

Determined Factors and Effective Strategies for Developing English Speaking Fluency among Vietnamese University Students

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Article information

Abstract

Fluency development is one of the prominent components of a well-balanced language course. In particular, speaking fluency interests second language (L2) researchers who have continuously tried to look for the finest approach for helping L2 learners attain a certain level of fluency to achieve effective communication. To this end, the primary purpose of this research is to explore what factors affect English-speaking fluency and what strategies can effectively boost its development among a cohort of Vietnamese university students. The participants were 142 English majors who filled out a questionnaire measuring their perceived self-efficacy concerning English-speaking fluency. Four teachers and six students joined the semi-structured interviews. Quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the most influential factors were linguistic elements, followed by performance, and affective factors. The most effective strategy for enhancing fluency was task repetition. Notably, the findings revealed a mismatch between teachers' and students' understandings of speaking fluency, which may negatively impact the achievement of fluent speech. Based on these results, pedagogical implications are discussed for English teachers and students regarding fluency development.

Keywords	English-speaking fluency, affecting factors, strategies, Vietnamese learners
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1. Introduction

Fluency, generally used as an indicator of speaking progress, is integral in the productive process of speech delivery as it emphasizes “the performance aspect of actually doing something in real-time rather than the knowledge of how something is to be done” (Schmidt, 1992, p. 93). Fluency, accuracy, and complexity have emerged as distinct components in the underlying L2 processing mechanism to attain L2 proficiency (Housen et al., 2012). According to Nation (2007), fluency is also considered one of the four strands of a well-balanced language course, as developing fluency increases the speed of delivery and enhances accuracy and complexity. For building L2 oral fluency, the role of input, interaction, and output is highlighted by Zhang (2009), suggesting that sufficient exposure to language can maximize the ability to master fluent speech.

Furthermore, fluency-directed communication activities can enable learners to integrate encountered linguistic items into an easily accessible, unconscious language system (Nation, 2018). However, traditional teaching approaches, which seem to be grammar-laden and test-oriented, have been the main barriers to making full use of fluency-based activities (Zhang, 2009). To make matters worse, previous studies (Dinh & Tran, 2020; Islam & Stapa, 2021) have shown that despite the appropriate amount of time for fluency practice in the classroom, students still struggle to achieve fluency due to hesitations and fear of making mistakes. This raises concern about the underlying reasons for these difficulties, which is the rationale for this study.

A review of literature in the area of fluency has unveiled that a great deal of effort has been made to determine the quantifiable linguistic variables contributing to perceptions of fluency or measures of fluency by analyzing oral production (e.g., De Jong, 2018; Kormos & Dénes, 2004; Lennon, 1990; Riggerach, 1991; Towell, 2002). In the meantime, several studies on factors affecting fluency were also investigated from both qualitative and quantitative viewpoints (Dinh & Tran, 2020; Guevara & Albuja, 2020; Khau & Huynh, 2022; Khong, 2019; Lestari, 2017; Utomo,

2022; Vo, 2021). These investigations demonstrate that fluency encompasses various aspects of language, and fluency attainment requires not only linguistic knowledge but also other psychological elements related to individual differences and oral performance. Most importantly, each researcher adopted different perspectives in conceptualizing fluency, resulting in diversity in the outcomes. For example, Guevara and Albuja (2020) classify factors affecting fluency into negative and positive ones, while external and internal factors are adopted by Utomo (2022). Therefore, more empirical investigation is needed to add research-based validation and gain fresh insights into the importance of fluency in achieving speaking proficiency in the Vietnamese context. Subsequently, the self-reporting factors influencing oral fluency in this study can contribute to existing knowledge of fluency by providing a new lens from Vietnamese EFL university learners as well as enhance the understanding of fluency development from a performance-based perspective. For these reasons, this study addresses the following two research questions:

1. What are the determined factors affecting the English-speaking fluency perceived by Vietnamese university English majors?
2. What are the effective strategies for developing English-speaking fluency perceived by Vietnamese university students and teachers?

