

**Problems in English Oral Production Fluency in Eleventh Graders from Liceo de la
Universidad de Nariño High School**

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PROBLEMS IN ORAL PRODUCTION FLUENCY

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Resumen

Este proyecto de investigación tiene como objetivo identificar y analizar los problemas más comunes que enfrentan los estudiantes de inglés como segundo idioma de una escuela pública del suroeste de Colombia, Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño, en el desarrollo de la fluidez en su producción oral. Para cumplir con este propósito, se ha diseñado un cuestionario que permite a los investigadores clasificar los problemas en factores cognitivos, afectivos y ambientales. En primer lugar, los resultados permitirán comprender mejor por qué los estudiantes presentan deficiencias en términos de fluidez. En segundo lugar, y, sobre todo, los resultados servirán de base para que los docentes actúen en este sentido, mediante la implementación de estrategias específicas teniendo en cuenta el origen de los problemas encontrados.

Palabras clave: producción oral, fluidez, desempeño oral, inglés como segunda lengua, comunicación.

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Abstract

This research project aims to identify and to analyze the most common problems that second language learners from a public school in the southwest of Colombia, Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño, face in the development of fluency in their oral production. To meet this purpose, a questionnaire has been designed to allow the researchers to classify the problems into cognitive, affective, and environmental factors. Firstly, the results will make it possible to better understand why students display deficiencies in terms of fluency. Secondly, and most importantly, they will serve as a basis for teachers to take action in this regard by implementing specific strategies considering the source of the problems found.

Key words: Oral Production, Fluency, Speaking Performance, English as a Second Language, Communication.

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Glossary

Oral Production

Bygates (1991) points out that oral production is the ability to produce sentences in different types of situations (as cited in Bula, 2015, p. 351). Likewise, O'Malley and Valdez (1996) say that oral production is the way people share information about things they are familiar with, taking into consideration the conversations' context (as cited in Bula, 2015, p. 351). Nevertheless, for the development of this study, oral production basically refers to the ability to communicate effectively with others through the speaking skill.

Speaking Fluency

In this study, the term fluency in speaking refers to the ability to use the target language confidently, smoothly, and without too much hesitation or too many unnatural pauses that cause barriers in communication (Bailey, 2003 & Byrne, 1986, as cited in Pham, 2018). That is, becoming fluent in a language also means to sound natural. Additionally, fluency is often used to denote general second language proficiency. Nevertheless, even though the term typically implies that an L2 user has a facility with grammar, vocabulary, and even the pronunciation of a second language (Segalowitz, 2010, as cited in Thompson, 2015), it does not imply that fluency and accuracy are dependent on each other, but are rather complementary. (Housen & Kuiken, 2009, as cited in Pham, 2018). Finally, according to Shahini and Shahamirian (2017), "One of the main characteristics of the communicative competence is fluency" (as cited in Pham, 2018). Therefore, fluency is appraised as a measure for language learning progress (Chambers, 1997, as cited in Pham, 2018), and it represents one of the conditions for success in communication (Gorkaltseva, Gozhin, & Nagel, 2015, as cited in Pham, 2018).

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Introduction

In respect to fluency in the second language acquisition field, there are various definitions stated through the years. According to Lennon, “Fluency, in a general term, is the speaker’s ability to produce speech at the same tempo with the native speakers without the problems of silent pauses, hesitations, filled pauses, self-corrections, repetitions, and false starts” (as cited in Mairi, 2016, p. 162). In addition, Stockdale (2009, p. 1) states that fluency occurs when somebody speaks a foreign language as a native speaker with the least number of silent pauses, filled pauses (ooo and emm), self-corrections, false starts, and hesitations. Nonetheless, the definition this research project follows is the one from Newton (2009), who states that “Fluency is a sub-skill and implies how easy a foreign language learner can express himself without having to stop to think about words, and experience breakdown in communication” (As cited in Barrios, 2017, p. 14).

In this context, in order to achieve what is mentioned above, the program Colombia Bilingüe 2014-2018 of the Ministry of National Education proposed the objective of raising the Pre-Intermediate B1 level from 2% to 8% of eleventh grade students by 2018 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016, p. 16). Similarly, as a quality requirement, the top purpose of Programa Nacional de Inglés: *Colombia Very Well* 2015-2025 expects to get that the English proficiency level B1 increases to 50% of the students in eleventh grade by the year 2025 (Programa Nacional de Inglés, 2015, p. 16). As stated in the CEFR, in general terms, a person with a B1:

Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe

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experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. (Council of Europe, 2001, p.5)

Currently, however, Colombia occupied the antepenultimate position in Latin America with a score of 448 out of 800 (EF English Proficiency Index, 2020). Furthermore, in 2016 only 1% of the eleventh-grade students in the official sector managed to reach the Pre-Intermediate level B1 (Ministerio de Educación, 2016, p. 66). In addition, those who do have some grasp of the English language may not be able to speak it. In that way, this study will bring forward the main problems that affect students' oral fluency in foreign language learning through the observation and interviews conducted on eleventh graders from Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño high school.

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Chapter 1: Description of the Problem

According to the standards established by the Ministry of Education in Colombia, an eleventh-grade student must reach a B1 level of English proficiency before graduating. Nevertheless, the reality faced by those students evidences an opposite situation. All this, because they show a lower level than that stated by the Colombian Educational System (B1 level), especially when it comes to oral production.

Besides, the low English oral production fluency reflected by students in Colombia, even in the urban area, is something that concerns teachers and the population in general. Consequently, this investigation project is significant for the Colombian educational English context, more specifically in the local context because the study will focus on the experiences and perceptions of eleventh graders from a public school in Nariño in the official sector, respecting fluency problems in oral production. Therefore, this work aims to collect data to generate awareness about overall constraints among the selected sample.

Taking into account what has been mentioned above, the problem identified in this research project relies on the lack of fluency that students, who are finishing their high school in Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño, display in English Learning as a foreign language.

Problem Statement

This research project aims to identify the principal aspects that prevent eleventh graders' oral production from emerging in the classroom setting in Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño, a high school in Pasto.

