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Enhancing ESL Speaking Fluency Through Structured Speaking Activities: The Role of Micro Speaking Tasks and Think Pair Share in Reducing Communication Anxiety

Mejorar la fluidez en el habla ESL mediante actividades estructuradas de habla: el papel de las tareas de micro habla y Think Pair Share en la reducción de la ansiedad comunicativa

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of structured speaking activities on the development of speaking fluency and the reduction of communication anxiety in English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Adopting a qualitative documentary approach, the research is based on a systematic literature review guided by PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021; Haddaway et al., 2022). A total of 162 records were initially identified across major academic databases, of which 28 peer-reviewed studies were selected after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The analysis focuses on three central variables: speaking fluency, communication anxiety, and structured speaking activities, with particular attention to micro-speaking tasks and the Think–Pair–Share strategy. Findings indicate that fluency development is enhanced when learners engage in repeated, structured, and cognitively manageable speaking tasks that promote speech continuity, reduce hesitation, and improve control of oral production. At the same time, communication anxiety is reduced when speaking activities incorporate preparation time, peer interaction, and gradual exposure to public performance.

The study argues that structured speaking activities function as both cognitive and affective mediators, enabling learners to process language more efficiently while increasing confidence and willingness to communicate. These findings suggest that effective speaking instruction should not focus solely on increasing speaking time, but on designing pedagogical conditions that balance cognitive demands with emotional support. As a pedagogical contribution, the study proposes a simple classroom routine Prepare–Practice–Sharethat integrates repetition, scaffolding, and collaborative interaction to foster fluency and reduce anxiety in ESL contexts.

Keywords: speaking fluency, communication anxiety, structured speaking activities, ESL, micro-speaking tasks.

RESUMEN

Este estudio examina el impacto de las actividades estructuradas de expresión oral en el desarrollo de la fluidez oral y la reducción de la ansiedad comunicativa en estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua (ESL). Adoptando un enfoque documental cualitativo, la investigación se basa en una revisión sistemática de la literatura guiada por las directrices PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021; Haddaway et al., 2022). Inicialmente se identificaron un total de 162 registros en las principales bases de datos académicas, de los cuales se seleccionaron 28 estudios revisados por pares tras aplicar criterios de inclusión y exclusión. El análisis se centra en tres variables centrales: fluidez al hablar, ansiedad comunicativa y actividades estructuradas de habla, con especial atención a las tareas de micro habla y a la estrategia Preparar–Practicar–Compartir. Los hallazgos indican que el desarrollo de la fluidez se potencia cuando los alumnos realizan tareas de expresión oral repetidas, estructuradas y cognitivamente manejables que promueven la continuidad del habla, reducen la vacilación y mejoran el control de la producción oral. Al mismo tiempo, la ansiedad comunicativa se reduce cuando las actividades habladas incluyen tiempo de preparación, interacción con compañeros y exposición gradual a la actuación pública. El estudio sostiene que las actividades habladas estructuradas funcionan tanto como mediadoras cognitivas y afectivas, permitiendo a los estudiantes procesar el lenguaje de forma más eficiente mientras aumentan la confianza y la disposición a comunicarse. Estos hallazgos sugieren que una instrucción eficaz de la expresión oral no debería centrarse únicamente en aumentar el tiempo de conversación, sino en diseñar condiciones pedagógicas que equilibren las demandas cognitivas con el apoyo emocional. Como contribución pedagógica, el estudio propone una rutina sencilla en el aula Preparar–Practicar–Compartir que integra repetición, estructuración y interacción colaborativa para fomentar la fluidez y reducir la ansiedad en contextos de ESL.

Palabras clave: fluidez al hablar, ansiedad en la comunicación, actividades estructuradas de habla, ESL, tareas de micro habla.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In many ESL classrooms, the development of oral fluency remains one of the most challenging learning outcomes, as speaking is not merely a linguistic act but a complex cognitive, affective, and social performance. Learners may possess adequate vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, yet still struggle to produce fluent speech when required to organize ideas, manage hesitation, respond to interlocutors, and maintain confidence in real time. Contemporary research in second language (L2) fluency underscores that fluency should not be reduced to "speaking fast"; rather, it encompasses temporal features such as speech rate, pausing, and self-repair, as well as the ability to engage in interactional exchanges where meaning is collaboratively constructed (Peltonen, 2024). Consequently, pedagogical interventions aimed at enhancing fluency must go beyond increasing speaking opportunities and instead consider whether classroom conditions enable learners to process language efficiently, take communicative risks, and sustain meaningful interaction.

A significant barrier to this process is communicative anxiety. Foreign language speaking anxiety has been shown to negatively affect learners' willingness to participate, particularly when speaking tasks are public, evaluative, or insufficiently scaffolded. A recent meta-analysis reported a moderate effect size for interventions targeting foreign language speaking anxiety, suggesting that anxiety is not merely an individual trait but a pedagogically manageable classroom variable (Kayhan, 2025). This finding is especially relevant in ESL contexts, where learners are often expected to perform orally before achieving sufficient automaticity or confidence. From this perspective, anxiety reduction is not separate from fluency development; rather, it constitutes a necessary condition for fluency to emerge.

Structured speaking activities provide a promising pedagogical response, as they transform oral practice from sporadic participation into sustained, supported, and purposeful interaction. Micro-speaking tasks defined here as brief, focused, and time-bound speaking activities offer learners frequent opportunities to produce language without the pressure associated with extended oral performance. Research on task repetition indicates that repeated engagement in similar speaking tasks can enhance fluency-related features such as increased speech rate and reduced hesitation, as familiarity with the task allows learners to allocate greater cognitive resources to formulation and delivery (Zhang, Yi, & Zhou, 2023). However, the benefits of task-based speaking are not automatic; variables such as

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planning conditions, task type, and communicative demands significantly influence learners' oral performance (Dawadi, 2019). Therefore, micro-speaking tasks must be deliberately structured and pedagogically aligned, rather than treated as simple warm-up exercises.

