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FILLERS IN THE SPEECH OF TRAINEE ENGLISH TEACHERS

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Descripción de Autoría:

El presente trabajo de investigación tiene como objetivo analizar, mediante una revisión de la literatura científica, las causas, los tipos y las funciones de las muletillas en la comunicación oral, con el fin de comprender su papel en la producción oral de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera

Declaración de Autoría:

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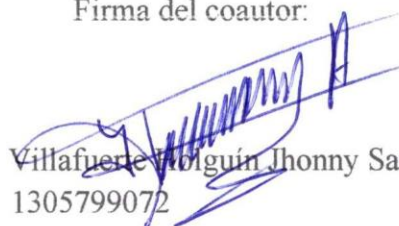
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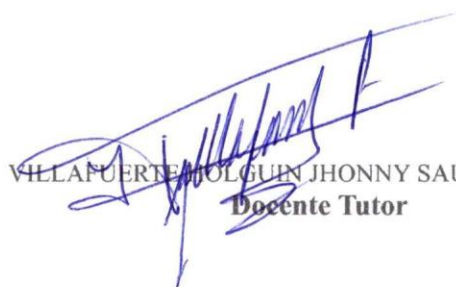
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Abstract

Oral communication is a fundamental competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. However, non-native English speakers commonly use fillers during spontaneous speech, which may influence fluency, comprehensibility, and listeners' perceptions. This systematic review analyzes the available scientific literature to identify the main causes, types, and functions of fillers in the context of EFL speaking skills. The review followed the PRISMA guidelines and examined a corpus of 66 scientific articles published in the period 2000-2025 in journals, 6 indexed in Scopus and 60 in Google Scholar. The search strategy included terms related to fillers, English language speaking, university students, and speaking skills. Other publications indicate that the excessive use of fillers can negatively affect speaker credibility, discourse clarity, and audience comprehension. Nevertheless, when learners use moderately fillers can serve important cognitive and communicative functions, such as providing planning time and increasing naturalness of oral discourse. These findings highlight the need for EFL teachers to address fillers explicitly in the classroom, not with the purpose of eliminating them entirely, but of helping learners regulate and use them strategically. Such instruction may contribute to more fluent, confident, comprehensible, and natural oral communication.

Keywords: EFL, fillers, speaking skills, trainee teachers

Introduction

Speaking is the most widely used communicative skill for sharing ideas and feelings, building personal relationships, and participating in social life. However, despite its importance, people can experience hesitation, uncertainty, or cognitive overload that disrupt the natural flow of speech. Linguists and researchers refer to these as filler words, which are short words, phrases, or expressions that arise when speakers process and organize their ideas to successfully convey a message in various contexts (Ghafar & Raheem, 2023). Numerous reviews of scientific literature focus on speaking skills, but none specifically on the pre-service EFL teacher group. Therefore, research is warranted to understand the causes and functions of filler words (Brown, 2017).

Authors such as Seals and Coppock (2022) and Vlasov (2015) identify that speakers use an excessive number of filler words when they emphasize a point, both in informal conversation and during professional presentations. They generate the use of filler words ("uh," "um," "you know"). In other words, when instructors advise students to sound more natural, they may take it too literally and end up incorporating those informal speaking habits into their presentations. Another factor is the need to fill gaps with filler words because the speaker likely forgot an important idea during the speech; therefore, they use them as a desperate way to "make the most" of the remaining time. This leads to another crucial factor: nervousness/speaking too quickly, which is often described as a phobia called glossophobia or public speaking anxiety. Possible causes include inadequate preparation, poorly constructed statements, awkward and uncertain transitions between statements, and the speaker's tendency to use filler words until they remember the next point (Wang, 2020; Podlipsky, 2021).

In the educational field, developing adequate communication and oral skills is essential for academic success and as a key competency in the future workplace. Gandeza (2023) proposes a linguistic strategy to avoid filler words, called FRET (Friends, Recognition, Experience, Training). This approach allows participants to improve their reasoning, learn and practice new vocabulary, and connect concepts. The strategy provides participants with the confidence to express themselves, whether it be ideas or points of view.

Fillers are classified into types, each with different functions. Efendi et al. (2024) present two types: (1) lexicalized filler words, which are words or phrases used when giving an academic presentation, and (2) non-lexicalized filler words, which are nonverbal sounds or incomplete phrases used during presentations. Lexicalized filler words such as "well," "you know," "like," "so," "I think," etc., show politeness and allow speakers to buy time to think of a word, express uncertainty or surprise before responding, organize ideas sequentially, signal hesitation when unsure of what to say, search for unusual terms or words, indicate unnecessary movements, share personal opinions, connect ideas while buying time to think, create pauses for planning, and show readiness to begin a conversation.

In the educational field, there is a persistent tendency to consider filler words a speech defect that should be eradicated, without taking into account their communicative functions or the role they play in the development of oral fluency (Agmon et al., 2023; Indriyana et al., 2021; Kharismawan, 2017; Suwastini, 2023). EFL students are unaware of how to use filler words, while teachers often lack clear pedagogical strategies to address this phenomenon in the classroom, limiting themselves to correcting it instead of teaching its strategic use (Duan, 2025). This gap between linguistic theory, which recognizes the functional value of filler words, and educational practice, which tends to stigmatize them, highlights the need to systematize existing knowledge about their causes, types, and functions in order to offer a solid conceptual basis to guide future teaching interventions in the development of oral production in English as a foreign language. The central questions guiding this research are:

What are the causes, types, and functions of filler words identified in the scientific literature?