2. Literature Review

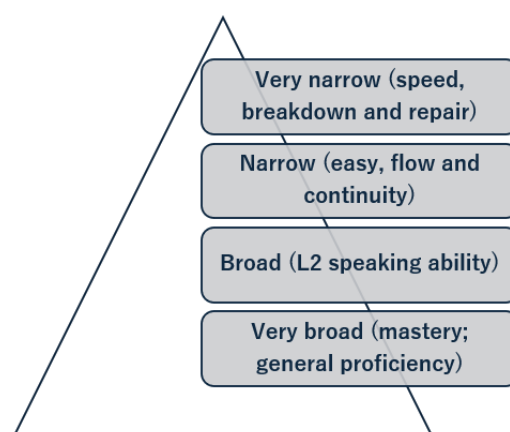
2.1 Understanding English-speaking Fluency

In Lennon's (1990) description of fluency, its broad sense pertains to the overall degree of oral proficiency of language learners, while in a narrow sense, it is a component constituting oral proficiency. In other words, fluency is purely a temporal performance phenomenon. Though he asserts that it is impossible to separate fluency from other elements of oral proficiency, some distinct temporal variables can be used as a benchmark for fluency assessment, such as speed, pausing, hesitation, and fillers. Similarly, Schmidt (1992) shares this performance-based view of fluency and highlights the ease of processing during production. He

stresses the performance aspect of producing fluent speech in real-time rather than the knowledge aspect. On the same premise, Chambers (1997) contends that speed and effortlessness are two main characteristics of fluent speech. In accordance with the previous definitions, Segalowitz (2010) refers to fluency as the ability to use language rapidly, smoothly, and accurately. He further categorizes it into three domains. First, the underlying processes occurring in the mind of the speakers in charge of producing utterances are described as cognitive fluency. These processes include planning, searching for lexical items, arranging ideas, etc. Second, features of an utterance (e.g., pausing, hesitation) indicate utterance fluency. These properties are the result of the analysis of spoken production. Finally, perceived fluency is how listeners judge the speech based on their perceptions of utterance fluency. Another attempt to define fluency has been made by Towell (2012) who portrays utterance fluency by distinguishing three types of fluency: speed fluency, breakdown fluency, and repair fluency. Towell (2012) specifies that speed fluency is based on counting the words, breakdown fluency is about the frequency of pauses, and repair fluency reflects hesitations and repairs.

Figure 1

A Pyramid of Defining Fluency (Tavakoli & Hunter, 2018)



Tavakoli and Hunter (2018) synthesize these divergent approaches to defining fluency with a pyramid to outline four layers from very broad to very narrow perspectives (Figure 1). Specifically, fluency can be regarded as an overall proficiency and global L2 speaking ability in the first two layers. The next layer

treats fluency as a separate component distinct from accuracy and complexity with main features: ease, flow, and continuity, while the other is about speed, breakdown, and repair fluency. Overall, these research perspectives demonstrate that fluency does not operate in isolation, and it is affected by many factors. In this study, fluency is characterized in the third layer of the pyramid, which is supposed to be a performance-based variable. Therefore, only related variables are covered in this study.

2.2 Perceptions of English-speaking Fluency

According to Tavakoli et al. (2020), in oral proficiency, accuracy becomes subsumed under fluency. In other words, the primacy is often placed on fluency. Moreover, there is no difference in the way listeners weigh the fluency characteristics of native and nonnative speech (Bosker et al., 2014). However, over-reliance on the so-called speaker norms for evaluating L2 speakers' fluency may be inadequate due to cross-linguistic issues such as speech tempo and pausing, to name but a few (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Instead, fluency in performance should be seen as a separate phenomenon from specific L2 linguistic knowledge or proficiency levels. In the same manner, Towell (2002) argues that oral fluency develops at different rates depending on students' level of proficiency. Specifically, some learners obtain higher scores on temporal variable measures than others, such as pausing behavior. For advanced learners, there is a tendency to complicate the syntactic features of speech in achieving speaking fluency.

2.3 Factors influencing English-speaking Fluency

The most common linguistic factors that constitute fluency are vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Indeed, lexical knowledge plays a vital role in achieving this (Koizumi, 2013). In the study of De Jong et al. (2012), vocabulary, together with sentence intonation, was found to be the best predictor of speaking performance of L2 learners. The more significant vocabulary bank learners possess, the more quickly they can conduct lexical searches, producing smoother speech. This lexical knowledge involves receptive and productive aspects, which

adds weight to the importance of pronunciation in speaking fluency. According to Levis (2018), pronunciation is the most noticeable feature when listeners judge fluency. Error-laden pronunciation can interfere with intelligibility, thus hindering successful communication. Another essential linguistic feature in fluency is grammatical knowledge. Though in spoken discourse, as Hinkel (2016) argues, grammatical errors tend to be treated less severely than other class errors, using the proper grammatical structures can add to the comprehensibility of the message, helping obtain communicative purposes more effectively.