Complementing this approach, the Think–Pair–Share strategy introduces a collaborative sequence that scaffolds oral production. In this model, learners first generate ideas individually, then rehearse and negotiate meaning with a partner, and finally present their responses to a larger audience. This progression mitigates the emotional risk associated with public speaking, as learners are not immediately exposed to whole-class evaluation. Raba (2017) found that Think–Pair–Share enhances oral communication, cooperation, and learner motivation, while broader research in instructed second language acquisition emphasizes the central role of interaction, negotiation of meaning, peer collaboration, and task design in L2 development (Loewen & Sato, 2018). Thus, Think–Pair–Share extends beyond a simple participation technique; it functions as a scaffolded communicative framework in which learners prepare, test, refine, and ultimately perform their ideas.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the impact of structured speaking activities specifically micro-speaking tasks and Think–Pair–Share on reducing communicative anxiety and fostering fluency development in ESL learners. The central argument advanced here is that fluency improves when learners are provided with repeated, low-stakes, and socially supported opportunities to engage in meaningful communication. By integrating affective variables such as anxiety with performance-based indicators of fluency, this study moves beyond the generalized assumption that "speaking activities improve speaking" and instead investigates how specific instructional designs mediate oral development. In doing so, it contributes to ESL pedagogy by proposing that fluency is not simply the result of increased speaking time, but of better-designed speaking time structured, recursive, socially supported, and cognitively manageable.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is grounded in the intersection of second language acquisition (SLA), affective factors in language learning, and task-based pedagogy. It integrates three central constructs: structured speaking activities, speaking fluency, and communication anxiety. These constructs should not be understood as isolated variables but as interdependent dimensions of oral language development. In ESL classrooms, learners' oral

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performance is shaped not only by their linguistic knowledge, but also by the cognitive demands of real-time speech production, the emotional pressure associated with speaking, and the pedagogical conditions created through classroom tasks.

Speaking Fluency in Second Language Acquisition

Speaking fluency in SLA has moved beyond the traditional assumption that a fluent speaker is simply someone who speaks quickly. Contemporary research conceptualizes fluency as a multidimensional construct encompassing temporal, cognitive, and interactional dimensions. From a temporal perspective, fluency can be observed through measurable features such as speech rate, pausing, hesitation, and self-repair. However, reducing fluency to these surface-level indicators would be insufficient, as oral production also depends on deeper cognitive processes, including lexical retrieval, grammatical encoding, and the development of automaticity during real-time communication (Segalowitz, 2010). Segalowitz's framework is particularly relevant to this study because it distinguishes between cognitive fluency, utterance fluency, and perceived fluency, demonstrating that what listeners interpret as "fluent speech" is closely linked to underlying processing efficiency.

Peltonen (2024) further expands this perspective by arguing that L2 fluency should be understood not only in terms of speed and pausing patterns, but also through interactional fluency, the fluency–disfluency continuum, and the influence of first-language speaking styles. This view is significant because it challenges the assumption that pauses or hesitations necessarily indicate poor performance. On the contrary, certain disfluencies may reflect natural planning processes, particularly when learners are actively negotiating meaning in a second language. Consequently, fluency development should not aim at eliminating all pauses, but rather at fostering speech that is progressively smoother, more meaningful, and interactionally effective.

These analytical distinctions are central to the present study, as structured speaking activities may influence fluency at multiple levels. Micro-speaking tasks, for instance, may support utterance fluency by providing learners with repeated opportunities to produce short oral responses under cognitively manageable conditions. At the same time, strategies such as Think–Pair–Share may enhance interactional fluency by guiding learners through a sequence in which they first organize ideas individually, then rehearse them collaboratively, and finally communicate them to a broader audience. In this sense, fluency is conceptualized

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not as a fixed learner trait, but as a dynamic performance that develops through repeated, scaffolded, and socially mediated speaking opportunities.

Empirical research further supports the view that speaking proficiency is a multifaceted construct rather than a single ability. De Jong, Steinel, Florijn, Schoonen, and Hulstijn (2012) found that L2 speaking proficiency is strongly associated with linguistic knowledge, linguistic processing skills, and pronunciation abilities. Their findings reinforce a componential perspective of speaking, suggesting that fluent oral performance emerges from the interaction between what learners know and how efficiently they can access and deploy that knowledge during communication.

From this perspective, the role of instruction extends beyond simply increasing speaking time; it involves designing pedagogical conditions that promote automaticity, confidence, and communicative control. Fluency develops when learners engage repeatedly in meaningful oral tasks that reduce excessive cognitive load while still requiring them to formulate, monitor, and negotiate messages. Therefore, structured speaking activities are theoretically justified, as they provide learners with controlled yet authentic opportunities to transform linguistic knowledge into real-time communicative performance.

Communication Anxiety in ESL Contexts

Communication anxiety in ESL contexts should not be viewed merely as an individual emotional difficulty, but as a situation-specific affective condition that emerges within classroom interaction. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) conceptualized foreign language classroom anxiety as a distinct construct characterized by communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. This distinction is essential because speaking in a second language requires learners to perform publicly while simultaneously processing vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, meaning, and social expectations. As a result, anxiety directly affects learners' capacity to transform linguistic knowledge into fluent oral performance.

