

Developing Oral Fluency in English: EFL Teachers' Understanding, Self-Reported Practices, and Textbook Support

Desarrollo de la fluidez oral en inglés: comprensión, prácticas y uso de libros de texto de un grupo de docentes

Lina María Robayo Acuña

Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia

This qualitative study examined the understanding of oral fluency among nine Colombian EFL teachers, their practices for promoting it, and the extent to which their classroom EFL textbooks support the development of oral fluency. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and a content analysis of textbooks. The findings evidenced that the teachers define fluency as both parallel to overall English proficiency and as an aspect of speech production narrowly related to the cognitive, utterance, and perception aspects of fluency. Furthermore, teachers reported a wide range of fluency activities proven beneficial by research, although their course textbooks seem not to sufficiently foster oral fluency. These results suggest that teachers' fluency definitions are not dichotomous, highlighting the need to relate teachers' cognitions of fluency with theoretical accounts.

Keywords: oral fluency, second language instruction, speaking skills, teaching practices, teacher understanding

Este estudio cualitativo examinó la comprensión de nueve profesores colombianos de inglés sobre la fluidez oral, sus prácticas para promoverla y la medida en que sus libros de texto contribuyen al desarrollo de la fluidez oral. Los datos se recopilaban mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas y un análisis de contenido de los libros utilizados. Los resultados revelan que los participantes definen la fluidez como parte del dominio general del inglés y como un aspecto de la producción oral vinculado a factores cognitivos, de enunciación y de percepción. Aunque utilizan prácticas respaldadas por la investigación, los libros de texto de sus cursos parecen no fomentar suficientemente la fluidez. Esto subraya la necesidad de alinear las concepciones de los docentes con los enfoques teóricos.

Palabras clave: comprensión de los profesores, enseñanza de una segunda lengua, fluidez oral, habilidades de habla, prácticas de enseñanza

Lina María Robayo Acuña  <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3026-8477> • Email: lmrobayoa@unal.edu.co

This article is based on the master's thesis completed by Robayo Acuña (2020).

How to cite this article (APA, 7th ed.): Robayo Acuña, L. M. (2025). Developing oral fluency in English: EFL teachers' understanding, self-reported practices, and textbook support. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 27(2), 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v27n2.115146>

This article was received on June 21, 2024 and accepted on May 5, 2025.

This is an Open Access text distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons license Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. Consultation is possible at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Introduction

Oral fluency is a key goal for second and foreign language (L2) learners and a long-established construct within the second language acquisition (SLA) field. Its importance has grown with the rise of communicative language teaching (CLT), becoming a core descriptor of oral skills among language practitioners, applied linguistics researchers, and language testers (Ellis, 2009).

Fluency, alongside complexity and accuracy, is a key measure of L2 performance and proficiency. Complexity involves the vocabulary and syntactical structures an L2 learner may display (Housen et al., 2012); accuracy refers to L2 norms adherence (Ellis, 2003); and fluency, to the ability to produce smooth, rapid, and automatic L2 speech (Housen et al., 2012; Koponen & Riggensbach, 2000; Lennon, 1990).

In the 1980s, fluency became central to oral skills, distinguishing between accuracy-based activities, focused on error-free linguistic forms, and fluency-based activities that promote spontaneous L2 use (Brumfit, 1984). This distinction reinforced CLT's emphasis on real-life communication relevant to learners' goals (Ellis, 2003).

In the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Colombia, research shows that many L2 teachers use practices involving authentic communication and interaction to foster learning (Cruz-Ramos & Herrera-Díaz, 2022; Ramírez Ortiz & Artunduaga Cuéllar, 2018). This tendency to use CLT predominantly in L2 classrooms—as it happens globally (Qasserras, 2023)—has encouraged the establishment of communicative competence and oral fluency as key goals in Colombia's National Program of Bilingualism 2018–2022 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, n.d.), aiming for school graduates to interact in various contexts and reach an intermediate English proficiency level (B1 in the scale of the Common European Framework of Reference; Council of Europe, 2001). However, national and international

tests indicate that Colombia lags behind in achieving these goals.

Results from the *Saber 11*, Colombia's national high-school graduation exam, reveal that about 80 % of students have low English proficiency (pre-A1 and A1 levels, Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación [ICFES], 2023). The *Saber Pro* test, which assesses Colombia's university education quality, also shows most test-takers at the A2 level (ICFES, n.d.). The *EF English Proficiency Index*, a renowned worldwide report on adults' English proficiency, ranks Colombia 74th out of 116 countries and 17th out of 21 in Latin America, classifying it as a country with low proficiency (EF Education First, 2024). While *Saber* exams primarily assess reading and linguistic knowledge (lexis/syntax) rather than speaking, these reports and the EF Index suggest minimal oral fluency development. Tavakoli and Wright (2020) argue that fluency also relies on a broad lexical and grammatical repertoire, implying that deficits in these areas may hinder processing speed and fluency. Moreover, English is a foreign language in the Colombian context and, as such, there are limited opportunities for authentic English use and fluency-oriented practices. However, little is known about the operationalisation of oral fluency in Colombian EFL pedagogy and the broader panorama of SLA research (Rossiter et al., 2010; Tavakoli & Hunter, 2018).

Additionally, EFL textbooks, which may take a prominent role in EFL classes, may underemphasise the oral fluency aspect and disregard explicit fluency activities even though they include the traditional speaking skill, as has been evidenced by research in other EFL contexts (Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013; Rossiter et al., 2010). Therefore, this study set out to explore EFL Colombian teachers' familiarity with oral fluency, how they promote it in the classroom, and whether EFL textbooks support oral fluency development, from both the teachers' perspective and the activities the textbooks contain.

Literature Review

Fluency: A Polysemous Concept

Fluency is a complex concept encompassing various aspects related to both understanding and producing language. This study focuses on speaking fluency in an L2 context. Defining “speaking fluently,” however, has been a longstanding issue in the SLA field, with numerous definitions emphasising different aspects.

