The Use of Fillers by the Students of English Study Program in English Speaking Practice

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Abstract: This study examines the use of fillers in speech among students in the Intermediate English-Speaking class at Palangka Raya University during the 2023/2024 academic year. Fillers, which include words, phrases, and clauses that do not carry meaning but serve to fill pauses, play a role in communication by organizing thoughts and managing speech flow. The research aims to classify the types of fillers used and determine which type is most dominant. Using a qualitative descriptive method with content analysis, data were collected through documentation and analyzed based on Rose's (1998) theory. From 32 recorded speech samples, a total of 306 fillers were identified. The findings revealed that Unlexicalized Fillers (such as "uh" or "um") were overwhelmingly dominant, accounting for 93.8% (287 instances), while Lexicalized Fillers (such as "you know" or "I mean") constituted only 6.2% (19 instances). The results suggest that excessive filler usage indicates a lack of fluency, as students spoke spontaneously without prior preparation. While fillers can aid communication, their overuse may hinder clarity. These findings contribute to sociolinguistic research, emphasizing the need for training to reduce filler dependency and improve spoken fluency in English learners.

Keywords: English fillers, conversation analysis, EFL speaking class, spontaneous speech

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan filler mahasiswa pada kelas intermediate speaking di tingkat universitas. Filler, yang mencakup kata-kata, frasa, dan klausa yang tidak membawa makna tetapi berfungsi untuk mengisi jeda, berperan dalam komunikasi untuk mengatur pikiran dan mengelola alur ucapan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengklasifikasikan jenis filler yang digunakan dan menentukan jenis mana yang paling dominan. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan analisis konten, data dikumpulkan melalui dokumentasi dan dianalisis berdasarkan teori Rose (1998). Dari 32 orang sampel yang direkam, total 306 filler diidentifikasi sebagai data. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa unlexicalized filler (seperti "uh" atau "um") sangat dominan, terhitung 93,8% (287 kasus), sedangkan lexicalized filler (seperti "you know" atau "I mean") hanya 6,2% (19 kasus). Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan filler yang berlebihan menunjukkan kurangnya kefasihan, karena siswa berbicara secara spontan tanpa persiapan sebelumnya. Meskipun filler dapat membantu komunikasi, penggunaannya yang berlebihan dapat menghambat kejelasan berbicara. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada penelitian sosiolinguistik yang menekankan perlunya latihan untuk mengurangi ketergantungan pada filler dan meningkatkan kefasihan berbicara pada pembelajar bahasa Inggris.*

Kata kunci: *filler bahasa Inggris, analisis percakapan, kelas speaking EFL, tuturan spontan*

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of fillers in a spoken interaction has been perceived as the natural act in a conversation. People unconsciously often produce the mumbling-like sounds, such as *mmmm,*

errr, well, or *you know,* and so on in the middle of explaining something in the conversation. These mumbling sounds or words that appear in utterances and can be removed without changing the content are fillers. Yule (2020:242) simplifies that fillers are the breaks in the speech flows. Due to not changing the content or giving any messages, fillers only fill the gap which happen in utterances naturally.

Fillers mostly happen when people speak in foreign language. Sometimes, foreign language students are facing difficulties on speaking their target language, expecially in spontaneous speech. Due to these difficulties, people tend to apply numerous hesitations, pauses and fillers. Fox Tree (1995) claims that fillers become normal to be used by the language learners regarding to their way to develop speech patterns overtime unless they put their best effort to avoid the fillers. Moreover, the disfluency happened among foreign language students is considered to happen due to the negligence of the students. Gosh (2014) also tells that even Ronald Reagon, the 40th USA President, used filler *well* at the beginning replies in several conferences quite often spontaneously which made him being mocked widely. By this reason, fillers may consider to happen by the spoken language disfluencies.

