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EFL fluency development in Catalan Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

According to the Catalan curriculum for foreign languages, fluency is not explicitly a prominent competence to achieve among Secondary Education students. The present paper, through a series of exercises and questionnaires, aimed to find out why and what could be done to improve the situation in this regard. Taking into consideration that being fluent in English is a key factor, arguably essential, for anybody living in a European society nowadays, compared to the fact that English levels could be vastly improved by many in Catalonia, it may seem timely and logical to carry out research based on the possibility of teaching and measuring fluency in class. According to the results, it could be stated that communicative, fluency-driven exercises actually work better in terms of student motivation and that measuring their level of fluency would indeed be appropriate and necessary.

Keywords: EFL learning, EFL teaching, fluency, student autonomy

RESUM

Observant el curriculum català de llengües estrangeres, es pot comprovar que la fluïdesa no juga un paper cabdal explícitament pel que fa als objectius que es volen assolir per part dels adolescents. Com a conseqüència, l'objectiu d'aquest treball, mitjançant una sèrie d'exercicis i questionaris, ha estat esbrinar per què i què es podria fer per tal de millorar la situació. Donat que, avui en dia, comunicar-se en anglès de forma fluïda és essencial i un factor decisiu per qualsevol persona pertanyent a una societat europea, en contrast amb el fet que l'anglès encara sigui l'*assignatura pendent* per molts a Catalunya, podria semblar oportú i lògic centrar aquesta recerca en la possibilitat d'ensenyar i avaluar la fluïdesa a classe. Segons els resultats obtinguts, es podria determinar que els exercicis comunicatius i de fluïdesa són favorables per als estudiants a efectes motivacionals i que avaluar la fluïdesa a l'aula és apropiat i necessari en aquest moment.

Paraules clau: aprenentatge d'anglès llengua estrangera, autonomia dels estudiants, ensenyament d'anglès llengua estrangera, fluïdesa

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1. Introduction

It is known by all EFL teachers that grammar and vocabulary are the main strands when it comes to teaching a second language and measuring the progress of a student that is learning a second language. However, in the long run, vocabulary and grammar do not guarantee the results that any EFL teacher would expect. The fact that students are linguistically independent or autonomous when they leave high school does not rely exclusively on memorising vocabulary and applying grammar. It also consists of being able to use what one knows and that is the main topic of this paper: teaching and measuring student's fluency in English as a second language. Throughout a test carried out with 8 Catalan Secondary Education students, in an attempt to bring up the possibility of considering certain priorities in the Catalan curriculum for foreign languages, this paper intends to be of use for English teachers as well as for anybody interested in finding out ways to help English students in Catalonia when referring to the improvement of their level of fluency.

When dealing with the fact, generalization or even cliché that Spanish, and thus Catalan adults are unable to communicate themselves in English overseas, it is often common to hear the following question: *what did they learn at school?* After much thought and reading throughout research, it is possible to understand that teaching and, consequently, learning a second language is especially difficult for a society with such a strong cultural and complex past from a sociolinguistic perspective, among other reasons, considering the existing tendency to prioritise certain languages before others.

As Soler-Carbonell, J., Gallego-Balsà, L., and Corona, V. (2016) stated "at present, the more recently arrived population to Catalonia come from radically diverse linguistic and cultural origins", which adds an important factor to take into consideration when laying out the need of learning multiple languages in high school since the students do not really understand the reasons why they have to do so. In this sense, the same results as those achieved with regard to Catalan being the "native language" in Catalonia could be followed in comparison to English understood as a second language and its corresponding purposes. According to Woolard and Frekko (2013), "these new sources of diversity place more pressure on an already complex sociolinguistic environment, but paradoxically enough, it is precisely these heightened mobility flows which seemingly have enabled Catalan to outgrow its 'native speaker' niche and to be adopted by speakers of different linguistic, ethnic and social backgrounds, who use it

for different purposes and in different situations in their daily lives.”

It is important to highlight the fact that learning several languages at a time should not be considered an obstacle, but quite the opposite. In order for students to be able to comprehend this idea, first it is necessary that they understand why they are required to learn multiple languages in Secondary Education. Additionally, would it be possible to switch the concept of “learning a language” into that of “being fluent”? In this direction: are students aware of the specific and individualised reasons why it is important for them to be fluent in each of the languages they study at school? What’s more, in most cases, are they aware of what the Common European Framework for Reference (from now on “CEFR”) is?

Therefore, firstly, students must understand why they are being asked what they are being asked, without being underestimated; secondly, would adding a third main strand to grammar and vocabulary be helpful for learners to improve their level of proficiency in English in Catalonia?

The present paper aims to define the term *fluency* from an English as a Foreign Language (from now on “EFL”) perspective, to discuss the different aspects (positive and negative) that teaching fluency has or may have in the classroom and to prove that the students’ attitude towards the language changes in relation to a series of variables such as class management and the materials used.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Contextualisation: the Catalan curriculum and The Four Strands

When looking closely at the basic competences the Catalan curriculum demands with regard to EFL learning in Secondary Education and having had the chance to experience what the situation is like in a real Catalan high school, it is difficult to determine whether the mentioned competences are adjusted to reality or not since the situation changes drastically from student to student, even more from school to school. The political and competitive factors our European society lives through are crucial to understand why the Catalan curriculum prioritises “school success” before “school progress”. Officially, the goal of every teacher within the Catalan Education System is to try to meet the requirements or competences established by the Government of Catalonia. The question is whether they are in line with what can be expected from the

students or not, taking into account that most of them do not really understand the importance of learning English in the first place. How could the students be able to *verbally reproduce, recite and dramatise adapted or authentic literary texts* without even knowing why they are learning the language such a text has been written in?

