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"Fostering 10th-grade EGB students' Fluency in Speaking through The Role-Play Strategy in EFL Classroom"

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Doménica Priscilla Mora Gonzaga

El esfuerzo y la dedicación empleada para llevar a cabo este proyecto ha sido una trayectoria llena de desafíos, pero a la vez de mucho aprendizaje. El final de un largo viaje ha llegado, pero es inevitable recordar como empezó. La idea de iniciar mis estudios universitarios nació luego de vivir un episodio que marcó el resto de mi vida. Después de decir que solo fue una idea, ahora diré orgullosamente que logré culminar mis estudios aún contra toda dificultad.

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Daniela Lisbeth Vacacela Macas

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Angélica Dayana Vásquez Espinoza

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RESUMEN

Esta investigación explora cómo el uso de la estrategia de role-play fomenta la fluidez oral en alumnos de 10º de EGB dentro de un aula de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). El objetivo general del estudio era comprender la influencia del role-play en el desarrollo de la fluidez de los estudiantes y explorar sus percepciones a lo largo del proceso.

Se empleó un enfoque de investigación cualitativa mediante el método de indagación narrativa, lo que permitió examinar en profundidad las experiencias vividas por los estudiantes. Los participantes fueron estudiantes de entre 14 y 15 años de un instituto fiscomisional de Azogues, Cañar, con un nivel de inglés A2. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de doce observaciones de clases y dos discusiones de grupos focales, apoyadas por notas de campo y preguntas guiadas.

El análisis se realizó a través de categorización temática, identificando temas claves como fluidez oral, apoyo de pares y el impacto de actividades variadas y dinámicas. Los resultados revelaron que los juegos de rol contribuyeron a mejorar la velocidad de fluidez, la entonación y la espontaneidad en el habla de los estudiantes. Al principio, los alumnos tenían problemas con las pausas, las vacilaciones y la entonación plana; sin embargo, estas dificultades se superaron progresivamente mediante la exposición repetida, el apoyo de los compañeros y la práctica contextualizada.

El entorno del juego de rol permitió a los estudiantes ser conscientes de sus puntos débiles, fomentar la autocorrección y facilitar conversaciones más naturales con el paso del tiempo. Además, la investigación puso de relieve la importancia de la interacción entre compañeros, en la que los estudiantes se apoyaron emocional y verbalmente durante las actividades, lo que contribuyó a reducir la ansiedad y aumentar la confianza. El uso de tareas dinámicas y contextualizadas motivó a los alumnos a participar activamente, mejorando tanto el compromiso como el rendimiento.

En conclusión, la estrategia del juego de roles demostró ser una herramienta pedagógica eficaz para fomentar la fluidez oral en estudiantes de EFL. Proporcionó a los estudiantes un contexto de apoyo y significativo para

practicar inglés, fomentando la interacción, reduciendo el miedo a cometer errores y mejorando la competencia comunicativa a través de la simulación del mundo real.

Palabras clave: juego de rol, fluidez oral, colaboración entre iguales, EFL, enseñanza del inglés

ABSTRACT

This research explores how the use of the role-play strategy fosters oral fluency in 10th-grade EGB students within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The general objective of the study was to understand the influence of role-play on students' fluency development and to explore their perceptions throughout the process.

A qualitative research approach was employed through the narrative inquiry method, allowing an in-depth examination of students' lived experiences. The participants were students aged 14 to 15 from a Fiscomisional high school in Azogues, Cañar, with an A2 English level. Data were gathered through twelve classroom observations and two focus group discussions, supported by field notes and guided questions.

The analysis was conducted through thematic categorization, identifying key themes such as oral fluency, peer support, and the impact of varied and dynamic activities. The findings revealed that role-play contributed to improving students' fluency speed, intonation, and spontaneity in speech. Initially, students struggled with pauses, hesitations, and flat intonation; however, these difficulties were progressively overcome through repeated exposure, peer support, and contextualized practice.

The role-play environment allowed students to become aware of their weaknesses, encouraged self-correction, and facilitated more natural conversations over time. Additionally, the research highlighted the significance of peer interaction, where students supported each other emotionally and verbally during the activities, helping to reduce anxiety and increase confidence. The use of dynamic and contextualized tasks motivated learners to participate actively, improving both engagement and performance.

In conclusion, the role-play strategy proved to be an effective pedagogical tool to foster oral fluency in EFL learners. It provided students with a supportive and meaningful context to practice English, encouraging interaction, reducing fear of making mistakes, and enhancing communicative competence through real-world simulation.

Keywords: role-play, oral fluency, peer collaboration, EFL, English teaching

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction **13**
Research context 13
Identification of the Research Topic/Problem 14
Importance of the Study 16
Research Questions 17
Main Research Question: 17
Sub-Questions: 17
Objectives 17
General Objective: 17
Specific Objectives: 17
Literature Review **18**
Previous Related Research 18
Theoretical Framework **21**
Sociocultural Theory 21
Communicative Language Teaching Approach 22
Speaking Skill 23
Fluency in Speaking Skills 24
Factors Associated with Fluency in Speaking 25
Role-play as a Strategy in Language Teaching 26
Types of Role-play Activities 27
Advantages of Role-play 28
Limitations for Implementing Role-play 29
Adaptation of Role-Play for Different Proficiency Levels 29
The Use of Role Play to Foster Fluency among Young Learners in English 30
Methodology **31**
Research Design 31
Research Method 32
Data Analysis **33**
Categorization 33
Triangulation 34
Techniques and instruments for data collection 35
Observation Field Notes 36
Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) 36
Participants 37
Phases in Narrative Inquiry Research 38
1. Purpose and Focus of the Study 38
2. Select Participants 39

3. Collected Data 39
4. Analyze Data 40
5. Restoring 40
6. Report Findings 40
Findings and Discussions 41
Categorization - Observations 41
Triangulation - Focus Group 50
Conclusions 56
Recommendations 57
Appendices 65

Introduction

Research context

Throughout our practicum at a fiscomisional institution located in the urban area of Azogues, Cañar, we had the opportunity to observe and interact with students of different age groups. In each classroom, there were approximately 35 to 40 students who presented both opportunities and challenges for effective language teaching and learning. Most of the time, we worked with 10th-grade students, which provided us with a clearer understanding of their linguistic needs and learning behaviors.

During our classroom interactions, we observed that many students struggled with speaking activities. They frequently hesitated, spoke with long pauses, and also showed an inability to speak for extended periods of time. This issue was especially evident during activities that required spontaneous or extended speech. Their lack of fluency was not necessarily due to a lack of knowledge, as they were able to form sentences using the correct verb tense, but rather to factors such as low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and little exposure to the use of English outside the classroom. These challenges became evident when students stood in front of the class, and it was obvious they were nervous. Their hands were sweaty, their legs were shaking, they were notoriously blushing, and their hesitations were permanent.

These challenges revealed a critical gap in the development of oral communication skills, particularly in fluency, one of the basic components of effective speaking. According to Richards (2008), fluency, defined as the ability to speak smoothly, naturally, and with minimal hesitation, is essential for meaningful communication in a foreign language. During observation, it was witnessed that in the classroom teaching strategies were often embedded in the Grammar-Translation Method. Also, the main input of language and content came from text books, which generally meant that students mainly concentrated in filling in grammar-based exercises and overlooked interactive speaking practice. Therefore, it became notorious that students' lack of speaking skills was due to the need of alternative and

engaging teaching strategies that promote real communication and support students to become more confident and fluent speakers.

In the field of language teaching, educators often rely on communicative strategies such as discussions, interviews, information gap tasks, storytelling, and role-plays to support students in developing fluency in speaking. These approaches are intended to create interactive and purposeful language use, allowing learners to speak with greater ease and confidence over time (Richards, 2006). Among the approaches considered, role-play emerged as a promising strategy. It allows students to simulate real-life conversations in a safe and structured environment, encouraging them to practice language in meaningful and purposeful ways.

Incorporating role-play in the classroom not only fosters spontaneous speech but also encourages learners to use English more naturally, reliably, and contextually, which is key to improving their overall fluency (Harmer, 2015). Students are not only exposed to practical vocabulary and functional expressions, but also have the opportunity to develop their confidence and spontaneity. As such, this research seeks to explore how the use of role-play activities can address the fluency challenges observed among 10th-grade students and ultimately contribute to the improvement of their overall communicative competence in English.

Identification of the Research Topic/Problem

This research addresses fluency, a speaking subskill, through role-play as a strategy among young learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. During our classroom observations as pre-service teachers, we noticed that students often showed poor participation and were reluctant to speak when engaged in oral production activities. Despite having a basic understanding of the grammar and vocabulary, they showed signs of hesitation, frequent pausing, and a general inability to carry on conversations. These challenges were especially evident when students were expected to speak spontaneously or express their ideas over a long period of time.

Furthermore, we also observed that this low participation during speaking tasks often resulted from a lack of confidence and a fear of making mistakes. Many learners seemed reluctant to speak out loud, concerned about being judged by their peers or using incorrect grammar. Limited vocabulary and strong interference from their mother tongue further contributed to their reduced level of fluency and hindered their ability to communicate effectively in English.

Moreover, the lack of real-life communication scenarios in the classroom meant that students had few opportunities to practice English in meaningful contexts. Students benefit from practice by creating real-life situations, and they can make mistakes without serious repercussions or consequences (Liu & Ding, 2009). The traditional grammar methods used, such as the Grammar-Translation Method and repetitive fill-in-the-blank exercises, often placed more emphasis on written work and rote learning rather than interactive speaking, which limited students' exposure to natural language use. As a result, students were not only missing out on essential speaking practice but were also becoming disengaged and unmotivated during language lessons.