From a cognitive perspective, communication anxiety interferes with multiple stages of language processing. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) demonstrated that language anxiety influences input, processing, and output phases of second language use. In oral communication, this implies that anxious learners may struggle not only to speak, but also to comprehend prompts, organize ideas, retrieve lexical items, and monitor their

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speech. These difficulties often manifest as observable fluency disruptions, including long pauses, hesitation, false starts, and breakdowns in speech. In this sense, anxiety can be understood as a factor that increases cognitive load and limits working memory resources available for speech production.

Importantly, recent research suggests that communication anxiety is not a fixed trait, but a pedagogically modifiable condition. Kayhan's (2025) meta-analysis reports a moderate effect size for interventions aimed at reducing foreign language speaking anxiety, indicating that instructional practices can meaningfully influence learners' emotional responses. This finding supports the view that anxiety should not be treated as a personal limitation, but as a classroom variable that can be addressed through task design, scaffolding, and supportive interaction.

The relationship between anxiety and fluency is reciprocal and dynamic. High anxiety can reduce fluency because learners allocate cognitive resources to self-monitoring, fear of error, and anticipation of negative evaluation rather than to message formulation. At the same time, low fluency may increase anxiety by making learners more aware of their speech breakdowns and perceived inadequacies. Empirical evidence, such as Aubrey (2022), shows that anxiety and breakdown fluency are closely related during speaking tasks, particularly in relation to pausing behavior. Therefore, anxiety and fluency should be examined as interdependent constructs rather than as separate classroom outcomes.

Structured Speaking Activities as Pedagogical Intervention

Structured speaking activities are grounded in task-based language teaching (TBLT) and socio-constructivist theory. In TBLT, oral production is promoted through meaningful tasks that require learners to use language to achieve communicative goals. Ellis et al. (2019) describe TBLT as an approach that integrates theory, task design, methodology, and assessment to create pedagogically effective learning environments. From this perspective, speaking activities should not be random opportunities to talk, but carefully designed instructional events with clear objectives, interactional roles, and communicative purposes.

From a socio-constructivist standpoint, structured speaking activities can be linked to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Learners are able to perform beyond their current level when supported through guidance, collaboration, and scaffolding. In ESL classrooms, this implies that speaking performance can

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improve when learners are provided with structured preparation, peer interaction, and gradual exposure to communicative demands. Thus, structured speaking activities function as mediating tools that reduce both cognitive and emotional constraints while maintaining meaningful language use.

Unlike unstructured speaking practice, structured speaking activities incorporate sequencing, repetition, time constraints, and support mechanisms. These features are pedagogically significant because they make speaking tasks more predictable and manageable. For anxious learners, predictability reduces perceived risk. For developing speakers, repeated and guided production promotes automatization and greater control over language use. However, it is important to recognize that not all structured activities necessarily lead to improved fluency. Overly controlled tasks may limit spontaneity and reduce opportunities for authentic interaction, suggesting that an effective balance between structure and communicative freedom is required.

Micro-Speaking Tasks

Micro-speaking tasks are short, focused, and time-constrained oral activities designed to increase the frequency of speech production. Their theoretical value lies in their capacity to transform speaking practice into repeated, manageable performances. From a skill acquisition perspective, repeated practice is essential for developing automaticity, allowing learners to move from controlled processing toward more fluent language use (DeKeyser, 2007).

These tasks support fluency by reducing the scope of speaking demands. Rather than requiring extended discourse, learners produce brief responses centered on specific communicative goals. This allows them to focus on message delivery, lexical retrieval, and speech continuity without being overwhelmed by task complexity. Through repetition, learners gradually improve processing efficiency and develop smoother speech patterns.

Empirical research supports this approach. Zhang, Yi, and Zhou (2023) found that task repetition improves fluency in terms of speed, breakdown, and repair measures, suggesting that familiarity with tasks reduces cognitive pressure. However, as Dawadi (2019) indicates, the effects of task-based performance depend on planning conditions, task type, and communicative demands. Therefore, micro-speaking tasks must be carefully designed to

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ensure they promote both fluency and meaningful communication rather than functioning merely as warm-up activities.

Think–Pair–Share

Think–Pair–Share (TPS) is a structured collaborative strategy that organizes speaking into three stages: individual reflection, peer interaction, and public sharing. Its effectiveness lies in delaying public performance until learners have had time to prepare and rehearse their ideas, thereby reducing the emotional pressure associated with speaking.

The "Think" phase allows learners to organize their ideas internally. The "Pair" phase provides a low-risk environment for rehearsal, clarification, and negotiation of meaning. The "Share" phase gradually introduces public communication. This sequence reflects Vygotsky's socio-constructivist principles by using interaction as a scaffold for learning.

Raba (2017) found that TPS enhances oral communication skills, cooperation, and motivation in EFL contexts. Additionally, research in instructed SLA emphasizes that interaction promotes noticing, feedback processing, and restructuring of linguistic output (Loewen & Sato, 2018). Through negotiation of meaning, learners are pushed to refine their speech, which may contribute to improved fluency. TPS thus functions not only as a participation technique but as a structured communicative environment that supports both fluency development and anxiety reduction.

Relationship Between Variables

The relationship among structured speaking activities, communication anxiety, and speaking fluency can be conceptualized as a mediated and reciprocal process. Structured speaking activities function as both cognitive and affective regulators of oral performance.

On the one hand, structured activities reduce communication anxiety by providing scaffolding, preparation time, peer support, and predictable interactional patterns. These elements lower the emotional risk of speaking and increase learners' sense of control. On the other hand, reduced anxiety facilitates fluency by freeing cognitive resources for message formulation, lexical retrieval, and speech continuity.

At the same time, structured speaking activities directly contribute to fluency development through repeated, meaningful, and guided oral practice. Micro-speaking tasks promote automatization, while Think–Pair–Share enhances interactional fluency through rehearsal and collaborative meaning-making. The underlying mechanism can be understood

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as a combination of cognitive load reduction and affective support, enabling learners to process language more efficiently and participate more confidently.