How can understanding the use of filler words contribute to the development of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?

The study aims to analyze, through a review of the scientific literature, the causes, types, and functions of fillers in oral communication to understand their role in oral production in English as a Foreign Language students.

Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review design to examine the causes, types, functions, and pedagogical implications of fillers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking. The review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, which provided a structured procedure for identifying, screening, assessing, and selecting relevant studies.

The search covered scientific publications released between 2000 and 2025. Studies were located through Scopus, MIAR, and Google Scholar because these sources provide broad access to research in linguistics, education, and English language teaching. The search strategy combined terms related to the central concepts of the review, including “fillers,” “filled pauses,” “English speaking,” “EFL learners,” “university students,” “oral communication,” and “speaking skills.” These terms were combined using Boolean operators such as AND and OR to broaden or narrow the results according to the purpose of the review.

The eligibility criteria were established before the screening process. Studies were considered eligible when they focused on fillers or hesitation phenomena in spoken discourse; examined EFL or English-language learning contexts; addressed speaking, fluency, oral presentations, communicative competence, or classroom interaction; and were published within the established period. Empirical studies, theoretical articles, and previous reviews were considered when they contributed directly to the research questions. Publications were excluded when they focused exclusively on written discourse, analyzed languages without a clear connection to English learning, lacked sufficient methodological information, or did not provide findings relevant to the causes, classification, functions, or pedagogical treatment of fillers.

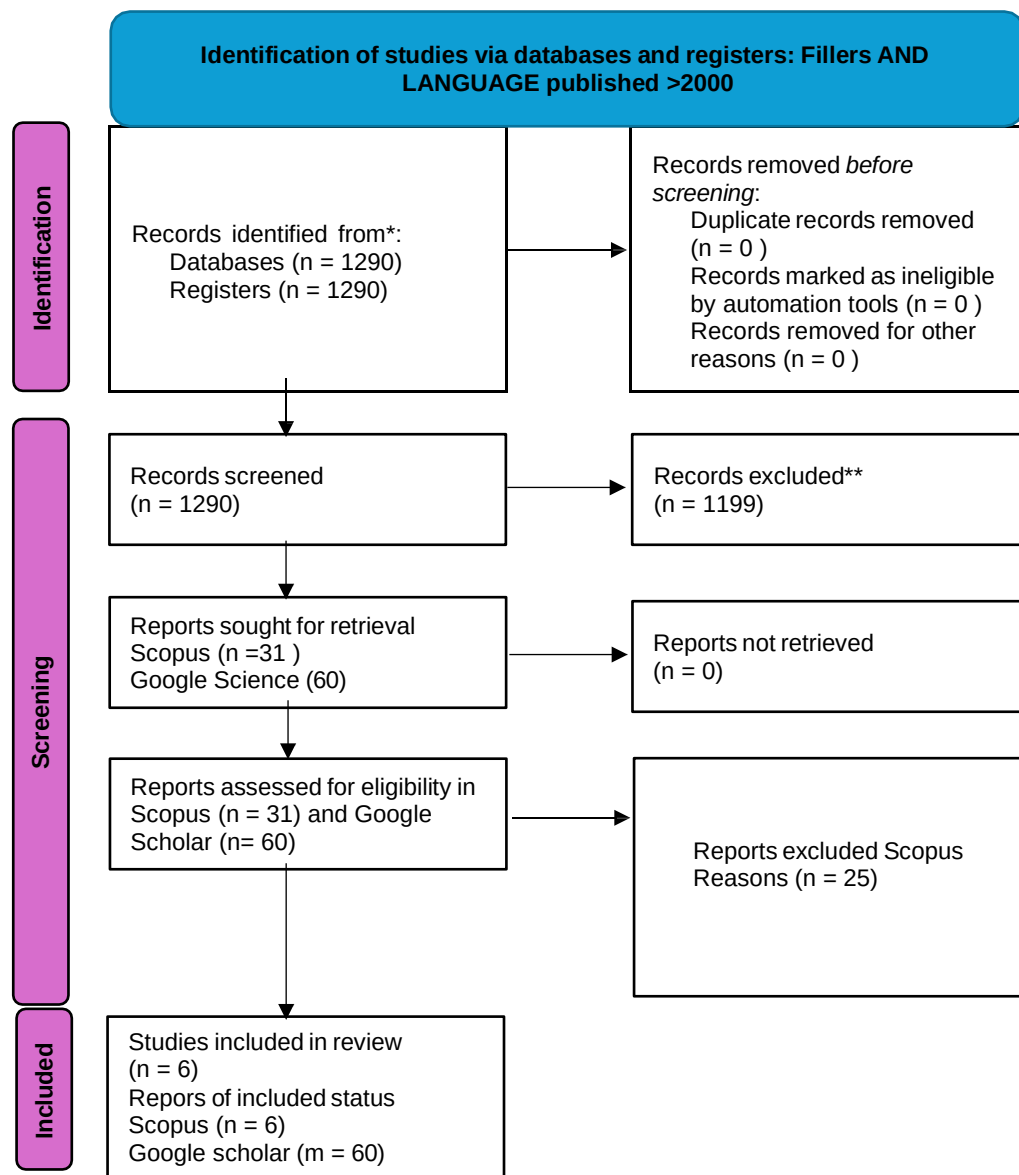
The selection process followed the PRISMA stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. First, all records obtained from the selected sources were compiled. Duplicate records and clearly irrelevant publications were removed. Titles and abstracts were then reviewed to determine their connection with the research objectives. The full texts of potentially relevant articles were subsequently examined against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. After this process, 66 scientific articles were included in the final corpus.