With these challenges in mind, this research sought to incorporate more dynamic and student-centered strategies that focused on enhancing fluency through authentic interaction. Role-play, as an instructional strategy, presents a valuable opportunity to address this issue. It allows students to engage in simulated real-life situations, encouraging them to speak more confidently and naturally in English. According to González et al. (2022), role-play promotes communicative competence and provides learners with a supportive environment to practice and develop fluency.

By using real-world scenarios and encouraging authentic interactions through the use of role-play, this study seeks to improve students' fluency in English and their ability to speak smoothly and continuously with a minimum of hesitation while avoiding long pauses. Likewise, the goal is to explore how these activities can encourage authentic communication and help learners overcome their insecurities.

Importance of the Study

This study overall reveals that young learners in EFL classes struggle while developing their speaking skills due to factors affecting communication. To endeavor to solve this problem, the role-play strategy has been considered, so 10th-grade students can improve their spoken English fluency. As Trivedi (2017) stated in his study, role-play is a technique that can improve students' fluency in the target language, motivate them to speak or engage with others in the classroom, and make the teaching-learning process more pleasurable. In this study, role-play is considered as a strategy that could lead to better language outcomes since students will be more engaged and have the opportunity to participate in speaking activities for a longer period of time.

Considering the educational context and classrooms, this strategy is considered adaptable and resource-friendly, making it accessible and effective in various learning settings as role plays offer immersive, real-life speaking scenarios that naturally enhance communication skills. In addition to seeing how language works naturally, students have a good opportunity to apply the language they have learned. So, with this strategy, teachers can make lessons more interactive, encouraging students to talk about different topics that can help them to think in other words, so that they can also have an improvement in their vocabulary and grammar comprehension.

Research Questions

Main Research Question:

How does the use of the Role Play strategy foster 10th-grade EGB students' fluency in the EFL classroom?

Sub-Questions:

- How is the students' performance during the implementation of role-plays to promote fluency in the EFL classroom?
- What are the 10th-grade students' perceptions of the role-plays implemented into their classroom to foster their fluency?

Objectives

General Objective:

To explore how the use of the role-play strategy fosters fluency among 10th-grade students.

Specific Objectives:

- To describe the students´ performance during the implementation of role-plays to promote fluency in speaking in the EFL classroom.
- To understand what are the 10th-grade students' perceptions of the role-plays implemented in their classroom to foster their fluency.

Literature Review

This section reviews national and international studies related to the main topic, as well as inquiries from the general to the more specific, without neglecting the connection that this research must have between the different topics that may arise in its development.

Previous Related Research

In a study conducted in Chile, Cuitiño Ojeda et al. (2019) investigated the effectiveness of using the role-play strategy in improving students' oral fluency and accuracy in English. The action research was developed with 34 fourth-grade students from a semi-public school. The objective of this study was to address the obstacles that students face, for example, the limited use of the language to communicate with others and the fear of speaking English. The study conducted role-play activities in a structured and sequential manner, in which learners demonstrated active participation in dialogues using real-life situations. On one hand, analytical rubrics were used to analyze students' performance at the beginning and the end of the intervention. On the other hand, the research applied semi-structured interviews to explore the learners' perceptions about their participation using a role-play strategy. The results obtained at the end of the intervention showed a significant improvement in both students' fluency and accuracy. Additionally, the study revealed that most students demonstrated increased confidence, and their statements indicated that they enjoyed their English classes significantly more.

This investigation makes a significant contribution to the research by exposing the benefits of implementing the role-play strategy to enhance students' fluency. Furthermore, the study emphasizes that the students' confidence improved during their performance, which is aligned with fluency and spoken language ability in general (Park & Lee, 2010, as cited in Seli, 2019). These findings highlight how implementing this strategy can be effective in encouraging students' fluency in English.

Similarly, Rojas and Villafuerte (2018) exposed in their research the positive influence of role-plays, since they support the development of students' fluency when they use the language and general speech skills. The study investigated a school in Ecuador. The researchers followed a qualitative approach to analyze the benefits of applying this strategy as well as communicative teaching methodologies such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and task-based Learning (TBL), among others. The instruments applied to gather data were observations and interviews to evaluate students' performance, fluency, and perceptions of using the role-play strategy. The results obtained demonstrated a significant improvement in their fluency after implementing the strategy. Additionally, students demonstrated greater confidence during the activity, enabling them to perform more effectively in speaking English, particularly in terms of fluency.

Considering this research context, this study provides a meaningful basis on which to develop this research. The results showed that role-play not only seeks to support students in developing fluency in oral activities but also encourages them to enhance confidence and keep active participation. Finally, the results highlight the effectiveness of applying the role-play strategy as a student-centered approach to support learners in reducing stress and anxiety, thereby promoting fluency in language use.

Alvarez (2024) in his research aimed to determine how role-playing activities affect the increase in university students' ability to speak English. This is a comprehensive research study in which information was collected through questionnaires administered to university students in Chile at varying levels of English language competency. This study aimed to measure different aspects of fluency in language both

before and after participating in role-playing exercises, using a well-planned and designed set of questionnaires that were influenced by previous research and accepted theories of language acquisition.

The conclusions of this research show that implementing role-playing activities in the classroom greatly improves students' conversational English skills, giving them more self-assurance and fluency in their spoken language abilities. Therefore, in response to this research, it can be said that the implementation of the role-play strategy serves well to help students improve their fluency in speaking. This strategy is effective since it allows students to practice the language while increasing their level of confidence, and therefore improving their fluency.

Moosa et al. (2024) conducted a case study in a Maldivian school to investigate the impact of role-play activities on the speaking skills of Grade 2 English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The study involved twenty students and two teachers. It used classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and lesson plan analysis as data collection methods. The researchers employed a thematic analysis framework to interpret the findings. The study revealed that role-play significantly improved students' vocabulary, literacy skills, and overall fluency. Additionally, it fostered confidence, social interaction, and engagement in authentic language use. The results demonstrated that students benefited from structured role-play activities by practicing grammar, pronunciation, and conversational skills in real-life contexts. Furthermore, the research highlighted the effectiveness of role-play in creating a positive learning environment, enhancing problem-solving abilities, and promoting communicative competence. These findings provide strong evidence for integrating role-play as a pedagogical strategy in ESL classrooms to enhance speaking proficiency and confidence.

This study is relevant to our research as it supports the use of role-play in language learning by demonstrating its impact on fluency and student engagement. The findings align with this research purpose, reinforcing the idea that role-play activities serve as an effective strategy to help learners practice and improve their oral communication skills. It enables students to work together with classmates,

simulate real-world scenarios, and practice the target language in a supportive and engaging environment.

Overall, the studies presented here provide us with a valuable endorsement to apply role-play strategies to explore the benefits that it can provide. The studies provide pieces of evidence that support that participants show an improvement in fluency and additionally show favorable results in increasing students' confidence and use of the language. On the other hand, the findings offer sustainability for this research since they demonstrate that the application of this strategy encourages learners to practice and develop communicative competence. In light of this evidence, there is validity in considering applying the role-play strategy to enhance students' fluency in their speaking.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural Theory

The Sociocultural Theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky, emphasizes how the use of role-play strategies positively influences speaking fluency through interaction with others and creates support from peers with more experience. Following Blake and Pope (2008), Vygotsky considers that language acquisition and learning begin when people interact with others, in the case of students, when they interact with their classmates and tutor. Interactive activities allow learners to assimilate knowledge and be immersed in the learning process (as cited in Panhwar, Ansari & Ansari, 2016). In terms of developing fluency, role-play provides learners with the opportunity to use and practice the target language in contexts similar to real life, allowing them to develop and improve their speaking fluency.

Learners receive guidance and support from peers and teachers who play the role of intermediaries in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986, as cited in Panhwar et al., 2016). Students can achieve a successful language acquisition in the company of others and with the support of teachers and tutors. The theory is more focused on what students can accomplish during interactive activities, such as role-play and internalizing the language learned. In this sense, students

improve their fluency in speaking gradually as they obtain constructive and opportune feedback in an engaging space.

In addition, learners achieve greater independence after having received support from third parties, which is the key to developing fluency in speaking. According to Moll (1990), Vygotsky considers that cognitive development takes place when learners participate in social activities (as cited in Panhwar et al., 2016). Thus, the use of role-play creates an environment where learners can use the language and develop their speaking fluency, simulating realistic conversations in familiar contexts. This means, through practice, students build confidence and eventually find their own strategies in speaking to maintain fluent conversations.

Communicative Language Teaching Approach

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach derived from Communicative Competence and has been developed as an innovative methodology that seeks to encourage and support students to develop communication through real and meaningful interaction. CLT was introduced in the 70s in the United Kingdom, and its main objective is to help students who are learning a second language to build their competencies and skills in English communication (Demirezen, 2011, as cited in Ortega & Recino, 2018). Since this approach is focused on supporting students to develop their communicative competence, the common mistakes committed when a new language is acquired are not relevant to their performance. Considering the development of fluency in speaking, Communicative Language Teaching plays an important role since it emphasizes the use of language to develop communicative competence and provides chances for advancement where learners can practice. Moreover, the implementation of role-plays is supported by this theory since it seeks to provide students with scenarios to use the language, which is connected with the development of fluency in speaking English. According to Richards (2017), CLT opens spaces where students can simulate real scenarios and hold conversations spontaneously, supporting them to develop fluent communication.