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Objectives

General objective:

To identify the main problems that prevent English fluency in oral production from emerging in the classroom among eleventh grade students from Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño high school through direct observation and interviews.

Specific objectives:

1. To identify the common pattern that interferes with the students' oral production in interaction, among students at eleventh grade from Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño high school, through interview analysis.
2. To describe the most common difficulties that students of the eleventh grade, from Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño high school, show in their oral performance through direct observation and data collection.

Significance of study

According to the Colombian Ministry of Education (2006), being proficient in another language is essential in a globalized world because it requires students to be able to communicate better, in order to open borders, appropriate knowledge, and to understand and be understood. That is, being competent in a second language expands opportunities globally and plays a decisive role in the development of a society (p. 3). Thus, taking into account what was previously stated, the program Colombia Bilingüe 2014-2018 was launched and, as a result, different standards were established. In this way, despite the fact that such standards of proficiency must be reached by eleventh graders before graduating, those L2 students evidence a lower level than the one stated by the Ministry of Education: B1, especially when

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it comes to fluency in oral proficiency. All this, justifies the purpose of this study, which in general terms, focuses on identifying what actually hinders the students' fluency from Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño high school.

In addition, the results obtained from this study can contribute to the improvement of the Colombian educational system not only by identifying and describing the most remarkable issues that prevent eleventh grade students' oral production to develop, but also by providing possible learning strategies in order to solve them.

Finally, the immediacy of closing this gap in knowledge is based on seeing time as a rectification factor in order to make teachers aware of the principal matters that provoke the lack of fluency in students. Therefore, teachers can implement strategies for avoiding any recurrence of these faults in future generations. In the same way, students may be conscious of the aspects they need to strengthen in their oral production performance, even by their own initiative.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Previous research

This chapter makes an overview about some remarkable antecedents with regard to oral production in English as a second language; as well as, some issues that pre-intermediate learners present on its development. The following is a short analysis of some of the available frameworks related to the mentioned gap in knowledge this research project will address. The mentioned sources served as the key bibliographic tools for providing an overview of previous research on the existing knowledge and secondary data sources. To sum up, the main purpose of this literature review work is to associate this proposal to the existing research and foundations and at the same time, suggest further research.

The following antecedent research project is from Al-Hosni (2014), who made a case study in a basic education school to find the speaking difficulties in young learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The population consisted of teachers and fifth grade students in elementary schools in Oman, United Arab Emirates.

The three employed instruments in this research were: observations, interviews, and curriculum analysis. The interviews aimed to find more about teachers' and students' beliefs regarding the factors that cause difficulties to students when trying to speak in English. Data obtained from observations, interviews, and curriculum analysis were examined qualitatively.

This study concluded that the main speaking difficulties encountered by grade 5th students were: *Linguistic difficulties*, which can be attributed to the fact that students are usually unable to speak in English because they lack the necessary vocabulary items and grammar structures. According to Al-Hosni (2014), "Data collected through observation

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showed that students struggle to find the appropriate vocabulary item when trying to speak in English, which reflects their insufficient vocabulary repertoire” (p. 26).

Another one was the mother tongue use since she discovered that students also lacked sentence formation skills, which would result in the constant use of their mother tongue. According to Al-Hosni (2014), “Students tend to speak in Arabic when they discuss the rubrics of different tasks. They meant how to discuss their ideas in English, so they shifted to Arabic. Therefore, the inadequate vocabulary repertoire and weak sentence building skills are the reasons for using the mother tongue” (p. 26).

The last difficulty was *inhibition*, which is usually understood as the students’ thought that making mistakes in speaking in front of their classmates is very embarrassing, which would result in preferring not to speak to avoid such situations. According to Al-Hosni (2014), “Students explained that their fear of making mistakes in front of their classmates was the reason for not speaking in the class” (p. 26).

This study is important for this research proposal because it coincides with the need to know the aspects that generate low fluency in students of a second language. As the students who participated in Al-Hosni’s research, eleventh graders from Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño are also in an educational environment and have difficulties in their oral production. Thereupon, the central purpose of this research project is to know their perceptions and experiences when trying to speak in English to identify the aspects that interfere with their oral production emergence.

Barrios (2014), in her work, made a contextualized action study with regard to the Colombian situation in second language learning and in the speaking ability of learners. Oral Production in the SL Classroom, is one of the main skills students are to learn in their language development. In addition, there are different aspects that affect its prompt

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development as the lack of opportunities to practice it, disability in the classroom, no feedback from part of teachers, no oral production from teachers either, curriculums based on writing skills more than any other skills, and lack of exposure to the target language.

One of the possible main failures identified from teachers is that they do not plan speaking activities for their students because sometimes they may consider that the speaking skill is simply very hard to develop. Even though, the ability to converse is highly valued by students and by the general public; thus, here is where teachers need to focus at some point of the second language teaching process, by promoting the importance of oral production and its correct development in L2 learners (Al-Hosni, 2014).

Another conclusion from these antecedents is that teachers need to encourage students to actually be able to use the language as correctly as possible and with a purpose. Moreover, students often give more value to the speaking skill than to the other skills of reading, writing, and listening, so motivation is not always an issue, but what often happens is that students feel more anxiety related to their oral production. As speaking is interrelated with the other skills, its development results in the development of the others.

The mentioned studies support the idea that fluency is essential to develop good communication in English. These studies also constitute a reference point to continue studying the problems that students may face when learning the L2. Transferred to a reality that does not agree with the objectives and demands proposed by the education system and explaining that students may have different needs when it comes to oral production. This research project attempted to provide educators with a better understanding of the development of oral fluency in beginner students, and at the same time, clarify that oral production requires practice and the creation of propitious spaces for it to emerge.

