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L2 Spoken Fluency through Interactional Tasks

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## Abstract

This research study explores the effects of interactional tasks to support speaking fluency amongst a group of eleven A1 students aged 20-50. The participants' initial difficulties with speaking the target language fluently were noticeable and had a negative effect on their abilities to communicate effectively. This problem is relevant to the Colombian context, where there is little research on oral fluency. The present study was conducted over a twenty-hour period, and the data collected was analyzed triangulating audio recordings, field notes and students' questionnaires. The results showed the benefits that interaction yield to the enhancement of the speaking fluency in the L2 in relation to pronunciation, connected speech and use of fillers. These results suggest that language teachers should make considerably more use of interactional tasks when seeking to develop learners' oral fluency.

*Key words:* speaking fluency, interaction, interactional tasks

**Resumen**

El presente estudio explora los efectos de la implementación de tareas de interacción en el desarrollo de la fluidez verbal en un grupo de once estudiantes con un nivel de inglés A1 de acuerdo al Marco Común Europeo y edades entre los 20 y 50 años. Las dificultades iniciales de los estudiantes en relación con su fluidez verbal en la segunda lengua fueron evidentes y tenían un marcado efecto negativo en su habilidad para comunicarse efectivamente. Esta problemática es de particular relevancia dentro del contexto local Colombiano donde no hay un número significativo estudios previos enfocados de forma específica en la importancia de la fluidez verbal en inglés. La presente investigación fue llevada a cabo en el transcurso de un mes y los datos obtenidos fueron analizados por medio de la triangulación de grabaciones de audio, diarios de campo y cuestionarios bajo los parámetros de la teoría fundamentada. Los resultados obtenidos muestran los beneficios que ofrece la interacción en términos del mejoramiento de la pronunciación, conexión de sonidos y uso de fillers. Estos resultados sugieren que los docentes de inglés deberían hacer un uso más considerable de tareas de interacción en búsqueda de desarrollar la fluidez verbal de sus estudiantes.

*Palabras claves*: fluidez verbal; interacción; tareas de interacción.

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**Chapter 1: Introduction**

The development of effective communicative competencies in the English language has become a matter of primary importance in the Colombian educational context in recent years. The past decade has seen a renewed importance of the implications that learning a second language has for both Colombian citizens and the country itself in relation to economic and industrial progress as well as integration into a globalized world. Thus, bilingualism has turned into a primary need in the Colombian educational system in the extent it is considered a standard of education quality. Thus, many institutions at different levels of instruction (pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary education) have adopted the instruction of English as a tenet of their academic programs. Likewise, the government has acknowledged the importance and necessity for Colombian citizens to become proficient in a second language, namely English, as a means of promoting economic, cultural and information growth. In this particular regard, two main initiatives (The Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo 2004-2019 and the Programa Nacional de Inglés 2015 - 2025 'COLOMBIA very well!') have been introduced by the Colombian government in the last decade with the common goal of guaranteeing the necessary conditions for Colombian citizens to learn English as a second language and become competitive at both professional and academic level. However, these efforts have neither attained the proposed goals nor shown acceptable results in relation to the effective learning of the English language. This situation is particularly evident in relation to the learners' speaking competence, especially concerning speaking fluency which has a markedly negative effect on their abilities to communicate effectively in the L2.

The present research paper focuses on the learners' lack of speaking fluency and was conducted at a private university with a group of 11 participants with a basic competence in

English. In order to tackle the aforementioned issue, this research report puts forward the implementation of interactional tasks developed by the teacher to foster learners' speaking fluency in English, being fluency understood as the "capacity to speak fluidly, confidently, and at a rate consistent with the norms of the relevant native speech community" (Bailey 2005). For this reason, fluency deserves special attention by students in the sense this capability is a key component of oral proficiency, an important indicator of an individual actual competence level under exam conditions Kormos & Dénes (2004) and as noted by Hedge (2000), an opportunity for learners to put into practice and internalize the input they have acquired by work on the formal aspects of language.

Finally, during the different stages of the present research study (needs analysis, research design, pedagogical implementation, data analysis, and findings and conclusions) the teacher carried out the role of a researcher by keeping a reflective and critical view of his current practice in order to have a sounder understanding of it and improving both teaching and learning conditions.

## 1.1    Rationale of the study

Students need to be able to communicate effectively in the target language in terms of using it for real communication. For this reason, the development of this research project became absolutely necessary since its main aim was to provide the learners with the adequate tools and strategies to speak more naturally and help them to get rid of their fears when speaking. This aligned with the institution goal which is to "develop the *communicative* competencies in the foreign language based on the Common European Framework standards in the levels (A1-B2) with face-to-face lessons as well as blended learning for kids, teenagers and professionals from both the educational and the business sector" ("Estudia en el Centro de Idiomas Rochereau,"

2015). This is due to the fact that despite most learners had taken English lessons in the past (eight of eleven participants had receive instruction at school or college), they cannot actually account for such knowledge in a significant way at the present time which is evident in their basic competence in English. (see Appendix J)

Consequently, a reason for the design of materials and tasks that promote speaking fluency is that they can be used as means of tackling students' difficulties in the target language, namely the inability to communicate effectively and make themselves understood.  Additionally, these tasks are to increase their motivation and participation in class as much as enhancing the opportunities to interact with peers, teachers and the native language assistants. Likewise, designing materials and interactional tasks can promote professional development, enhance creativity, and raise awareness on instructors' current teaching practice.

Nevertheless, the findings derived from this research study could be implemented and applicable to other educational settings in the Colombian local context aiming at developing fluent oral communication in an L2. The rationale behind this is that as some local studies focused on the speaking skill have pointed out (e.g. Gutierrez, 2005); there is a misbalance between the classroom input and the learners output in the different language skills being speaking one of the most noticeable regarding this issue. As the British Council (2013) states, "Around the world there is enormous demand and need for English in the state and public education systems, especially in developing economies". This idea is backed up by Shen (2013) who states that "we will have to communicate more with people from all over the world in English, a widely recognized universal language, and as a result, an English learner's communicative competence, especially his or her oral communicative competence, is becoming increasingly important". Thus, the present research study is justified in the extent that it can be

assumed that the mere knowledge of English unconnected with its communicative nature is no longer sufficient for the current globalized society we live in.

## 1.2.    Needs analysis and problem statement

As a result of a needs analysis process undertaken with the group of learners consisting of the recording of two lessons and a set of field notes written by the teacher, it was possible to identify the issue of the students' lack of fluency when engaging in oral tasks. At an institutional level, fluency is not dealt with in a significant way despite the language instruction at the institution is based on the tenets of the Communicative Language Teaching approach. Consequently, the teacher-researcher decided to focus on spoken fluency work in the classroom as a means of helping learners enhance their speaking skill. The learners' lack of fluency was particularly noteworthy in their inability to perform oral tasks in the target language and the low-level spoken output they produced. Such output was characterized by frequent pausing to think about what to say and the production of one-word-at-a-time utterances as can be seen in the following tables:

Table 1

*Students' hesitation during the needs analysis stage*

| Participant | Hesitation |
|---|---|
| P2 | *I live … in … apart(a)ment* |
| | iː laɪf     iːn     əˈpɑrtəmənt |
| P4 | *In neighbor…hood…. There is…. Park* |
| | iːn ˈneɪ.bə r     hɒd         ˈderis         pɑːr |
| P9 | *My mother …5…6… year… he…wife…house* |
| | miː ˈmɒd.ə r   faɪ siːs jəɑːr    hiː  waɪ      haʊse |

Table 2

*Students' One-word-at-a-time-utterances during the needs analysis stage*

| Participant | One-word-at-a-time-utterances |
|---|---|
| P3 | I-like-music-salsa |
|  | iː laɪ ˈmjuː.sɪ sɑlsɑ |
| P4 | My-father-is-independent |
|  | maɪ ˈfɑː.dər iːs ˌɪn.depen.de nt |
| P8 | I-am-auxiliar-in-university |
|  | aɪ am ausiː l.i.ar iːn dʒuː.nɪˈvɜː.sɪ.ti |

A major reason for the aforementioned issue could be attributable to the fact that teachers focus the input of their lessons on grammar instruction to the detriment of speaking fluency. As Appendix K shows, there is a clear emphasis on grammar work in the syllabus which may influence the institution teachers' instructional process in a great extent. However, as Thornbury and Slade (2006) point out, grammatical competence does not necessarily have a positive effect on conversational ability, namely fluency. Such feelings may lead teachers and learners to think that instruction is not effective enough but in reality the underlying reason of this issue is the lack of practice on acquiring L2 conversational competence. This can be attributable to the fact that students feel their spoken output is not aligned with what might be considered as acceptable by a native speaker, reason why communication can be seriously hindered. In connection with this regard, Bailey (2005) acknowledges the significance of encouraging learners to take reasonable risks in English as much as providing them with opportunities to notice the gap. That is the awareness of the misbalance between the input learners are exposed to and the actual output they can produce.

In order to overcome this issue, the teacher-researcher decided to acknowledge the importance of fluency work at beginning levels as a means of setting up the foundations of oral proficiency development. This view is pointed out by Brown (2001) since in his view "fluency is

a goal at this level but only within limited utterance lengths. Fluency does not have to apply only to long utterances. The "flow" of language is important to establish, from the beginning, in reasonably short segments." (p. 102). Thus, from the needs analysis stage of the present project came out the need to help learners develop their speaking skill through fluency work at the sentence level.

## 1.3.    Justification of the problem

Considering the aforementioned, the development of fluency practice tasks and materials serves as a means of addressing to the students' communicative needs, motivating interaction and helping learners' to communicate similarly to the way native speakers do.

## 1.4.    Strategy proposed to address the problem

One of the underlying reasons for the learners' lack of fluency relates to the lack of opportunities they are provided with to speak. English classes turned into grammar-driven lessons where the communicative aspects of the language are neglected in favor of the formal ones (see Appendix K). The researcher puts forward a proposal aimed at giving learners the opportunities to speak. The fluency practice tasks and materials proposed include conversations, information gap, picture-based activities, and role plays. Harmer (2007), describes the underlying principle of these activities and their benefits to the development of the speaking skill, which are characterized by the active involvement of "students in real or realistic communication, where the successful achievement of the communicative task they are performing is at least as important as the accuracy of their language use" (p. 69). These activities are outlined in more detail in chapter 4.

**1.5.    Research question and objective**

Based on the needs analysis carried out at the initial stage of the present research project, the teacher-researcher puts forward the following research question and objective for the study:

- How can learners' speaking fluency in English be promoted by interactional tasks?

- To determine the possible impact of the implementation of interactional tasks on the learners' speaking fluency.