Vocationally, the goal of every teacher within the Catalan Education System is to make an impact on the student, being able to contribute to their progress and offering them the tools they need in order for them to be linguistically autonomous in the near future. Paul Nation, who is an emeritus professor of Applied Linguistics and an expert at language teaching, enhances the importance that offering learning strategies to the students has in order to increase their autonomy. According to Nation (2016), an even balance of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development is necessary in every classroom. Out of the four, the fluency development strand —also meaning focused— consists of becoming fluent in listening, speaking, reading and writing. After having tested it in a real context, it could be stated that two of them —meaning focused input and language focused learning—, out of the four, are permanently visible in class, while the other two are only part of the agenda sporadically. As a result, the students learn new words, structures and sounds, but they do not get to integrate such knowledge in a way that allows them to adapt the language to their lives or what's more, to use it to communicate themselves.

Additionally, other key factors to be taken into consideration would be the type of content presented to the students, whether it works in comparison to reality and whether it is purposeful for them or not as well as their individual needs and the possibility to raise the complexity of the tasks in an attempt to boost their fluency abilities. Firstly, as Ruiz-Funes, M.T. (2002) stated, "the teachers emphasized the need for authentic and meaningful language use in the classrooms. They insisted on making language relevant to the students' lives in order to make it real and purposeful to them." Secondly, as Long M. H. and Crookes, G. (1992) claimed, "Language education provided to adult learners should cater to their individual needs and also focus on the formal features of language critical to success in contexts beyond the educational setting." The question is whether teenagers should be included in the aforementioned assumption, as opposed to the idea that only adult learners should be, or, on the contrary, whether they should be left behind, as they have been until now. The truth is they will become adults sooner or later. Therefore, shouldn't the above mentioned "contexts beyond the educational setting" be considered or envisioned beforehand?

Lastly, with regard to applying a raise-task-complexity approach, the results found throughout research, more specifically predicted by the Cognitive Hypothesis (Skehan & Foster, 1997; Robinson, 2001, 2003, 2005; Gilabert, 2006; Michel, Kuiken & Vedder, 2007), demonstrated that raising task complexity affects the fluency development of the students negatively (Levkina, M., 2008):

“Increasing task complexity along the number of elements generates negative effects for fluency and structural complexity, a positive impact on lexical complexity and no significant effect on accuracy.”

2.2 Defining, teaching and measuring fluency

In an attempt to provide a definition for fluency as a concept and outline its possibilities in terms of instruction and measurement, the following sections will cover some of the different findings reached by previous research. Additionally, a series of bullet points that could be used as a rubric or guide to determine what makes a student fluent and what makes a good language learner will also be included.

According to Fillmore (1979) on L1 fluency, it “might simply be the ability to talk at length with few pauses; the ability to fill time with talk; the ability to talk in coherent and semantically dense sentences; the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts; and the ability to be creative and imaginative in the language use.” While only L1 fluency was contemplated in this regard, it represented the starting point for consequently defining L2 fluency. In a more recent investigation, Tavakoli, P., Campbell, C., and McCormack, J. (2016) stated that “fluency is sometimes used as a holistic concept of language proficiency integrating all different aspects of successful performance, e.g. syntactically complex, lexically diverse and communicatively fluent speech. [...] In a narrower sense of the term, fluency is predominantly associated with the ability to communicate one’s intended meaning effortlessly, smoothly and with no or little disruption.” Therefore, it could be set out that in order to tell whether students are fluent or not they need to:

- ✓ have appropriate things to say on a wide variety of topics
- ✓ express their ideas effortlessly
- ✓ produce speech with little disruption

For the art of teaching to actually take place, a long list of variables converge depending on the field of study, the subjects, the teachers and a long etcetera, with the final purpose of contributing something to the students or, better said, of demonstrating to them that learning does not come exclusively from the teacher as a single source, but rather, from every single person taking part, as a whole. In that sense, as Hammond and Gibbons (2005) claimed, it could be stated that effective teaching "is not simply the transmission of information from one individual to another, but is a collaborative and negotiated social process, whereby knowledge is constructed between, rather than within, individuals."

Focusing more on the idea of teaching fluency, it is important to highlight that it emerges as learners develop automaticity, over time. In many cases, it flourishes as a result of other learning, as an outgrowth. Therefore, it may seem logical to wonder, is it actually possible for teachers to intervene in the students' fluency development? According to previous research, it is indeed. After testing it with an experimental group of learners, the result was that the students showed higher levels of fluency (Tavakoli, P., Campbell, C., & McCormack, J., 2016). Thanks to that experiment, it was possible to demonstrate that fluency could be targeted directly by raising the learner's metacognitive awareness of its features, in this case, learners studying L2 abroad, in the target language context. In this line, a second and more recent study carried out by Diana Peñuela shows that "increasing intelligibility can be a way to help students reach the language level they are expected to and most importantly, become better communicators and learners, which in the end is the ultimate goal of EFL teaching."

Another significant finding on a previous investigation carried out by Ellis, R. (2008) appealed directly to the importance of the learners' beliefs in relation to language learning. Thus, "if beliefs influence the actions that learners perform to learn an L2, they cannot be ignored by teachers. Little learning is likely if there is a mismatch between the teacher's and the students' belief systems." In relation to the students' exposure towards the language, which is crucial for them to develop their fluency ability, Segalowitz (2010), stated that "although the classroom context often provides limited and insufficient opportunities for L2 practice, tailor-made training aimed at improving fluency can have short-term positive effects."

