



**EXPLORING EIGHT EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ORAL FLUENCY DEVELOPMENT AT
THE COLOMBO AMERICANO CULTURAL CENTER IN CALI**

MASTER'S REPORT

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MASTER'S DEGREE IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores English foreign language (EFL) teachers' perceptions of oral fluency and its development, a topic underexplored in Colombia despite its importance in speaking assessment. The research aims to provide a multidimensional view of fluency, incorporating not only traditional indicators but also teacher interpretations and classroom practices. This is qualitative research with semi-structured interviews that were conducted with eight teachers from the Colombo Americano Center in Cali. Findings indicate that teachers prioritize cognitive fluency over utterance and perceived fluency, emphasize emotional and interactional factors, and incorporate fluency-oriented tasks in their classrooms. Although teachers' views are informed, they lack a strong technical foundation, highlighting the need for professional development to deepen their conceptual understanding of fluency.

Keywords: Fluency, qualitative research, cognitive fluency, emotional factors, fluency-oriented tasks.

1 Introduction

Even though fluency has been categorized into cognitive, utterance, and perceived dimensions and evaluated through features such as speed, pauses, and breakdowns, some researchers argue these criteria are insufficient to define fluency comprehensively (e.g., Rodríguez-Fuentes & Calle-Díaz, 2023; Williams, 2024). A recurring concern is that these features address only one aspect of fluency, offering a limited and superficial perspective. For instance, Lennon (2000) emphasizes the influence of vocabulary use and turn-taking management, suggesting that fluency should be viewed not only as a monologic but also a dialogic construct (as cited in Williams, 2024). Similarly, Rodríguez-Fuentes and Calle-Díaz (2023) note that listener impressions and psycholinguistic factors in speech production are often overlooked. These arguments highlight the need to understand not only linguistic features but also listener perceptions and emotional factors, particularly in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Such an understanding requires analyzing fluency from multiple perspectives and recognizing teachers' views as essential, given their central role in shaping classroom interaction and designing learning experiences.

Despite the relevance of this issue, teachers' insights on fluency remain underexplored in Colombian contexts. A search of prominent journals such as *TESOL Quarterly* and the *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal* yielded no studies focused on fluency perception or development in Colombia. In contrast, two studies from Chile examined how technological tools, such as smartphone apps, could support fluency (e.g., Agurto et al., 2024; Pardo & Cisterna, 2019). Additional research found in institutional databases from Icesi University and the University of Nariño focused on fluency elicitation through strategies like role plays, self-recordings, and corrective feedback (e.g., Ibarra, 2006; Paredes, 2021; Piedrahita, 2017). While these efforts demonstrated slight improvements in fluency, they did not explore teachers' perceptions of fluency development. This gap, combined with professional experiences in EFL context and interest in communicative teaching, motivated this research.

This study aims to analyze the perceptions of language teachers regarding fluency development

in EFL classrooms within a private language center. By gathering their viewpoints and beliefs, it also seeks to determine whether shared or collective understandings of fluency exist, contributing to a more nuanced and pedagogically informed view of fluency in the Colombian EFL context.

The following chapters of this report outline the process and findings of this research. Chapter 2 presents the research problem, including the study's purpose and research questions. Chapter 3 offers a review of the relevant literature, framing fluency in observable and non-observable indicators and exploring how it is perceived and developed in EFL contexts. Chapter 4 details the methodological approach, including participant selection, data collection, and analysis procedures. Chapter 5 presents and analyzes the findings, drawing connections between the teachers' perceptions and existing theories. The report concludes by highlighting the importance of teacher insights in redefining fluency beyond traditional metrics and proposing recommendations for pedagogical practice and further research.

2 Research Problem

There have been research projects and tailor-made methodologies to measure fluency by acoustic measures such as speed, repairs, pauses and breakdowns (e.g, Bosker et al., 2012; Hougham et al., 2024). However, there are more research projects that claim fluency does not only depend on these acoustic indicators, but also on interaction aspects such as turn management, delays and emotional factors such as anxiety (Cadena et al., 2019; Van et al., 2020). The latter have widened the scope of fluency features and key factors. Thus, the present research intended to explore tangible and non-tangible indicators of fluency as well as teaching practices for its development from teachers' perspective which can lead to a better understanding of the characteristics of oral fluency in EFL learners in Colombia.

This exploratory study was conducted in a private language center due to their communicative language approach. It aimed to analyze teachers' perceptions of fluency development and how these perceptions are reflected in their planning and teaching processes. By enriching information about

teachers' pedagogical sequences and criteria to assess high fluency levels, educational language centers with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology could highlight effective teaching practices or improve some areas by training teachers.

2.1 Research Question

What are teachers' perceptions about fluency development in EFL classrooms at a language center?

2.2 General Objective

To analyze teachers' perceptions about the development of fluency in English classes at a language center.

2.3 Specific Objectives

- To inquire teachers' perceptions about fluency in English language learning through interviews.
- To identify teachers' judgement about effective methodologies for fluency development in speech.
- To contrast teachers' perceptions with the theoretical foundations.

2.4 Justification

This study addresses a significant gap in existing literature by exploring eight EFL teachers' perceptions of fluency measurement, its facilitators, and methodologies, focusing not only on traditional acoustic indicators but also on interactional and emotional factors. Although fluency is commonly used as a criterion in speaking assessments (Naderifarjad & Niknia, 2024), its development remains insufficiently explored, particularly in terms of teachers' views on its complexities. This research is crucial for the field as it presents a holistic understanding of fluency, incorporating cognitive, emotional, and interactional elements that are often overlooked in conventional assessments. By examining successful classroom practices, such as familiarization tasks, task repetition and strategic planning (Bui & Huang, 2018), this study offers practical insights that teachers can apply to enhance fluency

development in their classrooms. Additionally, it contributes to the literature by providing teachers with a voice in conversation about fluency, emphasizing their role in shaping and supporting students' fluency development. The study reviews both traditional and emerging indicators of fluency, contrasting these with teachers' perceptions and practices, revealing correlations and discrepancies. As a result, this research offers a more comprehensive view of fluency, which could inform teacher professional development and shape future studies in this area.

3 Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations about Fluency Concepts and Indicators

Fluency has been defined by Segalowitz (2010) and Cadena et al. (2019) as the ability to speak smoothly and continuously, without many pauses, in a coherent and information-packed manner. Similarly, Segalowitz (2010) proposed three concepts to categorize fluency: cognitive, utterance, and perceived fluency. These concepts are closely related, as they influence the formulation, delivery, and perception of speech. According to Yan et al. (2025), fluency is a mental construct that results from automaticity, or cognitive fluency, which becomes observable in utterance fluency and then serves as the basis of perceived fluency.

