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## A Case Study of Four High School ESL Students' Oral Reading Fluency and Affect

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A Case Study of Four High School ESL Students'

Oral Reading Fluency and Affect

By  
Katie M. Devaney

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Master of Science  
In  
Teaching and Learning

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This thesis is submitted as part of the required work in the Department of Educational Studies, K-12 and Secondary Programs, KSP 610, Scholarly Writing, at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and has been supervised, examined, and accepted by the professor.

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### Abstract

This study examines the affective elements present when students learning English as a Second Language (ESL) are reading aloud. Special attention is paid to anxiety, motivation, and attitudes. Participants of this study included four ESL students who received English language support one to two hours per day, were literate in their L1, and were intermediate to advanced language learners in a midwestern suburban town. To identify affective elements related to oral reading fluency, participants were interviewed and observed in their ESL classroom. Each also participated in a think-aloud session in which he or she was asked questions when stumbling or pausing while reading aloud. The results of this study indicate that attitudes, motivation, and anxiety influence oral reading fluency. Results suggested that the anxiety related to social nervousness, pronunciation, and moving from an ESL class to a mainstream class had the largest impact on ESL students' oral reading fluency.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

Students in English as a second language (ESL) programs must learn to read, write, speak, and understand a new language. Students who move to America in high school often have less than four years to “catch up” to their native English-speaking peers. After this time, they must go to universities or enter into workforces that have little regard for the amount of time they have spent learning English. While they are learning English, students often learn to use English for social purposes before they master the art of academic English (Cummins, 2000). This may cause students to wonder why they seemingly speak English well and can communicate in real-life settings, but struggle with academic material like homework, standardized tests, and reading aloud.

ESL students often struggle to sound out words and read fluently aloud (Grabe, 2008). These same students may be fluent and confident when speaking, but are embarrassed to read in front of the class. This is likely due to the fact that “conversational aspects of proficiency (known as basic interpersonal communicative skills or BICS) reach peer-appropriate levels within about two years of exposure to a second language (L2) but a period of 5-7 years [is] required, on average, for immigrant students to approach grade norms in academic areas (known as cognitive academic language proficiency or CALP) of English” (Cummins, 2000). It makes sense that this discrepancy in BICS and CALP may cause a lack of confidence, low self-esteem, or feelings of inadequacy that should be addressed when working with students who are learning English as an additional language.

Literature suggests that affective elements of language learning, such as self-esteem

and confidence, influence language learners' abilities to use the language in appropriate ways. Attention has been paid to anxiety and language learning (Zehn, 2008) and (Pappamihiel, 2002), self-confidence related to oral performance (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002), and attitudes and willingness to use the language (Yashima, Zehuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004). These studies show that some elements of affect do indeed influence language learning. Literature is missing or limited that considers the affective side of oral reading fluency. This research study aims to discover which affective factors affect students while they are reading aloud.

#### Statement of the Problem

Affective elements that influence general language learning, oral performance, and willingness to use the language may affect oral reading fluency as well. Elements like anxiety, self-esteem, motivation, or feelings of inadequacy may hinder gains in oral reading proficiency. Students who have acquired BICS, but still struggle with CALP while reading may feel confused or frustrated by their inability to catch up to native peers while reading orally. Motivation, self-esteem, and anxiety can influence overall academic success as well. Zehng (2008) noted, "high levels of language anxiety are associated with low levels of academic achievement in second/foreign language learning" (p. 5). This study aims to discover which affective elements influence oral reading fluency for four high school students learning English as an additional language.

The research questions for this study include:

1. Why is oral fluency important to English learners for reading achievement?
2. What affective factors are present during oral reading for ESL students?
3. What factors are observable in an academic setting?

4. What factors are identified by students?
5. Which affective factors are most significant in influencing oral reading fluency from the perspective of students?

#### Importance of the Study

Many ESL students struggle to read fluently. This may affect their confidence when reading aloud. If one can discover which elements impact oral reading fluency, additional research can be done to determine ways to help ESL students improve their reading. It is important that researchers pay attention to affective elements involved in oral reading fluency as they may offer clues as to ways to help students continually advance their oral reading skills.

Research supports the need to focus on improving oral reading fluency to improve overall language proficiency. According to Geva (2006), oral reading fluency needs to be a focus for language teachers. She states that, "Some educators and practitioners believe that the main reason that second language learners (L2) lack accuracy and fluency with regard to L2 literacy skills is due to lack of L2 oral language proficiency" (p. 2). Li and Ness (2001) support that stating, "The development of reading fluency is an important aspect of learning to read. Fluent readers read faster and are more likely to absorb more information from the reading content" (p. 50). Obviously, this is an important area for study and, like any other area of language, is one that is influenced by affect.

Researchers have discovered the effect that anxiety, self-esteem, and motivation have on speaking and general language learning, but admit that more research should be done in the area of ESL students' reading. Pappamihiel (2002) suggests that, "Currently, in the field of foreign language research, such researchers are investigating anxieties related to specific skills



such as reading and writing. In light of the findings in this study, such research should be done with (English Language Learners) ELLs" (p. 348). Zehng, who researched anxiety related to language learning, sees solutions being sought by researching affective elements in language learning. Zehng (2008) says "by understanding the causes and effects of language anxiety and their relationship to language achievement, strategies and interventions to boost the self-confidence of learners and lower their language anxiety can prove beneficial to all stakeholders" (p. 9). This study aims to discover which affective elements influence oral reading fluency, and the hope is that research can be done that focuses on improving oral reading fluency with attention to affective factors.

