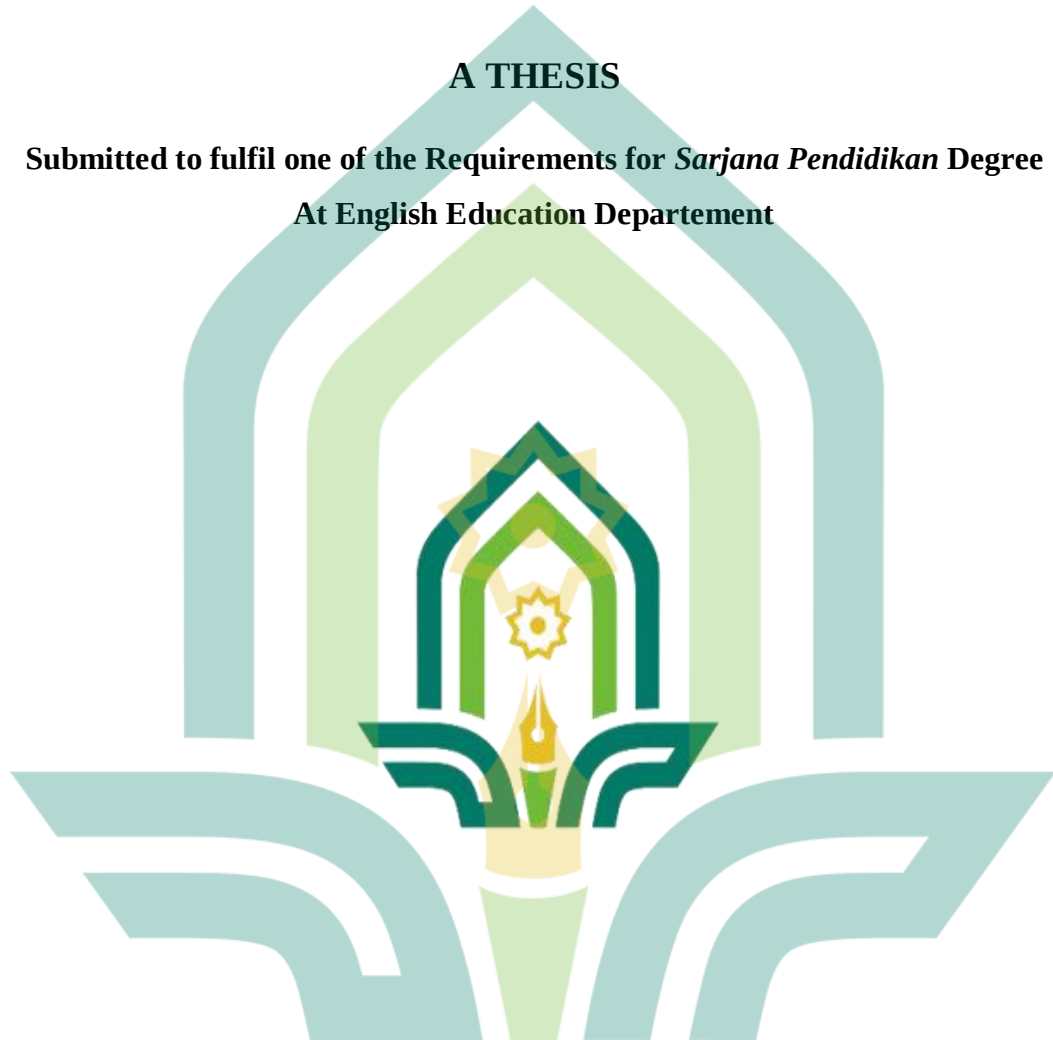


**AN ANALYSIS OF FILLERS IN ACADEMIC
SPEAKING PERFORMANCE AMONG EFL
STUDENTS**

A THESIS

**Submitted to fulfil one of the Requirements for *Sarjana Pendidikan* Degree
At English Education Departement**



By:

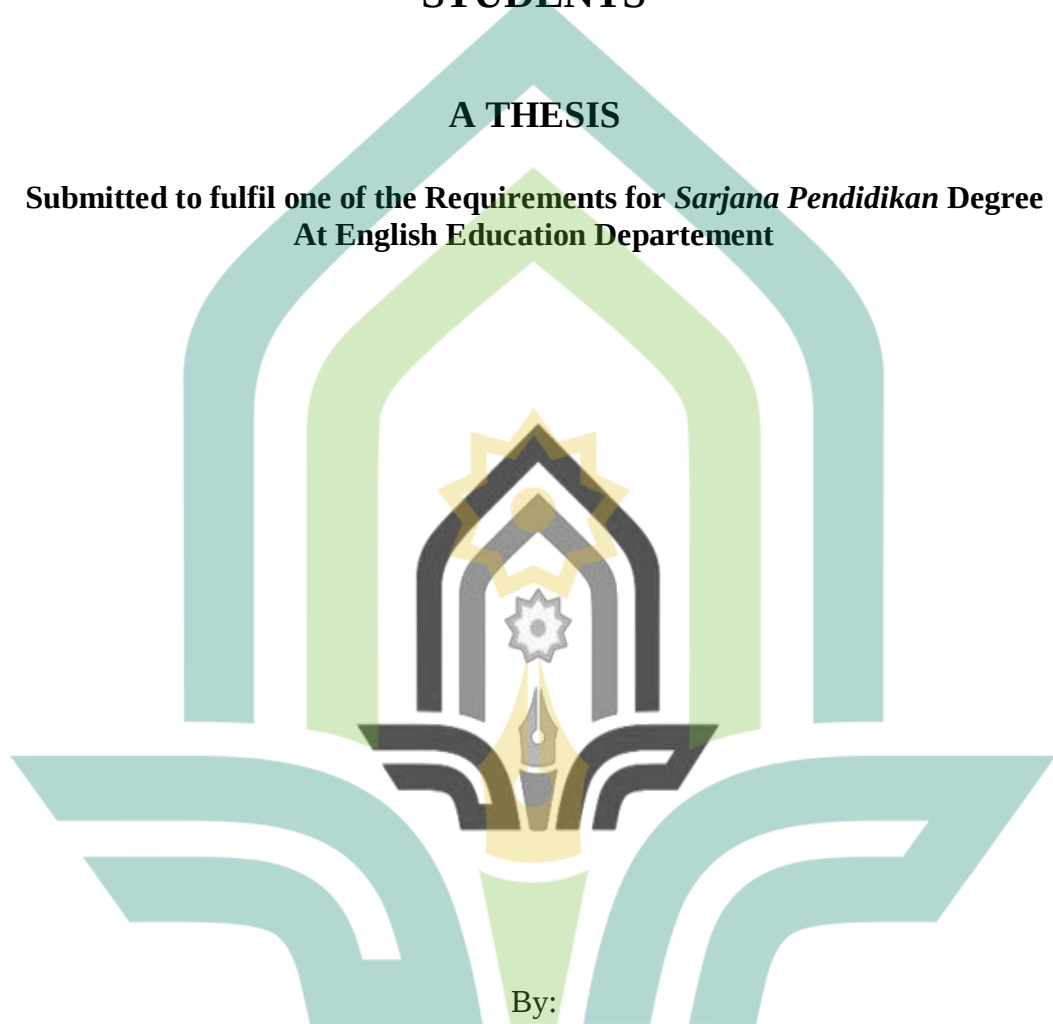
SALMA MAUDYTA RESTIANI
SN. 20522106

**ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND TEACHER TRAINING
UIN K.H. ABDURRAHMAN WAHID PEKALONGAN
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2026**

**SURAT PERNYATAAN KEASLIAN SKRIPSI
DAN PENGGUNAAN BANTUAN KECERDASAN ARTIFISIAL**

Saya yang bertanda tangan di bawah ini:
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"An Analysis of Fillers in Academic Speaking Performance among EFL Students"

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c/q. Ketua Program Studi TBIG

di Pekalongan

Assalamu'alaikum, Wr. Wb. Setelah melakukan penelitian, bimbingan dan koreksi naskah skripsi saudara:

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Judul : An Analysis of Fillers in Academic Speaking Performance among EFL Students.

Saya menilai bahwa naskah skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan kepada Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan untuk diujikan dalam sidang munaqasyah / ujian tugas akhir. Demikian nota pembimbing ini dibuat untuk digunakan sebagaimana mestinya. Atas perhatiannya, disampaikan terimakasih. Wassalamu'alaikum, Wr. Wb

Pekalongan, 7 Mei 2026

Pembimbing,



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APPROVAL SHEET

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MOTTO AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

MOTTO

"It's fine to fake it until you make it, until you do, until it's true."
-Taylor Swift

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ABSTRACT

Restiani, Salma Maudyta. 2026. *“An Analysis of Fillers in Academic Speaking Performance Among EFL Students”* Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Language Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, UIN K. H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan. Advisor: Dr. Dewi Puspitasari. M.Pd.

