

Understanding Oral Fluency in English from Students' Perspectives

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Abstract: In recent years, research on how to promote students' oral fluency has proliferated due to its central role in effective communication. However, given its complex nature, oral fluency remains a contested concept among educators, learners, and assessors. Notably, in-depth research from learners' perspectives is limited, although such perspectives can offer valuable pedagogical insights. This phenomenological qualitative study aimed to address this gap by exploring undergraduate students' experiences and conceptualizations of oral fluency and the factors shaping its development. Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with ten undergraduate civil aviation students enrolled in an English speaking skills course. Thematic analysis revealed that students' prior experiences with oral fluency were highly limited and that most held predominantly transactional conceptions, associating fluency with rapid, uninterrupted speech based on linguistic resources. The findings further indicated that cognitive, social, and affective constraints jointly shape oral fluency development. In response, learners expressed a preference for classroom environments that combine sustained L2-mediated interaction with individualized pedagogical support. By foregrounding learners' voices, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of oral fluency as a psychologically mediated, socially situated, and emotionally regulated construct, with implications for designing more learner-responsive approaches to fluency development in higher education.

Keywords: Oral fluency in English, learners' perspectives, oral fluency conceptualization, oral fluency development

Öğrencilerin Bakış Açısından Akıcı İngilizce Konuşmayı Anlamak

Öz: Son yıllarda, etkili iletişimi sağlamadaki rolü nedeniyle akıcı konuşmanın sınıf ortamında nasıl geliştirilebileceği üzerine yapılan araştırmalar artmaktadır. Ancak karmaşık doğasından ötürü akıcı konuşma; eğitimci, öğrenci, ölçme ve değerlendiriciler için hâlâ tartışılan bir kavram olmayı sürdürmektedir. Özellikle de akıcı konuşmayı öğrencilerin bakış açısından derinlemesine ele alarak, akıcılığın sınıf ortamında daha etkili şekilde geliştirilmesini sağlayabilecek araştırmaların sınırlı kaldığı görülmektedir. Olgubilim desenindeki bu nitel çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin akıcı İngilizce konuşma kavramı hakkındaki deneyimlerini, kavramlaştırmalarını ve akıcı konuşmanın gelişimini etkileyen faktörleri inceleyerek, bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamıştır. Bu amaçla, İngilizce konuşma becerileri dersini alan on sivil havacılık programı öğrencisi ile yüz yüze görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmelerden elde edilen verilerin tematik analiz sonuçları, öğrencilerin akıcı İngilizce konuşma ile ilgili deneyimlerinin oldukça sınırlı olduğunu ve akıcı konuşmanın öğrenciler tarafından başta hızlı ve kesintisiz konuşma ile ilişkili ve dilbilgisel unsurlara dayalı, aktarımsal bir kavram olarak algılandığını ortaya koymuştur. Dahası, sonuçlar hem bilişsel hem de sosyal ve duyuşsal faktörlerin, akıcı konuşmanın gelişiminde rol oynadığını göstermiştir. Buna bağlı olarak, öğrenciler akıcı konuşmanın sınıf ortamında geliştirilebilmesi için bireyselleştirilmiş öğretimle desteklenmiş bir hedef dil topluluğu oluşturulmasına ihtiyaç olduğunu vurgulamışlardır. Çalışma, öğrencilerin bakış açılarını ve akıcı konuşmanın bilişsel, sosyal ve duyuşsal boyutlarını vurgulayarak, akıcı konuşmanın daha bütüncül bir şekilde anlaşılması ve geliştirilmesine katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Akıcı İngilizce konuşma, öğrenci bakış açısı, akıcı konuşmanın kavramlaştırılması, akıcı konuşmanın gelişimi

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Introduction

In the field of English language teaching (ELT), being fluent is regarded as one of the most salient markers of language proficiency. Particularly with the growing demand for promoting citizens' communicative competence and accompanying ELT approaches giving prominence to communicative aspects of language, developing students' oral fluency has become a primary concern for many language courses worldwide (Yang, 2014). English language examinations and evaluation systems such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) have further pushed the need to integrate oral fluency into language programs, and students are now expected to show a certain level of fluency even at lower proficiency levels (McCarthy, 2010). Despite this, students' lack of oral fluency in English has been reported as a pervasive problem across educational contexts (Ngoc & Dung, 2020) which is commonly linked to a broad range of pedagogical, psychological and cultural factors (Fan, 2020). Research conducted at various university settings revealed some major impediments to learners' oral fluency in English including poor grammar, lack of in-class speaking opportunities, first language (L1) interference, and fear of making mistakes (Gul et al., 2022).

Whereas second language (L2) oral fluency has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years, and fluency research has now become a productive research field with multiple strands, pedagogical implications of such research for practitioners remain rather limited (Foster, 2020). This limited impact is often attributed to the fuzziness of the concept itself as much as to the tendency to treat fluency as synonymous with speaking ability, thereby overlooking its distinct nature (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Consequently, a large body of research on L2 fluency has primarily focused on developing reliable measures of fluent speech, with comparatively few studies examining its pedagogical dimensions (Robayo Acuña, 2025). In particular, how teachers and students understand and experience oral fluency, how it develops, and how it is addressed in classroom practice remains under-investigated (Morrison, 2018; Wright & Tavakoli, 2020). Considering the recognized importance of learners' experiences and beliefs in language development (Dörnyei, 2019), more research that specifically investigates L2 fluency from learners' perspectives is needed. Such research is expected to bear practical implications and support the teaching of oral fluency in a more efficient way in classrooms by providing insights into students' developmental trajectories (Tamás, 2024).

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to extend the current fluency debate from several aspects. First, in contrast to the conventional line of research conducted to quantify and measure oral fluency, this qualitative study attempts to understand the oral fluency construct from students' perspectives. Drawing on students' lived experiences, it primarily aims to reveal how fluency is perceived and conceptualized by learners, as well as what supporting or hindering factors are at play in their oral fluency development. In this vein, it also seeks to uncover effective pedagogical practices for oral fluency development according to students' views. By attempting to link the conception, development, learning, and teaching of oral fluency, the present study aims to offer a student-centered perspective on L2 pedagogy. In light of these purposes, the main questions (RQ) for the study were formulated as follows:

RQ1: How do civil aviation undergraduates perceive oral fluency in English based on their own experiences?

RQ2: What do students perceive as important for their oral fluency development?

Theoretical Background

In the ELT literature, oral fluency is generally associated with the ease and automaticity of speech without strain, pauses, hesitations, repetitions, and the like (Hedge, 1993); however, there has been little agreement on the precise definition of the term. Researchers tend to approach the concept in varying ways, giving way to multiple interpretations. For instance, in one of the early classifications, Fillmore (1979) explained the term over "the ways of talking" and listed four kinds of fluency as the ability (1) to talk to fill the time, (2) to talk in a coherent and reasoned manner, (3) to talk appropriately in changing contexts and (4) to talk creatively and imaginatively. Others, such as Lennon (1990), pointed out "broad" and "narrow" approaches to fluency, relating the first to a more general spoken command of a foreign language and the second to the key and more distinctive features of speech. Similarly, Chambers (1997) drew attention to the definition of fluency in communicative language teaching (CLT), which focuses on the speech production processes in naturally occurring situations rather than language mastery or native-like performance. In an attempt to go beyond the limitations of previous approaches, Segalowitz (2016) called for a more systematic approach to explain L2 fluency with his oft-cited triadic framework and distinguished among L2 utterance fluency, focusing on temporal features, such as syllable rate, hesitations, and pauses; L2 cognitive fluency, referring to cognitive processes at work when performing L2 speech acts and L2 perceived fluency which deals with subjective judgments of L2 speakers' oral fluency. As conceptions of fluency have evolved, researchers continue to suggest even more perspectives that might extend the current line of research. In one of these recent works, Peltonen (2024) marked "fluency in interaction," "the continuum between fluency and disfluency," and "the role of first language (L1) speaking style" as fresh themes that can offer researchers further foundations for rethinking and reconceptualizing the concept.

