figure 4 encompasses the procedure of the first three sessions (as a sample) by group and manifests the differences in the relationship between main tests and feedback tests.

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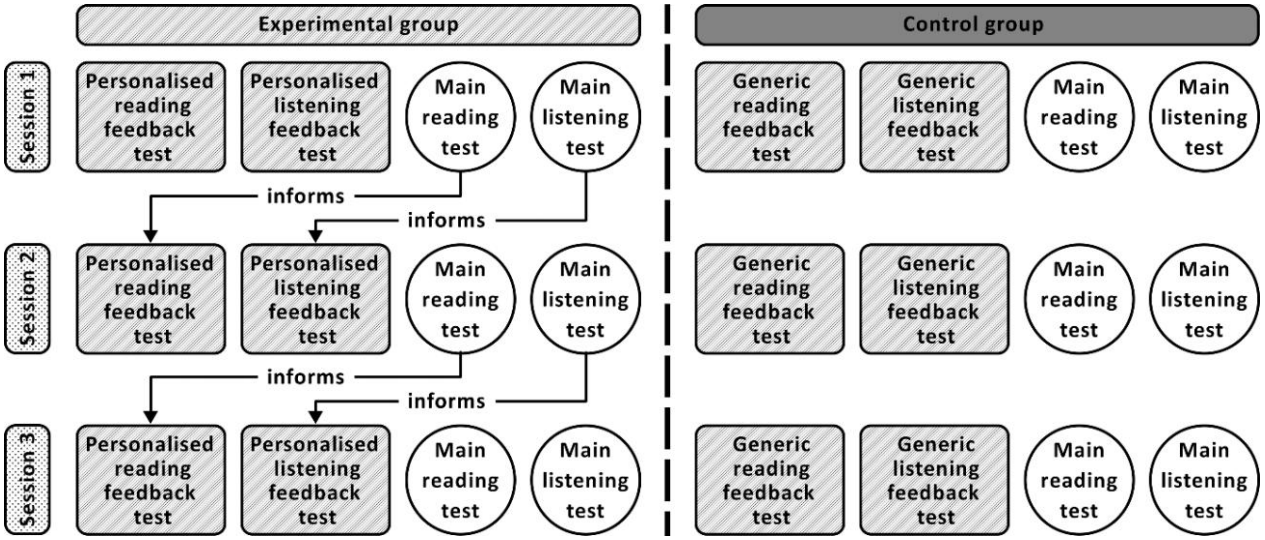

Figure 4. *Procedural differences between groups in the use of main tests for the specification of the experimental activities.*

3.4. Data analysis

The data were initially transferred to an SPSS® file and then analysed with the same statistics software. As the nature of the information did not present a normal distribution, nonparametric statistical analyses were conducted. In all of them, the alpha level for significance to establish whether differences between and within groups were relevant or not was determined at $p < .05$. Nevertheless, the effect size was also reported based on Cohen's *r* measure, calculated through the online tools provided by Lenhard and Lenhard (2016). In keeping with Cohen (1988), values of *r* below .3 were considered of small effect size, from .3 to .5 of intermediate effect, and over .5 of strong effect.

The answer to each question was labelled as 0 when it was wrong and as 1 when it was right, whereas no answer at all was tagged with a 999 value that the software was instructed to recognise as missing information. Nonetheless, the statistical analyses did not operate with these questions in isolation, but rather with the scores in the main tests (total reading score –RG– and total listening score –LG) and the outcomes in each subskill (RGI, LGI, RSI, LSI, and so forth, as specified in Table 1). These constructs were weighted so that they ranged from 0 to 10. Furthermore, to assess the effects of the treatment condition between and within groups, a new set of subtraction variables was calculated, considering the global scores as well as the subskills scores in the posttest and the pretest (RG posttest minus RG pretest, RGI posttest minus RGI pretest, and so on). Although the present investigation was focused on the

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whole sample, a couple of exploratory analyses to address the study of gender differences were conducted and discussed as well.