### Methods

The primary databases used to locate resources were Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Journal Storage (JSTOR). All resources were peer reviewed and published no earlier than 2000. Interviews with and texts by experts in the field of reading and ESL were also used.

The research design used for this study was a qualitative case study. Methods of data collection were observations in the classroom and interviews with students. Also, think-aloud reading sessions, in which students read aloud then described thoughts when they stopped reading or stumbled over a word, were also used to gather data.

For the research questions defined in this study, different methods of data collection were used. One research question asks what affective factors are present during oral reading for ESL students. To determine these factors, the researcher did a think-aloud activity with the participant in which he or she shared his or her thoughts when stumbling or misreading a word

aloud. Think-aloud sessions were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

Another research question asks which factors are observable in an academic setting. To determine observable factors, the researcher observed students reading aloud in a classroom setting. Observational field notes were taken while participants read aloud. During this time the researcher noted which affective elements were present. Notes were typed into a data analysis program and coded.

Other research questions ask what factors are identified by students and which affective factors are most significant in influencing oral reading fluency from the perspective of students. To gather information about these questions, the researcher interviewed students about which affective factors influence them while reading. The researcher started with a list of questions to ask, and followed up on these questions as the interview took place. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

To understand the concept of oral reading fluency in ESL populations, homogenous sampling was used. Participants included four high school students currently enrolled in an ESL program. Analysis of data was done using a qualitative data analysis computer program that stores, organizes, and codes data (Creswell, 2012, p. 241). Research was approved by the International Review Board (IRB) at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

#### Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to the study conducted. The study did not have wide representation of all ESL students. It was conducted using a homogenous sample of four ESL students in a suburban school. There is limited research related specifically to ESL students and oral reading fluency. Studies about oral reading fluency in EFL (English as a Foreign Language)

and other foreign languages may be used to add to the depth of the research. Another limitation was generalizability. In general, according to Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) case studies “are not generalizable in the conventional sense” (p. 11). Other limitations involved, according to Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001), are that case studies “do not lend themselves to numerical representation” (p. 10) and “cannot answer a large number of relevant and appropriate research questions” (p. 12). However, this case study was designed to surface affective factors that may influence oral reading fluency so that more extensive research that is generalizable to larger populations can be conducted in the future. In addition, case studies that employ rich descriptions of contexts, participants, and research methods can inform practices in other settings that have similar characteristics. (Merriam, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Weiss, 1994; Yin, 1994)

#### Definition of Terms

English as a second language (ESL or ELL) student. Student whose native language is not English and who is receiving support from an ESL program.

ESL Services. Support ESL students receive in schools. According to the Minnesota department of education (2012):

Parent(s) complete the student’s Home Language Questionnaire (HLQ) listing a language other than English; and,

Based on language tests, teacher recommendations and parent input about language skills, the student shows a need for English Learner services and instruction to gain skills in listening, speaking, reading, or writing academic English, the language needed for success in school. (para. 3)

Fluency. "Rapid and automatic word recognition, the ability to recognize basic grammatical information, and the rapid combination of toward meanings and structural information" (Grabe & Stoller, 2001, p. 196).

Affect. A domain that "includes attitudes, emotions and feelings" (Morley, 2001, p. 75).

BICS. basic interpersonal communicative skills (Cummins, 2000), social language

CALP. cognitive language academic proficiency (Cummins, 2000), academic language

L2. The second language learned by a participant.

L1. The first language learned or native language of participant.

#### Overview

The remainder of this thesis includes a review of literature related to affective elements in language learning. The methodology of the research will be reviewed. Findings of research will then be discussed, followed by limitations of the study. Finally conclusions will be addressed, including suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are several studies that describe affective elements like attitude, motivation, and anxiety found in language learning. Studies related to specific aspects of language learning, like oral reading fluency, are not as readily available. Review of the current literature helps answer two of the research questions posed in this study and will help guide the organization of this literature review. First, the question of why oral reading fluency is important to language learners will be addressed. To answer the question of which affective factors are observable in an academic setting, the second part of the literature review will be split into three sections based on three affective factors found in research. The first section relates attitude to language learning. Second, motivation and language learning will be examined. The last section of this part of the review deals with anxiety and its relation to language learning. The literature review will conclude with a summary of main points and a discussion of the need for the research conducted in the present study.

#### Importance of Oral Reading Fluency

In 1983, Allington contended that oral reading fluency was often ignored when teaching English learners. She noted that it was missing from, "instructional objective(s) in reading skills hierarchies, teacher's manuals, daily lesson plans, individualized educational plans, or remedial intervention" (p. 556). This was unfortunate because efficient oral reading was regarded as something that improved reading comprehension.