There are numerous experts that explain some possible sequences in fillers usage. Fillers are words, phrases, and clauses used to fill utterance gaps (Nurjamin et al., 2019). Even during a lecture, EFL learners also naturally produce pauses in their speaking proficiency activity (Fatimah et al., 2017). Fillers were frequently used to communicate the idea to the learners or to contribute to the instruction in languages more appealing and retain all of the students' attention. However, fillers are often seen as a negative trait in educational field due to decreasing the speaking fluency level. It is possible because sing fillers excessively may distract from a speech and reduce trustworthiness (Indriyana et al., 2021). Therefore, fillers have positive or negative effects in speech depending of the functions of the fillers.

As one of the English Education study programs, the researcher is intrigued to do research in filler utterances field, expecially among the foreign language learners. The knowledge of fillers in utterances are not directly presented in some of course curriculum or syllabus, especially at Palangkaraya University. However, based on the researcher's preliminary study in Intermediate Speaking Course Group B at the English Education Study Programs, there are lots of students frequently usied fillers in their utterances regardless of the negative perceptions of using them. Based on this case, investigating the reasons behind applying filler utterances among English Education students might be compelling to be found out. Additionally, the efficiency of fillers utilized among students as their preferred means of communication style and learner knowledge of fillers create the framework of the relevance of fillers utilized by students.

There are several previous analyses related to fillers which also may help the researcher in doing the recent study. First, Fitriati's et al (2021) research aimed to investigate and examine the types and the fuctions of fillers used by produced by EFL Master's students. The research subjects are at advanced level of English which made the analysis became necessary to be investigate. The research used the qualitative research and conversation analysis in order to solve the research questions. The results showed that the students were frequently used

lexicalized fillers, followed with the unlexicalized. Moreover, the fillers aimed to hesitate, empathize, mitigate, edit and create time in the speech.

Second, Stevani's et al research (2018) aimed to investigate and identify filler types as well as their functions used by the sixth-semester students in delivering their academic presentation. The results showed that fillers in their research served numerous tasks, including giving a speaker time to think, restating or repairing what the speaker had stated, initiating the speech, confirming the outcome to the opposing speaker, and emphasizing the primary point of the topic.

Third, Nurfadilah's et al (2021) research evaluated reasons for the use of fillers by English department's students. The research's findings show that fillers used by students emplotes several functions such as for exposing hesitation, empathizing, altering terms, mitigating, and creating time.

Although previous studies have examined the use of fillers among EFL students, they primarily focus on specific groups such as advanced-level Master's students (Fitriati et al., 2021), sixth-semester students delivering academic presentations (Stevani et al., 2018), and general students for English lectures (Nurfadilah et al., 2021). However, none of these studies specifically investigate students enrolled in an English-speaking course of undergraduate students in the English study program. This creates a gap in understanding how filler usage manifests in a structured speaking-focused learning environment at the undergraduate level.

Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by analyzing how students use fillers in their speech in an English-speaking practice in the English study program. It will examine the types of filler and the most dominant filler produced by the students of the English study program at the university. By doing so, this research will provide more context-specific insights into the role of fillers in language learning and fluency development within a structured academic setting.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Fillers

There are several researchers who have stated their opinion about fillers. . Fillers are words, phrases, and clauses used to fill utterance gaps (Nurjamin et al., 2020). The fillers are commonly appeared to mark the hesitation in a speech or to control certain holds in a speech while the speakers consider the next utterances. Fillers can also be used to provide more time for the speaker to prepare what they want to say (Firiady & Mahendra, 2019). The speaker uses fillers to fill up the moment while elaborating on another topic or statement. Richard and Schmidt (2013:220) describe that the speakers are most likely using certain phrases such as *I mean…, actually…, well…, you know…,* etc to construct communication delays while having difficulties in oral interactions. These delays enable to carry on the oral interactions. Fillers constitute prevalent aspects of organic speech in which gaps emerge during utterance creation. Thus, the fillers are mostly applied in organic speech which may aim to fill the gaps.