The present chapter outlined the basic aspects of the research study and stated the existing need to integrate fluency in a more noticeable way into language lessons due to its inextricable connection with effective communication in a second language. In the next chapter, the concept of fluency and its importance to language learning will be accounted for from the views theoreticians and researchers.  Futhermore, the constructs the present research paper is based upon are explained in terms of its relevance to the study.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and State-of-the Art

The current research study is based on three main constructs. The concepts *speaking fluency, interaction* and *interactional tasks* are outlined according to the views of theoreticians from both international and national contexts. The following diagram illustrates in a general way the existing relationship among the constructs selected for the development of this study and the problem researched:
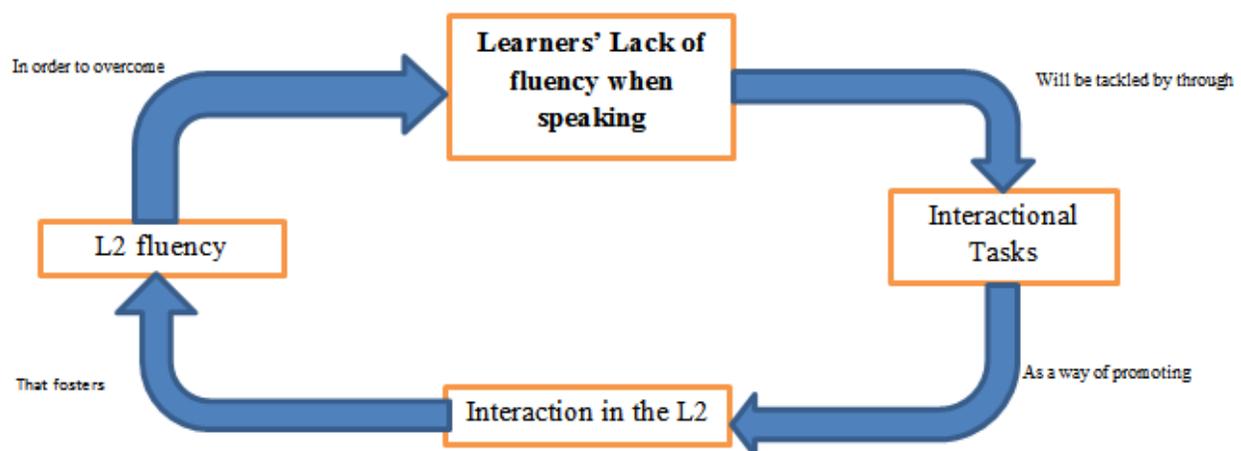


*Figure 1*. Problem under study and constructs

## 2.1. Definitions of terms

### 2.1.1. Fluency

The concept of fluency has been extensively discussed by different authors in the field of ELT throughout the years and to some extent, it could be considered as a somewhat difficult term to define. Brumfit (1984) sets out fluency as the ability to use the language in a natural way. That is, similarly to how native speakers of a language communicate in their daily lives. Such *naturalness* is put forward clearly by Fillmore (1979) in his description of a fluent speaker as an individual who is able to "…fill time with talk", spend a little time thinking "what to say next or how to phrase it" effectively in terms of successful communication. An alternative view on the

definition of the concept fluency can be found in Johnson (2009) who regards it as "the skill of being able to do many things correctly at the same time" (p. 270). A more complete and straightforward definition of this concept is put forward by Bailey (2005), who defines fluency as "the capacity to speak fluidly, confidently, and at a rate consistent with the norms of the relevant native speech community". The present research study is based on this definition in the extent it describes the characteristics the teacher-researcher aimed to develop in the participants. Firstly the ability to speak without making any major or unnecessary pauses, and secondly, to build the necessary confidence to make themselves understood, even with native speakers of the target language. However, Jones' definition of fluency as "being able to express yourself despite the gaps in your knowledge, despite the mistakes you're making, despite not knowing all the vocabulary you might need" (2007. p. 18) appeals as well to the issue under study in the present paper due to the characteristics of the participants in terms of their language proficiency level. In spite of the undeniable effect that fluency work has on the enhancement of the learners' speaking skill and their ability to communicate naturally, this key component seems to be given a secondary role in the contemporary communicative language classroom. In order to tackle this, Nation (2008) puts forward a set of conditions in order to develop fluency in speaking. Firstly, he considers that the main focus has to be "communication". Similarly, Klippel stated that "… foreign language teaching should help students achieve some kind of communicative skill in the foreign language…" (1984, p. 4). This means that rather than assessing students' oral competence in terms of the accuracy of their utterances, what is really needed is to provide them with meaningful practice and strategies in order to engage in real communicative situations. Finally, learners need to be assigned very easy tasks, to be under some pressure in order to "perform at a higher than usual rate" and more importantly, "lots of practice". (2008, p. 56).

**2.1.2. Interaction**

Bailey (2006) defines interaction as not unidirectional interactive speech in which at least two people communicate with each other. In this view, for interaction to take place are needed at least two interactants who exchange information with one another. Interaction is a key concept in relation to the process of teaching/learning a second language and its value has been traditionally measured in regard to the participants involved. Ellis (1984) highlights the importance of interaction in the process of learning a language since it "contributes to development because it is the means by which the learner is able to crack the code. This takes place when the learner can infer what is said even though the message contains linguistic items that are not yet part of his competence and when the learner can use the discourse to help him/her modify or supplement the linguistic knowledge already used in the production" (p. 84). In other words, interaction serves as a major fluency booster that allows learners to enhance their oral competence in a given language. Brown and Rodgers (2002) identify three main interactions: *Teacher interactions with learners, Teacher error correction* and *Learner-to-learner interactions*. The first is characterized by the active role carried out by the teacher, who is the one that leads and controls the interactional exchanges whereas the learners have a passive role and depend entirely on the teacher command. The most known teacher-learner interaction is known as the Initiation – Response – Follow-up (IRF) exchange which is defined by the British Council (2008) as "a pattern of discussion between the teacher and learner. The teacher initiates, the learner responds, the teacher gives feedback. This approach to the exchange of information in the classroom has been criticized as being more about the learner saying what the teacher wants to hear than really communicating". However, despite the potential benefits of this discussion pattern in connection to learners' participation and opportunities to receive immediate feedback, it does not resemble

real communication and the learners are like to be predisposed to focus on accuracy rather than

on fluency.

On the other hand, *Teacher error correction* is traditionally regarded as one of the most

necessary steps leading to language learning in the sense that "most learners and most teachers

feel that it is part of the teacher's responsibility to let learners know if they have made an error

and to assist them in not making a similar error again" (p. 82). However, Brown (2001)

highlights the importance of providing error correction in a careful way, especially at beginning

levels. He states that is necessary to "be very sensitive to students' need to practice freely and

openly without fear of being corrected at every minor flaw. On the other hand, you need to

correct some selected grammatical and phonological errors so that students don't fall into the

trap of assuming that "no news is good news" (no correction implies perfection)" (p. 102).

Finally, *Learner-to-learner interaction* is acknowledged as the other main interaction pattern in

the language classroom. Brown & Rodgers state that "in communicative methodology,

increasing emphasis is placed on language learning tasks which involve pair work and group

work" (p. 84).

**2.1.3. Interactional tasks**

Tasks have been traditionally associated with activities people do as part of their

everyday life. In this line of thought, Long (1985) defines tasks as "(…) the hundred and one

things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between" (p.89). Thus, if learners are

to communicate effectively in a second language it is of vital importance to provide them with

meaningful tasks that require them to interact with other by using the target language in a way

that transcends the limits of the language classroom. Thus, Kumaravadivelu (2006) suggests that

tasks are "based on the future language needs of a particular group of learners, tasks such as

attending a job interview, making an airline reservation, reading a restaurant menu or a journal abstract, writing a lab report, or taking a driving test." (p. 65). As a means of dealing with the implementation of interactional tasks, Thornbury (2005) puts forward a list of concise criteria for speaking tasks in order to promote oral interaction and learners' autonomy, consisting of the following features:

*Productivity:* Speaking tasks need to be as language productive as possible to foster autonomous language use. In other words, tasks must create suitable scenarios for the learners to *produce* the target language.

*Purposefulness:* Tasks must have a straightforward *purpose.* This is of primary importance in order to encourage students' participation, increase their commitment for the development of the task and more importantly, to guarantee that learners carry out a task because of its outcome and not for the activity's sake.

*Interactivity:* Speaking activities need to be effective in terms of preparing learners for real-life language use, especially in regards with the effect their use of language has on interlocutors. This is achievable through providing tasks with interaction patterns for the learners to get used to the way language works in real situations.

*Challenge:* Speaking tasks need to be in agreement with the learners' current level of competence in the target language. However, this does not necessarily mean that such tasks cannot be slightly beyond in relation to that competence level. This feature is of great significance since it pushes learners to take hold of all their existing knowledge in order to accomplish a goal and by doing so foster language acquisition. Nonetheless, the challenge an activity presents to a student must not be beyond the scope of his L2 competence, otherwise it can turn discouraging and counterproductive.

*Safety:* Learners need to feel confident when using the target language. Therefore, they do need adequate conditions in terms of *supportive classroom dynamics* by peers, the same as the teacher guidance and appropriate feedback. Otherwise, the fear of losing face, in front of classmates may consequently lead to constrain learners' oral production (for example being laughed at because of committing a mistake)  may consequently lead to constrain learners' oral production because of the pressure exerted by themselves.to perform accurately at all times.

*Authenticity:* A key feature of speaking tasks is that they should have a connection with real life. What is learned must have the characteristic of transcending the limits of the classroom so learners can raise awareness of its usefulness and meaningfulness for real-life communication events (2005, pp. 90-91).

## 2.2. Relevance of fluency and interaction in the classroom

The key role of fluency has been acknowledged by different theoreticians in the field of ELT for many years. An example of this can be found in Nation (1989), who points that the importance of fluency lays in the fact that the student's attention is "on the message that is being communicated and not the language forms". An additional view on the significance of fluency in the classroom is stated by Brumfit (1984), who considers that "language use requires fluency, expression rules, a reliance on implicit knowledge and automatic performance. It will on occasions also require monitoring and problem-solving strategies, but these will not be the most prominent features, as they tend to be in the conventional model where the student produces, the teacher corrects, and the student tries again" (p. 51). In this view, it becomes absolutely necessary to provide learners with a certain grade of autonomy and freedom to perform in the target language, otherwise they will always be prevented from speaking due to an unnecessary overreliance on the teacher's approval of their performance.

The relevance of interaction in the classroom is best summarized by Rivers (1987), since in his view "communication derives essentially from interaction" (p. xiii). Likewise, Shumin (1997) highlights the key role that interaction has in the process of learning a second language since "being able to interact in a language is essential. Therefore, language instructors should provide learners with opportunities for meaningful communicative behavior about relevant topics by using learner-learner interaction as the key to teaching language for communication" (p. 208). Doughty (2003) who highlights the benefits that the implementation of interactional tasks have since they "(…) help learners integrate forms and meaning, create their metalinguistic awareness, and increase their noticing capacity all of which, (…), promote successful intake processing and ultimately language development".

The interaction itself may also direct learner's attention to something new, such as a new lexical item or grammatical construction, thus promoting the development of the L2. (p. 181). In this line of thought, interaction in a language is a necessary condition for the development of communication.

**2.3. Studies on fluency and interaction in developing the students' speaking skill**

Previous studies on the issue of oral fluency have found out its importance in the process of acquisition of a second language in terms of its differences with accuracy, learners' beliefs, and the judgment of what a fluent speaker is (e.g. Rossiter 2009; Brand & Götz 2009; Seifoori & Vahiri 2011) except Rossiteer et al. (2010) where types of fluency instruction are described in order to be integrated in L2 classes. Other studies highlight the significance of developing speaking fluency in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (e.g. Yang 2014) and the use of multimedia-based programs for developing EFL speaking fluency skills (e.g. Diyyab, Eman Aly, Abdel-Haq, Eman Muhamad & Aly, Mahsoub Abdel-Sadeq 2013). In the local Colombian

context there are a few research studies focused on fluency in relation to the use of self-directed speaking tasks (e.g. Jimenez 2013), self-assessment (e.g. Duque & González 2014), and Web 2.0. tools (e.g. Castiblanco 2014). Nevertheless, no significant prior research about how to promote oral fluency in the L2 through interactional tasks can be found. As a consequence of this, the present research paper points up the key role of interaction in the L2 as a means of enhancing oral fluency in the local Colombian context.

