

The Impact of Using Speech Fillers on the Adequacy of Communicative Competence in English as a Lingua Franca

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Abstract—The current study sought to investigate the impact of using speech fillers on students' communicative competence in English within higher education contexts. To achieve the intended aim, the study addressed two primary research questions regarding how using speech fillers in oral presentations would impact students' communicative competence in English and what suggestions could be offered to assist students in minimizing the use of speech fillers while presenting. Additionally, the study raised one secondary research question on which speech fillers were most frequently used by the participating students. The study involved three categories: language instructors, toastmaster members, and university students covering a total of two-hundred and four subjects. The author implemented three study tools, namely, a questionnaire, an interview, and class observations. The findings revealed that the vast majority of subjects viewed using speech fillers in oral presentations as having a negative impact on students' communicative competence in English. In light of subjects' suggestions, the study offers a variety of ideas as to how producing speech fillers in oral presentations could be minimized. Finally, the study presents the speech fillers which were frequently used by the participating students, offering recommendations for scholars to consider.

Index Terms—communicative competence, English as a Lingua Franca, oral presentations, speech fillers

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, the acquisition of adequate communicative competence in English as a lingua franca has become a success requirement. What does adequate communicative competence reflect though? As seen by the author of this paper amongst others, adequate communicative competence embodies one's ability to manipulate language fluently, accurately, and appropriately. Fluency is the ability to use language in stretches of discourse without undue hesitations and pauses, accuracy is the ability to use error-free language both orally and in writing, and appropriacy is the ability to use language in line with the communication situation. When one of these three pillars is missing, the communication process cannot be claimed to be sufficiently effective.

Focusing on oral communication specifically, it comprises linguistic and paralinguistic devices and is affected by different factors such as the speaker's language proficiency, mood, culture, background, physical surrounding, and the context in which the situation takes place (Al-Alami, 2019). While orally communicating with others, Clark and Fox (2002) elucidate, a number of people depend on vocal fillers whilst conveying the intended message. Spoken speech is obviously influenced by several phenomena which do not necessarily exist in written speech such as the use of speech fillers (Szekely et al., 2019).

Excluding the discussion to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, it goes without saying that it is of extreme importance to empower learners with adequate communicative competence so that they can use English fluently, appropriately, and accurately (Savignon, 2002; Gilmore, 2007; Stelma, 2010). Motivated by the need to equip EFL learners in higher education with sufficient communicative competence, the current paper seeks to explore how using speech fillers in oral presentations could impact students' communicative competence in English.

Comprised of six more sections, section two portrays a number of opinions and studies which pertain to the main issue this paper explores. Section three presents the research aims and questions, section four explains the study methodology, section five delineates the study's findings, and section six discusses the findings. The paper concludes with section seven, offering recommendations for researchers to consider.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Section two sheds light on three areas which are related to the main issue this paper addresses. These are: speech fillers in terms of meaning; causes; and impacts, studies on speech fillers, and suggestions for reducing the use of speech fillers. It is worth noting that, for each area, citing previous works is presented chronologically.

To start with, speech fillers can be defined as irregularities in one's speech produced as a result of hesitation and uncertainty about what to say while communicating (Brennan & Williams, 1995). Some speech fillers are discourse markers. Discourse markers are phrases and words which are used to indicate boundaries in the content of a conversation

between one topic and the following one (Carter & McCarthy, 1997). However, when having no function to perform in utterances, discourse markers become speech fillers.

Swerts (1998) explains that daily conversations are different in features from formal lectures in that while a good lecture sounds formal, a daily conversation does not. Daily conversations include hesitations and filled pauses whilst formal lectures should not. Tottie (2011, 2014) is of the opinion that speech fillers are usually considered flaws in speech. Considering spoken professionalism, DeVelder (2013) highlights the essential role of voice tone, words, nonverbal communication, keeping an average pace while speaking, clarity, and straightforwardness. Using speech fillers would somehow influence a speaker's spoken professionalism.