The use of filler in communication may indicate someones fluency level in a certain languager. In some cases, fillers can be perceived indicating a speaking disfluency of a speaker when they are communicating in foreign language, especially English (Mahendra & Bram,

2019; Siahaan et al., 2023). It can also be an obstacle for audience to understand what someone is saying if the filler is overused (Nurjamini et al., 2019). On the other hand, several cases also shows that the use of fillers may help in communication fluency (Lomotey, 2021), because it enables someone to think of what they about to say and prevent misunderstanding. Therfore, the use of fillers can indicate both fluency and disfluency depend on the context of use (Abdulla & Mohammed, 2023). It's even perceived as one of communication strategies (CS) in using foreign language (Awang et al., 2022).

2.2 Types of Fillers

There are several types of filler in communication. The most common theory of fillers types is the one proposed by Rose (1998), who divide them into two types of fillers; unlexicalized and lexicalized fillers. The theory of Rose is still proven relevant for present context, since being referred by some recent studies, such as the one conducted by Al-Faragy & Mohammed (2022), Abdulla & Mohammed (2023).

Unlexicalized Fillers

Unlexicalized fillers are known as non-lexemes pauses which are used to portray hesitations while thinking of the next utterances (Rose, 1998). Juan (as cited in Andriani, 2018) also adds that unlexicalized fillers may be called as neutral vowel sounds because they give the easiest sound while speaking. Some examples of unlexicalized fillers are *ehm, uh, err, ah, umm,* et cetera (Baalen, 2001).

Examples:
a.   *Ehm,* I believe that was not a good idea.
b.   Can you help me to, *uh*, put away that garbage?
c.   I want to order, *err*, seafoods.
d.   I really like, *ummm*, that sweet chewy snack.
e.   *Ahh,* I remember that you were in our class, weren't you?

These examples above show how unlexical fillers fill the gap of the utterance. The italic words there are undefinited words and have no meanings in them. However, all of them are appeared to fill the gap or to give time for the speakers in considering their next utterance.

Lexicalized Fillers

Rose (1998) explains that lexicalized fillers are types of fillers which in the form of short phrases or words. Baalen (2001) adds that lexicalized fillers are used when a someone is trying to form an utterance but does not want to give up to claim the communication floor. The examples of lexicalized fillers are *like, well, yeah, you know, I mean* and so on. Stenström (1994) also mentions verbal fillers, which are comparable to lexicalized fillers and include words like *well, I mean*, and *sort of.* Yule (2020) also adds that filled pauses are also considered as lexical fillers because of giving some utterance due to the speaker is planning to say something.

Examples:
a.   I want that *what is it* the sweet chewy snack? Oh, mocha.
b.   *Well*, *I guess* this way may work out.

c. They are, *like,* they have wasted their time for too long.

d. She was, *yeah*, a little unhinged.

e. That was disgusting, *I mean*, who on earth eats porridge by sipping it through straws?

f. That wig is *sort of* off, yet if you like it, that is okay.

The first example is using a clause *what is it* to make some time to think about the next utterance without being silence. The second example also gives the phrase like *well, I guess* to fill the time of the speaker in speaking their minds. The third (*like*), the forth (*yeah*), and the sixth (*sort of*) examples are used to mitigate the critics so that the sentences may sound less direct. While, *I mean* here aims to be an attention-getter.

2.3 Benefits of Using Filler in English Speaking

English language users cannot deny that fillers have great contributions as spoken language assistances. Nurrahmi et al. (2021) explain that people like to use fillers to maintain their speech turns and avoid interruptions. Furthermore, speakers use it to demonstrate their fluency without taking significant pauses. Aside of that Stenström (1994), Foss and Hakes (1978), Wu (2002), and Baalen (2001) propose 5 advantages of fillers in English speaking. They are hesitation devices, attention-getting devices, mitigating devices, editing-term devices, and time creating devices. Below are the detailed explanations among all the devices.