Keywords: *Fillers, Academic Speaking, EFL Students*

This study examines the challenges EFL students face when required to generate ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, and construct sentences simultaneously during academic speaking performance. As a result, students often use filler words to maintain the flow of communication. Although gaps from previous studies have been investigated through a focused analysis of the types and functions of filler words used by EFL students during academic speaking performance. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design. The participants were three students in their fifth semester who had completed the Academic Speaking course at a university in Central Java, Indonesia. Data were collected through video-based observations of students' academic speaking performances and semi-structured interviews. To ensure the data was reliable, they checked it by comparing information from video recordings with interview results. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The types of fillers were classified according to Clark and Tree (2002), and the functions of fillers were analyzed using Schifffrin (1987) discourse markers theory. The study found 64 filler words, divided into two types: lexicalized fillers and unlexicalized fillers. The unlexicalized fillers like *uhh* and *umm*, and the lexicalized fillers like *so*, *okay*, *right*, and *yeah*. The results also showed that fillers only had four of five functions in communication, according to Schifffrin (1987) framework: Exchange Structure, Ideational Structure, Action Structure, and Participation Framework. These functions helped students keep conversations going, link thoughts together, move smoothly between topics, and keep people interested while speaking in academic settings. The results show that fillers are not just signs of hesitation, but also tools people use to help keep conversations flowing and interact more smoothly.

PREFACE

All praise to be Allah SWT for mercy, blessings, and guidance, which have enabled the writer to complete this thesis entitled "*An Analysis of Fillers in Academic Speaking Performance among EFL Students.*" This thesis is submitted as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in English Education at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the types and functions of filler words used by EFL students in academic speaking performance. This research is expected to contribute to the development of English language teaching, particularly in speaking instruction, and to provide useful insights for students, lecturers, and future researchers interested in discourse analysis and academic speaking.

On this occasion, the writer would like to express sincere gratitude and appreciation to the following individuals for their support and guidance during the completion of this thesis:

1. Prof. Dr. H. Zaenal Mustakim, M.Ag., as a Rector of UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan.
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3. Mr. Ahmad Burhanuddin, M.A., Head of the English Education Study Program, and Ms. Eros Meilina Sofa, M.Pd., Secretary of the English Education Study Program.
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The researcher hoped that this thesis will provide valuable insights and contribute to the development of English Language Education. The result of this study is also expected to benefit students, lecturers, and future researchers in related fields.