Affective factors are psychological elements that influence how learners perform or produce speech to achieve fluency. The three dominant factors are motivation, anxiety, and confidence. Motivation has been considered the driving force for L2 acquisition in all aspects (Wu, 2022). Without exceptions, motivation facilitates oral proficiency, particularly as a precursor for learners to be willing to engage in L2 communication. The findings of Dincer (2017) have demonstrated that inner motivation, including personal satisfaction and content, mainly contributes to students' engagement in English speaking. Another psychological factor is anxiety which has been proven to have a negative effect on speaking performance (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Zheng & Cheng, 2018). Specifically, anxiety arousal can make L2 learners more reluctant to express their ideas and less confident. Anxiety disrupts practical thinking, ultimately causing non-fluent speech. Anxious feelings often arise from fear of negative judgments, low-performance test scores or communication apprehension, and excessive worry over evaluation. As anxious speakers tend to produce non-fluent speech, this also accounts for their low self-confidence in speaking. Lack of self-confidence is another inhibiting element to how fluently students speak English. Self-confidence in speaking is a belief that students can express ideas in English successfully, and it has a significant positive relationship with their speaking achievement (Suryani et al., 2020; Tridinanti, 2018). Taken together, motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence influence students' willingness to engage in oral tasks.

As fluency is an oral performance phenomenon (Schmidt, 1992), time pressure has a crucial part to play. Empirical evidence shows that learners familiarize themselves with speaking under time constraints and make better progress in speed of delivery (Arevart & Nation, 1991; De Jong & Perfetti, 2011). As time is one of the pressure-inducing factors in oral performance, planning can ease this pressure and benefit the speech production process (O'Grady, 2019). Specifically, planning creates opportunities for speakers to complete oral tasks smoothly by facilitating cognitive processes during the tasks.

To summarize, oral fluency is affected by the abovementioned factors throughout the literature. These major factors have been addressed by numerous researchers in multiple contexts among various participants. However, previous studies have yielded different results because of the inconsistency in depicting oral fluency. Due to the performance-based nature of oral fluency, contributing factors may vary in terms of individuals, time, and task types. This investigation offers a fresh perspective on understanding factors affecting English oral fluency in the Vietnamese context.

2.4 Strategies for Developing English-speaking Fluency

Major principles for developing oral fluency in the classroom include repetition, increased speaking time, time for preparation, topic familiarity, appropriateness of language, time pressure, and formulaic sequences (Albino, 2017; Kellem, 2009). Based on these principles, a wide array of techniques can be created to develop fluency of L2 learners. The review here is not exclusive but underscores the fundamental strategies that have received much attention from scholars: task repetition, planning, extensive reading, formulaic sequences, and filler words.

Research has shown that repetition positively affects oral performance, particularly fluency (Arevart & Nation, 1991; Bozorgian & Kanani, 2017; De Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Kellem, 2009). Specifically, task repetition facilitates retrieving

information during performance, as repeated engagement in tasks can strengthen the automatization of linguistic processes (Bygate, 2018). Bozorgian and Kanani (2017) have found that repetition benefits fluency and accuracy development. Some researchers have argued that combining repetition and time pressure helps students increase their oral fluency (Arevart & Nation, 1991; De Jong & Perfetti, 2011). Known as the 4/3/2 or 3/2/1 technique, these numbers represent the time limit for a repeated task. For instance, with the 4/3/2 technique, students speak three times, for 4, 3, and 2 minutes, respectively. It has been reported that learners made substantial gains in the speed of delivery and a considerable decrease in the number of hesitations. Their progress was ascribed to the changes in the underlying mechanism due to the repeated practice of planning and allocating attentional resources during the task, resulting in fluency improvement.

Furthermore, fluency can be developed through extensive reading, an independent and silent reading activity covering a wide range of materials that is at the right level for the readers (Nation & Waring, 2019). Through extensive reading, learners can learn new words, thanks to repeated encounters with words or lexical phrases in contexts. Nation (2018) argues that incidental vocabulary learning is acquired mainly from extensive reading. In this way, learners reinforce the form-meaning connection and gain comprehensible input, strengthening or enriching their vocabulary knowledge. In addition to linguistic refinement, learners can augment their world knowledge by covering various topics, which can facilitate the process of generating ideas in speaking. The scale of information and greater familiarity with information learners have, the more easily fluency can be enhanced.