Hesitation Devices

Fillers are used as hesitation devices. Stenström (1994) explains that fillers utterances are commonly applied as hesitation marks. Hesitations are breaks that increase in the middle of an expression when a speaker is hesitant whether to employ the words (Foss & Hakes, 1978, p.184). As stated by Matthei and Roeper (1983) and Wu (2001), these fillers occur when the speaker needs pause to think about what he or she will say next or when putting a sentence together. The majority of filled breaks (ee, em, err, uhm, ah, hm, and so on) are used as breathing pauses; such pauses generally correspond to semantic-syntactic restrictions (Stenström, 1994, p.7). As a result, filled pauses are utilized for reluctance. For instance, "***Well, umm**, it is quite difficult to be elaborated, however…"*. The bolded words are showing the hesitation of the speaker on explaining something.

Attention-getting Devices

Attention-getting devices are the function of fillers where the speaker may check if the interlocutor pay attention or not. Fillers engage the interlocutor to take a part to the conversation (Stenström, 1994, pp. 64-65). Jordan (2001, p.12) adds that the fillers may become the indicators whether the messages are received clearly or not by engaging the interlocutor in the conversation to give responses. The fillers are often attached at the beginning or at the end of the utterances. For instance, a person is about an information and wants to engage the listeners giving the filler (bolded phrase) "*This is where things become fascinating, **you see…**"*.

Mitigating Devices

Baalen (2001, p.6) proposes that fillers can soften or mitigate utterances so that the utterances do not offend the interlocutor. Moreover, the fillers may reflect the solidarity or politeness. Fillers play a vital role in protecting face needs since face needs include the need to

be liked and the desire for having someone's personal space respected (Baalen, 2001, p.6). Fillers such as well, ehm, eer, and alright can serve as mitigation or politeness tactics. For instance, someone wants to give a critic to another. The speaker gives the politeness tactic in a critic "***Well**, I don't like your act"*. Therefore, the filler makes the critic less direct.

Editing-term Devices

Baalen (2001) explains that fillers serve to remedy speech faults in the speakers of utterances. In other words, the speakers recognizes if they perform speech mistakes and immediately correct them. *I mean, um, ehm, uh, huh, ee,* and so on can show the speakers' recognitions the speech problem, followed by attempts to fix them. When repairing speech errors, speakers replace specific past phrases with new ones, indicating that the previous words were unintentionally used. The speaker may even directly repeat the speech fault at times. For instance, "*I got 7, **eh**, 8 apples in discount*". The bolded filler is used as a *bridge* to fix the misinformation.

Time-creating Devices

Fillers may help the users on creating time. Stenström (1994, p.77) explains that fillers give the speakers time to consider the next utter to be spoken. In addition, fillers which are used to create time are lexical repetitions (Stenström, 1994, p.78). The lexical repetitions are formed in two types. The first type is single-word repetition. It aims to help to extend the time by repeating a single word in the previous utterance. The second is clause partial repetition. This repetition is used by repeating clause. All repeats in the utterances serve as fillers to allow the speaker time to contemplate what to say next. For instance, if a person needs time to consider the answer in an interview, sometimes the speaker is going to say "*The reason why I applied this position because**, umh…,** the jobdecs suit my skills*". The bolded filler is used to give an extra time to think the next utterance.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Kind of Research and Approach

This research used qualitative descriptive methods. specifically using content analysis methods. The content analysis method was an approach used to analyze the content of text documents or other media materials with the aim of identifying certain patterns, themes or meanings. Then, this content analysis approach was developed into a structured and systematic content analysis method for analyzing qualitative data.

This method is used to analyze qualitative data, such as interviews or narratives, with the aim of identifying themes and patterns of meaning that emerge from the text. This method is more descriptive and allows researchers to dig up in-depth information from existing narratives. The content analysis approach described by Holsti (1969) is a strategy for drawing conclusions by recognizing the special qualities of messages in an objective, methodical and generalist manner. Objective means following norms or methods which, if followed by other people (researchers), can provide equivalent results.

3.2 Research Participants

The participants of this research were the 3rd semester students of English Education Study Program at Palangka Raya University, in academic year 2023/2024 who followed the course of Intermediate English Speaking. There were 38 students participating in this research consisting of 14 males and 24 females.