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Another antecedent research project was done by Buitrago (2016), a teacher from Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín, Colombia, who before having developed it, realized that despite the support in the curricula to develop the learners' communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the instruction still focused on the traditional test-oriented or form-based approaches (Littlewood, 2007; Savignon & Wang, 2003, as cited in Buitrago, 2016) where, an overemphasis on teaching grammatical forms and written language, remained at almost all levels of education. Besides, English learners gave evidence not only of limited knowledge of linguistic forms, as revealed by national tests (Cely, 2007, as cited in Buitrago, 2016), but also of an inability to convey in ordinary communicative situations after years of instruction in a classroom (Velez & Rendon, 2003, as cited in Buitrago, 2016).

The mentioned issues were noticeable in the tenth grade English class of a co-educational public school located in the Northeast area of Medellín (Colombia), where the study was carried out. This school was characterized by presenting a low level of English proficiency. The syllabus proposed by the school for tenth grade gave teachers guidelines to develop students' communicative competence, but Buitrago (2016) noticed that her tenth graders had not enough progress in their speaking competence despite having received English classes every school year, concluding that several factors contributed to this situation: first, learners did not have enough opportunities to practice the English learned in class in order to share their ideas or to interact as they wanted. Second, since the previous teachers had taught the class in Spanish, there was an absence of exposure to spoken English, and third, the English lessons were focused on teaching the students vocabulary, grammatical structures, and tenses. All this, to prepare them for their mid-term exams. Consequently, bilingual dictionaries, grammar, and translation exercises were usually implemented.

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After observing the above-mentioned problems, she identified the need to implement a teaching approach that could help to improve the communicative competence. Thus, she decided to implement the task-based learning (TBL) approach based on the framework of TBL teaching proposed by Willis (1996). This approach “Combines the best insights from communicative language teaching with an organized focus on language form” (Willis, 1996, as cited in Buitrago, 2016). In addition, the general results were positive in relation to the students' use of the communicative competence, especially in the cases where the task-based approach replaced the use of other approaches, (Lopez, 2004; Tanasarnsanee, 2002, as cited in Buitrago 2016). Through this approach, the participants were expected to develop a variety of tasks that would expose them to spoken and written English, while giving them opportunities to use the language in a spontaneous or planned way, and finally, center their attention on grammar and form at the end of each task.

This study concluded that the exposure to English and the frequent opportunities to use the target language through the various tasks and pre-tasks developed during the classes, contributed significantly to improve the students' oral and written production, which was evidenced in the learners' participation. Another conclusion was that teachers, in order to boost their students' communicative competence, should pay particular attention to providing students with enough opportunities for production in oral and written English and to more exposure to the target language.

Moreover, in the Colombian EFL context, (Gutiérrez, 2005, as cited in Buitrago, 2016) investigated ninth graders' oral skills improvements while implementing TBL instruction. This approach proved to be effective, and the results suggested that the tasks arranged let students express their feelings and opinions freely, as well as use language meaningfully and effectively. Likewise, Peña and Onatra (2009), implemented a study on

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TBL in a public school to investigate students' oral outputs. They found that the tasks favored learners' fluency, vocabulary, and strategies to keep communication (as cited in Buitrago, 2016). Finally, it should be mentioned that the application of task-based activities not only helped learners to understand and manipulate information, but also to interact meaningfully and spontaneously orally (González & Arias, 2009, as cited in Buitrago, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

As indicated earlier in this paper, speaking comprises a variety of processes where individuals interact, produce and process information in order to construct meaning and facilitate verbal communication (Brown, 1994). This specific skill in the field of second language acquisition needs special attention and practice mechanisms to be developed to the point of getting a fluent performance based on the learner's level and aims. Chaney (1998) defines speaking as: "The process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (p. 2). Despite its importance, Kayi (2006) states:

For many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. (p. 2)

The speaking ability comprises different elements, and fluency is one of them. Fluency is considered as the ability to express oneself smoothly and with accuracy, by connecting one's speech with prosodic features like intonation and rhythm, and the main

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units of a language with confidence, clearness, and articulation, grammatically and phonologically correct (Nation & Newton, 2009). That is to say, it involves producing and understanding language in a flowing-natural way, (as natural as a non-native speaker can be) by eliciting background knowledge in the language according to the learners' level of proficiency. Fluency development is important at all levels of proficiency, and even beginners need to become fluent with the few items of a language that they know (Nation & Newton, 2009). Hence, the more proficient learners are about certain topics, the more likely they are to have an equivalent fluency level when talking about it. Despite this fact, Nagel, (n.d.) states:

Language fluency does not necessarily equal language proficiency and vice-versa. So you might have an incredibly high level of language proficiency (large vocabulary, strong grasp of grammar, advanced reading level), yet have terrible fluency when you speak (you're slow to produce speech and get the words out or an impeded pronunciation). Likewise, you may have encountered people who are quite fluent yet aren't overly proficient. (p. 6)

The speed of one's speech is commonly assumed as the measure for fluency, but it is just one of the components of it, and it does not define the entire performance of students' oral communicative skill.

As a matter of fact, Schmidt (as cited in Grabe, 2010, p. 7) and Segalowitz (as cited in Grabe, 2010, p. 7) elucidated that fluency stimulates accuracy and builds automaticity and chunking (recognition of bigger units). In addition, they stated that accuracy functions as an indicator of fluency growth, instead of making them competing factors in L2 development, contrary to what was believed in the 1990s. Outlining the current perspectives on oral fluency and its role as a key component for communicative and comprehension abilities in ESL, it is

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important to cope the relationship between fluency and meaningful communication, without forgetting that fluency must not be assessed as a consolidated ability, but in accordance with the different stages learners are in.

Contrary to what might be thought, an excellent competence in English is not imperative for the appearance of fluency in oral production, and the constant concern to produce a flawless discourse can terminate causing counterproductive effects in ESL learners. At this point, Krashen (1982) and his Monitor hypothesis gain importance, as it makes a distinction between quality and quantity in English proficiency, arguing that those who over-monitor their performance are more conservative users of the language, while more confident and talkative students usually pay less attention to their errors. Whereas, optimal monitor users are those who have a proper balance between both self-monitoring and production (output). After all, the aim of speaking is communication, therefore perfect English is not compulsorily required. Subsequently, it is reasonable to occasionally encourage quantity over quality into the classroom for the intended purpose of promoting interaction (pp. 15-125). As Shrouf suggests: "Break the silence and get students communicating with whatever English they can use, correct or not, and selectively address errors for then correct them" (n.d., p. 2). In other words, teachers need to be prudent concerning when and how to correct students' errors, as well as conscious about the importance of class immersion, "A desirable goal is that the student «forgets», in a sense, that the message is actually encoded in another language" (Krashen, 1982; 2009, p. 74).