Varying approaches to the oral fluency construct indicate that fluency does not operate in isolation, and its development is governed by a mixture of cognitive, social, and emotional factors (Luu, 2024). Foregrounding cognitive processes responsible for speech production, most researchers agree on the view that speech emerges by following the stages of conceptualization, a pre-verbal stage for planning what the speakers intend to convey; formulation, which is associated with the lexical, grammatical, and phonetical choices; articulation related to the actual production of speech sounds and self-monitoring that is paying attention to the output and checking its correctness and appropriateness (Kormos, 2011). While such an approach to fluency development has been found fruitful, it has also been criticized for treating fluency mainly as a linear process moving from one stage to another rather than a dynamic and evolving construct interacting with other personal, social, and contextual factors (Derwing, 2017). Taking conditions under which speech unfolds into consideration, some researchers isolated a number of cognitive, affective, and performance factors that might be useful in predicting learners' speaking fluency (Thornbury, 2013). According to this categorization, cognitive factors include processing demands, familiarity with the topic, genre, or interlocutors; affective factors encompass feelings towards the topic or participant and self-consciousness, whereas performance factors include mode, degree of collaboration, discourse control, planning and rehearsal time, time pressure, and environmental conditions (Thornbury, 2013). Relevant research results also imply that relying merely on cognitive processes or linguistic knowledge alone may not be enough to explain fluency development and other relevant and intervening psychological and sociological factors, such as language anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, exposure to English, home and school environment, and socio-economic status also need attention for providing a fuller and more complementary account (Nhan, 2024).

The fuzziness surrounding the concept and the wide-ranging factors influencing its development inevitably present challenges to oral fluency teaching in the classroom setting. Indeed, the foreign language classrooms have been widely depicted as constrained environments for the teaching of oral fluency, particularly due to low L2 exposure and limited practice opportunities (Hanzawa, 2024). For this reason, compared to the classroom setting, other non-classroom and study abroad (SA) contexts are favored as they provide learners with ample opportunities to engage in oral communication (Kim et al., 2026) and help enhance their sense of autonomy and mastery (Myhre & Fiskum, 2021). Some concerns have also been raised about how oral fluency is presented in policy and curriculum documents. As noted, in many language policy and curricula documents, including the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR), oral fluency is handled in a restricted and insufficient manner with limited attention to its distinctive features and characteristics (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Similarly, research on instructional materials suggests that most materials used for foreign language teaching might be inadequately designed, and even some of the most popular textbooks used in language classrooms fall short in targeting oral fluency (Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2014). Language learner textbooks and teacher resource books are claimed to mainly focus on free-production tasks rather than formulaic language units, rehearsal, and repetition, which are associated with better fluency gains (Onoda, 2014). Another concern is related to the gap between theory and practice. Even though some general teaching methods (Masuram & Sripada, 2020), useful classroom techniques (Molina & Briesmaster, 2017; Santos & Ramírez-Ávila, 2022), effective tasks and activities (Namaziandost et al., 2019) to promote students' oral fluency have been suggested in the literature, findings indicate that there can be discrepancies between what fluency research offers and what teachers actually do in the classroom (Tavakoli & Hunter, 2018) and interventions aiming to promote students' oral fluency through interactive practice activities may fail to yield expected results (McDonough & Sato 2019). Research results highlight that perceiving fluency as speaking ability in a broad sense, teachers often rely on free production tasks that target speaking ability rather than specifically focusing on promoting fluency (Gan & Ma, 2023). These results imply that oral fluency remains an undeveloped component of L2 teaching, and more research and training interventions are required to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Tavakoli, 2023).

Whereas the field of oral fluency is rich in methodological approaches that claim to enhance speaking performance, the most crucial part of teaching, that is, the students' opinions and experiences are often disregarded (Türk, 2020). Only a small number of studies have examined the oral fluency construct from students' own understandings and lived experiences, and even fewer have explored learners' evaluations of how instructional practices influence their fluency development (Reynolds & Yu, 2022). Existing research on students' perceptions of oral fluency indicates that learners often conceptualize oral fluency in various ways. For instance, a phenomenographic study conducted with first-year university students revealed that learners tend to hold a very broad understanding of fluency, viewing it as a part of a general spoken ability, emphasizing pronunciation and other spoken-language specific features and underlining the role of input, active language use, and informal learning for its development (Lintunen & Peltonen, 2019). Using metaphor analysis, another study investigated undergraduates' beliefs about L2 speaking fluency and found that learners primarily consider oral fluency as a growth-oriented process with pause, pronunciation, intonation, and grammar as its key features, emphasizing the importance of patience, regular care, attention, and practice to attain it (Naghavian, 2024). Other research showed that most university students relate fluency with flow and speed of speech, and believe that talking to others, having a good English environment and getting feedback from the teachers after their speaking

performance can improve their fluency to a great extent whereas socio-affective factors such as lack of confidence, feeling of embarrassment or losing face can hinder their English-speaking fluency considerably (Phisutthangkoon, 2024). Investigating participants' perception of oral fluency to arrive at various oral fluency conceptions, another study suggests that students' and teachers' views on oral fluency can differ (Khai & Huynh, 2022). All of these results indicate that how undergraduates make sense of oral fluency based on their own experiences and what they perceive as shaping its development in and beyond the classroom needs closer attention.

Method

Study Design

Since the purpose of the study was to capture the complexity of the oral fluency construct from students' point of view, one of the qualitative designs, phenomenological research was used in which the researcher seeks to explore the lived experiences of participants to arrive at shared meanings and develop a composite description of individuals' experiences about the concept under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Context

The vocational school where the study was conducted belongs to a state university in the northwest of Turkey. Located on a moderately sized campus, it serves around five hundred students from six departments. The Civil Aviation Department follows a curriculum with a strong emphasis on improving students' English speaking skills, as most graduates are expected to be employed by international companies. Students of the department take a four-hour basic English course at the elementary level (A1-A2) for both terms during their first year, and then are offered a four-hour Business English course and English speaking skills course at the intermediate level (B1+) in their second year for both Fall and Spring terms.

The English Speaking Skills course, which specifically aims to improve students' oral fluency, is an obligatory one involving thirty students with mixed language abilities. The course follows a topic-based design and is organized around broad themes such as people and relationships, healthy living, studies and work, technology and culture with topics changing around every two weeks. The learning objectives of the course are aligned with the B1-B2 level descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), with a particular focus on enabling students to enter into and sustain conversations on a range of topics by providing reasons and explanations. The course book functions as the primary instructional resource and serves as the curricular framework guiding the course. Its topic-based units are structured around model speeches, dialogues, and audio recordings designed to expose students to natural and idiomatic uses of language. Each unit typically begins with model texts related to the target topic, through which students are introduced to common expressions and relevant language patterns. These are typically reinforced through structured practice activities that focus on repetition and guided production. Units generally culminate in more extended speaking practice tasks, such as preparing a short speech or engaging in a topic-related conversation, allowing students to use the instances of language introduced earlier in the unit.

Researcher Reflexivity

In this study, the researcher assumed a dual role as a teacher-researcher, adopting an insider perspective that presented both opportunities and challenges for the research process (Poulton, 2023). The researcher's experience as an instructor observing classroom dynamics, learners' difficulties, and the challenges of developing oral fluency in this context served as a key motivation for the study. This insider position also facilitated establishing rapport with the participants and supported the collection of rich, in-depth data in a trusting environment. However, this dual role also raised concerns regarding interpersonal power imbalances, particularly the possibility that students might feel hesitant to express their views openly due to the fear of teacher evaluation. To minimize this risk, participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that their responses would have no impact on their course grades. They were also informed about the purpose of the study and the value of their contributions for enhancing oral fluency development in higher education contexts. Throughout the research process, the researcher adopted a facilitative and dialogic stance rather than an evaluative or authoritative one, acting as a collaborative inquirer interested in learners' experiences rather than as an assessor of their performance. In this way, both the researcher and the teacher lenses were engaged reflexively to enrich the study while remaining attentive to power relations within the research context (Brookfield, 2017).