3.3 Techniques of Data Collection

Techniques of data collection in this research was a documentation analysis where the data needed in this research was in the form of audio recordings from the Intermediate English-Speaking class students of English Education Study Program at Palangka Raya University as the research subject. Thus, the method used in collecting data for this research was documentation. The steps to be taken in data collection were the researcher obtained the documentation of recorded audio in speech activity produced by students in the course of Intermediate English-Speaking. There were total of 32 of 38 audios containing fillers. She listened to the students' speech data and transcribed the utterance into written texts. Then, she identified fillers in the script and coded the data with the code format in sequence as number of students, students' acronym names, and number of data token.

3.4 Techniques of Data Analysis

Techniques of data analysis in this study was textual analysis. The data was in the form of speech transcripts which were analyzed by the types of the fillers contained therein. After the data was collected, the steps taken to analyze the data were by classifying the data into the units of the types of fillers based on the Rose's theory (1998); finding the most dominant use of the type of filler; analyzing the types of the fillers by developing the description of each type unit; analyzing the most dominant used of the types of the fillers; and discussing the findings to theory and previous studies where relevant.

3.5 Trustworthiness of Data

In qualitative research, the validity or trustworthiness of the data is very important, otherwise the research may not get the right results. Therefore, this research needs to test the validity of the data used in this research, according to Sugiyono (2013) The trustworthiness of the data is tested by test level of *credibility*, *transferability, dependability,* and *confirmability*.

To ensure that the research was credible, the researcher took the data was taken by recording the speech activities of the Intermediate English-Speaking class students of English Education Study Program at Palangka Raya University. In terms of transferability, data will be described clearly, in detail and in depth about the results and research context of the filler types, so that it can be read by other readers or researchers for the use in other similar studies. This was in line with the purpose of this transfer was that other people could understand the results of the research, so researchers in making their reports had to provide detailed, clear, systematic, and reliable descriptions (Sugiyono, 2013).

This study is said to be dependable since the dependability test was carried out by the researcher and the supervisors checked the entire activity of researcher in conducting her study. This study was a part of researcher's bachelor thesis so that the process was carried out and run under the supervision and approval of the supervisors. Last, the confirmability test of this study

was obtained by seeking the approval of supervising lecturers for their views, opinions on matters related to the focus of research, and the data result.

4. RESULTS

This research found that of the 32 speaking audios conducted by the Intermediate English-Speaking class of the English Education Study Program at Palangka Raya University in the academic year 2023/2024, there were 306 (100%) fillers, with the total and a percentage of Unlexicalized Fillers type of 287 (93,8%) and Lexicalized Fillers type of 19 (6.2%). The frequency of use of each type of filler can be seen in detail in the table below which shows the total filler data produced by each student.

Table 1. Total of unlexicalized and lexicalized fillers produced per student

No.	Students' Acronym Name	Types of fillers in frequency	
		Unlexicalized Fillers	Lexicalized Fillers
1.	HAN	2	1
2.	A	22	1
3.	ATP	1	0
4.	AA	0	0
5.	CCF	4	0
6.	SH	11	1
7.	D	3	1
8.	DEH	0	0
9.	FS	16	5
10.	FH	3	0
11.	G	7	0
12.	GSC	3	2
13.	I	6	2
14.	KA	12	0
15.	L	34	1
16.	N	20	0
17.	AP	24	1
18.	P	16	1
19.	RO	5	0
20.	RR	16	1
21.	R	2	0
22.	TT	7	0
23.	UF	0	0
24.	WV	0	0
25.	YP	19	1
26.	Z	16	0
27.	ZA	3	0
28.	MIF	8	0
29.	MAZ	2	0
30.	N	16	1
31.	C	4	0
32.	AMV	5	0
	Total	**287**	**19**
	Grand total	**306**	

