


An Exploration of Factors Affecting Speaking Difficulties among 2022 English Education Students In University

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A B S T R A C T

Speaking fluency is crucial for English competence, yet many English Education students still face speaking fluency difficulties despite completing speaking courses. This qualitative case study aimed to explore the forms of speaking fluency difficulties, their contributing factors, and students' coping strategies, involving 12 participants. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed five forms of speaking fluency difficulties, influenced by thirteen factors and addressed through seven coping strategies. This research concludes that speaking fluency difficulties are multidimensional problems heavily rooted in linguistic deficits, highlighting the need for targeted instructional support to help students overcome these communication barriers.

Keywords: *Speaking Difficulties, Fluency Difficulties, EFL Learners*

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the primary productive skills in language learning and an essential competence for English Education students. As prospective English teachers, these students are expected to communicate effectively in English for both academic and professional purposes. To achieve effective communication, students need not only adequate linguistic knowledge but also speaking fluency, which enables them to express ideas smoothly, spontaneously, and with minimal disruption. However, despite receiving formal speaking instruction, many EFL learners continue to experience difficulties in achieving speaking fluency.

Speaking fluency is widely recognized as a fundamental component of speaking competence. It generally refers to the ability to produce speech smoothly, continuously, and with minimal hesitation or disruption (Thornbury, 2005). Fluent speakers are able to express their ideas naturally, maintain the flow of communication, and respond appropriately without excessive pauses. In line with this, Wang et al. (2024) describe fluency as smooth speaking with a clear and logical flow of ideas produced in a spontaneous way. Furthermore, Peltonen (2023) strengthens this perspective by identifying fluency as a key indicator of speaking proficiency, which is explicitly characterized by speech that sounds effortless and uninterrupted. In contrast, speaking fluency difficulties may hinder communication and reduce the effectiveness of message delivery. Previous study indicate that speaking fluency difficulties are commonly associated with hesitation, vocabulary limitations, and other barriers that interfere with effective oral communication (Jamoom & Bahron, 2024). These disruptions can prevent learners from communicating their ideas confidently and effectively during classroom speaking activities.

Despite the importance of speaking fluency, many EFL learners continue to experience difficulties in achieving speaking fluency. This issue remains evident even among students who have received formal speaking instruction. In the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University, students of the 2022 cohort have completed a structured sequence of speaking courses, these courses are designed to progressively develop students' oral communication abilities. However, preliminary observations indicated that some students still encountered difficulties in maintaining fluent and spontaneous speech. These difficulties were reflected in long pauses, hesitation, repetition, disrupted speech flow, and occasional code-switching into Indonesian.

Previous literature suggests that speaking fluency difficulties are influenced by various linguistic, psychological, environmental, and instructional factors. Linguistic factors include limitations in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation which may disrupt learners' ability to produce speech smoothly (Brown, 2007; Thornbury, 2005). Study conducted by Normawati et al. (2023) also indicate that vocabulary limitations, grammatical difficulties, and pronunciation problems remain major barriers affecting EFL learners' speaking performance and fluency. Psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence may also hinder students' willingness and ability to communicate fluently (Horwitz et al., 1986; Ur, 1996). Among these psychological barriers, Horwitz et al. (1986) define second-language speaking anxiety as a complex conceptualization of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. It primarily manifests through three interrelated performance anxieties: communication apprehension, where learners experience shyness and difficulty speaking in groups; test anxiety, stemming from a fear of academic failure; and fear of negative evaluation, which continually disrupts the cognitive process required for spontaneous speech formulation. Study conducted by Gunawan (2026) also indicate that speaking anxiety is often driven by fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and linguistic insecurity, which can reduce learners' willingness to communicate and negatively affect their speaking performance and fluency.