Through the years, close attention has been paid to the grammar-oriented parts of language performance, and the relation they have in second language learning. As a result, there are a variety of articles studying and analyzing the grammatical affairs of English, and a few more about the oral part of second language acquisition, the speaking skill. However,

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with respect to fluency in L2 contexts, most articles focus on fluency in reading merely, rather than in oral communication, while there are some problems in communicative competences and oral production goals (as it is the case of the progress in fluency) in ESL learners, which require to be properly addressed, reported and analyzed.

“The overwhelming focus on learners’ lexico-grammar appears a shortcoming (Pallotti 2009) since it is well known that one can use complex and accurate language while not being functionally effective, and, vice versa. That is to say, it is possible to get one’s message across without using complex language and being accurate” (as cited in Revesz, Ekiert, & Torgersen, 2006, p. 4). In this sense, the idea of being fluent not only refers to being able to receive and produce language at a reasonable pace but also to the strongly message focused feature of language.

Despite the fact that, the lack of fluency in a conversation might be a potential generator of ineffectual communication, as it can interfere with the optimum understanding of the message the recipient gets, as a consequence of a constantly interrupted interaction due to pauses, hesitations and false starts (Barrios, 2017, p. 3). It can be said that there is a misconception about the nature of fluency and what it certainly includes, which might be preventing teachers and students from being committed to its exponential development. Nation (2009) argued that one of the reasons why fluency development is usually neglected in courses constitutes; somewhat, the shared belief from part of teachers and students that learners must learn new things all the time in order to be fluent; when in reality, fluency development implies making the best possible use of what is already known (as cited in Grabe, 2010, p. 1). In the same sense, the idea being reinforced by most people with regard to the definition of fluency, often relates being fluent to being able to receive and produce language at an accelerated pace, while the fluency development sub-skill is also a strongly

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message focused feature of language which includes more than just speaking rapidly.

According to Nation and Yamamoto, “The principle of the four strands says that a well-balanced language course should have four equal strands of meaning focused input, meaning focused output, language focused learning, and fluency development. Each strand should receive a roughly equal amount of time in a course” (2012, p. 2).

Speaking, with all its components, is a crucial part of second language acquisition, yet it continues to be taught as a monotone set of pre-designed dialogues, repetitions, and activities in which authentic materials are not frequently included. Moreover, the importance of self-initiated oral production in English proficiency cannot be neglected. English is without doubt, the Lingua Franca of the 21st Century, and each year, the number of ESL students increases, and with it, the concern about the shortcomings ESL learners have when facing real-life conversations, or arbitrary situations for which they were not prepared in the classroom. For this reason, the effectiveness of form-focused methods in the scope of fluency in oral production is still debatable, based on their results.

Attaining a fluent English level in the oral production part is not an easy, nor a rapid task to land, as much for teachers as for students because ESL learners are expected to manage multiple essential components suchlike: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, stress, rhythm, comprehension, and accuracy. Speaking is a substantial element in the use of a language and to show the mastery of that language, moreover it is highly required, since the learners of a language are named as the speakers of that language. “Learners should have enough English-speaking ability in order to communicate easily and effectively with other people. Rivers (1981) studied the use of language outside the classroom setting and understood that speaking is used twice as much as reading and writing combined” (as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017, p. 35).

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As it can be seen, developing fluent oral production may be a complex task because it comprises a number of elements, and there are also some factors that could interfere with the ideal development of fluency in the English-speaking domain in second language acquisition; indeed, in this section, those aspects will be classified into three different wider categories: affective factors, environmental factors, and cognitive (linguistic knowledge) factors.

Initially, as Krashen (1982), claims that there are a range of affective factors that have been assured to be related to the general success in second language acquisition, most of the research over the last decade examined three predominant variables: anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation. Anxiety is one of the most greatly attested psychological phenomena. In the same token, Krashen (1980-1982) throughout his *Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter* places particular emphasis on the fact that students learn best with comprehensible input and by lowering their anxiety levels. Although it sounds complicated, this can be executed with the aid of realia, images, and other tools to facilitate language acquisition, and more importantly, by creating a non-threatening environment, where students feel comfortable to express themselves through enjoyable and interesting real-life based activities with speech, and tasks specially selected, so they can understand them with ease (comprehensible input). Otherwise, those materials will not have a productive effect on ESL learners, as they might become tedious, negligible, and even demotivating tasks. Accordingly, Wang (2009) expresses that:

Linguistic input for foreign language acquisition is very important. For beginners, rich input such as randomly chosen listening materials will just be noise. No matter how motivated, beginners are unlikely to be able to notice and pick out anything comprehensible, and therefore will not learn from them. (p. 60)

As Krashen says in his input hypothesis conference in the 80's, "The speaking ability may come gradually" (Rounds 2010; Krashen 1980). Namely, the acquisition of a second

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language occurs just as the acquisition of the first language; it is to say, first, humans learn word by word, then expressions, sentences, and with time, the language itself according to Krashen, 1980. Hence, the importance of respecting the silent period of the apprentices and not overdoing them, in order not to raise their anxiety levels. Correspondingly, teachers need to understand that learners' development of the different skills requires time, and that pressure alter their performance in different extents, but overall, in negative ways; having as a result, a rise in their anxiety levels, and a diminish in their self-confidence, self-esteem, and motivation because of a sense of failure and inability might appear. Furthermore, Krashen (1980) has argued that starting to speak is not the beginning of language acquisition, it is just the comprehensible input period, where learners start understanding the second language for then use it by themselves. In that connection, if anxiety is lowered, then acquisition will result, on the contrary, if anxiety is elevated, the acquisition process will perish. As mentioned earlier, the intention is to make the classroom setting so comfortable that learners no longer feel they have to make major efforts to communicate in another language (Rounds 2010; Krashen 1980). In brief, low self-esteem, low motivation, and high anxiety might make the affective filter elevate, which spoils the possible output on the part of L2 learners. Thereby, in scenarios where production is strictly controlled by the teachers and classmates, the eagerness of ESL learners to practice their communicative strategies reduce significantly, and reluctance does not help to develop these competences.