A structured data-extraction matrix was used to organize the information obtained from each study. The matrix included the author and year of publication, research context, participant characteristics, methodological approach, types of fillers identified, reported causes, communicative functions, effects on fluency and credibility, and pedagogical recommendations. This procedure facilitated comparison across studies and supported the identification of recurring patterns.

The selected articles were analyzed through qualitative thematic synthesis. Findings were coded and grouped into four main categories: cognitive, linguistic, affective, and situational causes; lexicalized and non-lexicalized filler types; communicative and discourse functions; and pedagogical strategies for regulating filler use. Particular attention was given to similarities, differences, and contradictions among the studies. Because the included research presented heterogeneous designs, participants, and measures, no meta-analysis was conducted. Instead, the review produced an integrative

narrative synthesis intended to explain how fillers operate in EFL speaking and how teachers can address them strategically in classroom practice.

Results



Graphic 1: Prisma model: Research: Fillers AND LANGUAGE published >2000

The results of the research 1: Fillers AND LANGUAGE published >2000 are 6 publications. They are presented in the table 1.

Table 1. Publications found in Scopus

N	Document title	Authors	Source	Year	Citations
1	<u>Global syntactic disambiguation in bilingual subjects during psycholinguistic experiment</u>	Vlasov M.S., Savostyanov A.N., Saprygin A.E., Astakhova T.N.	<u>Vestnik Tomskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta Filologiya</u> , 36(4)	2015	0

2	<u>Listening to spoken English, second edition</u>	Brown G.	Listening to Spoken English Second Edition	2017	5
3	<u>Wake word detection with alignment-free lattice-free MMI</u>	Wang Y.,Lv H.,Povey D.,Xie L.,Khudanpur S.	<u>Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the International Speech Communication Association Interspeech, 2020-October</u>	2020	14
4	<u>Phonetic drift reveals interconnected phonological representations in simultaneous bilinguals: A case study of English and Czech stop consonants</u>	Podlipsky V.J.,Simackova S.,Chladkova K.	<u>International Journal of Bilingualism, 25(3)</u>	2021	1
5	<u>Representation of Gendered Language in English Textbook for Indonesian Junior High School</u>	Suwastini N.K.A.,Wiraningsih P.,Adnyani K.E.K.	<u>International Journal of Language Education, 7(1)</u>	2023	6
6	<u>LLM-empowered literature mining for material substitution studies in sustainable concrete</u>	Duan Y.,Tian Y.,Ghosh S.,... Chen J.,Olivetti E.A.	<u>Resources Conservation and Recycling, 221, 108379</u>	2025	5

Source: Scopus.

DEVELOPMENT

1. Speaking skills and human communication

Gani et al. (2015) defines speaking skill as the ability to orally express opinions, thoughts, facts, and feelings to others. Subari et al. (2019) conceptualize speaking as an indispensable ability, in which someone express his/her ideas, thoughts, or opinions to another person, in order to construct good social relationships, and Bohari (2019) recognize speaking as a key goal of language learning, because it enables people to express their ideas, or thoughts to others in a clearly and accurately way.

According to Pratiwi and Ayu (2020), speaking is the use of language with minimal, natural pauses, expressed with confidence—what they refer to as fluency. For Emirza and Sahril (2021), speech is the ability to produce, receive, and process information from another speaker. Furthermore, Susanti et al. (2021) argue that speech is the most common form of verbal expression, uttered for the sole purpose of being received and responded to by a listener, where its interpretation involves a thought process based on the processing of information from existing sources and the relationship between speech and thought. Alrajafi et al. (2022) considers speaking as a procedure in which people create and share the meaning of a message through the use of verbal and non-verbal signs, in many contexts.

The factors that contribute positively or negatively to students' oral performance can be motivation, speaking confidence, anxiety, time, planning, support received, performance level, listening skills, and feedback from teachers or mentors during

speech activities (Tuan & Mai, 2015). However, EFL learners' main obstacles to speak are related to psychological factors such as nervousness, or fear of making mistakes (Shen & Chiu, 2019). Additionally, insufficient vocabulary and learning environment lacking in classrooms, can hinder substantially the learners' speaking performance. In addition, Rizki et al. (2020) finds that speaking error can be related to (a) linguistic issues such as vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation issues, and (b) psychological issues which include fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, or lack of confidence/motivation. Consequently, when assessing speech quality, indicators such as verbal fluency, clear pronunciation, appropriate intonation, and the ability to engage in meaningful conversations are taken into account, and it provides the tools necessary to effectively meet the demands of professional and social settings (Tiu et al., 2023).