Cognitive Fluency. Segalowitz (2010) defines cognitive fluency as the speaker's capacity to carry out cognitive processes crucial to producing utterances. Other authors associate it with language automaticity (Liang & Apedoe, 2025). This refers to the ability to recognize and use grammar and vocabulary accurately and quickly, ensuring language proficiency (Liang & Apedoe, 2025; Yan et al., 2025). Although cognitive fluency has potential for study, there has not been a consensus on the indicators used to measure it, as they are considered non-valid or difficult to observe (De Jong, 2018; Yan et al., 2025).

Utterance Fluency. It has been described as the "outward manifestation" of a speaker's ability to plan and deliver speech, involving lexical retrieval and phonetic encoding processes (Naderifarjad &

Niknia, 2024). It can be observed, along with language complexity and accuracy, through speed (measuring the number of words per minute), breakdowns (measuring pause length and frequency), and repair (measuring false starts, repetition, and reformulations) (Bui & Skehan, 2018). Many studies have used these observable indicators to analyze how utterance fluency appears in communicative tasks using CLT and TBL approaches. For example, Bosker et al. (2012) revealed that speed is also determined by pauses, and that breakdowns strongly influence listeners' perceptions of fluency. In contrast, repair features such as repetition and corrections—also called disfluencies—did not affect fluency perception. Bosker et al. (2012) also explored perceptual sensitivity, identifying which features listeners are most sensitive to when determining fluency, concluding that this psychological factor did not play a significant role in the perception of fluency. Hougham et al. (2024) also researched acoustic features, emphasizing the influence of pause positions in speech. They concluded that dysfluent speakers made more mid-clause pauses. Similarly, De Jong (2018) reached the same conclusion but additionally noted that these pauses and articulation rate reflect personal speaking style rather than target language abilities.

Some authors consider that utterance fluency should be observed not only in monologic but also in dialogic tasks, which lead to interactive fluency. For example, Williams (2024) studied teachers' perceptions of fluency to create and use a rating scale for measuring it in pair conversations. He worked with temporal features—speed, breakdowns, and repair—and included non-temporal features such as vocabulary and grammar accuracy, intonation, and formulaic sequences, which are associated with comprehensibility, accentedness, and intelligibility. Among his results, it was evident that temporal and non-temporal indicators, also called peripheral indicators, have an equal influence on teachers' perceptions. Another important contribution was the use of a scale to distinguish individual and interactive fluency. He finally suggested not only studying temporal but also peripheral indicators in interaction and highlighted the importance of teachers' judgments about non-temporal indicators and their effects.

Following that idea, interactive fluency has become relevant. This refers to the joint process that two speakers develop to achieve fluent communication. According to Van et al. (2020), this cooperation involves turn and topic management, interactive listening, breakdown repairs, and nonverbal behaviors. They highlight how essential turn-taking behaviors are in perceived fluency. For them, non-native and native speakers demonstrate fluency with more overlaps during slow speech; however, when native speakers overlap during fast speech, they are categorized as non-fluent. Furthermore, Sato (2014) established turn-taking and scaffolding in conversations as indicators of interactive fluency after analyzing professional fluency raters' discussions about non-native speakers in Japan. He also concluded that individual and interactive fluency are different constructs. Finally, other studies (e.g. Brown et al., 2023; Zakaria & Mugaddam, 2015) include abilities such as exchanging information harmoniously, engaging in interactive listening, managing turns through pragmatic markers, and using nonverbal communication as important indicators of interactive fluency.

Perceived Fluency. This concept refers to the holistic impression that listeners form from speakers' cognitive fluency (Segalowitz, 2010; Van et al., 2020). These impressions can also include inferences about the speaker's capacity to plan and coordinate cognitive processes to deliver speech. However, Segalowitz (2010) claimed that perceived fluency involves not only cognitive process inferences but also sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and psychological factors. Social context, the neurocognitive system that produces speech, and motivation were mentioned as examples of these aspects. Similarly, Zabihi et al. (2021) argued that perceived fluency can be predicted by socio-psychological aspects such as willingness to communicate, anxiety, and other affective factors. This study also claimed that utterance fluency indicators play a major role in listeners' impressions of oral fluency, especially the number of pauses and speech rate (also seen in Pinget et al., 2014).

Hence, L2 fluency can be understood as the impression listeners form from the speaker's cognitive processes, aiming to communicate ideas effectively through spoken language and resources

that make speech fluent and intelligible. This definition integrates the three concepts of fluency (Zabihi et al., 2021).

Research Studies about Fluency Development

This section provides information about results and challenges in the promotion of fluency in several studies. First, it explores language speaking practice as an important factor; second, how interactive fluency can be developed; third, how some strategies and activities were used to increase fluency awareness; fourth, crucial tasks used by some authors to plan classes for fluency; and finally, important emotional and social factors that influence its development.

Foreign Language Practice and Interaction as Facilitators of Fluency. The main strategy that these studies propose to support students in the development of their speaking skills, specifically fluency, is the exposure of students to constant practice of communicative tasks in groups. After all, it is unlikely that oral fluency develops without frequent engagement in oral interaction (Szyszka & Lintunen, 2025). Thus, Muñoz and Ramirez (2018) propose transactional communication activities to reduce breakdowns in communication. This study underscores the importance of incorporating both individual and group communicative tasks in language learning. While individual tasks, such as presentations or solo recordings, can enhance students' confidence and accuracy through preparation and rehearsal, group tasks provide opportunities for spontaneous interaction, mirroring real-life communication. Balancing these approaches can foster more comprehensive oral fluency development. In addition, they claimed these activities were easy to plan, which made students more confident and comfortable venturing into oral tasks. For teachers, the design of activities demands planning and a clear definition of the messages students are expected to convey and guidance on how to support them during the process. Teachers need to design activities in such a way that they provide functional expressions, fixed sentences, and communicative strategies to deal with limitations in oral interactions. Among these activities, they include information-gap exercises, simulations, role-plays, and group discussions. Even

though they obtained positive results in the reduction of long delays in interaction, the criteria they used to assess fluency were very basic.

Similarly, other studies showed that consistent practice through activities with realia, the teaching of formulaic phrases, and the use of multi-word sequences mitigated mid-clause pauses (Hougham et al., 2024; Tavakoli et al., 2016). However, the overuse of prefabricated expressions might cause the opposite effect, as students could overload their memory and experience disruptions in speech (Hougham et al., 2024). Other strategies include multimedia approaches, such as recording journals, to increase students' self-confidence in oral presentations and help them develop mechanisms to deal with nervousness that may cause long pauses in speech (Cadena et al., 2019). These studies highlight the need to implement instructional practices that foster communication and interaction in the classroom but also recognize this as a challenge for teachers, particularly in contexts where student-student interaction is limited and a teacher-centered approach prevails.