Furthermore, the implementation of the role-play strategy creates a dynamic environment that allows students to be more active and engaged with the task. The main objective of CLT is to provide students opportunities to use the language with practical purposes and grow fluency instead of being only focused on accuracy. Richards (2017) states that the use of role-plays is greatly beneficial for developing fluency since students communicate with their peers naturally and spontaneously using a variety of fictional scenarios, improving their ability to communicate effectively.

Speaking Skill

Speaking skills refer to the ability to communicate effectively and clearly through speech. This skill involves articulating thoughts, ideas, and messages in a way that is understandable to others in a verbal context. Teachers must prioritize student talk but often dominate class time with instruction and management (Koran, 2015). Students should engage in learner-centered, interactive activities in groups or pairs, rather than sticking to a teacher-directed curriculum. Besides, learners should have a sufficient understanding of the English language to gain oral proficiency since it is the best indicator of linguistic competence (Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018). In simple terms, learners need to be exposed to language that is challenging enough to push them to the next level of proficiency.

Leong and Ahmadi (2017) argued that speaking English can be challenging as it requires knowledge of several important components, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Moreover, students should be provided with a friendly and cooperative environment to help them overcome their speaking difficulties.

Fluency in Speaking Skills

Fluency is having the ability to engage in a conversation spontaneously without frequently breaking off (Kusumawardani & Mardiyani, 2018). It means, when learners have to convey information, they do not have to think for a long time about what they wish to say. Kusumawardani and Mardiyani (2018) mentioned that speaking naturally without hesitating or reiterating yourself, and using comprehensible compound sentences are all components of fluency. According to Fillmore, (1979, as cited in Yang, 2014), speaking

fluently is summarized as follows: a) capability to speak for extended periods with few pauses; b) the production capacity to come up with statements in a coherent reasoned, and semantic manner; c) the successful application to employ suitable expressions in multiple types of contexts; and d) the use of language in a creative and imaginative in-nature style. According to Gilbert (1994, as cited in Hsieh et al., 2013), intonation has taken an important role in oral fluency, which helps people who take part in a conversation to understand, follow the discussion, and give a response. This means that when we take part in a dialogue, our voice has variations, for instance, the tone of voice may rise when we ask a question or express emotions, and fall when we make statements or end a conversation. These aspects provide support and help the understanding of what we mean in that dialogue.

To gain a great strength in fluency, it is important to work in a collaborative way, through interaction, where individuals engage in communication, involving the exchange of information, ideas, thoughts, or responses, influencing one another and corresponding reactions (Nisa, 2014). Therefore, the educator, when implementing activities with a communicative purpose, should implement strategies focused on learner-centered learning. This implies that language learners gain fluency from actively implementing the language in authentic contexts like conversations, discussions, debates, role-plays, and other forms of communication that have a purpose and meaning.

Factors Associated with Fluency in Speaking

Many internal and external factors affect the ability to speak English fluently. Ngoc and Dung (2020) stated in their study that by being aware of these elements, both teachers and students can address issues that hinder fluency and encourage strategies that facilitate better communication. Anxiety is one of the most important internal elements. A common concern among learners of English as a foreign language about making mistakes can lead to hesitation and excessive use of pauses. When students believe that their performance is being evaluated in formal oral contexts, such as presentations or exams, this nervousness can be very noticeable. Then, to reduce this concern, teachers should foster an appropriate environment in which making mistakes is considered a normal part of learning.

The level of automaticity with which learners use language is another internal element. It means the ability to generate words without a conscious effort. Speaking often requires a lot of cognitive work for beginners, as they have to carefully consider their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Therefore, learners can concentrate on more complex facets of communication, such as conveying meaning and responding to their interlocutor, as their language use becomes more automatic and they become proficient (Aziez, Nita, & Istikharoh, 2024).

Besides that, as noted by Rabab'ah (2016, as cited in Aziez et al., 2024), the development of fluency is also influenced by external factors. For example, a learner's ability to speak fluently can be greatly influenced by the amount of exposure to English he or she receives outside the classroom. Compared to students who only use English in the classroom, individuals who regularly interact with the language through the media, conversations with native speakers, or other immersion activities are more likely to become fluent.

In addition, teachers' comments and teaching methods can influence learners' fluency development. While frequent error correction can help learners become more accurate, it can also occasionally break speech fluency and increase their self-awareness of how they use the language. Therefore, educators must strike a balance between correcting errors and encouraging fluent, natural speech. In response to this, it is suggested that the role-play strategy can be applied in order to boost students' fluency dynamically.

Role-play as a Strategy in Language Teaching

Role-play is an effective pedagogical strategy to develop fluency, especially in teaching English. As, it trains individuals to communicate successfully, and to interact better with other colleagues (Stokoe, 2011). Students practice fluency through interacting in authentic social contexts. Likewise, roleplay forces participants to listen, respond, and negotiate meanings. Giving pupils the equipment they need to express themselves successfully in the target language is the key objective of teaching English as a foreign language (Neupane, 2019)

Additionally, educators must implement effective strategies to enhance students' speaking fluency. Among the several techniques available, role-play has been identified as a particularly successful strategy. Students must work together to create a narrative or solve a problem during role-play, which reinforces cooperation and positive interaction in a spontaneous manner. Akbar et al. (2020) explain that role-play involves students taking on specific roles or characters and acting out scenarios in simulated situations.

Besides, with the help of this strategy, learners can actively practice language use, improve their ability to think on their feet, and gain a deeper comprehension of relevant vocabulary and cultural context. This process strengthens both fluency and communicative competence, as learners are required to make quick linguistic decisions in real-time conversations. Understanding the types of role-play is crucial for facilitators, it allows them to apply the most appropriate format to achieve learning outcomes by fostering fluency.

Types of Role-play Activities

According to Nuriyanti (2017), role play comes in three different versions. Fully scripted role-playing is the first kind, in which students prepare and rehearse conversation in advance for a later presentation after receiving instructions linked to a particular situation. They are expected to memorize lines before presenting the conversation to the class. This type is beneficial for beginners as it reduces anxiety and helps them focus on pronunciation, intonation, and the rhythm of the language.

Semi-scripted role-play is a second kind of scripted dialogue. This kind has spaces in blanks, and learners have to fill them in with their own ideas. This format offers a balance between structure and flexibility, encouraging learners to think critically and make linguistic choices while still receiving some guidance. It is particularly useful for intermediate learners who are transitioning from controlled to freer forms of communication.

Non-scripted role-playing is the third kind, where a group of students is given a situation to present without any planning or pre-written screenplay. They must rely on their own language knowledge, imagination, and communicative strategies to act out the scenes.

It is significant to emphasize that unscripted role-play will be used for this project because it allows students to have natural discussions. In accordance with Thornbury (2005), fluency occurs when students are given freedom to communicate in real time without the use of scripted language. This type of role-play is especially effective for promoting fluency, as it simulates real-life communication and pushes students to use English spontaneously.

Advantages of Role-play

Many advantages are well worth mentioning. According to Docmo (2011, as cited in Jakob, J. C., 2018), role-play has several advantages, including 1) being an enjoyable and stimulating activity; 2) allowing active participation by all students, including the most shy ones; 3) saving time; 4) experiential learning is more effective than instructions; 5) simplifying complicated ideas; and 6) requiring less preparation by the teacher or facilitator (unless role descriptors are printed out). Therefore, it can be concluded that the application of this strategy is of great help for language improvement in EFL classes. However, just as there are benefits, there are also challenges that this strategy can bring, and the teacher should be aware of them.

Limitations for Implementing Role-play

Role-play activities can help develop learners' speaking skills, but they have several limitations. In Kumaran S.J.'s (2010) view, those limitations include difficulty in maintaining discipline, limited availability of time, and insufficient materials. Specifically, teachers may lose control over the lesson as they may not ensure all students stay on the intended language focus or activity purpose. Another factor is the time limitation, as short and simple role-plays only take about 20 minutes to conduct, thus the teacher should be aware of how to manage time in the organization of the activity, and also, the planification of the activity needs to be well-planned so there will be no shortage of material.

Moreover, Wan (1997, as cited in Kumaran, 2010) mentioned that role-play can produce students using it in the wrong way since grammatical correction is not encouraged immediately. Then, according to Shangeetha and Saravanan (2010), teachers should remind students of the correct forms and review

them during feedback sessions (as cited in Kumaran, 2010). However, excessive correction can lead learners to shift their focus from meaning to form, preventing them from speaking fluently. Apart from this, according to Ur (2000), the lack of purpose in role-plays can also be a cause for concern, as learners may not be told what role and situation they are in, leading to confusion and uncertainty (as cited in Kumaran, 2010). Thus, to solve these problems, teachers should provide clear direction and purpose for the role and situation, as well as clarify the purpose of the activity. But also, it's important to do an adaptation of those different types of role-plays according to the level of the students, where they will be applied.

Adaptation of Role-Play for Different Proficiency Levels

As mentioned above, three types of role-play can be distinguished: non-scripted role-play (NSRP), semi-scripted role-play (SSRP), and fully scripted role-play (SRP). As the SRP kind of role-play is so controlled, it may be appropriate for students with lower competence levels, i.e., students who don't know the context (Cho, B., 2015). Furthermore, since SSRP is less structured and controlled than SRP, learners with upper-beginner to intermediate competence levels who are comfortable with the fundamentals and wish to advance to more difficult tasks can employ the second type of role-play, which is categorized as semi-controlled (Cho, B., 2015). Additionally, as Cho, B. (2015) states in his research, the third kind of role-play is called NSRP and, because it is loosely structured and occasionally requires problem-solving abilities, it can be used with learners at intermediate to advanced levels.