A key distinction in defining oral fluency is Lennon's broad and narrow senses (Koponen & Riggensbach, 2000; Lennon, 1990). In its broadest sense, fluency, or higher-order fluency, encompasses L2 overall proficiency (Lennon, 1990) or language mastery, a definition familiar to all L2 learners (Freed, 2000). Oral fluency in a narrower sense, or lower-order fluency, refers to a single component of oral proficiency (Lennon, 1990) which, integrated with complexity and accuracy, indicates successful L2 acquisition (Towell, 2012). This narrow concept of oral fluency is defined as the “rapid, smooth, accurate, lucid, and efficient translation of thought or communicative intention into language, under the temporal constraints of online processing” (Lennon, 2000, p. 26). In other words, speaking fluently commonly refers to control over L2 linguistic knowledge regarding temporal and acoustic features such as speed rate, pausing, and repair features (Housen & Kuiken, 2009).

Within such a narrow definition of oral fluency, Segalowitz (2010) offers a holistic perspective, viewing fluency as a multicomponent construct that encompasses cognitive, utterance, and perceived fluency. *Cognitive fluency* relates to speech production mechanics, involving conceptualising speech content, activating working memory, and transforming the mental lexicon into phonemes (Segalowitz, 2012). This cognitive processing is crucial since “the more rapidly language users can access and produce the words they want to use, the more fluent their speaking” (Lintunen et al., 2020, p. 4).

Utterance fluency, the oral manifestation of cognitive fluency, represents measurable speech aspects. Skehan (2003) and Tavakoli and Skehan (2005) propose a three-dimensional framework: speed of delivery, breakdown in speech, and repair measures. *Speed of delivery* includes speech rate, articulation rate, amount of speech, time ratio, and mean length of run. *Breakdown in speech* refers to interruptions (e.g., pausing), while *repair measures* include strategies such as reformulation, replacement, false starts, and repetition. Although pausing and repairs are generally markers of disfluent speech, recent studies suggest they may maintain fluency from a problem-solving perspective (Peltonen, 2020). This framework has proven very influential for researchers approaching fluency in its narrow sense (Lintunen et al., 2020).

Lastly, *perceived fluency* concerns “the inferences listeners make about a speaker's cognitive fluency based on their perception of utterance fluency” (Segalowitz, 2010, p. 48). Teachers or assessment practitioners contrast this type of fluency with objective fluency measures from learners' performance and ratings (Lintunen et al., 2020). This fluency type often relates to intelligibility and pleasantness of utterances, emphasising engagement (Freed, 2000; Lennon, 2000).

While Segalowitz's framework provides a comprehensive view of oral fluency and systematicity in its observation and measurement, other social, attitudinal, and motivational factors may also play a role in understanding oral fluency (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009).

Fluency Research: L2 Pedagogy Background

L2 fluency research has mainly focused on identifying reliable measures to characterise fluent speech—primarily on utterance fluency—and its relationship with perceived fluency (Kormos & Dénes, 2004), cognitive fluency (De Jong et al., 2013), general L2 speaking proficiency (Kahng, 2014), and L1 fluency (Derwing et al., 2009). However, studies on L2

fluency pedagogy are less diverse, mainly addressing task design, implementation, and complexity (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020).

Research on task design consistently reports six techniques or tasks that benefit L2 oral fluency development: formulaic sequences, task repetition, planning time, the 4/3/2 technique, fluency strategy training, and awareness-raising tasks. *Teaching formulaic sequences* (e.g., collocations, phrasal verbs, lexical bundles) reduces working memory load, facilitating easier processing (McGuire & Larson-Hall, 2017). *Task repetition* improves speech speed, articulation, and automaticity (Tavakoli et al., 2016) while also allowing learners to familiarise themselves with task content, refine language use, and compensate for disfluencies (Gashan & Almohaisen, 2014). *Planning time* before a task enhances oral output and fluency (Bui & Huang, 2018). *The 4/3/2 technique*—task repetition under decreasing time limits (4, 3, and 2 minutes)—boosts fluency (Thai & Boers, 2016). *Fluency strategy training* and *awareness-raising tasks* help learners address dysfluency. Strategies include reducing unnecessary repetitions, paraphrasing, and using fillers (e.g., “er,” “hum”), alongside activities such as listening, analysing, and reenacting fluent and dysfluent speech (Tavakoli et al., 2016).

Building on this previous research and a summary by Rossiter et al. (2010), Tavakoli and Hunter (2018) proposed a framework for analysing pedagogical activities that foster oral fluency. The framework includes (a) consciousness-raising activities; (b) planning, rehearsal, and repetition; (c) use of formulaic sequences, discourse markers, and lexical fillers; (d) fluency strategy training; (e) communicative free-production tasks, which focus on meaning and encourage free L2 communication (e.g., role-plays, debates, group work); and (f) general L2 proficiency tasks, a broader category covering activities aimed at developing pronunciation, vocabulary, or other linguistic skills such as listening or reading. These tasks distinguish general speaking activities from those specifically designed to target fluency.

Regarding task complexity (i.e., cognitive demands of a task), studies have revealed that increasing cognitive-task demands results in positive effects for accuracy often at the expense of oral fluency development (Gilbert et al., 2011; Michel, 2011; Nayoung, 2020), unless L2 speakers have more resources available for task performance, such as more planning time or guided attention towards mode, language form, and fluency resources (Ellis, 2017).

Despite advancements in understanding oral fluency and its application in L2 classrooms through specific tasks and techniques, research on teachers' fluency practices remains scarce. Few studies have examined how L2 teachers define and promote oral fluency, despite their critical role in fostering fluency, especially when the L2 cannot be practised outside the classroom.

Previous studies have shown varying definitions and classroom practices regarding oral fluency. Dore (2015) investigated the intuitive notions of oral fluency among Italy- and UK-based English teachers, finding no consensus among the participants. Italian teachers defined oral fluency as general spoken command, while UK teachers emphasised cognitive and utterance fluency, likely due to their greater training and qualifications. Tavakoli and Hunter (2018) surveyed 84 English as a second language, EFL, or modern foreign languages (e.g., Spanish, German) teachers, discovering that they fell between broad and narrow definitions of oral fluency, often overlooking ease and automaticity in speech. Furthermore, reported activities tended to focus on general speaking skills rather than fluency-specific techniques. According to Burns (2017), these general skills involve pronunciation, performing speech acts, interaction management, and discourse organisation.