More recently oral reading fluency has been given more attention because it is noted as being "an important indicator of overall reading acquisition" (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Stahl,

2004 as cited in Dudley & Mather, 2005). Less fluent readers seem to focus on sounding out words and making guesses rather than comprehending the text. It makes sense when hearing readers who are not fluent that they have trouble grasping the meaning of what they read. Less fluent readers spend more time on homework and reading tasks than more fluent readers. Dudley and Mather's (2005) research suggests that average readers continue to improve their reading skills, learn new vocabulary, and gain more background knowledge while struggling readers continue to fall behind. Li and Ness (2001) agree that English learners need support in areas like oral reading fluency. They contend that fluent readers are more likely to take in the information and comprehend what they are reading. Their research proved that efforts to improve oral reading fluency, like student-teacher paired reading sessions, took away vocabulary limitations and improved oral reading fluency. In her research, Geva (2006) found that often the main reason English learners lack literacy is because they lack oral language proficiency. While it is commendable that more attention is being paid to this important aspect of language learning, little research has been done to determine which affective factors impact oral reading.

#### Affective Factors Influencing Oral Reading

Research indicated that three major affective factors influence language learning. These are attitude, motivation, and anxiety. Studies related to these three factors are discussed in the following section of this literature review.

##### Attitudes toward language learning.

Two notable studies relate language learning and attitudes. Research done by Yashima, Zehuke-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) in Japan found that there are different reasons students

may or may not be willing to communicate in a second language. In contexts where students needed to learn the language to go to college or communicate in an English speaking country, students were more likely to be willing to communicate. This study found that regardless of why students were learning the language, the perception of their own confidence played a big role in how willing the students were to communicate in the target language. Further proving that different contexts influence attitudes about language learning, Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, and Alzari (2011) studied Libyan students who had negative attitudes about learning English. Unlike students in the Japanese study, Libyan students seemed to have no knowledge of the importance of learning English and didn't see how learning it could be beneficial for them. The research specifically related to attitude and oral reading is scarce but Dudley and Mather (2004) suggest that less fluent readers have negative attitudes about reading. While limited, the current research gives us a good indication that the context in which oral reading takes place could have an impact on the affective factors present while oral reading is taking place.

#### Motivations of language learners.

A fair amount of research has been dedicated to the motivations of language learners. Babae (2012) elaborated on historical theories noting that motivation can come from wanting respect and approval, can be task or situation specific, and can be intrinsic and extrinsic. She elaborated on the importance of motivation saying that it is, "found to be a determining factor in ultimate language performance." (p. 4)

While it may be an important indicator for language performance, Pawlak (2012) discovered that motivation is not stable. Students have different reasons for wanting to know a language including simply enjoying the language, wanting to get a job that required the

language, and because it is a required class. Her research indicated that intrinsic motives played a role for more advanced learners who persevered over time and that extrinsic motivation was more important for weaker learners who needed a grade for a class. Another factor in the instability of motivation could be gender. Shams' (2008) research indicated that while many students had a good attitude towards learning English, girls tended to have slightly higher degree of motivation and more positive attitudes than boys.

Motivation is also shaped by context. In a study of language learners in seven countries, Gardner (2007) noted that there are two basic contexts for motivation for language learners. These are integrativeness and classroom motivation. Integrativeness refers to the learner's interest in learning the language because of interest in the culture associated with the L2 or general interest in language learning and/or other cultures. Classroom motivation refers to the attitude toward the learning situation. Csizér & Dörnyei (2005) contended that, of the two, integrativeness is the most important component in determining the disposition of learners. These researchers proposed that a broader definition of integrativeness be used to explain its relation to motivation. They related students perceived ideal-self to integrativeness saying that if students' ideal self is perceived to be proficient in the L2 then they have an integrative disposition. In contrast to research conducted by Csizér & Dörnyei, Wei discovered that for Chinese learners' instrumental motivation, or classroom motivation as described by Gardner, was more prevalent. The researcher found that Chinese English learners learned the language in order to get good grades or advance their careers rather than to learn about English speaking culture or because they wanting to communicate with native English speakers.



Current research lacks specific studies about motivation and oral reading fluency. It can be concluded based on studies about overall language learning, that different students will have different motivations about whether or not they want to read and why they are interested or not interested in improving their oral reading skills. Oral reading fluency may play a role in overall motivation because less fluent readers may lack motivation (Dudley & Mather, 2005) when compared to average or advanced readers.

Anxiety and language learning.

Less motivated readers may also experience more anxiety than fluent readers (Dudley & Mather, 2005). Several studies have been conducted to learn about anxieties involved with learning a language. Zehn (2008) found that anxiety is something that can be detrimental to language learning. Anxiety can manifest in different ways based on culture, personality, and particular experience. It can come from apprehension about communicating, receiving negative feedback, perceptions of self, perceptions of the teacher, and social nervousness. "Research indicates that language learners experience a kind of psychological apprehension, which, sometimes can be damaging to the learner process" (Zhang, 2001, p. 73). Zhang (2001) found that the older a learner is, the more likely that she or he will be anxious about language learning. Gregersen's (2009) research revealed that both visual and vocal cues are important to consider when determining if language anxiety is present. Visual cues that can indicate anxiety are fidgeting, shifting, not genuine smiles, and limiting eye contact. Vocal cues of anxiety are excessive pausing, laughter at inappropriate times, and the need for prompting.