Building on the importance of speaking practice, the next section explores how interactive fluency can be developed through collaborative communication strategies.

Information-gap Activities and Peer Interaction for Interactive Fluency Development. The negotiation of meaning is crucial to developing interactive fluency (Ortiz-Neira, 2019). This was demonstrated in a study on the use of information-gap activities to support fluency in a general way. Students needed to complete a task by decoding information from one another, and their ability to understand their exchanges was key to achieving fluid interactions. Nevertheless, this study fell short when addressing specific fluency indicators such as breakdowns and pausing in individual production. The study also identified students' attitudes during interaction as a key factor, emphasizing how teachers are challenged to adapt activities in ways that motivate and engage students to make an effort to speak.

Another implementation related to speaking negotiation for fluency development was

developed by Sato (2014), who conducted pair decision-making tasks in which students had to solve a problem by planning and discussing their answers within three minutes to reach one solution. The author highlighted the importance of learner-learner interaction, as it reflects a context learners might encounter in real-world communication. Finally, one challenge noted in this study was how to assess and provide feedback on interactive fluency, especially when the evaluation relied on recordings. For the author, it was difficult to assess speakers individually, and he had to use a special stereo-sound system to distinguish voices.

In addition to promoting fluency through peer interaction and negotiation of meaning, several studies have focused on raising students' fluency awareness through targeted strategies and activities.

Fluency-enhancing Tasks. Tavakoli et al. (2016) proposed strategy training involving explicit instruction and practice of fluent speech, along with awareness-raising activities that expose learners to specific language aspects as enhancers of fluency. They claimed that awareness-raising activities provide noticing stages that make students aware of fluency indicators such as speed, breakdowns, pausing, and repair. Similarly, training students in managing false starts was also beneficial, as it taught them specific strategies, such as how to avoid leaving an utterance or word incomplete during speech by using lexical fillers or chunks.

Likewise, Yenkimaleki et al. (2023) trained students on disfluency features, including repetition, false starts, reformulation, and replacement, and proposed the use of fillers as a supporting strategy. Moreover, familiarization content tasks became relevant in this study, allowing students to learn multi-word chunks by becoming familiar with the topic. Consequently, the task for teachers is to train students on how these expressions can be used accurately alongside other grammar structures. However, this approach might not work similarly for proficient students, as they already have a repertoire of formulaic expressions. Thus, teachers may face the challenge of finding alternative mechanisms to develop fluency in advanced students.

Furthermore, more group-oriented and repetitive fluency-building activities have been suggested to generate more spontaneous interactions. First, drama-based techniques create spaces for students to make real-time adjustments or improvise their lines (Galante & Thomson, 2017). Second, Hanzawa (2021) demonstrated that ongoing questions during speeches and prompt sentences motivate narrative speaking and support students in producing longer speeches focused on content rather than form.

Planning for Fluency. Building on these strategies, it is crucial to identify elements in lesson planning that researchers believe promote fluency. The main concern of the following studies is how fluency development should be aligned with task design and lesson planning for classes. The following authors discovered that pre-task planning, topic familiarization, and repetition tasks can address the challenges of disfluent performances.

Yenkimaleki et al. (2023) claimed that teachers can plan to improve fluency by providing a scaffolding plan. They found that stages such as modeling, explaining, guided practice, monitoring progress, and providing feedback influence the performance of communicative tasks. Particularly, topic familiarization tasks during modeling stages can foster vocabulary development, formulaic sequences, and multi-word chunks, which serve as mechanisms to avoid false starts. This can develop students' proceduralized skill of accessing chunks without pausing while selecting proper words or syntactic structures for speech (Bui & Huang, 2018). However, this skill did not reduce filled pauses or speech repairs, meaning that accuracy and the use of grammar rules remain concerns for teachers in the development of fluent speech. Other authors have stated that providing pre-task planning time improves temporal fluency aspects such as speed, speech rate, and lexical retrieval (Xitenga & Yiweib, 2023).

Alongside scaffolding, repetition tasks play an important role in developing fluent oral production. According to Bui and Huang (2018), students go through two processes in the performance

of communicative tasks: pre-task planning and online planning, where students often struggle with real-time adjustments. Thai and Boers (2015) proved that techniques such as 4/3/2 monologue repetition can support students during the online planning stage. Students find a strategy to practice their speeches, overcome pauses, and increase their speed. Nevertheless, this study also argued that the length of pauses, which are considered flow measures, is not always a sign of hesitation or disfluency. For example, a short silence in a faster speaker can be detectable, while the same silence in a slower speaker may be part of smooth speech. This could pose a challenge for raters and teachers when perceiving and developing fluency. Thai and Boers (2015) admitted that this technique did not offer opportunities for corrective feedback, retrospective reflection, or language study during repetitive speech delivery, limiting students' ability to self-correct or use sophisticated new expressions. On the other hand, repetition tasks allow students to plan and consolidate their utterances, avoid mid-clause pauses, and process information more quickly (Hunter, 2017; Bui & Skehan, 2018).

Beyond instructional strategies, research has also emphasized the crucial role of emotional and social factors in supporting and shaping students' fluency development.

Emotional and Social Factors of Fluency Development. How the willingness to communicate is influenced by affective-cognitive contexts and its relationship with fluency development was studied by Szyszka and Lintunen (2025). The willingness to talk was defined by the authors as the disposition to initiate speech. They explored language and intergroup attitudes, as well as emotional and social factors, and how these influence the willingness to talk. First, they discovered that a lack of willingness to talk is often linked to low language fluency. Second, they connected high levels of language anxiety to poor L2 fluency, revealing that anxiety leads to more filled pauses, while practices promoting willingness to talk increase speech speed and articulation rate.

The study conducted by Wang et al. (2024) revealed that students with higher emotional intelligence had better control of their emotions while speaking, enabling them to communicate more

clearly and fluently. Furthermore, personality traits and intergroup attitudes—such as students' perceptions of the international community, foreign language learning, and foreign cultures—also influenced the willingness to talk and, indirectly, oral fluency (Szyszka & Lintunen, 2025). The study established that students whose social contexts involved intercultural exchanges and cultural openness showed greater automatization of language use, leading to more fluid interactions and speech (Szyszka & Lintunen, 2025). Finally, they demonstrated that students were more willing to speak in unplanned scenarios, particularly advanced students who enjoyed the challenge of speaking spontaneously.

Moreover, Wang et al. (2024) identified creative thinking as a key factor in fluency development, as it enhances students' linguistic adaptability. According to the study, a creative speaker is someone who can adjust their language use when facing vocabulary gaps. The authors also demonstrated that creative thinking supports improved speaking performance by enabling learners to solve communicative problems effectively and express ideas with linguistic originality. Importantly, they highlighted a central challenge for teachers: designing and implementing authentic learning experiences that foster critical thinking, curiosity, and creativity, while simultaneously promoting oral interaction and motivating students to develop both fluency and accuracy.