In addition, environmental and instructional factors play an important role in speaking fluency development. Limited exposure to English, insufficient opportunities for authentic communication, and classroom practices that provide restricted speaking opportunities may impede fluency development (Harmer, 2007; S D Krashen, 1982). Study conducted by Saragih et al. (2024) also indicate that limited exposure to English-speaking environments can reduce learners' willingness to communicate and hinder the development of speaking fluency. Furthermore, instructional practices that provide insufficient speaking activities and interaction opportunities may restrict students' oral language development and fluency improvement, and to cope with these challenges, learners often employ various strategies, such as preparation, self-practice, peer discussion to manage speaking challenges and improve their speaking fluency (Abrar et al., 2024).

Several previous studies have examined speaking fluency from different perspectives. Winaryo & Gusdian (2021) investigated English Education students' speaking fluency levels through objective measurements such as speech rate, pause rate, and disfluent syllables. Their findings demonstrated that most students achieved an intermediate level of fluency. Monica (2022) explored the effectiveness of chunking techniques in improving speaking fluency and reducing speaking anxiety, revealing that the technique significantly enhanced students' speaking performance. Meanwhile, Setyawan et al. (2026) examined the relationship between fluency, accuracy, and academic speaking proficiency and found that fluency was positively associated with overall speaking performance.

These studies tend to emphasize performance measurement, instructional effectiveness, or statistical relationships between variables rather than investigating how students perceive, experience, and interpret their speaking fluency difficulties. As a result, a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences with speaking fluency difficulties remains underexplored.

Therefore, to address this gap, this research explores speaking fluency difficulties among the 2022 English Education students at Tadulako University. Specifically, it investigates the

forms of speaking fluency difficulties experienced by students, the factors contributing to those difficulties, and the strategies they employ to cope with them. The findings are expected to provide a deeper understanding of how students experience speaking fluency difficulties.

METHOD

This research uses qualitative case study design. A case study is appropriate because it enables researchers to explore a phenomenon in depth within a bounded system (Coombs, 2022). In this research, the bounded system refers to the 2022 cohort of the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University. The research focus on exploring the forms of students' speaking fluency difficulties, the factors contributing to those difficulties, and the strategies they used to cope with them. Data are collected through an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The data will be analyzed using qualitative data analysis model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014).

Respondents

The respondents in this research are twelve students from the 2022 cohort of the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University. They are selected using purposive sampling, a technique in which researchers intentionally choose participants who can provide rich information and relevant experiences regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants are selected based on specific criteria which are the participants had completed all speaking courses offered in the curriculum. In addition, they had experience participating in various classroom speaking activities, such as discussions, presentations, and question-and-answer sessions, and were willing to share their experiences regarding speaking fluency difficulties. The decision to involve twelve participants is based on the methodological consideration of data saturation in qualitative research. A small sample size ranging from nine to seventeen participants is often sufficient to identify the core issues and achieve saturation in a study with a relatively homogeneous group (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Instruments

Data are collected using an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The open-ended questionnaire consists of six questions designed to obtain preliminary information. It is distributed online through Google Forms to allow participants to respond freely and in detail. The open-ended questionnaire is developed based on the research objectives and theoretical framework and validated through expert judgment prior to data collection to ensure the clarity and relevance of the items. Subsequently, semi-structured interview consists of ten questions designed to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences and to clarify issues emerging from the questionnaire responses. The interview guide is developed based on the research theoretical framework, research objective and the initial responses from the questionnaire and also validated through expert judgment. During the interviews, the researcher uses an audio recorder to capture the full conversation. The interviews are conducted face-to-face to allow more natural interaction between the researcher and the participants. The duration of each interview may vary depending on the participants' responses and the depth of information that is provided.