Finally, in order to teach fluency effectively, it seems essential to define what makes a good language learner. A clear definition for this was proposed by Rubin, J. (1975). He stated that a good learner implies "being a willing and accurate guesser;

having a strong, persevering drive to communicate; often being uninhibited and willing to make mistakes in order to learn or communicate; focusing on form by looking for patterns; taking advantage of all practice opportunities; monitoring his or her own speech as well as that of others; and paying attention to meaning". To sum up, the present paper suggests that fluency teaching would potentially be possible, taking into account that knowledge is constructed between the students, that they are aware of the efforts they need to make in order to become good language learners and that tailor-made training is provided considering the students' belief systems by the teachers.

With regard to measuring fluency, the fact that fluency is not currently included in the Catalan curriculum for foreign languages as a sole dimension to achieve among the students, together with the hypothesis that only two out of the four strands proposed by Nation (2016) are normally practiced in class, subsequently has a direct impact on the progress of the students with regard to their level of language proficiency and thus on their ability to express themselves fluently. In the same way that the students' knowledge of grammar or vocabulary is tested, the present study suggests that adding fluency as a third main block could be positive and beneficial for the students' autonomy and communicative level of fluency. Speaking is sometimes tested too. However, some teachers prefer to reduce the number of speaking practices or, more drastically, even avoid it completely in an attempt to make the students feel more comfortable in class. However, such a decision may have a hugely negative impact on the future of the students in terms of their ability to be communicatively autonomous or fluent.

Additionally, the possibility to transform teaching practices into plurilingual and translanguaging opportunities could also serve as an engine towards the students' fluency development. In the words of Vallejo and Moore (2016), "transforming educational practices implies that emergent plurilingual speakers move from being positioned as deficient to adept users of a wide ranging semiotic repertoire. Adopting a plurilingual / translanguaging lens allows pupils to display competences that are not usually validated in educational environments and to enact practices that allow them to position themselves and be positioned as active agents and competent readers and language users". On the one hand, with regard to the guidelines to be followed when designing a session focused on fluency, according to previous research, and more specifically, according to Nation (2007), the fluency development activities that could

be used in class with the purpose of making the students more autonomous and fluent, should not present new vocabulary, should not be related to language features and should be demanding in terms of time pressure. The first condition, "the activities should not present new vocabulary", is particularly interesting for the present investigation since the students often find applying what they learn especially difficult. In this regard, would it help them to be provided with opportunities to put all the grammar and vocabulary previously learned into practice and thus get the feeling of exposure they need to be autonomous in the future?

On the other hand, in order for the students to be able to produce language and improve their fluency skills, which could be tested by the teacher afterwards, a series of strategies used when developing a second language could be presented to them, in line with Nation's ideas. Going more in depth in relation to the type of strategies that are used when learning a second language, previous work carried out by Yang N. D. in 1995 showed that compensation strategies were, in fact, "the most frequently used group of learning strategies reported by the subjects". As per the rest of possible strategies used, compensation strategies were followed by "affective strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies, cognitive strategies, and memory strategies." In this sense, a more recent study carried out by Anna Ljunberg reads that "those students who do not use strategies in an effective way may benefit from becoming aware of what strategies there are and how they can be applied". Therefore, by making the students aware of the different strategies that they can use it would be possible to monitor and measure their level of fluency.

2.3 Class management: scaffolding and motivation

The following chapter's intention, based on previous investigations, is to reflect on a series of key elements that may help EFL teachers obtain better results in class. The elements chosen for this purpose are scaffolding and motivation as the core pillars of class management.

The importance of an effective, thorough and planned class management when it comes to teaching EFL is inarguable. Peers need a good dose of organisation, rhythm and an active and even-balanced participation monitoring in order to be able to make the most of their learning opportunities. Additionally, in the present study, scaffolding (or the absence of it, if that were the case) is considered as key — in line with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978) — and as the engine or unifying thread in every language session. In order for teaching and, therefore, learning, to be

successful, "the tasks should be ahead of students' abilities to complete alone, but within their ability to complete when scaffolding is provided (Mercer, 1994)."

More specifically, when referred to students learning a second language, Hammond, J., and Gibbons, P. (2005) stated that "effective scaffolding should also result in 'handover', with students being able to transfer understandings and skills to new tasks in new learning contexts, thereby becoming increasingly independent learners" and added that "this emphasis on students' learning potential, and not simply on their current abilities, and the consequent raising of expectations about what is possible, seemed to us to be especially significant for students learning through the medium of their second language, where cognitive and conceptual understanding may outstrip English language development or, conversely, where abilities in English may constrain subject-specific learning."

If scaffolding is considered as the engine or underlying thread in every session, then the role of motivation could be no other than the steering-wheel or the needle. If the students are not so talented at learning English as a second language but they are motivated, then fluency development is possible. However, if the students are very talented but they are permanently demotivated, then the chances that learning and progress happen in relation to their second language acquisition are reduced. In this line, in the words of Dailey A. (2009), four core factors influence motivation: a positive attitude towards the L2 community, an enjoyment in learning the language, how students see themselves in the future as language speakers, and what external pressures are hindering their learning.

The competences the Catalan curriculum lays out together with the assessment criteria followed by EFL teachers arguably represent two key factors to be potentially analysed and re-design that highly influence what has been proven decisive by research when it comes to learning English as a second language: motivation. In this sense, Dörnyei Z. (1990) stated the following on motivation:

1. Instrumentality and especially integrativeness are broad tendencies or subsystems rather than straightforward universals, comprising context-specific clusters of loosely related components.

2. Motivation to learn a foreign language involves two further components widely discussed in general motivational psychology but generally ignored in second language acquisition research: these are "need for achievement" and "attributions about past failures". Drawing on the theoretical and practical findings of educational psychology concerning these concepts might be particularly fruitful with regard to the analysis of task difficulty and learning effort, effects of success and failure, as well as perceived ability and anxiety.