Rossiter, M., Derwing, T., Manimtim, L. & Thomson, R. (2010) call into question how oral fluency has become a neglected component of contemporary language instruction. This fact is of particular interest having in mind the communicative focus that such instruction claims to have on the paper, but when it comes to the real world it is evident how the focus of instruction is on the formal aspects of the language rather than on promoting effective communication. This issue could be attributable to factors such as limitations in terms of the syllabus, lack of teachers' experience on fluency instruction and even lack of learners' interest in fluency work due to a personal interest on getting good marks, passing exams or just learning the grammar of the language. However, as Segalowitz, Gatbonton, and Trofimovich (2009) point out, instruction is crucial to the process of developing oral fluency since it may ultimately raise learners' awareness of its importance and how to include it effectively into their language learning process.

To this extent, helping learners enhance their speaking fluency turns into a matter of primary importance in the EFL classroom. Leaver, Ehrman & Shekhtman (2005) point out the relevance of fluency when learning a foreign language in terms of the effect it has on communication. This is particularly noteworthy in many EFL classrooms where students with an acceptable command of language (in terms of grammar use and vocabulary) fail to carry out tasks that demand real communication due to fact they have no fluency (2005). Rossiter et al., who in a research study

conducted in Canada found out that "many ESL classes offer little or no explicit, focused instruction on the development of oral fluency skills" (2010, p.585). This problem is particularly evident in aspects such as the learners' tendency to *speak-word-by-word* and their long and infrequent pauses, unfilled pauses, and lack of pauses at meaningful transition points. As Thornbury (2005) states, when a speaker is characterized by the previously mentioned features, it does not matter how accurate their utterances are in relation to pronunciation and the use of grammar since in the view of native speakers he will not be considered a fluent one.

In terms of working with fluency in the ELT classroom there have been varied approaches and techniques different from interactional tasks addressing fluency work in the classroom. One of them is known as the 4/3/2 technique which is described by Nation (1989):

> A learner spends a few minutes preparing a talk on a given topic. During this time the learner just thinks of what she will talk about and does not make notes. Then the learner pairs up with another learner and she talks on that topic for four minutes. The listener does not interrupt and does not ask questions. The listener's job is just to listen. Then they change partners. The speaker now talks again on the same topic to the new listener, but this time she has only three minutes to give the same information. When this has been done the learners change partners again. The speaker gives the same talk for the third time to her new partner, but this time she only two minutes. So, the speaker gives the same talk to a different partner with less time to do it each time. (p. 378)

The technique outlined supports fluency development by means of providing learners with meaningful practice for three main reasons. Firstly, they have a new interlocutor each time; second, the information is repeated which helps learners to gain confidence when speaking in an L2; and finally, the fact the time is reduced every time the learner pairs up with a new classmate works as a major fluency booster since they do not have to think of additional information.

Another strategy intended to aid speaking fluency can be found in Cohen et al. (1996) Speaking Task Battery, which is made up of three speaking activities: Self-description, story

retelling, and city description. The self-description and city description are based on previously learned lexis whereas story retelling is focused on the acquisition of new vocabulary through spoken repetition. This strategy helps learners develop their speaking fluency since it can be used by learners "throughout the language learning process" (p. 9) regardless of the level of instruction they are in.

Even though the two strategies outlined above are highly beneficial in terms of speaking fluency enhancement, they do not suit the particular linguistic and affective needs the participants of the present research study because of two main reasons. Firstly, the complexity of the tasks might have affected participants spoken output rather than fostered it. Secondly, affective factors such as motivation and confidence would have been affected by the pressure of performing the activities in an acceptable way. Thus, learners would have focused their attention on carrying out the task well instead of communicating in the L2. Keeping this in mind, the teacher researcher decided to provide participants with meaningful tasks aligned with their actual L2 competence level so they gradually improved their L2 speaking fluency and confidence by accomplishing the objectives set.

Finally, another approach to tackle the learners' lack of speaking fluency can be found in Seifoori and Vahidi's (2012) seminal study on fluency. In their research study they present task planning as an effective means to help students "to focus their attention at various stages of speech and thereby to foster accuracy, complexity, and fluency of production". In this sense, it could be concluded that emphasizing the work on learners' fluency is a feasible task provided that teachers do not focus excessively on promoting accuracy and language form correctness to the detriment of affecting students' ability to communicate naturally in the foreign language and reducing the opportunities to implement tasks aimed to fulfill this purpose.

To sum up, it is crucial to the process of language learning to provide speaking tasks with a high quality of communication in the sense their usefulness and meaningfulness go beyond the limits of the classroom and have a practical implementation in real life situations. In order to accomplish this, the design and development of appropriate teaching materials seems to be absolutely necessary so fluent speaking in English can be enhanced.

**Chapter 3: Research Design**

This chapter puts forward the insights of the present research project in regards with the type of study, the outline of the educational setting where it took place, the participants and the data collection process in terms of the instruments used and the procedures carried out for this purpose. In addition, this chapter also presents a description of the researcher's role, the ethical considerations and the processes of validity and triangulation considered for the implementation of this study.

**3.1 Type of study**

This project is carried out in the light of a qualitative action research. Action research is defined as the self-reflective enquiry of an individual as participant in a social context in order to enhance or modify a particular situation by means of taking effective *action* on such context (Hinkel, 2005). In terms of ELT it refers to the initiation of investigation in the classroom by a teacher to understand the process of teaching and learning in order to cause a change in the day to day classroom practices (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). The implementation of this methodology offers numerous benefits and advantages to educational research. First, it helps to focus teachers' attention on specific issues in regards to their classroom practice instead of the process of language learning as a whole. Secondly, it is characterized as a never ending process. This is, as a researcher completes the research process, he or she can take up a new investigation on a different issue. Finally, it contributes to bring about a change or an improvement in relation to classroom practices, with which teachers can benefit directly in terms of professional development.

The study described in this paper is qualitative in the sense it sets out to outline and account for a phenomena as of classroom observation. Kothari (2004) states that qualitative research "is concerned with qualitative phenomenon". It aims to get grasp and explain the underlying reasons for human behavior. For instance, this research goes over the underlying reasons for the university students' lack of fluency when engaging in speaking tasks in English. In addition to that, this research is *descriptive* in the sense that as of observable phenomena it *describes* how a particular situation occurs and affects its immediate context. That is, such students' lack of fluency has a profound effect on the specific educational setting where it takes place and its participants which can be seen in the learners' low oral production in the target language. Finally, this study corresponds to an *interpretive* one since the researcher is interested in *interpreting* the underlying characteristics for the phenomenon described based upon data obtained from the group under study.

## 3.2.    Context

The institution where the present research project was carried out is a private non-profit tertiary-education institution whose mission has three main components. First, to offer high quality education, accessible to all the community. Second, to educate highly competent and qualified professionals, with ethical principles and able to lead social transformation processes. Finally, to contribute to build a fair and peaceful country. These components aim to foster a foreign language culture and contribute to learning by means of high quality programs and projects. The institution provides English lessons to all the students of the different academic programs offered at the university based on the principles of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). All the students have to take three compulsory English levels as a graduation requirement. Unfortunately, this situation has set the conditions for a negative academic

environment in the sense learners study English not because they want to learn the language but because they want to graduate regardless of how little they learn. However, the CIR also has a program called "English to Share" in which any worker can take English classes sponsored by the university. These English lessons are taught in alternative schedules so the university workers can attend the classes without this meaning they will neglect their work duties. The present research project was implemented with one "English to Share" class using the principles of CLT as the main objective of it was the enhancement of the learners speaking fluency.

### 3.2.1. Participants

This project was implemented during a four-week period with 11 students aged 20-50 at a private university. Most of the students had previously received instruction in an L2 and could be classified as level A1 according to the Common European Framework (CEF). In relation to the students' proficiency level, it is particularly noteworthy how they cannot account for such previous instruction in a significant way, for they can be categorized as *false beginners.* In this sense, instruction tends to be positive since it helps learners to reactivate their previous knowledge of the L2, making it easier for them to pick up some grammar structures and vocabulary items. Moreover, it provides learners with an appropriate scenario by reducing the fear of learning a second language from the outset. The main learners' objective in regards with the course is to get a good grade independently of how much is learnt or how effective instruction might be.

### 3.2.2. Researcher's role

During the development of this study the researcher adopted the role of a participant-observer. This means that *direct observation* was carried out in the sense that the researcher was an active participant in the context studied and the other participants were aware they were being

observed by the researcher (Norton, 2009. P. 108). Being this the researcher's second year as an English teacher at the institution, he is familiarized with the problem under study. For this reason a group of 11 students with noticeable difficulties in terms of oral fluency in the foreign language was selected in order to record audio from the lessons randomly and analyze it to collect valuable data. The interpretation and selection of data collected was determined by the researcher's point of view as of its meaningfulness for the study and the phenomenon under study was accounted for from his own perspective.

### 3.2.3.  Ethical considerations

Ethics took part in this research study by means of the adoption of four significant features related to this concept. Firstly, there was not any *abuse of authority,* since the implementation of this project did not engage students in tasks that did not contribute in a meaningful way to succeed in their studies (Wallace, 1998). Secondly, there was a straightforward protocol for all the participants involved in this research project. This was achieved by means of the signing of a consent letter (see appendix A) in which the learners were informed about the research carried out as well as the teacher and participants' role. In addition to this, the teacher-researcher kept the participants well informed about the different actions taken during the study and guaranteed the confidentiality of all the information provided in the instruments used the same as the participants' identities. Thirdly, *anonymity* of the research participants in the sense that the information obtained from and provided by them does not reveal their identities in any possible way. Finally, this research study had confidentiality through the promise of keeping private the participants' identities in relation to the information provided. The information used for this project was not addressed to particular people and there was an

agreement between the participants of the project and the teacher researcher by signing a consent letter (see Appendix A).

## 3.3.    Data collection instruments

During the data gathering stage of this research project, the analyzed data was collected by means of audio-recordings of classroom speaking tasks, lesson reports and surveys as instruments. The rationale behind this choice was: firstly the need of having evidence of the students' actual oral production. Secondly, to provide researcher's point of view of the issue under study, and finally, to have the learners' point of view about the role of fluency regarding the process of acquisition of a second language.

### 3.3.1.  Description

#### 3.3.1.1.        *Audio Recordings*

Since the primary concept of this study is learners' oral production, it is of significant importance for it to have real and trustworthy evidences of how this process materializes in the classroom. As Richards and Lockhart (1994) state, recordings are useful since they allow focusing on key aspects to study the same as having the advantage of developing an examination in depth by replaying the data recorded. Using audio recordings of spoken interactions in the classroom as research instrument has the primary aim of helping the researcher to identify what actually happens in the classroom with regards to the students' lack of fluency when speaking in English.

#### 3.3.1.2.        *Field notes*

Another important element in this research study is the teacher-researcher's point of view in relation to the classroom events that take place during lessons. To this extent, a good way to

collect data is by writing notes of outstanding events or situations that help enrich this project. Wallace (1998) highlights how field notes can be beneficial to teachers since "(a)part from increasing efficiency, field notes can prevent our hard-won experience of ebbing away and being lost in the tide of the pressures caused by 'getting on the next thing'" (p. 58). For the present study field notes were a valuable resource for data collection since they allowed the researcher to contrast what was intended to do (lesson plan) and what actually happened during the different implementation sessions.

### 3.3.1.3.        *Questionnaires*

Questionnaires were valuable to this research study since they helped the researcher to gather important information about learners' beliefs, attitudes, motivations and preferences. In addition to this, they allowed to collect a large amount of information in a short time. Kasper & Roever (2005), acknowledge the versatility questionnaires have since they can be designed to meet the particular characteristics of a given population and may vary according to the needs of the researcher. They additionally point out the careful process that must be carried out when designing questionnaires since "the quality of the data depends on the validity and reliability of the instrument" (p. 327). The data obtained from the questionnaires was contrasted with the data from the audio recordings and the researcher's field notes.