Secondly, environmental factors, "Studying about learning environments to promote students' achievement has been widely discussed among scholars in the area of English as a second language" (Kiatkheeree, 2018, p.1). Second language students need indeed, a friendly learning environment which provides them with an encouraging surrounding and allows them to use their target language without feeling intimidated. In this spirit, an enjoyable and motivational environment is the one that promotes self-confidence and eases to reach the

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personal objectives and the class goals for each individual. It is noted that the learning environment has a significant effect on stimulation and the level of language proficiency learners develop. For example, aspects such as students and teachers' interaction in a classroom, participation, exposure, and more, are part of a learning environment; equally regarded as important factors promoting students' achievements, and they will be listed below. Therefore, building suitable learning environments has a remarkable impact on L2 learners (Kiatkheeree, 2018, p.1).

In particular, the relationship students have with their instructor plays a substantial role in their learning process and stimulation, as teachers represent an authority and guidance figure. Also, teachers' appropriateness of the subject matter demonstrates their allegiance with their labor and the way they treat students has an impact upon their incentivization and academic achievements. Evidently, competent teachers are required and the quality of their teaching strategies and methods is crucial to transmit knowledge and to engage students. Naturally, ESL teachers might possess high communicative competences and may adequate their strategies based on their students' needs. Krashen (1982) also states in his comprehensibility requirement that «just talking», or «free conversation», is not language teaching. It means that being a native speaker of a language does not qualify someone as a teacher of that language, neither does extensive knowledge of grammatical structures (Krashen, 1982, p. 64). As a matter of fact, what makes a good teacher is the capacity of making input comprehensible to a non-native speaker from any level.

Another interaction to be discussed is the relationship ESL learners have with their peers, the cooperation with classmates also has a place in ESL learning because regardless of how good and friendly the teacher is, and how positive his techniques are, if there are students judging their classmates or mocking them for their mistakes, accent, pronunciation, and so forth, this will create an unfavorable and hostile environment that will impede their

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free development and optimal participation. Kagan and Kagan (2009) emphasize the importance of creating a supportive, caring, and positively interdependent environment, where students feel safe to speak and are highly motivated to contribute to group goals (as cited in Ning & Hornby, 2014, p. 111). Also, they assure that expanding group cohesiveness and having positive learning experiences are effective ways of enhancing students' interest. "The cohesiveness-performance effect can be particularly strong in language classes in which the learners' communicative skills are developed primarily through participatory experience in real world language tasks" (Dörnyei, 1997, as cited in Ning & Hornby, 2014, p. 111).

Another important barrier that ESL learners might encounter in their learning process is their perception about not having teachers who are native speakers of English. Due to the big demand on English teachers, non-native English-speaking teachers who have learned English from other non-native English-speaking teachers are the ones that commonly teach English in non-native speaking countries, which can represent a barrier in a matter of phonetic, syntactic, and pragmatic gaps, which somehow influences the effectiveness of instruction. Some students would rather learn English from native speakers because of the feel of reliability. The appreciation that students usually have is that a non-native English-speaking teacher is less proficient and authentic than a native English speaker (Tosuncuoglu, 2017, p. 637). Nonetheless, the problem is not having non-native speakers as teachers, but not having the presence of at least one native speaker teacher to clarify queries that only a native may perceive as evident. Both native and non-native speaker teachers can complement each other. This perception goes in line with what Tosuncuoglu revealed in his study, "The conclusion is also supported by those earlier studies that show that students prefer and perform best when a combination of NNESTs and NESTs is utilized in their instruction" (2017, p. 635).

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Closely related to the aforementioned is the lack of effective linguistic environment and exposure to the foreign language (overall in speaking). One of the possible reasons why ESL learners have trouble giving speeches in their target language or maintaining conversations with fluent speakers is because most of the exposure they have had consisted of written language and isolated grammatical points without regard to authentic materials or situations based on real-practical life settings. As announced by Wang, “They are used to reading textbook exercises and hearing carefully scripted dialogues. Many have been exposed to little real spoken interaction other than instruction-focused teacher talk” (2009, p.59).

The linguistic environment has a pragmatic importance for learners of English as a second language and the development of their proficiency and fluency in oral production. Thereby, it is crucial that teachers create a real communicative environment with authentic materials and activities based on real situations for their students, where learners can communicate with each other in different tasks and activities, discuss specific topics, and interact freely with their own English production. In that way, learners have enough useful linguistic input for foreign language acquisition. “We suggest that proficiency causes participation. That is, the more proficient the learners are, the more they get to participate. In order to acquire a foreign language effectively, the quality of learners participating cannot be ignored” (Wang, 2009, p.61).

ESL learners in Colombia have low exposure to the target language and few opportunities to interact with native speakers. Not only do they live surrounded by Spanish speaking countries and the prominent spoken language around them is Spanish, but they are also generally taught by non-native English speakers. Therefore, the only place they can practice their oral fluency is usually the classroom setting as they may not have enough chances to practice outside the classroom or beyond their academic field. In addition, this leads to another difficulty, which is the lack of resources. It is not a surprise that education in

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Colombia is not the main concern of its leaders, and not much financial support goes to the public sector of education, this causes the overcrowding in classrooms; unequal opportunities for teachers' professional development; as well as the lack of qualified equipment to reproduce different materials or to implement certain activities, not to mention that smart classrooms and E-learning have become fundamental options for meaningful learning and classrooms need to be equipped with modern teaching resources.