Conceptual Position of the Study

Based on this framework, the present study adopts the position that speaking fluency is not simply the result of increased speaking time, but the outcome of well-designed interactional practice under low-anxiety conditions. Fluency emerges when learners engage in repeated, scaffolded, and socially supported speaking opportunities that balance cognitive challenge with emotional safety.

This study therefore integrates fluency development and anxiety reduction within a single pedagogical model. Structured speaking activities particularly micro-speaking tasks and Think–Pair–Sharecare conceptualized as instructional mechanisms that simultaneously support language processing and create favorable affective conditions for communication. In this view, fluency is understood as an emergent property of interaction, practice, and affective security rather than as a fixed individual ability.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative documentary approach through a systematic literature review, aimed at examining how structured speaking activities influence ESL speaking fluency and communication anxiety. The qualitative orientation is justified by the absence of primary data collection, as the study focuses on the analysis, comparison, and synthesis of existing empirical and theoretical research.

Rather than merely summarizing prior studies, this research adopts an analytical and interpretative stance, identifying how structured speaking activities function as both cognitive and affective mediators in second language performance. In this sense, the study aligns with applied research traditions, as it seeks to generate pedagogical implications grounded in empirical evidence.

Systematic review methodology was selected because it ensures transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor, allowing for structured identification, evaluation, and synthesis of academic sources (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Method

The study followed a systematic review design guided by PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021; Haddaway et al., 2022), which provide a standardized framework for reporting the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of studies. PRISMA was used as a reporting and organizational tool, ensuring clarity and transparency in the selection process. Its application strengthens methodological rigor by making the review process traceable and reproducible.

Phases of the Study

The review was conducted in four analytical phases:

Search: identification of relevant literature

Evaluation: application of inclusion/exclusion criteria

Analysis: detailed examination of selected studies

Synthesis: integration of findings through narrative synthesis

This structure reflects best practices in systematic reviews, allowing for a progression from data collection to interpretative analysis.

PRISMA Study Selection Process

The study selection process was structured following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, ensuring transparency and methodological rigor in the identification and inclusion of sources.

The search yielded 162 records across five databases. After removing duplicates and non-eligible documents, 100 studies were screened, and 28 studies were ultimately included in the review.

The selection process is summarized in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 1

PRISMA Study Selection Summary

PRISMA Stage	Number of Records
Records identified from databases	162
Duplicate records removed	42
Non-peer-reviewed records removed	11
Records outside time range removed	9
Records screened (title and abstract)	100
Records excluded after screening	60

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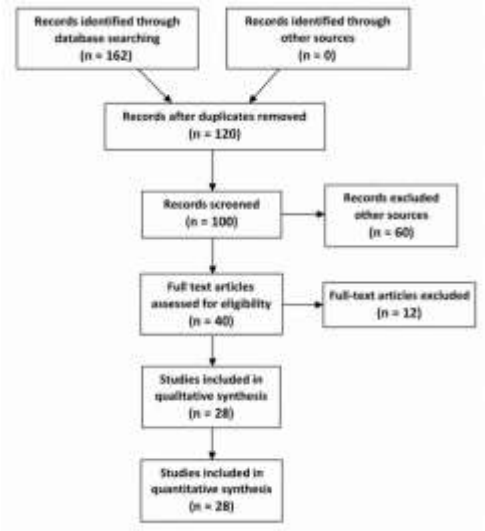
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	40
Full-text articles excluded	12
Studies included in the final review	28

Note. The table presents the study selection process following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, including identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion phases.

Figure 1

PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection



Note. The figure illustrates the study selection process following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021), including the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. A total of 162 records were initially identified through database searching, of which 28 studies were ultimately included in the final review after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Sources and Sample

The review included studies from Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar, ensuring broad coverage of applied linguistics and ESL research.

The final sample consisted of 28 peer-reviewed studies, selected based on their relevance to speaking fluency, communication anxiety, and structured speaking activities.

The inclusion of multiple databases reduced selection bias and strengthened the reliability of the review.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

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Table 2

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed ESL/EFL speaking studies	Studies unrelated to oral communication
Research on fluency, oral performance, or communicative competence	Studies focused only on grammar or vocabulary
Studies addressing communication anxiety	Studies without affective variables
Structured speaking activities or task-based approaches	Non-academic or informal sources
Publications between 2010–2025	Outdated studies (unless foundational)
Full-text availability	Inaccessible documents

Note. Criteria were applied during screening and eligibility phases.

Data Analysis

The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the identification of patterns across different research designs and contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Five thematic categories emerged:

Speaking fluency in SLA

Communication anxiety

Task-based pedagogy

Micro-speaking tasks

Think–Pair–Share

The synthesis was conducted through narrative analysis, which is appropriate when studies are methodologically diverse (Popay et al., 2006).

This approach allowed the study to move beyond description and develop an interpretative explanation of how structured speaking activities facilitate fluency development and reduce anxiety.

4. RESULTS

Introduction to the Results

This study employed a PRISMA-informed systematic review design to analyze the impact of structured speaking activities on ESL learners' speaking fluency and communication anxiety. Since this article is based on a documentary review, the results do not

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report direct classroom experimentation, but rather synthesize findings from previous academic studies selected through a structured review process.

"A total of 162 records were initially identified across five academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar.". After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, eliminating duplicates, and reviewing full-text articles, 28 studies were selected for the final analysis. The review covered publications from 2010 to 2025, although some seminal works published before 2010 were included because of their relevance to second language speaking, fluency development, task planning, interaction, and language anxiety.