Procedures

The research procedure carried out in several stages. First, the researcher obtained participants' consent and distributed the open-ended questionnaire online to all participants. After collecting the questionnaire responses, a preliminary review was conducted to identify key issues and generate follow-up questions for the interview stage. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the same participants to explore their responses in greater depth. The interviews focused on the forms of speaking fluency difficulties experienced by

students, the factors contributing to those difficulties, and the strategies they used to cope with them.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire and interviews were analyzed using interactive model of qualitative data analysis, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). During data reduction, the researcher reviewed and selected information relevant to the research objectives. The reduced data were then organized and displayed in descriptive form to identify recurring patterns and themes. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified through repeated examination of the data to ensure the credibility and consistency of the findings. The analysis focused on identifying the forms of speaking fluency difficulties, the factors influencing those difficulties, and the coping strategies employed by the participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research present and discuss the answers to the research questions concerning speaking fluency difficulties. The findings were obtained from the analysis of data collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The researcher elaborated the research findings through the two instruments. The results are organized into three main sections: the forms of speaking fluency difficulties, the factors contributing to those difficulties, and the strategies employed to cope with them.

What Forms of Speaking Fluency Difficulties are Encountered by the Students During Classroom Speaking Activities?

The findings revealed that students experienced several forms of speaking fluency difficulties during classroom speaking activities. Based on the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data, five forms of speaking fluency difficulties were identified, namely long pauses, hesitation, repetition, code-switching, and difficulty speaking spontaneously.

Long pauses

One of the most common forms of speaking fluency difficulties experienced by the students was long pauses. The students often stopped speaking for several seconds because they needed time to think about vocabulary, grammar, or the next idea they wanted to express.

Student "D": When I speak English in class, especially during presentations or question-and-answer sessions, I experience several difficulties that affect my fluency. One of them is long pauses because I need time to think about what I want to say.

Hesitation

Another difficulty frequently experienced by the students was hesitation. The students often felt doubtful and unsure when speaking English, especially when they were not confident about their grammar or vocabulary choice.

Student "L": I experience hesitation while speaking. I feel that it happens because of a lack of practice, fear of making mistakes, and a lack of confidence in the vocabulary and grammar that I use.

Repetition

The next form of speaking fluency difficulty found in this research was repetition. Some students tended to repeat words, phrases, or sentences while speaking because they needed additional time to think about what they wanted to say next.

Student "A": I also experienced repetition while speaking. I realized that I repeated certain words or phrases because I was still thinking about what I wanted to say next, not because I intended to do so. The repetition happened because I needed time to decide how to continue my speech.

Code-switching

Code switching was also found as one of the forms of speaking fluency difficulties experienced by the students. The students sometimes switched from English to Indonesian when they could not find appropriate English vocabulary or expressions.

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Student "R": Code switching often happened to me when I was given unfamiliar topics or contexts to talk about. In those situations, I used code switching to express my ideas when I did not know the English vocabulary, so I switched to Indonesian words while speaking.

Difficulty speaking spontaneously

The last form of speaking fluency difficulty found in this research was difficulty Speaking Spontaneously. Several students explained that they often had ideas in their minds but struggled to arrange them into English sentences spontaneously.

Student "C": Sometimes, the words are already in my mind, but they are difficult to express, so speaking feels difficult.

What Factors Do Students Perceive as Influencing Their Speaking Fluency Difficulties?

The findings revealed that there were several factors contributing to students' speaking fluency difficulties. Based on the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data, the factors were categorized into linguistic, psychological, environmental, and instructional factors. These factors caused the students to experience various difficulties in speaking fluency during classroom speaking activities. For better readability and to provide a clearer overview of the findings, the identified factors are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The Factors Influencing Speaking Fluency Difficulties

No	Factor	Category
1.	Limited vocabulary	Linguistic
2.	Limited grammar knowledge	Linguistic
3.	Pronunciation difficulty	Linguistic
4.	Mother tongue interference	Linguistic
5.	Fear of judgment	Psychological
6.	Nervousness	Psychological
7.	Overthinking	Psychological
8.	Low self-confidence	Psychological
9.	Limited English exposure outside the classroom	Environmental
10.	Lack of speaking partners	Environmental
11.	Serious or tense classroom atmosphere	Instructional
12.	Script dependency	Instructional
13.	Online learning	Instructional

As presented in Table 1, the findings revealed thirteen factors contributing to students' speaking fluency difficulties. The following sections discuss each category in greater detail.