4. RESULTS

The results are presented in two different sections according to the skill to which they refer. For each one, three tests were run: first, a Mann–Whitney test to confirm the groups' comparability; second, another Mann–Whitney test comparing the groups based on the differences between the pre- and posttest outcomes; and finally, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test to study the differences between the pre- and posttest results within each group.

The subskills are named with the abbreviations in Table 1. The results of the Mann–Whitney tests are reported by stating the test statistic (*U*), the standardised test statistic score (*Z*), the level of significance (*p*), and the effect size (*r*). For the account of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, the standardised test statistic score (*Z*), the level of significance (*p*), and the effect size (*r*) are mentioned.

4.1. Reading comprehension

To ensure that the groups presented a comparable initial EFL reading comprehension proficiency, a Mann–Whitney test of the pretest scores was taken. Both groups showed the same median (6.25) and were statistically similar ($U = 243.5$, $Z = -.221$, $p = .825$, $r = .03$).

After that, another Mann–Whitney test was performed, operating with the set of subtraction variables of the score difference between posttest and pretest. The *p*-value in every case was higher than .4, except for the RII subskill. In this subskill, the groups showed similar outcomes ($Mdn = 0$), but a small effect size was detected in favour of the control group ($U = 205$, $Z = -1{,}163$, $p = .245$, $r = .16$). In any case, no significant differences were found.

Finally, the difference between the posttest and the pretest outcomes within each group was examined through a Wilcoxon signed-rank test. Significant differences were found in RG and RSI (see Table 2). In RG, the control group slightly outperformed the experimental group, although within the experimental group, female students (Pretest $Mdn = 6.25$, Posttest $Mdn = 7.5$, $Z = -1{,}912$, $p = .056$, $r = .35$) improved considerably more than their male counterparts (Pretest $Mdn = 6.88$, Posttest $Mdn = 6.88$, $Z = -.782$, $p = .434$, $r = .19$). The control and the

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experimental groups showed an improvement of small-to-intermediate effect sizes. On the other hand, the strong effect size enhancement in RSI was almost identical for both groups.

Reading variable	**Group**		***M dn* (Pre)**	***M dn* (Post)**	***Z***	***p***	
Total reading score (RG)	Control	2	2.25	6.50	7.50	−2.32	.020*	35
	Experimental	3	2.25	6.50	7.50	−1.9	.058	28
General information (RGI)	Control	2	2.5	7.5	7.69	−.90	.490	10
	Experimental	3	2.0	5.0	1.43	−1.52	.121	21
Specific information (RSI)	Control	2	2.0	5.0	1.26	−4.26	<.001**	64
	Experimental	3	2.0	5.0	1.36	−4.36	<.001**	64
Inferring information (RII)	Control	2	2.0	5.0	1.6	−1.6	.109	24
	Experimental	3	2.0	5.0	5.0	.00	1.000	00
Avoiding information matching (RIM)	Control	2	2.0	5.0	5.0	−1.41	.157	21
	Experimental	3	2.0	5.0	5.0	−1.47	.143	22

*Note: * p <.05; ** p <.01*

Table 2. Reading Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

4.2. Listening comprehension

To acknowledge the comparability of groups in the listening skill, as in the case of the reading comprehension skill, a Mann–Whitney test was performed. Although the median of the

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experimental group (5.33) was lower than the median of the control group (6.14), their differences were not significant (U = 200, Z = −1.22, p = .223, r = .18).

The Mann–Whitney test with the set of subtraction variables showed more differences than the reading skill, but these were not statistically significant either. In LG, the experimental group (*Mdn* = 0) outperformed the control group (*Mdn* = −1.25), showing a small effect size (U = 200, Z = −1.22, p = .223, r = .18). The former also obtained better outcomes of small effect size in LII and LD. In these cases, although the groups achieved the same median (LII *Mdn* = 5 and LD *Mdn*= 0), the results of the statistical tests showed slight differences in both the LII (U = 209, Z = −1.076, p = .282, r = .15) and the LD (U = 201.5, Z = −1.246, p = .213, r = .17) subskills.