Communication is a dynamic and interactive process that requires both intellect and courage to achieve a harmonious connection between people; it involves speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, and is crucial for the transmission of knowledge and meaningful interaction in the educational process (Khan et al., 2017). The goal is to connect ideas between two people through communication patterns that are supported by practice and the imitation of speech (Kalpana & Subba, 2018).

Researchers such as Krishnan et al. (2019) point out that strong communication skills enhance collaboration and teamwork in professional settings—skills that will be required of pre-service EFL teachers. In addition, Lo and Hsieh (2020) acknowledge that communication can be significantly improved through approaches focused on creating workplace experiences using strategies such as role-playing.

Ivanova et al. (2020) claim that the ability to speak in public is essential in the current world. Learners work three crucial components (1) positive emotional state, (2) preparation, and (3) public speaking skills. They can allow pre-service teachers for excellent understanding of the speech topics, to develop questions that the audience might ask, and to formulate arguments in response to those questions. Public speaking skills require engaging in meaningful and lively dialogue with the audience.

Marjonet et al. (2020) argue that teachers work on speech development in the classroom. They convey content, give instructions, or offer constructive criticism; therefore, in addition to mastering the subject matter, teachers possess well-developed oral skills. Areta and Purwanti (2021) acknowledge that factors such as preparation time, anxiety, motivation, the pressure to give a good oral presentation, and feedback can influence students' performance in terms of their motivation to use the target language.

In this context, communication enables the seamless exchange of knowledge (Ansari et al., 2022) and ideas in a clearly and accurately way through speech (Ghafar & Raheem, 2023). This evidence confirms that communication remains the primary process for the exchange of knowledge, and its use in professional contexts where EFL is employed is crucial to achieving the proposed goals.

2. Teaching methodologies for EFL instruction

According to Pardede (2021), the main goal of teaching English as a foreign language is to help students improve their communication skills in the language they are learning, in socially and culturally appropriate contexts.

Violetta-Irene (2015) states that the use of literature as a teaching method for EFL aims to make classes more interactive, with the goal of enhancing learners' communication skills and have a significant impact on their mindset. Ceylan (2016) emphasizes the advantages of using short stories because they are authentic and varied language materials, provides contextualized communicative situations, real-life social

communicative patterns, and use of language, and highlights the main role of the learners in their learning process. They also encourage learners to relate what is being read to their own life experience since it is correlational on emotional responses, and finally, they contribute significantly to develop further reading skills. In addition, Turan & Çolak (2018) found that the use of short stories develops listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills in EFL/ESL, as well as expands learners' vocabulary and improves their ability to understand grammatical structures.

Alamsyah (2016) states that short stories can be an effective resource provided that the materials are carefully selected to ensure they meet the needs and expectations of both students and their teachers, parents, school administrators, etc. In addition, Zahra & Farrah (2016) argue that short stories provide students with significant opportunities to develop their skills in the target language from linguistic, cultural, intellectual, and educational perspectives. Berrarbi & Bahous (2018) find that the literary genre should be the first choice when selecting a book. Meanwhile, Barzani (2020) indicates that the use of short stories has a positive effect on EFL teachers and students, specifically in reading comprehension and storytelling. Kurdi and Nizam (2022) note that short stories have been recommended as a way of studying English as a second language. According to Irhamni et al. (2025), this approach serves as an excellent resource for acquiring a foreign language.

Ayand and Shafiee (2016) argue that watching films in English is used to enhance learners' proficiency. The use of subtitles as a teaching tool proves to be particularly effective in the learning process. To Günay-Köprülü & Bengü Aksu Ataç (2018), movies are powerful audiovisual resources for learning the culture of a target language because they engage both sight and hearing, allowing learners to observe the patterns and contexts in which expressions and words are used. In fact, Albiladi et al. (2018) affirm that movies as an English-learning tool can improve learners' speaking and communication abilities and foster cultural understanding. Besides, Bostancı (2022) indicates that the use of videos and films offers learners greater opportunities to use the language. According to Sánchez-Auñón et al. (2023), in addition to improving listening skills and expanding knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics, films can also be used as background material through which students can practice and improve their communicative skills in the target language.

Imaniah & Gunawan (2017) explain that TEFL is a teaching way in which professors teach English as a Foreign Language in countries where English is not the main language. Ampa & Nurqalbi (2021) explain that innovative teaching refers to the creativity and originality of educators who adapt their instructional styles or strategies. Around the world, educational institutions are adopting new technology-driven ideas, approaches, and innovations to improve students' learning experiences. Hayati et al. (2021) determine that discussion, small group, role play, etc; had a positive outcome in student's learning. This allows teachers to adjust the class material based on their observation of student's English level, and create a more relaxed and participatory class environment. However, Paragae (2023) claims that effective teaching strategies in EFL classrooms must stem from a deep understanding of both the content being taught and the students themselves. Educators should take into account factors such as learners' age, proficiency levels, and preferred learning styles, along with the specific aims of each lesson.