Similar to the previous two studies, Morrison (2018) investigated the understanding, confidence, and practices of Chilean high school EFL teachers related to oral fluency, using a Spanish-adapted version of Tavakoli and Hunter's (2018) questionnaire. The findings revealed misconceptions about oral fluency, with 56% of teachers associating it with general speaking ability and L2

proficiency, while only 14% referred to maintaining natural speech flow, which aligns with a narrow view of oral fluency. The remaining 30% provided unrelated definitions. Despite reporting confidence in developing oral fluency, their classroom practices lacked fluency-enhancing activities supported by research.

Lastly, Tavakoli (2023) examined the effects of a one-day professional training workshop on the oral fluency, understanding, and practices of 106 L2 teachers. Using the Tavakoli and Hunter (2018) questionnaire pre- and post-training, the study found that the intervention helped teachers adopt a narrower, research-aligned perspective on defining and promoting oral fluency. These findings align with Dore's (2015) hypothesis that professional development improves oral fluency, understanding, and classroom practices.

Overall, the findings of these previous studies call for more fluency-focused classroom practice and familiarising teachers with adequate activities to promote oral fluency.

Method

This study examined the meanings attributed to oral fluency by nine EFL teachers at a public university

in Bogotá (Colombia), their descriptions of teaching practices related to oral fluency development, and their perception of how the textbooks they use promote oral fluency. This involved enquiring into (a) the teachers' confidence in promoting oral fluency, (b) their familiarity with L2 oral fluency research, (c) the types of oral fluency activities they promote in class, (d) their perception on their class textbook for oral fluency development, and (e) the extent to which the speaking activities in these textbooks emphasize oral fluency. The participants' insightful qualitative interpretations might inform similar cases and guide future, larger-scale research (Merriam, 2009). Content analysis, which allows "the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" (Neuendorf, 2020, p. 1), was selected to appropriately address the analysis and record occurrences of specified codes (types of fluency-oriented tasks) in the textbooks.

Participants

The participants were Colombian (three women, six men) and Spanish speakers. Their age range was: 5 = 25–34, 3 = 35–44, and 1 = 55+. Table 1 shows further details on the participants.

Table 1. Background of Participating Teachers

Teacher	Gender	Last academic level	CEFR English level	Years teaching at the University
T1	Male	MA	C1	9–10
T2	Female	BA	C1	3–4
T3	Male	BA	C2	5–6
T4	Male	MA	C2	7–8
T5	Female	MA	C1	9–10
T6	Male	BA	C1	3–4
T7	Male	MA	C2	9–10
T8	Female	BA	C1	>10
T9	Male	MA	C1	3–4

Data Collection

A questionnaire, designed and distributed through Qualtrics, and a semi-structured interview were used for data collection. Additionally, a content analysis of the *English File* student textbook, third edition (the primary instructional material used by the participants), was conducted.

The questionnaire gathered participants' profiles and background, while the interview addressed the research objectives. The semi-structured interview was chosen to draw richer data from the participants' experiences (Galletta, 2013) and "raise extra-unplanned questions to explore and clarify [the participants'] responses" (Elliot et al., 2016, par. 1). The interview had two sections, aligned with the research questions: (a) a section for participants to define oral fluency, describe fluent EFL speakers, assess their confidence in promoting oral fluency, and discuss their familiarity with oral fluency research; (b) open-ended questions about classroom activities that promote oral fluency and how the textbook supported it, if applicable.

The interview was piloted with two non-native EFL teachers from the participants' university, which led to the addition of a third section that presented three sample textbook activities identified as fluency-based in prior content analysis, enriching the participants' descriptions and rationale for using such activities. The content analysis investigated the extent to which fluency-oriented speaking activities were present in the textbooks employed by the participants, specifically the Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, and Upper-Intermediate levels of the *English File* series.

Data Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The data from each section were then analysed as follows:

Section I: Teachers' oral fluency definition, confidence, and research familiarity. Thematic coding was applied (descriptive, analytic, and axial), segmenting

the qualitative data into initial codes, grouping them into categories, and connecting them to main themes (Cohen et al., 2007). For example, the statement "an L2 fluent speaker should be able to transfer the information or speak with another person in an effective manner" (T2) was coded as: fluent-speaker features (descriptive), ability to convey meaning effectively (analytic), and fluency as effective communication (axial). A frequency analysis was then conducted to determine the most frequent codes or categories.

Section II: Promotion of oral fluency in the classroom. Tavakoli and Hunter's (2018) framework on fluency-focused activities was used to code the activities described by participants.

Section III: Perception of the *English File* student textbook. Same process as in Section I. Emergent codes were recorded and refined through the researcher's iterative reading and re-examination.

The content analysis of each textbook was carried out in three phases. In the first phase, all activities aimed at developing the speaking skill were identified and classified into tasks that focused on accuracy and tasks that focused on oral fluency. In the second phase, accuracy-based activities were discarded, and fluency-based activities were coded using Tavakoli and Hunter's (2018) framework, and those codes were logged. The results of both phases were recorded on different spreadsheets. To ensure an accurate and objective coding through content analysis, another researcher conducted the same second-phase analysis, confirming the results. In the third phase, IBM SPSS Statistics software was employed to calculate the number of entries and the frequency of each type of activity across the four textbooks.

Ethical Considerations

Participants received information sheets and online consent forms. After five weeks of data collection, participants were anonymised with codes, ensuring confidentiality and restricted data use for academic purposes.