Table 2. Specific unlexicalized fillers produced by students

No	Unlexicalized Fillers	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	e	10	3.37
2.	a	10	3.37
3.	um	33	10.8
4.	em	5	1.63
5.	ow	1	0.33
5.	uh	222	72.5
7.	eh	5	1.63
8.	er	1	0.33
	Total	**287**	**93.8**

Table 3. Specific Lexicalized Fillers Produced by Students

No.	Lexicalized Fillers	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	You know	2	0.65
2.	Yeah	2	0.65
3.	Like	14	4.58
4.	Well	1	0.33
	Total	**19**	**6.2**

The table above illustrated that fillers were produced more towards speech disfluency so that the words that automatically came out were words without meaning. However, this study found the use of unlexicalized fillers, such as *e, a, um, em, ow, uh, eh*, and *er*, and lexicalized fillers, such as *you know, yeah, like,* and *well*.

The following is the specific elaboration of the data findings based on the filler typology (unlexcicalized and lexicalized fillers) and their types.

4.1 Unlexicalized Fillers

This study found unlexicalized fillers, such as *e, a, um, em, ow, uh eh and er* as specified in the following table.

Table 4. Unlexicalized fillers uttered by the students

No.	Types of filler	Examples of filler occurred in sentences & elaboration of analyses
1.	"e"	Data: … *and to be given medicine or **e e** for follow up* (HAN-1). ♦ *"e"* sound here is used by the speaker because it was the easiest vowel to pronounce in a state of thinking about the next utterance (time creating devices) before saying the phrase *for follow up*. "e" was a filler in the form of a vowel without meaning, so it was included in the unlexicalized filler.
2.	"a"	Data: ... *from the topic we have to **a** today* (A-2). ♦ *"a"* sound as in the example sentence spoken by the student was a vowel that was also the easiest to pronounce when at a loss for the next words to be said (time creating devices), before then saying the word *today*. This filler helped the student to consider her next utterance. This filler a was a neutral vowel sound without meaning, so it was classified as an unlexicalized filler.
3.	"um"	Data: ... *So, I prefer **um** to take the test* (A-3). ♦ The *um* sound in this sentence was a filler for pause in speech to remember or caught the words or vocabulary that would be said next (time creating devices).

		It helped the student to find the next frase *to take the test* to be uttered. The *um* sound in the data above was a sound unit that had no basic meaning, so it was classified into the type of unlexicalized filler.
4.	*"em"*	Data: ... *about* **em** *I have to .... knowledge* (A-12). ♦ The *em* sound in this sentence was a filler for pause in speech to remember or caught the words or vocabulary that would be said next (time creating devices). It helped the student to find the next frase … *knowledge* untuk diucapkan. The *um* sound in the data above was a sound unit that had no basic meaning, so it was classified into the type of unlexicalized filler.
5.	*"ow"*	Data: ... **ow** *I think exam is*... (A-21). ♦ The *ow* sound in this sentence was the easiest word to say when remembering or catching the words or vocabulary that would be said next (time creating devices). It helped the student to find the next sentence … *I think exam* to be uttered. The *ow* sound in the data above was a sound unit that had no basic meaning, so it was classified into the type of unlexicalized filler.
6.	*"uh"*	Data: ...*which the experience during headache walks* **uh**, *the experience during headache is walking problem* (CCF-1). ♦ The *uh* sound in this sentence was a filler for pause in speech to remember or caught the words or vocabulary that would be said next (time creating devices). It helped the student to find the next sentence to be uttered. The *uh* sound in the data above was a sound unit that had no basic meaning, so it was classified into the type of unlexicalized filler.
7.	*"eh"*	Data: … *and I often feel nervous during exam,* **eh** *during test* (SH-12). ♦ The *eh* sound in this sentence was a filler for pause in speech to fix the words or vocabulary that would be said next (editing-term devices). It helped the student to find the next right phrase *during test* to be uttered. The *eh* sound in the data above was a sound unit that had no basic meaning, so it was classified into the type of unlexicalized filler.
8.	*"er"*	Data: … *The news is more up to date because it's happening around us at that time* **er**, *at the moment* (SH-1). ♦ The *er* sound in this sentence was a filler for pause in speech to fix the words or vocabulary that would be said next (editing-term devices). It helped the student to find the next right phrase *at the moment* to be uttered. The *er* sound in the data above was a sound unit that had no basic meaning, so it was classified into the type of unlexicalized filler.