As seen by Duvall et al. (2014) amongst other scholars, the reasons for using speech fillers while presenting are being nervous, having to use infrequent expressions, lack of attention, and glossophobia. Being nervous could make the speaker forget what to say, leading him/her to the use of speech fillers. Infrequent expressions are those which a presenter initially planned to use while delivering the speech. Due to their infrequent use by the speaker, he/she may fail to use them and resort to speech fillers accordingly. Lack of attention can be caused by trying to focus on varied points whilst presenting. Glossophobia refers to feelings of anxiety when someone has to deliver a speech in public. The anxiety, once persists, becomes social disorder resulting in speech disorder. Similarly, Seals and Coppock (2022) describe speech fillers as unneeded sounds, words, or discourse markers which a speaker uses due to several reasons such as nervousness, lack of preparation, poor self-confidence, and/or weak language skills. Repeating the same word(s) when unrequired is also considered a speech filler.

Using speech fillers, specifically if excessively, results in disfluency. Speech disfluency is defined as using anything that would disrupt the regular flow of speech (Kowal et al., 1997). Rieger (2003) argues that speech disfluencies are repetitions and fillers that would interrupt the speech flow, and are particularly used when a speaker has not planned for what to say next or is in need of vocabulary to convey the meaning. Gustafson et al. (2021) among others, explain that how humans speak in conversations and during presentations depends partly on paralinguistic factors such as those of personality, age, and the context within which communication takes place. A speaker's fluency, thus, plays a role in how we perceive the speaker's character.

With reference to their effect on delivering a presentation smoothly by a presenter and comprehending the presentation's message by the audience, several scholars such as Clark and Tree (2002), Corley et al. (2007), and Fraundorf and Watson (2011) amongst others explain that filled pauses may develop recalling the content of speech since adding filled pauses would allow for a longer processing time while speaking. Using pauses if not excessively while speaking may even positively impact the comprehension of spoken language (Dinkar et al., 2020; Dinkar et al., 2022). Looked at from a different perspective, using speech fillers if not excessively might not affect the speaker's credibility (Villar et al., 2012). On the other hand, a number of scholars such as Conrad et al. (2013) observe that a speaker's credibility decreases as the number of speech fillers increases.

As far as studies on the use of speech fillers are concerned, Duvall et al. (2014) examined the effect of using speech fillers on both the comprehension of the message by the listener and the credibility of the speaker as perceived by the listener. The results showed that when the listener is aware of a presenter's use of speech fillers, his/her comprehension of the spoken content will not be negatively impacted, and that even credible speakers may sometimes use filler words. Based on his study, Erten (2014) confirms the importance of teaching speech fillers in EFL and ESL contexts, adding that the speech fillers which his students in Turkey used the most were *uhm*, *ehm*, *how can I say*, and *how to say*. Laserna et al. (2014) explored the use of speech fillers by certain groups in five research studies, seeking to investigate the psychometric features of speech fillers via means of studying their uses whilst considering the variables of both age and gender. The results proved that using speech fillers was more noticeable among college students than by both older individuals and female students. Gikas and Sutcliffe (2019) studied the effect of using speech fillers on one's personal accountability and likeability as perceived by others. The findings revealed that, regardless of gender type, the more speech fillers were used, the less personal accountability and likeability were indicated.

Relating the discussion to suggestions on how to minimize using speech fillers, Levelt (1983) emphasizes the essential role monitoring one's speech and self-repair would play. Lease and Johnson (2006) reiterate the effectiveness of starting to delete speech fillers in parsing casual talks at an early stage. Duvall et al. (2014) and Zandan (2022), amongst other scholars propose employing several strategies and solutions to avoid resorting to speech fillers such as good preparation, pausing for a while to organize one's thoughts, slowing down while delivering a speech, and consulting a speech pathologist in case of severe cases. Lastly, in Seal's (2022) opinion, it would be essential to receive adequate training on how to avoid producing speech fillers while speaking.

III. STUDY AIMS AND QUESTIONS

Aiming to equip higher education students with adequate communicative competence in English, the current study seeks to explore the impact of using speech fillers on students' communicative competence and propose tips on how to minimize producing speech fillers in oral presentations. Considering the study's aims, the current study addresses the primary research questions below.