Whereas Anjella (2025) points out that EFL teaching methodology should be adapted to students' needs, cultural contexts, and learning objectives, without adhering to a single standardized method. Strategies such as communicative language teaching, integrated skills development, contextualized instruction, and the use of digital tools

should be employed in the classroom to create a dynamic learning environment that supports and enhances fluency and accuracy

Taken together, these teaching approaches point to a common conclusion: developing oral fluency in EFL classrooms depends less on any single resource and more on creating frequent, low-anxiety opportunities for learners to speak. Communicative, contextualized, and learner-centered strategies are consistently associated with more natural and confident speech production. However, this body of literature rarely addresses one specific by-product of spontaneous oral production: the hesitation phenomena and filler words that naturally emerge when learners speak with reduced preparation time. Understanding how fillers function, and how teachers might approach them pedagogically rather than simply correct them, therefore requires turning to research that examines these words directly.

3. Definition, Types, and Production of Fillers:

Navaretta (2016) indicates that fillers, whether used on their own or alongside pauses and/or gestures, are very common across all forms of spoken communication. The author discovered in his research paper that Danish fillers perform the same function as fillers in other languages, including providing feedback, managing turn-taking conversation, and signaling discourse planning processes such as lexical retrieve. Santos et al. (2016) conceptualize fillers as a pausing or hesitation phenomena, which is a frequent characteristic of natural speech, characterized by gaps or pauses that occur while a person is producing utterances. In addition, Stevani et al. (2018) define fillers as words, clauses, or phrases which are used by the speaker during the moment he/she attempts to convey the main message. To Gandeza (2023) fillers are words, sounds, or phrases which can occur any point within a spoken utterance and can be removed without altering the core meaning of what is being said.

Stevani et al. (2018) state fillers can be categorized into three types based on their word structure. (1) Simple word fillers, which consist of just a single word, such as but, okay, well, um, yeah, uh, so, etc. (2) Phrasal fillers, which are groups of words that lack a subject or a verb, for example, “by the way” and “how to say”, (3) Clausal fillers, which are groups of words that contain both subject and a predicate, for instance, expressions like “I mean” or “you know” are good examples of clausal fillers.

Indriyana et al. (2021) admit that fillers aren't always speech interruptions. EFL learners can use them as communication strategies to improve interactions, particularly in speeches. Seals & Coppock (2022) argue that the excessive use of verbal fillers in scientific presentations decrease the speaker's perceived authority, but also hinders audience comprehension. Yulpia (2025) states that learners sometimes struggle with spontaneous speaking, which would lead to frequent hesitations, pauses, and fillers.

Kharismawan (2017) determined that his study about Barack Obama's speech found two types of fillers: unlexicalized and lexical filled pauses. It also identified five functions: hesitating, empathizing, mitigating, editing, and time-creating. The researcher concludes that fillers are not always speaking distractions, foreign language learners (EFL learners) should see them as tools to improve interaction.

To Abdullah & Mohammed (2023) fillers are as key indicators of fluency or disfluency in speaking. When EFL learners take speaking tests, they naturally pause and use fillers in spontaneous speech. Furthermore, training courses with improved lesson plans can help students master speaking fluency and reduce filler repetition.

Pamolango (2016) infers that students from Asia are not the only ones who use fillers more frequently; Foreign students who use English as first language also tend to produce more fillers. Additionally, the more complex the language is being used; the more fillers are likely to appear. To Urbis (2020) the linguistic fillers on university teachers that college professors most frequently use discourse markers as linguistic fillers and least often use explicit editing terms. Overall, professors typically employ linguistic fillers to emphasize a point. Thus, professors should also monitor their own

filler usage to avoid excessive or inappropriate use, which could negatively impact the teaching-learning process.

Lomotey (2021) infers that fillers help to structure the discourse by allowing teachers to answer to students. For instance, teachers might use fillers to acknowledge a student's reaction, express agreement, or signal that they are ready to answer a question. In addition, Efendi et al. (2024) emphasizes the need to improve students' understanding of filler words through a range of instructional approaches. Teachers can, for example, provide direct instruction on the various categories and purposes of fillers to enhance students' communication skills. Thus, through a deeper grasp of filler usage, educators can help students communicate more effectively and way more confident in both academic and everyday situations. Al-Alami (2025) argues that fillers on communicative competence in English. Based on the study's findings, the use of speech fillers during oral presentations in formal settings hinders the development of students' communicative competence in EFL, especially in fluency.

Gikas & Sutcliffe (2019) find that vocal fillers (such as “um”, “uh”, “like”) have a significant impact on people's perception toward a person's professional credibility, communication skills, likability, and overall personal trustworthiness. Learning to speak without relying completely on filler words is an important step toward presenting oneself in a more professionally form. Agmon et al. (2023) consider that, while fillers don't convey specific lexical meaning on their own, they are more than just speech errors or production hiccups. Instead, they probably fulfill a number of key communicative functions, for instance, they assist the speaker in converting their internal thoughts into spoken language, and they also aid the listener in understanding a determined speech.