Anxiety is something that can occur outside of the language learning classroom as well. Pappahiel (2002) researched the anxiety that is associated with going from an ESL class to a

mainstream class. Through quantitative and qualitative measures, she found that when students move from ESL to mainstream classes, students' overall anxiety increases. Her research suggests that affective factors as well as overall proficiency should be considered when determining whether students can be successful without direct language support.

A few studies about specific language skills have been conducted. Gregersen's and Horwitz's (2001) research focused specifically on speaking a second language. This study involved students watching a recording of their own oral performance. After giving them an anxiety questionnaire and documenting their response to their oral performance, it was determined that anxious and non-anxious learners have different expectations of their performances. The researchers found that the more anxious learners had perfectionist tendencies. They suggest that methods to help overcome perfectionism may be useful for improving anxiety levels.

In the current research, two studies link anxiety and reading. Lien's (2011) research focused on reading strategies used by anxious and less anxious learners. She found that students who were more anxious used supportive reading strategies like looking up words in a dictionary while students who were less anxious used general strategies like guessing. Research showed that to be successful, students should use strategies like analyzing texts, using context clues to guess meanings of words, and using background knowledge. Lien explains that these strategies could reduce reading anxiety and improve overall reading performance. The less anxious learners in Lien's study may have been the more advanced readers. Brantmeier (2005) noted that advanced English learners did not experience anxiety about reading itself, but were nervous about the oral tasks that came after reading. In relation to the present study, this

indicates that students may experience more anxiety related to oral reading than independent reading.

Anxiety seems to be found in many areas of language learning. Research indicated that oral performances tend to make learners more anxious than other tasks. These studies lead to the conclusion that some level of anxiety most likely exists when students are reading aloud.

#### Summary

Research shows that oral reading fluency is important not only for literacy, but for overall English proficiency. Studies involving attitude, motivation, and anxiety suggest that affective factors exist in many areas of language learning. It would make sense that oral reading fluency is impacted by these factors as well. While current research links overall language learning with affective factors, a gap in the research exists that gives specific attention to which affective factors impact oral reading.

The present study aims to fill that gap in research. The purpose of the study is to determine which affective factors influence English learning students oral reading. Ohata (2005) notes that being aware and trying to understand the affective factors students are dealing with “can provide a basis for creating a comfortable, learning-conducive environment in the classroom” (p. 152).

## CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

This study was initiated to determine which affective factors affect high school English language learners when they are reading aloud. This chapter describes the research sample, validity concerns, and research design.

There are five questions that shaped the purpose of this study. They were previously listed in chapter one and include:

1. Why is oral fluency important to English learners for reading achievement?
2. What affective factors are present during oral reading for ESL students?
3. What factors are observable in an academic setting?
4. What factors are identified by students?
5. Which affective factors are most significant in influencing oral reading fluency from the perspective of students?

To answer these questions, the research was designed with a sample of students in a suburban midwestern high school.

#### Sample and Participant Selection

Homogenous sampling was used in this study to focus only on students who are learning English as an additional language. Participants were asked to participate because all received English language support one to two hours per day, were literate in their L1, and were intermediate to advanced language learners. They also lived in a midwestern town and attended high school where approximately 1% of the students were learning English as an additional language. Participants included four eleventh and twelfth grade high school students

currently enrolled in an ESL program. Participants were from four different countries and have three different native languages. Two participants were males and two were females. Students who were learning English and received special education services were excluded from the study. Parent permission as well as student assent was attained prior to beginning the study.

### Validity

This case study was conducted using a small sample size, which may not be, “generalizable in the conventional sense” (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2001, p. 11). However this case study is designed to surface affective factors that may influence oral reading fluency so that more extensive research that is generalizable to larger populations can be conducted in the future.

Various researchers (Merriam, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Weiss, 1994; Yin, 1994) also outline five reasons for using qualitative design in research seeking descriptions of the how and why of specific beliefs and behaviors in context. These are:

- when respondents provide a lot of information, small sample sizes are justified
- when context is important in interpreting results, a qualitative design is indicated
- rich descriptive data requires qualitative data analysis techniques
- qualitative interviewing is needed to understand human perceptions
- qualitative design permits emergent theory construction that includes participants and phenomenon.

### Research Design

The research design used for this study was a qualitative case study. Methods of data collection were think-aloud reading sessions and interviews with participants. Observations in

the classroom were also used to collect data.

Participants participated in a think-aloud and interview session. First the researcher interviewed students about which affective factors influence them while reading in class or at home. Interview questions included:

1. How do you feel when you are reading aloud in class?
2. How does reading aloud affect you in class?
3. When you stumble on a word, do you want to continue? Why or why not?
4. When you are asked to read in class, what goes through your mind?
5. Are there different situations when you feel better reading aloud? Explain.
6. What makes reading aloud hard/easy in class?
7. How do you feel when reading aloud at home?
8. How would you feel if you were able to read aloud more fluently?
9. Does reading aloud make you feel more or less confident? Tell me about that.
10. What goes through your mind when you have to pause while reading aloud?
11. Do you raise your hand to read aloud in class? Why or why not?
12. When you read a passage perfectly, how do you feel?
13. Do you feel motivated to improve your ability to read aloud? Explain.
14. What motivates you to improve your ability to read aloud?