### 3.4.     Validation and piloting

Validity is a central aspect to both quantitative and qualitative research in the sense it determines and provides the worthiness of a research study (Cohen et al., 2007). For this study, this feature will be visible in terms of *internal validity,* which is defined as the connection between a piece of research and the data that supports it. In other words, the data collected must provide solid and accurate descriptions of problem under investigation (2007:135). In this study,

the data collected through the audio recordings and questionnaires is to provide accurate evidences on the development of the students' ability to speak fluently. Moreover, validity will be accomplished in this research study through a triangulation process of the instruments used and by contrasting them, offer a sound and rich explanation of how to overcome the problem of the students' lack of fluency when engaging in speaking tasks. Finally, this research study will attain to offer reliability by means of publishing the findings of excerpts transcripts of the audio recordings      as      a      means      of      assessing      the      trustworthiness      of      the      project.

## Chapter 4: Pedagogical Intervention

The present chapter outlines the steps and procedures undertaken by the teacher-researcher as well as the action plan implemented in order to address the issue of the learners' lack of fluency in the target language. This implementation took place during a four-week period in which learners were exposed to different tasks aimed to help them enhance their fluency in English through interaction tasks. In addition to this, the vision of language, curriculum and learning are provided along with the pedagogical approach adopted during the pedagogical intervention of the project. Finally, an account of the lesson plan, materials used, and a rationale of them are provided.

### 4.1.    Visions of language, learning, and curriculum

### 4.1.1.  Vision of language

Although at first sight the concept of language may not seem difficult to understand when it comes to make a definition of it in a simple way, the situation tends to complicate slightly. Language may well be defined in terms of its essence. That is "our hearing/reading, speaking/writing and thinking/being conscious" (Roth, 2010, p. 3). However, this ability transcends the limits of humanity being the animals able to use their own languages with a variety of purposes. In this sense, the concept of language goes far beyond to what we know as languages, namely English, Spanish, French or German, etc. and becomes a phenomenon that can be conceptualized according to one's own set of beliefs. Nevertheless, there is no one conceptualization of it that can be assumed as correct.

In order to facilitate the understanding of what such thing called language is, throughout the years the concept has been collocated with other ones due to its vague nature and difficulty to

define. Thus, it is possible to come across concepts such as *language acquisition, language learning, language teaching, second language, foreign language, global language, language acquisition device, language families, language disorder, etc.* and the list might continue. However, one common aspect that can be found when it comes to the study of language is its communicative nature. As Yule (2010) states, "All creatures communicate in some way. However, we suspect that other creatures are not reflecting on the way they create their communicative messages or reviewing how they work (or not)" (p. 11).  In this extent, what makes the human language so special and unique is the individuals' ability to make conscious use of it.

Furthermore, language may well be regarded as a cultural product as well. This is due to the fact that language is firstly acquired within a culture when we are children rather than inherit it (ibid, p.14). As a consequence of this, language is developed according to the surrounding culture and not by the geographical location an individual is born in. However, being born in a particular country (say Colombia) does not necessarily impede an individual ability to learn the language of a different culture (say English) even though he or she does not live or have a strong connection with the culture in which such language is spoken. Nowadays, there is a term that is gaining significant recognition around the world because of its importance in people's daily lives. That concept is *global language,* which is when "a language achieves a genuinely global status" and "develops a special role that is recognized in every country" (Crystal, 2003, p.3). The perfect example of it is the English language. This language has rapidly grown to become the world's first lingua franca and a primary need in terms of communication in dissimilar areas such as entertainment, business, education, work and politics. Because of the aforementioned,

English is the most taught language worldwide and millions of people study it not just in terms of communication but for understanding the everyday more globalized world we live in.

For the present research study language will be understood as a human ability to intentionally and reflectively interact with a communicative purpose with others within a global culture. This is, learners do need to be in the capacity of communicating effectively while interacting with others, which can be achievable to a greater extent whenever they speak the target language fluently. As Leaver et al. (2005) stated, fluency is key to accomplish real communication since mere knowledge of language in terms of grammar, rules and words does not determine effective communication and what is more, "it is not what you know that counts in foreign-language proficiency, it is what you do with it" (p. 41).

**4.1.2. Vision of learning**

In contrast to the concept of language, learning is a somewhat easier term to conceptualize. In a general sense, it can be defined as "the conscious process of accumulating knowledge" (Yule, 2010, p. 289). From a view more connected to the concept of language, that is, *language learning*, it could be defined as the "the conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the features, such as vocabulary and grammar, of a language, typically in an institutional setting" (ibid, p. 187). This latter definition is linked to the implementation of the present research study since firstly, it was implemented in an institutional setting, and secondly, the learners consciously accumulated knowledge of the features of the English language (fluency, connection of sounds, use of fillers, etc.). However, it is important to clarify that learning is a process that does not normally occur in its own right. For learning to take place, interaction is absolutely necessary. This interaction can be with a book, a computer, a teacher, but most specially, with peers. Thus, being interaction a key component of the present research

study, collaborative learning is the instructional model that suited best the learners' needs in

terms of enhancing their speaking fluency in the target language. According to Colburn (2003)

collaborative learning "happens when individuals work together to help each other learn" (p. 17).

This instructional model boost learning through fostering learners' interaction, equity, mutual

dependence to achieve a goal and the development of a sense of group responsibility.

### 4.1.3. Vision of curriculum

The instruction of the English language is based upon the tenets of communicative

language teaching since this approach "combines an innovative methodology and integrate the

language skills speaking, writing, listening and reading" (syllabus).  In addition to this, the

English courses offered by the institution aim to develop the learners' communicative

competence through rigorous work on four key competences: grammatical, socio-linguistic,

discursive and strategic. Finally, the curricula of the languages programs are based on the

guidelines of the Common European Framework and seek to provide leaners with tools and

strategies to carry out an effective and real communication in the target language by means of

active participation, autonomy and self-enquiry (see Appendix K).

### 4.2.    Instructional design

### 4.2.1. Lesson planning

During the pedagogical implementation of this research project five different lesson plans

were designed and then implemented (see Appendix G). All of them had a common feature

which was the fluency work and interaction as a means of enhancing learners' communicative

competence. These lesson plans were divided into four sections. Section A presented the basic

information of the population. Section B described the teaching aids used during the lesson.

Section C put forward the aims of the lesson and Section D showed in a detailed way the

different steps undertaken during the development of the lesson, the different patterns of interaction that took place during the class and the board plan used (see Appendix G).

The procedures outlined above were chosen in terms of their pertinence for the present research study. The main objective of this study was to inquire on the effect that the implementation of interactional tasks has on the students' language learning process, specifically, in terms of fluency development. However, this is not an easy task in the extent that fluency has traditionally been one of the neglected components of the process of language instruction. This idea is supported by Dinçer & Yeşilyurt (2013):

> "(…) neglected because traditional approaches still exist in the golden age of communicative approaches in language education. In addition, speaking is complex and difficult to master because it contains linguistic and non-linguistic elements such as vocabulary, intonation, articulation, formal and informal expression, gestures, and so forth." (p. 88)

A proof of this is the learners' tendency to speak in a word-at-a-time way, the long hesitations to think about what to say, the lack of the use of fillers, the inability to keep a conversation going and most of all, their reluctance to view the English language from a communicative perspective and not as a subject of study. This can be seen in the following samples:

Table 3

*Students' lack of fluency samples commented*

| Participant | Lack of fluency evidence | Comment |
|---|---|---|
| P3 | "I … want … juice orange" | The participant took more time to normal to convey the idea he wanted to communicate as a consequence of thinking about what to say excessively. |
| P4 | "My-father-name-is…"<br>/maɪ-ˈfɑː.ðə ɾ-neɪm-ɪz/<br><br>(■ = phoneme that was ommited) | The participant speaks one-word-at-a-time and does not connect the combinations consonant-vowel in a natural way. Additionally, omission of final sounds takes place on a regular basis (omission of the phoneme /m/ in the word "name". |
| P7 | (well), My music favorite is (err) Reggaeton<br><br>� = ideal filler to be used in the utterance | The participant hesitates for an extended time. These long silence periods could be feel by the fillers "well" and "err" (as shown in the brackets) |

### 4.2.2. Implementation

The implementation was carried out for twenty hours in which the following structure of

class was developed on the first week and then replicated during the remaining three ones:

Day one - Laboratory

The first day of each week the learners worked autonomously way in the laboratory

watching videos on specific communicative situations (e.g. the first time you meet a person).

With these videos the learners made notes on key vocabulary as well as focus their attention on

the correct pronunciation of words, appropriate intonation and linking of sounds. Then, they

worked with a partner and created a conversation using the input given, recorded it and then

emailed to the teacher who used the data as a basis for providing feedback on fluency work (see

Appendix L).

Day two – English Assistant

On the second day of each week of the pedagogical implementation the learners were

visited by three native language assistants who provided meaningful speaking practice and

exposed learners to British English. The value of this for students can be found in the opportunity to have contact with native speakers of the language in a conversational context characterized by the emphasis on cultural aspects rather than grammar and accuracy. Additionally, interacting with native speakers posed a challenge to participants since they have to make a considerable effort to understand as well as make themselves understood. One of the key aspects worked during these sessions was the development of spontaneous use of the L2 as well as fluency work on connection of sounds, appropriate intonation and avoidance of long hesitations to think about what to say or the use of the learners' L1.

Day three – Speed talking circles

On the third day of each week the learners were divided into two groups and then placed in two different seating arrangements. The aim of the task was to have learners repeating the same task several times for them to internalize the input given and enhance their L2 speaking fluency as a result of the multiple repetition of the given task. The rationale behind this task is the fact that participants do not have alternative scenarios to practice the L2 speaking skill different from the language classroom. For this reason, even though over repetition may not resemble real life, by practicing learners are likely to improve their spoken fluency. This line of thought is acknowledged by Cook (1994):

> "based on experience as a language learner, and shared I believe by many others, that repetition and learning by heart, though condemned by pedagogic and acquisition theorists, are two of the most pleasurable, valuable, and efficient of language learning activities, and that they can bring with them sensations of those indefinable, overused yet still valuable goals for the language learner: being involved in the authentic and communicative use of language." (p. 133).

Similarly, Bei (2012) states that "task repetition appears to significantly improve fluency while accuracy also has quite some benefit to gain" In addition to this, Swain (1995) notes that

"One function of producing the target language, in the sense of "practicing," is that it enhances fluency." Consequently, learners' spoken fluency can be improved in a significant way provided that they are given opportunities to practice and repeat the L2 as much as possible.

Day four – Presentations

On the fourth day of each week the learners prepared a presentation based on the information given by the teacher. Additionally, learners worked on their ability to ask each other and answer questions as well as keep a conversation going since this is an important ability that native speakers of a language have.

Day five – Role play

On the fifth day of each week the learners were given a task which they had to carry out in pairs. The final product was an audio recording of a dialogue based on a real communicative situation, that is, one they may encounter outside the classroom, which was sent to the teacher later on for its further analysis. Using the data gathered from the audio recordings, the teacher researcher completed the speaking fluency chart for each learner (see Appendix D).