Linguistics Factors

Linguistic factors became one of the factors contributing to students' speaking fluency difficulties. Based on the questionnaire and interview data, the linguistic factors included limited vocabulary, limited grammar knowledge, pronunciation difficulty, and mother tongue interference.

Limited vocabulary

The main linguistic factor most frequently mentioned by the students was limited vocabulary mastery. Several students explained that they already had ideas in their minds, but they found it difficult to remember or find the appropriate English words to express those ideas clearly.

Student "C": Another factor is my limited vocabulary mastery, so I feel that I still need to learn more English vocabulary. Actually, the words are already in my mind, but they are difficult to express, so I often experience difficulties while speaking, including long pauses or suddenly becoming silent.

Limited grammar knowledge

The findings showed that students often had difficulty arranging correct grammatical sentences while speaking. In addition, they were also afraid of making grammatical mistakes and being judged by others.

Student "A": As Indonesians, we often think about whether the sentences we use are correct or not. In fact, in communication, the most important thing is that other people understand the meaning we want to convey. However, we are often afraid of making even small

mistakes because we worry that others will judge or comment on us. This fear makes us hesitant to speak, so fluency cannot be achieved.

Pronunciation difficulty

Pronunciation difficulty was another linguistic factor that caused speaking fluency problems. Students explained that their speech often became interrupted and filled with long pauses because they were unsure about the correct English pronunciation. This difficulty was also related to fear of negative judgment.

Student "C": The factor causing the difficulty was pronunciation. I was afraid of pronouncing words incorrectly because I had once been corrected by the lecturer during a presentation

Mother tongue interference

The last factor was mother tongue interference. The findings showed that students often thought in Indonesian first and then translated their ideas into English while speaking. This process made speaking slower and sometimes caused grammatical mistakes, long pauses, or suddenly going blank during communication.

Student "R": So, the main problem I experience while learning speaking is finding suitable vocabulary in English. In my mind, the ideas are already arranged in Indonesian, but I still struggle to arrange the words properly in English.

Psychological Factors

The data analysis showed that psychological factors often played a major role in hindering students' speaking ability, even when they actually have some knowledge of the language. In this research, the researcher found four psychological factors that made students difficult to achieve speaking fluency, namely fear of judgment, nervousness, overthinking, and low self-confidence.

Fear of judgment

The first psychological factor was fear of judgment. The findings showed that many students were afraid of being negatively evaluated by other people when speaking English.

Student "D": One of the most noticeable difficulties was the fear of being judged by other people when I spoke in English. When I felt that others were evaluating or criticizing the way I spoke, I became less confident and more cautious. This made me hesitate, pause frequently, and eventually caused my speaking to become less fluent. Difficulties like this were quite influential because they not only affected my speaking ability, but also my mentality and confidence to participate actively in the classroom.

Nervousness

The findings showed that students often felt nervous when they had to perform in front of the class, especially during presentations. This feeling was usually related to pressure from the surrounding environment.

Student "A": There was pressure that I felt from the people around me. Even though they were like, 'Come on, you can do it, you can do it.' Even though they supported me, I still felt like, honestly, it felt really overwhelming inside me. My heart was beating so fast, like extreme nervousness, that's what I felt.

Overthinking

The findings showed that students often thought excessively while speaking English, especially about grammar accuracy and the way they delivered their ideas. Some students felt that they actually had ideas to express, but because they thought too much before speaking, their speech became less smooth and fluent.

Student "J": As an English Education student, I think the biggest challenge I face comes from internal factors within myself, especially the way I control my thoughts while speaking, so that I do not overthink and hesitate. Most of the time, I feel that I actually have ideas that could be expressed better, but because of overthinking, my delivery becomes less smooth. That is what makes me not as fluent as I expect to be.

Low self-confidence

The findings revealed that many students feel that their English skills are lower than their friends' skills. This negative self-assessment makes them feel insecure and small.

Student "W": I often experience long pauses and hesitation while speaking. For example, I sometimes feel that the word choices I use during the performance are not appropriate enough. Because there are many people there and some of them may know better than me, I become less confident, hesitant to speak, and insecure.