In summary, research highlights that fluency development is a dynamic process influenced not only by task design and strategic practice, but also by emotional, social, and cognitive factors that shape learners' willingness and ability to communicate effectively.

4 Methodology

The research approach was qualitative with an inductive method because it intended to get an in-depth opinion from participants and contrast it with general concepts and theories (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the research strategy is phenomenological, because its purpose was to explore, describe and understand the participants' beliefs and experiences about a phenomenon capturing common experiences and concepts (Sampieri et al., 2014). This study may also help identify the characteristics of

the local context and recognize potential changes that can be developed in action and contribute to the social and educational context. Finally, a cross-sectional time horizon will be used to collect the data.

4.1 Context

This study was conducted at the Colombo Americano Cultural Center in Cali, Colombia. The center is a binational language institution operated in partnership between Colombia and the United States. Its mission is to promote mutual understanding between the two countries through language and cultural education. The center is recognized and supported by the U.S. Embassy, which provides resources and organizes cultural activities. Operating as a non-profit private language school, the Colombo Americano has been active in Colombia for nearly 70 years. It offers English programs designed to support learners in achieving personal and professional goals. Programs are available for children, teenagers, young adults, adults, professionals, and corporate clients. Currently, the center offers five types of programs: (1) a Standard English Program with 18 levels, each typically completed in one month; (2) a Kids and Teens Program held on Saturdays; (3) Intensive Courses with five academic hours per class; (4) Specialized Courses focusing on preparation for international exams; and (5) Corporate Training Programs tailored to business needs. Nationwide, there are nine Colombo Americano Centers. In Cali alone, the center serves approximately 4,000 students from diverse age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds, supported by a teaching staff of 140 educators. The center follows a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, fostering interactive classrooms that emphasize functional language use.

4.2 Participants

The participants in this study were eight EFL teachers from the Colombo Americano Center in Cali. A participant profile was established to align with the study's objectives. The inclusion criteria required teachers to: (1) hold a bachelor's degree in languages or a related field, (2) demonstrate an upper-intermediate or advanced level of English, (3) have experience teaching both adults and

teenagers using the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, (4) currently teach intermediate or advanced levels, and (5) have at least one year of teaching experience. These criteria ensured that participants were capable of facilitating complex oral production tasks and could reflect on both monologic and dialogic discourse development.

It is important to note that the sample is not representative of the entire teaching staff because of the profile-based selection and the exclusion due to availability. After defining the profile, potential candidates were identified. Of approximately 140 instructors at the center, 87 met the established criteria. Due to logistical constraints, specifically the requirement to conduct interviews during working hours, participants were selected based on their availability. Eight teachers who were both qualified and available were invited to participate. Teachers with incompatible schedules were excluded, regardless of their suitability in other respects. Consequently, the findings reflect the experiences of a specific subset of qualified instructors and should be interpreted within the limitations of the sample size.

Table 1

Participants' Academic Background, Teaching Experience, and Gender

Participant ID	Academic Background	Teaching Experience and current role	Gender
Teacher T	Bachelor's in Basic Education (Foreign Languages); Master's in Teaching English as a Foreign Language	7 years; experience teaching adults. Currently a teacher's advisor	Female
Teacher S	Bachelor's in foreign Languages (English and French)	4 years; experience teaching teenagers and adults; a B1 level teacher and academic advisor	Male

Teacher G	Bachelor's in foreign Languages (English).	24 years; experience with all age groups; teacher trainer and academic coordinator.	Female
Teacher V	Bachelor's in foreign Languages (English and French).	4 years; experience with teens and adults; has worked as a supporting teacher.	Male
Teacher A	Bachelor's in foreign Languages, (Specialization in Self-Directed Learning)	20 years; experience teaching teenagers and adults; B1-level teacher and virtual branch coordinator	Female
Teacher R	Bachelor's in Languages.	13 years; experience teaching children, teenagers, and adults. Currently a teachers' advisor	Male
Teacher M	Bachelor's in foreign Languages (English).	15 years; experience with teenagers and adults. Currently a teachers' advisor	Male
Teacher N	Bachelor's in social communication.	5 years; experience teaching children, teenagers, and adults. Currently a teachers' advisor	Female

Participants held B2, C1, and C2 placement test certificate. All participants signed an informed consent form prior to the interviews, acknowledging their voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their responses.

4.3 Data collection methods

Data was gathered by one 40-minute interview with each teacher. The eight teachers were interviewed individually. This research project aimed to gather data that serves to understand teachers' perception about the development of fluency as exploratory research.

4.3.1 Interviews.

To have questions that could be flexible and adaptable, semi-structured interviews were chosen for this research. Besides, their open-ended narrative allowed the researcher to know in-depth responses where teachers had the chance to share their opinions without restriction (Heyl, 2007). The interviews cover 3 topics: teaching experiences in communicative approaches and tasks, high fluency perceptions and planning for fluency, see Appendix. Some teachers were interviewed in the north and south branches and others via Google Meet. During the interviews, notes were taken, and audio recordings were made for subsequent transcription and analysis.

4.4 Analysis of the data

A Thematic analysis was used in the research with the support of Atlas.ti software. Following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis involves the following steps: First becoming familiar with the data, then generating initial codes, searching for themes, and finally reviewing and defining themes (cited in Pardo & Cisterna, 2019). Once the interview recordings were transcribed, they were imported into the software. This systematic analysis tool first helped code data based on predetermined categories from the theoretical framework. Equally, it was possible to include and code new categories and themes. Atlas.ti was essential to create, visualize and count the relations and patterns within the data which led to analyzing diverse insights efficiently. This analysis of this data had descriptive labels that allowed the identification of related content. These patterns and findings facilitated the understanding of opinions, and reactions in the interviews. Finally, the interpretations and conclusions were contrasted with theoretical foundation to draw meaningful conclusions.

5 Results and Discussion

The primary objective of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs regarding oral fluency and its development in an EFL context and examine the relationship between their perceptions and theoretical foundations, facilitating identification, categorization, and comparison of key findings. The results presented here are analyzed in response to the following research questions.

5.1 *What are Teachers' Perceptions of Fluency?*

Fluency Development Indicators. The interviews with teachers shed light on the fluency concepts particularly, cognitive, utterance and perceive fluency and their respective indicators. Five out of eight teachers asserted that fluency does not necessarily equate to rapid speech but rather to the ability to communicate messages coherently. For example, teachers defined a fluent speaker as someone who "can communicate (...) and transmit his or her idea correctly" (Teacher T), "transmit a message that is easily understood" (Teacher G) and "possesses the ability to get his ideas across without hesitating too much in a very comprehensible way" (Teacher R).