Since Gulzar et al. (2024) view, fillers can be divided into two subcategories: lexical and non-lexical fillers. Lexical fillers are real words, for instance, words like “well”, “I mean” “You know”, etc.; are examples of lexical fillers. Non-lexical fillers, on the other hand, are simply sounds (like “uh” or “um”) and are commonly referred to as filled pauses. Although linguistic fillers are usually thought to be pointless, they can also be useful for some situations.

Mahendra & Bram (2019), in their finding about fillers admit that the fillers used by male and female instructors served distinct functions. For instance, the filler “alright”, which appeared at the beginning of utterances, helped instructors capture students' attention and deliver instructions. Next, the filler “err” functioned as a time-gaining strategy to allow for word search, and therefore occurred in the middle of utterances. Similarly, the filler “so” was also mostly found at the star of utterances, where it served both to grab students' attention and to introduce new ideas or topics. Then, the filler “umm”, found in the middle of utterances, indicated that the instructor was struggling to find the right words or trying to identify a problem. Lastly, the filler “ya” (which means “yes”) was used to introduce the instructors' ideas.

Tanaka et al. (2025) suggest that the moderate use of fillers can actually enhance fluency when speaking on assessments. Their study examined how filler words usage relates to the perceived fluency of Japanese learners of English, using the KISTEC as the assessment tool. The results revealed that fillers play a complex role in how fluency is evaluated, confirming the hypothesis that a moderate amount of filler use can improve fluency ratings, whereas excessive filler use has a detrimental effect. Cui (2025) also has a similar opinion compared to the previous study. She also argues that filler words and hesitation devices, when used appropriately, can actually improve the fluency and coherence of speech for English Language Learners (ELLs) by creating a more natural rhythm and flow in spoken discourse.

4. Cognitive, linguistic, affective, and situational causes

Seals & Coppock (2022) discover several factors on why speakers produce an excessive number of fillers during their speech. For instance, a meticulous emphasis on speaking in a more naturally and conversationally during professional presentations,

instead of reading from a script or memorizing all your speech, might lead to cause filler words (such as “um”, “uh”, “you know”). This happens because filler words are commonly used in everyday casual interaction. Therefore, the speaker is employing fillers as an urgent way to “take advantage” of unused time. This factor leads to another crucial factor: the nervousness/ action of speaking too quickly, which is usually represented as a phobia called Glossophobia or anxiety related with public speaking. Thus, it will originate to feel nervousness and anxiety before a presentation. Lack of preparation time is another reason of excessive use of filler words.

To Cui (2025) the factors that contribute to the use of fillers and hesitations by L2 speakers in oral performance. For instance, the author first identifies four general factors established in prior research: L1 Background, which indicates that patterns of filler use can transfer from a speaker’s first language (L1) to their second language (L2); L2 proficiency, which indicates that lower proficiency tends to increase hesitation phenomena; therefore, more fluent speakers produce fewer disfluencies; Task type which means that fillers and hesitations increase with the cognitive load of the task being performed; and Contextual Factors, which refers that the setting, the interlocutor, and the topic are aspects that influence hesitation patterns.

4.1. Communicative functions: Fillers and their relationship to fluency

Tanaka et al. (2025) suggest that the moderate use of fillers can actually enhance fluency when speaking on assessments. Their study examined how filler words usage relates to the perceived fluency of Japanese learners of English, using the KISTEC as the assessment tool. The results revealed that fillers play a complex role in how fluency is evaluated, confirming the hypothesis that a moderate amount of filler use can improve fluency ratings, whereas excessive filler use has a detrimental effect. Cui (2025) also has a similar opinion compared to the previous study. She also argues that filler words and hesitation devices, when used appropriately, can actually improve the fluency and coherence of speech for English Language Learners (ELLs) by creating a more natural rhythm and flow in spoken discourse. Abdullah & Mohammed (2023) consider fillers as key indicators of fluency or disfluency in speaking. When EFL learners take speaking tests, they naturally pause and use fillers in spontaneous speech. The authors also conclude that teachers should explicitly teach fillers to EFL students; Furthermore, training courses with improved lesson plans can help students master speaking fluency and reduce filler repetition. Teachers must also identify students' strengths and weaknesses regarding the factors that influence filler use and affect speaking performance.

4.2. Pedagogical implications/ How to reduce the use of fillers

Pedagogical approaches to reducing filler use in EFL speaking should not focus on eliminating fillers completely, but on helping learners use them consciously and strategically. Gandeza (2023) proposes the FRET strategy, which consists of four components: Friends, Recognition, Experience, and Training. This approach supports students who experience difficulties during oral presentations and helps them speak with greater confidence, fluency, and control.

The Friends component encourages learners to feel comfortable using fillers during conversations. Instead of pressuring students to avoid fillers entirely, teachers should create a supportive environment where students can express themselves naturally. Moderate filler use may give learners time to organize their thoughts and maintain the flow of speech. When students feel less anxious and less afraid of making mistakes,

they are more likely to communicate freely and gradually develop greater control over their speaking performance.