Primary Research Question 1: How does the use of speech fillers impact students' communicative competence in English as a foreign language within higher education contexts?

Primary Research Question 2: How can EFL instructors assist university students in minimizing the use of speech fillers in oral presentations?

Based on the two research inquiries above, the current study also addresses the secondary research question below.

Secondary Research Question: Which speech fillers are most frequently used in oral presentations by EFL university students at the university where the author works?

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Section four of the paper depicts the research methodology which the researcher utilized to fulfill the aims of the study. Ensuring clarity and comprehensiveness, this section encompasses the study's subjects, tools, procedures, and ethics.

Subjects

This study involved three categories: language instructors, toastmaster members, and university students. The number of participating instructors is 4, all of whom are major colleagues of the author. The number of participating toastmaster members is 6, all of whom are members of the same Toastmaster club the author is a member of. And the number of participating students is 194, all of whom were taught by the author during the 2023-2024 academic year at the university where the author works. The rationale behind including both instructors and students as study subjects is logically clear. Regarding the inclusion of toastmaster members, Toastmasters is a global international club which aims to develop participants' public speaking and leadership skills (Chih, 2008). Therefore, inclusion of toastmasters would add credibility to the current study. Tables 1, 2, and 3 below present the demographic data of the subjects.

TABLE 1
INSTRUCTORS' DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Terminal Degree	Gender	Years of University Teaching Experience	Number
PhD in English Linguistics	Female	Between 25 & 30 years	2
PhD in English Linguistics	Male	33 years	1
PhD in English Literature	Female	24 years	1

TABLE 2
TOASTMASTERS' DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Terminal Degree	Gender	Years of Toastmasters Membership	Number
B.A. in Psychology	Female	32 years	1
PhD in Language Education	Female	30 years	1
Diploma in Secretarial Practice	Female	12 years	1
B.A. in Accounting	Female	8 years	1
B.A. in Business	Female	8 years	1
M.A. in Business	Female	5 years	1

TABLE 3
STUDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

School	Gender	University Level of Study	Number
Business	Female	Freshmen	34
Business	Male	Freshmen	60
Computing	Female	Freshmen	42
Computing	Male	Freshmen	58

Tools

The author created a nine-item questionnaire, using the options Yes, No, and Unsure. The questionnaire was distributed to the three categories referred to above. Table 4 below presents the questionnaire.

TABLE 4
QUESTIONNAIRE

No.	Item	Yes	No	Unsure
1.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations is a disfluency indicator.			
2.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of language accuracy.			
3.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of language appropriacy.			
4.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations reveals a lack of self-confidence.			
5.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations reveals a lack of preparation.			
6.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of eloquence.			
7.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could negatively impact language style.			
8.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could be a boredom causer.			
9.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could impair the comprehension of the presentation's content by the audience.			

Additionally, the author conducted interviews with the participating instructors and toastmaster members, along with several participating students. Below are the instructors' interview questions which the author raised.

Interview Question 1: How does using speech fillers in oral presentations impact students' communicative competence in English as a foreign language?

Interview Question 2: What suggestions would you like to propose for EFL instructors to minimize students' use of speech fillers in oral presentations?

The toastmasters, on the other hand, were asked the below question.

Interview Question 3: Based on your experience as an active toastmaster, what suggestions would you like to propose for EFL students to minimize using speech fillers in oral presentations?

As far as the participating students are concerned, they were asked the two questions below.

Interview Question 4: What make(s) you use speech fillers in oral presentations?

Interview Question 5: What steps should be taken to minimize using speech fillers in oral presentations?

Moreover, the author used class observations as a study tool to record the frequency of speech fillers produced by students while delivering oral presentations. It should be noted that delivering an oral presentation is an assessment requirement as regards the courses the author teaches.

For clarification purposes, Table 5 below demonstrates the number of participants against each of the three study tools applied by the author.