This finding aligned with the study that claimed fluency indicators do not only refer to speed, breakdowns and repairs (Sato, 2014; Williams, 2024). While speed is often considered a primary indicator of fluency, the teachers in this study did not equate faster speech with higher fluency. Instead, they emphasized the ability to transform thoughts into coherent speech (also highlighted in Cadena et al., 2019). When a speaker delivers a coherent speech, he is able to communicate clearly and effectively which may involve cognitive fluency processes such as lexical access for selecting accurate words quickly, working memory for retaining key ideas, and attention to avoid digressions (Gagné et al., 2022). Therefore, the teachers in this study primarily viewed cognitive fluency as the defining feature of a fluent speaker, highlighting a shift from surface-level features to deeper cognitive processes in assessing fluency.

Concerning utterance fluency, teachers identified speed and pauses as variable factors in assessing a fluent speaker, a view consistent with findings from Bui and Skehan (2018). Two teachers

explicitly considered that long pauses negatively affect fluency, one teacher said a fluent speaker “does not have many pauses (...) does not stop that much (...) if they do, they are thinking in Spanish” (Teacher V). While they acknowledged that pauses are a natural part of organizing thoughts, they argued that frequent or extended pauses can disrupt communication (see also Bui & Skehan, 2018; Hougham et al., 2024). Breakdown occurrences were less frequently mentioned, though one teacher noted that fluency breakdowns often arise when students struggle with vocabulary and fail to express their ideas effectively or employ strategic competence.

Additional indicators, such as speech length and lexical resources, were also found to influence teachers’ perceptions of fluency. Three teachers suggested that speech length is closely tied to topic familiarity, aligning with Bui and Huang (2018), who identified content familiarity as a key variable affecting fluency-related features such as speed, rate, and pauses. For instance, Teacher G stated:

You're not able to give a fluent or long speech or to talk about a topic that is not familiar to you, no matter the language, no matter if it is your native language. I cannot speak, for example, about dinosaurs if I don't know, you know, anything about them, so it's not only the language, but the knowledge about the topic makes a difference.

Other studies similarly conclude that topic familiarity enhances fluency, particularly during the formulation phase of speech (Yenkimaleki et al., 2023). This phase involves selecting appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures, reinforcing the connection between extensive speech production and lexical knowledge.

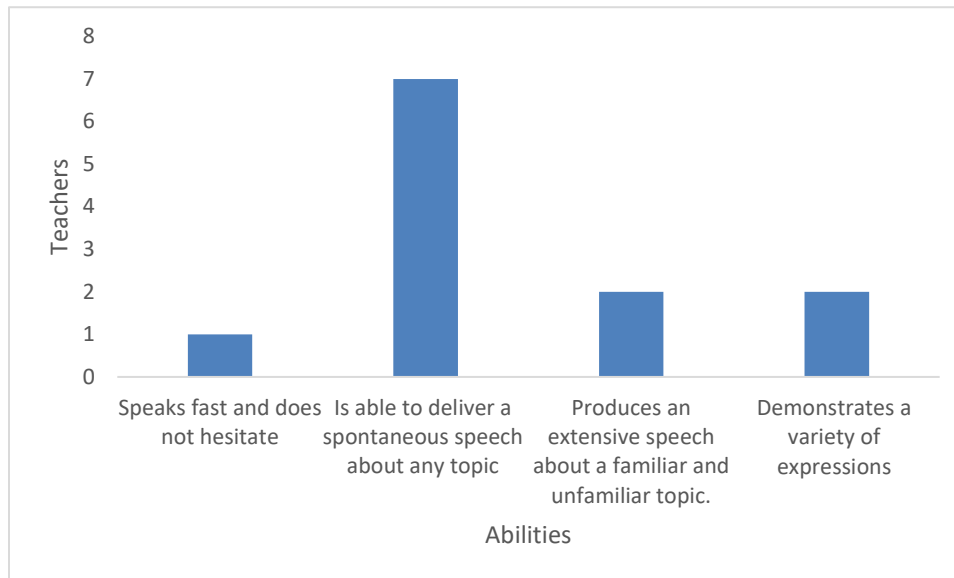
Furthermore, seven teachers emphasized that a broad vocabulary, including synonyms, discourse markers, and fillers, contributes to fluency. One teacher specifically noted that nuanced expressions tend to emerge in speech when speakers possess an extensive lexical repertoire. Limited vocabulary was identified as a barrier to fluency, leading to breakdowns and repetition (Williams, 2024). Teachers also pointed out that students demonstrate fluency when they “do not know a word but they

come up with a different way to say it” (Teacher S). This cognitive ability can be associated with lexical access which demonstrates cognitive fluency (Gagné et al., 2022). Similarly, three teachers highlighted the role of linking words and discourse markers in structuring coherent speech. In line with theoretical perspectives, discourse markers function as connectors that facilitate logical flow and repair communication breakdowns (Chen et al., 2024).

Teachers also identified non-conventional observable indicators of fluency, which reflect their personal inferences about fluent and non-fluent speakers. These can be understood as perceived fluency indicators. Two teachers associated low fluency with a lack of contractions in speech, while others viewed code-switching to Spanish as a sign of poor fluency. Similarly, Figure 1 illustrates spontaneous speech as crucial fluency criterion, with seven teachers agreeing that a fluent speaker should be capable of delivering an unplanned monologue on any topic. Only one teacher equated fluency with rapid speech and minimal hesitation. Teachers hesitated to choose only one option, then they were able to select more than one. Two teachers out of the seven specified that fluent speakers should be able to produce extensive speech on both familiar and unfamiliar topics, while another two emphasized the use of varied expressions, such as collocations, idioms, and fillers (e.g., "Oh, I see," "Let me think," "That's interesting").

Figure 1

Teachers' Perspectives About the Abilities of a Fluent Speaker



The expectation of extensive speech production on unfamiliar topics sparked some debate, as two teachers argued that even in their native language, speakers might struggle to elaborate on unfamiliar subjects. Spontaneity emerged as the most widely accepted indicator of fluency, suggesting that teachers prioritize unplanned speech. Galante and Thomson (2017) describe spontaneity as the cumulative result of structured discussions and fluency-building activities, such as role-plays and information gap tasks. This view was echoed by Teacher G, who explained:

I think it is very important that they feel that they can take the time to kind of prepare what they are going to say. Little by little ... they will be able to develop fluent spontaneous oral interaction, but it's not something that happens, you know, like since the very beginning. At the beginning, we have to be patient and give the students tools to develop this.