Participants

In phenomenological research, three to fifteen participants are usually selected from a heterogeneous group who have all experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Accordingly, all students enrolled in the English Speaking Skills I course were informed about the study. From those who volunteered to participate, 10

undergraduate students, five male and five female, were selected with ages ranging from 18 to 22. While selecting participants, students' previous English II course grades were also considered to ensure that the voices of unsuccessful, average, and successful learners could be represented in the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected during the fall term of the 2024–2025 academic year through one-on-one semi-structured interviews to elicit students' subjective experiences regarding oral fluency in English. A semi-structured interview form consisting of four main open-ended questions was used. The questions addressed students' experiences of speaking English, their understandings and definitions of oral fluency, factors they perceived as shaping or constraining their fluency development, and their views on classroom practices and conditions that support their fluency development. The interview questions were aligned with the main questions guiding the study and formulated as follows:

- Can you describe your previous experiences with using spoken English?
- What does speaking English fluently mean to you?
- What factors do you think influence your ability to speak English fluently?
- In your opinion, what classroom practices or learning conditions help you improve your oral fluency?

Follow-up probing questions such as "Can you give an example?" and "Why do you think that is?" were included to elicit clarification and depth where necessary. The interview form was reviewed by an expert in English language teaching to ensure clarity and alignment with the aims. All interviews were conducted face-to-face by the researcher in a quiet room on campus. The interviews were scheduled over several weeks during the semester to allow time for reflection and emerging insights between interviews. They were audio-recorded after obtaining informed consent from the participants and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. As the participants' first language is Turkish, the interviews were conducted in their mother tongue to enable them to express their views in detail and to avoid psychological and linguistic constraints that might arise from using English. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and excerpts used in reporting were translated into English and checked for accuracy by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed inductively following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis phases since the aim was to reveal patterns of meaning across participants' accounts and to develop a thematic representation of learners' experiences and perceptions of oral fluency. In the first phase, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the dataset while recording initial notes and reflections. In the second phase, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments of data that reflected participants' experiences, beliefs, and perceived influences on their oral fluency development. In the third phase, initial codes were analyzed and sorted into potential themes with their relevant sub-themes. In the fourth phase, potential themes were reviewed and refined after checking their internal coherence and consistency with the entire dataset. In the fifth phase, the themes were clearly defined and named. In the final phase, the themes were organized and presented with analytic descriptions and illustrative quotations from the data as evidence.

The data were managed and coded using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 software to support systematic data organization, coding process, and the development of themes. To reflect learners' voices through their actual remarks, *in vivo* coding was employed (Saldaña, 2021). Finally, to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis, an independent parallel coding process was conducted by a second researcher with expertise in English language teaching. The two coding schemes were then compared to identify areas of convergence and divergence, and any discrepancies were discussed and resolved until agreement was reached.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies recommended in the literature were followed to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Brink, 1993). In the study, thick descriptions of the procedures and detailed information about the settings and participants were provided. All the stages of the study, with its culminating results, were checked by another independent researcher who specialized in English language teaching. For member checking, the interpretations of transcribed data were shared with the participants and feedback was requested to ensure representativeness and accuracy of the results.

Research Ethics

Before commencing the study, ethical approval was obtained. In analyzing and reporting data, each participant was assigned aliases and numbers to protect their anonymity i.e. S1 for Student 1. All sorts of private and personal data about the participants, other individuals or institutions were concealed to ensure confidentiality.

Findings

Thematic analysis of participants' responses yielded four major themes, namely "negative impact of previous learning experiences on oral fluency," "transactional conceptions of oral fluency," "interacting constraints on oral fluency," and "building ideal classroom conditions for oral fluency". Themes 1 and 2 primarily address RQ1 by illuminating learners' prior experiences with oral fluency and their conceptualizations of what it means to be fluent. Themes 3 and 4 respond to RQ2 by capturing the cognitive, social, affective factors and pedagogical conditions that learners perceive as critical for their oral fluency development. Table 1 below presents these major themes with their descriptions, sub-themes and illustrative quotes.

Table 1.
Themes, Sub-themes and Illustrative Quotes

Theme	Description	Sub-theme	Illustrative Quote
1. Negative impact of previous learning experiences on oral fluency	Participants' experiences regarding oral fluency are limited mainly due to poor language education, albeit they perceive fluency as a valuable goal and make personal efforts to achieve it.	-Lack of speaking practice	S10: "Would it sound too strange if I say they didn't teach us anything about speaking English in high school? We never spoke about it at all!"
		-Self-directed attempts to develop fluency beyond the classroom	S6: "I mostly try to learn from movies or books. Sometimes, I read aloud and listen to audiobooks. This is how I try to improve myself a bit."
2. Transactional conceptions of oral fluency	Most participants conceptualize fluency as an individual, performance-based delivery centered on linguistic features.	-Fluency as rapid speech production	S5: "Fluency means speaking fast, like your mother tongue without thinking about where to put the elements in a sentence."
		-Linguistic knowledge as the basis for oral fluency	S4: "Knowledge of words is really important to speak fluently. And not only that, but you must also know how to put these words together as well."
3. Interacting constraints on oral fluency	Participants think that cognitive, social and affective factors all play a role in determining their degree of oral fluency.	-L1-based cognitive processing	S8: "When I try to speak in English, the sentences I want to say come to my mind in Turkish. I really struggle and hesitate as I try to translate these into English."
		-Interlocutor effect	S3: "You can't talk fluently to everyone. It depends on the people and the way they see you. But you can talk about anything with a friend as you can even say silly things and make mistakes."
		-Emotional dysregulation	S8: "It causes me stress when I struggle to express myself. This, in turn, makes me even more anxious and less fluent."
4. Building ideal classroom conditions for oral fluency	Participants believe that exposure to the target language combined with individualized instruction leads to higher oral fluency gains.	-L2 use	S1: "I really appreciate it when teachers use English as they teach us. Fluency can only be taught through speaking English not your own language."
		-Individualized instruction	S2: "Individuality is important for learning. I learn better when there are fewer people in the classroom. Then, each of us can take turns and find a chance to express ourselves."

Theme 1: Negative Impact of Previous Learning Experiences on Oral Fluency

This theme demonstrates how participants' prior language learning experiences have constrained their oral fluency development, particularly due to limited opportunities for spoken interaction and an overemphasis on form-focused instruction. Under this theme, two interrelated sub-themes were identified, namely "lack of speaking practice" and "self-directed attempts to develop fluency beyond the classroom."

Sub-theme 1: Lack of Speaking Practice

The majority of participants voiced their concerns over the current language education system for not giving enough weight to the teaching of fluency, especially during the early ages. Participants strongly argued that attaining oral fluency isn't likely without having enough speaking opportunities:

“We spent 12 years in primary school, middle school, and high school, where we wrote on the board, read, memorized things, and moved on without speaking English. This is why I insist that fluency teaching must start at an early age. You can't force people to speak after they come to a certain age. You can't learn to speak fluently when you don't have some practice with other people. Unfortunately, the education system can't provide this enough.” (S3)

Students frequently reported that English was not used as the language of instruction, and they were taught about the rules of grammar at elementary levels, with little or no clear focus on oral fluency. Lacking regular speaking practice at school, many participants could not take advantage of real-world opportunities they encountered and often felt inadequate when communicating in English. S8's remarks below represent his discontent about his previous educational experience and how it had almost no practical use during a real-life encounter:

“In high school, English was hardly used in the classroom. The teacher would write elementary-level activities about grammar on the board and then tell us to solve them. So, we wrote in English, but we didn't speak it. This way of teaching didn't help my oral fluency even a bit. Once, I met a tourist at the bus station, who gave me a real chance to practice my English. He asked me for directions and information on how to travel around. I tried hard, but struggled to speak. This experience made me realize how much I lacked fluency.” (S8)

Together, these accounts indicate that participants' earlier educational experiences could not provide the interactional conditions necessary for fluency development, leading to a perceived gap between formal language education and the ability to use English fluently in real-time communication.