TABLE 5
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS AGAINST STUDY TOOLS

Category of Subjects	Study Tool	Number of Subjects
EFL instructors	Questionnaire	4
	Interview	4
Toastmaster members	Questionnaire	6
	Interview	6
EFL students	Questionnaire	194
	Interview	7
	Class observations to record frequency of speech fillers in oral presentations	194

Procedures

To ensure transparent outcomes, the current study used a mixed-methods design implementing both qualitative procedures for examining opinions and quantitative procedures for translating data into quantitative values. The author distributed the study's questionnaire to the three categories after explaining the study's aims, interviewed the three categories raising the interview questions mentioned above, and recorded the frequency of speech fillers produced by the students while they were delivering oral presentations as a formal assessment requirement, noting at the same time whether the presenter was above average, average, or below average student in English. Upon gathering the required data for this study, the author calculated the subjects' answers using percentages for participants' responses, and thematic analysis for interviewees' answers.

Ethics

Adhering to research ethics, several steps were taken by the author. First, it was emphasized that subjects' participation in answering the questionnaire items and interview questions should be made with willingness to participate. Second, it was confirmed that subjects' personal data and responses be kept anonymous. Third, subjects were assured that the findings of their responses be communicated transparently. Lastly, this research study neither required any payments by any parties, nor imposed any physical harm.

V. STUDY FINDINGS

Section five depicts the study's findings in relation to the research questions this study raises, covering the study subjects and tools. Starting with the study tool questionnaire, Table 6 & Chart 1 reflect the instructors' responses, Table 7 & Chart 2 the toastmasters' responses, and Table 8 & Chart 3 the students' responses.

TABLE 6
INSTRUCTORS' RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

No.	Item	Yes	No	Unsure
1.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations is a disfluency indicator.	100%	0%	0%
2.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of language accuracy.	80%	20%	0%
3.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of language appropriacy.	60%	40%	0%
4.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations reveals a lack of self-confidence.	100%	0%	0%
5.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations reveals a lack of preparation.	80%	20%	0%
6.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of eloquence.	100%	0%	0%
7.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could negatively impact language style.	80%	20%	0%
8.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could be a boredom causer.	60%	40%	0%
9.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could impair the comprehension of the presentation's content by the audience.	40%	60%	0%