Teachers also identified several conditions necessary for spontaneous speech production. Three of them noted that spontaneity is influenced by learners' English proficiency levels and individual speaking styles. They explained that beginner learners often require substantial teacher support before they can speak spontaneously, while advanced learners are expected to show greater independence in

real-life communication. This perspective aligns with Szyszka and Lintunen (2025), who found that advanced students are more eager to engage in challenging, unplanned speaking situations. In addition to proficiency, teachers acknowledged that first-language (L1) speaking habits can affect second language (L2) spontaneity and fluency. This observation is supported by De Jong (2018), who argues that L1 fluency behaviors can be strong predictors of L2 utterance fluency.

Teachers also emphasized the importance of additional skills—such as listening comprehension, creativity, and critical thinking—for achieving fluid speech and smooth transitions. Listening comprehension enables learners to follow the flow of conversation, recognize linking devices and pauses, and respond promptly and appropriately. This reduces hesitation and prevents conversational breakdowns. Similarly, Wang et al. (2024) highlighted that creative thinking promotes linguistic adaptability and supports the expression of diverse viewpoints, both of which contribute to richer and more fluent discussions. One teacher in the study specifically pointed to adaptability as a key indicator of fluency, noting that the ability to reformulate ideas using available language helps learners speak more spontaneously and avoid overthinking. Generating multiple perspectives may also reduce the likelihood of communication gaps or hesitation during speech.

5.2 *What Factors and Methodologies Promote or Hinder Fluency Development?*

Beyond fluency indicators, the study explored teachers' perspectives on the factors and instructional practices that support or hinder fluency development.

Factors Involved in Fluency Development. The factors influencing fluency development were categorized into individual and interactional domains. Individual factors include emotional influences, personal traits, and independent learning habits, whereas interactional factors relate to group dynamics and the overall learning environment.

Individual Factors. Teachers identified several emotional factors that negatively affect fluency. Four of them noted that anxiety, nervousness, and fear of making mistakes often inhibit students' oral

participation—an essential context in which fluency can be practiced and observed. This concern is echoed by Szyszka and Lintunen (2025), who found that language anxiety reduces students' willingness to speak, with pauses serving as a common observable symptom. Similarly, teachers also emphasized that low self-esteem or shyness can severely limit students' willingness to speak English, for example, “when student are too shy, they don't like to participate...they're not confident enough” (Teacher V).

Positive factors were also highlighted, such as students' enthusiasm when observing fluent speakers and their personal satisfaction in expressing themselves. Wang et al. (2024) suggest that enthusiastic learners develop a sense of classroom belonging, leading to greater engagement and improved fluency. Five teachers affirmed that self-confidence and self-efficacy positively influence oral participation, encouraging students to speak more freely and enjoy communication activities. Foreign language enjoyment was also associated with increased intrinsic motivation.

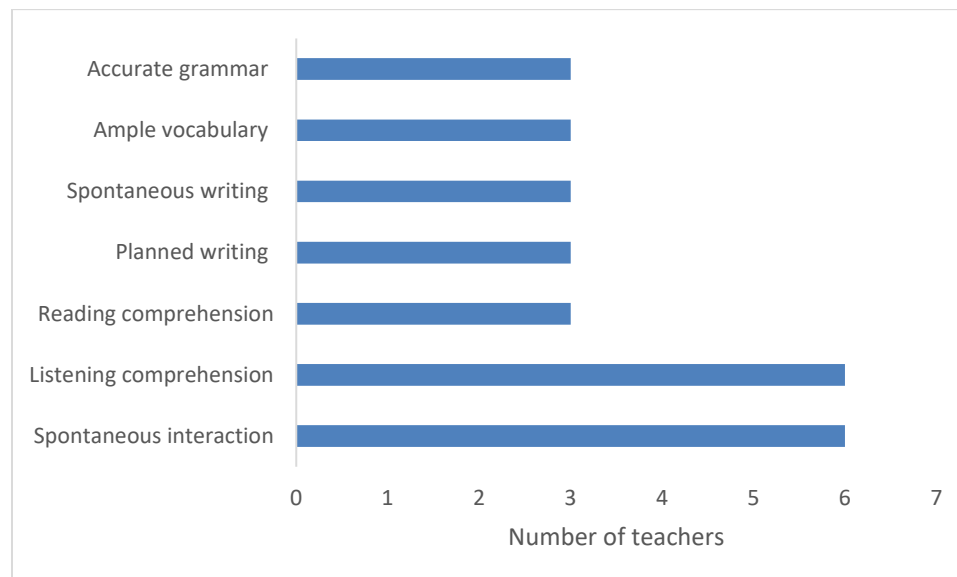
Regarding how students feel about being fluent, one teacher categorized learners into two fluency-related profiles based on what he observed in classes: “grammar overthinkers (...)they want to speak as perfect as possible, sacrificing fluency and spontaneous speakers who just speak, perceived as more fluent (...) they might tend to make more mistakes” (Teacher M). This tension between spontaneity and accuracy appears to reflect broader perspectives on fluency development. For instance, Szyszka and Lintunen (2025) found that spontaneity plays a key role in producing extended speech, noting a positive correlation between articulation rate and willingness to speak in unplanned scenarios. However, Kormos and Dénes (2004) argued that the accurate use of linguistic forms can outweigh speed and spontaneity, suggesting that accuracy may be a more relevant indicator of fluency (as cited in Sato, 2014).

Interactional Factors. During the interviews, it was important to examine the role of classroom interaction in the development of fluency, given the extensive body of research that identifies interaction as both a context for measuring fluency and a means of enhancing it (Bui & Huang, 2018;

Ortiz-Neira, 2019; Sato, 2014; Szyszka & Lintunen, 2025; Van et al., 2020; Williams, 2024). In line with this perspective, Figure 2 illustrates that six teachers identified spontaneous oral interaction and listening comprehension as the most relevant aspects of language performance for fluency development. These elements are fundamental to maintaining conversations and support the concept of co-fluence—defined as the fluency achieved collaboratively between two speakers (Van et al., 2020). Other aspects, such as grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, writing spontaneity, and reading comprehension, were each selected by three teachers. It is important to note that participants could select more than one aspect as relevant.

Figure 2

Most Relevant Language Performance Aspects



Note. This figure displays the number of teachers who identified each item as crucial to fluency development.

All participants agreed that interaction is a central factor in the development of oral fluency in their classrooms. As a result, their lessons regularly incorporate interactive tasks “to keep the conversation going on” (Teacher G), “where students face the fear of speaking” (Teacher S) “tasks that favor student-student interaction” (Teacher S). Teachers also confirmed that “student-centeredness”

(Teacher A) is central to the institution's methodology, which established teachers' roles as "guides... not the center of the class" (Teacher T), "facilitators, aiming communicative competences" (Teacher M).