3. The nature of motivation to learn a foreign language varies as a function of the level of the target language to be mastered; therefore, an adequate motivation construct should incorporate a time-factor as well.

Therefore, on the one hand, it could be stated that, in order for the students to be motivated, it would be intrinsically necessary for the teacher to be aware of their past performance and for the student to be aware of every single step forward they take towards the final goal, which should be programmed and communicated beforehand. For fluency, on the other hand, with it being another big strand to be potentially taken into account when it comes to assessing the students' performance, different opportunities would emerge for peers to put their skills into practice as well as a new range of abilities to be assessed in the classroom, which could be motivating both for the students and for the teachers. Furthermore, Csizér, K. (2017) argues that "classroom related processes seem to be crucial for young learners" and establishes a series of elements to be taken into account by the teachers in relation to motivation, more specifically "four issues should be noted here as defining for classroom motivation: the role of teachers in students' motivation, task motivation, group dynamics and demotivation."

3. The study

This paper aims to find out whether Catalan peers would be more motivated or not towards the idea of English learning using the kind of exercises as the matrix, with the final aim of promoting their level of fluency. The research questions this study aims to answer are as follows:

1. Would including a significant number of fluency exercises and/or real-situation activities, in line with the goals set by the CEFR, as part of the main strands to

be contemplated in the Catalan curriculum, be beneficial for the students to improve their EFL communicative skills?

2. Is measuring EFL fluency possible and timely in a Catalan instruction context in order for the students to improve their EFL communicative skills?

Hoping to answer the above-mentioned research questions, a test was designed with the purpose of trying it with 8 voluntary Catalan subjects. The data was collected from 7 females and 1 male aged 13-17 who were kind enough to participate. The test itself consisted of 2 questionnaires (one completed at the beginning of the test and one at the end) and 3 different exercises (1, vocabulary; 2, grammar; 3, fluency) completed in between the questionnaires.

3.1 Methodology

After having analysed the Catalan curriculum for foreign languages and subsequently having had the chance to experience what it is like to be a teacher in a real instruction context in a Catalan high-school, important gaps to fill so that the students actually have a chance to become fluent in English during their Secondary Education period were detected.

The nature of the present study is qualitative in the sense that it aims to understand the reasons why fluency does not play a prominent role in the Catalan curriculum, the effect it has in the classroom without applying a rigorous control over every variable, and in a naturalistic environment, and to be able to provide ideas and techniques for teachers and researchers to have more resources. My research method consists of:

1. Identifying a problem — according to a study carried out by the European Union, the knowledge of English as a second language in Spain is low: less than 25% of the adult population over the age of 14 is fluent in English.
2. Proposing a potential alternative — development of motivating strategies in an attempt to provide resources and qualitative information.

Therefore, this study could be categorised as an innovative research project focused on analysing the current situation, understanding what is realistic and what is not and planning new motivating strategies in order to contribute resources to research and society.

The subjects were a group of Catalan Secondary Education students aged 13 to 17 years old who kindly agreed to participate in a videoconference conducted in order to provide specific information on the matter and carry out a series of activities.

Student 1 was studying at *Institut Montmeló (IES)*, student 2 at *Sagrada Família Sant Andreu*, students 3 and 4 at *Salesians Sabadell* (same class), students 5 and 6 at *Institut Bon Salvador* (same class), student 7 at *Institut Vilamajor* and student 8 at *Institut Antoni de Martí i Franquès (Tarragona)*.

On the one hand, three of the schools were organically public; on the other hand, the other three were public-private partnership schools of a Christian religious character. The socioeconomic background of the families ranged from low to middle and upper-middle.

Out of the eight, one of them had not studied English for the previous year, another one was part of the American Baccalaureate programme and most of them attended English lessons after school some days a week. This information is considered as relevant to understand the variety of students present in the group of subjects and their differences L2 level-wise. However, it should be taken into consideration that their L2 level did not represent an indicator for the purpose of the present study.

All the subjects shared the same mother tongues (Spanish and Catalan). Nevertheless, even though the questionnaires were conducted either in Spanish or in Catalan, the language used in order for them to go through the exercises was almost exclusively English, with the exception of some clarifications that were given in Catalan or Spanish for the students' convenience.

3.1.1 Data collection

It seems logical to understand that, given the difficult situation our society is going through with the COVID-19 pandemic, the possibility to design data collection tools has been of a considerably limited nature. However, in an attempt to present

reliable and real evidence, the use of different TIC resources seemed a good solution in order to obtain the information needed to conduct the study of the present paper. For that reason, a series of tools such as Google Drive, Skype, as well as pre-planned exercises found online have been used in line with the innovative character of the investigation. Besides, a couple of questionnaires were organically designed in order to find out the students' perspective on the matter and to understand the situation in depth.

To begin with, the main resource for elaborating the first data collection tool of this project has been the analysis of the investigation carried out until now as such. Reviewing the references chosen and analysing them in order to better understand the source of the *problem* to the best of one's ability was crucial and enlightening. More specifically, the data collected from the first questionnaire consisted of a series of oral answers, duly transcribed simultaneously as the subjects produced them. Notwithstanding, the answers collected from the second questionnaire were written and produced directly by the students and later reviewed and stored. The reason why the procedure was chosen to be different from the first questionnaire to the second is the latter played a significantly higher importance as it was based on the activities previously carried out. Giving a certain degree of privacy to the subjects in order to better develop their answers was intended and considered a priority in this case.