Findings and Discussion

What Oral Fluency Means to the EFL Teachers

According to the participants, oral fluency is an ability that involves a wide range of speaking features. Interestingly, most of these features reside in both the broad and narrow senses of the term formulated by theory. Although the teachers mentioned the features shown in Table 2, they do not distinguish categorically between the broad and narrow definitions, highlighting a discrepancy between the scholarly definition of the concept and the teachers' understanding of it. This is consistent with Dore's (2015) and Tavakoli and Hunter's (2018) findings regarding the definitions of oral fluency as encompassing a wide variety of characteristics and a mixed conceptualisation.

"Efficiently transmitting a communicative intention or message" was the most reported feature (8 out of 9), suggesting a broad notion of oral fluency akin to communicative competence or L2 overall proficiency

(Lennon, 1990). Example statements from teachers include:

Oral fluency would be the ability to express one's ideas... without hesitation...to articulate in a way that the other person gets...the complete idea. (T1)

You're able to producing [*sic*], not grammatically correct necessarily, but to create meaning through the language... have a group of words that MEAN SOMETHING for the person I'm speaking to. (T9)

In second place, six participants reported that "exhibiting control over cognitive processes," such as lexical retrieval and message codification, is of vital importance to be fluent in an L2. These teachers noted, for example, that fluency involves "express[ing] ideas without having to look for words or structures" (T1), "using [rules] unconsciously" (T3), or avoiding "translating in [one's] head" (T6). In other words, they suggested oral fluency relates to automaticity in uttering the desired message (i.e., cognitive fluency; Segalowitz, 2010).

Table 2. Features Considered by Participants to Define Oral Fluency

Type of definition	Feature	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	Frequency
Broad	Efficiently transmitting a communicative message	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	8
	Using comprehensive vocabulary	*				*	*	*			4
	Native-like pronunciation					*			*		2
	Organising discourse appropriately	*							*		2
	Regulating speech interaction	*									1
Narrow	Automaticity in cognitive processes	*	*	*	*		*	*			6
	Speaking at a regular pace	*		*			*	*			4
	Speaking with a few pauses		*				*	*	*		4
	Pleasing the listeners				*		*				2
	Absence of filler words		*								1
Other	Showing self-confidence		*	*				*			3

Additionally, some participants suggested that “speaking at a regular pace” (4) and “with few pauses” (4) are other essential features when defining fluent speech. For instance, T7 described fluency as “the ability to communicate...maintaining a similar pace without many breaks...and to continuously provide a message in a clear way.” This view was echoed by T8: “A fluent speaker would be someone who expresses without pauses, hesitation...being coherent,” and T3: “Conveys a message smoothly without major issues and having constant speed in their speech.” These two aspects—natural pace and lack of pauses—coincide with aspects such as speed and breakdowns within the utterance fluency type introduced by Segalowitz (2010).

Further analysis revealed that “using comprehensive vocabulary” (4) is the fourth most relevant aspect in the oral fluency definition. This feature, as suggested by Burns (2017), reflects a general L2 speaking ability that allows the full command of the language (oral fluency, broad definition). T5 emphasised: “You have to have a really good knowledge of vocabulary...to express your ideas,” while T6 indicated that “fluency will be deeply related to vocabulary. As long as you feel you have enough lexicon to speak, you’re not gonna stop too much. You’re gonna be able to continue the conversation.”

Additional features to define oral fluency included “organising discourse appropriately,” having “native-like pronunciation,” and “pleasing the listeners ($f = 2$ each). The following excerpts exemplify these features:

[Their] ideas would have to be organised so that the person would know...how to introduce the topic, introduce himself, mention the subject, focus on the main points, give some sort of outline of what he’s gonna do, use connectors and expressions for signposting, etc. (T1).

I think that, for fluency, it’s important...speaking [*sic*] very fast or as a native speaker. (T5)

I’d say that, yeah, native speaker is the model in general to follow. (T8)

I think that fluency may not only be a skill that the speaker [is] developing, but it is also the way the person listening perceives the speaker. Who is going to say if I’m a fluent speaker or not? The other person. Fluency may be also something given by the others. (T6)

A fluent speaker is someone who can express their ideas in a way that comes up as natural to them and the people that are listening to them. (T4)

These comments suggest, on the one hand, that these teachers may favour native-speakerism in their oral fluency-related teaching practices, and on the other, that evaluating the quality of fluent speech may not depend solely on the actual speech performance of L2 speakers, but also on the interlocutor’s role in the communicative act.

Thus, while “organizing discourse appropriately” and having a “native-like pronunciation” reflect a broad conceptualization of oral fluency, alluding to two additional general L2 speaking abilities, “pleasing the listeners” refers to perceived fluency from Segalowitz’s (2010) three-type fluency framework, which defines oral fluency as a single component of oral proficiency.

Other less emphasised features to define oral fluency and characterise L2 fluent speakers, but important for a couple of teachers, were having strategies to “regulate speech interaction” and the “absence of filler words.”

[A fluent speaker] would have to know conversation... communication strategies, how to begin a conversation, how to take the floor, how to use turn-takers, how to show interest in the other person, how to motivate the other person to take part in the conversation. (T1)

T2, in turn, insisted that when L2 speakers show a lack of filler words, they are more fluent. As she put it, “the absence of those filler words is a mark of actual fluency.”

In addition to the previous features associated with either the broad and narrow definition of oral fluency, the results of this study also supported Ushioda and

Dörnyei's (2009) view that fluency may be related to attitudinal factors, since three teachers mentioned that "showing self-confidence" is also a fluency marker. This may be a call to study how other social factors can be considered in defining oral fluency.

Overall, these results suggest that most participants understand oral fluency as a blend of elements from different conceptualisations, referring mainly to the command of an L2 (Lennon, 1990) and features which portray oral fluency as a single descriptor of L2 speaking consistent with Segalowitz's (2010) framework.

Confidence of the EFL Teachers in Promoting Fluency and Familiarity With Fluency Research

The interview results showed that four participants felt confident and knowledgeable about promoting oral fluency in the EFL classroom, while another four felt barely confident. Only T1, a very experienced teacher, considered himself very confident.