Sub-theme 2: Self-directed Attempts to Develop Fluency beyond the Classroom

Even though students complained about the quality of their language education, could only find a few occasions to speak, and considered themselves disfluent speakers, results revealed that they acknowledged the importance of being fluent, viewing it as a valuable goal to be achieved. Students stated that being a fluent speaker of English is particularly significant for enabling them to “communicate with other people,” “live abroad” and “make a career.”

“Being fluent is an important advantage for my career. English is already the common language in the world. It doesn't matter much when you don't know how to speak other languages because you know you can find someone speaking English wherever you go. I mean, your life also becomes more fluent if you are fluent. I wouldn't like to experience communication problems in my life or in my career.” (S7)

Having been provided minimal speaking opportunities by school education but being aware of the importance of being a fluent speaker, students relied on their own efforts such as “watching English series,” “listening to songs,” “reading books,” or “chatting with friends” in order to compensate for their lack of speaking practice:

“I try to improve myself by practicing and speaking more. For example, I speak English with my friends, which helps greatly. Sometimes, I watch TV shows or movies, and if a word or expression sticks to my mind or if I come across some phrasal verbs that are difficult to understand, I check the subtitles and I try to translate those. That's how I first learned what “a piece of cake” means.” (S5)

However, as seen in the quotation below, such personal, self-directed efforts seem to only partially contribute to enhancing students' oral fluency, particularly by extending their lexical range or increasing their knowledge of idioms. Students recognize that such undirected work may not be enough to achieve higher oral fluency levels, indicating a need to get guidance on how to develop their fluency skills in a more effective way:

“I've been watching series with subtitles to improve my fluency. I also read some English books, but I found them quite dull. I'm not sure what else I can do. I still have all my language learning books, but haven't looked at them in a while. It's a matter of time, and I doubt how much I can achieve. How can I know if the way I study is right and effective and if I'm truly making progress or not?” (S9)

Theme 2: Transactional Conceptions of Oral Fluency

This theme captures how students conceptualize English oral fluency and how they perceive its constituent elements. It consists of two sub-themes: (1) fluency as rapid speech production, and (2) linguistic knowledge as the foundational basis of oral fluency.

Sub-theme 1: Fluency as Rapid Speech Production

Findings indicate that most learners adopt a predominantly transactional and form-oriented understanding of oral fluency, equating fluency with speed, smoothness, and the absence of hesitation. Fluent speech was described as continuous and uninterrupted, with minimal pauses or hesitation markers:

“For me, fluency means speaking without any interruptions. For example, you might say a word, stop, and say words like ‘Ihm,’ ‘uh,’ or ‘emm’ as you think and try to go on again. That’s not fluent. But when you speak as if everything lines up and comes out smoothly one after another, that’s fluency, in my opinion. It should come out of your mouth all at once, and you should be able to say what you’re thinking without pausing.” (S4)

Within this conception, speaking English fluently is often considered similar to “speaking like one’s mother tongue”. As the quotation below reveals, students heavily emphasized the “ease of speaking” when they made this comparison. Accordingly, they often defined English oral fluency by referring to how they use their mother tongue naturally and effortlessly:

“Being fluent is speaking English the same way we speak Turkish, just as we can comfortably express ourselves when talking to friends. I understand fluency as speaking English with the same ease, without struggling or stumbling. It’s about conveying the first thought that comes to mind without difficulty. I want to speak English as naturally as I speak Turkish.” (S8)

Whereas the majority of students associated fluency with “uninterrupted speech” and “ease of speaking,” thereby foregrounding its transactional and production-oriented dimensions, a smaller group highlighted its interactional nature, emphasizing the importance of sustaining conversation and ensuring mutual comprehension. Within this perspective, fluency is understood as a co-constructed, two-sided process rather than a one-way act of speech production:

“When I have a dialogue with someone, I also pay a lot of attention to what the other person says. Yes, at times it’s important to speak fast, but the speech should still be comprehensible to others. For me, it’s not about knowing the language perfectly and speaking it that way, but rather about conveying, explaining, and communicating things to the other person. So, the key is to maintain the flow of the dialogue and keep it going.” (S1)

These imply that while the dominant fluency orientation among students is transactional, there is also an emerging awareness among some learners of interactional fluency as co-constructed meaning-making.

Sub-theme 2: Linguistic Knowledge as the Basis for Oral Fluency

According to students’ accounts, knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax in particular, constitutes the primary foundation for fluent speech. Students repeatedly linked their (dis)fluency to limitations in their lexical and syntactic resources:

“First of all, for any language, you need to learn the sentence structure, especially how a sentence is formed in that language, and where to put the words when expressing yourself. Understanding how these work and knowing the grammar is actually the essence of fluent speech. If you know the vocabulary and how to form sentences, then I think you can speak fluently.” (S9)

In addition to grammar and vocabulary, some students also highlighted the importance of pronunciation and intelligibility for the emergence of fluent speech. From this perspective, fluent speech requires not only producing language smoothly but also producing it in a way that is comprehensible and recognizable to others, particularly in terms of accent, stress, and clarity of articulation.

“Speaking fluency is about knowing how to combine sounds to form words and how they come out of your mouth. Not everyone can speak or pronounce them in the same way. When they are pronounced correctly, then it becomes understandable and fluent.” (S1)

Moreover, beyond linguistic resources, a small number of students mentioned topic familiarity and content knowledge as supporting conditions for the emergence of oral fluency, suggesting that being able to speak fluently also depends on having something to say. In this view, familiarity with the topic facilitates access to relevant vocabulary and language structures, thereby enabling smoother speech production:

“Being familiar with the topic matters. You hear English, you research it, you memorize vocabulary, and you learn how grammar works and how sentences should be structured. When you know these, you become more willing to communicate, especially if the topic interests you. You become fluent this way by forming a few sentences at a time on a topic you can talk about.” (S6)

Theme 3: Interacting Constraints on Oral Fluency

This theme encapsulates students' views regarding the cognitive, social, and emotional constraints they experience that impact their oral fluency development and contains three sub-themes. While expressing their thoughts on what influences their degree of fluency the most, students frequently mentioned "L1-based cognitive processing," "interlocutor effect," and "emotional dysregulation."

Sub-theme 1: L1-based Cognitive Processing

As implied by their comments, L1-based cognitive processing seems to cause a heavy cognitive load for students during the sentence formation process as their minds are kept too busy with multiple operations at the same time, such as retrieving the rules of grammar, searching for the right words and deciding on the proper sentence order. This process seems to take much longer when students try to shift between languages or make "mental translations", which eventually results in disfluent speech and frustrations:

"I first think in Turkish about what I want to say in my mind. Then I try to say it in English, but I feel stuck, which leaves me speechless for a while. I start to think, 'OK. I probably can't make it,' and that's where I'm blocked. Maybe it's because I don't know the meaning of a word, or it can be because I can't put the sentence in order. Finally, the sentence comes out as if it were a Turkish sentence. I think I focus so much on Turkish sentence structure that it finally comes out that way." (S10)

Students agree that such a planning process involving translations slows down their fluency to a great extent. However, it seems that they draw on translating as a way to ensure the accuracy of their speech, despite admitting that one-to-one equivalence between languages is hard to achieve:

"I think about the sentence in Turkish. Then, I separate the subject, object, and all other elements. That's why I struggle and go slow. I try to find the right place for everything in my mind, and that's how I speak. I think about how to form the sentence for a long time to avoid any grammatical mistakes. So, I don't think it's good to think in Turkish. Grammatically, it sometimes works, but when it comes to meaning, it often doesn't." (S6)

Students' accounts imply that L1-based cognitive mediation serves as a control mechanism for accuracy while interrupting fluent speech production at the same time.