Additionally, the tasks carried out by the participants were based upon the following principles outlined by Kellem (2009):

Table 4

*Speaking fluency development principles*

| PRINCIPLE | HOW IT WAS INCORPORATED IN THE SPEAKING TASKS |
|---|---|
| 1. Incorporate repetition | In the 'inner and outer circle' task, were given an opportunity to produce output in the L2 repeatedly as well as they were exposed to input in the L2 by means of interacting with several classmates. |
| 2. Increase speaking time | Most of the talk was done by the students themselves. The role of the teacher and the language assistants was limited to provide meaningful input and feedback when necessary. The most relevant spoken interactions took place among learners. |
| 3. Prepare before speaking | Learners were always provided with guidance from both the teacher and the language assistant as well as the input they were exposed to in the lab sessions. |
| 4. Use familiar and motivating topics | All of the topics chosen for the tasks were appealing to the students and connected to their own reality since they resemble real communicative situations which they are likely to encounter in real life. |
| 5. Ensure appropriate level | The given tasks were based on the learners' current proficiency level and its likely developmental path. |

To sum up, the implementation stage was a rewarding experience for both the researcher and the participants since the spoken use of the L2 increased noticeably and it had a positive effect in relation to the enhancement of the learners' spoken fluency (see Appendix D). However, there were two major challenges that required to be tackled which were the participants' nervousness and the way it affected fluent speaking and their inexperience and lack of speaking practice. The first challenge was addressed by means of providing learners with tasks connected to their own reality and which required them to communicate information about themselves through the language instead of exerting the pressure on them of having to memorize and repeat a set of words unconnected to their lives (see Appendix H). The latter challenge was addressed by means of providing learners with extended repetition practice aimed at giving learners opportunities to use the L2 as much as possible among themselves rather than just answering the teacher's questions (see Appendix I).

## Chapter 5: Results and Data Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the data and the findings. First, the data obtained from the questionnaires, audio recordings and field notes gathered was organized and grouped according to common patterns as well as the frequency they took place for it to be accounted for and explained (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 461). Secondly, this data was tabulated for the researcher to make a better interpretation of it focusing on the issue being researched. Thirdly, the procedures for data analysis from the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 2008) were carried out through an open, an axial and a selective coding of the information obtained from the implementation of three instruments. Throughout the chapter, excerpts from these instruments are presented to facilitate understanding and show the existing relationship among the data collected and the way they provide an answer to the research question of the present study. Finally, the categories which emerged from the data analysis process are outlined in order to provide evidence of the significance of the implementation of interactional tasks as a means of enhancing L2 speaking fluency.

### 5.1. Data management procedures

Data was gathered from different instruments. Firstly, learners completed a questionnaire (see Appendix E) at the initial stage of the implementation process, in which they provided some information in relation to their beliefs about language learning, more specifically on the speaking skill. From the implementation of this instrument it was possible to identify key features regarding speaking fluency. From this process could be concluded that affective factors such as motivation and confidence play a significant role in relation to the learners' willingness to engage in oral tasks in the classroom, and learners are aware of the importance that interaction

has for the development of the speaking skill in the L2. The following responses illustrate this

point:

Table 5

*Importance of affective factors and interaction for speaking fluency*

| Learners' affective factors | Learners' acknowledgement of the importance of interaction |
|---|---|
| Questionnaire item 4. ¿Qué se le dificulta más a la hora de aprender inglés? ¿Por qué? <br><br> *"Hablar. A veces se las palabras pero me da pena hablar frente a los demás. "* <br><br> *"El speaking. Porque todo el tiempo hablamos en español . Cuando hablo en inglés no me siento muy segura de lo que digo y siempre me pongo nerviosa."* <br><br> *"Hablar. Me da miedo equivocarme y que se rian de mí."* <br><br> *"Las actividades de hablar. Porque soy muy tímida y siempre me bloqueo y se me olvida lo que tengo que decir."* <br><br> Questionnaire item 5. ¿Ha interactuado con hablantes nativos de la lengua inglesa? (Si su respuesta a la pregunta anterior fue afirmativa describa como ha sido la experiencia) <br><br> *"Sí. Terrible porque nunca me entienden y me da pena hablar en inglés.* | Questionnaire item 10. *¿Cúal considera ud. Qué es la mejor forma desarrollar la fluidez oral en inglés?* <br><br> *"Hablando en inglés con mis compañeros"* <br><br> *"Interactuando en clase en vez de solo estudiar la gramatica o hacer ejercicios del libro"* <br><br> *"Poder interactuar con los compañeros y con los Asistentes"* <br><br> *"Practicando el speaking con otros compañeros"* |

These two aspects were identified in the other two instruments implemented by the

teacher researcher as the learners made a significant effort to use connected speech in their

spoken output and improved their speaking fluency in a noticeable way during the

implementation stage of the project. This is reflected the following excerpt from the field notes written by the teacher-researcher:

"During the speaking practice it was particularly noticeable how learners were able to apply the connected speech input from previous lessons. This was particularly noticeable in the consonant-vowel combinations. Additionally, they avoided long and unnecessary pauses using the filler "well" when replying. However, further work on intonation is to be done due to the tendency of some of them to end utterances with a rising intonation."

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On the other hand, the data obtained from the questionnaire helped the teacher develop activities aimed at overcoming the learners' speaking difficulties and more specifically, helping enhance their speaking fluency in the L2. As it could be seen in Table 4, the participants' replies acknowledged the necessity of having more opportunities to use the L2 orally by means of interacting with their partners if their speaking competence was to be enhanced. Furthermore, as Table 5 below shows, most participants recognized having difficulties with the speaking skill, reason why this vital skill was to be addressed.

Table 6

*Participants' difficulties in the second language*

*"Hablar. A veces se las palabras pero me da pena hablar frente a los demás."*

*"El speaking. Porque todo el tiempo hablamos en español . Cuando hablo en inglés no me siento muy segura de lo que digo y siempre me pongo nerviosa."*

*"Las actividades orales. Porque las palabras en inglés se pronuncian muy diferente a como se escriben."*

*"Hablar. Cuando hablo no me entienden y me toca hablar en español."*

*"El speaking y la escucha. Porque no estoy acostumbrado a eso y no tengo tiempo para practicar."*

*"Hablar. Me da miedo equivocarme y que se rian de mí."*

*"Las actividades de hablar. Porque soy muy tímida y siempre me bloqueo y se me olvida lo que tengo que decir."*

*"Hablar en inglés. Yo se palabras pero cuando tengo que decir frases se me olvidan las reglas de la gramática."*

In addition to the aforementioned, the researcher collected two audio recordings per week as a means of contrasting and comparing the data collected from learners through the questionnaire as well as identifying the enhancement of their speaking fluency throughout the implementation process. One on the first day, which was used as a means of identifying issues related to speaking fluency that required further work by the students and the second one, collected at the end of each week, which was used to assess the progress made by learners during the process. Finally, the researcher wrote entries on a field notes format (see Appendix B) based on what was observed during each lesson. Once the data collection stage was complete, they were stored in a computer for their further analysis and they were studied in order to account for all the aspects connected to fluency development through a matrix in which the data was grouped together according to common features. This process led the teacher-researcher to establish the following units of analysis:

Table 7

*Data units of analysis*

| |
|---|
| Speaking as a difficult skill |
| Difficulty to understanding native speakers of the language |
| Affective factors and their relation with speaking |
| Speech speed |
| Oral reading to facilitate speaking |
| Contextualized language |
| Peer interaction |
| L1 use |
| Translation use |
| Pronunciation |
| Importance of fluency |
| Repetition as a fluency booster |
| Interaction as a fluency booster |
| Contextualized practice |

## 5.1.1.  Validation

The validation of the data analysis was ensured through a data reduction process (Myles & Huberman, 1994) aimed to identify common and repetitive patterns as well as negative evidence in each of the three instruments applied during the implementation stage of the study. Furthermore, a data analysis instrument was created (see Appendix D) in order to account for the problem researched. The design of this instrument was geared towards the fundamental issue of finding a convergence of the data from the audio recordings and the field notes made by the researcher.

### 5.1.2.  Data analysis methodology

Once the implementation stage of the present research study was finished, the researcher initiated a process of organization of the data collected which consisted in "(a) preparing the data for analysis, (b) analyzing the data, and (c) interpreting the data" (Marczyk et al. 2005, p. 198). Furthermore, the principles of grounded theory were applied in order to suit the issue under study and facilitate its subsequent interpretation and analysis. This process was carried out through the coding of the data in order to have a clear focus on the data to be analyzed. Cohen et al. (2007) define coding as the deconstruction of the "data into manageable chunks in order to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p. 493). For this project, the three types of coding from the grounded theory were used: open, axial and selective.

### 5.2.  Categories

The analysis process of the data collected led the researcher to find three main categories: *recognizing the importance of fluency, interaction as a means of improving speaking* and *effects of tasks on speaking*. These categories emerged from a constant comparative data analysis which is a means of "generating and connecting categories by comparing incidents in the data to other incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories" (Cresswell, 2012, p. 434). This procedure led the teacher-researcher to find common patterns of occurrence across the three instruments implemented as the table below illustrates:

Table 8

*Instruments data triangulation*

| | *recognizing the importance of fluency* | *interaction as a means of improving speaking* | *effects of tasks on speaking* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Field notes | "it can be seen that most participants make a significant effort to speak at a natural rate. This is particularly noticeable in the sessions they have with the native language assistants. What at the outset was perceived as a threat now seems to be a motivation for learners to enhance their oral competence in the L2. They somewhat have figured out that the more fluent they speak the easier they can communicate with native speakers" | "it was observed that despite the repetitive nature of the inner and outer circle activity learners did not lose their motivation and regarded its value in therms of the opportunity it offers to use the L2 comfortably without the pressure of the teacher assessing every single word they utter instead." | "The participant has benefited from the different activities and task implemented by the teacher in the extent hesitation and use of one-word-at-a-time-utterances has reduced significantly." |
| Questionnaire | "hablar rapido como los nativos para que le entiandan a uno mejor" | "Poder interactuar con los compañeros y con los asistentes" | "Sería ideal usar actividades que nos permitiera practicar el inglés que se usa en la vida real y así comunicarnos mejor." |
| Audio recording | See Appendix D | | |

### 5.2.1.  Category mapping

The table below illustrates the different categories the researcher found in the analysis of

the data after a process of open, axial and selective coding:

Table 9

*Category mapping*

| INTERACTIONAL TASKS INFLUENCE SIGNIFICANTLY THE ENHANCEMENT OF SPEAKING FLUENCY IN ENGLISH | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **IMPORTANCE OF FLUENCY** | | **INTERACTION AS A MEANS OF IMPROVING SPEAKING** | | **EFFECTS OF TASKS ON SPEAKING** | |
| **Fluency work to develop effective communication in an L2** | **Connection of affective factors to fluency development** | **Interaction as a fluency booster** | **Interaction as meaningful practice** | **Tasks as a fluency improvement generator** | **Tasks as a means of fostering L2 communication inside the classroom** |
| Factors such as the repetition of tasks as well as the extended speaking practice allow the participants to enhance their speaking fluency in the L2. | Most participants acknowledge that factors such as nervousness had a great influence on their reluctance to speak in the L2 | Most participants acknowledge the need to interact in the L2 as a means of practice. Furthermore, repetitive and extended interaction helped learners develop initial features of fluency, especially in terms of connected speech. | | Having to talk to other classmates about topics connected to their lives help learners to feel more comfortable when speaking in the L2 and as a consequence of this improve their performance in this skill. | The activities proposed helped to increase the use of the L2 inside the classroom with a clear communicative purpose different from the typical teacher-student interaction pattern or the excessive use of a textbook as language learning principle. |

### 5.2.2. *Identification of core category*

The process of selecting the core category involved the careful analysis of the

subcategories obtained through open and axial coding. For this process the following factors

were considered: relationship amongst categories, frequency of patterns, saturation, and the

extent to which theory can be developed from data (Glaser, 1978).

### 5.3. Analysis of categories

#### 5.3.1. Recognizing the importance of fluency

Richards (1990) claims that "the overall goal of a second language learner is to produce fluent speech". This thought was identified by several of the participants in their questionnaire's responses:

> "Para mí el factor más importante es hablar de una manera natural igual que en español y sin hacer tantas pausas".