The data on the table above show that there were various meaningless sound that came out as fillers for speech pause such as *e, a, um, em, ow, uh, eh and, er.* These made certain difficulties to describe them with the right sound symbols used the alphabet. However, these unlexicalized fillers were useful in helping students to give time to get/fix the words, phrases, or sentences that would be said next in expressing their ideas in speaking. Unlexicalized fillers in this study were proven to function as time-creating and editing-term devices.

4.2 Lexicalized Fillers

The research identified the following data, including lexicalized filler types such as: *you know, yeah, like,* and *well.*

Table 5. Lexicalized fillers uttered by the students

No.	Types of filler	Examples of filler occurred in sentences & elaboration of analyses
1.	"you know"	Data: *When I was **you know** in high school* (D-3). ♦ Short sentence *you know* was lexicalized fillers that was used as time fillers to get the words that would be said later (time creating devices), in this data was *high school*. The filler was said because the speaker missed the words that should have been said next.
2.	"yeah"	Data: *…that we can see in this country **yeah**…* (AP-24). ♦ The word *yeah* was a lexicalized filler, used to confirm or ensure a previously spoken phrase *in this country* that the speaker had doubted (hesitation devices) to utter it.
3.	"like"	Data: *I want to, how feel the quiet and calm situation in there or **like** I feel in Jepara beach* (P-17). ♦ The word *like* was a lexicalized filler that was used to provide further explanation or an example of the phrase *quiet and calm situation* that was previously said by the speaker as hesitation device.
4.	"well"	Data: ***Well**, you can think this and ended up to take a test* (L-14). ♦ The word *well* was a lexicalized filler that was used to provide time to correct words that were considered inappropriate that had been said by the speaker as the editing term device.

Those lexicalized fillers as shown in Table 5 were used by speakers to provide additional time to consider the appropriate word, phrase, or sentence to articulate next utterances. In this context, fillers served as hesitation devices, editing-term devices, and time-creating mechanisms.

4.3 The dominant use of fillers

Among the two types of fillers predominantly found in this research, unlexicalized fillers accounted for the majority, with a total of 287 instances (93.8%) in utterances. Specifically, eight different unlexicalized fillers were identified, with **uh** being the most frequently used, appearing 222 times. In contrast, lexicalized fillers were less common, with four specific types identified. Among these, the **like** filler was the most dominant, occurring 14 times.

The dominant use of unlexicalized fillers by the intermediate English-speaking class of the English Education Study Program at Palangka Raya University can be attributed to their function as time fillers. These fillers were used by students to buy time while searching for the appropriate words to say next. Unlexicalized fillers, being simple and easy to pronounce, were favored as they did not require any consideration of meaning, especially in moments of hesitation or uncertainty. In comparison, lexicalized fillers, which typically consist of phrases carrying specific meanings, were less frequently used.

Among the unlexicalized fillers, **uh** was the most commonly used because it was the easiest to articulate in situations of confusion, without necessitating any thought about its meaning. Similarly, **like** was the dominant lexicalized filler identified in this research. Its use allowed students to provide further clarification or elaboration on previously stated ideas, often reflecting uncertainty about the accuracy of the words they had just spoken.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that unlexicalized fillers (93.8%) were significantly more prevalent than lexicalized fillers (6.2%) among intermediate-level English learners. The most frequently used unlexicalized filler was "uh", appearing 222 times, while the most dominant lexicalized filler was "like", occurring 14 times. The preference for unlexicalized fillers can be attributed to their role as time fillers, allowing students to pause and think while searching for appropriate words. In contrast, lexicalized fillers were used more deliberately to provide clarification or elaboration. These findings align with and expand upon previous research.