Sub-theme 2: Interlocutor Effect

"Interlocutor effect" emerged as another prominent factor influencing one's fluency. Concerns regarding "being judged by others" due to language mistakes highly resonated in participants' views. The participant's feeling of unease while speaking among strangers is evident in the excerpt below:

"I can speak fluently if I don't feel like an outsider, for example, when there's no one around who might make me feel bad for saying something wrong. I'm much more fluent when I'm with a close friend, as I don't hold back, even if I say something wrong. I know they won't judge me because of such things. But with a stranger, I keep worrying about saying something inappropriate." (S4)

However, results also revealed that some participants hold completely different opinions, as they like talking to unfamiliar interlocutors, especially foreigners. The motive behind this choice seems to be related to self-consciousness, being put in the spotlight, and caring about social identity:

"I can speak English more fluently at work as I deal with foreigners there. My speech is more fluent because my self-consciousness isn't that high when I'm around people I don't know. Maybe it is because I think I'll only see these people once, and we probably won't talk again afterward. I feel the same way when I talk to people online or give a presentation in front of a crowd." (S2)

Additionally, some students expressed that they feel more comfortable when talking to foreigners because they know their disfluency will not be judged, their level of speech will be adjusted, and their mistakes will be tolerated since they would be treated as novice speakers of English:

"I wouldn't want to make language mistakes when talking to people I often see. For example, speaking English abroad isn't a problem for me. They would know I'm a foreigner, my fluency is bad, and I'm trying to learn how to speak. They would understand that I can't speak fluently and talk to me accordingly. I can't talk to Turkish people whose fluency is better than mine that way." (S6)

Another participant voiced similar concerns about speaking English with Turkish speakers. Her views implied that previous speaking experience and cultural foreign language teaching practices focusing on learners' accuracy and error correction might be an underlying factor for developing such an attitude:

“I feel more relaxed when talking to a foreigner. I find the things a foreigner says sweet, and I believe that a foreigner will feel the same about my mistakes or slips of my tongue. I feel more nervous when I speak English with Turkish people. They directly focus on detecting the errors in my speech. The only people I spoke to were my language teachers, and whenever I said something, they immediately corrected me. Maybe that’s why I feel this way.” (S10)

These contrasting accounts indicate that familiarity with interlocutors does not influence all learners in the same way, and fluency is shaped by how learners position themselves socially in interaction, particularly in relation to perceived judgment, face concerns, and expectations of tolerance from interlocutors.

Sub-theme 3: Emotional Dysregulation

“Emotional dysregulation” was highlighted as another factor that substantially impacts students’ oral fluency development. Students stated that heightened emotions felt while speaking English can determine the degree of fluency. According to the results, students often feel ‘shy, stressed, anxious, or excited’ when they speak, which decreases their oral fluency considerably:

“When something exciting or bad happens, it directly affects my mood, and I can’t express myself. That’s my worst trait when it comes to speaking fluently. I must suppress and control my emotions, but I can’t. When I know it’s my turn to speak next in class, I get excited as I start waiting in anticipation. But if someone asks me something incidentally when I’m calm, I speak more fluently.” (S6)

As reflected in the excerpt above, even though students are aware of the importance of controlling their emotional states, they fail to do so as they struggle to “regulate their emotions.” Perceiving “stress” as a major impediment to her oral fluency, another participant expressed how things turned around when her stress was eased after getting help from the interlocutor:

“I went to an English course to find out my speaking level, and they said, ‘Let’s have some practice.’ I was so stressed that my hands started shaking, and I forgot my mother’s name. When the interviewer saw how stressful I was, he stopped the interview and tried to soothe me. Then I thought I could do it because everything was in my head. After that moment, I could speak a bit, even though my speech wasn’t fluent. Still, it made me believe that I can speak much more fluently as long as I can deal with my stress.” (S10)

Overall, these accounts demonstrate that emotional arousal, anxiety, stress and anticipatory tension in particular, can disrupt cognitive processing and reduce learners’ willingness and ability to sustain fluent speech, indicating that affective regulation is integral to oral fluency performance.

Theme 4: Building Ideal Classroom Conditions for Oral Fluency

This theme captures students’ experiences, evaluative judgments, and expectations about how to promote oral fluency in a classroom setting and consists of two sub-themes: “L2 use” and “individualized instruction.” L2 use seems to be perceived as central for building a language learning environment, and individualized instruction is often emphasized as a way of recognizing learners’ individuality by paying attention to their voices, needs, and feelings. Each sub-theme is further explained with quotations below.

Sub-theme 1: L2 Use

Students believe that using and hearing English in the classroom helps enhance their oral fluency by maximizing language exposure, extending vocabulary range, and improving pronunciation. Teachers’ L2 use is also seen as crucial, as they serve as model speakers and help students learn incidentally:

“If you want to be fluent, you should be immersed in that language and spend time among its speakers. For example, my brother went abroad, and his fluency started to improve suddenly. A similar impact happens when English is spoken in the classroom. Even if we don’t fully understand what is being said, we pay close attention to the sounds and the teacher’s speaking style. We also check the meaning and pronunciation of words we could catch. This way, not only does the ear become familiar with the melody and rhythm of the language, but we also learn implicitly.” (S4)

Participants frequently emphasized the central role L2 use plays in creating a speaking community. For students, active use of L2 in the classroom serves as a catalyst for group dynamics by encouraging them to speak, as reflected in the participants’ views below:

“In my opinion, successful fluency teaching depends on making students speak English in the classroom. If students see everyone around them trying to speak as much as possible, they’ll try to do the same. Once such an environment is built, people start to think, ‘If so many others can speak, why can’t I?’ It’ll boost your confidence and self-respect. This, in turn, will trigger the desire to speak and facilitate learning.” (S7)

Although most participants agreed on the benefits of using L2 in the classroom, a few mentioned some positive effects of L1 use on their fluency development, which implies that the judicious use of L1 can be beneficial, especially in supporting students' understanding and forming semantic links between languages:

"It is more beneficial for me to hear the Turkish version of the same speech so I can see exactly where I get lost while speaking. It also facilitates following utterances and helps me clarify obscure meanings. This way, I can also understand how meanings can be converted from one language into another." (S8)

Sub-theme 2: Individualized Instruction

As emerged in the participants' views, another effective way to foster students' oral fluency development in the classroom is "individualized instruction," mainly characterized by giving direct attention to each learner, asking personal questions, and providing one-to-one speaking opportunities. S10 referred to such aspects of teaching, stressing how important it is for learners to be recognized and addressed as individuals within the classroom community:

"Being called by my name and having one-on-one interaction with the teacher is incredibly helpful. During a question-and-answer activity in class, the teacher asked a question about me. Although I'm surprised and hesitated at first, I could respond in English. While I may not have formed a perfect sentence, I combined a few words to express myself. It made me realize oral fluency can indeed be taught at school if we are given more opportunities for individual practice." (S10)

However, students also acknowledged that such individualized support is difficult to realize in typical large classrooms due to the high student population. Similar concerns about losing face and accompanying negative emotions were also reiterated:

"The classroom is a bit crowded, whereas I speak much more fluently one-to-one. Even if I know the answer, I hesitate because I don't want people to laugh at me if I make a mistake. The number of people in the room really determines what teachers can offer in terms of speaking practice. When there are only a few students, you can have closer contact with the teacher and get more private instruction meeting your needs. You can talk about yourself and share your views much more easily." (S5)

In this respect, populated classrooms were often described as counterproductive environments for improving oral fluency since they can lead to numerous challenges, such as increased noise levels, poor acoustics, distractions, and reduced opportunities for individual participation:

"When I hear other voices around me as I speak, I hesitate. It makes me feel like I'm not being listened to and my words aren't important or cared about, which lowers my desire to speak. To have a healthy conversation, two people should clearly hear each other. For me, that's the most important thing." (S6)

Highlighting the dual importance of L2-mediated community building and individualized pedagogical support, this theme demonstrates that understanding learners' expectations of oral fluency instruction is crucial for addressing the mismatch between existing classroom practices and optimal learning conditions.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how undergraduate students experience and conceptualize oral fluency in English and what they perceive as important for its emergence and development. Drawing on the four themes identified in the analysis, this discussion interprets the findings in relation to existing research on L2 oral fluency and pedagogy. The findings show how learners' prior educational experiences, their understandings of oral fluency, the cognitive, social, and emotional challenges they face, and their expectations for more supportive classroom conditions are closely interconnected. As the findings indicate, oral fluency development is not merely a matter of linguistic competence, but a socially and emotionally situated process shaped by learners' histories, beliefs, and their perceptions of learning environments.