The activities, which played a significant part of the study, were presented in a shared Google Doc file, as well as the questionnaires themselves, and served as an illustrating guide on the different typologies of exercises available. Regardless of the outcome, the difficulty or the content they offered, their practicability, typology and the feelings they gave the students were the key pieces to take into consideration by the students and thus, by the investigation.

Firstly, the questionnaires were prepared in order to understand the current situation of English instruction taught in high school from the students' perspective and secondly in order to analyse how familiar they were with the activities presented, whether they were evenly used in class and the disposition of the students towards learning English fluency wise.

The answers from Questionnaire 1 were verbally reproduced by the subjects and simultaneously typed as they were being developed. For that reason, it was possible to get a first impression of what the data would later reveal. Getting familiar with the data

was the main purpose of this step. However, after comparing the data with the initial objectives of the study it was possible to reach further conclusions. The exercises or activities were used to see how resourceful the subjects were, whether they felt comfortable or not in an English instruction context and also for them to be able to distinguish among different types of exercises. With regard to the behaviour of the subjects, it may be interesting to point out that all of them kept their camera turned on during the videoconference with the exception of the male subject. All of them showed a great interest in relation to improving their English skills.

In order to analyse the data, a comparison between questionnaire 1 and questionnaire 2 was carried out, logically by pointing out those answers that contradicted previous answers from the same person and those which did not. Moreover, a series of statistics and pie charts was created in order to present the information more clearly, graphically and in a more organised way so that conclusions could be reached more easily and in an attempt to evoke the reflection of the potential readers.

4. Results

On the one hand, the first questionnaire's goal was to find out information related to the way the students perceive English as a language taught in Secondary Education, how self-confident they feel in a situation where they need to use English as a communicative tool (both in real life situations and in class) as well as how important fluency is for them. On the other hand, the second and final questionnaire aimed to collect data related to the exercises carried out during the test in comparison to those practiced in their real instruction context. Additionally, it also served as a tool to find out about their expectations from us as teachers. Finally, it was also used to learn about their attitude when they are asked a question in English as well as their ability to react in such a hypothetical situation.

With regard to the central and most practical segment of the test and as previously explained, it consisted of two different parts. The first part took place in the shape of two quite simple multiple choice exercises, delimited within level A2/B1, according to the CEFR for languages. In the first exercise, the students had to choose between 2 lexical options; in the second, between 3 grammar options. The second part of the test consisted of a communicative exercise where the students had to express how they felt in 6 potential situations (they only had to work with 2 of them, as they

were provided an online die so that the game could be played for real which was rolled only twice). The students were provided a series of tools and were instructed to only use vocabulary they were already familiar with:

1. List of adjectives (see Appendix 1)
2. Example of how to sort out the exercise → structure/model/scaffolding
3. Board game with questions (see Appendix 2)
4. Online die

For questionnaire number 1, which was carried out in Catalan, the results are as follows:

Question 1

How happy are you about the quality of English taught in class?

Are you happy about the quality of English taught in class?

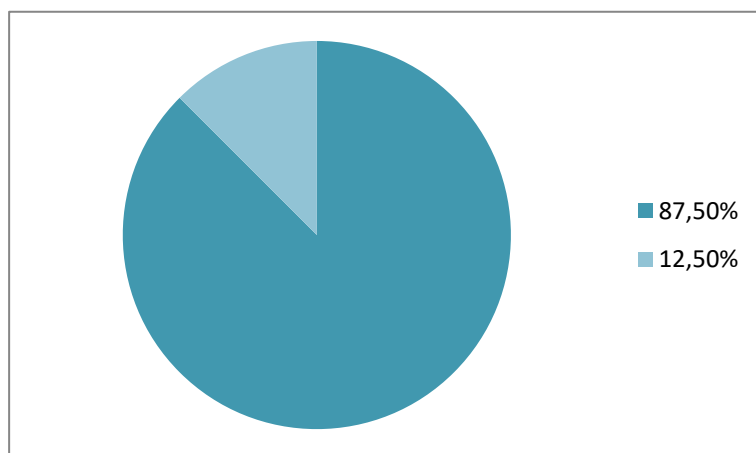


CHART 1

Generally, all the students agreed on the fact they are not happy about the quality of the English taught in class (87.5%), with the exception of one student (12.5%).

Question 2

Have you ever had to face a situation where English was the means of communication?

Absolutely all of them claimed to have had experienced situations where English was the main means of communication.

Question 3

Would you be interested in practicing this sort of situations more often in class?

Generally, all of them found that this type of situations (real-life situations) should be practiced more often in class, with the exception of one of them, who claimed to be happy about the number of times this sort of situations are practiced in class.

Question 4

How do you feel when asked to write a composition in class? How difficult is it for you?

In this case, half of them stated that they felt ready when asked to elaborate a composition; they confirmed they felt all the necessary tools were, in general, duly provided beforehand.

Conversely, three of them answered the opposite and one of them reported to never have been asked to write a composition by the teacher.

Question 5

In your opinion is fluency less important than vocabulary and grammar, as important as vocabulary and grammar or more important than vocabulary and grammar?

How important is fluency in comparison to grammar and vocabulary?