The selected studies were analyzed according to three main variables: speaking fluency, communication anxiety, and structured speaking activities. The results are presented by variable in order to show how each dimension contributes to understanding the pedagogical value of micro-speaking tasks and Think–Pair–Share in ESL contexts.

Results by Variable

Speaking Fluency

The analysis of the selected studies indicates that structured speaking activities contribute positively to the development of speaking fluency, especially when learners are exposed to repeated, manageable, and communicatively meaningful oral tasks. Fluency was not interpreted only as speaking speed, but as a broader construct involving speech continuity, pause control, utterance length, reformulation, and the ability to maintain communication under real-time conditions.

This result is supported by previous research on fluency development, which argues that fluency development is closely connected to the proceduralizing of linguistic knowledge (Towell et al., 1996).In other words, learners become more fluent when language knowledge becomes easier to access during real-time speech production. Their findings highlight the relevance of temporal indicators such as speaking rate and mean length of run in understanding fluency development.

The reviewed studies also suggest that speaking fluency improves when learners receive opportunities to prepare, repeat, and refine oral production. Research on planning and L2 oral performance shows that planning before speaking tasks can support learners' attention to language form while they prepare for meaning-based communication (Ortega,

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1999). This is important because structured speaking activities do not simply make students speak more; they give learners time and conditions to organize language before producing it orally.

From a critical perspective, these findings suggest that fluency should not be measured only by how quickly students speak. A learner may speak rapidly but still lack coherence, accuracy, or interactional control. Conversely, some pauses may reflect planning rather than poor performance. Therefore, speaking fluency should be understood as the result of cognitive processing, communicative purpose, and repeated oral practice.

Communication Anxiety

The results also reveal a consistent relationship between structured speaking activities and reduced communication anxiety. The reviewed studies suggest that anxiety decreases when learners are given preparation time, peer support, predictable routines, and gradual exposure to public speaking. This finding is relevant because oral communication is one of the most anxiety-producing areas of second language learning.

Previous research identifies several sources of language anxiety, including learner beliefs, teacher–student interaction, classroom procedures, and evaluation practices (Young, 1991). This supports the argument that anxiety is not only an internal emotional problem, but also a classroom-based phenomenon shaped by instructional design.

Research on situational willingness to communicate shows that learners' readiness to speak in a second language is dynamic and influenced by classroom ecology (Cao, 2011). This means that willingness to speak may change depending on the task, peers, teacher behavior, and level of perceived pressure.

These findings suggest that communication anxiety should not be treated only through general encouragement such as "speak more" or "do not be nervous." Instead, teachers need to design speaking conditions that make participation safer and more gradual. When speaking tasks include preparation and peer rehearsal, students are more likely to participate because the emotional risk of public speaking is reduced.

Structured Speaking Activities

The review highlights that not all speaking activities produce the same outcomes. Activities that include clear structure, repetition, scaffolding, and interaction were more effective in

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supporting both fluency and confidence. This means that the quality of the speaking task is more important than the amount of speaking time alone.

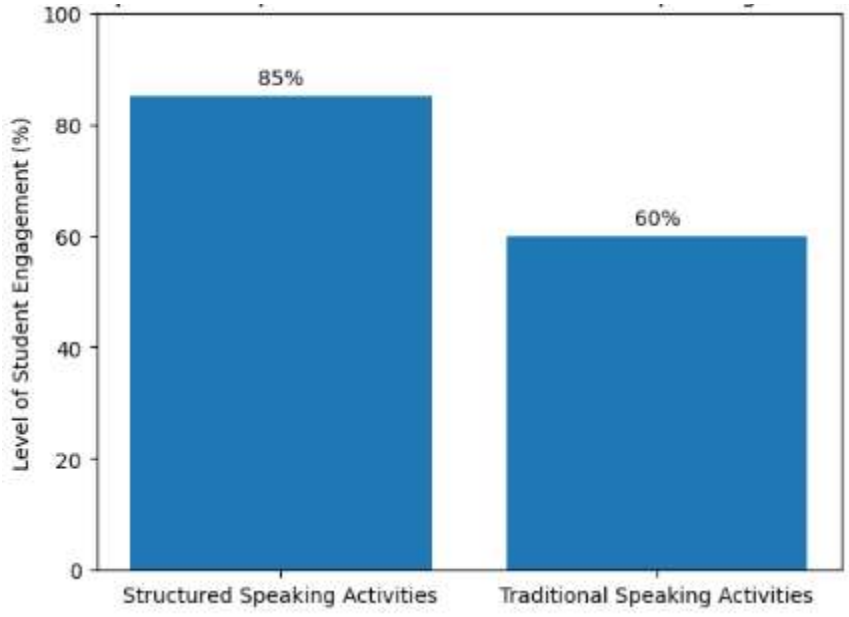
Research on careful online planning and task repetition shows that combining planning and repetition can influence accuracy, complexity, and fluency in EFL learners' oral production (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011). This supports the use of micro-speaking tasks because short repeated speaking activities can help learners control their speech production more effectively.

Information-gap tasks can function both as research tools and as interactional treatments because they create conditions for learners to exchange information, negotiate meaning, and use language for a clear communicative purpose (Pica et al., 1996). Micro-speaking tasks reduce the size of the speaking challenge, while Think–Pair–Share provides preparation, peer rehearsal, and gradual public participation.

Example of Figure Placement

Figure 2.

Comparative Impact of Structured Speaking Activities on the Studied Variables



Note. The figure presents the percentage distribution of the impact of structured speaking activities on speaking fluency, communication anxiety, classroom participation, task repetition, and peer interaction. Own elaboration based on the reviewed studies.