The findings regarding students' prior oral fluency experiences indicate that not having enough speaking opportunities in and out of school is a major drawback to oral fluency development. As a result, students hardly experienced and therefore mentioned any educational practices specifically addressing oral fluency. This finding is similar to research conducted in other educational settings reporting that early fluency teaching substantially shapes fluency development, and school education cannot contribute much to oral fluency largely due to minimal speaking opportunities and inadequate language exposure (Deshmukh, 2024). In this respect, the findings support the earlier claims that oral fluency remains a neglected component of ELT in many contexts (Rossiter et al., 2010). The findings also revealed that while students perceive fluency as a valuable goal and try to compensate for their lack of speaking practice, they need better guidance on collaborative and self-directed strategies to promote it beyond the classroom (Buitrago, 2017).

In relation to students' conceptualizations of oral fluency, the findings revealed a dominant transactional orientation, in which fluency is primarily linked with rapid and uninterrupted speech. Students generally associated oral fluency with speaking naturally and effortlessly, like speaking one's mother tongue, and viewed hesitations or false starts as signs of disfluent speech. Accordingly, most learners considered linguistic knowledge of words and syntax as the essential constituents of oral fluency. These suggest that students perceive oral fluency mainly as an individual, transactional, and linguistically driven process, rather than a jointly constructed, collaborative activity (Peltonen, 2024). At the same time, a smaller number of learners extended this linguistic perspective to include listener-oriented dimensions such as accentedness, comprehensibility, and intelligibility, indicating their awareness of perceived fluency (Chau & Huensch, 2025). In addition, topic familiarity was identified by some learners as an enabling condition for fluent speech, suggesting that fluency is also linked to having meaningful content to convey, which was supported by previous research (Qiu, 2019).

Findings related to the factors influencing the emergence and development of oral fluency indicate that dysfluencies in speech do not stem from a single source but rather emerge from the dynamic interaction between cognitive processing demands, social concerns, and emotional dysregulation. Regarding cognitive constraints, students reported that they often struggle to transform their thoughts into corresponding linguistic forms due to L1-based cognitive processing which inhibits their fluency to a great extent by creating a heavy cognitive load. These findings are consistent with research demonstrating that linguistic resources and processing speed substantially determine utterance fluency (Takizawa, 2024) and high cognitive load resulting from language encoding and formulation demands can impair especially less proficient learners' oral fluency (Peters et al., 2024). On the other hand, using chunks or formulaic sequences, which can ease the automatic retrieval of lexical units and speed the delivery of speech, was completely missing in students' accounts, suggesting a gap in their strategic repertoire for managing speech production. (Mohammadi & Enayati, 2018; Vacalares & G. Ong, 2024).

Alongside cognitive demands, socio-affective factors such as (un)familiarity with speakers and emotional dysregulation were identified as other major constraints determining students' oral fluency development. Students' preference for speaking with familiar or unfamiliar interlocutors appears to be directly linked to their level of self-consciousness and fear of evaluation. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that self-consciousness can be a main barrier to students' willingness to communicate in English due to the risk of social rejection (Nguyen, 2024). Similarly, anxiety, low confidence, and fear of negative evaluation have been found among psychological constraints that can impede oral fluency (Dauba & Jullanda, 2024). These self-presentational concerns and social pressures regarding correct language use can be attributed to perfectionist tendencies among students (Flett et al., 2016) since they associated L2 oral fluency with fast and flawless speech free of any false starts, hesitations, and mistakes, which is possibly shaped by cultural expectations and their prior school education giving importance to grammar, accuracy and correct language use.

Finally, with regard to pedagogical implications, the findings highlight learners' strong preference for classroom environments that combine sustained L2 use with individualized pedagogical support. In this view, using English was found to be highly effective as a way to maximize language exposure and help learners feel like a part of a real second language (L2) speaking community. Results indicate that frequent exposure to the target language in the classroom may enhance students' word recognition skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, and overall fluency by providing meaningful input, as found by other research (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). It has been reported that using L2 as the medium of instruction may help build an interactive English environment where students can find opportunities to imitate other speakers, initiate dialogues, and discuss various topics (Chou, 2018). However, judicious use of the first language (L1) was found helpful by some students, particularly for clarifying meaning and understanding how expressions are converted into another language, a finding which is supported by other research (Yüzlü & Atay, 2020). In addition, students emphasized the importance of individualized attention, such as one-to-one interaction, personalized questioning, and smaller class sizes, as key conditions for building confidence and enabling participation. This result signifies the importance of differentiated and learner-responsive pedagogies that take into account learners' emotional needs, proficiency levels, and communicative readiness which are welcomed by students and found to be effective in promoting oral fluency development in classroom settings (Menson, 2024).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored English oral fluency qualitatively by delving into students' prior experiences, conceptions, and the determinants and conditions influencing its development and learning. The findings imply that poor experiences lead to limited oral fluency conceptions, and cognitive, social, and affective factors all influence and have complementary roles in the emergence and development of oral fluency. In this sense, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of oral fluency as a situated, socially mediated and psychologically conditioned process. Moreover, learners' expectations and evaluations of oral fluency instruction point to the need to create classroom environments that foster L2-mediated

interaction and provide individualized support responsive to learners' needs, identities, and emotional states. The findings suggest several pedagogical implications, which can be summarized as follows:

As the findings indicate, English oral fluency remains underemphasized in many learners' prior schooling. Therefore, English language courses and programs should systematically integrate regular speaking opportunities as well as activities that specifically target oral fluency into classroom practice from early stages of instruction. Since learners predominantly conceptualize fluency as rapid, error-free speech, instruction should explicitly address broader, interactional, and communicative dimensions of oral fluency by including turn-taking, listener awareness, repair strategies, and co-construction of meaning. Raising awareness of these dimensions may help learners reduce their perfectionist tendencies. Learners' overreliance on L1-based mental translations at the formulation stage also indicates a need for pedagogical practices that help develop automaticity and lexical retrieval to reduce cognitive load and support faster and smoother speech production. Given the strong influence of self-consciousness, fear of judgment, and emotional dysregulation, teachers should create low-anxiety, supportive speaking environments, especially by normalizing speech errors and encouraging peer support rather than peer judgment. Lastly, while building a strong L2 community, teachers should remain consistently aware of and responsive to learners' differing needs, readiness levels, and affective states.

The present study has several limitations. First, the participants were selected from a single school and department, which may restrict the diversity of experiences and perspectives represented in the data. Consequently, due to the small sample size and the context-specific nature of the study, the findings may not be generalizable to other undergraduate students or educational settings. Additionally, as the study relies solely on interviews for data collection, the findings are based on participants' self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by factors such as memory recall or personal biases. Future research could strengthen and extend these findings by triangulating data through classroom observations, reflective journals, or learner diaries. Investigating teachers' beliefs and practices regarding oral fluency, as well as other stakeholders' perspectives, may lead to more comprehensive and comparative insights. Examining oral fluency development from broader psychological and cultural perspectives, and exploring how personalized and individualized instruction can be effectively integrated into fluency pedagogy, would contribute valuable insights to the field.