Formulaic sequences also function as fluency-enhancing devices and positively correlate with speech rate (Guz, 2014). According to Wray and Perkins (2000), a formulaic sequence is “a continuous or discontinuous of words that appear to be prefabricated and it is stored and retrieved from memory at the time of use” (p. 1). A stock of automatized formulaic sequences during speech can help

learners free up cognitive resources for attending to other aspects of speech, leading to a more fluent performance in speed and pausing (Wood, 2010). In this sense, learners can achieve native-like temporal patterns of speech with an extensive repertoire of formulaic sequences. Another strategy is the appropriate use of filled pauses, as one of the prominent features of spoken discourse. Filled pauses are non-words (such as er, erm, mm, etc.) that speakers produce during interaction for deliberate functions, namely, frequency effects and message formulation (Kirjavainen et al., 2022; Watanabe et al., 2008). Though filled pauses can facilitate speech fluency, abundant occurrences will be counter-productive, leading to disfluency.

2.5 Previous Studies regarding English-speaking Fluency

An earlier attempt to quantify the characteristics of fluency was made by Lennon (1990). From the analysis of spoken production, he has proposed some quantifiable performance variables that are key factors in measuring perceived fluency. They are speech pauses and the frequency of filled pauses and repetitions. Similarly, the investigation of Riggerach (1991) has revealed that speech rate and unfilled pauses contribute to the evaluation of non-fluency. In the same manner, Guevara and Albuja (2020) conducted a survey to identify the positive and negative factors in developing oral fluency of 26 undergraduates studying English at Universidad Técnica del Norte. They found that lack of interaction and exposure to English environments were the main barriers to building fluency. The positive factors they reported were linked to the diversity of learning activities and habits of autonomous learning. Their findings also highlight the importance of language exposure in enhancing pronunciation and self-confidence in achieving fluent speech. Furthermore, factors contributing to fluency were also examined from a qualitative viewpoint. For instance, Lestari (2017) used observation and interviews to collect data from 28 students in a classroom setting. The findings unveiled major impacts that stem from linguistic factors, including vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and affective factors, consisting of student motivation to learn to speak and listeners' support. In the same vein, Utomo (2022)

explored factors affecting fluency of 65 students and found that both internal and external factors had a part to play in building fluency. Internal factors included anxiety, motivation, topical knowledge, and language competence, while the external factor was support from listeners.

In Vietnam, Khong (2019) sought to identify internal and external factors influencing high school students' English fluency in Vinh Phuc province. Research instruments included questionnaires for students and teachers and classroom observations. The findings revealed a wide range of factors which were learning styles, habits of using L1, low motivation, limited knowledge of vocabulary, and poor pronunciation. In another study, with a focus on specific variables, Vo (2021) examined the effects of motivation and task types on developing oral fluency in higher education in Vietnam. A total of 13 teachers and 30 second-year students filled out the questionnaire, and the teachers were also invited to participate in the interviews. The results stressed that the teachers believed that students with proper motivation would succeed in obtaining fluency. Later on, efforts have been made by Khau and Huynh (2022) to discover the concept of fluency from cohorts of teachers and students. They collected both quantitative and qualitative data from 33 English majors, 20 English teachers with a Bachelor's degree, 22 English teachers with a Master's degree, and ten English teachers with a doctorate to explore their perceptions of oral fluency. The findings showed that the criteria required for oral fluency consisted of length, making oneself understood, maintaining one's thoughts during a speech, less pausing, avoidance of reformulating the speech, speaking effortlessly, using a natural colloquial flow, linking sounds together when possible, and avoiding articulating some hesitant words. Finally, a study was conducted by Dinh and Tran (2020) to investigate prominent factors influencing oral fluency of 98 second-year non-English majored students and 15 instructors. The findings indicated that the instructors reported appropriate time allocation for fluency-based activities in the speaking class, hesitation was the main barrier for students in achieving fluency, and affective

factors, notably fear of making mistakes, were identified as the most influential in students' fluency development.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

A total of 142 Vietnamese English majors, including second-year students (11.3%), third-year students (49.3%), and fourth-year students (39.4%) studying at a private university in Ho Cho Minh City filled out the survey. Of these, 66.7% were female and 33.3% were male. In addition, six students and four instructors participated in the semi-structured interviews. The participants' demographic characteristics are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of The Study Participants

Students	Student Status	Age	Gender
Participant S1	Third year	21	Female
Participant S2	Second year	20	Male
Participant S3	Second year	20	Female
Participant S4	Third year	21	Female
Participant S5	Fourth year	22	Female
Participant S6	Fourth year	22	Female
Teachers	Academic Level	Age	Gender
Participant T1	Ph.D.	28	Female
Participant T2	MA.	28	Male
Participant T3	MA.	38	Female
Participant T4	Ph.D.	40	Male