The self-reported confident teachers attributed their confidence to their knowledge of various learning strategies and their creativity in designing tasks. For instance, T5 firmly believed that "it's very important that, if you wanna help students develop fluency, you...give them a lot of strategies and tools." T8 also highlighted activities like "work[ing] with linking [words]...reading out loud [and] making graphic links on the text for rhythm" as essential strategies.

Those less confident in promoting oral fluency had different reasons for this to be the case. T2, for example, noted she had limited experience teaching advanced courses, implying that oral fluency should be taught only at higher levels: "I cannot say that I have enough experience on that...since I've [been teaching in] the very first endeavours, like from [levels] 1 to 4. I focus on the basic primary structures and helping [students] be understood."

Similarly, T6 rarely focused on fluency in class preparation due to a lack of confidence. He expressed

that he has not "realised...if [he] say[s], for example, 'today I'm gonna plan a class which is gonna be mainly focused on promoting fluency,' and I really know what to do...I'M NOT SURE!"

Unlike these participants, T1 felt certain about various language aspects and activities that EFL learners should be directed to when developing oral fluency:

I focus mostly on conversations, discussions...some games, where they negotiate information...meaning, and they have to argue, give opinions, give reasons, examples, etc. I also work on pronunciation. I focus mostly...on the sounds...on rhythm. I think that vocabulary is very important—vocabulary not as single words, but as units of meaning.

Further analysis revealed that most participants (8) were not acquainted with up-to-date oral fluency research. They admitted being "not very familiar" (T1), "not having read much" on the topic (T4), or lacking training, specifically about fluency (T5 & T8). Despite this, all teachers agreed that being informed by research is essential to improve their teaching practices.

T3 was the only teacher who had read research papers and received formal training on promoting oral fluency. He emphasised the importance of combining language learning experiences, teaching practice, and formal training to acquire effective techniques for stimulating oral fluency:

The fact that I've learned other languages before can make it easier for me...I'm picking some advice, some strategies, also some tools that I've found out during this process, and I'm combining that with my experience as a teacher, as a former student of [my] career...I'm trying to mix that along with the research papers to offer my students the best strategies and the best ways to acquire language.

Although eight teachers perceived themselves as not very knowledgeable about oral fluency research

and theoretical foundations, three agreed with T3's statement, as illustrated in this excerpt:

I project what I've done personally onto my students. I tell them this is what I did. I developed my own fluency in a very particular way, and these are some of the exercises I've come up with in the last couple of years. You go for the things that you either like or the things that you see that are the most useful with some groups. (T4)

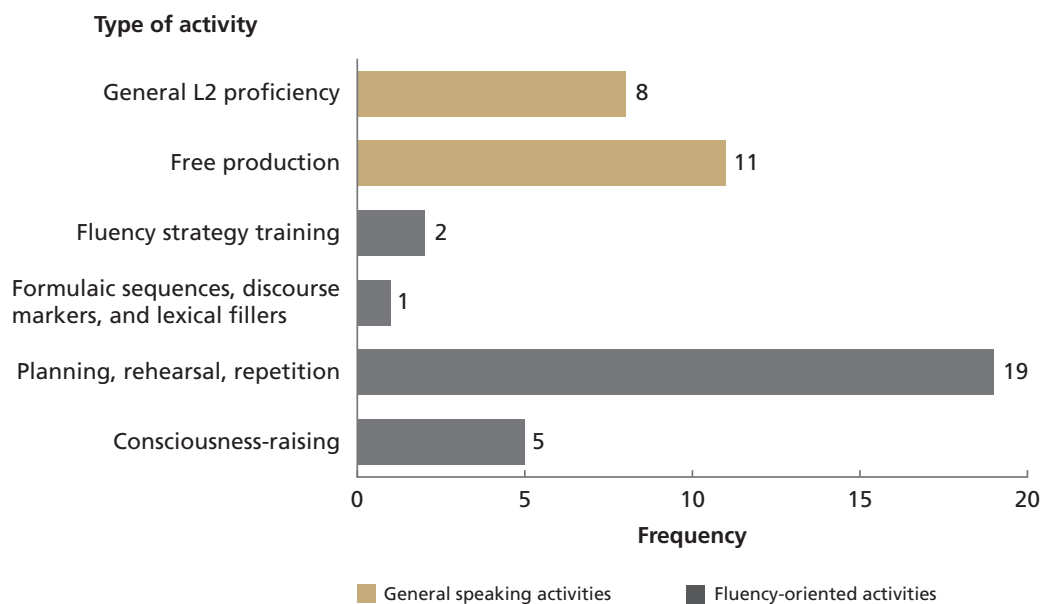
This finding supports Lightbown's (2017) view that language teachers draw knowledge from multiple sources, including personal experiences, early teaching experiences, and research on L2 learning and teaching.

Lightbown argues that research helps teachers feel more confident in their pedagogical choices when they are reinforced by evidence, or it prompts teachers to try new methods. Thus, the teachers' limited confidence in promoting oral fluency may relate to their lack of familiarity with fluency research.

Teachers' Promotion of Oral Fluency in the Classroom

The participants described 46 activities they considered promoted oral fluency. These activities were coded using Tavakoli and Hunter's (2018) framework, and the results are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Frequency of Self-Reported Activities to Promote Oral Fluency in the EFL Classroom



As can be seen from Figure 1, 27 (58.7%) out of the 46 activities described by the teachers are, in fact, activities proven beneficial by research for L2 oral fluency development. This result is counterintuitive, given the teachers' reported unfamiliarity with oral fluency research and lack of confidence in promoting oral fluency.

Within these fluency-oriented activities, "planning, rehearsal, and repetition" was the most reported

(70.4%). Most examples within this category involved shadowing activities, that is, activities that consisted of having learners listen to and repeat as closely as possible what they hear from an audio material produced in the L2, particularly extracts from TV series or films. For instance, T6 explained:

I ask them to find a character or a film that they like and focus on two sentences that the character is saying in an

episode. Listen to it carefully and then record themselves repeating the same extract. I ask them to do that until they feel and I, as a teacher, that they're repeating or sounding the same as the original voice.