The Use of Role Play to Foster Fluency among Young Learners in English

Since role play offers an immersive, interactive setting where young learners may practice language in context, it is a dynamic and successful method for promoting fluency in young English language learners. Moreover, recent research highlights the effectiveness of role play in enhancing fluency by allowing learners to apply language in interactive situations, helping them transition from textbook language to natural conversation (Zhang, 2019). Dynamically learning English leads students to put into practice the target language related to real-life situations, such as ordering food, taking public transportation, and shopping. This helps them gain more confidence to improve their ability to use English

spontaneously. These activities not only encourage the practical application of the target language but also allow learners to use their imagination and enhance their creativity.

Role-play supports cognitive development, as students are required to think quickly and respond in real-time, fostering both linguistic and mental agility. Furthermore, role play promotes social interaction, turn-taking, and communication skills, fostering confidence and reducing the fear of making mistakes, which is essential for fluency (Thornbury, 2020). Fluency in role-play helps foster critical thinking and problem-solving abilities since young learners need to be able to react fast to unforeseen circumstances.

Methodology

Research Design

This research will be conducted using a qualitative approach focused on expressing non-numerical data, specifically, exposing words, experiences, narratives, and people's perceptions. According to Bryman (2008), qualitative research emphasizes the use of words and stories over quantitative data or information expressed in numbers (as cited in Hammersley, 2012). The presented approach is pertinent to this research project, as it seeks to understand students' experiences and perceptions while participating in role-plays, a strategy used to foster their fluency. As Sandelowski (2004) explains, the qualitative approach in research endeavors apprehends how people construct and make sense of the social world (as cited in Hammersley, 2012).

This study intends to get first-hand information from the people involved, that is, the students participating in the role-plays. We consider that it is important to go directly to the active subjects in order to understand and compile substantive data. The qualitative approach allows us to collect data based on students' feelings and experiences, which cannot be expressed with numerical terms (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This approach is important when researchers decide to explore and obtain information that entails emotional issues and feelings.

The main objective established in this research project is to explore how role-play, as a strategy, can foster students' fluency. Through this research, new aspects and insights may appear that can enrich

findings, meaning that a flexible approach is required in order to consider all the possible outcomes that can emerge during this study. The qualitative approach is considered less structured than other kinds of approaches; it is more open, mainly in the early stages of the investigation, due to its flexible nature (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

Research Method

The research method used to identify how the use of role-plays fosters students' fluency in speaking activities is the narrative inquiry. Tomaszewski, Zarestky, & Gonzalez (2020) state that a narrative inquiry is a research method that aims to construct a description based on what people express about what they have lived or experienced in a particular situation. As highlighted by Creswell, a study conducted through this approach can involve one or more people who have shared or lived through the same common experiences (as cited in Tomaszewski et al., 2020). As human beings, when we live new experiences, we express what we have perceived through stories in a narrative form. However, this research approach is not just a means to compile stories and narratives, but it is a means to study experiences and the journey of students themselves.

A narrative inquiry approach begins with a reflection of researchers' perspectives and experiences. This approach is mainly reflexive, and its thoughtful consideration continues with all the phases of the investigation. According to Clandinin and Caine (2013), researchers may launch the study choosing one of two ways: by listening to the participants' experiences and stories or by being part of the experience through participant observation. This research has been applied in both ways. The starting point was to observe the students' performance while the strategy was applied. Following, interviews in groups were carried out, which led to a final reflection regarding the application.

In both cases, the narrative plays an important role, as it enables the exploration and deep comprehension of participants' perceptions, giving them the space to express their experiences and articulate their thoughts and words. The data collected through the observation field notes and interviews demonstrated the complexity, but at the same time, the richness of the information gathered. With that, a

deep, authentic, and meaningful understanding of how the participants lived and experienced the benefits of using the role-play strategy was obtained, which made this narrative approach a more suitable method to meet our research objectives.

The narrative inquiry research approach is tailored to this since it seeks to explore and understand students' lived experiences. With this research approach, it is feasible to collect rich information and data from the participants themselves. According to Bruner (2004) and Polkinghorne (1988), human identity and perceptions are embedded in narrative, which makes this research approach suitable to carry out this investigation (as cited in Channa, 2015). On the other hand, due to each participant's perceptions and experiences being lived in a personal way and individually, the narrative inquiry approach allows us to have access to the complex nature of those different points of view effectively.

Data Analysis

Categorization

The information gathered in this research project has been analyzed through a categorization process that seeks to group the data into common characteristics and patterns. The categorization has been a widely used process by investigators to understand the complexity of data by organizing that information into themes and categories (see Appendix 10). This analysis method helps researchers to group extensive amounts of data more easily without difficulty (Douglas, 1986; Zerubavel, 1996, as cited in Vergne and Tyler, 2014). Placing the information into groups allows comparison and comprehension of the data collected to further analyze systematically. Furthermore, the method chosen for this research project has helped determine patterns and behaviors among students during their performance, which has been a big support to give responding to our main research objective.

To analyze the data collected for this research study, categorization was employed, as it enables the organization of information in a deductive manner, that is, from the general to the particular. When working with observation field notes, many diverse ideas and perceptions emerged, so classifying the responses into thematic categories helped to identify common patterns. This technique also facilitated the interpretation

process; it assisted in relating each category to the theory and to the objective of the study, which allowed us to draw deeper and more meaningful conclusions about how the use of the role-play strategy fosters fluency among students of the 10th grade.

In this chapter, the data analysis will be presented based on the research objectives exposed in previous sections. The first specific objective, which has been analyzed through the categorization process, is to describe the students' performance during the implementation of role-plays to promote fluency in speaking in the EFL classroom. Data was collected through classroom observations during students' participation in role-play activities, focusing on how students performed while applying this strategy. The employment of categorization enables the organization of the gathered data, which is then connected to the first specific objective and clearly explains how the application of the role-play strategy promotes students' fluency.

Triangulation

To analyze the information from the focus group and obtain reliable findings for one of the research questions, data triangulation was employed (see Appendix 11). According to Noble and Heale (2019), triangulation can enhance research by providing a range of data sets to explain various facets of a phenomenon that is of research interest, and it aims to validate what researchers obtain from a study. Thus, this method is used to verify the completeness of the data and validate the conclusions already stated. Moreover, Bryman A. states that the purpose of using two or more independent measures is to increase confidence in the results of a study (n.d., as cited in Heale and Forbes, 2013).

Bans-Akutey and Tiimub (2021) noted that the triangulation method has several advantages for analyzing data. To begin with, it helps validate the results of interventions or studies, and it provides the researcher with more information that helps explain a phenomenon. The analysis made through the triangulation method is closely aligned with the pre-established objectives of this study, which is to explore how the use of the role-play strategy fosters students' fluency. The use of different data resources assisted in contrasting what our participants conveyed during the interviews in the focus group with what was logged

during observation. This facilitated a more well-grounded interpretation; as a result, the triangulation process reinforced the trustworthiness of the analysis and esteemed the reflective nature of the narrative approach implemented.

Techniques and Instruments for Data Collection

Observations and focus group discussions were conducted to gather detailed and rich information for subsequent analysis and interpretation. The tool used for documenting observations was field notes, ensuring consistent data collection (see Appendix 3). Additionally, interventions were conducted over six weeks, with two sessions per week, totaling twelve sessions (see Appendix 4). The decision to implement this number of interventions was based on the need to balance feasibility and research objectives.

Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize the importance of designing qualitative research with a practical and achievable purpose. They also suggest that the scope should be realistic to ensure successful data collection. Therefore, a well-organized and structured sequence of interventions provides participants with sufficient opportunities to practice and improve their fluency through the role-play strategy.

Observation Field Notes

The observation field notes are used as an instrument to directly gather information about students' reactions when the role-play strategy is applied. Observations were conducted in each role-play session, which were twelve in total. To ensure consistency in data collection, a teaching proposal was designed with its respective lesson plans (see Appendix 14). During the intervention, researchers observe students' oral performance and how fluency is developed in the activity (see Appendix 5).

The observations aim to capture the time when any hesitation occurs and the flow of the conversation is disrupted. Throughout observation field notes, relevant information is collected, which will cover all the aspects related to the benefits of role-play in learners' fluency. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the application of observation field notes enables researchers to capture in real-time students' performance, interaction, and other additional changes that may occur during the intervention.

Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)

Focus group discussions are another data collection method that will be applied in this study, as they enable the gathering of a variety of perspectives from students, as well as their experiences using role-play activities. Nyumba et al. (2018) highlight that focus groups are an adaptable tool that can be used at any point in the research process. Unlike more traditional methods, such as individual interviews and surveys, focus groups offer the opportunity to examine problems that are poorly understood or for which few previous studies exist. This data collection method allows students to start a discussion in a comfortable environment where all of them can share their thoughts and feelings freely (see Appendix 6). Then, considering that the participants are between 14 and 15 years old, this tool is particularly effective as they will not feel fear or be shy during the intervention. Moreover, as the FGDs were carried out in small groups, to provided an open communication where students could express their ideas and gather information without limitations (see Appendix 7).

In a study by Gillham (2020, as cited in Naz et al., 2022), semi-structured interviews are based on open-ended questions that are personalized and adjustable, which allow the conversation to flow. Thus, to not miss information or anything, it is useful to draw up an interview guide, not only because there is a lot to cover, but also to provide consistency in the treatment of the various focus groups (see Appendix 8).