Environmental Factors

The data analysis showed that the students' environment does not provide enough support for them to develop their speaking fluency. In this research, the researcher found two factors: limited English exposure outside the classroom, and lack of speaking partners.

Limited English exposure outside the classroom

The findings showed that once the students leave the classroom, their environment is completely dominated by their mother tongue or the Indonesian language. They rarely hear or use English in their daily life. This lack of input and exposure makes it difficult for them to get used to the language.

Student "D": In my opinion, the environment outside the classroom has not really supported the improvement of my fluency. This is because the use of English is still very limited both in my friendship circle and at home. As a result, my opportunities to practice speaking consistently are also limited.

Lack of speaking partner

The findings showed that some students had difficulties finding friends or environments that supported them in practicing English regularly outside the classroom. Even when they tried to invite their friends to speak English or join English learning activities, their friends were often not interested and preferred to use Indonesian.

Student "A": In my opinion, the biggest challenge comes from friends and the surrounding environment. This is because the environment strongly influences a person's habits. For example, I often invite my friends to speak in English, but they still prefer to use Indonesian. I also used to invite them to study together or join an English Club so that we could have a place to practice English, but they were not interested. In the end, I also became less motivated to participate because my circle of friends did not really support it.

Instructional Factors

The findings showed that certain instructional practices and classroom settings can unintentionally create barriers for students when they try to speak fluently. In this research, the researcher found three sub-themes under instructional factors: a serious or tense classroom atmosphere, script dependency, and online learning.

Serious or tense classroom atmosphere

The findings revealed that the environment created by the instructor plays a critical role in encouraging or discouraging students from speaking. When a classroom atmosphere is too formal, overly serious, or tense, students feel highly pressured. This tension usually worsens when lecturers focus too much on linguistic errors and immediately correct students in the middle of their speech, which causes students to experience mental blocks and lose their flow of speech.

Student "R": The classroom atmosphere greatly influenced me because when the class was too serious or the lecturer focused too much on students' mistakes, such as immediately correcting someone while they were speaking, it made us afraid to speak up. As a result, we kept overthinking, felt afraid of making mistakes, and worried about not speaking fluently.

Script dependency

The findings indicated that the dominant use of traditional presentation methods in speaking classes makes students heavily rely on reading texts rather than practicing spontaneous speech. They become dependent on looking at their phone screens or script. This dependency reduces their ability to produce natural and fluent English.

Student "D": Presentations are still the most dominant method used in speaking classes. In my opinion, this method is not fully effective in improving fluency because many students tend to read texts during presentations, so they do not really practice speaking spontaneously.

The findings showed that online learning influenced students' speaking fluency because students became less motivated to actively practice speaking during online classes.

Student "R": In offline classes, we interacted directly with the lecturer, so we were more encouraged to speak spontaneously. Meanwhile, in online classes, especially when lecturers did not require students to turn on their cameras, many students became less motivated to actively speak. I personally felt that I put less effort into online learning. This happened because most speaking classes were conducted online without the requirement to turn on cameras, so students tended to read texts instead of practicing spontaneous speaking. As a result, online learning made students more relaxed and less serious about practicing speaking fluency compared to offline learning, where students were required to speak directly in English.

How Do Students Attempt to Cope with These Difficulties?

In order to manage and overcome their speaking fluency difficulties, the students implemented various strategies. These strategies helped them to maintain the flow of conversation, and ensure that their ideas were delivered well during classroom performances. Based on the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data, the researcher identified seven strategies used by the students: outlining, simplifying sentences, memorizing, repeated practice, code-switching, content preparation, and fillers strategy.

Outlining

When preparing for a speaking performance, some students preferred to write down only the main ideas or key points of their material rather than writing a full text. This strategy allowed them to remember the core message of their presentation while still giving them room to speak spontaneously and develop sentences naturally in front of the class.

Student "J": The strategy I use to become more fluent during presentations is usually preparing only the main points, so that I do not depend too much on the script.