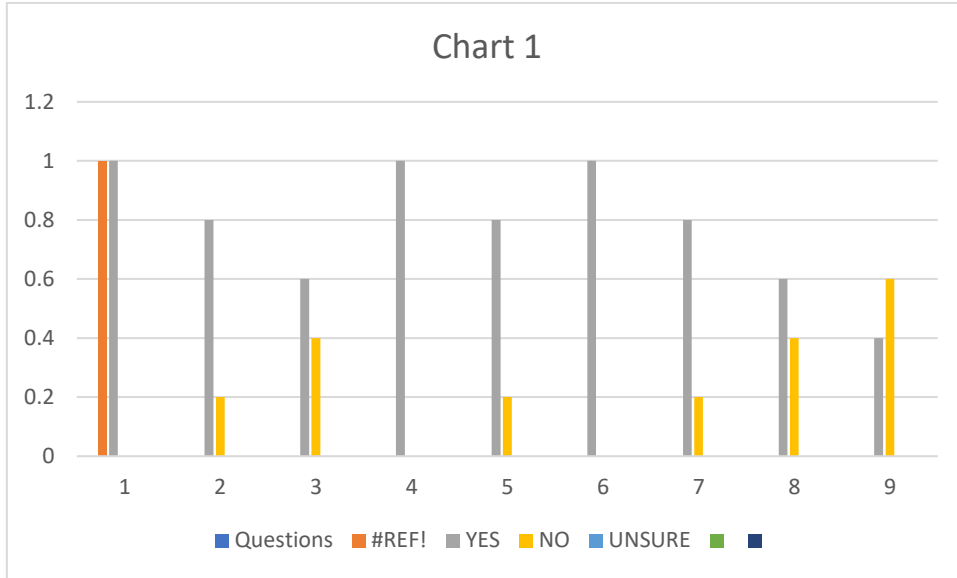


Chart 1. Instructors' Responses to the Questionnaire

TABLE 7
TOASTMASTERS' RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

No.	Item	Yes	No	Unsure
1.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations is a disfluency indicator.	100%	0%	0%
2.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of language accuracy.	80%	20%	0%
3.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of language appropriacy.	60%	40%	0%
4.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations reveals a lack of self-confidence.	80%	0%	20%
5.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations reveals a lack of preparation.	100%	0%	0%
6.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of eloquence.	100%	0%	0%
7.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could negatively impact language style.	100%	0%	0%
8.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could be a boredom causer.	60%	40%	0%
9.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could impair the comprehension of the presentation's content by the audience.	50%	50%	0%

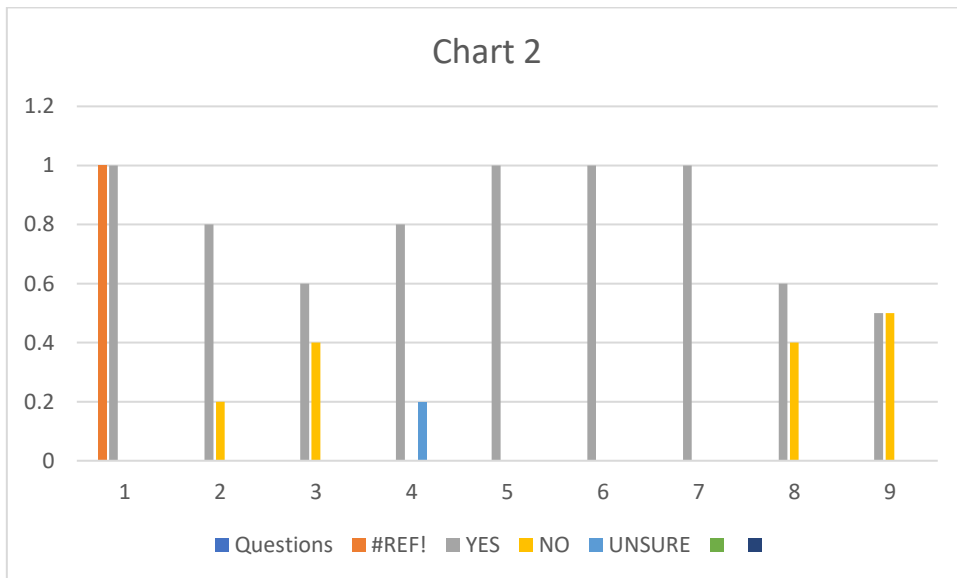


Chart 2. Toastmasters' Responses to the Questionnaire

TABLE 8
STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

No.	Item	Yes	No	Unsure
1.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations is a disfluency indicator.	80%	15%	5%
2.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of language accuracy.	63%	31%	6%
3.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of language appropriacy.	67%	27%	6%
4.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations reveals a lack of self-confidence.	93%	6%	1%
5.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations reveals a lack of preparation.	75%	24%	1%
6.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of eloquence.	89%	9%	2%
7.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could negatively impact language style.	82%	15%	3%
8.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could be a boredom causer.	46%	52%	2%
9.	Using speech fillers in oral presentations could impair the comprehension of the presentation's content by the audience.	23%	74%	3%