Another representative activity within this category was having students speak under time constraints and repeat the exercise to produce and correct as much language as possible. According to T4, he tells students: "Take your phone, hit the record button, and then, just give yourself a topic... transportation in my city! and just speak for two minutes." On another possible variation, EFL students can take some time to prepare and then practise and practise to "provide that information in... one minute, or one minute and thirty seconds."

Additional activities mentioned included classroom surveys, such as "speed dating" (T6) or "find someone who" (T9), which require constant language repetition, allowing teachers to give learners time to plan their questions. T7 noted these activities seem to be beneficial for oral fluency since the "learners start worrying less about the form of the language [or] technical aspects of grammar, and they worry more about getting the message across."

The second type of fluency-oriented activity with some presence was "consciousness-raising activities" (18.5%). From the five activities described, four involved the explicit analysis of some relevant elements of the speaking skill (e.g., speed, pronunciation, intonation) from the EFL students' self-recorded audios. T4 described:

Record yourself, listen to yourself and pay attention to what you're doing right, what you're doing not so well, what things you can change. Wonder: Am I speaking fast enough? Am I trying to speak too fast, or am I speaking too slowly? Is my pronunciation clear enough, or does it sound like there is a lot of first-language interference?

Apart from those elements, T8 emphasised the value of analysing connected speech to enhance oral fluency:

I usually have [students] read a text...and then, I write a sentence on the board and say: "What words should be connected here?" I model. I insist on that. I ask them to mark it on their texts. It makes you realise [connected speech] more easily.

Although reported to a much lesser extent, "fluency strategy training activities" (7.4%) and the use of "formulaic sequences, discourse markers, and lexical fillers" (3.7%) were also mentioned as activities believed helpful for oral fluency development. Regarding the former, T4 and T8 said having taught rhythmic patterns and word stress to later give EFL learners opportunities to have controlled practice:

When reading aloud...I use these recordings [from coursebooks/web] and...I tell them: "Pay closer attention to the rhythm of the language. Those are the kind of features you're gonna have to imitate...the closer you get to that rhythm, the more natural you're gonna sound and then, do it out loud." (T4)

I also make them aware of the stressed words in a sentence. After this awareness, [I ask them] to read the paragraph and record it and listen to themselves. (T8)

Concerning formulaic sequences, T3 explained the importance of teaching fixed chunks of words: "If [they] memorise or [get] familiar with groups of words, especially those that aren't closer to [them], [they] will be able to speak easi[ly]." This idea aligns with the theory that automaticity leads to faster and smoother L2 speech.

Another significant finding was the constant reference to "free production" (11) and "general L2 proficiency activities" (8), with a total of 19 (41.3%) out of 46 activities. Although the SLA literature does not consider these two types of activities as proper fluency-oriented activities (Burns, 2017), the study participants believed they contributed to the development of oral fluency.

Debates (4) were the most frequent free-production activity. T2, for instance, narrated how he involves EFL students in debates: "Basically, I just pick any topic that is

in vogue. [I] just divide the classroom and have one group talk about the possible pros and the other one [about] possible cons.” Likewise, T5 said: “Students need to read about a controversial topic, and they need to summarise ideas, and decide if they agree or disagree.” Additional samples of free-production activities were free conversations (3), role-plays (2), interviews (1), and contests (1).

General L2 proficiency activities included information gap activities where students interact and exchange information with their classmates (e.g., “students are supposed to solve a murder case like Sherlock Holmes” [T1]); the presentation of written compositions like “propaganda about products...which they must present in front of everybody” (T5); and oral presentations stemming from additional activities like “reading a book [and] writing a summary” (T5). These activities appeared to focus on supporting other language skills beyond speaking.

Overall, these results suggest a correlation between the EFL teachers’ understanding of oral fluency and the types of activities they believe encourage its development. As discussed above, oral fluency was seen as both equated to L2 proficiency and as a single component of the speaking skill, partly explaining why some activities encouraged general speaking.

Do the Textbooks Promote Oral Fluency?

The participants had mixed views on the support the *English File* textbook series provides for oral fluency. Four teachers found it minimally helpful, while the remaining five considered it a valuable resource for developing oral fluency. Positive aspects included guidance on pronunciation and ample opportunities for speaking. T3 and T4 highlighted these features:

The book also tries to help [students] with the pronunciation using the IPA, the International Phonetic Alphabet. (T3)
I think the people behind English File are very aware of [fluency]. They want to get people to speak, and that’s the feeling you get throughout every single unit that you analyse. (T4)

Critiques included a lack of “conversation models [and] conversation strategies . . . students don’t have any way of knowing how to organise these conversations” (T5). Moreover, T2 noted that some speaking activities “are rigid, limiting the ability of the student to speak freely or deviate a little bit from the topic.” T9 believed, however, that EFL teachers “can adapt most of [the activities, and that it is their] responsibility [to create] real situations” to promote oral fluency.

Content Analysis of the Textbooks

The content analysis revealed that while the four selected textbooks included a considerable number of fluency-enhancing activities (see Table 3), their repertoire of fluency-focused activities was limited (see Table 4). It also showed that these textbooks predominantly relied on free-production activities, with minimal inclusion of explicit fluency-focused activities.

Table 3. Frequency of Fluency Activities in Individual Books

Textbook	Frequency
Elementary	37
Pre-Intermediate	64
Intermediate	77
Upper-Intermediate	85
Total	263

Table 4. Frequency of Fluency-Focused Activities Across the Four Textbooks

Type of activity	Frequency (%)
Consciousness-raising	0
Planning, rehearsal, repetition	37 (14%)
Formulaic sequences, discourse markers, and lexical fillers	6 (2.3%)
Fluency strategy training	1 (0.4%)
Free production	219 (83.3%)
Total	263

These findings suggest that the textbooks prioritise general speaking production activities over targeted oral fluency practice. Furthermore, the heavy reliance on free-production activities (83.3%) and the scarcity of fluency-related aspects, such as formulaic language, fluency strategy training, or planning and repetition activities (16.7%), may explain teachers' disagreement on the usefulness of the textbooks for promoting oral fluency. According to Rossiter et al. (2010) and Tavakoli and Hunter (2018), there is insufficient empirical research supporting the effectiveness of free-production activities in developing L2 oral fluency. Future studies might, therefore, focus on how free-production activities are manipulated in class to determine whether they have a positive impact on oral fluency development.