Equally important, the lack of opportunities to participate and practice is another prominent aspect that conditions the speaking skill and fluency of ESL students. If students do not feel like they have good capabilities in social interaction in the target language, they may avoid being engaged in real life conversations. Not giving learners the chance to participate in the classroom may be another reason for the difficulty in fluent oral production. It is significant to offer enough knowledge and strategies that would enable them to participate, hence master their discourse skills. Kumaravadivelu (2003) establishes that the best way to learn language is by comprehending, saying, and doing something with that language, instead of focusing on linguistic features merely (p. 27).

In fact, the larger the ESL class is, the less personalized the learning process becomes and the less opportunities learners have to participate and receive positive washback from the teacher. Khazaei, Moinsadeh, and Ketabi (2012) indicate that: "Class size had a substantial effect on the students' willingness to communicate. Students were found to be more willing to communicate in small classes where they had more opportunity to practice oral skills and communicate" (as cited in Hamad, 2013, p. 90). In these terms, "Now many linguists and ESL teachers agree that students learn to speak in the second language by *interacting*" (Kayi, 2006, p. 3). That is to say, communicating by using the target language based on real-life situations and applying cooperative and collaborative learning. In brief, ESL teachers need to create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic

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activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral production. This can occur when students collaborate in small groups to discuss and share ideas, achieve a goal, or complete a task, meaning interaction.

The Influence of home factors on ESL learners is another important aspect of language learning that can represent benefits for some learners and constraints for some others. It varies depending on social status, parents' educational background, parental involvement and encouragement, and economical support. Notwithstanding, something to bear in mind is that the family, independently of their social or economic status, can provide quality learning environments for their children without interrupting their daily lives. Spera's study in 2006 (as cited in Anisur, 2015) revealed that there is a strong correlation between parental practices and their children's educational achievement. The study showed that parental involvement such as assisting with homework instills more interest in children about studying and education. Similarly, previous studies reported that parents' involvement in homework accomplishment of the adolescents does have a positive effect in their academic success in school, and hence in their second language acquisition. Home environment factors such as parental engagement, spur, and financial contribution have a relevant role in second language learners and on the development of their skills. If ESL learners are not confident from home, there is some probability that they will be shy to speak in their target language in front of the class, or to participate in speaking activities, which will not be positive for oral fluency to emerge. As concluded in his study, Anisur (2015) claimed: "It appears that parental involvement and encouragement are important factors in adolescent learners' attitude building to the second language, English" (p.54).

It cannot be ignored that home environment also influences to a certain extent the interest, motivation, self-confidence, and general performance of ESL learners within their

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second language acquisition, speaking skill, and thereby fluency development. The lack of confidence from their own home and background might be reflected during the performance of their communication skills and fluency evolution. “Parents have an important role to play in the lives of their children when it comes to educating them in English. Their active role instills more interest in the learners’ minds and strengthens their determination to learn the target language” (Anisur, 2015, p.54). Although some parents may not have the knowledge or possibilities to boost their children’s English level, they can help them by simply supporting them and providing a nice environment. “However, many parents cannot offer direct help to English studies probably because of their own weakness in the English skills, they may serve as an extrinsic motivation” (Anisur, 2015, p.55). In any case, parental support and financial contribution may not guarantee a total success in the target language.

Finally, the last factor that could explain the lack of fluency in the speaking ability is related to the linguistic knowledge in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation quality. In this sense, the frequent difficulties in speaking during the process of teaching and learning that are often encountered by the language learners are closely related to non - linguistic problems and linguistic problems (Heriansyah, 2012). However, even though most of the common non – linguistic problems like being afraid of speaking, not being confident to speak, being nervous to speak, etc., can be linked to the affective filter, linguistic problems such as difficulties to understand the 12 tenses, being afraid of making errors, and being confused about how to use appropriate words, as well as the difficulty to express words or sentences come from two causes: lack of grammar knowledge and lack of vocabulary respectively. That is, the limited grammar skills and vocabulary make it difficult for students to speak in English, thus becoming more fluent. In addition to this, as we know, English is not a phonetic language. That is, the pronunciation of English words is not similar to their spellings. Words with similar spellings are sometimes pronounced differently because of their

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surrounding contexts; for instance, tenses and phonemes that come after them. This can cause a lot of problems for non-native speakers of English, and they sometimes get confused in producing the English words (Leong & Seyedeh, 2017, p. 37). Besides, Khamprated (2012) emphasizes that it is difficult for students to speak in English with the correct pronunciation and to speak as fluently as a native speaker when there is not a space dedicated for practicing. All this, because in most of the cases their peers have a lower level of English ability, and teachers use their native language during the class. Finally, it is convenient to say that poor pronunciation can also be associated with the listening ability. Doff (1998) states that students cannot improve their speaking ability and therefore their pronunciation unless they develop the listening skill. Learners should comprehend what is said to them in order to have a successful conversation (as cited in Leong & Seyedeh, 2017, p. 37). Shumin (1997) supports the previous idea by saying that when students talk, the other one responds through attending by means of the listening process (as cited in Nguyen & Tran, 2015, P. 9). In fact, every speaker plays the role of both a listener and a speaker. Hence, one is certainly unable to respond if he or she cannot understand what is said. Thus, one can conclude that speaking is closely related to listening (Leong & Seyedeh, 2017, p. 37).

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, the procedure used to accomplish the objectives planned is going to be described. Therefore, firstly, the design and the type of research will be delineated. Second, one can find an overview of the participants, sample, and finally, the way data collection will be carried out.