Recognition refers to allowing learners to share their ideas, emotions, experiences, and personal viewpoints. Through this process, teachers can better understand students' needs, values, and communication difficulties. Recognition also helps learners become aware of the situations in which they rely on fillers. This awareness is important because students cannot regulate a speaking habit unless they first identify when, why, and how it occurs. Teachers can therefore use classroom discussions, reflective activities, and oral tasks to help students notice their filler use without making them feel judged.

The Experience component emphasizes giving students repeated opportunities to use spoken English in informal and formal contexts. Learners may feel embarrassed, intimidated, or confused when speaking, especially when expected to perform in front of others. However, frequent and enjoyable speaking experiences can reduce this discomfort. As students participate in conversations, presentations, and collaborative tasks, they can observe how fillers function in their speech and distinguish between acceptable, moderate use and excessive dependence. These experiences can motivate students to improve their language use and communicate more effectively.

Training is the final component of the FRET strategy. In this stage, teachers can treat fillers as a temporary communicative resource or a springboard for generating ideas. Fillers may help students brainstorm, connect concepts, recall vocabulary, and maintain their speaking turn. Through guided practice, learners can expand their vocabulary, improve sentence organization, and replace unnecessary fillers with appropriate pauses, discourse markers, or more precise expressions. Training also encourages learner autonomy because students gradually take responsibility for monitoring and managing their own filler use.

Al-Alami (2025) provides further pedagogical recommendations based on interviews with instructors, Toastmasters, and students. Instructors believed that excessive filler use mainly damages fluency, followed by accuracy and appropriacy. From their perspective, frequent fillers weaken communicative competence and reduce the effectiveness of oral presentations. To address this problem, they recommended improving students' language proficiency, establishing public speaking clubs, and emphasizing rehearsal before formal presentations. These measures can help learners feel better prepared and reduce the hesitation that often produces fillers.

The Toastmasters participants offered similar suggestions. They emphasized strengthening language skills as a foundation for effective speaking and proposed creating a Toastmasters club on campus. They also recommended that students record their presentations before delivering them formally. Video or audio recordings can help learners identify repeated filler words, unclear sections, weak organization, and moments of hesitation. In addition, one-to-one support was suggested for students who rely heavily on fillers. Individual feedback can address problems and provide targeted strategies for improvement.

The students interviewed by Al-Alami also contributed practical ideas. They suggested organizing low-stakes, non-graded presentations before formal assessments. Such activities can reduce anxiety and allow learners to practice without fear of losing marks. They also highlighted the need to improve communication skills and create

extracurricular clubs where students can practice presentations regularly. These suggestions show that learners value supportive, repeated opportunities to speak.

Overall, the findings indicate that filler reduction requires awareness, practice, feedback, language development, and emotional support. Teachers should avoid treating fillers only as errors. Instead, they should help students understand their communicative functions, identify excessive use, and develop alternative strategies. Public speaking clubs, rehearsal, recording, peer interaction, low-stakes presentations, reflective activities, and individual coaching can contribute significantly to improvement. When these practices are applied consistently, EFL learners may reduce unnecessary fillers, improve fluency and clarity, and communicate with greater confidence in academic and formal speaking contexts.

Conclusion

In base to the evidence found in Scopus and MIIAR, the author concludes that communication and speaking skills constitute one of the most fundamental pillars of human interaction and language learning. Many researchers widely agree that communication is a dynamic, interactive process that covers not only the transmission of information but also the ability to establish meaningful connections with others. Speaking, as the most common form of verbal expression, requires the integration of multiple competencies, such as verbal fluency, accurate pronunciation, appropriate intonation, and the capacity to engage in meaningful conversations. However, it is also recognized that speaking performance is heavily influenced by psychological factors such as anxiety, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and insufficient vocabulary, all of which can significantly hinder a learner's ability to communicate effectively. In educational contexts, teachers play a key role in stimulate speaking development on an English classroom environment through the use of the target language in the classroom, the quality of feedback teachers provide, and the communicative activities they design; Consequently, all these aspects will directly impact on how students develop their oral skills. Ultimately, developing strong speaking and communication skills is not only essential for academic success but also for professional and social participation in an increasingly interconnected world in which speakers must convey their ideas globally.

Al-alamy (2025), evaluate how impactful are speech fillers on communicative competence on EFL learners. Based on his study's findings, using speech fillers during formal oral presentations can negatively affect EFL students' communicative competence, especially in terms of language fluency. To ensure high-quality presentations in formal settings, EFL instructors should identify the reasons behind a student's continued use of speech fillers and develop a corresponding action plan. Furthermore, instructors should expand students' linguistic knowledge and strengthen their language skill through all available means as a prerequisite for effective oral presentations. Instructors should also provide students with opportunities to observe model presentations that they can learn from. Ultimately, in cases where students lack self-confidence or struggle with planning, instructors should help them develop essential life skills, including time management, planning, and coping with stressful situations.