Lastly, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test within groups allowed to clarify the differences that had appeared in previous tests. As seen in Table 3, the control group experienced a significant worsening of intermediate effect in LG. This effect was particularly relevant for male students, whose median score dropped from 7.5 in the pretest to 3.75 in the posttest (Z = −2.32, p = .02, r = .58). Furthermore, the performance of the control and the experimental groups declined in LGI and LSI, with intermediate-to-strong effect sizes. On the other hand, they improved in LII: the control group with an intermediate effect size, and the experimental group with a strong effect size. Finally, the experimental group showed a non-significant increase of small effect size in LD.

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Listening variable	Group		*M dn* (Pre)	*M dn* (Post)	*z*	*p*	
Total listening score (LG)	Control	2	7.14	6.83	−4.2	.045*	.030
	Experimental	3	7.33	5.00	−.577	.441	.011
General information (LGI)	Control	2	8.0	7.87	−2.583	<.001**	.054
	Experimental	3	7.8	6.76	−2.369	<.001**	.054
Specific information (LSI)	Control	2	9.3	9.59	−2.982	.003**	.045
	Experimental	3	8.7	6.81	−2.812	.005**	.041
Inferring information (LII)	Control	2	7.7	6.24	−3.122	.002**	.047
	Experimental	3	7.7	6.17	−3.583	<.001**	.053
Distractors (LD)	Control	2	7.5	4.43	−.224	.813	.004
	Experimental	3	7.0	4.36	−1.382	.166	.120

*Note: * p <.05; ** p <.01*

Table 3. Listening Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of activities has contributed to the improvement of both groups in the receptive skills, particularly in reading. Apart from the small-to-intermediate effect size improvement found in the global reading comprehension scores, there has been a remarkably high gain of strong effect size in the ability to identify specific information in this skill. Based on the results, the experimental group does not seem to have benefited from the individualised

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feedback condition in this skill, any more than the control group has with their generic activities. This finding does not correspond with the conclusions of Razagifard et al. (2011) in higher education, probably due to differences in the nature of feedback; while they used answer-until-correct instant feedback, the present study employed elaborative delayed feedback. Following Van der Kleij et al. (2015), the fact that the latter was delayed and the former immediate may have accounted for these divergences. Indeed, as in Bown (2017), the contrast between verification and elaborative feedback has not seemed to be particularly relevant.

On the other hand, for the discussion of the listening skill, it is essential to bear in mind the interlevel variability inevitably present when comparing two examination sources (CE, 2001). Indeed, the results suggest that the listening posttest was considerably more complex than the pretest. Nonetheless, the fact that the research design involved the participation of two groups, control and experimental, facing the same tests allows for controlling such variability by attending to the differences in the outcomes of these groups. With this in mind, it is evident that, unlike in Sun and Hwang (2023), there has been no effect on the ability to understand general and specific information derived from the personalised pedagogical intervention. However, that metacognitive didactic procedure does seem to account for the benefits in the capacity of performing inferences and, more particularly, avoiding distractors. These results, also reflected in the global listening scores, are in line with the findings of Min et al. (2022), who also reported gains from custom feedback in this skill as a whole. In spite of the fact that the only distinction between groups –the instruction on question typologies, along with their awareness of mistakes and engagement in individualised feedback activities– supports this interpretation, the hypothetical effects on metacognition need to be further contrasted (with interviews, for example).