> (P2, Questionnaire – ítem 10)

> "yo creo que lo importante es hablar rápido"

(P3, Questionnaire – ítem 10)

"A mí me gustaría hablar igual de rápido que los nativos"

(P6, questionnaire – ítem 10)

> "yo pienso que lo más importante es hablar de una manera que uno se haga entender, sin tener que pensar en español que es lo que uno va a decir en inglés"

> (P10, questionnaire – ítem 10)

The replies above were provided as an answer to the question *¿Qué factor(es) cree ud que son importante(s) a la hora de hablar inglés?* (see Appendix A) and reflect the learners' acknowledgement of the importance of fluency for L2 speaking, especially in relation to speech rate. In this regard, Thornbury and Slade (2006) point out that fluency phenomenon can be divided into two main categories: "temporal variables and hesitation phenomena" (p. 216). Amongst the temporary variables can be found speech rate, pause length and length of run. Speech rate is of particular importance in the extent it is inextricably connected to natural language use (Bailey, 2006) and the conception of

acceptable speaking.  This view is also found in Leaver et al. (2005, p. 41) who

characterize fluency as "speaking with a normal tempo", being this a necessary condition

for proficient speech. In addition to this, it is fundamental to note the positive effect that

fluency work has on the learners' affective factors such as confidence building and

reduction of nervousness and anxiety when engaging in oral tasks in the L2. This can be

seen in the following excerpts from the field notes written by the researcher:

*"The speaker is becoming more confident when speaking. Hesitation is not as*

*long as it used to be."*

(Field note 2, P9)

*"The student resorts less to his L1. This is because of repetition that makes him*

*become more confident when speaking. Additionally, connected speech is used in some*

*cases and his speech speed has increased considerably in relation to the previous week."*

(Field note 2, P10)

These two entries made by the teacher-researcher in his field notes are reflected in

the participants spoken output development throughout four tasks:

Table 10

*Audio recordings excerpts*

| TASK | PARTICIPANT 9 | PARTICIPANT 10 |
|------|---------------|----------------|
| 1 | Lionel Messi-is () soccer player … and plays in Barcelona | Shakira is a Colombian singer … y… she have two children |
| 2 | I have a bulldog… It's white and like playing | Well, I love cats … because they are very intelligent and playful |
| 3 | well…Lorena has lunch after English class … and then go back to work | Angela get up at 5 o'clock and has breakfast with his … err her family |
| 4 | I'd like a hamburguer and lemonade, please | Can I have a chicken sandwich, please? |

___ = indicates the use of connected speech
-  = indicates the ocurrance of one-word-at-a-time utterances
… = indicates hesitation
▮ = indicates the lack of subject-verb agreement
() = indicates the absence of indefinite article
▮ = indicates the use of a filler
▮ = indicates the use of the L1

Even though the excerpts in table 10 are analyzed at a sentence level, it is possible to see how the participants were able to implement the use of connected speech and fillers in their spoken output. Furthermore, it can even be seen how participant 10 corrects himself after using an incorrect possessive adjective.  Another salient aspect in terms of fluency enhancement was the rate of speech which was aligned to a great what could be considered as natural language use by a native speaker. Thus, learners' utterance speed was rather normal and negative factors such as hesitation, production of one-word-at-a-time utterances as well as use of the L1 decreased dramatically. However, as it can be seen in the excerpts there are some flaws, particularly when accuracy is concerned. This situation took place in two specific cases which were the omission of the indefinite article and the lack of subject-verb agreement as table illustrated but it was not characteristic of all participants, and most importantly, it did not affect or hindered communication at all.

Table 11

*Speaking assessment chart, Participant 1 and Participant 2*

| TASK | PARTICIPANT 1 | PARTICIPANT 2 |
|:---:|---|---|
| 1 | *He's an actor*<br><br>*He's American*<br><br>*He lives in California* | She's a singer |
| 2 | *The dog is a mammal.* | The cat is very intelligent |
| 3 | *He gets up*<br><br>*He takes a shower* | Enrique leaves<br>home and starts work at seven |
| 4 | *Can I have a soda?* | I'd like a hamburger |

From the excerpts it can be inferred that learners were able to internalize one of the most important features related to speaking fluency, namely the use of connected speech. In this particular regard it is necessary to keep in mind the fact that being the participants' elementary level students with no alternative scenarios to practice the L2 different than the classroom it can be considered as a very positive outcome the fact they demonstrate the initial speaking fluency features illustrated in tables 10 and 11. Nation (2001) for whom "the fluency development strand of a course is important at all stages of learning. Learners should become fluent with what they learn from the beginning, developing fluency with greetings, numbers, time, days of the week, time indicators like *today, yesterday, next week, last month,* some colours, and other items which could be used frequently. This fluency practice is a first step" (p. 127). Thus, it is possible to come to the assertion that fluency enhancement and development is a sequential process which requires lots of practice and opportunities to use the target language to come to fruition. For this reason, given the characteristics of the participants and the context it would be unrealistic as well as unfeasible to demand a fluency performance beyond the sentence level.

*5.3.2. Interaction as a means of improving speaking*

Traditionally, interaction has been considered as a major generator of speaking fluency in an L2. From a sociocultural perspective, interaction is regarded "as the basic genesis of language itself" this is due to the fact that "learners negotiate meaning and fulfill pragmatic objectives even while their linguistic resources are still exceedingly limited." Saville-Troike (2006, p. 102). A similar view can be found in Thornbury (2005):

"Shortage of opportunities for practice is identified as an important contributing factor to speaking failure. And by practice is meant not practice of grammar and vocabulary, but practice of interactive speaking itself" (p.28).

During the implementation stage of the research project learners had approximately an amount of 20-30 minutes of speaking practice per lesson. This brought a positive change on the learners' fluency which was particularly noticeable in the data analyzed in the speaking fluency assessment chart. In this regard Yule (2010), acknowledges the benefits of providing learners with opportunities to perform in the L2 since "The opportunity to produce comprehensible output in meaningful interaction seems to be another important element in the learner's development of L2 ability" (p. 193). This view, is also stated by Richards & Lockhart (1994), who highlight the importance of interaction since "Through interacting with other  students in pairs or groups, students can be given the opportunity to draw on their linguistic resources in a nonthreatening situation and use them to complete different kinds of tasks" (p. 152).

The role of interaction for L2 speaking fluency pointed out by the theoreticians above is backed up in the data obtained from the participants:

10. ¿Cúal considera ud. qué es la mejor forma de desarrollar la fluidez oral en inglés?

"Hablando en inglés con mis compañeros"

(S3, Questionnaire ítem 10)

"Interactuando en clase en vez de solo estudiar la gramática o hacer ejercicios del libro"

(S4, questionnaire ítem 12)

"Poder interactuar con los compañeros y con los asistentes"
(S8, questionnaire ítem 12)

The excerpts above evidence the key role of interaction as an L2 speaking fluency booster and its acknowledgement by the participants. A similar insight can be seen in the following excerpts from the researcher's field notes:

"The speaker is steady in her use of connected speech and her speaking is produced at a normal speed as a result of frequent interaction in the L2."

(Field note 3, P11)

"Even though the speaker still struggles with the effective implementation of connected speech in his output, his fluency has significantly improved in terms of speech rate and lack of use of the L1. It is particularly evident that interaction with peers has helped the participant to make exclusive use of the L2".

(Field note 3, P10)

These excerpts reflects Shumin (1997) views on the importance of interaction since "Being able to interact in a language is essential" in terms of developing proficiency in a second language. However it is of primary importance for teachers to set up the necessary conditions for this to be feasible by providing learners with meaningful opportunities to use the language orally as well as practice their communicative skills through real interaction with peers instead of focusing exclusively on working with the textbook.

### *5.3.3. Effect of tasks on speaking*

Tasks are defined by Long (1985) as "the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between" (p.89). This aspect has important implications in relation to teaching in the extent that as Brown (2001) points out, tasks need to have a "focus on the authentic use of language for meaningful communicative purposes beyond the language classroom" (p. 129). Based on these tenets the researcher designed a series of tasks aimed at providing learner with maximized practice involving peer-interaction, repetition. The importance of these aspects is recognized by the students in their replies to the question "¿Cuál considera ud que es la mejor manera de desarrollar la fluidez oral en inglés?"

"Con actividades orales que me permitan poner en práctica lo visto en clase"

(S5, ítem 12)

"Con actividades en grupo"

(S5, ítem 12)

Similarly, the researcher has also highlighted the importance of tasks for the enhancement of L2 fluency as it is shown in the following excerpt from the field notes on a "day three" lesson:

"Even though most participants had noticeable difficulties when engaging in interactional tasks at the initial stage of the implementation it has been evident the improvement in connection to their speaking skill. This can be attributable to the connection of tasks with the learners' immediate contexts and the feasibility of applying the language used in real-life contexts".

(Field note 4)

One of the necessary conditions for learners' fluency enhancement is related to the issue of learners' involvement. As Klippel (1983) states "learning is more effective if the learners are actively involved in the process" (p. 5). This took place through the active interaction process learners experienced, especially in the inner and outer circle activities since the more participants repeated the better their spoken output was.  Similarly, Nunan (2004) puts forward the implications of implementing tasks in the ESL classroom. As he puts it, tasks "require learners to rehearse, in class, the sorts of communicative interactions outside the classroom" (p. 53).

An example of the aforementioned can be found in the four tasks carried out by the participants. In task one and two they had to describe a famous person they admire and their favorite animal respectively since describing (people, objects, places, etc.) is a very common activity made in everyday speech. Task three, required the participants to interact with a classmate, have a conversation about what their daily routines were and then report it to another classmate. Reporting is another type of task people daily do as part of their routines in their jobs, studies and even as a means of socializing. Finally in task four the participants acted out a restaurant role play in which they created their own menu and then played the customer and the waiter. Eating out is one of the commonest activities done by people as part of their routines on a daily, weekly or even monthly basis but with certain degree of repetition. Thus, the tasks provided by the teacher-researcher aimed at providing the participants with the necessary practice and rehearsal that enabled them to perform well in these situations: describing, reporting and asking for food. An important aspect to bear in mind is that such rehearsal can be achieved through the formation of repetitive habits as Tudor (2001) mentions:

"One justification for a degree of habit-formation based learning is thus that it can help

learners develop more fluency and communicative confidence by helping them to be able to use

more predictable or high yield language elements without conscious reflection or planning"

Tudor (2001, p. 94)

Thus, it can be concluded that providing learners with tasks which allow them to practice the target language as much as possible is key in order to foster the enhancement of L2 speaking fluency in the L2 in the sense learners do not only need language to perform within the classroom but in daily situations.

## 5.4.    Core category

The teacher-researcher could establish a core category after going through the process derived from the open and axial coding stages. For this process the following factors were considered: relationship amongst categories, frequency of patterns, saturation, and the extent to which theory can be developed from data (Glaser, 1978). As a result of the aforementioned it was possible for the researcher to establish the inextricable and interdependent relation between interactional tasks and fluency improvement.

To sum up, the present research study has yielded some relevant aspects about the phenomenon of learners' lack of speaking fluency in English. First, it can be concluded that the implementation of interactional tasks has a positive effect on the learners' fluency in the L2. This was evident in the improvement of the learners' speech rate, linking of sounds as well as the decreased occurrence of one-word-at-a-time utterances, hesitation and use of the L1. Second, it was shown that habit formation through repetition of interactional tasks effects positively learners' affective factors since levels of nervousness and anxiety were considerably reduced. This could be attributable to factors such as repetition and connection between the tasks implemented and the learners' immediate context. Finally, these results suggest that language teachers should make considerably more use of interactional tasks when seeking to develop learners' oral fluency.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

The present chapter puts forward the conclusions derived from the research project carried out at university in relation to their value to the educational community, its likely replicability and compares its results with previous research on the issues of oral production and interaction at the Colombian local context. Finally, the limitations and implications for future research are stated.