Conclusions and Implications

The aim of this study was to explore the understanding and beliefs of a group of nine Colombian EFL teachers about oral fluency, their self-reported practices in developing fluency, and the extent to which the textbooks they used as main instructional material contributed to oral fluency development.

The study found that the EFL teachers' definitions of oral fluency do not correspond to a single view. Instead, they referred to elements characterising oral fluency from both broad and narrow theoretical perspectives. This suggests that the teachers equated oral fluency with English language general proficiency as well as an exclusive aspect of oral production involving cognitive, utterance, and perceived fluency features. Additionally, the teachers reported their lack of familiarity with fluency research, which may correlate with their lack of confidence in their oral fluency knowledge and in how to promote it in the EFL classroom.

The second major finding was that the participants seem to approach oral fluency development through tasks and activities proven beneficial by SLA research. However, these tasks and activities are not supported by EFL textbooks such as the *English File* series used

by the teachers, as the material lacks a wide variety of fluency-oriented activities.

A note of caution is warranted here, as this study has an exploratory nature and involved a small sample. Moreover, it focused solely on a single teaching context (an EFL university institute), and the classroom practices reported here are not the result of class observations but rather the verbal accounts of the participants. Therefore, future studies on this topic should include systematic class observations and a more diverse and representative sample of participants.

Despite these limitations, the study demonstrates that we can acquire a better understanding of how EFL teachers comprehend oral fluency and how they enact practices to promote it, which is important for conceptualising fluency since L2 teachers' views should be considered to update oral fluency-related theory. The study also highlights the urgent need to close the prevailing gap between what L2 teachers believe and do in the classrooms and what research literature indicates.

Particularly in the EFL teaching field in Colombia, this study provides a brief glimpse into how EFL teachers deal with teaching speaking, specifically oral fluency. Hence, this study illustrates the need to strengthen L2 teacher training courses at the university level for teachers' future professional development. These teachers require specialised guidance on strategies for teaching speaking that contribute to oral fluency development. Focusing on this area could involve creating spaces at universities and other educational institutions for teachers to read research and reflect with their colleagues, sharing teaching knowledge built within the classroom, as well as successful or not-so-successful teaching experiences. This validates the EFL teachers' knowledge and empowers their personal teaching practices.

Finally, this small-scale research recommends that EFL teachers enrich their L2 speaking and oral fluency-related practices, as their EFL textbooks do not sufficiently encourage the development of oral

fluency. This requires providing EFL teachers with quality training, probably emphasising technology and Internet use. Access to a wider array of academic and cultural sources through digital tools and content would allow teachers to design more oral fluency-oriented activities relevant to their specific teaching contexts, experiment with different ways of engaging learners in more communicative speaking activities with a special focus on oral fluency development, and share ideas with their colleagues.

References

- Brumfit, C. (1984). *Communicative methodology in language teaching: The roles of fluency and accuracy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bui, G., & Huang, Z. (2018). L2 fluency as influenced by content familiarity and planning: Performance, measurement, and pedagogy. *Language Teaching Research*, 22(1), 94–114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168816656650>
- Burns, A. (2017). Research and the teaching of speaking in the second language classroom. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (Vol. 3, pp. 242–256). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716893-18>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203029053>
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cruz-Ramos, M., & Herrera-Díaz, L. E. (2022). Assessment of students' oral communicative competence in English through a web conferencing platform. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 24(1), 143–156. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v24n1.91282>
- De Jong, N. H., Steinel, M. P., Florijn, A., Schoonen, R., & Hulstijn, J. H. (2013). Linguistic skills and speaking fluency in a second language. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 34(5), 893–916. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716412000069>
- Derwing, T. M., Munro, M. J., Thomson, R. I., & Rossiter, M. J. (2009). The relationship between L1 fluency and L2 fluency development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 31(4), 533–557. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263109990015>
- Diepenbroek, L. G., & Derwing, T. M. (2013). To what extent do popular ESL textbooks incorporate oral fluency and pragmatic development? *TESL Canada Journal*, 30(7), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v30i7.1149>
- Dore, C. (2015). *Perceptions of fluency* [Master's thesis, University of Reading]. British Council. <https://bit.ly/3RC9D88>
- EF Education First. (2024). *EF EPI: EF English Proficiency Index*. <https://bit.ly/4jjhflQ>
- Elliot, M., Fairweather, I., Olsen, W., & Pampaka, M. (2016). Semi-structured interview. In M. Elliot, I. Fairweather, W. Olsen, & M. Pampaka (Eds.), *A dictionary of social research methods*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780191816826.001.0001>
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2009). The differential effects of three types of task planning on the fluency, complexity, and accuracy in L2 oral production. *Applied Linguistics*, 30(4), 474–509. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amp042>
- Ellis, R. (2017). Task-based language teaching. In S. Loewen & M. Sato (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of instructed second language acquisition* (pp. 108–125). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315676968-7>
- Freed, B. F. (2000). Is fluency, like beauty, in the eyes (and ears) of the beholder? In H. Riggensbach (Ed.), *Perspectives on fluency* (pp. 243–265). University of Michigan Press.
- Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication*. New York University Press.
- Gashan, A. K., & Almohaisen, F. M. (2014). The effect of task repetition on fluency and accuracy of EFL Saudi female learners' oral performance. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 5(3), 36–41. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aialc.alls.v5n.3p.36>