The moderate efficacy of the intervention in this particular subject in relation to other subjects such as mathematics or science is not surprising (Van der Kleij et al., 2015). Furthermore, the outcomes are also consistent with the meta-analysis of Saad-Mohamed (2020), which showed higher benefits in the use of personalised feedback in EFL listening than in EFL reading. In any case, further research is required to go in-depth into the nature and effect of individualised feedback in these skills. In fact, the listening skill remains almost completely unexplored in this sphere, and very few studies have directed their attention to the effect of custom feedback in L2 reading comprehension. Furthermore, to the best of the authors' knowledge, there is no piece of research addressing the components of these constructs –which have been named *subskills* in the present work– from either a diagnostic or didactic perspective. We consider that further attention must be paid to this matter due to the pedagogical

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implications it might entail. As a matter of fact, being aware of the specific comprehension flaws of the students and how to overcome them is essential to direct teaching efforts.

The limited number of sessions may have accounted for the appearance of benefits in some variables but not in others. In any case, further studies should be conducted in this field to cast light on the aspects that remain unclear. Particularly, we propose a line of research that may include larger samples, more sessions, and follow-up interviews with the learners, to examine the subskills that they may apply in each case, and the metacognitive mechanisms underlying their reasoning process. A larger and more diverse sample would also be helpful in order to dig into the gender differences hinted at in this piece of research in favour of female participants, who appear to have benefited more than their male counterparts from the personalised feedback methodology. It would also be interesting to pay attention to the learners' initial skill levels to ascertain benefit differences between high- and low-achieving students during the procedure.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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APPENDIX. MAIN READING TEST SAMPLE

About us

You don't want just a gym membership. You want a membership that means something. And that means you need support, expert help and a community.

Best Body Fitness isn't just a gym: it's a full-service fitness membership made for you.

Here's how it works:

STEP ONE: Your assessment

We begin with an assessment session. This is a chance for you to see what we do at **Best Body**. Our assessment plans are no-cost and no-risk. We'll also make a training plan specifically for you.

STEP TWO: Your training

When you decide to become a **Best Body** member, we show you what to do, how to do it and why you are doing it. After a few sessions with an expert private trainer you will feel comfortable working out on your own. But don't worry, we'll always be nearby if you have questions.

STEP THREE: Your membership

Membership works on a month-to-month basis. There are no sign-up fees and no cancellation fees. Start and stop whenever you want. And the best part? Our fees are the most competitive in the whole downtown area.

STEP FOUR: Your community

At **Best Body Fitness**, we see everyone as part of a big team. And when you work with a team, you can do great things. Join any of our specialised classes, led by expert instructors. Come to our nutrition classes. Participate in our regular social events. Everything is included in your fee.

It's so EASY

- Easy to start, stop, cancel or refund a membership
- Easy to access – we're open 24/7
- Easy to do exercise – we have lots of equipment, no long wait
- Easy results – our trainers and equipment give you success, fast

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Questions

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. **The gym aims…**

a) To create a cohesive group of people
b) To offer the help of professionals
c) Both a) and b) are objectives of the gym

GENERAL INFORMATION

2. **What is Best Body Fitness?**

a) It's a gym which offers many services
b) It's a special plan to get you fit.
c) It's a common gym

INFERRING INFORMATION

3. **The assessment step is a good opportunity to…**

a) Evaluate the risk of the activities
b) Learn how to make a training plan for you
c) Get to know Best Body Fitness

INFERRING INFORMATION

4. **Once you become a Best Body member and have a training plan…**

a) You start working out by yourself and can ask any questions to the professionals of the centre
b) You start working out with a professional that will help you
c) You start working out at what you think is better for you

AVOIDING INFORMATION MATCHING

5. **Your membership depends on…**

a) The fidelity you show by going month after month to the gym
b) The money you pay each month
c) The money you pay with the sign-up fee

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

6. **To become a member of the gym, you have to pay…**

a) A lot of money because they offer many services
b) Less than in similar places of the area
c) Less than in similar places of the city

AVOIDING INFORMATION MATCHING

7. **In this gym you can…**

a) Learn about eating healthily
b) Become an expert in specialised classes
c) a) and b) are things you can do

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

8. **You can go to the gym…**

a) Whenever you want
b) 24 hours every week
c) 24 hours from Monday to Friday

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