3.2 Instruments

In this study, the first data collection instrument was the questionnaire on oral fluency development (see Appendix A) constructed based on a review of previous literature (e.g. Dinh & Tran, 2020; Khau & Huynh, 2022; Khong, 2019; Lestari, 2017; Utomo, 2022) regarding factors influencing oral fluency and effective strategies for oral fluency development. The questionnaire items were divided into three main factors: linguistic, performance, and affective factors. In addition, there were five major strategies identified for oral fluency development. The items in the survey questionnaire were arranged in a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). High scores indicated a high level of agreement in evaluating the impact of each factor as well as the effectiveness of each strategy related to fluency performance. Before the distribution, the questionnaire was validated by two experts and piloted within a small group of students. Further, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to determine the reliability of the questionnaire items, which was equal to .89, suggesting that the reliability of the questionnaire was relatively high.

Moreover, a semi-structured interview was employed to collect more in-depth qualitative data from both the students and the instructors who participated in the study. There were 13 items in the interview protocol (see Appendix B).

3.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

In the first stage, students were asked to fill out the online questionnaire, which was in Vietnamese, via Google Forms, after they were provided with explanations about the purposes of the study. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. After that, all responses were collected, coded, and analyzed with the SPSS 25 before descriptive statistics were calculated. In the second stage, six out of 142 students were chosen randomly to participate in semi-structured interviews, while four instructors volunteered to be interviewed. Each interview lasted about 20 to 30 minutes and was conducted in Vietnamese to overcome language barriers. Recordings were transcribed and analyzed by means of content

analysis by two trained raters. The expert validation technique was utilized to validate the categorization of the qualitative data.

4. Findings

The study findings showed that the students had a low level of confidence in their ability to speak English fluently ($M = 3.1$; $SD = .71$) (see Table 2). The most common factors that were found to have an impact on students' English-speaking oral fluency were linguistic factors ($M = 3.6$; $SD = .84$), followed by performance factors and affective factors ($M = 3.2$; $SD = .79$ and $M = 3.1$; $SD = .69$, respectively). As displayed in Table 2, as regards linguistic factors, the item with the highest mean score was the role of the lexical bank ($M = 3.8$; $SD = .84$), followed by pronunciation ($M = 3.5$; $SD = 0.83$) and grammar ($M = 3.3$; $SD = 0.90$). In terms of performance, the impact of time pressure and planning time was more noticeable ($M = 3.5$; $SD = 1.02$ and $M = 3.4$; $SD = 1.03$, respectively). Finally, when it came to affective factors, motivation had the highest mean score ($M = 3.5$; $SD = .61$), and anxiety was the second contributing factor to oral fluency development ($M = 3.0$; $SD = .86$), whereas confidence was found to have the least impact ($M = 2.7$; $SD = 1.14$).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Factors Affecting Students' Oral Fluency Development
($N = 142$)

Main categories	Self-evaluation	Linguistic factors	Performance factors	Affective factors
Mean	3.1	3.6	3.2	3.1
SD	0.71	0.84	0.79	0.69

Table 3*Mean Values for Sub-Categories in Each Group Factors*

Main factors	M	SD
Linguistic factors		
Vocabulary	3.8	0.84
Pronunciation	3.5	0.83
Grammar	3.3	0.90
Performance factors		
Time pressure	3.5	1.02
Planning time	3.4	1.03
Affective factors		
Motivation	3.5	0.61
Anxiety	3.0	0.86
Confidence	2.7	1.14

In terms of perceived effective strategies for oral fluency development, the results of the survey demonstrated that learners showed a high level of agreement on the effectiveness of using such strategies as repetition, using fillers, extensive reading, planning, and using formulaic sequences for strengthening oral fluency (see Table 4). Specifically, task repetitions or extensive practice was recognized as the most effective strategy for enhancing oral fluency with the highest mean value ($M = 4.1$; $SD = .66$), followed by using filled pauses ($M = 4.0$; $SD = .86$). Moreover, reading extensively was perceived as an effective method to enhance oral fluency ($M = 3.9$; $SD = .76$). Two other strategies receiving agreement equally among students for building oral fluency were using formulaic sequences and planning ($M = 3.7$; $SD = .96$ and $SD = .95$, respectively).