The design chosen for this study is related to the goal established in this investigation, which is to explore how the use of the role-play strategy fosters students' fluency and helps them gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions about the activities implemented. Applying a narrative design ensures that every event is recorded carefully, providing meaningful data on how the interventions are executed in class with detailed descriptions (see Appendix 6). A deeper comprehension of the teaching and learning process is made possible by this kind of approach, which highlights the relevance of documenting experiences as individuals and classroom dynamics (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Participants

This research was carried out in a public high school with students from different contexts who have previously demonstrated difficulties in communicating in English. The narrative inquiry enables this research to explore students' perceptions and gain a detailed understanding of them, and also gain insights into their performance while they participate in role-plays.

The students who participated in this project were adolescents from General Basic Education (EGB) in a school located in Azogues, Cañar. The average age was 14 to 15 years old, and according to their English teacher, the estimated English level was A2. Students proved to be suitable for this type of strategy and also for the data collection methods; observations and focus group sessions. These decisions were made after considering their ages, English levels, behavior, and their English teacher's insights, who provided some background on the context of his students' strengths and weaknesses. Ethical considerations were prioritized, and the researchers obtained permission from the school director and the teacher in charge of the class (see Appendix 1). All participants were informed about the objectives and purpose of the research study and they were also given a consent letter for their parents to sign, as the participants are minors (see Appendix 2). By signing the letter, they granted the researchers permission to observe and focus group discussions in case they were selected.

Phases in Narrative Inquiry Research

1. ***Purpose and Focus of the Study***

According to Criollo (2018), if students' oral participation remains limited, students may have problems transmitting their knowledge. For this reason, teachers should focus on teaching oral skills by choosing the best techniques and strategies to encourage students' active participation in pairs or groups. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to have role-play as a teaching strategy, which offers a valuable opportunity for students to foster their fluency through constant interaction and exposure to the language. It allows students to participate in simulated real-life situations, encouraging them to speak English more confidently and naturally. The use of traditional strategies or techniques may represent an obstacle due to

the lack of ability to improve oral skills (Criollo, 2018). Hence, this project focuses specifically on the influence of role-playing on learners' oral fluency, especially taking into account aspects such as speaking speed, intonation, hesitations, and pauses. What will be explored in this research is students' performance during these activities, how they react to spontaneous use of language, and how their fluency evolves. This research focuses on classroom application and observation, highlighting qualitative data from students and their perceptions.

2. *Select Participants*

Main variables were considered while choosing participants for the study. The first criterion was choosing students from 10th grade of EGB, whose English level was identified as A2, which made them suitable for engaging in role-play activities that required basic but spontaneous communication (Cho, 2015). Another important aspect was that students were already familiar with interactive strategies applied in the classroom during practicum sessions, since, as Stokoe (2011) highlights, role-play activities are more effective when students feel comfortable enough to interact authentically and negotiate meaning.

3. *Collected Data*

In this study, the data were collected through qualitative instruments that provided a clearer picture of how students develop fluency through role-play activities. Classroom observation was one of the primary tools used, and was documented in thorough field notes. As Creswell (2012) noted, observation is a useful way to capture participants' authentic behaviors and classroom dynamics in natural contexts. These notes helped identify moments where learners used English spontaneously and how they reacted to the activities. Alongside this, a focus group discussion was held, which was chosen because it allows participants to exchange ideas collectively and reveal multiple perspectives (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The conversation was recorded and then transcribed so that the students' expressions could be analyzed more carefully. Using both field notes and focus group transcripts also contributed to triangulation, a strategy that, according to Denzin (2012), increases the reliability and credibility of qualitative research.

4. *Analyze Data*

After the data had been collected, the analysis of field notes from the classroom observations were reviewed and organized in order to detect patterns of behavior and aspects related to foster fluency using role-play activities. Likewise, the focus group transcriptions were examined through thematic analysis, a method that helps to uncover common ideas, perceptions, and experiences shared by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were first segmented into excerpts, then grouped into emerging themes, and finally organized into codes. Following this procedure, significant connections were identified between observations of student behavior and their expressed experiences, which ensured a comprehensive understanding of the findings and enabled them to be represented in graphs for triangulation.

5. *Restoring*

It involves organizing and rewriting participants' narratives to create a solid, fast-paced, and meaningful story. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), restoring allows researchers to represent participants' experiences more holistically, moving beyond fragmented statements toward more interpretative, insightful narratives. This focus not only preserves the authenticity of the original voices but also helps to uncover patterns and themes that are central to answering the research questions (see Appendix 9).

6. *Report Findings*

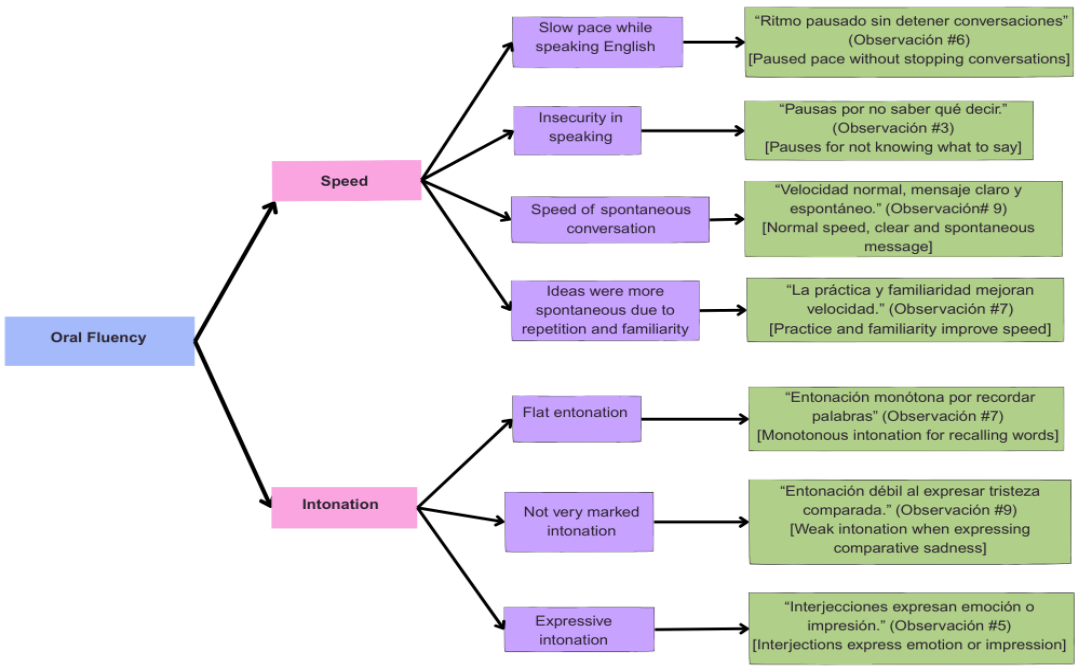
In the final stage, the findings were reported in order to provide a clear description of the participants' experiences. The results were presented through figures and visual representations that summarized the themes and codes emerging from the field notes and focus group transcripts. In addition, Creswell (2012) suggests that the use of organized displays contributes to making complex data more accessible to readers (see Appendix 13). By using this method, the findings were not only explained but also illustrated in a way that represented the students' common perceptions as well as their observable actions.

Findings and Discussions

Categorization - Observations

Figure 1

Oral Fluency



Note. The oral fluency with the first theme was developed from students' performance.

As shown in Figure 1, the first theme analyzed is oral fluency. The first two categories are: speed and intonation. In each category, we found codes that group the data into similar patterns. For example, the fluency pace was affected both positively and negatively. The negative effect was due to students taking a lot of time to express what they wanted to say in English and to the insecurity of not knowing what to say during the role-play; however, it did not significantly affect students' ability to complete the conversation. However, an advancement was notable during the final interventions; students got familiar with the role-play, which helped them to have more spontaneous conversations and boost their pace, as a consequence, their fluency.

The intonation of students also showed differences between the first and final observations. That means that at the beginning, students did not use variations in their intonation when formulating questions or when they had to put more emphasis on some verbal ideas. Students expressed what they said with a monotonous intonation, which did not contribute to oral fluency. However, it did not affect the fact that they could continue with the conversation and finish it. Even so, we could observe remarkable progress in the latest interventions. Students showed multiple intonation styles, and this demonstrated a positive effect on their oral fluency, resulting having a positive outcome at the end of the interventions. Something that was frequently observed was that, besides getting familiar with the role-play activity, students helped each other with clues and repeated prompts to help their peers understand what they were saying. In this way, considerable progress was observed in students, which enabled students to boost their oral fluency in English.