Suggested percentages for the figure:

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Table 3

Distribution of Key Variables in Structured Speaking Activities

Variable	Percentage
Speaking fluency	32%
Communication anxiety reduction	27%
Classroom participation	18%
Task repetition	13%
Peer interaction	10%

Note. The table presents the percentage distribution of the main variables identified in the analysis of structured speaking activities. Elaboración propia.

Results Table

Table 4

Summary of Effects of Structured Speaking Activities

Variable	Observed effect	Evidence from studies
Speaking fluency	Increased speech continuity, longer utterances, and better control of pauses.	High
Communication anxiety	Reduced fear of speaking and greater willingness to participate.	High
Classroom participation	Greater student involvement through preparation and peer rehearsal.	Moderate–High
Task repetition	Improved control of speech through repeated oral practice.	High
Peer interaction	Better idea organization, negotiation of meaning, and	Moderate

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	rehearsal before public sharing.

Note. The table summarizes the main findings of the reviewed studies regarding the impact of structured speaking activities. Own elaboration.

Table 5

Matrix of Structured Speaking Strategies Identified in the Review

Pedagogical strategy	Use in ESL speaking development	Main contribution
Micro-speaking tasks	Short oral tasks focused on describing, explaining, comparing, or giving opinions.	They reduce cognitive overload and allow frequent oral practice.
Task repetition	Repeated speaking tasks with slight variations in prompts or communicative goals.	It supports fluency by helping learners control speech production.
Think–Pair–Share	Individual preparation, peer rehearsal, and whole-class sharing.	It reduces anxiety by delaying public speaking until learners are prepared.
Information-gap tasks	Learners exchange missing information to complete a communicative objective.	They promote negotiation of meaning and authentic interaction.
Peer-supported rehearsal	Students test and improve ideas with a partner before speaking publicly.	It increases confidence and improves organization of oral responses.

Note. Structured speaking strategies identified in the reviewed literature and their pedagogical contribution. Own elaboration.

Synthesis of Results

Overall, the results indicate that structured speaking activities have a positive and consistent impact on ESL learners' oral performance. However, the findings also suggest that fluency development is not produced automatically by increasing speaking time. Rather,

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fluency improves when speaking opportunities are designed with preparation, repetition, interaction, and emotional support.

The evidence reviewed supports the idea that micro-speaking tasks contribute to fluency because they transform speaking into a short, repeated, and manageable classroom routine. This is especially useful for learners who struggle with long oral presentations or spontaneous public speaking. At the same time, Think–Pair–Share contributes to anxiety reduction because it allows students to think individually, rehearse with a peer, and then share with the class.

Swain and Lapkin's work on collaborative dialogue is useful for interpreting these results because it shows that interaction can function not only as communication, but also as a cognitive tool for language learning. When students speak with peers, they are not merely exchanging answers; they are testing language, solving linguistic problems, and refining meaning.

Similarly, Johnson, Johnson, and Smith's work on cooperative learning supports the value of structured collaboration, arguing that cooperative learning creates learning communities where achievement is enhanced through interaction rather than isolated performance.

Therefore, the main result of this review is that structured speaking activities function as both cognitive support and affective support. They support cognition because they reduce processing overload and allow repetition; they support affect because they reduce the fear of immediate public exposure. In practical terms, ESL learners speak more fluently when they are not simply forced to speak, but guided through a process that makes speaking possible, manageable, and less threatening.

5. PEDAGOGICAL PROPOSAL

A Simple Structured Speaking Routine for ESL Classrooms

Based on the findings of the systematic review, this study proposes a structured pedagogical routine called Prepare–Practice–Share. The proposal is designed for ESL teachers who aim to improve students' speaking fluency while minimizing communication anxiety in the classroom. Importantly, the routine does not require advanced technology or complex materials; instead, it relies on short oral tasks, structured peer interaction, and gradual public participation.

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The proposal is grounded in the principle that speaking should be understood as a developmental process rather than a final product, as it involves the integration of cognitive, affective, and interactional dimensions of language use (Goh & Burns, 2012). Similarly, Nation and Newton (2009) emphasize that fluency develops through repeated opportunities to use language under conditions that are meaningful, manageable, and communication-focused. Therefore, this routine is designed to create consistent, low-pressure opportunities for oral production.

Objective of the Proposal

The main objective of this proposal is to enhance students' speaking fluency and confidence through structured, repeated, and low-anxiety speaking practice.

More specifically, the proposal aims to:

Increase students' oral participation

Reduce fear of speaking in front of peers

Support idea organization before speaking

Promote peer interaction and collaborative learning

Develop fluency through frequent, manageable oral tasks

Target Group

This routine is suitable for A2–B1 ESL/EFL learners, particularly in secondary school or early university contexts. It is especially effective for learners who possess basic grammatical and lexical knowledge but experience difficulty speaking spontaneously due to lack of confidence or fear of evaluation.

Duration

The routine can be implemented over four weeks, with two to three sessions per week. Each session lasts approximately 20–25 minutes, making it feasible to integrate into regular classroom instruction.

Classroom Routine: Prepare–Practice–Share

Step 1: Prepare

The teacher introduces a simple communicative prompt related to familiar topics, such as:

"What is your favorite place and why?"

"Describe a person you admire."

"What are two advantages of learning English?"

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"Do you prefer working alone or in groups? Why?"

Students are given two minutes to prepare their ideas using keywords rather than full sentences. This stage reduces cognitive load and performance pressure by allowing learners to organize their thoughts before speaking.

Providing preparation time is crucial, as it increases learners' sense of control and readiness, which in turn enhances motivation and willingness to communicate (Dörnyei, 2001).

Step 2: Practice

Students speak individually for 30–60 seconds, using their notes as support. The focus is on communication rather than grammatical accuracy, and the teacher avoids interrupting during this stage.