Beyond fluency, teachers emphasized additional benefits of interaction, including collaborative learning and group work. Previous studies have examined specific interactional features—such as backchannels and turn management—and their relationship with fluency, particularly speech rate (Sato, 2014). Similarly, Van et al. (2020) analyzed elements like overlaps, delays, and gaps in conversation, which may signal strengths or weaknesses in interactional fluency. These findings support the view of interaction as a valid context for assessing fluency levels. However, the interviewed teachers primarily regarded interaction as a facilitator of fluency rather than a tool for assessment. This perspective contrasts with earlier studies, suggesting that teachers see interaction as a way to provide students with meaningful practice and opportunities to build confidence, rather than as a means of identifying or evaluating deficiencies.

With a strong philosophy of creating safe spaces for interaction aligned with the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, fluency development may be understood more as a process than a product. It is also possible that teachers have not been trained to analyze conversations using tools focused on interactional features, such as gaps or overlaps, and therefore naturally frame interaction more as practice than assessment.

When discussing group activities, the importance of interactive listening and listening comprehension emerged again as a key theme. One teacher emphasized that students who do not actively listen to their peers, struggle to participate in speaking or writing activities due to a lack of contextual information. In theory, another effect of listening comprehension is an increased speech rate, as listeners who effortlessly process speech are able to engage and respond more quickly (Williams, 2024).

Finally, a safe learning environment was identified by four teachers as a key facilitator of oral

interaction and fluency development. For instance, they defined a safe environment as a place where “everyone can speak, take the risk to give opinions” (Teacher G), “nobody feels judged” (Teacher R) and “there is equity or nobody is punished by their mistakes” (Teacher S).

Teachers agreed that a lack of confidence in the classroom impedes interaction, which in turn reduces opportunities for language practice—an essential condition for fluency development. These beliefs are supported by research suggesting that active participation in communicative tasks and sustained target language use often stem from a positive classroom climate (Salbaş & Ekmekçi, 2024). Teachers also noted that negative interactional contexts, such as teacher criticism or peer disrespect, can discourage students from speaking. Additionally, the degree of familiarity among students was identified as a contributing factor: mutual respect, patience, and emotional connection were seen as critical in fostering more tolerant and collaborative responses to language mistakes (Salbaş & Ekmekçi, 2024). One teacher concluded that a positive learning environment is one in which students are provided with equal and diverse opportunities to engage in meaningful language use.

Teaching Methodology for Fluency. All interviewed teachers reported following the communicative learning approach as the institution’s methodology. Their classes are designed to encourage the use of English in real-life scenarios. In terms of grammar instruction, students are expected to “discover grammar rules and see it in a context” (Teacher M) through contextualized usage and interaction. They believed that this methodology promotes fluency since it prioritizes interactive activities. Five teachers stated that the lack of English interaction leads to students failing to practice the language, which, in turn, increases hesitation when speaking. Teacher N stated that: “since students only speak English like an hour a day or two hours a day. It sounds basic. It doesn't sound fluent. They hesitate too much”. These beliefs align with research indicating that students immersed in environments with insufficient opportunities to practice speaking face significant barriers to fluency development (Cadena et al., 2019).

Although teachers agreed that speaking practice fosters oral fluency, some studies argue that general speaking practice alone is insufficient. For example, Yenkimaleki et al. (2023) suggest that fluency development requires a more structured approach, such as the implementation of language automatization or proceduralization through formulaic expressions. Their research demonstrated that students trained explicitly in prefabricated language, including grammatical structures and multi-word chunks, were less likely to leave sentences incomplete and exhibited fewer delays in speech formulation. These mechanisms functioned as fillers in pauses, reducing hesitation and enhancing fluency.

Additionally, teachers acknowledged the importance of both classroom input and practice outside the classroom in fluency development. Five teachers recommended that students create an "English atmosphere" outside of class to maximize their exposure to the language. They recognized, however, that students often struggle due to limited input. This concern echoes findings from Hanzawa (2021) and Yenkimaleki et al. (2023), both of whom brought the concept of "minimal input" in EFL context and concluded that greater exposure to the target language is necessary for improving oral fluency. Finally, two teachers expressed the difference in fluency growth between native and nonnative speakers. They said that the amount and quality of English use beyond the classroom or in non-learning space can contribute to how fast and well speakers develop fluency. This condition is what native speakers have while nonnative speakers in foreign language context only use English in class and rarely outside which implies that they reduce the possibilities of being constantly exposed to the language.

Teaching Sequence. Regarding lesson structure, all teachers strongly believed that a well-planned teaching sequence equips students with the necessary tools and processes for fluency development. Their classes follow a structured framework consisting of pre-, while-, and post-class stages.

In the pre-stage, teachers introduce speaking activities, icebreakers, and games to activate

students' prior knowledge of the lesson's theme. Two teachers emphasized that this stage should encourage students to use rich vocabulary, context-specific expressions, and grammar structures to build confidence and foster engagement in later discussions. This effect was also noted in research on information gaps, which serve as preparatory tasks for deeper discussions (Ortiz-Neira, 2019). Information gaps function as structured speaking tasks designed to introduce new vocabulary and a challenging communicative goal, enabling students to prepare themselves and build confidence in speaking fluently. Teacher M highlighted that the pre-stage positively influences the affective filter by "preparing them to receive the class and to help them leave everything that might hinder their understanding of the class.

The while-stage was characterized as a task-oriented phase in which both teachers and students engage in communicative activities. Teachers stated that they introduce more specific vocabulary and expressions, facilitate in-depth discussions with ongoing questions, and approach grammar inductively. They also incorporate videos, audio recordings, emails, and texts to contextualize language use. Two teachers reported modeling the target task to provide students with clear expectations. Research categorizes modeling as a significant instructional strategy, as it fosters a risk-free interactional environment and serves as a scaffolded learning support (Yenkimaleki et al., 2023).

Finally, the post-stage involves individual or group work in which students complete communicative tasks such as role-plays, presentations, or video recordings. One teacher described his activities as transactional, requiring students to exchange information to complete a task. This approach aligns with transactional communication strategies, which guide students through preparation, elicitation, modeling, practice, and review (as seen in Muñoz & Ramirez, 2018). These authors also found that transactional strategies facilitate fluency by encouraging students to connect their speech to real-life contexts. Conversely, one teacher stated that he preferred individual tasks, arguing that "students who work individually may be at a better level of fluency" (Teacher S). He claimed that

working alone pushes students to become independent learners and perform at their best since they feel more pressure to use language accurately, as they fear making mistakes in front of the class.