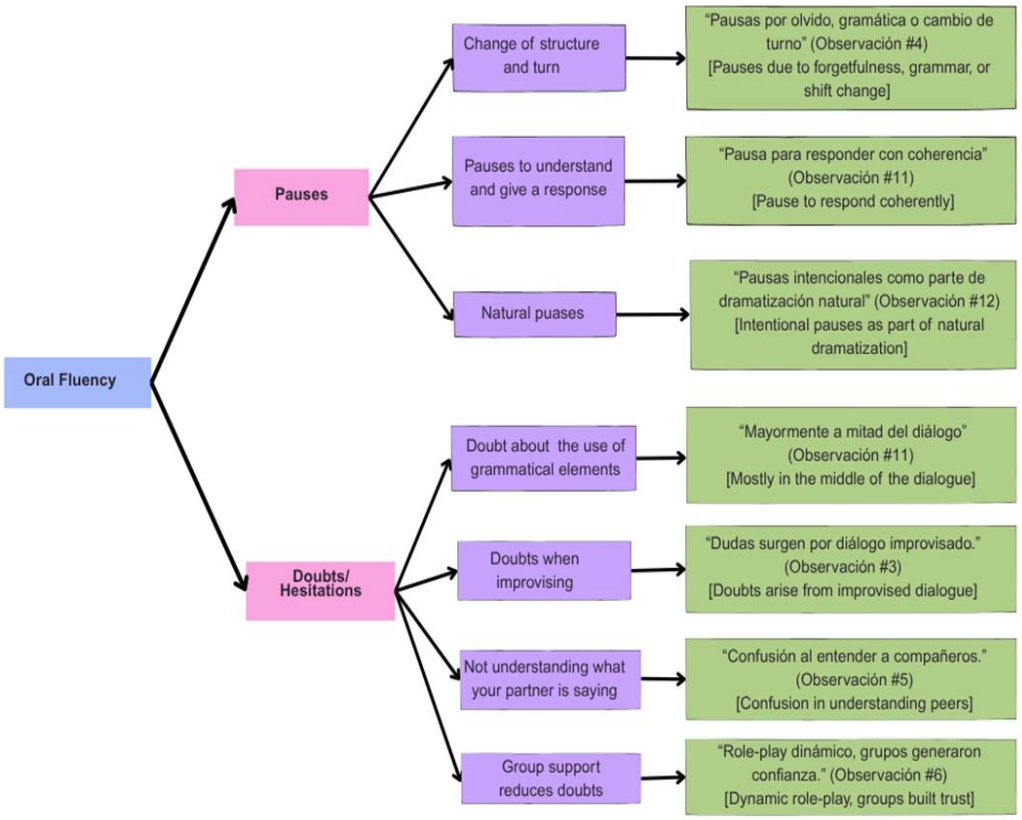
According to Kusumawardani and Mardiyani (2018), holding a fluent conversation involves speaking without frequent disruptions. In the data analysis, it was initially observed that pace was affected due to insecurity and the slowness of expressing ideas in English. However, as time passed, students were able to return to the conversation with minor disruptions when they became familiar with the activity and when they received their peers' support. The intonation is also an important aspect that helps hold fluent conversations. According to Gilbert (1994), the intonation has taken an important role in oral fluency, which helps people who take part in a conversation understand and follow the discussion and give a response (as cited in Hsieh et al., 2013). This means that when we take part in a conversation, our voice has variations, for instance, the tone of voice which can go up when we formulate a question or express emotions, and down when we make affirmations or give an ending to a conversation (Gilbert, 1994 as cited in Hsieh et al., 2013). These aspects provide support and help us understand what we mean in a conversation, and if we can understand the conversation, we can hold it fluently.

Considering the results obtained, we can conclude that, although students' fluency was not initially boosted as expected, we observed that as time passed, learners became familiar and were able to

understand what they had to fulfill in the role-play activity. That means students need repetition and a deep understanding of what the activity implies to perform a fluent conversation in role-play. Besides, the peers' support was also an important ingredient that boosted students' fluency. Students felt comfortable and confident when they participated with their classmates, which helped them improve their fluency. Moreover, it is worth noting that despite initial disruptions and poor fluency, students were able to continue and complete the conversation, which can be considered a positive starting point that supports oral fluency in students.

Figure 2

Oral fluency with other findings



Note. The oral fluency in students' performance, showing other categories that lead with the theme.

Figure 2 has the same theme, but other categories. The categories are: Pauses and Doubts/Hesitations. The use of pauses was evident, but it did not affect the natural course of the conversation. The pauses were used to change the turn in the conversation or when students tried to remember some grammatical structures. However, it did not harm students' oral fluency because those pauses were not long and were used naturally, similar to a spontaneous conversation. The results are in agreement with Fillmore (1976), who states that speaking fluently does not just have to do with speaking quickly without any interferences; indeed, he explains that speaking fluently involves holding extended conversations with few pauses, application of suitable expressions, and use of the language in a natural style (as cited in Yang, 2014).

Nevertheless, doubts and hesitations were more frequently observed when students performed the role-play activity. While some students used natural pauses to think about the grammatical structure they had to use, others, however, hesitated about the correct structure, which greatly affected the oral fluency. Moreover, some students improvised what they had to say, which showed themselves in doubt. It can be related to the fact that students did not perform the role-play with pre-written dialogues. Even though it affected the oral fluency in the first role-play activities, learners could finish the conversation and improve their fluency over time. Additionally, students showed some difficulties understanding what their partners said, which made students hesitate about what to respond due to the prompt being incomprehensible.

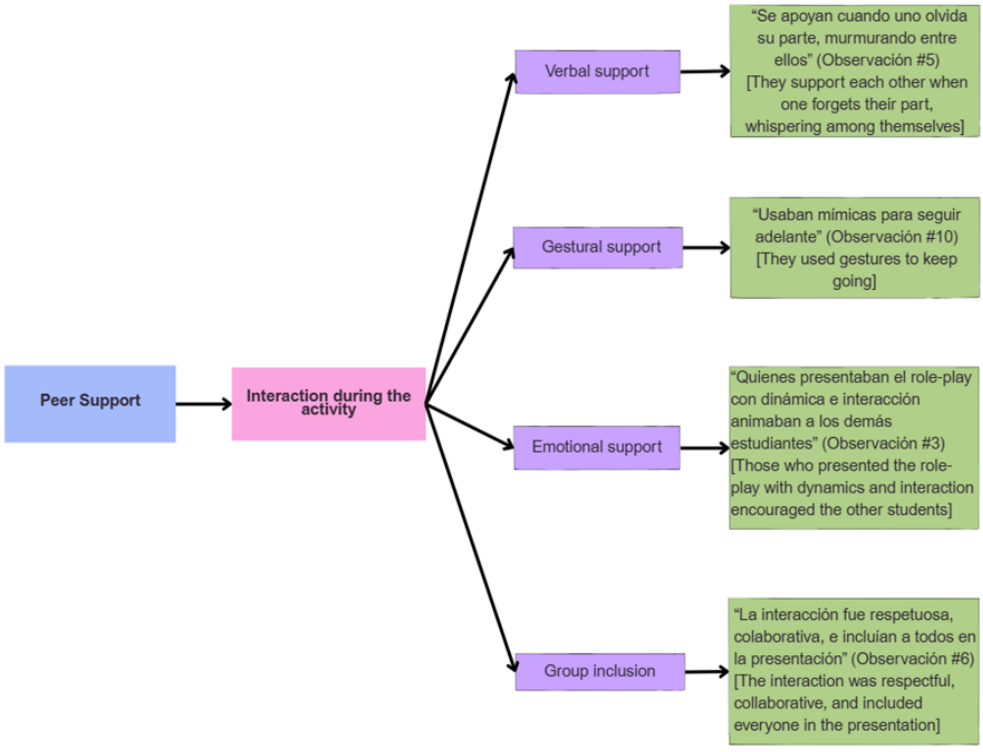
Despite it negatively affecting their oral fluency, students showed an effort to continue the conversation even though it was not as fluent as expected. Moreover, this aspect improved as time progressed when learners worked in pairs in a collaborative way and when they got more familiar with what they had to do in the role-play activity. According to Nisa (2014), collaborative work helps individuals engage in communicative activities as well as receive support from others. Students were allowed to work with their peers, which made them feel comfortable and allowed them to learn from what their classmates did while the activity was performed. This is an important aspect that emerged during our analysis: the value of

collaborative work. The support that students received from others played an important role in helping students reduce the number of pauses and hesitations during their participation.

Based on the results, there were aspects that affected their fluency both positively and negatively. Nevertheless, in the analysis, we could observe that even though those aspects affected their fluency at the beginning, they did not represent an obstacle for students to finish the conversation and later boost their oral fluency. As time passed, pauses and hesitations were less evident compared with the first role-plays performed. This was influenced by students becoming more familiar with the role-play activity over time, and they were allowed to work collaboratively with their classmates. This demonstrated that the exposure to the role-play activity and working in partnership supported them in fostering their fluency and reducing the pauses and hesitations.

Figure 3

Peer support among students



Note. Peer support among students in the performance of the role-play activity.

Concerning the theme of peer-to-peer support, Figure 3 displays the varied insights of interaction in the role-play activity. During the development of the sessions, it was observed that the students showed active participation through peer support, especially during the role-play activities. In the qualitative records, it was noticeable how students collaborated, supported each other when one forgot their part or was left blank, generating an environment of trust to continue with the development of the dialogue.

In addition, gestural support was observed, especially at times when students used mimics, laughed, or corrected each other, which helped to maintain communication continuously. Another relevant aspect was emotional support. Those students who had already presented their activity in the role-play scenario encouraged their peers who were to intervene afterwards, generating a motivational effect that encouraged participation and reduced anxiety. Finally, a strong group inclusion was evidenced, where all students worked collaboratively, respected the turns of intervention, and made an effort to include all members of the group in the development of the role-play.