EFL instruction across all ages represents a spacious and evolving pedagogical framework aimed at building communicative competence in learners for whom English

is not the primary language of daily life. The main objective of EFL education is to set up students with the ability to use English effectively and appropriately across social and cultural contexts, and this goal requests instructional approaches that are flexible, learner-centered, and responsive to individual needs and learning styles. The literature also highlights a wide range of resources and strategies that have been applied and proved they are effective in EFL classrooms, including teaching techniques like the use of literature and short stories to develop the four language skills, films and audiovisual materials to enhance vocabulary, pronunciation, and cultural understanding, and innovative teaching methods such as role play, group discussion, and technology-driven activities. TEFL instructors are encouraged to motivate learners, provide meaningful exposure to authentic language, and create inclusive classroom environments that support both fluency and accuracy. Throughout all age groups and proficiency levels, effective EFL instruction depends entirely on the teacher's ability to adapt content and methodology to the specific characteristics and goals of their students, ensuring that language learning is both meaningful and tradable to real-world communication.

Many studies show that fillers are a natural component of all spoken discourse. However, what makes them distinctive is that the choice of fillers reflects individual speaker preference, which explains, why different speakers of the same language employ different fillers. For instance, the study researched by Gulzar et al. (2024) explored the types of lexical and non-lexical fillers and their functions as used by instructors and students in EFL classroom interactions. The findings further validate that in local Pakistani classrooms, teachers also incorporate fillers into their teaching, much like educators worldwide. Therefore, it can be concluded that using fillers does not indicate a lack of communicative competence; rather, these are words naturally embedded within spoken discourse.

Indriyana et al. (2021) conclude that the notion academic professionals have about fillers as usual interrupters to speech is incorrect. For English as a foreign English (EFL) learners, fillers can actually serve as a communication strategy that supports successful interaction. By understanding the functions of fillers and gaining more exposure to their use, EFL learners can leverage them to improve their spoken interactions, particularly in speeches.

Fillers are a naturally occurring feature of spoken language that has received growing scholarly attention, particularly inside EFL research. Defined briefly, fillers are words, sounds, or phrases, such as “uh,” “um,” “well,” or “you know”, that appear during spoken utterances without changing their core meaning, typically emerging during moments of hesitation or cognitive processing. Rather than being dismissed as mere speech errors, Current research has reformulated fillers as functional communicative tools that serve multiple purposes; For instance, they allow speakers processing time, regulate turn-taking, signal discourse planning, and can even make speech sound more natural and socially considerate. In academic and professional settings, fillers have been categorized into simple word fillers, phrasal fillers, and clausal fillers, and their use has been observed across a variety of spoken contexts, from informal conversation to academic presentations and formal speeches. It is important to note that research suggests that the relationship between filler use and perceived fluency is not linear, while excessive reliance on fillers can undermine a speaker's credibility and hinder audience comprehension, moderate use has actually been associated with enhanced fluency ratings in EFL learners. These findings carry direct implications for EFL instruction, recommending that teachers should explicitly address fillers in the classroom with the aim of not to eliminate them entirely, but to help learners understand

their functions and employ them strategically in order to communicate more confidently and naturally.

There are some recommendations for reducing the use of fillers during an academic or professional speech. Having awareness could be an important step to detect how much fillers are repeated during speech, since speakers can apply this approach through helpful observation and sharing advices of a colleague or mentor. In case a mentor or colleague is not available, a speaker may be encouraged to review their own presentation in order to see how many fillers are used, either through a recording or a transcription. Another recommendation is using the silence as a key intervention for your speech. Currently, many speakers use fillers to avoid those silent pauses that happens when they don't connect their ideas; consequently, they will use vocal fillers in order to fill those silent periods and evade a "long" uncomfortable moment. It is important to note that using the silence during your speech is not necessarily unacceptable, on contrary, silent and brief pauses usually seems to be interpreted by the audience as a demonstrating confidence and outstanding narrative control of a presentation. Last but not least, prepare your presentation. When a speaker prepares their presentation, it will increase the chance to avoid nervousness, and therefore, the use of excessive vocal fillers or other speaking diseases during a presentation. Some ways a speaker could improve their preparation quality are: using transitions, which is a practical tool that is useful to apply between statements throughout a presentation; Practice the overall presentation is suggested by many speakers to have a partial sense of the total preparation time a speaker will has during the speech. A useful recommendation according to many speakers is practicing intensively the total presentation until you can convey it without any effort, at least 10 or more times. Focusing on tricky segments is also an important aspect to consider for conveying a message effectively, since the speaker can recognize specific parts of the speech in which there may have issues on articulating the phrase in a cleanly way, so it is necessary to practice those difficult parts until you can say it in a smoothly and fluent way. Practicing in front of others, especially mentors or peers, is a suggested form to give a confident presentation, evade the nervousness in the speech, and consequently, will decrease the use of fillers. Slow down your speech is also an excellent way to elude the excessive use of fillers, since the audience might comprehend what the speaker is saying due to a moderate and clear pace. Applying non-verbal communication such as maintaining eye contact or gestures is essential to communicate your idea effectively, especially during pauses. Actions like nodding, shrugging, or pausing briefly to drink water, as well as facial expressions, will assist the speaker to maintain the interaction with the audience, besides giving enough time to connect the ideas without the necessity of employ fillers. These exercises have been linked to the reduction of using fillers, so they are recommended to convey a clear message, either in an academic or professional contexts.

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