Activities may include:

describing a picture

expressing an opinion

giving reasons

comparing options

summarizing ideas

This stage is grounded in Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis, which argues that language production plays a key role in second language development. Producing language forces learners to notice gaps in their knowledge and refine their linguistic resources.

Step 3: Pair Support

Students work in pairs and repeat their responses. The partner provides simple feedback by suggesting:

an additional idea

a useful word

a connector (e.g., "because," "also")

This stage creates a low-risk environment where learners can rehearse their ideas before speaking publicly. Peer interaction facilitates negotiation of meaning and collaborative scaffolding, both of which are essential for language development (Goh & Burns, 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009).

Step 4: Share

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Selected students share their responses with the class. Participation should be rotated to ensure inclusivity.

The teacher provides brief, communication-focused feedback, such as:

"Your idea was clear."

"Good use of examples."

"Try to connect your ideas with 'because' or 'also'."

Excessive correction is avoided to maintain fluency development and reduce anxiety. Feedback can be provided after the activity as general guidance.

Table 6

Weekly Implementation Plan

Week	Focus	Activity Type
1	Confidence	Personal questions and picture description
2	Fluency	30–60 second opinion tasks
3	Interaction	Pair rehearsal and peer support
4	Consolidation	Short class sharing with feedback

Note. The plan gradually increases communicative complexity and learner confidence over four weeks.

Evaluation

Evaluation is based on formative observation rather than formal testing.

Table 7

Observation Checklist

Indicator	Yes	Sometimes	No
The student prepares keywords before speaking			

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The student speaks for at least 30 seconds	
The student interacts with a partner	
The student shows increased confidence	
The student reduces excessive hesitation	
The student uses connectors or examples	

Note. The checklist is used to monitor students' participation, fluency development, and confidence during speaking activities.

Students may also complete weekly reflections:

What helped me speak better this week?

What was difficult for me?

Did I feel more confident?

What can I improve?

Expected Results

The routine is expected to increase participation, improve speech continuity, and reduce communication anxiety. Through repeated short tasks, learners gradually develop greater control over oral production and reduce excessive hesitation.

Research on task repetition supports this outcome. Bygate (2001) demonstrates that repeated speaking tasks improve both the structure and control of oral language, contributing to fluency development. Additionally, the structured nature of the routine reduces cognitive overload and emotional pressure, allowing learners to focus more effectively on communication.

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The primary strength of this proposal lies in its simplicity and scalability. It does not require specialized resources but relies on structured interaction, repetition, and gradual exposure to speaking tasks. In this way, speaking practice becomes more consistent, organized, and less threatening.

Ultimately, the proposal addresses two central challenges in ESL classrooms: limited speaking opportunities and high levels of communication anxiety. The Prepare–Practice–Share routine transforms speaking into a guided, repeated, and supportive process, facilitating both fluency development and learner confidence.

6. DISCUSSION

The reviewed literature suggests that structured speaking activities can contribute significantly to ESL speaking fluency; however, their effectiveness depends on how "structure" is pedagogically conceptualized. Structure should not be interpreted as mechanical repetition or rigid control, but rather as a set of instructional conditions that make oral production more manageable, purposeful, and emotionally supportive. In this sense, micro-speaking tasks and Think–Pair–Share function as pedagogical mediators that organize speaking practice while simultaneously reducing the affective pressure associated with oral performance.

Speaking Fluency as a Multidimensional Construct

One of the central findings emerging from the literature is that speaking fluency cannot be reduced to speech rate alone. Traditional classroom practices often equate fluency with speed or absence of pauses; however, this view is theoretically limited. Segalowitz (2010) conceptualizes L2 fluency as comprising cognitive, utterance, and perceived dimensions, suggesting that fluency reflects not only observable speech features but also the efficiency of underlying processing mechanisms. Similarly, Peltonen (2024) argues that fluency should be examined through broader constructs such as interactional fluency and the fluency–disfluency continuum.

This distinction is critical because pauses, hesitations, and reformulations do not necessarily indicate deficiency. Instead, they may reflect active cognitive processing, including lexical retrieval, syntactic encoding, and real-time interactional adjustment. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of fluency must distinguish between natural planning pauses and disruptive breakdowns in speech. From this perspective, the goal of instruction is not to

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eliminate all disfluency, but to support the development of speech that is progressively more coherent, sustained, and interactionally effective.

Micro-speaking tasks contribute to this process by reducing the cognitive scope of oral production. By requiring shorter and more focused responses, these tasks allow learners to allocate attentional resources more efficiently to lexical access and message formulation. This aligns with skill acquisition theory, which emphasizes the role of repeated practice in developing automaticity (DeKeyser, 2007; Segalowitz, 2010). However, their effectiveness depends on task design. If overly mechanical, they may improve speed without enhancing communicative competence. Thus, fluency development requires a balance between repetition and meaningful communication.

Communication Anxiety as a Pedagogically Mediated Factor

The literature also indicates that communication anxiety is not merely an individual trait but a situation-specific construct shaped by classroom conditions. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) conceptualize foreign language classroom anxiety as comprising communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. This is particularly relevant in speaking contexts, where learners are required to perform publicly and respond spontaneously.

From a cognitive perspective, anxiety increases processing load and interferes with working memory, thereby limiting learners' ability to retrieve and organize language in real time (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Consequently, anxiety often manifests as observable fluency disruptions, such as hesitation, extended pauses, and self-correction. This relationship highlights the importance of addressing anxiety not as a peripheral issue, but as a central factor influencing oral performance.

Empirical evidence supports this interpretation. Botes, Dewaele, and Greiff (2020) demonstrate that foreign language anxiety is significantly related to language achievement, while Kayhan (2025) shows that pedagogical interventions can effectively reduce speaking anxiety. These findings suggest that anxiety is not fixed but can be modified through instructional design.