Table 4*Descriptive Statistics of Strategies for Oral Fluency Development*

Strategies for oral fluency development	M	SD
I try to repeat the same sentence to enhance fluency.	4.1	0.82
To remain fluent, I use filled pauses.	4.0	0.86
Extensive reading can be useful to improve my fluency.	3.9	0.76
Outlining the main points helps me speak more fluently.	3.7	0.95
To remain fluent, I use formulaic sequences.	3.7	0.96

Qualitative findings from interviews with students and instructors supported the quantitative findings. Regarding fluency definitions, there was a mismatch in conceptualizing the term fluency between the two views. On the one hand, the majority of the students (five out of six) characterized oral fluency as “speaking English smoothly without many pauses, effortlessly without many hesitations, and intelligibly to the listeners.” On the other hand, three out of four instructors described the concept in a very unclear manner like “how to define fluency depends on the level of the students” (T01), “fluency is not only about speed but also about correct, native-like pronunciation” (T02), and “fluency is defined based on the achievement of communicative purposes” (T03). Commenting on strategies, three out of four instructors stated that repetition could be increased through exposure to English via frequent communication in English, rehearsal, or self-talk. In one case, an instructor reported that shadowing, the act of repeating the audio just after hearing it, could be a useful technique for reinforcing oral fluency, stating “practicing speaking English with shadowing can be an effective way for gaining fluency. The activity can be done autonomously. Students listen to a clip, pause it, and repeat it. This self-practice is also helpful for enhancing pronunciation and smoothness in speaking” (T04). Moreover, reading extensively was recognized as an effective method to enhance oral fluency, as one teacher commented:

I think reading regularly to enrich the source of linguistic knowledge is an effective way to develop oral fluency. In this way, the speakers

have a large repertoire of vocabulary, which will enable them to diversify the ways they produce English. Moreover, reading extensively also offers speakers a bank of grammatical structures for speaking English more accurately, which results in more fluent speech. Besides, extensive exposure to information via reading also benefits speakers in a way that they gain a more general knowledge of numerous topics. (T04)

5. Discussion

Overall, the students showed a low level of confidence in their ability to speak English fluently, which can be ascribed to a variety of factors. One possible explanation is the inadequate amount of exposure to English the students received in the Vietnamese context, especially speaking practice. Only those who were proactive in approaching circumstances where they had the opportunities to exchange information in English could strengthen their communicative skills in English, which also resulted in a higher degree of confidence. This finding reflects those of Guevara and Albuja (2020) who stress the importance of language exposure in enhancing self-confidence in obtaining fluent speech.

5.1 Commonly Perceived Factors Influencing English-speaking Fluency

Linguistic factors were found to have the most dominant impact on students' English-speaking fluency, followed by performance factors and affective factors. The close distance between the mean values among the factors showed that they were acknowledged to be equally relatively significant in oral fluency development. Besides, the modest mean values indicated the uncertainty in the student's awareness of what constituted the development of English oral fluency.

Understandably, the linguistic group was reported to be the most influential because to produce or understand English output, learners must possess a vast repertoire of English linguistic input. This also accounts for the highest acceptance among students regarding the vital role of the lexical bank. Grammar and pronunciation were identified as important elements in building oral fluency. The

results lend support to the findings of Lestari (2017) and Khong (2019) who have discovered the major influences of knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in producing speech fluently. Limited lexical resources, poor knowledge of language rules, and error-laden articulation can cause a high frequency of unnecessary pauses, long hesitations, serious mistakes, and unintelligible content during speech delivery, all of which affect the oral fluency of the speakers (Hinkel, 2016; Koizumu, 2013; Levis, 2018).

The second-factor group contributing to oral fluency was related to performance, such as time pressure and planning time. In this regard, the impact of time pressure and planning time was more noticeable. As a performance phenomenon, fluency is inevitably determined by time constraints and preparation (Schmidt, 1992). If speakers can handle the pressure and deliver speech spontaneously, their oral fluency will be facilitated (De Jong & Perfetti, 2011; O'Grady, 2019). However, this impact is minor in the case of some learners, as demonstrated in the results of Dinh and Tran's study (2020). The speakers' capacity to deal with timing during speech is likely decided by their prior communication experience.

With regard to affective factors, motivation was found to be the most influential in this study. Motivation in this study mainly came from external sources such as high scores and compliments. In other words, students strongly believed that they would be motivated to speak English fluently with these types of encouragement. Such findings were consistent with prior research conducted by Khong (2019), Lestari (2017), Vo (2021), and Utomo (2022). In these studies, students with proper motivation were likely to succeed in obtaining fluency. However, the distinction of motivation was not clear-cut as long as that form of motivation could trigger students' engagement in expressing ideas, the initial step for further improving their fluency. Meanwhile, anxiety was identified as a contributing factor to oral fluency development. Generally, high levels of anxiety can disrupt the flow of thinking and delivering information, causing non-fluent

speech. These anxious feelings tend to arise from fear of making mistakes, receiving negative judgments, etc. (Zheng & Cheng, 2018). This finding is in accord with those obtained by Dinh and Tran (2020), indicating that speakers with excessive worry often produce speech containing unnecessary pauses and an unexpectedly long duration.