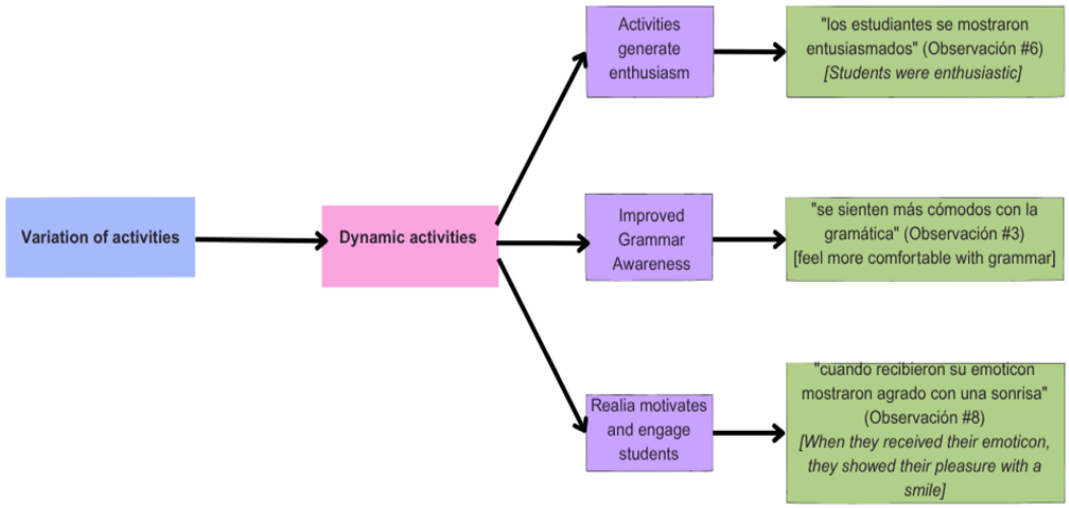
This sort of interaction matches up with what Vygotsky (1978, as referenced in Panhwar et al., 2016) refers to as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which learning is facilitated through the accompaniment of peers who offer assistance during challenging times. In this case, that support translates into verbal and gestural interventions between peers that help maintain continuity of dialogue, decreasing fear of error, and increasing confidence to express oneself.

Additionally, the communicative approach, supported by Richards (2017), emphasizes the importance of creating authentic spaces for oral interaction where students can simulate real scenarios, take turns, and develop fluency in meaningful contexts. Here, turn-taking played a crucial role: students intervened to rescue the conversational thread, organize turns, and continue spontaneously, which is a concrete sign of progress in communicative fluency. As Stokoe (2011) states, the ability to coordinate turns in a conversation is key to the development of conversational competence, and it was visible throughout these sessions.

Looking at this evidence, it can be concluded that peer support was a natural pedagogical resource that emerged within the role-play activities and contributed directly to the development of fluency. Not only did it allow students to deal more confidently with moments of blocking, but it also strengthened group cohesion and promoted a collaborative learning environment. In the classroom, it was found that when students feel supported by their peers, their anxiety is significantly reduced, and their willingness to speak English, even in impromptu situations, increases.

Figure 4

Variation of activities



Note. The effect of varied activities on students' performance while doing role-play activities.

Concerning the variation of activities, Figure 4 demonstrates Dynamic Activities as a unique category for this theme. By having several activities in the class, the teacher can guarantee that students are not going to get bored. Also, while engaging in these dynamic or interactive activities, students can experiment, interact, and feel comfortable expressing themselves. According to Hahl (2022), various theatrical and playful activities require the application of imagination, curiosity, and inventiveness. From this perspective, variety enables teachers to cater to different learning styles and break the routine, thereby contributing to the improvement of students' emotional well-being and performance.

Additionally, it has codes that were deduced from the previous observations. Firstly, it was stated that these activities generate enthusiasm, which can help students be more active in the classroom. With that in mind, learners enjoy it more when they are doing or working with something new. The other code suggests that the use of dynamic activities improves grammar awareness, which implies that if students already know about grammar and its structure, their performance will be better. They feel comfortable using it, as they will have in mind how to apply it correctly.

Finally, the last code, which involves realia, motivates and engages students. It can be said that if the teacher creates and brings materials to class, students appreciate it by participating actively during the lesson, allowing the role-play activity to be carried out properly. Elli and Johnson (1994, as cited in Yang, 2020) noted that authentic material can be any material from the real world, not necessarily created for language teaching; thus, it can include realia such as tickets, maps, or objects like products, equipment, and so forth.

Everything mentioned above is rooted in solid data that were directly observable in the classroom while students were engaged in or creating dialogues according to the task. Therefore, it can be concluded that the variation in activities helped students develop their fluency in speaking. The results obtained from the observation were positive, as students significantly improved their performance, as well as their participation and engagement with the tasks.

Triangulation - Focus Group

It is important to emphasize in order to ensure the identity of the participants during their interventions, acronyms were applied. For example, Focus Group Discussion #1 = FGD#1, and to refer to the participants, the initials of their names were used. Student #1=NL, Student #2=MT, Student #3=EL, Student #4=AR, Student #5=JC, Student #6=PG. Focus Group Discussion #2 = FGD#2, and to refer to the participants, the initials of their names were used. Student #1=JC, Student #2=AC, Student #3=FM, Student #4=VA, Student #5=SA, Student #6=JU.

As shown in Figures 5 and 6 (below), to analyze the collected data, a principal theme: Students' feelings & perceptions, is divided into positive and negative aspects. To develop this theme, we use a deductive analysis to pursue accurate information to respond to the previously established research questions. The deductive thematic analysis employed was considered the most practical method due to its flexibility, as well as being straightforward and easy to understand (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). This analysis supported our efforts in conducting a valid examination, which enabled us to build the triangulation process. The themes considered for this analysis were chosen based on the specific objective established to provide a response and create a systematic narrative.

Additionally, it is essential to note that in qualitative research, perceptions and feelings are frequently analyzed together because they are closely intertwined aspects of human experience. Perceptions reflect how individuals interpret events, while feelings reveal the emotional responses triggered by those interpretations. As Creswell and Poth (2018) point out, exploring these dimensions together provides a more complete understanding of participants' realities, especially in educational contexts where learners' emotions directly influence their engagement and behavior. When participants describe an experience, their explanations frequently include both what they thought about it and how it made them feel. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) explain that experiences are not only cognitive perceptions but also emotional feelings. Grouping perceptions and emotions into a single theme helps researchers analyze how emotional reactions shape the way individuals perceive educational strategies, such as role-play.

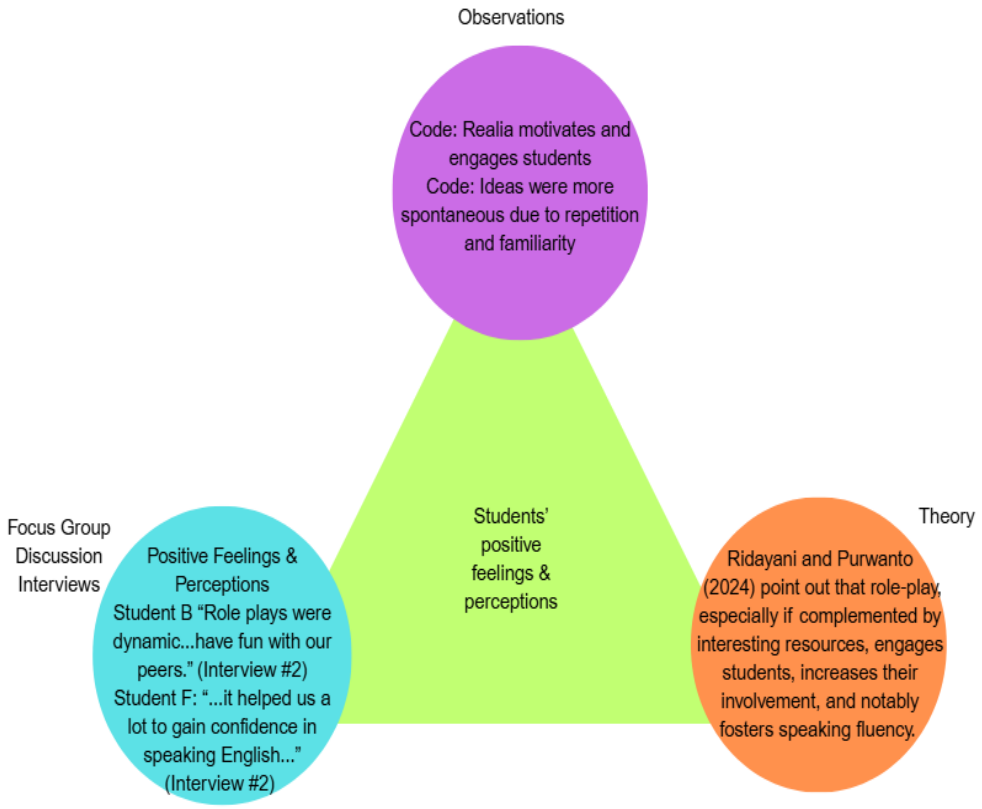


Figure 5. *Students' positive feelings & perceptions regarding the use of role-play to foster their fluency in English.*

Concerning the students' positive feelings and perceptions, Figure 5 reveals a consistent pattern across focus group discussions, observations, and theoretical contributions. The majority of participants reported positive emotions such as enjoyment, engagement, and laughter, describing the sessions as entertaining and dynamic, and distinct from their typical lessons. Participants also stated that the role-plays helped them to reinforce grammatical structures and break out of the traditional routine, and more importantly, they fostered their fluency and confidence in speaking.

As stated by one of the participants, role-playing was recognized as an engaging activity. FGD #2 AC refers to this experience as follows:

Role plays fueron dinámicos y nos permitieron no solamente aprender sino divertirnos con nuestros compañeros. [Role plays were dynamic and allowed us not only to learn but also to have fun with our classmates]

And FGD#1 EL, reinforces by saying:

Para mí fue divertido, fue relajante porque ya con las clases del profe nos cansábamos un poquito y nos venían a hacer dinámicas divertidas. [For me it was fun, it was relaxing because with the teacher's classes we were getting a little tired and they came to make us do fun dynamics]

In support of this opinion, field note #5 highlighted how students used props like scarves creatively, generating spontaneous laughter and an entertaining environment, thereby illustrating how humor and interaction became integral to the learning process.

La actividad mostró que los estudiantes estaban pasando un momento divertido por la forma creativa de usar las pañoletas de cada grupo y las risas que generaron en sus compañeros. [The activity showed that the students were having fun because of the creative way each group used the scarves and the laughter they generated among their classmates]

According to Richards (2006), role-play engages learners in authentic and participatory communication, helping them practice language in situations similar to those encountered in real life. This theory supports the students' opinions that the role-play strategy was fun, interactive, and emotionally stimulating, making the class more enjoyable and helping to break out of routine lessons.