- Gilabert, R., Barón Parés, J., & Levkina, M. (2011). Manipulating task complexity across task types and modes. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Second language task complexity: Researching the cognition hypothesis of language learning and performance* (pp. 105–138). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tblt.2.1och5>
- Housen, A., & Kuiken, F. (2009). Complexity, accuracy, and fluency in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics*, 30(4), 461–473. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/ampo48>
- Housen, A., Kuiken, F., & Vedder, I. (2012). Complexity, accuracy and fluency: Definitions, measurement and research. In A. Housen, F. Kuiken, & I. Vedder (Eds.), *Dimensions of L2 performance and proficiency: Complexity, accuracy and fluency in SLA* (pp. 1–20). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/llt.32.01hou>
- Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación. (2023). *Cuadros de salida Saber 11* [Excel file]. <https://bit.ly/4jeGjAt>
- Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación. (n.d.). *Resultados de los exámenes Saber TyT y Saber Pro*. <https://www.icfes.gov.co/evaluaciones-icfes/examen-saber-tyt/resultados-examen-saber-tyt/>
- Kahng, J. (2014). Exploring utterance and cognitive fluency of L1 and L2 English speakers: Temporal measures and stimulated recall. *Language Learning*, 64(4), 809–854. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12084>
- Koponen, M., & Riggenbach, H. (2000). Overview: Varying perspectives on fluency. In H. Riggenbach (Ed.), *Perspectives on fluency* (pp. 5–24). The University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.16109>
- Kormos, J., & Dénes, M. (2004). Exploring measures and perceptions of fluency in the speech of second language learners. *System*, 32(2), 145–164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2004.01.001>
- Lennon, P. (1990). Investigating fluency in EFL: A quantitative approach. *Language Learning*, 40(3), 387–417. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1990.tb00669.x>
- Lennon, P. (2000). The lexical element in spoken second language fluency. In H. Riggenbach (Ed.), *Perspectives on fluency* (pp. 25–42). The University of Michigan Press.
- Lightbown, P. (2017). SLA research and foreign language teaching. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (Vol. 3, pp. 103–116). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716893-8>
- Lintunen, P., Mutta, M., & Peltonen, P. (2020). Defining fluency in L2 learning and use. In P. Lintunen, M. Mutta, & P. Peltonen (Eds.), *Fluency in L2 learning and use* (pp. 1–15). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788926317-003>
- McGuire, M., & Larson-Hall, J. (2017). Teaching formulaic sequences in the classroom: Effects on spoken fluency. *TESL Canada Journal*, 34(3), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v34i3.1271>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Michel, M. C. (2011). Effects of task complexity and interaction on L2 performance. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Second language task complexity: Researching the cognition hypothesis of language learning and performance* (pp. 141–174). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tblt.2.12ch6>
- Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia. (n.d.). *Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo 2018–2022*. <https://bit.ly/4ch3jwD>
- Morrison, A. (2018). *Fluency in the EFL Chilean classrooms: To what extent do teachers and textbooks promote oral fluency?* [Master's thesis, University of Reading]. British Council. <https://bit.ly/4isngYt>
- Nayoung, K. (2020). Conditions and tasks: The effects of planning and task complexity on L2 speaking. *Asia TEFL*, 17(1), 34–52. <https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2020.17.1.3.34>
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2020). *The content analysis guidebook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Peltonen, P. (2020). *Individual and interactional speech fluency in L2 English from a problem-solving perspective: A mixed-methods approach*. University of Turku.
- Qasserras, L. (2023). Systematic review of communicative language teaching (CLT) in language education: A balanced perspective. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 4(6), 17–23. <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2023.4.6.763>

- Ramírez Ortiz, S. M., & Artunduaga Cuéllar, M. T. (2018). Authentic tasks to foster oral production among English as a foreign language learners. *How Journal*, 25(1), 51–68. <https://doi.org/10.19183/how.25.1.362>
- Robayo Acuña, L. M. (2020). *Fluency in oral English: A case study of Colombian EFL teachers' beliefs and self-reported practices* [Master's thesis, University of York]. Biblored. <https://www.bibliotecadigitaldebogota.gov.co/resources/3711584/>
- Rossiter, M. J., Derwing, T. M., Manimtim, L. G., & Thomson, R. I. (2010). Oral fluency: The neglected component in the communicative language classroom. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 66(4), 583–606. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.66.4.583>
- Segalowitz, N. (2010). *Cognitive bases of second language fluency*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203851357>
- Segalowitz, N. (2012). Fluency. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *The Routledge encyclopaedia of second language acquisition* (pp. 240–244). Routledge.
- Skehan, P. (2003). Task-based instruction. *Language Teaching*, 36(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480200188X>
- Tavakoli, P. (2023). Making fluency research accessible to second language teachers: The impact of a training intervention. *Language Teaching Research*, 27(2), 368–393. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820951213>
- Tavakoli, P., Campbell, C., & McCormack, J. (2016). Development of speech fluency over a short period of time: Effects of pedagogic intervention. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(2), 447–471. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.244>
- Tavakoli, P., & Hunter, A.-M. (2018). Is fluency being “neglected” in the classroom? Teacher understanding of fluency and related classroom practices. *Language Teaching Research*, 22(3), 330–349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817708462>
- Tavakoli, P., & Skehan, P. (2005). Strategic planning, task structure, and performance testing. In R. Ellis (Ed.), *Planning and task performance in a second language* (pp. 239–273). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/llt.11.15tav>
- Tavakoli, P., & Wright, C. (2020). *Second language speech fluency: From research to practice*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108589109>
- Thai, C., & Boers, F. (2016). Repeating a monologue under increasing time pressure: Effects on fluency, complexity, and accuracy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(2), 369–393. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.232>
- Towell, R. J. (2012). Complexity, accuracy and fluency from the perspective of the psycholinguistic second language acquisition research. In A. Housen, F. Kuiken, & I. Vedder (Eds.), *Dimensions of L2 performance and proficiency* (pp. 47–70). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/llt.32.03tow>
- Ushioda, E., & Dörnyei, Z. (2009). Motivation, language identities and the L2 self: A theoretical overview. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 1–8). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293-002>

About the Author

Lina María Robayo Acuña is a doctoral candidate in Language and Translation studies at the University of Turku (Finland) and holds an MA in Applied Linguistics for ELT from the University of York (UK). She teaches English at Universidad Nacional de Colombia, focusing on EFL, authentic materials, and speech fluency.