Ethics Committee Approval Information

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Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Akıcı konuşma, İngilizce öğretimi alanında, yabancı dil yeterliliğinin en belirgin göstergelerinden biri olarak kabul edilmektedir. Özellikle öğrenenlerin iletişimsel yeterliklerinin geliştirilmesine yönelik artan talep ve buna paralel olarak dilin iletişimsel yönlerine öncelik veren İngilizce öğretim yaklaşımlarının yaygınlaşmasıyla birlikte, öğrencilerin yabancı dilde akıcı konuşmalarını geliştirmek dünya genelindeki çoğu dil öğretim programının temel hedeflerinden biri haline gelmiştir (Yang, 2014). Ortak Avrupa Dil Referans Çerçevesi gibi kılavuzlar, İngilizce dil sınavları ve değerlendirme sistemleri de akıcı konuşmanın dil programlarına dâhil edilmesi gerekliliğini pekiştirirken, öğrencilerin artık düşük yeterlik düzeylerinde bile belirli bir akıcılık seviyesi göstermeleri beklenmektedir (McCarthy, 2010). Buna rağmen, öğrencilerin akıcı İngilizce konuşma konusundaki eksikliği pedagojik, psikolojik ve kültürel olmak üzere birçok faktörle ilişkilendirilen yaygın bir sorun durumundadır (Fan, 2020). Üniversite ortamlarında yürütülen araştırmalar, öğrencilerin İngilizce akıcılığını engelleyen başlıca etkenler arasında zayıf dilbilgisi, sınıf içi konuşma fırsatlarının yetersizliği, ana dil (L1) etkisi ve hata yapma korkusu bulunduğunu ortaya koymuştur (Gul vd., 2022).

İngilizcede akıcı konuşma, son yıllarda giderek artan bir ilgi görmüş ve çok yönlü bir araştırma alanı haline gelmiş olsa da, bu araştırmaların öğretmenler tarafından sınıf ortamına aktarımını sağlayacak pedagojik yansımaları sınırlı kalmıştır (Foster, 2020). Bu sınırlı etki genellikle kavramın kendi belirsizliği kadar akıcılığın konuşma becerisiyle eşanlamı olarak ele alınmasına ve böylece kendine özgü doğasının göz ardı edilmesine bağlanmaktadır (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Sonuçta, akıcı konuşma üzerine yapılan çok sayıda araştırma esas olarak akıcı konuşmayı sağlayan değişkenleri ve ölçütleri tespit etmeye odaklanmış, buna karşın pedagojik boyutları inceleyen çalışmalar sınırlı kalmıştır (Robayo Acuña, 2025). Özellikle, öğretmenlerin ve öğrencilerin yabancı dilde akıcı konuşmanın ne olduğu, nasıl geliştiği ve sınıf ortamında en iyi nasıl öğretilebileceğine dair kendi anlayışları ve deneyimleri yeterince araştırılmamış bir konudur (Wright & Tavakoli, 2020). Öğrenenlerin deneyimlerinin ve inançlarının dil gelişimindeki önemli rolü dikkate alındığında (Dörnyei, 2019), akıcı konuşmanın öğrenciler için gerçekte ne anlam ifade ettiği ve nasıl oluştuğu hakkında daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç duyulduğu ifade edilebilir. Bu tür araştırmaların öğrencilerin dil gelişim süreçlerine ışık tutarak akıcı konuşmanın sınıf içinde daha etkili bir şekilde öğretilmesini de desteklemesi beklenmektedir (Tamás, 2024).

Bu çerçevede mevcut araştırma, akıcı konuşma konusundaki araştırmalara birkaç açıdan katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Öncelikle, konuşmada akıcılığı nicel olarak ölçmeye odaklanan yaygın araştırma geleneğinin aksine, bu nitel araştırma, konuşmada akıcılık kavramını öğrencilerin bakış açısından anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Öğrencilerin yaşanmış deneyimlerinden yola çıkarak, akıcılığın öğrenciler tarafından nasıl algılandığını ve kavramsallaştırdığını, ayrıca akıcı konuşma konusunda gelişimlerinde etkili olan destekleyici veya engelleyici faktörleri ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir. Bunun yanı sıra, öğrencilerin görüşlerine göre akıcı konuşmalarının geliştirilmesine yönelik etkili pedagojik uygulamaları da ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu şekilde, akıcılığın kavramsallaştırılması, gelişimi, öğrenilmesi ve öğretilmesi arasındaki ilişkiyi kurmaya çalışan bu araştırma, akıcı konuşma konusuna öğrenci merkezli bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır.

Yöntem

Araştırma, öğrencilerin akıcı İngilizce konuşma olgusuna ilişkin deneyimlerinin özünü ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla gerçekleştirildiğinden fenomenolojik araştırma deseni tercih edilmiştir. Böylece araştırma Türkiye'nin kuzeybatısında yer alan bir devlet üniversitesinde öğrenim gören ve İngilizce konuşma becerileri dersini alan beş erkek, beş kadın olmak üzere toplam on adet sivil havacılık programı öğrencisi ile yürütülmüştür. Veriler 2024-2025 akademik yılının güz dönemi boyunca yarı yapılandırılmış birebir görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Soruların geçerliliği için İngilizce öğretimi alanından bir uzmanın görüşüne başvurulmuştur. Görüşmeler öğrencilerin onaylarıyla ses kaydına alınmış, her biri ortalama 45-60 dakika civarı sürmüştür. Elde edilen veriler, Braun ve Clarke'ın (2006) tematik analiz yaklaşımı izlenerek çözümlenmiştir.

Bulgular

Tematik analiz sonucunda, “önceki olumsuz öğrenme deneyimlerinin akıcı konuşmaya etkisi”, “aktarımsal akıcı konuşma kavramlaştırmaları”, “akıcı konuşmayı belirleyen etkileşimli unsurlar” ve “akıcı konuşma için ideal sınıf koşullarının oluşturulması” olmak üzere dört ana temaya ulaşılmıştır.

“Önceki olumsuz öğrenme deneyimlerinin akıcı konuşmaya etkisi teması”, “konuşma pratiği eksikliği” ve “akıcı konuşma açığını telafi çabaları” olmak üzere iki alt tema içermektedir. Bu tema altında katılımcılar, okul içi ve dışında yeterli konuşma fırsatına sahip olmadıklarını belirtirken, bu durum, öğrencilerin akıcı konuşmalarını geliştirebilecek anlamlı deneyimlerden mahrum kalmalarına yol açmıştır. Bununla beraber bulgular, öğrencilerin akıcı konuşmayı değerli bir hedef olarak algıladıklarını, akıcı konuşmayı sağlamada yetersiz buldukları okul eğitiminin eksikliklerini giderecek bireysel çalışmalara başvurduklarını ancak bunların sistematik bir şekilde ilerlemediğini ortaya koymuştur.

“Aktarımsal akıcı konuşma kavramlaştırmaları” teması “hızlı konuşma” ve “akıcı konuşmanın temeli olarak dilbilgisi” olmak üzere iki alt temaya sahiptir. Bu temaya ilişkin olarak katılımcıların çoğu akıcılığı, “hızlı ve kesintisiz konuşma” olarak tanımlamış, genellikle ana dil gibi ve hatasız konuşmayı akıcı konuşmanın göstergesi olarak görmüşlerdir. Öğrenciler özellikle sözcük bilgisi, dilbilgisi ve sözdizimi gibi dilsel kaynakların akıcılık için en önemli unsurlar olduğunu belirtmişlerdir.

“Akıcı konuşmayı belirleyen etkileşimli unsurlar” teması içindeki katılımcı ifadeleri, bilişsel, sosyal ve duyuşsal faktörlerin, akıcılık gelişiminde belirleyici olduğunu göstermiştir. Bilişsel yönden katılımcılar, düşüncelerini hedef dile dönüştürme sürecinde sık sık çeviri yolunu tercih ettikleri için bilişsel yüke maruz kaldıklarından ve bu durumun akıcı konuşmalarını engellediğinden yakınmışlardır. “Konuşucu etkisi” ise akıcılıkta içinde bulunulan sosyal ortamın, beklentilerin ve aktörlerin etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir. Bazı öğrenciler tanıdık kişilerle konuşurken daha rahat olduklarını, yabancılarla konuşurken ise kaygı ve hata yapma korkusu yaşadıklarını belirtirken, bazı öğrenciler yabancılarla konuşurken yapacakları dil hatalarının yargılanmayacağını ya da bu kişileri bir daha görmeyeceklerini düşündüklerinden daha rahat olduklarını ifade etmişlerdir. “Duygu durumlarının düzenlenememesi” temasında öğrenciler, İngilizce konuşma sırasında hissettikleri karmaşık ve yoğun duygu durumlarını kontrol edemedikleri için konuşma güçlüğü yaşadıklarını ve bu durumun istedik ve akıcı biçimde konuşmalarına engel olduğunu vurgulamıştır.