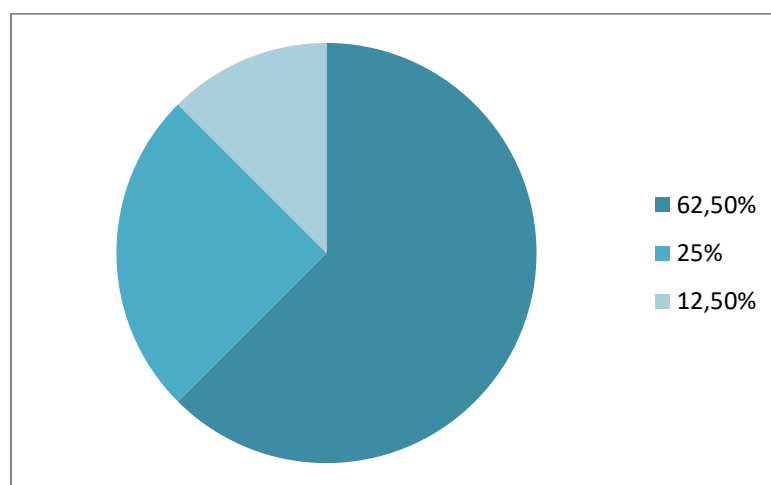


CHART 2

Finally, five out of the eight students expressed the opinion that fluency is as important as grammar and vocabulary (62,5%), two of them stated they found fluency more important than the other two (25%) and one student, on the contrary, claimed to find it less important (12,5%).

As per questionnaire number 2, which was also carried out in Catalan, the results are as follows:

Question 1

Rate the importance given to each exercise from 1-5 (1 being the minimum level of English and 5 being the maximum).

Importance given to each exercise

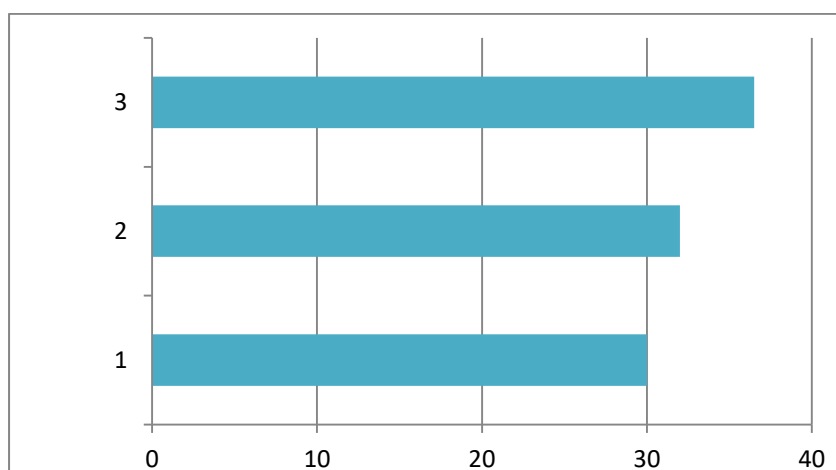


CHART 3

Here, vocabulary received a score of 3 three times, of 4 four times and of 5 once only (75% of importance); grammar received a score of 3 twice, of 4 four times and of 5 twice (80% of importance); last but not least, fluency received a score of 4 three times, of 4.5 once only and of 5 four times (90% of importance).

Question 2

In your opinion, are these exercises equally practiced in class according to their typology?

The general answer was a "no" from almost all of them, with the exception of one who found the diversity of the exercises even.

Question 3

According to you, which exercise would be more beneficial for your English fluency development?

Which exercise would be more beneficial for your English fluency development?

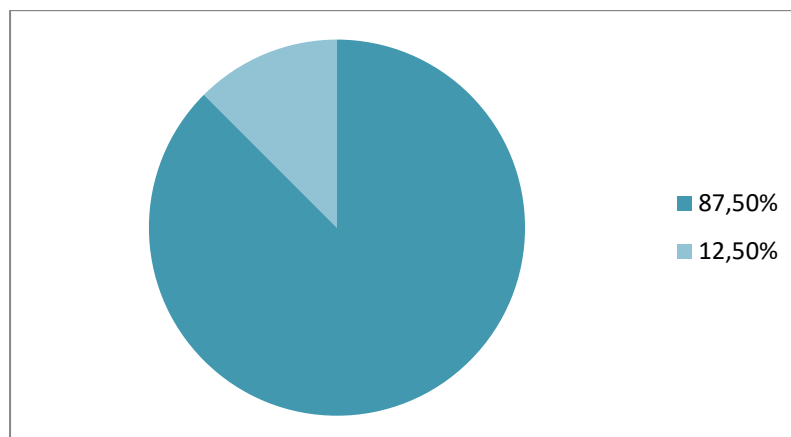


CHART 4

The general answer was number 3 (87.50%), with the exception of one who stated that all of them are beneficial towards their fluency development (12.50%).

Question 4

From 1 to 5, what would be the level of English in your class in your opinion (1 being the minimum and 5 the maximum)?

Four of the subjects found that the level, out of 5, in their class would be 2; one of them answered 2 or 3; one of them answered 3 or 4; one of them answered 4; finally, the last did not provide an answer by arguing the range of levels was too diverse to give an answer.

Question 5

Are you motivated or demotivated by that fact?

Six out of eight students claimed to be demotivated by the allegedly low level of English of their classmates. On the contrary, two of them claimed to be motivated.

Question 6

How can the teachers be of help to the students?

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Student 1 | By separating us in different levels. |
| Student 2 | By providing us with more fun activities. |
| Student 3 | By providing us with more exercises related to the past simple and past continuous tenses. |
| Student 4 | By providing us with more flexible exercises, divided in different levels. |
| Student 5 | By providing us with more personalised feedback. |
| Student 6 | By offering us a better level of English, that is, by improving their level of English. |
| Student 7 | By speaking in English at all times and using movies as a resource. |
| Student 8 | By motivating us more through more practical exercises. |

Question 7

If I were to ask you something in English, would you be able to answer "I don't understand" in English?

All of them answered positively. Three of them answered in English, whereas five of them answered in Catalan.