On one hand, students who feel the pressure to perform an oral task successfully may have a space in individual tasks to improve and reflect about their performance making a greater effort in preparing their speech, rehearsing, and expanding their vocabulary. On the other hand, a lack of exposure to interaction with others — which can mirror real-world communication — may limit students' ability to respond in a fluent and spontaneous way (Muñoz & Ramirez, 2018).

Additionally, one teacher reported implementing the 4/3/2 technique to develop fluency during the post-stage. This technique involves students repeating the same speaking task under progressively shorter time limits.

The increasing time pressure encourages students to communicate more efficiently, pushing them to streamline their speech while maintaining meaning. Thai and Boers (2015) examined the effects of this method on oral fluency and found that it led to slight increases in fluency, accuracy, and complexity, as students improved their real-time task planning during repeated performances.

Fluency Development Tasks. To obtain more robust data on the tasks teachers implement to enhance fluency, they were asked about fluency-building tasks, including topic familiarization, task repetition, rehearsal, strategic planning, and fluency awareness tasks (Bui & Huang, 2018; Xitenga & Yiweib, 2023).

As shown in Table 2, all eight teachers developed topic familiarization using class discussions, games, or icebreakers in the pre-stage. Research suggests that familiarity with content improves interactional competence and narrative skills (Van et al., 2020; Bui & Huang, 2018). Familiarization allows students to make predictions and hypotheses about the topic, which enhances their interaction and contributes to improved speech and lexical rates.

All teachers also incorporated task familiarity in the while-stage, with two using modeling as a

strategy. Five teachers implemented pre-task planning, arguing that it fosters fluency and spontaneous interaction. Also known as strategic planning, this approach helps students produce uninterrupted speech, reducing silent pauses, false starts, and reformulations (Bui & Huang, 2018). Two teachers applied pre-task planning in large projects. Additionally, five teachers sometimes used rehearsal, depending on class time. Rehearsal involves intentional task repetition where students know the communicative goal, while task repetition is completed without prior knowledge of the final outcome. This study supports the notion that rehearsal is not always feasible but can be supplemented by topic familiarization and task repetition (Bui & Huang, 2018). Finally, six teachers stated they incorporate fluency awareness tasks in the post-stage but did not specify activities.

Table 2

Tasks for Fluency

Class stage	Task (N)		
Pre	Topic familiarity (8)		
While	Task familiarity (8)	Students' pre-task planning speech (5)	Rehearsal task (5)
Post	Fluency awareness task (6)		

Note: N=Number of Teachers

Notably, the combination of topic familiarization, task repetition, and strategic planning serves as a practical alternative to support fluency without overburdening instructional time. However, the lack of clarity around post-stage fluency tasks suggests a gap in practice or awareness that may warrant further exploration or professional development. Briefly, their teaching sequence and tasks demonstrate the influence of fluency-oriented pedagogy.

6 Conclusions

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of fluency development in an EFL context, focusing on their understanding of fluency indicators, the methodologies they implement, and the factors they believe influence fluency. The findings suggest that cognitive fluency is highly valued by teachers, who prioritize coherent and meaningful speech over speech rate. Regarding observable indicators, teachers consistently identified long and frequent pauses as negatively affecting fluency, aligning with many of the studies cited. A more holistic perspective on fluency also emerged, with teachers recognizing the importance of socio-psychological factors such as language anxiety, self-confidence, and the creation of a safe classroom environment—all of which are supported by previous research.

Teachers reported using research-backed strategies such as topic familiarization and pre-task planning to support fluency development. However, discrepancies were also noted. Teachers tended to frame interaction more as practice than as a tool for assessment, and they often assessed fluency informally rather than through technical or standardized measures. While many relied on perceptual indicators such as students' use of contractions or code-switching, they were generally less familiar with technical measures like speech rate, pauses, or breakdowns. Although they frequently emphasized the role of practice in developing fluency, they did not always refer to structured strategies such as proceduralizing the use of multi-word expressions or formulaic sequences.

Despite these insights, the study has certain limitations and potential biases, including a small sample size and limited interview duration, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research could build on these results by including a more representative sample and exploring the impact of fluency awareness strategies and explicit fluency instruction. Additionally, the institutional context—where teachers receive ongoing professional development, particularly in communicative methodologies—may have influenced their responses. Further investigations in varied educational settings would offer valuable pedagogical insights and support teachers in developing a more balanced

and informed approach to fluency development—one that integrates both structured learning activities and authentic communicative opportunities.

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8 Appendix

Interview Questions

The questions for the semi-structured interviews were:

Introduction.

- Could you tell me briefly about your professional experience and your methodology?
- What levels do you teach? How many students do you have?
- Apart from teaching, do you have other responsibilities in the center or University?

High fluency perception.

- Rate the following aspects of language performance in terms of importance from 1 to 5, 1 is the least relevant and 5 the most relevant:
 - a. Fluent planned oral performance
 - b. Fluent spontaneous oral interaction
 - c. Good listening comprehension
 - d. Good reading comprehension
 - e. Good writing performance in planned tasks
 - f. Good writing performance in spontaneous writing
 - g. Ample vocabulary base
 - h. Strong and adequate command of grammar structures
- How would you define a fluent speaker? What language resources or utterances does a fluent speaker have?
- What is the most important ability a fluent speaker should have?
 - a. Speaks fast and does not hesitate
 - b. Is able to deliver a spontaneous speech about any topic
 - c. Produces an extensive speech about an unfamiliar topic.

- d. Demonstrates a variety of expressions (collocations, idioms, fillers)
- What factors do you think affect your perception of fluency? How do you think your perception of fluency has developed?
- How do you see the development of fluency in native and non-native speaker identities of English?
- How do you think your students feel about fluency?
- In your opinion, what factors can promote or hinder students' fluency?
- Does interaction help the development of fluency? How can a student develop interactional competence?
- How do you promote and monitor students' interaction in the classroom?

Planning for fluency.

- How are learning sequences developed in your class? Is there a specific methodology that you follow? Why?
- What factors influence your pedagogical sequence?
- Is fluency among them? Do you devote time to developing fluency?
- What works and doesn't work for you in the development of fluency?
- Would you rather develop individual or group activities in classes? Why?
- Does institutional policy influence the development of fluency in any way?
- Regarding the types of tasks, you develop in a communicative class, which of the following do you include?
 - a. Topic familiarity (introduce the topic to discuss)
 - b. Task familiarity (exemplification of the communicative task before doing it)
 - c. Task repetition (perform the communicative task more than once)
 - d. Rehearsal task (students practice their presentation)

e. Fluency awareness task (address directly tips, strategies, mechanism to explain fluency indicators)

- How do you view your role as a teacher in the development of fluency?
- How do you identify successful/unsuccessful oral performance? What instruments do you use to evaluate oral performance? How do you assess oral performance in a group?