### 6.1.    Comparison of results with previous studies' results

Some preliminary research on the effect of interaction on speaking has been carried out in the Colombian context and has focused primarily on the positive effect that it has for learners in relation to their communicative skills. Forero (2005); Gómez (2011); Gonzalez (2009). These studies have shed some light on the benefits that interaction yields to the process of learning a second language, particularly in relation to speaking. Such benefits were evident in the present study and prove that including interaction into language lessons at the local Colombian contexts is likely to help learners enhance their competence in English. This is illustrated in table 12:

Table 12

*Studies in the local Colombian context*

| | **Forero (2005)** | **Gonzalez & Arias (2009)** | **Gómez (2011)** | *Usma (2014)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population | Fifteen 10th grade students | Thirty-five 8th grade students | undergraduate students at a private university in Bogotá | Eleven administrative workers at a private university |
| Problem | Students were not participating, neither talking frequently nor fluently. | Students' low quality oral interaction | Lack of dynamics of interaction in the classroom aimed at the development of students' language learning | Learners lack of speaking oral fluency |
| Methodology and result | - Implementation of games, role-plays and interviews that had to be carried out in groups<br>- Field notes, interviews and questionnaires were carried out<br>- Speaking ability was not improved as much as expected but the kind of work (group work) helped students to participate more in class. | - Provision of goal-oriented input<br>- Questionnaires, interviews, direct observation, student diaries, and audio/video recordings.<br>- task-based activities helped the students comprehend and manipulate information, as well as interact meaningfully and spontaneously | - Implementation of meaningful interaction dynamics derived from a three-month needs analysis process.<br>- Field diaries and surveys.<br>- students engaged in a process of language learning in which they were no longer afraid of expressing their ideas either in L1 or L2. (…) they used both languages in order to communicate their ideas successfully | - Implementation of interactional tasks (e.g. role plays, information gap activities)<br>- Field notes, questionnaires, audio recordings<br>- Interactional tasks yield a positive effect on the development of the learners speaking fluency (and the speaking skill itself). However, this depends to a great extent on the amount of practice learners are provided with. |

Regarding fluency, some studies analyzed this component of speaking in terms of

assessment (Muñoz, Aristizabal, Crespo, Gaviria, Lopera & Palacio, 2003); and oral production

(Prieto, 2007). However, the concept of fluency as such, and more importantly, development of

strategies to enhance this ability intended to address the needs of Colombian students are not

clearly established. Thus, this thesis aims to provide an analysis of how speaking can be fostered

as well as acknowledge the crucial role that fluency has in connection to effective

communication in a second language.

**6.2.      Significance of the results**

The development of the present research study showed how the participants managed to incorporate the key aspects underlying the enhancement of the speaking fluency in the L2. Firstly, they developed an initial speaking fluency by means of linking sounds in their speech as well as hesitating less when interacting with peers in the L2. For this reason, it is possible to say that spoken interaction and speaking fluency are inextricably connected in the extent that the more oral practice learners were provided with, the better their fluency in the L2 was.

However, there were two factors that prevented learners from enhancing their fluency in the L2, age and origin. The first factor was evident in two students aged 50 and 56 who despite the efforts made in order to implement the different strategies given, and their efforts to carry out the assigned tasks properly, really failed to improve their fluency in the L2 due to an excessive attention to the language form rather than the message that was being communicated and a noteworthy difficulty to remember the input they had been exposed to. The latter factor was evident in two learners (one from the Pacific coast and another one form the Caribbean coast) who had noticeable difficulties with the pronunciation of the final consonants in words such as (nine, name, there, etc.) and therefore with the connection of sound which led them to produce one-word-at-a-time utterances.

Consequently, according to the aforementioned issues it is possible to assert that fluency in a language can be improved by means of interaction in the target language, nevertheless age and regional differences are two aspects that require special attention in order to help learners succeed in their language learning process. Bortfeld et al (2001) acknowledge the key role that age has on fluency in the extent that "age-related changes seem likely to make conversation more effortful and to generate higher disfluency rates". The connection among age and disfluency is

also analysed by Burke et al. (1991) who state that "the connections between lexical and phonological nodes become weakened due to infrequent use, nonrecent use and aging". This is the aged learners' inability to satisfactorily account for the effect of language instruction in a meaningful way regardless of the means used and the provided practice. On the other hand, the relationship between dialect varieties and fluency is analyzed by Newcombe (2007) who points out that they "affect morphology and lexis as well as phonology" (p. 53).

Another important factor that hinders L2 speaking fluency deals with the ethnical background of speakers. Shield and Whitley-Price (1999) draw out the implications that lack of fluency due to ethnical origin have in relation to crucial aspects of people's lives, namely employment. This is due to the fact that fluency in the English language is a major requirement in order to "climb the occupational ladder". This issue is of particular importance in the extent it shows how lack of fluency in an L2 might not merely impede successful communication but their progress within society too.

### 6.3. Limitations of the present study

The present study has some limitations being the most noticeable ones the unlikely enhancement of speaking fluency in aged learners and the deep-rooted beliefs some teachers and learners have in the sense of favoring formal aspects of the language to the detriment of effective communication in an L2. Nevertheless, this project could be a starting point for acknowledging and emphasizing on the importance of helping learners work on speaking as a means of improving language proficiency as well as affective factors such as motivation and confidence.

### 6.4. Further research

Future studies on the issue of speaking fluency should concentrate on enhancing the opportunities for spoken interaction in the L2 to take place on a more regular basis. This is of

primary importance considering that one of the goals that was not covered in the present research project is not to limit the study to the sole attainment of helping learners to improve their speaking fluency in English during the time the project lasted but to guarantee that learners will have an ongoing improvement in connection to their spoken output. However, this may depend heavily on factors such as the participants' implementation of the strategies worked during the course, their commitment and autonomy in relation to their language learning process, and more importantly, the possibility to continue studying English in the near future. In that regard, it must be taken into account by institutions, teachers and learners that the prospect of being able to communicate effectively in a second language through fluent speaking serves as a continuous incentive for all of them, especially in a particular context like the Colombian one. Furthermore, crucial factors like age and regional variations must be kept in mind by researchers, especially at the initial stage of a study in order to obtain the desired results as well as accomplish the set goals.

Fluency work must be at the heart of the foreign language instruction. This is due to the fact that communication in a language is based on the ability to get one's message across and understand what other people attempt to convey when engaging in a conversation. Difficulties in any of the two abilities mentioned may consequently lead to communication breakdowns which are just the tip of the iceberg. In addition to this, failing to communicate effectively in the language being studied may have serious consequences in terms of motivation, self-confidence, competence and even in the capacity to socialize with others.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned, raising learners' awareness on the importance of fluency is vital to change their perception of English as a subject rather than a language. In the extent this can be materialized, the sometimes unlikely scenario of students

actually communicating in the L2 rather than trying to show they have learnt a grammar rule or memorize a set of words may come into fruition. However, this challenging task requires a strong commitment by both teachers and learners otherwise communication will continue being a noticeable neglected component of the process of teaching/learning English as a second/foreign language.

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**Appendix A: Consent letters**

**CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PROYECTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN EN LENGUA EXTRANJERA**

Febrero de 2014
Bogotá D.C., Colombia

**Estudiantes Unicorporativa:**
**Centro de Idiomas Rochereau**
**Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios**
**Bogotá D.C.**

**Estimados estudiantes:**

En este momento me encuentro desarrollando un proyecto de investigación titulado ***"Developing L2 Speaking Fluency Through the Implementation of Interactional Tasks"***, dirigido al personal administrativo en la Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios, el cual intenta contribuir en forma significativa al proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) dando especial atención al desarrollo de la fluidez verbal en inglés por parte de los estudiantes.

El proyecto en mención busca determinar el efecto de la implementación de materiales y actividades que promuevan la interacción en lengua extranjera en el desarrollo y/o mejora de la fluidez verbal de los estudiantes. El desarrollo e implementación de este estudio hace parte de mi trabajo de grado de la Maestría en Didáctica del Inglés con Énfasis en Ambientes de Aprendizaje Autónomo de la Universidad de la Sabana.

Por tal motivo, hago solicitud de su consentimiento y colaboración para llevar a cabo mi proyecto de investigación, lo cual no involucrara de manera alguna la modificación del syllabus o el enfoque para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera establecido por la institución. De igual manera a los participantes del proyecto investigativo en mención se les garantizará mantener su identidad en el anonimato.

Cabe anotar que el proyecto no tendrá incidencia alguna en las evaluaciones y notas parciales y/o finales del curso, por tal razón al firmar el estudiante acepta voluntariamente participar del proyecto de investigación.
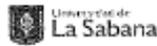
MASTER in
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
AUTONOMOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Universidad de
La Sabana

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

Cordialmente,

Diego Alejandro Usma Restrepo
Docente de inglés de tiempo completo del Centro de Idiomas Rochereau (Corporación Universitaria
Minuto de Dios) y estudiante de Maestría en Didáctica del Inglés, Universidad de la Sabana

Yo _____ * autorizo a Diego Alejandro Usma Restrepo
para llevar a cabo su investigación en la Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios

*Estudiantes *English to Share*

Hayro Alejandro Huerfano Penagos

William Camilo Gil

ONIRA CAICEDO ZAMORA

Gelber Josid Castro

Monica Peñaloza FLOREZ

Enrique Diazgranados R.

Martha Esperanza Rodriguez M.

Angela Johanna Garcia Quiroga

laura Marcela Rojas

Alexandra Villamizar Alarcón

Lizeth Lorena Guerrero Durán

DIEGO ALEJANDRO USMA RESTREPO

MASTER IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
AUTONOMOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Universidad de
La Sabana

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

Cordialmente,

Diego Alejandro Usma Restrepo
Docente de inglés de tiempo completo del Centro de Idiomas Rochereau (Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios) y estudiante de Maestría en Didáctica del Inglés, Universidad de la Sabana

Yo _____ DIANA ESCANDÓN _____ autorizo a Diego Alejandro Usma Restrepo para llevar a cabo su investigación en la Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios

Coordinadora Extensión CIR

## Appendix B: Teacher-researcher's field notes format

| FIELD NOTES _1_ | |
|---|---|
| **Classroom Observations** | |

Date: Feb 2014
Class: A1 – Beginners
Teacher: Diego Usma

TOPIC:

| OBSERVATIONS | COMMENTS |
|---|---|
| ① The students show reluctance and lack of confidence when engaging in oral activities | • There can be different reasons for this situation: 1. The students are not used to carry out oral activities in the L2 different from answering the teacher's questions. |
| I ... am ... from Santa Marta | 2. Lack of opportunities to engage in oral activities from previous learning experiences seems to have taken a toll in relation to the learners' development of their speaking skill since they clearly favor grammar instruction over oral production in the L2. |
| | 3. Negative past experiences when using the L2 orally may have hindered the learners' initiative and motivation to produce spoken output in the L2. An undeniable proof of this is the continuing and uncontextualized use of the rising intonation in order to reply to the teacher's questions. This clearly shows how they do not feel secure of what they are saying, probably because they do not think they are pronouncing correctly or using the grammar accurately. For this reason most of their utterances sound like questions as if they were expecting the teacher's approval. |
| ② Constant hesitation when producing oral output in the L2. | Most learners hesitate when producing oral output which could be attributable to the following reasons: |
| I like ... music ... salsa ... and music reggaeton. | ① They in search of producing acceptable oral output to the teacher take too much time retrieving vocabulary and thinking about adequate grammar structures to convey their ideas. |
| | ② Nervousness and fear of losing face in front of their classmates force them to hesitate in an unnatural way. |
| | ③ Learners do not acknowledge how hesitation and long pauses affect their speaking skills in terms of sounding natural and engaging in real life conversational. |

**Appendix C: Needs analysis questionnaire**

1. ¿Cómo se siente ud. cuando tiene que usar la lengua inglesa en clase?