5. Discussion

With regard to the existing link between the present results and former research studies, fluency constitutes a field of study that has been researched by many. However, it was not easy to find answers related to what the students think or what could be done to improve the situation in Catalonia according to them. For that reason,

the main purpose of the present study was to serve as a potential alternative to ordinary English instruction, as also suggested by Vallejo and Moore (2016) "transforming educational practices" and "adopting a plurilingual / translanguaging lens", by focusing on the level of fluency among the students as one of the main goals to achieve in Secondary Education.

Firstly, it is indeed possible to establish several links between the present results and former research studies. For instance, the truth is that when provided with scaffolding, the students were able to reproduce structures in order to better communicate themselves. Therefore, it could be claimed that understandings and skills were transferred and, thus, effective scaffolding had taken place (Hammond, J., and Gibbons, P. (2005). Besides, taking into account that no new vocabulary was added (Nation P., 2016), the students were able to integrate and solidify vocabulary to express themselves. Furthermore, it was intended to raise the learners' metacognitive awareness, which worked relatively well given that the adequacy of the activity had to be readapted due to the circumstances.

With regard to their level of motivation or demotivation, it could be stated that, according to the results, it actually has an impact on the way they perceive the language (Csizer, K. 2017) given that their answers are aligned with this idea.

In terms of disposition, when students were asked about their self-confidence in situations where the teacher was asking them to write a composition, that is, to tackle a task that could make them feel uncomfortable, half of them agreed on having all the necessary tools; however, the other half claimed to feel unprepared or left behind. In the same line, when asked about their attitude or feelings when having to express themselves in English in real-life situations, most of them confirmed to feel nervous, vulnerable or even defenceless. This is significant in the sense that none of them claimed to not be afraid of making mistakes, which, according to Rubin J. (1975) should be one of the main features of a good language learner: "often being uninhibited and willing to make mistakes in order to learn or communicate."

In relation to the statement that knowledge should be constructed between, rather than within, individuals (Hammond and Gibbons, 2005), the subjects seemed to disagree with this idea; they felt that the best way for them to learn is by being divided in different levels in an attempt to progress more adequately.

Secondly, concerning the link between present results and the study's initial objectives, the latter found an incentive in the fact that Spanish students, ergo Catalan students, struggle to be at the same level as other European countries when referring to EFL management from a communicative point of view. The truth is the present results are aligned with the initial objectives and that is positive. However, better results potentially could have been obtained if the current situation were different, that is, if the study had been conducted in regular circumstances. All in all, the link between the present results and the study's initial objectives is stable; the findings are relevant, a few of them unexpected, some of them predictable and others were just to be confirmed.

Finally, concerning whether the research questions could be answered or not by the results of the study, it has been possible to reach several answers. On the one hand, it could be stated that providing the students with more fluency and real-situation activities in class in order to improve their EFL communicative skills would be beneficial for them, according to the results. In order to better illustrate such an affirmation, it would be convenient to draw attention to the results obtained from charts 2 and 3. Before carrying out the activities, that is, during the first questionnaire, most of the students agreed on the fact that all the activities were important. However, after conducting the exercises, they seemed to have changed their mind at some level in this regard, since fluency was the strand evaluated as most important on average, with a difference of four and a half points. A potential reason why it may have occurred is the participants, unconsciously, better understood what was being referred to as fluency when provided with a practical example, which could be used as a quite explicit argument to always provide examples from the beginning. Another possibility could be that they consciously understood the exercise as a demonstration of what they actually need to become better at communicating themselves in English.

On the other hand, regarding whether measuring EFL fluency is possible and timely in a Catalan instruction context in order for the students to improve their EFL communicative skills, according to the results obtained from the study, it could be stated that the answer to both questions is positive for several reasons. As experienced with the subjects, it is indeed possible to measure the fluency of Catalan Secondary Education students since, when provided with the necessary requirements and specifying clear and solid objectives, they responded positively and showed proper use of the language and a good attitude towards it. According to the answers resulting from question 6 (Questionnaire 2), students' sole will is to improve by being able to

apply what they learn through practical activities, good models to imitate and real life situations, among others .

As shown by the subjects when answering the last question of the study, the disposition towards using English as the means of communication when asked something in English is still low as only 3 of them took the initiative to use the language they already know and thus prove their answer. This could be due to the fact that they are lacking information on how to become good language learners. To have been trained in that direction, in the words of Rubin J., they would "have a strong, persevering drive to communicate." Taking into consideration that fluency is not directly related to linguistic correctness, including it as an important strand in class would bring up new opportunities for both those that are considered to have a lower level and for those that looking for higher levels of exposition in class. Besides, it would minimize the feeling of lack of improvement due to the fact that specific classmates' level of English is allegedly too low.

Last but not least, concerning the urge of including fluency as another big strand, it could actually be stated that it is timely as the generalised level of demotivation in class, both experienced during my placement and also transferred by the students through the answers in question 5 of Questionnaire 2 in the study, interferes negatively in the progress of the students towards fluency (Csizer, K., 2017) and thus in their potential opportunities.