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

Next, the participant took part in a think-aloud activity. He or she read a passage aloud and shared his or her thoughts when stumbling or misreading a word aloud. Questions asked during think-aloud sessions included:

- How confident do you feel about reading aloud? Explain.
- What worries you about reading aloud?
- What went through your mind when you stumbled on that word?
- Do you feel comfortable continuing, why or why not?
- What would you be thinking if you were reading in front of a class?
- What were you thinking about when you skipped that word?
- What are you feeling now that you've read aloud with me?
- How did you feel when I corrected your reading? Explain.

Think-aloud sessions were recorded, transcribed, and coded by the researcher.

To determine observable affective factors, the researcher observed students reading aloud in an ESL classroom setting. Observational field notes were taken while participants read aloud. Gregersen's (2009) research indicated that the following visual and vocal cues may be present if anxiety exists: fidgeting, shifting, not genuine smiles, and limiting eye contact, excessive pausing, laughter at inappropriate times, and the need for prompting. Occurrences of these cues while students read aloud were noted. Notes were typed and coded.

All transcriptions and notes taken while conducting the research were typed in a data analysis program and coded. The coding software used was dedoose.com (2011). This software has the capability to upload media, code excerpts, analyze and export data, and create descriptors and memos. The software is comparable to Atlas TI (2012) and Nvivo (2012). Codes included information related to attitudes, motivation, and anxiety related to L2 oral reading. The findings of the research will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## RESULTS

Interviews, think-aloud sessions, and classroom observations were transcribed and coded using dedoose.com (2011). Codes were derived from research noted in chapter two of this study and additional codes were found in transcriptions. In this chapter, results of the study will be organized into the categories of attitude, motivation, and anxiety. Conclusions and indications for further research will be discussed in the following chapter.

The following table shows codes used after transcription. The left column indicates the codes found from research in the literature review and the right column lists codes discovered while reading the interviews. Results of the study will be discussed according to these codes.

Table 5.1

*Codes Used after Transcription*

Initial Codes from Literature Review	Additional Codes
Anxiety- ESL to Mainstream	Anxiety- expectations from others
Anxiety- avoidance	Attitude- if reading improved
Anxiety- apprehension	Anxiety-pronunciation
Anxiety- negative feedback	Attitude- after corrective feedback
Anxiety- perceptions of self	
Anxiety- perceptions of teachers	
Anxiety- perfectionist tendencies	
Anxiety- social nervousness	
Anxiety- nervous audio cues	
Anxiety- visual cues	
Attitude- confidences	
Attitude- context	
Motivation- classroom/instrumental	
Motivation- integrativeness	
Motivation- lack of in content classes	



## Results from Interviews and Think-Aloud Sessions

Interviews and think-aloud sessions with participants provided valuable information related to the information discovered in the literature around language learning and affect. Affective factors such as attitude, motivation, and anxiety were present in the discussion with participants. The table and figure below show the distribution of codes by student and overall.

Table 5.2

*Summary of Code Distribution in Interviews and Think-Aloud Sessions*

Codes	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Totals
Anxiety - pronunciation	2	1	3	9	15
Anxiety- Avoidance		1	2		3
Anxiety- ESL to Mainstream	7	2	5	4	18
Anxiety- apprehension	1	2	1	1	5
Anxiety- perceptions of self	2	2	1	1	6
Anxiety- perfectionist tendencies		1	3	1	5
Anxiety- social nervousness	3	5	8	10	26
Attitude- after corrective feedback	1	1	1		3
Attitude- confidence	5	2	4	3	14
Attitude- context		2		1	3
Attitude- if reading improved	2	2	1	2	7
Motivation-					
classroom/instrumental	1	1	3	1	6
Motivation- intrinsic	2		1	2	5
Motivation- lack of in content	2	2	2	3	9
Motivation- respect/approval		1	1	2	4

### Results Related to Attitude

Affective factors relating attitude to oral reading fluency were found as participants described their attitude after corrective feedback, the context of oral reading, feelings related to improved reading, and confidence about oral reading. Least notable was information about their attitudes after corrective feedback. Three of the four participants discussed the topic saying that corrective feedback doesn't affect them much if coming from the ESL teacher. The context of oral reading was also scarcely discussed. Students described different areas where they feel comfortable reading when asked questions about the context of oral reading. All four participants agreed that their attitude about oral reading would improve if they were able to read more fluently. When asked how they would feel if their oral reading improved, participants answered with words like, "Awesome," "Good," and "Happy." Most notable is the confidence participants feel about oral reading. Each participant mentioned not feeling confident about reading at least two times and the topic was mentioned fourteen times overall. Participants noted that they lack confidence because English is not their native language. Overall, attitudes about confidence proved to be a common affective factor present in this study.

### Results Related to Motivation

Motivation was discovered to take on various forms in this study. Students were motivated by respect and approval, were intrinsically motivated, and were motivated by classroom grades and college. Three of four students reported being motivated by the desire to gain respect and approval. One student reported that they are motivated to improve their oral reading fluency because other students, "most likely (are) going to judge me and how I

read or act." Another said, "I want my reading to be good because I think your reading is showing the kind of person you are too, you know?"