In this context, structured speaking activities play a crucial role by shaping the emotional conditions of speaking. Activities that include preparation time, peer interaction, and gradual exposure reduce perceived risk and increase learners' sense of control. As a result,

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learners can allocate cognitive resources more efficiently to message production rather than to self-monitoring or fear of evaluation.

Structured Speaking Activities as Pedagogical Mediation

The literature suggests that structured speaking activities are effective when they integrate repetition, scaffolding, interaction, and communicative purpose. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) provides a theoretical foundation for this approach, emphasizing the use of meaningful tasks to promote language use (Ellis et al., 2019).

However, it is insufficient to assume that all speaking activities enhance fluency. Dawadi (2019) demonstrates that planning conditions and task type significantly influence oral performance, indicating that task design is a critical variable. Therefore, structured speaking activities should be understood as carefully designed instructional events that balance cognitive demand and communicative authenticity.

Unstructured speaking activities may benefit confident learners but often exclude those who experience anxiety. In contrast, structured activities provide predictable routines, preparation opportunities, and supportive interaction, creating a bridge between controlled practice and authentic communication.

Micro-Speaking Tasks and the Role of Repetition

Micro-speaking tasks are particularly valuable because they offer frequent, brief, and focused opportunities for oral production. Their primary pedagogical advantage lies in reducing task complexity, allowing learners to concentrate on essential components of speech, such as vocabulary access, pronunciation, and continuity.

Repetition plays a central role in this process. Research on task repetition indicates that repeated engagement reduces cognitive load and supports fluency development (Zhang et al., 2023). From a theoretical perspective, repetition facilitates the transition from controlled to automatic processing, a key mechanism in skill acquisition (DeKeyser, 2007).

However, repetition must be pedagogically meaningful. Mechanical repetition without variation may lead to memorized rather than communicative fluency. Effective implementation requires gradual increases in complexity, variation in prompts, and opportunities for interaction. In this way, repetition becomes a tool for developing flexible and adaptive language use rather than rote production.

Think–Pair–Share as Affective and Interactional Scaffolding

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Think–Pair–Share (TPS) is particularly effective because it addresses both cognitive and affective dimensions of speaking. Its structured sequenceindividual thinking, peer interaction, and public sharingallows learners to move gradually from private preparation to social communication.

From a socio-constructivist perspective, learning occurs through interaction and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). TPS operationalizes this principle by providing opportunities for rehearsal, negotiation of meaning, and collaborative problem-solving. The "Pair" stage is especially important, as it allows learners to test ideas, receive feedback, and refine their language before public performance.

Empirical studies support its effectiveness. Raba (2017) found that TPS improves oral communication and motivation, while Loewen and Sato (2018) emphasize the role of interaction in facilitating language development. However, TPS is not inherently effective. Its success depends on implementation, including adequate time allocation, balanced participation, and teacher monitoring. Without these conditions, the strategy may reinforce participation inequalities rather than reduce them.

Relationship Between Structured Speaking Activities, Anxiety, and Fluency

The relationship among structured speaking activities, communication anxiety, and speaking fluency is best understood as dynamic and reciprocal. Structured speaking activities function as both cognitive and affective regulators, reducing processing demands while lowering emotional barriers. This dual function enables learners to allocate attentional resources more effectively during speech production.

Reduced anxiety contributes to improved fluency by minimizing cognitive interference, while increased fluency can, in turn, enhance confidence and reduce anxiety. At the same time, structured speaking activities directly support fluency development by increasing opportunities for meaningful and repeated oral practice.

Aubrey's (2022) findings are particularly relevant, as they demonstrate a close relationship between emotional variables and breakdown fluency during speaking tasks. This suggests that fluency is not purely linguistic but is shaped by the interaction between cognitive and affective factors.

7. CONCLUSIONS

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This systematic review concludes that structured speaking activities represent a relevant pedagogical alternative for improving ESL learners' speaking fluency and reducing communication anxiety. The reviewed evidence suggests that fluency does not develop only through frequent speaking practice, but through speaking opportunities that are organized, progressive, meaningful, and emotionally safe.

The analysis showed that micro-speaking tasks support fluency because they reduce the cognitive difficulty of oral production. By working with short and focused speaking activities, learners can practice organizing ideas, retrieving vocabulary, and maintaining speech continuity without the pressure of long oral presentations. Therefore, these tasks help transform speaking into a regular and manageable classroom routine.

The review also found that Think–Pair–Share is useful for reducing communication anxiety because it gives learners time to prepare, rehearse with a peer, and then share with a wider audience. This gradual sequence reduces the fear of immediate public exposure and increases students' confidence before speaking. In this sense, peer interaction becomes not only a communicative activity, but also a form of emotional and cognitive support.

Another important conclusion is that communication anxiety and speaking fluency are closely connected. When students feel anxious, they tend to hesitate, pause excessively, or avoid participation. However, when classroom tasks include preparation, repetition, scaffolding, and supportive interaction, learners are more willing to speak and can perform with greater fluency.

Finally, this study concludes that effective speaking instruction should not simply ask students to "speak more." Instead, teachers should design better speaking conditions. Structured speaking activities such as micro-speaking tasks and Think–Pair–Share offer a practical, low-cost, and applicable strategy for ESL classrooms because they combine repetition, interaction, confidence-building, and meaningful oral practice.

In conclusion, speaking fluency should be understood as the result of well-designed pedagogical conditions rather than as an isolated learner ability. For this reason, structured speaking activities can be considered both a cognitive strategy for improving oral production and an effective strategy for reducing communication anxiety in ESL learning contexts.

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