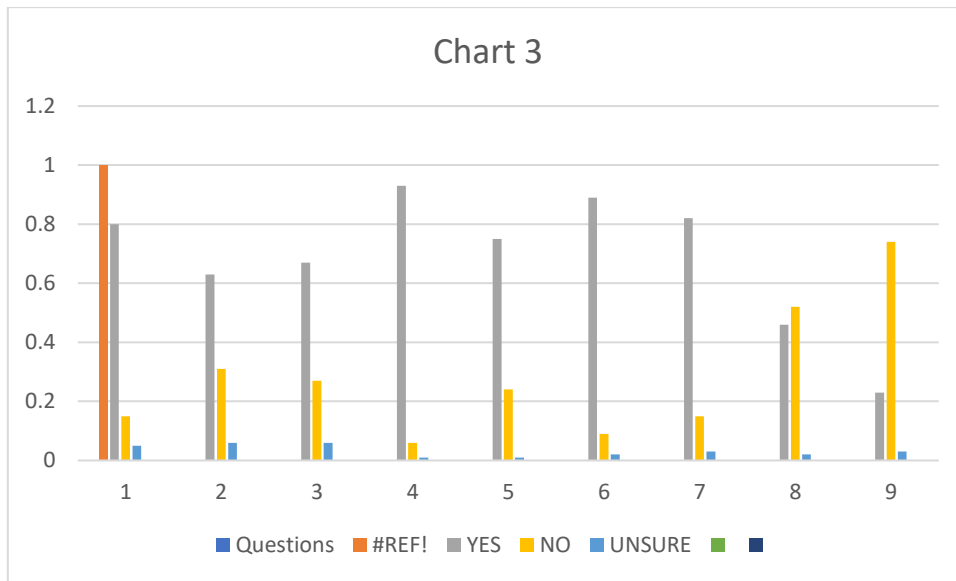


Chart 3. Students' Responses to the Questionnaire

Proceeding to the study tool interview, instructors were asked two questions, toastmasters were asked one question, and students were asked two questions, as explained earlier. Responding to the first interview question on how using speech fillers in oral presentations impacts students' communicative competence in English as a foreign language, the four participating instructors highlighted that it would specifically impact the component of fluency negatively. With regard to the component of accuracy, instructors A, B, & D thought that using speech fillers would also have a negative impact, particularly as regards the language element of structure as adding unneeded words and phrases when unrequired would lead to the use of a wrong sentence structure. Instructor C, on the other hand, was of the opinion that when used in informal presentations, producing speech fillers might not necessarily entail using wrong structures if occasionally used. In respect of the component language appropriacy, instructors A & C asserted that it would depend on the type of oral presentation. If formal for assessment purposes, using speech fillers would negatively affect how the oral presentation would be viewed and should be evaluated. When not used for formal assessment purposes though, a slight use of speech fillers in oral presentations should be tolerated.

As regards the second interview question on what suggestions could be proposed by EFL instructors to minimize students' use of speech fillers in oral presentations, instructor A proposed addressing the issue whilst targeting its roots. If what makes students use speech fillers is a lack of vocabulary, for example, then instructors need to implement purposeful activities the aim of which is to equip students with a repertoire of English vocabulary. Instructors B & D stressed the need to establish a public speaking club of which students are all members and organizing events to empower students with presentation skills. Instructor C, in her turn, elucidated the urging need to equip students with the receptive skills of listening and reading as a prerequisite for the acquisition of the productive skills of speaking and writing. The four participating instructors also discussed the essential role prior rehearsal and sufficient practice of oral presentations would play in the long run.

Regarding toastmasters' responses to the interview question, the six participating toastmasters suggested chartering a toastmaster's club for university students to join and enhance their presentation skills. Toastmasters A, B, C, & E suggested recording the oral presentation by each student prior to delivering it in class, so that adequate awareness of areas of weakness in giving an oral presentation such as that of producing speech fillers would be gained and dealt with. Toastmaster A suggested promoting students' language proficiency as a prior requirement for delivering oral presentations effectively, and toastmasters C & D suggested having individual sessions with each student whose

presentations reveal an excessive use of speech fillers to target the major causes for using speech fillers and then act efficiently to overcome weaknesses.

As for the students' interviews, the seven participating students considered lack of language proficiency and fear of facing the audience as two major reasons for producing speech fillers. Students B, D, & F added two more reasons as major causes, namely, poor self-confidence and weak planning. Student A considered lack of interest in giving a presentation as another main reason. In discussing what steps should be taken to minimize using speech fillers, the seven participating students proposed offering non-assessment presentation opportunities for students to benefit from and enhancing communication skills in English. Similar to the suggestions made by instructors and toastmasters, students B, C, D, E, & F proposed establishing a club for practicing oral presentations outside the classroom.