Three of the four students made statements about being intrinsically motivated to improve their oral reading fluency. When asked why they would like to improve their oral reading fluency one student said, "It will make me feel more confident and stuff." Another responded, "For me, just (to) feel good when I'm reading aloud." When answering the same question, the third said, "Because it (would) make myself feel better, I guess."

Classroom grades and their academic futures in college motivated all of the participants. When asked about motivation, one student said, "I want to have like good grades." Another replied, "I mean, it's pretty embarrassing to be the worst reader in college." A third answered, "Maybe when I will be in college, someone will ask me to read aloud and I will not (be) shy." A fourth said that improving oral reading fluency could affect the future, "like college and jobs."

The most notable comments about motivation came as students described their lack of motivation to read in classes other than ESL. Each student mentioned at least twice in their interview and think-aloud sessions that they are not motivated to read outside of the ESL classroom. All four students said they never raise their hand to read in classes other than ESL. One student said that if called on in class, "I would just be like, I don't want to read." When this topic came up another nervously laughed and said, "I don't want to read it."

#### Results Related to Anxiety

Participants reported many different anxieties about oral reading. They experienced anxieties related to pronunciation, avoidance, moving from ESL to mainstream classes, apprehension, perceptions of self, perfectionist tendencies, and social nervousness. While

anxiety played a large role in the interviews, some areas of anxiety were mentioned less than others. Only two students described times when they avoided reading. Three of the four students told of perfectionist tendencies that made them anxious. Once or twice, each student mentioned general apprehension and anxiety related to their perception of themselves.

There were three standout areas of oral reading anxiety for these learners.

Pronunciation was mentioned fifteen times in the interviews and think-aloud sessions. Each student mentioned it at least once, one mentioned it three times, and another mentioned it nine times. Students reported that they were anxious because they didn't know if other students could understand them. When asked why they were nervous about reading aloud one student reported, "Because I can't speak perfectly, pronounce everything perfectly." Another said, "I like pronounce the words wrong, then like, yeah, I just don't like when that happens."

Students also expressed anxiety related to reading in their ESL classroom versus in a content class like science or social studies. Each student mentioned this concern at least twice with one bringing it up seven times. When one student was asked, "How do you feel when you read aloud in ESL class?" the response was, "Well if it's in ESL, I don't really care, but if it's in other classes then I just get really nervous and red and it's not fun." Another said "I feel good and like confident and everything." When this same student was asked, "What about in your other classes?" The response changed completely; the student said, "I'm not like a native speaker, I feel kind of weird, you know, because of my accent and everything." To follow up, students were asked why they weren't anxious about reading in ESL class, but were in other classes. One student shared the sentiment of others by saying, "Because in another classes

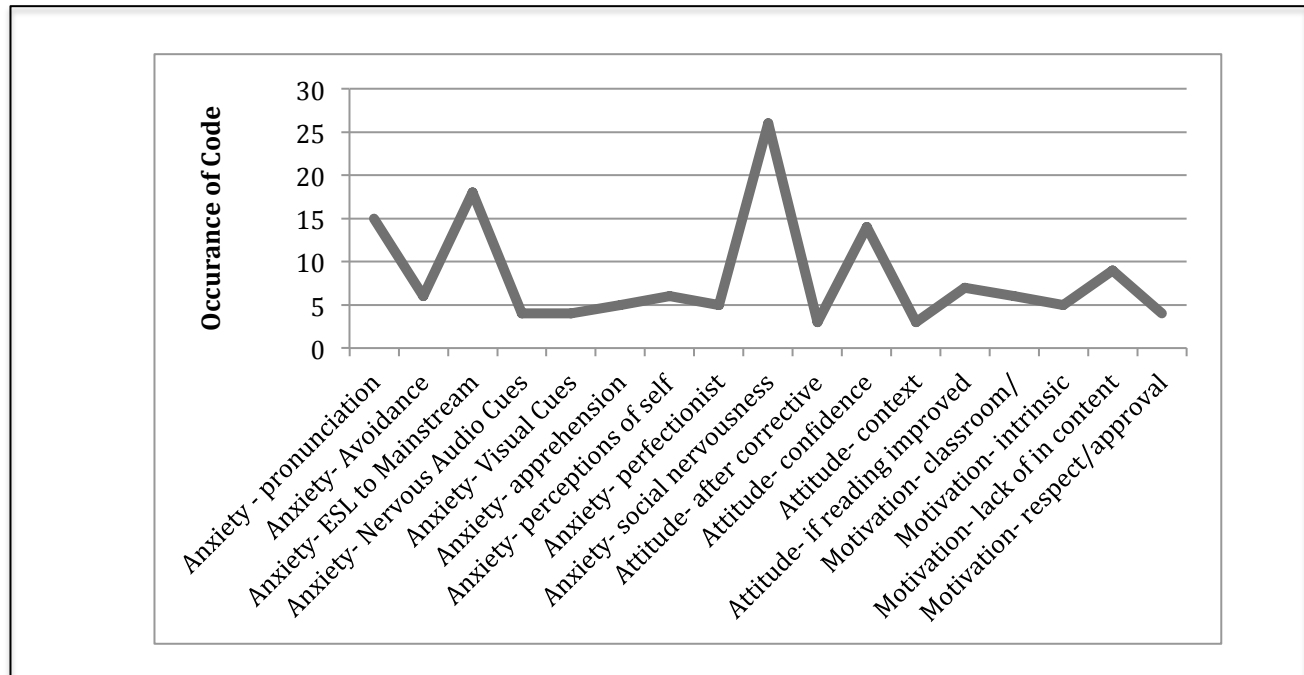
American people (are there) and they read really good and fast. In ESL class (there are) all immigrant people, they (are) all like me.”