First, Fitriati et al. (2021) examined filler usage among advanced EFL Master's students and found that lexicalized fillers were used more frequently than unlexicalized fillers, though the latter were still present in speech. The contrast between their findings and the present study suggests that higher-proficiency learners are more skilled in structuring spoken language, reducing their reliance on unlexicalized fillers. In contrast, the intermediate learners in this study relied more on unlexicalized fillers due to their developing fluency and limited preparation in spoken English.

Similarly, Nurfadilah et al. (2021) identified filler functions such as hesitation, emphasis, mitigation, and creating thinking time—all of which were observed in this study. The excessive use of fillers in the present study signalled spontaneous speech and untrained fluency, reinforcing the idea that unlexicalized fillers serve as cognitive crutches for intermediate learners.

These findings also align with Stevani et al. (2018), who highlighted that fillers provide cognitive processing time and aid self-repair in speech. This supports the idea that filler use is an inherent feature of spoken English, especially among learners at lower proficiency levels, who struggle with real-time language production.

Further, Ali et al. (2023) found that lower-proficiency learners tend to use unlexicalized fillers more frequently due to their difficulty in maintaining speech fluency. This supports the present study's conclusion that students rely on fillers like "uh" to sustain speech flow, particularly when facing hesitation or uncertainty.

Additionally, Rose (1998) categorized fillers based on their functions in discourse, asserting that unlexicalized fillers primarily serve as placeholders that allow speakers to process their thoughts before continuing. The dominant use of "uh" in this study supports Rose's classification, as intermediate learners appear to rely on this strategy for speech management.

Moreover, Clark & Tree (2002) found that lexicalized fillers such as "like" often signal uncertainty or serve as a discourse-organizing tool. The present study reinforces this, as students used "like" to clarify or elaborate on previously stated ideas, indicating some awareness of structuring spoken discourse.

Finally, Tottie (2011) compared filler use among native and non-native speakers, concluding that non-native speakers use more unlexicalized fillers due to higher cognitive load and difficulty retrieving words in real-time communication. This aligns with the findings of the present study, where students relied heavily on unlexicalized fillers as compensation for their limited fluency.

Overall, these results confirm that intermediate EFL learners depend heavily on unlexicalized fillers to manage speech flow, while lexicalized fillers play a secondary role in clarification and discourse organization. The contrast with studies on advanced learners highlights how proficiency level influences filler use, with more fluent speakers relying less on unlexicalized fillers. Future research could explore how structured fluency training impacts filler usage, potentially reducing overreliance on unlexicalized fillers and improving spontaneous speech production.

6. CONCLUSION

Filler words in English are an inseparable part of communication. They play an essential role in making speech more natural and engaging while serving as a strategic tool for maintaining fluency. However, excessive use of fillers can negatively impact communication, making speech appear disfluent or difficult to understand. This study aimed to analyze the types of fillers used and determine which type was most dominant in students' speech.

The findings confirm that filler words are integral to spoken language, functioning as hesitation markers, attention-getting devices, mitigating tools, editing terms, and time-management aids. While fillers can facilitate smooth communication, their overuse can make speech unclear and uncomfortable to listen to. The results showed that students frequently relied on fillers, which created the impression of disfluency. This was particularly evident in the dominance of unlexicalized fillers, which are the easiest to produce spontaneously without requiring conscious thought. The prevalence of these fillers suggests that students, as intermediate-level learners, spoke without prior preparation and lacked extensive training in using English for communication.

Despite the drawbacks of excessive filler use, the findings of this study offer valuable insights for language learning. Teachers can incorporate the results into sociolinguistic lessons, helping students learn to use fillers appropriately rather than excessively. Similarly, students can use this research as a reference for understanding how fillers function in speech—both as a communication strategy and as a potential barrier to fluency if overused.

Since this study focused on EFL university students, future research could expand its scope by examining filler usage among non-English program students who use English in daily communication. This would provide a broader perspective on how fillers function across different learning environments and levels of proficiency.

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