Additionally, field note #10 highlighted the students' growing fluency due to repeated exposure to the same activity type:

Algunos hablaban con mayor fluidez que en intervenciones anteriores, lo que demuestra que están ganando confianza y acostumbrándose a usar el idioma en situaciones reales. [Some spoke more fluently than in previous sessions, demonstrating that they are gaining confidence and becoming accustomed to using the language in real-life situations]

Students emphasized how this strategy helped them to gain confidence. FGD #2 Student JU mentioned:

Nos obligó a salir de nuestra zona de confort a no tener miedo de equivocarnos y si lo hacíamos pues ya nada o sea técnicamente nos ayudó mucho primero a ganar la confianza a hablar inglés. [it forced us to leave our comfort zone and not be afraid to make mistakes, and if we did then it was fine, I mean, technically it helped us a lot to first gain confidence to speak English]

Therefore, this triangulation confirms that role-play is not only a tool to enhance oral fluency but also an emotionally enriching strategy that reduces affective filters, increases confidence, and promotes student-centered learning. The students perceived the activities as supportive and dynamic, which encouraged them to participate and speak English more freely.

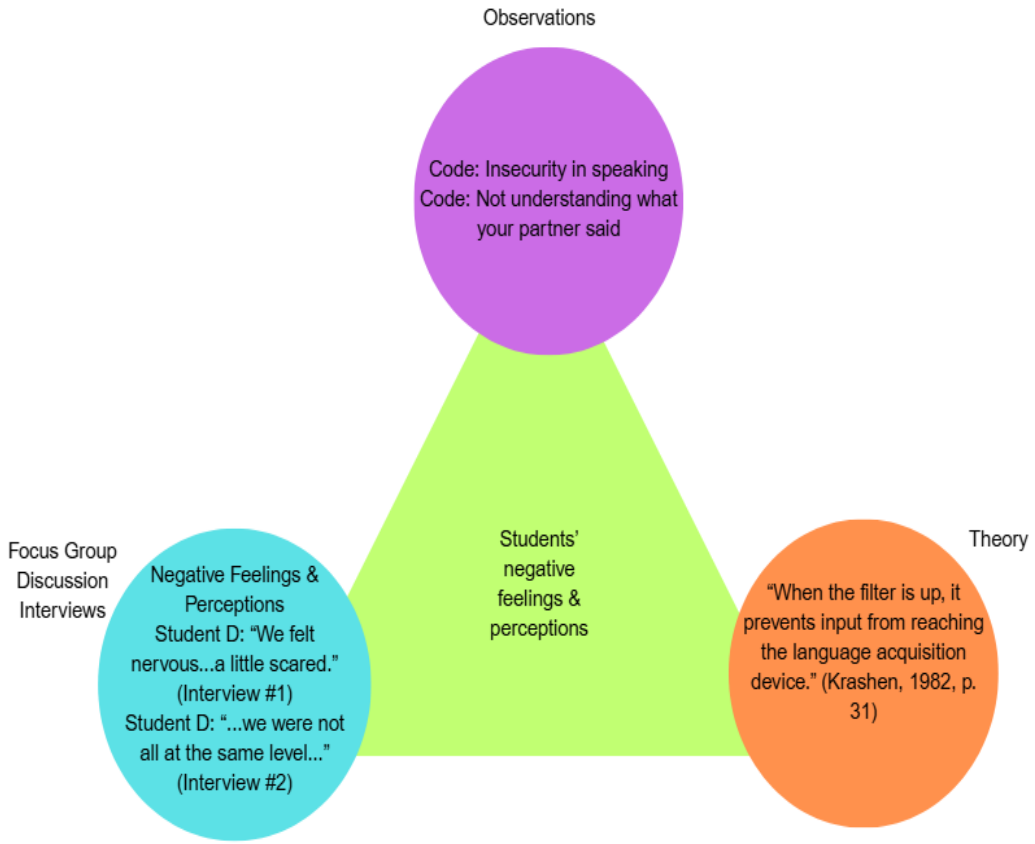


Figure 6. *Students' negative feelings & perceptions about the use of role-play to support them in fostering their fluency in English.*

Regarding students' negative feelings and perceptions, Figure 6 displays some of the challenges that students experienced when participating in role-play activities. These included anxiety, nervousness, and insecurity, especially in early performances or when facing peers with higher English proficiency levels. FGD# 1 Student AR expressed:

nos sentimos nerviosos por el role-play. Nos sentimos un poco asustados. [We feel a bit nervous about role-playing. We feel a little scared]

In Observation #3, the emotional impact of insecurity was evident, as some students hesitated or paused due to not knowing what to say or how to respond:

Hubo otros estudiantes, que al no estar seguros qué decir, o expresar o responder, hicieron pequeñas pausas lo cual afectó a la velocidad general de la conversación. [There were other students who, unsure of what to say, express, or respond, paused briefly, which affected the overall speed of the conversation]

Furthermore, some students had difficulty understanding their peers' speech, leading to confusion and affecting the interaction mentioned in observation #5:

a tratar de entender lo que sus compañeros mencionan, mostrando una confusión de lo que escuchan de su compañero de role-play. [trying to understand what their peers are saying, showing confusion about what they hear from their role-play partner]

FGD #2 Student VA also addressed the issue of language level disparity:

un punto negativo fue que básicamente no todos teníamos el mismo nivel. [one negative point was that basically we didn't all have the same level]

These reactions are closely aligned with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which posits that emotional aspects, such as self-confidence, anxiety, and engagement, that affect language learning are involved. Input is blocked and learning is slower when the affective filter is high, caused by nervousness, fear

of failing, or poor confidence. During role-play, students who are less confident or have a weaker proficiency in English may hesitate more and speak less fluently.

Despite these initial barriers, most students were able to overcome their emotional discomfort through the progressive implementation of role-playing. The findings imply that although role-playing can be emotionally demanding, it can be beneficial when done in a supportive and inclusive environment. Students demonstrated that emotional difficulties can be overcome through practice, support, and collaboration among classmates, as they eventually transitioned from fear to confidence.

Conclusions

This study reveals that the use of role-plays in an English teaching classroom has a positive influence on the improvement of students' speaking fluency. As mentioned by participants, even though they were nervous and scared, participating in role-plays helped them practice speaking, while having fun, stepping away from their traditional English classes.

The findings of this study provide a valuable understanding of how the use of role-play activities can significantly contribute to the development of fluency in speaking English as a second language. In relation to the students' performance during the implementation of role-plays and their perceptions of the role-play activities implemented in classes, the results highlighted earlier are significant, as this strategy not only helped students with speaking, but also created an engaging and creative learning environment.

Although the results obtained are mostly positive, it cannot be overlooked that some students did not share the same sentiment about the use of this strategy. They expressed that they had enjoyed being part of it, but they did not consider it as helpful as the others, in terms of fluency. Besides that, some of the responses could be influenced by the students´ comfort or willingness to answer in the case of the focus group interview. Students often feel hesitant to share their ideas openly, as they may worry that their peers will judge them.

Ultimately, this research suggests that this strategy is effective when applied to interactive tasks, enabling students to practice in various ways and become more engaged, ultimately leading to improved oral

fluency. Overall, as mentioned above, the study established a clear relationship between students' performance and perspectives and how the role-play activities were carried out in the EFL classroom.

Recommendations

This section presents practical recommendations and considerations based on the findings of this research. The primary objective of this research project was to conduct a thorough examination of how the application of the role-play strategy in a high school context enhances students' fluency. The following list of suggestions is connected to students' performance and perceptions throughout the application of the mentioned strategy.

- For future researchers or EFL teachers, it is recommended to execute the role-play strategy considering the participants' English level. That means students should have at least an A2+ or B1 level of English. This facilitates and guarantees that participants can develop their fluency and ensure that students are actively involved in the task.
- To enhance students' participation and support them to be focused on the activity, it is suitable to work with small groups. It will enable teachers to provide personalized feedback to students, considering each student's individual needs, and reduce common distractions that often occur in large groups.
- It is important to have in mind a contingency plan in case the school or context calls off class sessions. It is vital to have a flexible and realistic schedule to meet objectives despite inconveniences.
- It would be useful to have a quantitative perspective that reinforces the results and proves students' improvement in their fluency/speaking skills.
- It would serve well to extend this research to other classrooms, levels, or English teaching contexts to determine if results are consistent or similar.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter of consent from the School Director

Letter of consent

Appendix 2: Letter of Consent from the parents of the students

Letter of Consent from the parents of the students

Appendix 3: Observation Field Note Template

Observation Field Note Template

Appendix 4: Images & Videos of Role play Implementation

Images & Videos of Role play Implementation

Appendix 5: Weekly Observation Field Notes

Weekly Observation Field Notes

Appendix 6: Audios from Focus Group Discussion

Audios from Focus Group Discussion

Appendix 7: Images from Focus Group Discussion

Images from Focus Group Discussion

Appendix 8: Focus Group Discussion Guide/Questions

Focus Group Discussion Guide/Questions

Appendix 9: Transcriptions of Focus Group Discussion

Transcriptions of Focus Group Discussion

Appendix 10: Categorization Table

Categorization Table

Appendix 11: Triangulation Table

Triangulation Table

Appendix 12: Lesson Plans of Role-play Implementation

Lesson Plans

Appendix 13: Graphics

Graphics

Appendix 14: Teaching Proposal

Designing Teaching Proposal