2. ¿Cómo calificaría ud su nivel de habilidad oral en Inglés?

3. ¿Cuándo ud usa la lengua inglesa es para…

4. Dentro de estas opciones cual considera ud que es la mejor manera de practicar la habilidad oral en Inglés
    a.Haciendo actividades del libro
    b.  Estudiando la gramática
    c.Interactuando con otros compañeros en clase
    d.  Otra – Cúal? _____

5. ¿Qué tipo de actividades considera ud. Más pertinentes para practicar la habilidad oral en

lengua Inglesa?

**Appendix D: Speaking fluency assessment chart**

## SPEAKING FLUENCY ASSESSMENT CHART

| UDENT | TASK 1 | TASK 2 | TASK 3 | TASK 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | PERFORMANCE (S) NS M D | PERFORMANCE (S) NS M D | PERFORMANCE (S) NS M D | PERFORMANCE (S) NS M D |
| | COMMENTS | COMMENTS | COMMENTS | COMMENTS |
| | (A) The learner tends to speak one-word-at-a-time. (B) No use of fillers is identified. | (A) The learner is able to make simple consonant + vowel connected speech. (B) No use of fillers is identified. | (A) The learner is able to make more consonant + vowel connected speech. (B) Use of the filler "well" can be noticed. | (A) The learner has effectively introduced the consonant vowel connected speech pattern. (B) The learner is able to use the filler "well" in an effective way to avoid long unnecessary pauses. |
| | RECORDED EVIDENCE | RECORDED EVIDENCE | RECORDED EVIDENCE | RECORDED EVIDENCE |
| | (A) Hello... my-name-is-51 How-are-you? (B) ...I'm-from-Fractativa | (A) My favorite animal is the parrot I like it because it is... (B) ...It is green and it has a beak | (A) I live in Garces Now. (B) Well, in my house there's a living room, two bedrooms, a bathroom and kitchen | (A) I'd like a soda, please. (B) Well, that is all for now. |

# Appendix E: Questionnaire

Developing L2 Speaking Fluency Through the Implementation of Interactional Tasks

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. ¿Ha estudiado ingles en el pasado?            Sí X   No___            ¿Dónde?
Colegio X        Instituto___      Universidad___   Otro___ ¿Cúal?_____

PARTICIPANT #1
[23 years old]

2. ¿Cómo considera su experiencia en el proceso aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa?
Excelente___          Muy buena___   Buena___      Regular X     Mala___       N/A___
¿Por qué?
Solo veíamos el verbo Tobe

3. ¿Qué se le facilita más a la hora de aprender inglés? ¿Por qué?
Leer, porque era lo que más hacíamos en el colegio y además
uno puede usar el diccionario

4. ¿Qué se le dificulta más a la hora de aprender inglés? ¿Por qué?
Hablar. A veces sé las palabras pero me da pena hablar frente
a los demás.

5. ¿Ha interactuado con hablantes nativos de la lengua inglesa? (Si su respuesta a la pregunta anterior fue afirmativa describa como ha
sido la experiencia)
Sí. La verdad no me gusta por que no entiendo lo que dicen.

6. ¿Qué se le facilita más a la hora de hablar inglés? ¿Cuál cree ud que es la razón de dicha situación?
Decir las palabras que veo en clase, porque vemos clase todos
los días.

7. ¿Qué se le dificulta más a la hora de hablar inglés? ¿Cuál cree ud que es la razón de dicha situación?
Hablar rápido como los nativos. Porque ellos hablan muy rápido

8. ¿Cómo califica su habilidad para comunicarse oralmente en inglés? ¿Por qué?
Excelente___          Muy buena___   Buena___      Regular___    Mala X       N/A___
Porque me da pena hablar en inglés.
9. ¿Considera ud. Qué la "fluidez oral" es importante/necesaria para el proceso de aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa?
Sí.

10. ¿Cúal considera ud. qué es la mejor forma de desarrollar la fluidez oral en inglés? ¿Por qué?
Practicando y hablando en inglés con mis compañeros.

## Appendix F: Lesson plan for Day 1

**A. THE CLASS**
**Students:** 11 administrative workers aged 20-50 from *Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios*
**Level:** English 2 (A1 according to the CEF)

B. TEACHING AIDS
- Computers
- Internet, YouTube<sup>TM</sup>

C. AIMS
- To expose the learners to actual conversations of people who meet for the first time.
- To provide learners with meaningful input on what to say when meeting a person for the first time.
- To provide the learners with meaningful

| TIMING | PROCEDURE |
|---|---|
| **2 mins** | **1.** The teacher writes the links the learners will browse on the board and tells them to write meaningful vocabulary on their notebooks. |
| **15 mins** | **2.** Individual work. The students will watch the videos and write important vocabulary on their notebooks. The teacher will clarify any possible doubts the learners may have in relation to vocabulary. |
| **20 mins** | **3.** Pair work. The learners will work in pairs and create their own conversation. They will use the 'personal information' vocabulary from the videos and then practice the conversation to sound as natural as possible. The teacher will monitor the different groups and help if needed. |
| **7 mins** | **4.** The students will record their conversations on their cellphones and then send it to the teacher. |
| **1 min** | **5.** The teacher assigns the homework for the next day. |

**H. BOARD PLAN**
**1.**
**A. Check your e-mails and browse the following links:**
**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

http://youtu.be/d4xHaGUx3c0
http://youtu.be/FxVK4XGuxRw
http://youtu.be/pEa-qDxhQ9w
http://youtu.be/Uum2nyKd3VQ
**B. Write important words/phrases/expressions on your notebook as you'll need them later.**

5.
HOMEWORK
Bring a picture of your family and be prepared to talk about it.

## Appendix G: Lesson plan for Day 17

**A. THE CLASS**
**Students:** 11 administrative workers aged 20-50 from the college
**Level:** English 2 (A1 according to the CEF)

**B. TEACHING AIDS**
**- TV**
**- Laptop**

**C. AIMS**
**- To recycle input from previous lessons.**
**- To provide the learners with extended speaking practice.**
**- To challenge students to use the L2 spontaneously**

| TIMING | D. PROCEDURE | INTERACTION PATTERN |
|---|---|---|
| **10 mins** | **1.** The teacher will select the menu of one of the classmates and use it as a model to carry out a restaurant conversation. | **T-S** |
| **10 mins** | **2. The teacher will provide input on two aspects:**<br>- Yes/no questions intonation<br>- Use of fillers<br>- Connected speech | **T-S** |
| **2 mins** | **3.** The teacher will divide the students into two seating arrangements (inner-waiters/outer-customers circle) | **T-S** |
| **18 mins** | **4.** The students will make two circles (inner and outer) and ask/answer questions about their houses using the input previously given.<br>The teacher will monitor and make notes on items such as mispronunciation, lack of fluency and no connection of sounds. | **S-S** |
| **5 mins** | **5.** The teacher will provide feedback on the learners' performance and assign homework for the next session. | |

H. BOARD PLAN (shown on the TV screen)
1.

| Waiter: | Good evening. What can I get you? |
| Customer: | Um, I'm not ready to order yet. Can I have a minute or two? |
| Waiter: | Certainly. Take your time. |
| .................... |
| Waiter: | Can I take your order now? |
| Customer: | Yes, I think so. I'd like the vegetable soup to start with. |
| Waiter: | And for the main course? |
| Customer: | A burger deluxe. |
| Waiter: | Would you like anything to drink? |
| Customer: | Just a bottle of mineral water. |
| Waiter: | Thank you. |

5.
HOMEWORK
Bring a PowerPoint presentation about your favorite dish including the following information:
- Where the dish is from
- Its ingredients
- How to prepare it

**Appendix H: Speaking Practice aided by the English Assistant**

| TIMING | D. PROCEDURE | INTERACTION PATTERN |
|---|---|---|
| 5 mins | 1. The English assistant (Helena) will show a picture of her family. Then the learners will be divided into groups and write down personal information questions about one specific member of Helena's family. | T-S S-S |
| 5 mins | 2. The students will work in pairs according to the instruction on 1 | S-S |
| 10 mins | 3. The teacher will elicit questions from learners and Helena will answer them if they are correct. If they are not, the students have to correct it. | T/EA-S |
| 10 mins | 4. Helena will make a short presentation of her family and call the learners' attention on key aspects such as: <br> - Vocabulary <br> - Pronunciation <br> - Connected speech and fluency | EA-S |
| 10 mins | 5. The students will talk to a least three classmates and ask/answer question about their families. <br> The teacher and Helena will monitor the students and provide help if needed. | S-S |
| 5 mins | 6. Helena will elicit information from some learners and call their attention on correct pronunciation, vocabulary as well as fluency. | EA-S |

**Appendix I: Extended repetition practice (Speed talking circles)**

| TIMING | G. PROCEDURE | INTERACTION PATTERN |
|---|---|---|
| 10 mins | 1. The teacher will show a picture of his family and learners will ask questions about each member. The teacher will only answer a question if it is correct. | T-S |
| 10 mins | 2. The teacher will provide input on two aspects:<br>- Pronunciation: The teacher will play the pronunciation of some words with the *Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary* and have the students repeat afterwards.<br>- Connected speech | T |
| 15 mins | 3. The students will make two circles (inner and outer) and ask/answer questions about their families using the input previously given.<br>The teacher will monitor and make notes on items such as mispronunciation, lack of fluency and no connection of sounds. | S-S |
| 5 mins | 4. The teacher will provide learners with a general feedback based on the information collected during inner/outer circle activity. | T-S |

**Appendix J: Questionnaire, question 1**

| PARTICIPANT | 1 ¿Ha estudiado ingles en el pasado? ¿Dónde? |
| --- | --- |
| P1 (23) | Sí. Colegio |
| P2 (30) | Sí. Universidad |
| P3 (18) | Sí. Colegio |
| P4 (22) | Sí. Colegio; Instituto |
| P5 (35) | No |
| P6 (31) | Sí. Instituto |
| P7 (50) | No |
| P8 (50) | Sí. Instituto |
| P9 (20) | Sí. Colegio |
| P10 (35) | No |
| P11 (22) | Sí. Colegio; Universidad |

## Appendix K: A1 Syllabus, assessment and general

## competencies

| English Club: | 2 British Language Assistants. |
| --- | --- |

| Evaluation Percentages | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| PRIMER CORTE 35% | | SEGUNDO CORTE 35% | | TERCER CORTE 30% | |
| Parcial | 50% | Parcial | 50% | Parcial | 50% |
| Proyecto | 20% | Proyecto | 20% | Proyecto | 20% |
| Virtual Classroom (lesson 1 & 2, majoring in reading, and self evaluation) | 15% | Virtual Classroom (lesson 1 y 2, majoring in reading, and self evaluation) | 5% | Virtual Classroom (lesson 1 y 2, majoring in reading, and self evaluation) | 15% |
| Trabajo de Clase | 15% | Trabajo de Clase | 15% | Trabajo de Clase | 15% |

| GENERAL COMPETENCES (CEF) A1 |
| --- |
| • Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. |
| • Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. |
| • Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. |

| FIRST TERM | SECOND TERM | THIRD TERM |
| --- | --- | --- |
| GRAMMAR | | |
| • Modals: have to, can, could, should | • Past simple | • Past continuous • Past continuous Vs Past simple |
| CONTEXT | | |
| • Health/city places | • Biographies and short stories/adventures | • Stories/adventures |
| VOCABULARY | | |
| • Rules • Health problems | • Regular and irregular verbs • Linking words for sequence • Time expressions: last, ago, yesterday, etc | • Regular and irregular verbs • Adverbs: when, while, as, • Suddenly |

**Appendix L: Emails sent by students during the autonomous laboratory practice**