It is worth noting that confidence was found to have the least impact among the factors investigated in the present study. Such a finding was inconsistent with the findings of Guevara and Albuja (2020), who highlight the link between confidence and fluent speech. This may be related to the nature of confidence which is a personal belief under the influence of a combination of both internal and external factors in each student's life. Despite its identified positive relationship with speaking achievement (Suryani et al., 2020), how confidence facilitates the level of fluency of the speech delivered by the students may vary.

Qualitative findings from interviews with students and instructors revealed some differences in definition of fluency and identification of key factors for oral fluency development. Regarding fluency definitions, there was a mismatch in conceptualizing the term fluency between the students and instructors. Interestingly, only students' definitions echoed those characteristics of oral fluency in prior literature (e.g., Schmidt, 1992; Segalowitz, 2010). The findings aligned with the findings of the study carried out by Khau and Huynh (2022) which portrayed a list of criteria required for oral fluency. Conversely, a vague distinction between fluency and proficiency existed among instructors who participated in the present study. It could therefore be assumed that the instructors in this study were likely unaware of the correct components in evaluating speaking fluency, while the students somehow seemed to have a certain knowledge of this concept. These discrepancies call for further explorations of English-speaking fluency in the current context.

In addition, all of the interviewees acknowledged the significant factors contributing to oral fluency development. One distinction arose when they were asked to specify the most influential factor. However, it is noteworthy that there was a discrepancy in students' and instructors' perception. Whereas linguistic factors such as language proficiency and pronunciation were perceived to play a more dominant role in oral fluency development by the instructors, the students stressed the facilitating effect of the affective factors, namely confidence and motivation.

4.2 Effective Strategies for English-speaking Fluency Development

The findings showed that repetition, using fillers, extensive reading, planning, and using formulaic sequences were effective strategies for developing oral fluency with different degrees of impact. Specifically, task repetition and extensive practice were recognized as the most effective strategies, thus indicating that students were aware of the benefits of repetition in establishing fluency in speaking English, which has been pointed out by previous research (e.g., Bozorgian & Kanani, 2017; Bygate, 2018; De Jong & Perfetti, 2011). Instructors also recognized the significance of repetition techniques that could be increased through exposure to English via frequent communications in English, rehearsals, and self-talks. Furthermore, using filled pauses was reported to effectively enhance oral fluency, which indicated that these students knew how to use linguistic elements to make their speech smoother and more natural to maintain fluency. In fact, this is also one of the speaking strategies that can help speakers maintain the flow of the natural speech. Moreover, reading extensively was recognized by the students as an effective method to promote oral fluency. This finding highlighted students' understanding that achieving more lexical items and expanding topical knowledge played a crucial role in fostering oral fluency, and this supports the ideas of Nation (2018) who underscores the importance of reinforcing the form-meaning construction via reading.

5. Limitation and Recommendation

One main limitation of this study was it focused only on performance-based variables, and other variables such as cognitive factors, gender, and student status were not explored within the scope of the study. Future work should address these variables to better understand possible factors that can promote development of English-speaking fluency among Vietnamese and other EFL learners.

6. Implications

The main goal of the current study was to determine the main contributing factors in developing English-speaking fluency and perceived effective strategies for English-speaking fluency development among 142 Vietnamese university students. This study identified three main factors influencing speaking fluency in the case of Vietnamese learners, which are linguistics factors, performance factors, and affective factors. Among linguistic factors, knowledge of vocabulary was recognized as the most influential in producing fluent speech. Therefore, instructors should make use of fluency-based activities both inside and outside the classroom that provide students with a wide range of lexical knowledge in addition to grammar and pronunciation. As a performance-related factor, time pressure was believed to have the most considerable impact on oral fluency. As a result, students should be involved in speaking practice under time control with a high degree of repetition so as to enable them to develop the ability to produce oral speech more spontaneously. In addition, motivation was the psychological factor found to have the most substantial influence on oral fluency development. As motivation is considered an external factor that comes from peers and instructors, instructors should keep in mind the necessity to increase students' motivation. Finally, repeating tasks or intensive practice was found to be the most effective strategy to promote oral fluency, instructors should utilize a variety of speaking activities repeatedly to maximize students' practices. Finally, students' awareness of the benefit of this strategy should also be raised so that they can make the most use of it.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study have added to the growing body of research that attempts to explore factors affecting the development of English oral fluency. Fluency is one of the critical constructs of communicative speaking ability. Nevertheless, it has been proven that fluency does not operate in isolation, but it is governed by many factors depending on certain conditions. The findings of this study contribute to further understanding of how fluency is perceived among learners and instructors. Such a finding indicates the importance of connecting research into how fluency is perceived with research into how fluency is achieved. The alignment between the two facets should result in a better outcome in English oral fluency development among EFL learners.