The most common source of anxiety for these students was social nervousness. Each student mentioned this at least three times with one student bringing it up ten times. Students were asked how they felt about reading in classes with native English speakers. One said, “I just know that like Americans obviously read better than me so it makes me more like self-conscious about how my reading is.” Another stated, “Kind of awkward because other people can read better, way better.” The third said, “Maybe some will laugh, some will be waiting, some don’t understand me, my accent.” The fourth responded by saying, “The question is always like, are they going to understand what I say?” Students also expressed concern about people around them rather than the actual reading as well as getting embarrassed when reading aloud in front of native speaking peers.

#### Overall Results of Interviews and Think-aloud Sessions

As Figure 5.1 shows, there were four affective factors that impacted participants’ oral reading the most. Confidence, anxiety about pronunciation, and anxiety about reading in ESL class verses mainstream classes were discussed numerous times. Based on this study, the most influential affective factor related to oral reading is social nervousness.

Figure 5.1 Overall Distributions of Affective Factors in Transcripts



### Results of Classroom Observations

While observing students in an ESL class, attention was paid to visual and vocal cues of anxiety. One student had a need for prompting. Three of four students fidgeted, had flush skin, and laughed at inappropriate times while reading aloud. All four participants paused excessively while reading aloud in class. Noises of frustration like “arg” or “god” were also noted when students stumbled on words. All students displayed multiple cues of anxiety while reading aloud.

The results of this research provided insight into what affective factors ESL students experience while reading aloud. It was discovered that students are influenced by multiple factors related to attitudes, motivation, and anxiety while reading aloud. Discussions of these results and conclusions about how these results can lead to further research will take place in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine which affective factors influence EL students' oral reading fluency. The foundation of the research was provided by the five questions introduced in chapter one. The results of this research were addressed in chapter four. Conclusions that can be made based on the results will be discussed in this chapter. The chapter will conclude with a review of limitations and suggestions for future research.

#### Importance of Oral Reading Fluency

The first research question focused on why oral reading fluency is important for ESL learners. Research says that students lack literacy skills and comprehend less because of poor oral reading fluency (Li & Ness, 2001, Geva, 2006). In addition to these academic concerns, this study suggests that affective components like confidence and motivation are also affected by ESL students' oral reading proficiency. As this study indicates, it is important to focus on advancing EL learners' oral reading to improve motivation for learning, reduce anxiety, and build confidence.

Another research question focused on which affective factors were observable in an academic setting. Research suggested that visual and vocal cues could be seen when students are experiencing anxieties in the classroom (Gregersen, 2009). The results of this study concur with the results of Gregersen's research. Students fidgeted, refused eye contact, paused excessively, and laughed at inappropriate times while being observed as part of this study. This suggests that they were feeling anxious when reading aloud. Students confirmed that they were anxious while reading when they were interviewed. The results of this study suggest that

visual and vocal cues exist related to anxiety, but that cues related to motivation and attitude are not observable in an academic setting.

#### Affective Factors Present in Oral Reading

Two questions in this study relate to which affective factors are present during oral reading and which factors are identified by students. Students reported that their oral reading was impacted by attitude, motivation, and anxiety. The affective factors identified by students validate the information found while conducting the literature review. The results of the interview and think-aloud sessions indicate that attitude, motivation, and anxiety all factor in while students are reading aloud.

##### Attitudes of ESL readers.

Research suggested that the context in which reading takes place impacts the attitude of the language learner (Yashima et al., 2004, Abidin et al, 2011). The present study indicates that context plays only a minor role in the attitude of language learners while reading orally. Yashima, Zehuke-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) also noted that the perception of students' own confidence played a role in how willing students were to communicate. The results of this study confirm that this is also true when students are reading aloud. The amount of confidence a student has appears to have a correlation with how willing a student is to read aloud.

##### Motivation and ESL oral reading.

Motivation, according to research, can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Babae, 2012), comes from the desire to do well in the classroom or learn about other cultures (Gardner, 2007), and is not stable (Pawlak, 2012). The results of this study suggest that most of current research about language learning and motivation ties into oral reading fluency as well.



According to the results of this study, students have intrinsic and extrinsic motivations related to oral reading fluency. Intrinsic motivation comes from students desire to become more confident and feel better about themselves. Extrinsic motivations come from the desire to improve grades and continue on in their education. While both were addressed in student interviews, discussions about extrinsic factors were more prevalent.