Design

To start talking about this design, it is important to cite Maxwell (2012) who defined a qualitative design as:

An interactive model, which consists of the components of a research study. For instance, goals, conceptual framework, validity, among others, and the ways in which these components may affect and be affected by one another. In addition, it does not presuppose any particular order for these components, or any necessary directionality of influence. The model thus resembles the more general definition of design employed outside research: “An underlying scheme that governs functioning, developing, or unfolding” and “the arrangement of elements or details in a product or work of art” (Frederick et al., 1993 as cited in Maxwell, 2012). That is, a good design, one in which the components work harmoniously together and promote efficient and successful functioning. Moreover, this model can be used to represent the “design-in-use” of a study, the actual relationships among the components of the research, as well as the intended (or reconstructed) design (Maxwell & Loomis, 2002, as cited in Maxwell, 2012). (p. 215-216)

In this sense, a qualitative design will be applied in the development of this research project because its characteristics take into consideration the identification of patterns,

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relationships among the participants, seek for a concept that can encompass a part of reality and also tries to explain a specific phenomenon.

Method

The chosen method for this research project is Case Study since, according to Stake (1995), "It is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (as cited in Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills, 2017, p. 11). That is, it provides the research with an intensive study about a person, a group of people or phenomena, which is aimed to generalize over several units.

Taking into account what was already mentioned, a case study provides a suitable way which allows the researcher to gain a wider perception of the phenomenon than using another type of method.

Participants / Population

120 eleventh graders from Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño high school, were chosen as participants. In addition, the above-mentioned institution provides them with three hours of English classes once a week.

Sample

As a sample for this study, 40 eleventh graders of the above-mentioned institution, whose ages are between 15 to 19 years old including men and women, were chosen because of their English level, which according to the Ranking Col-Sapiens Research Report (2019), Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño was classified as the best High School in the official Sector in Colombia, with a D4 category (being D1 the best category) and an achieved overall score of 70.2 out of 100, being English, one of its strengths, with 70 points (as cited in Universidad de Nariño, 2019). However, based on what has been already observed by the

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researchers, it is below the standards established by the Colombian Ministry of Education. In this sense, one can speculate that those students' English level range from A1 to A2 of English proficiency.

Other characteristics that these students display are: A low English fluency in their oral production, shyness when they try to speak in the target language as well as a low intonation and hesitation. Furthermore, it should be clarified that even these learners are from different strata and social backgrounds, most of them are from the middle-class and lower-middle class.

Data Collection Instruments

To carry out this research project, interviews and direct observation will be applied in the natural classroom setting of eleventh grade students in order to do the collection of data.

Direct observation

Since the objective of a direct observation is to evaluate an ongoing behavior process, event, or situation, this instrument for data collection was appropriate to be applied during the development of a class. All this, with the purpose of observing how the teacher developed the English class, whether she used the target language to communicate with the learners or not, and to analyze the English level of the students. Finally, it should be mentioned that so far, only two semi-overt observations (since only the teacher knew their objective), have been accomplished.

Interviews

A qualitative interview was chosen because it provides rich and detailed information about the different interviewees' experiences. In this sense, four semi-structured interviews will be applied in order to elicit information about students' perceptions and experiences

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regarding their oral production fluency in their academic performance. Thus, during the first term, the following questions will emphasize on what they know about fluency, how they perceive the oral production in English, and how they perceive themselves when performing in the target language. During the second term, the interview will focus on what they believe are the most common difficulties that students have to face in relation to developing their fluency. Therefore, around 12 to 15 questions, distributed between open-ended and closed-ended questions, will take place.

Data Collection Procedures

Pilot Study

The purpose of this section is to test if the questions of the designed interview are suitable for this research project and what it aims to cover. Then the interview previously stated took place in a classroom provided by the institution and was developed during school time. Therefore, firstly, after some observation, 4 eleventh graders from Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño High School were selected to be part of the interview. The participants were interviewed both individually and in pairs, as they preferred, and this process took at least 40 minutes. Before starting the interview, the interviewees were provided with clear instructions and recommendations on how to take part in the interview, and this one was recorded and transcribed with the students' consent. Finally, the date for accomplishing this instrument of data collection was October 16th, 2019.

Pilot Study Results

Based on the interview applied on 4 eleventh graders from Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño, it could be said that, in general, students cooperated and showed a great disposition

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when answering all the questions because they shared their opinions, perceptions, and feelings without hesitation and in the best way.

On the other hand, one of the issues to consider is the presence of unnecessary questions since the students' answers were so wide that they covered the possible answers to other questions. That is, some questions were no longer necessary because the information required was already given. Furthermore, based on how learners answered the different questions, it could be assumed, so far, that this instrument for data collection is suitable for the type of investigation carried out, and the information that it requires. In addition, though the information that students provided was clear and complete, it is convenient to consider that further questions may contribute to understanding additional information about the topic of this study. Besides, some questions need to be reformulated. Finally, regarding the estimation of time; 45 minutes were appropriate (see appendix A).

Data Analysis Procedure

Coding

Gibbs (2007) in the book: *Analyzing Qualitative Data*, provides a definition about coding and its correct use. Also, Gibbs (2009), refers to coding as a convenient and effective way to process data. Moreover, Gibbs and Taylor (2005), in their webpage *Online QDA*, stated, "Coding is the process of combining the data for themes, ideas and categories and then marking similar passages of text with a code-label so that they can easily be retrieved at a later stage for further comparison and analysis. Coding the data makes it easier to search the data, to make comparisons and to identify any patterns that require further investigation" (p. 1). In addition, Graham R. Gibbs highlights the importance of analytic and theoretical codes rather than descriptive codes by promoting two techniques that are effectively used to analyze instead of simply describe, these are: constant comparison and line-by-line coding. Thus, it is

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to say that Gibbs presumes that intensive coding, code-comparisons, constructing and working on the code hierarchy, building tables representing the data, and case-by-case comparisons might allow analytic data interpretation because codes will emerge from the data and include categorizing and indexing the data. Data might also be transcribed from videos and audios.

Therefore, in order to categorize the collected data, labels would be presented as follows: AF (affective factors), EF (environmental factors), and CF (cognitive factors). In this way, patterns concerning fluency problems in oral production might be identified, classified, and finally, analyzed in further investigation.