Simplifying Sentences

When students faced a lack of vocabulary or felt stuck with complex expressions, they chose to change their words into simpler and easier vocabulary. This strategy was highly effective in helping them avoid long pauses and ensuring that the audience could still understand their meaning without breaking the flow of speech.

Student "D": Before the presentation began, I usually paraphrased the material that I was going to deliver into simpler language. I tended to use sentences that were easier to understand because I felt more comfortable using simple language rather than overly complex expressions. This strategy helped me become more prepared and reduced my nervousness while speaking. As a result, I was able to deliver the presentation more fluently even though my fluency was not fully developed yet.

Memorizing

Many students admitted that they relied heavily on memorizing scripts before performing in front of the class. Even though some students found it risky because they could experience a sudden blank mind if they got nervous, memorizing was still widely used as a quick way to build immediate confidence and gain new vocabulary words before a test or presentation.

Student "A": Yes, there is one strategy, although it is not really good, but it works, which is memorizing. It is not recommended, but most students, almost everyone, tend to memorize when they want to perform in speaking activities. This strategy is not completely wrong, but it is not entirely right either. By memorizing, students can also learn new vocabulary. However, this method is still not recommended because people usually suggest that students should understand the material instead. Still, I think it works because it can be effective, even though the impact may not be very significant. Sometimes, this strategy can still be applied.

Repeated practice

Students found that practicing their speech multiple times before the actual performance was very helpful. By reading the text or speaking to themselves repeatedly, the sentences became more familiar to their brain, making it much easier to recall the words quickly when standing in front of the audience.

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Student "A": In my opinion, repeated practice is an effective strategy. This strategy is quite effective because before entering the class, I usually reread the sentences that I am going to say, so they are still easier to remember. As a result, the material can be recalled more quickly while speaking.

Code switching

When students completely forgot the English words or faced severe language blocks due to nervousness, they temporarily switched their language into Indonesian or mixed both languages. This strategy acted as an emergency tool to prevent them from stopping their speech completely and to keep the interaction going.

Student "L": I used code switching when I suddenly forgot the English words or felt nervous while speaking. By switching to Indonesian for a moment, I could continue speaking and avoid stopping completely.

Content Preparation Strategy

Before performing in speaking activities, students usually developed and prepared the material by searching for relevant references related to the topic given by the lecturer. This strategy helped students feel more prepared and confident during presentations or classroom speaking activities.

Student "I": The strategy I usually use to make my presentation more fluent in class is developing the topic given by the lecturer by finding references related to the topic. After that, I practice speaking by focusing on understanding the grammar and new vocabulary, and then checking the pronunciation.

Filler strategy

The last strategy found in this research was using fillers. The findings showed that students used filler words to gain additional time for thinking while speaking. This strategy helped students avoid long pauses and maintain the flow of communication during speaking activities.

Student "R": There were always moments when I suddenly went blank. At those times, I usually used filler words such as "well" or "actually" to gain some time to think before continuing my speech.

Discussion

The findings of this research shows that the 2022 English Education students at Tadulako University experienced five forms of speaking fluency difficulties, with long pauses and hesitation being the most common problems. The finding on long pauses supports (Hajmi et al., 2026), who explain that pauses often occur when EFL learners need extra time to think of ideas and choose appropriate vocabulary while speaking. In this research, long pauses indicate that students need more time to process their thoughts before expressing them in English. Similarly, the frequent hesitation found among students supports (Ilmi & Nurya, 2023), who state that hesitation occurs when learners are unsure about the correctness of their language use. In addition, word repetition was found as another form of speaking fluency difficulty, usually appearing when students forgot what they wanted to say or tried to correct themselves. This finding differs from Li (2023) who viewed repetition as a useful communication strategy. In contrast, the present research identified repetition as a manifestation of speaking fluency difficulty because it occurred when students struggled to generate ideas, recall vocabulary, or continue their speech smoothly. Furthermore, code-switching and difficulty speaking spontaneously were also identified as signs of speaking fluency difficulties. According to Ulfah & Perangin-Angin (2026), frequent code-switching occurs when learners cannot quickly recall English vocabulary. Meanwhile, difficulty speaking spontaneously indicates that speaking spontaneously is still a challenge for the 2022 English Education students at Tadulako University because they tend to depend on preparation and scripts, making it difficult for them to communicate naturally without prior planning.