These extrinsic motivations fall under the category of classroom or instrumental motivation (Gardner, 2007, Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). The research about language learning indicates that another type of motivation, integrative motivation, may also influence language learning. This study indicates that this is not the case when it comes to oral reading fluency. Not one student said that they are motivated by any desire to learn more about the culture of English language speakers. All indicated that they wish to improve their oral reading fluency so they are more successful at school and in their careers. This corresponds with Csizér & Dörnyei's (2005) research that suggested that classroom motivation was more prevalent for language learners.

The present study proposes that students are far less motivated to read aloud in content area classes like science and social studies as opposed to ESL class. Results suggest that students will not volunteer to participate in reading in these classes and if called on to read will refuse to read. Pappahiel's (2002) research may have an answer for why students are not motivated to read in these classrooms. She suggests that students experience far more anxiety when they are in classes outside of ESL. Pappahiel's research corresponds with the results of the present study related to anxiety as well.

Anxiety related to oral reading.

In addition to anxiety related to nervousness felt outside of the ESL classroom, results of this study indicate that ESL students have a lot of anxiety related to pronunciation and social nervousness while reading aloud. Also notable are anxieties related to avoidance, apprehension, perceptions of self, and perfectionist tendencies.

The results of this study suggest that less anxiety is experienced associated with the latter group of anxieties listed in the previous paragraph. The study confirmed Zehn's (2008) research about language anxiety. Avoidance, apprehension, perceptions of self, and perfectionists tendencies played a role in oral reading fluency, according to students, but weren't among the most common topics discussed.

The present study proposes that most of the anxiety when ESL students are reading aloud stems from anxieties about pronunciation, reading outside the ESL classroom, and social nervousness. Brantmeier's (2005) research may explain anxiety related to pronunciation, this research said that advanced English learners did not experience anxiety about reading itself, but were nervous about the oral tasks that came after silent reading. It makes sense that students don't experience as much anxiety while silent reading, because students are not concerned with pronunciation when they are reading to themselves. Once students are asked to read orally, pronunciation comes into play and causes anxiety for ESL students.

As previously noted, Pappahiel (2002) suggests that students experience far more anxiety when they are in classes outside of ESL. This study confirms that idea. All students reported at least twice that they were much more comfortable reading aloud in their ESL class than they were in any other class. Smaller class sizes and familiarity with other students may contribute to the lower level of anxiety in an ESL classroom. Along with that, ESL classes are

often grouped by proficiency level so students know that students in their class will read aloud with roughly the same ability as them. These factors may contribute to the level of anxiety related to social nervousness as well.

This study indicates that social nervousness has a large impact on ESL students' oral reading fluency. Zehn (2008) noted that anxiety can be based on social nervousness. This was confirmed in the present study. Each participant mentioned at least three times that social situations cause anxiety. Students noted that they felt awkward reading in front of native English-speaking peers, felt like they were being judged, and worried that peers wouldn't understand what they were saying. The large number of comments about anxiety related to social nervousness suggests that this type of anxiety has a major impact on oral reading fluency.

Overall, each student noted that anxiety was the most influential factor while reading orally. Zhang (2001) indicates that the older a learner is, the more likely that she or he will be anxious about language learning. Students' ages were within one year of each other in this study, but the eighteen-year-old students did not experience more anxiety than the seventeen-year-old students. The bigger factor was gender. Male students reported more anxiety than female students. This study suggests then that gender is more indicative of who will experience more oral reading anxiety than age is.

#### Most Significant Affective Factors According to Students

According to the participants in this study, there may be four affective elements that influence oral reading more than others. As noted in the previous section, anxiety was the most influential factor according to students. Specifically anxiety related to social nervousness was the most significant factor. Following that, anxiety related to moving from an ESL class to a

mainstream class caused anxiety. Next, anxiety related to pronunciation influenced oral reading fluency. This study suggests that one other factor plays a big role in oral reading fluency.

According to the students, confidence influences their attitudes. These results demonstrate that first anxieties, then attitudes, followed by motivations impact oral reading fluency.

#### Study Limitations

This study provides some evidence that affective factors related to attitudes, motivation, and anxiety impact ESL students' oral reading fluency. However, this research does contain some limitations that should be considered when generalizing the data. First, the study did not have wide representation of all ESL students. It was conducted using a homogenous sample of four ESL students in a medium-sized, suburban school. The sample was based on convenience and willingness to participate. The results are applicable to students in similar demographics, but more research should be done before generalizing the information to students in urban settings.

Another limitation may be overall generalizability. In general, according to Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) case studies "are not generalizable in the conventional sense" (p. 11). However, this case study was designed to surface affective factors that may influence oral reading fluency so that more extensive research that is generalizable to larger populations can be conducted in the future. In addition, case studies that employ rich descriptions of contexts, participants, and research methods can inform practices in other settings that have similar characteristics. (Merriam, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Weiss, 1994; Yin, 1994)

### Future Research

Further studies regarding ESL students' oral reading fluency would be valuable in the future. Current research indicates that attitude, motivation, and anxiety impact oral reading fluency. Longitudinal studies that track the affective factors experienced during oral reading as students progress in their language development would provide insight into how affective factors change as students become more and more proficient in English. Studies done with a larger sample size, younger students, or in an urban setting could provide more generalizable results. It will also be important to research methods of reducing affective factors during oral reading. These additional studies would be beneficial to ESL students and teachers.

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