Conclusions and Suggestion

As some general conclusions and considerations for this research paper, it can be stated that aspects as affective factors, the learning environment, and linguistic knowledge have a significant effect on students' performance, and they condition fluency in the language proficiency level. That is, cognitive factors; for instance, limited grammar and vocabulary as well as difficulties in pronouncing some English words are some of the causes that could explain the lack of fluency in the speaking ability. Additionally, poor pronunciation can be associated with a low level in the listening skill. Furthermore, a non-anxiety rising environment, where learners feel comfortable expressing themselves through specifically selected materials for their level and needs, is ideal for the development of their communicative competences. In the same way, social interaction in the target language as much as involvement is substantial, so students can center on the process of receiving and producing messages. Equally important, the contributions of native and non-native speaker teachers combined with genuinely compliment the process of second language teaching and

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learning. Besides, in order to promote sporadic interaction into the classroom, overcorrection should be avoided, and quantity can be encouraged over quality.

Consequently, the assessment of fluency must be done correspondingly the English level that students have. Also, it is important to point out that accuracy and fluency are not interchangeable terms, although accuracy can stimulate fluency and be an indicator of its growth. Moreover, it can be said that the aspirations in relation to the standards established by the MEN are somewhat ambitious since they are not in accordance with the way English is being implemented in the Colombian educational context. Finally, this research paper represents a small contribution to the second language acquisition field and suggests that further research needs to be done in the future.

Appendix A**Problemas de fluidez en los estudiantes de undécimo grado del Colegio Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño en la producción oral en inglés.****Propósito**

El propósito de esta entrevista es recolectar datos basándose en sus experiencias y percepciones como estudiante con respecto a su desempeño en inglés, enfocándose particularmente en la producción oral y su fluidez. Así, la siguiente entrevista consta de alrededor de 20 preguntas las cuales requieren respuestas objetivas y la mayor honestidad posible. Los participantes serán entrevistados de forma individual o con un compañero de clase según lo prefieran.

Política de Privacidad

Lea detenidamente la siguiente política de privacidad. Si tiene alguna pregunta antes, después o durante la entrevista, se solicita informar a los entrevistadores.

Los datos recopilados se utilizarán sólo para fines investigativos. La información que identifica los nombres, la escuela o el origen del participante no se divulgarán para fines diferentes a los estudios aplicados en esta investigación. Además, cabe aclarar que la participación es voluntaria y que los participantes no tienen que responder ninguna pregunta que no deseen.

Esta entrevista será grabada simplemente para evidenciar y respaldar dicho trabajo investigativo. Por lo tanto, nadie fuera del equipo de investigación escuchará esta grabación.

Finalmente, es conveniente aclarar que los entrevistados pueden detener la entrevista o la grabación en cualquier momento.

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FIRMA

Al firmar este documento, acepta las políticas de privacidad previamente mencionadas.

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Preguntas

Clasificación de las preguntas

- Filtro afectivo.
 - Factores cognitivos (Conocimiento lingüístico).
 - Factores ambientales.
1. ¿Qué entiendes por fluidez? (Pregunta adicional para aclarar este término)
 2. En tu opinión, ¿es importante tener fluidez cuando hablas en inglés?
 3. ¿Uno de tus objetivos es hablar inglés con fluidez?
 4. ¿Cómo te sientes al hablar en inglés?
 5. En clase, ¿tienes suficientes oportunidades para practicar inglés?
 6. ¿Encuentras fácil hacer descripciones en inglés sin la ayuda de diccionarios o aparatos electrónicos?
 7. ¿Cuáles son los desafíos que enfrentas cuando hablas en inglés?
 8. ¿Por qué crees que muchos de los estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua presentan dificultades para convertirse en hablantes fluidos?
 9. Con base en tu experiencia, ¿cuáles consideras que son los problemas más comunes que impiden el desarrollo de tu fluidez?
 10. En la clase de inglés, ¿los maestros promueven estrategias para poner en práctica la producción oral de los estudiantes?
 11. ¿Cómo evalúa el profesor de inglés tu producción oral?
 12. ¿Qué sentimientos genera la manera en la cual el profesor evalúa tu producción oral?
 13. ¿Qué aspectos crees que contribuyen en el desarrollo de la fluidez en la producción oral?

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- 14.** ¿Alguna vez has sugerido algunas actividades o estrategias a tu maestro para mejorar tu fluidez?

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Problems in English Oral Production Fluency in Eleventh Graders from Liceo de la Universidad de Nariño High School

Purpose

The purpose of this interview is to collect data based on the students' experiences regarding their English performance particularly when it is related to fluency in their oral production. Thus, during this first term, the following questions will emphasize on what they know about fluency, how they perceive the oral production in English, and how they perceive themselves when performing in the target language.

Privacy Policy

Please take a minute to read the following policy. If there are any questions before, after, or during the interview, let the interviewers know.

The collected data will be used for research purposes only. Information that identifies the participant's names, school, or district will not be disclosed for purposes different from research studies. Besides, it should be known that participation is voluntary, and participants do not have to respond to any questions they do not want to.

This interview **may be recorded** simply for note-taking purposes. No one outside of the research team will hear the audio file.

Finally, it is convenient to clarify that the interviewees can stop whether the interview or the recorder at any time.

By signing here, you accept the previously mentioned privacy considerations.

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Questions

Classification of questions

- Affective filter.
 - Cognitive factors (Linguistic Knowledge).
 - Environmental factors.
-
1. What do you understand by fluency? (as an additional question to clarify this term)
 2. In your opinion, is it important being fluent when you speak in English?
 3. Becoming fluent in English is one of your objectives?
 4. How do you feel when speaking in English?
 5. In class, do you have enough opportunities to practice English?
 6. Can you describe things easily in English without looking up words in the dictionary or on electronic devices?
 7. What are the challenges you face when speaking in English?
 8. Why do you think most ESL students struggle to become fluent speakers?
 9. Based on your experience, what do you consider are the most common issues that prevent your fluency development?
 10. In class, do teachers promote some strategies to put in practice your oral production?
 11. How does your teacher assess your English oral production?
 12. What aspects do you think contribute to make you a fluent speaker?
 13. Have you ever suggested some activities or strategies to your teacher to improve your fluency?

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