The findings also reveal four factors that contribute to speaking fluency difficulties, namely linguistic, psychological, environmental, and instructional factors. Linguistic factors

remain one of the main barriers to fluent speaking, supporting the theories proposed by (Brown, 2007; Thornbury, 2005). Limited vocabulary was identified as the most dominant linguistic problem because students often struggled to find suitable words when speaking, which led to pauses and code-switching. This finding is consistent with Hamza et al. (2025) which identified linguistic limitations as one of the major barriers to speaking fluency. Other linguistic challenges included limited grammar knowledge, pronunciation difficulties, and interference from the mother tongue, as students often translated ideas from Indonesian into English before speaking. Psychological factors also played an important role. The findings showed that fear of judgment, nervousness, overthinking, and low self-confidence negatively affected students' ability to speak fluently. Among these factors, fear of judgment emerged as the most dominant psychological barrier. Students tended to hesitate, produce long pauses, and avoid speaking because they were afraid of making mistakes and receiving negative reactions from others. The findings support (Horwitz et al., 1986; Ur, 1996), who emphasize that psychological barriers may interfere with students' speaking performance. Environmental and instructional factors further contributed to students' speaking fluency difficulties. Consistent with Krashen (1985) Input Hypothesis, the lack of English exposure outside the classroom limited opportunities for students to improve their fluency. Most students lived in environments where Indonesian or local languages were predominantly used and had few opportunities to practice English. Classroom conditions also influenced speaking fluency difficulties. A tense classroom atmosphere, and presentation activities that focused on scripts rather than spontaneous communication encouraged students to rely on scripts. This problem became more noticeable during online learning, where students could easily read prepared texts instead of practicing real communication.

To overcome these difficulties, students used several strategies that can be grouped into preparation, cognitive, and communication maintenance strategies. Preparation strategies, such as outlining, content preparation, and repeated practice helped students feel more confident and reduced hesitation. This finding supports Alaraj (2024) who argues that preparation can reduce cognitive load during communication. Cognitive strategies included simplifying complex sentences and memorizing. These strategies helped students cope with limited language knowledge and support Wang (2023) view that cognitive strategies assist learners in storing and retrieving information. In addition, students used communication maintenance strategies, namely code-switching and filler words such as "well" and "actually." Although code-switching is often considered a sign of speaking fluency difficulty, the findings of this study revealed two different perspectives among the students. Some students perceived code-switching as a difficulty because it occurred when they were unable to recall appropriate English vocabulary. However, other students intentionally used code-switching as a strategy to maintain communication, keep conversations flowing, and avoid communication breakdowns. This finding highlights that code-switching can function both as an indicator of speaking difficulty and as a communication strategy, depending on how and why it is used by learners in EFL contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the forms of speaking fluency difficulties, the factors influencing them, and the coping strategies employed by EFL students. The findings identified five forms of speaking fluency difficulties shaped by thirteen interrelated factors categorized into linguistic, psychological, environmental, and instructional dimensions. To overcome these challenges, students applied seven coping strategies that can be grouped into preparation, cognitive, and communication maintenance strategies. These results indicate that speaking fluency difficulties are a multifaceted phenomenon resulting from the interaction of language-related, personal, learning, and contextual factors rather than linguistic limitations alone. The findings suggest several pedagogical implications for EFL lecturers. First, teachers should create supportive, low-anxiety classroom environments that reduce students' fear of making mistakes and enhance self-confidence. Second, speaking activities should emphasize

spontaneous communication to decrease students' dependence on prepared scripts. Finally, lecturers should carefully design online speaking instruction by incorporating interactive activities that encourage authentic communication, sustain students' motivation, and promote greater fluency development in both face-to-face and online learning environments.

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