“Akıcı konuşma için ideal sınıf koşullarının oluşturulması” teması, “hedef dil kullanımı” ve “bireyselleştirilmiş öğretim” olmak üzere iki alt tema içermektedir. Bu temada katılımcılar, sınıf ortamında İngilizcenin yaygın biçimde kullanımının bir yabancı dil ortamı oluşturarak akıcılığı artırmada önemli rol oynadığını vurgulamış, özellikle öğretimde hedef dili kullanmanın faydalarına değinmişlerdir. Bununla birlikte bazı öğrenciler, belirli amaçlarla kullanıldığında ana dilin de akıcılığı artırmada yararlı olabileceğini ileri sürmüştür. Ayrıca öğrenciler sınıf ortamında özellikle birebir konuşma fırsatlarının yaratılmasının akıcı konuşmalarına olumlu etkisi olduğunu belirtmişler, kendi duygu ve düşüncelerini rahat biçimde ifade edebilecekleri bir öğretim ortamı oluşturmanın gerekliliğini vurgulamışlardır.

Tartışma ve Sonuç

Araştırma sonuçları, okul içinde ve dışında yeterli konuşma fırsatına sahip olmamanın akıcı konuşmanın gelişimi açısından önemli bir dezavantaj olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bulgu, okullardaki eğitimin ancak sınırlı konuşma fırsatları sunabildiği ve dile yeteri kadar maruz kalınmaması nedeniyle akıcı konuşmaya fazla katkı sağlayamadığını aktaran diğer araştırmalarla benzerlik göstermektedir (Deshmukh, 2024). Bu sonuçtan, İngilizce öğretiminde akıcılığın halen ihmal edilen bir konu olduğu iddiasının öğrencilerin bakış açısından da doğrulandığı anlaşılmaktadır (Rossiter vd., 2010). Bulgular ayrıca, öğrencilerin akıcı konuşmayı değerli bir hedef olarak gördüklerini ve konuşma pratiği eksikliklerini telafi etmeye çalıştıklarını, ancak sınıf dışında akıcılığı geliştirmek için işbirlikçi ve öz yönelimli stratejiler konusunda daha iyi bir rehberliğe ihtiyaç duyduklarını ortaya koymuştur (Buitrago, 2017).

Öğrencilerin akıcı İngilizce konuşmaya ilişkin kavramsallaştırmaları açısından aktarımsal bakış açısı ön plana çıkarken, bu bakış altında öğrenciler akıcılığı hızlı ve kesintisiz konuşma ile bağdaştırmış, hatalı başlangıç ve duraksamaları akıcı olmayan konuşmanın bir parçası olarak değerlendirmiştir. Bu durum, öğrencilerin akıcı konuşmayı başta bireysel, aktarımsal ve dilbilgisel bir olgu olarak algıladıklarını, dinamik, sosyal ve işbirlikçi bir etkinlik olarak ise değerlendirmediklerini göstermektedir (Peltonen, 2024). Buna paralel olarak, öğrenciler sözcük bilgisi, söz dizimi ve dil bilgisi kuralları gibi dilsel kaynakları akıcı konuşmanın temel unsurları olarak değerlendirmiştir.

Araştırmada, ana dilde düşünerek İngilizce konuşma, konuşulan kişiye aşinalık ve duyguların düzenlenememesi gibi bilişsel, sosyal ve duygusal faktörler, akıcı konuşmanın gelişimini belirleyen etkili etmenler olarak tanımlanmıştır. Öğrencilerin İngilizce konuşma sürecinde Türkçe düşünceleri ve çeviri yoluna başvurmaları özellikle de İngilizce düzeyi düşük olan öğrencilerde yüksek bir bilişsel yük yaratarak akıcı konuşmalarının önüne geçmiştir. Akıcı yabancı dil konuşma üzerine yapılan diğer araştırmalar da, dilsel kaynakları verimli kullanabilme ve bilişsel işlemleri seri biçimde gerçekleştirmenin akıcılığı önemli ölçüde belirlediğini (Takizawa, 2024), dilde kodlama ve dönüştürme taleplerinden doğan fazla bilişsel yükün özellikle düşük dil yeterliliğine sahip öğrencilerin akıcı konuşmalarını olumsuz etkileyebileceğini göstermiştir (Peters vd., 2024). Öğrenciler söylemlerinde bilişsel işlem süreçlerini hızlandırıp otomatik bir hale getirerek akıcı konuşmayı önemli ölçüde artırdığı belirtilen kolay hatırlanabilir dil kalıpları, söz öbekleri ve formül dizilerinin kullanımı gibi yollara ise değinmemişlerdir (Mohammadi & Enayati, 2018; Vacalares & G. Ong, 2024).

Öğrencilerin tanıdık veya tanımadık kişilerle konuşma tercihleri, doğrudan öz bilinç düzeyleriyle ilişkili görünmektedir. Bu bulgu, öz bilincin sosyal reddedilme riski nedeniyle öğrencilerin İngilizce iletişim kurma istekliliğinin önündeki temel engellerden biri olabileceğini gösteren önceki araştırmalarla örtüşmektedir (Nguyen, 2024). Bu araştırmada görüldüğü gibi kaygı, düşük özgüven ve olumsuz değerlendirilme ve yargılanma korkusu önceki çalışmalarda da akıcılığı engelleyebilecek psikolojik unsurlar arasında gösterilmiştir (Dauba & Jullanda, 2024). Öğrencilerin bu tür psikolojik kaygıları ve dili doğru kullanıma konusunda hissettikleri baskı ise buldukları öğretim ortamında geliştirdikleri mükemmeliyetçi eğilimlere bağlanabilir (Flett vd., 2016). Zira öğrenciler, muhtemelen dilin kurallarına ve doğru dil kullanımına odaklanan önceki öğretim deneyimlerinden kaynaklı olarak İngilizce akıcı konuşmayı öncelikle yanlış başlangıçlar, duraksamalar ve hatalardan arınmış, hızlı ve kusursuz konuşma ile ilişkili olarak değerlendirmişlerdir.

Son olarak, sonuçlar sınıf içinde İngilizceye sık maruz kalmanın, anlamlı girdi sağlayarak öğrencilerin sözcükleri tanıma konusundaki becerilerini, sözcük dağarcığını, telaffuzlarını ve genel akıcılıklarını geliştirebileceğine işaret ederken, bu bulgu diğer araştırmalarla da desteklenmektedir (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). Araştırmalar, sınıfta öğretim dili olarak İngilizce kullanmanın, öğrencilerin diğer konuşucuları taklit etme, diyalog başlatma ve çeşitli konuları tartışma fırsatları bulabilecekleri etkileşimli bir İngilizce ortamı oluşturmaya yardımcı olabileceğini belirtmektedir (Chou, 2018). Sınıfta İngilizce kullanımının yanında öğrenciler, genellikle her bir öğrenciye dikkat edilmesini ve bire bir konuşma fırsatlarının sağlanmasını içeren daha bireyselleştirilmiş bir akıcılık öğretimi tercih ettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bu sonuç, akıcılık öğretiminin farklılaştırılmasının, öğrencilerin hazırbulunuşluk düzeylerine, çeşitli ihtiyaçlarına ve öğrenme biçimlerine daha uygun hale getirilmesinin önemini ortaya koymaktadır. Benzer şekilde, diğer araştırmalarda da farklılaştırılmış akıcılık öğretiminin öğrencilerin akıcı konuşma düzeylerini geliştirmede etkili bir yöntem olarak sınıflarda olumlu karşılandığı belirtilmektedir (Menson, 2024).