Lastly, the class observations yielded a record of students' speech fillers used in the oral presentations which they delivered as a formal assessment requirement. Table 9 below reveals the speech fillers including sounds, words, phrases, and repetitions sequenced as per frequency of occurrence.

TABLE 9
FREQUENCY OF SPEECH FILLERS SEQUENCED ACCORDING TO FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE

Speech Fillers	Remarks
So	Used by above average, average, and weak students.
Like	Used by above average, average, and weak students.
Ei	Used as long vowels by average and below average students especially when forgetting what to say next, rather than to mean 'no' or 'not' which is the English meaning.
Ya'ani	Ya'ani is an Arabic word equivalent in meaning to 'it means' in English. It was mostly used by average and below average students.
Okay	Used mostly by above average and average students.
Repetition of the same words when unneeded	Used mostly by below average students.
You know	Used mostly by above average students.
Eh	Used mainly by above average students who spent some of their life in an English-speaking country.
Um	Used mainly by above average students who spent some of their life in an English-speaking country.

VI. DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS

Section six reports on the study's findings including the three categories of subjects and tools in addressing the research questions. The section presents the research questions alongside each category of subjects and study tools at a time. Regarding the first research question on how the use of speech fillers impacts students' communicative competence in English as a foreign language within higher education contexts, the corresponding items of the questionnaire are 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7. In responding to the first item on whether using speech fillers in oral presentations is a disfluency indicator, 100% of the instructors, 100% of the toastmasters, and 80% of the students agreed. In responding to the second item on whether using speech fillers in oral presentations is a lack of language accuracy indicator, 80% of the instructors, 80% of the toastmasters, and 63% of the students agreed. In responding to the third item on whether using speech fillers in oral presentations is a lack of language appropriacy indicator, 60% of the instructors, 60% of the toastmasters, and 67% of the students agreed. In responding to the sixth item on whether using speech fillers in oral presentations indicates a lack of eloquence, 100% of the instructors, 100% of the toastmasters, and 89% of the students agreed. Finally, in responding to the seventh item on whether using speech fillers in oral presentations could impact language style, 80% of the instructors, 100% of the toastmasters, and 82% of the students agreed. Relying on the given percentages, it would be safe to claim that students' use of speech fillers while delivering a formal presentation negatively impacts the adequacy of communicative competence.

Concerning the second research question on how EFL instructors can assist university students to minimize the use of speech fillers in oral presentations, the corresponding items of the questionnaire are 4, 5, 8, and 9. In responding to the fourth item on whether using speech fillers in oral presentations reveals a lack of self-confidence, 100% of the instructors, 80% of the toastmasters, and 93% of the students agreed. In responding to the fifth item on whether using speech fillers in oral presentations reveals a lack of preparation, 80% of the instructors, 100% of the toastmasters, and 75% of the students agreed. In responding to the eighth item on whether using speech fillers in oral presentations could be a boredom causer, 60% of the instructors, 60% of the toastmasters, and 46% of the students agreed. Finally, in responding to the ninth item on whether using speech fillers in oral presentations could impair the comprehension of the presentation's content by the audience, 40% of the instructors, 50% of the toastmasters, and 23% of the students agreed. Depending on the given percentages, it would be essential to assert instructors' role in empowering students with quality presentation skills whilst considering the points the questionnaire comprises.

As discussed earlier, instructors, toastmasters, and several students were involved in answering the study's interview questions. Commencing with instructors, the findings indicate instructors' conviction that using speech fillers in oral presentations would mostly influence the construct of language fluency, followed by language accuracy, and lastly language appropriacy. In other words, using speech fillers in oral presentations would negatively impact students'

communicative competence. To answer the second research question on how EFL instructors can assist university students to minimize the use of speech fillers in oral presentations, the instructors' suggestions while being interviewed were to address this issue whilst targeting its roots. Establishing a public speaking club, improving students' language skills, and stressing the essential role of prior rehearsal and sufficient practice of oral presentations could also play a significant role in minimizing the use of speech fillers.