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Appendix A

Factors on Oral Fluency Development Questionnaire

PART 1: Demographic characteristics

Gender: _____

Age: _____

Year of study: _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate what applies to you:

(1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly agree.

PART 2: Self-evaluation

1. I think my fluency is excellent.
2. I often spend time practicing to improve my fluency.
3. I can speak English with minimal hesitation and pausing.
4. It is easy for me to express my ideas fluently in communication.

A. Linguistic Factors

5. I cannot speak English fluently due to my poor vocabulary.
6. I often hesitate when I don't find the word/phrase/expression I need.
7. I often disrupt my speech in search of the correct tenses.
8. I often produce short sentences because of my limited grammatical knowledge.
9. I often pause while speaking to fix my mispronunciations.

B. Affective Factors

10. I often hesitate to speak English due to my worry about using inappropriate words.
11. I am often tongue-tied and lost for words when feeling nervous.
12. I often have trouble recalling what to say because of my shyness.
13. I tend to speak less due to my shyness while speaking English.

14. Making mistakes while speaking makes me look funny to other students.
15. I am afraid to speak out because I am not sure of what I am saying.
16. I am not confident about speaking because I am afraid other students cannot understand my English.
17. I need encouragement to speak out such as receiving good grades, and praise from my instructor.
18. Motivational words from my instructor help motivate me to produce better speech.
19. My speaking is poor because I am less motivated.

C. Performance Factors

20. I cannot join spontaneous conversation easily if I do not have time to prepare.
21. I get nervous when the instructor asks questions that I have not prepared for.
22. When giving a speech in a limited time, I start to worry that my fluency is affected.
23. My fluency is poor due to a lack of encouragement from my partners.
24. Immediate corrective feedback from the instructor makes me lose my train of thought.
25. I worry that my instructor will try to stop me anytime to correct every mistake I make.

PART 3: Strategies for fluency development

26. To remain fluent, I use fillers (e.g., well, right, anyway)
27. To remain fluent, I use contractions (e.g., don't, aren't, isn't)
28. Extensive reading can be useful to improve my fluency.
29. I outline the main points before I speak.
30. I try to repeat the same sentence to enhance fluency.

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Students

1. How do you define English-speaking fluency?
2. In your opinion, what contributes to your English-speaking fluency?
3. Do you think your grammar knowledge can affect your English-speaking fluency? Please explain.
4. Do you think your pronunciation knowledge can affect your English-speaking fluency? Please explain.
5. Do you think your vocabulary knowledge can affect your English-speaking fluency? Please explain.
6. Do you think anxiety can affect your English-speaking fluency? Please explain.
7. Do you think self-confidence can affect your English-speaking fluency? Please explain.
8. Do you think motivation can affect your English-speaking fluency? Please explain.
9. Do you think planning time before speaking can affect your English-speaking fluency? Please explain.
10. Do you think time pressure can affect your English-speaking fluency? Please explain.
11. In your opinion, which one is the most influential factor? Please explain.
12. As a student, do you have any ideas on how to improve your English-speaking fluency?
13. What do you think the instructor should do to help students improve their English-speaking fluency?

Interview Questions for Instructors

1. How do you define English-speaking fluency?
2. In your opinion, what contributes to students' English-speaking fluency?
3. Do you think grammar knowledge can affect English-speaking fluency? Please explain.

4. Do you think pronunciation knowledge can affect English-speaking fluency?

Please explain.

5. Do you think vocabulary knowledge can affect English-speaking fluency?

Please explain.

6. Do you think anxiety can affect English-speaking fluency? Please explain.

7. Do you think self-confidence can affect English-speaking fluency? Please explain.

8. Do you think motivation can affect English speaking fluency? Please explain.

9. Do you think planning time can affect English-speaking fluency? Please explain.

10. Do you think time pressure can affect English-speaking fluency? Please explain.

11. In your opinion, which one is the most influential factor? Please explain.

12. As an instructor, do you have any ideas on how to help your students improve their English-speaking fluency?

13. In your opinion, what should the students do to improve their English-speaking fluency?