5.1 Study limitations and further research

Before the current situation, it was not easy to carry out proper research, that is, with the most appropriate tools and with the help of optimal scenarios. Therefore, apart from the information related to non-verbal signs that went missing, for instance, a significant fact that could logically be understood as a limitation in this regard is that only one of the participants in the study was male. Another major limitation to be taken into account is that, initially, the planned exercises were to be group ones, but, due to the situation, they had to be adapted to the circumstances, resulting in individual activities that do not provide the same feeling, information and, ultimately, results, as the group ones. Concurrently, disposition was supposed to be tested in a different way, as well as many other aspects. The way it was analysed could potentially lead one to think that it was not as accurately explained to the students as it should have. Nevertheless, to have been explained in more detail, it would have not had the effect

that it had, which was somewhat successful. Last but not least, time pressure is an element that could have integrally been applied to the study, but that, however, was dismissed in an attempt to make the subjects feel comfortable when having the experience of participating in a study of this kind. The repercussion the current situation has had is serious and feeling comfortable was prioritised before other important elements such as this one. Furthermore, the possibility to link the competences set in the Catalan curriculum to those included in the CEFR came too late for reasons related to the nature of the research itself. To have had the occasion to better investigate the possible reasons why both documents present a series of specific and relatively significant differences to a considerable extent, the research could have potentially been addressed in a more detailed manner.

As a result, it could be stated that further research could be carried out in different areas. For example, the role the CEFR plays from a European community perspective is significant, but, however, many students still ignore its existence and the opportunities it brings; the transmission of information related to linguistic strategies to be applied when learning EFL to the students could also be a good subject for research, since many of them could benefit from such information to a certain extent, as stated by Anna Ljunberg; according to this study, the students tend to think that the most helpful for them would be to split the class into different levels for them to be able to progress, which represents an important finding in terms of opportunities for research.

6. Conclusions

Teaching and measuring fluency in class in Catalonia is not only possible and timely but also necessary as an opportunity for the students to change their perception towards the language and, more importantly, towards their classmates and their assumptions on the different levels that there are. On the one hand, the students need to be provided with a series of strategies and bullet points on what makes a good language learner for them to be able to understand what they need to do in order to achieve such a goal. On the other hand, it would be beneficial that teachers started moving from ordinary instruction to alternative and innovative educational practices where the metacognitive awareness of the students was raised, intelligibility was taken into account, etc. in order to help the students improve their fluency skills as a final goal.

A language is only useful when communication of any sort can be established. When put into practice, regardless of the correctness applied, it is possible to understand that grammar and vocabulary are indeed extremely important, but that communication can also be established without them, to an extent. If communicative resourcefulness was evaluated or assessed and thus taken consideration, it would be possible for us as teachers to start measuring how resourceful the students are and thus, whether they would be able to manage in real-life situations or not. Exposure is extremely important for all language learners in order to be able to self-test them and see exactly what needs to be improved.

By offering the students a more even balance of activities, among which grammar and vocabulary would play, of course, a crucial and key role, the doubts on whether learning English is useful or not could be significantly reduced since as soon as we feel we are able to dominate the language and not the opposite, it is easier to reach certain levels of acceptance and motivation. Moreover, as it could be extracted from the final question asked to the subjects during the study, disposition is very important in order to overcome language barriers and consequently achieve a certain level of fluency. Therefore, as teachers, we should keep that in mind at all times: it is highly important to help the students work on their disposition.

With this paper I aimed to present potentially inspiring information and resources for all those EFL teachers willing to make a difference in the lives of the students in a way that they do not need us as teachers anymore. In my opinion, proper learning happens when a student feels more autonomous and independent than before, and not only indoors, inside the class, but most importantly, outside of it. It is about time we envision a different, more practical reality in order to put our good will to actually help the students into practice.

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8. Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Super adjectives!

adjectives are words which describe

| People  | Objects  | Good feelings  | Bad feelings  | Size  | Time  |
|--|---|---|--|--|--|
| adorable | bright | brave | angry | big | ancient |
| adventurous | clear | calm | annoyed | colossal | brief |
| aggressive | distinct | cheerful | anxious | enormous | early |
| annoying | drab | comfortable | ashamed | gigantic | fast |
| beautiful | elegant | courageous | awful | great | late |
| clumsy | filthy | determined | bewildered | huge | modern |
| confident | gleaming | eager | bored | immense | old |
| considerate | grotesque | elated | clumsy | large | quick |
| excitable | long | encouraged | confused | little | rapid |
| glamorous | magnificent | energetic | defeated | long | short |
| grumpy | muddy | enthusiastic | defiant | mammoth | slow |
| helpful | precious | excited | depressed | massive | swift |
| important | sparkling | exuberant | disgusted | mini | young |
| intimidating | spotless | fantastic | disturbed | minuscule | |
| obnoxious | strange | fine | dizzy | puny | |
| odd | unsightly | healthy | embarrassed | short | |
| talented | unusual | joyful | envious | tall | |
| thoughtless | valuable | pleasant | frightened | teeny | |
| timid | | relieved | hungry | tiny | |
| handsome | | | lonely | | |

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APPENDIX 2

ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS
How did you feel...?

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| Finish | | ...the last time you lost something? | ...the last time a shop assistant tried to sell you something? | ...the last time you watched a horror film? | ...the last time someone gave you a hug? |
| ...the last time you did a lot of exercise? | | Go back 1 space | | | ...the last time you won something? |
| ...the last time many people liked a post you wrote online? | | ...the last time you helped someone? | | Super skip! Move ahead | ...the last time you went on holiday? |
| ...the last time you made a mistake? | | ...the last time you had a difficult test? | | | |
| Miss a turn | | ...the last time you laughed a lot? | | | |
| ...the last time you travelled by boat? | | ...the last time you ate too much? | | ...the last time a beggar asked you for money? | |
| ...the last time a motorist drove closely behind you? | | ...the last time someone interrupted you? | | ...the last time you travelled by airplane? | |
| ...the last time you were invited somewhere? | | Oh no! Go back | | ...the last time a waiter or waitress ignored you? | ...the last time you got stuck in a traffic jam? |
| Go forward 2 Spaces | ...the last time you got soaked in the rain? | ...the last time a friend cancelled on you? | | | Start |

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