In offering fruitful suggestions regarding how to help students minimize producing speech fillers while giving a formal presentation, toastmasters' suggestions were like instructors' suggestions to a great extent. For example, toastmasters proposed enhancing students' language skills as a springboard for the improvement of presentation skills, chartering a toastmaster's club for university students to join, recording the oral presentation prior to delivering it in class to become aware of weakness areas such as using speech fillers while presenting, and conducting individual sessions with students whose presentations reflect an excessive use of speech fillers to overcome this weakness.

When asked to discuss what steps should be taken to minimize the use of speech fillers while delivering a formal presentation, the seven students who were involved in the study's interview suggested provision of non-assessment presentations in class as a prior step to delivering an oral presentation for formal assessment purposes, augmenting communication skills, and setting a club for practicing oral presentations outside the classroom.

The suggestions described above whether by instructors, toastmasters, or students portray adequate answers to the second research question on how EFL instructors can assist university students in minimizing the use of speech fillers. If considered by educationalists and researchers, the author thinks, EFL students will be able to reduce using speech fillers in formal presentations for better outcomes not only in terms of achieving higher grades but also in relation to becoming better presenters and more effective communicators.

Last but not least, to answer the secondary research question on which speech fillers are most frequently used by EFL university students in oral presentations, the author recorded the speech fillers uttered by students while delivering oral presentations as a formal assessment requirement. As previously highlighted, the most frequently used speech fillers were so, like, ei, ya'ani, okay, repetition of unneeded words, you know, uh, and um (see Table 9 for further details).

VII. CONCLUSION

Production of speech is considered a complex process as it involves phonatory, respiratory, and articulatory components, all of which need to be carefully timed in order to smoothly produce acoustic signals which express the message a speaker intends to convey at a suitable speed. With this in mind, the current paper seeks to explore how the use of speech fillers whilst delivering formal presentations would impact the adequacy of communicative competence. As mentioned earlier, a speech filler is a word, phrase, or sound which has no meaning or function in the context in which it is used, for example, when a presenter keeps using *so* when such a use is meaningless.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be stated that producing speech fillers while delivering oral presentations within formal contexts would negatively impact the adequacy of students' communicative competence in EFL, particularly the aspect of language fluency. To deliver quality presentations in formal settings, EFL instructors need to diagnose why a student maintains using speech fillers when delivering an oral presentation and set an action plan correspondingly. In addition, instructors need to enrich students' language knowledge and develop their language skills via all means possible as a prior requirement for giving a good oral presentation. Instructors should also ensure students' exposure to model presentations for them to benefit from. In case of poor self-confidence and weak planning, instructors need to improve life skills on the part of students such as time management, planning, coping with stressful situations, and so on. If possible, chartering a public speaking club like debate and toastmaster clubs would also be supportive. Lastly, instructors' role must remain that of a facilitator rather than a dominator, offering quality services the ultimate outcomes of which remain solid over the years.

It should be added that this study is limited in relation to the number of participating subjects. To achieve more comprehensive findings, future research studies ought to cover bigger samples. Further, the study's findings highlight using the speech fillers *ei* and *ya'ani* mainly by Arabic speakers, and using the speech fillers 'uh' and 'um' mainly by the students who spent some time in an English-speaking country. It would be of relevance and interest to conduct further studies on EFL speakers who belong to varied nationalities around the globe, to investigate how the mother tongue regardless of which language it is, could impact the use of certain speech fillers when using English for presentation and communication purposes. Mention of this recommendation should not be made without mention of Erten's (2014) study which reflected amongst other findings, producing other sounds by Turkish students such as *uhm* & *ehm* as speech fillers.

To conclude, using speech fillers while delivering a formal presentation would negatively impact students' communicative competence in English as a foreign language within higher education contexts. If not put under control at an early or relatively early stage, producing speech fillers while delivering formal presentations may sometimes become a bad speaking habit. Efforts made by both instructors and students alike should, therefore, be geared toward reducing the use of speech fillers for quality delivery of oral presentations. Ultimately, to be able to give a quality presentation in English as a lingua franca is a success indicator in a globalized world of ever competitive requirements and challenging demands.

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