Pekalongan, 4 juni 2026

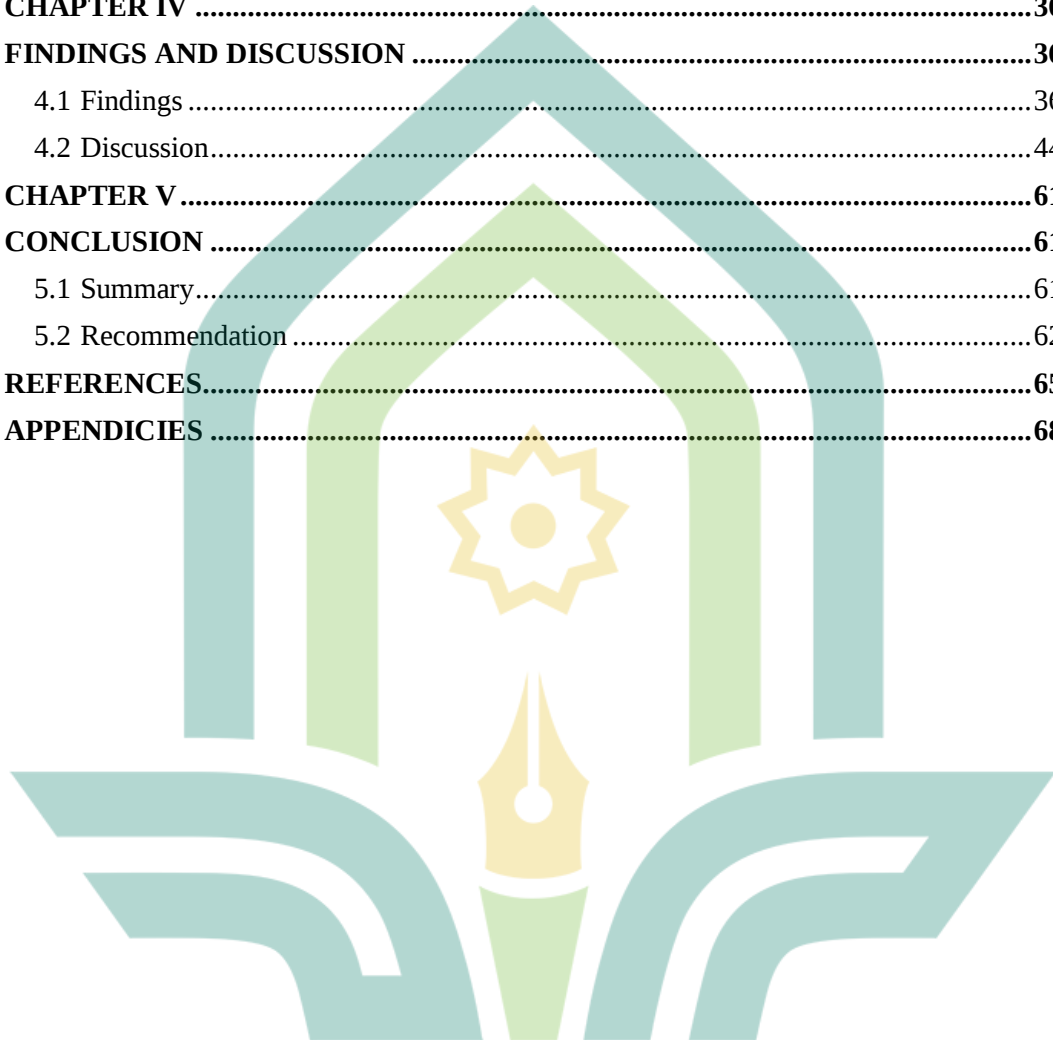
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TABLE OF CONTENT

COVER.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
SURAT PERNYATAAN KEASLIAN SKRIPSI	ii
DAN PENGGUNAAN BANTUAN KECERDASAN ARTIFISIAL.....	ii
NOTA PEMBIMBING	iii
APPROVAL SHEET	iv
MOTTO AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
PREFACE	vii
TABLE OF CONTENT	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xi
CHAPTER I	12
INTRODUCTION.....	12
1.1 Background of the Study.....	12
1.2 Identification of the problem.....	16
1.3 Limitation of the problem	17
1.4 Formulation of the problem	17
1.5 Aim(s) of the study	17
1.6 Research Benefits	17
CHAPTER II.....	19
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	19
2.1 Theoretical Framework.....	19
2.1.1 Fillers	19
2.1.2 Academic Speaking Performance	23
2.1.3 EFL Students	24
2.2 Previous Studies.....	25
2.3 Conceptual Framework.....	27
CHAPTER III	29
RESEARCH PROCEDURE	29
3.1 Research Design	29
3.2 Research Focuses.....	29
3.3 Data and data source	30

3.4 Data collection	30
3.5 Data Trustworthiness	31
3.6 Data Analysis.....	32
CHAPTER IV	36
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	36
4.1 Findings	36
4.2 Discussion.....	44
CHAPTER V.....	61
CONCLUSION	61
5.1 Summary.....	61
5.2 Recommendation	62
REFERENCES.....	65
APPENDICIES	68



LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Types of fillers used by EFL students.....	37
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Many students view speaking as a challenging skill because it requires rapid meaning processing, impromptu concept structure, and careful word choice. Speaking ability is often regarded as the most visible indicator of a student's communication competence. Especially relevant in academic contexts that require clarity and confidence (Stevani & Supardi, 2018). Asih and Wikanengsih (2018) explain that speaking skills are crucial to language learning because they contribute to vocabulary development and self-confidence. Nguyen (2024) emphasise that speaking is a cooperative activity where speakers create meaning by producing, receiving, and processing information. This understanding suggests that speaking involves a significant cognitive load for EFL learners.

In practice, many EFL students find it challenging to stay fluent when they have to speak on their own. Hesitancy or pauses are frequently caused by the simultaneous organisation of ideas, selection of words, and processing of meaning (Kirjavainen & Beeching, 2022). These difficulties intensify in the context of academic speaking performance, as students must respond directly, articulate concepts clearly, and organise arguments logically (Paltridge, 2012). Further, Alghazali (2019) found that Indonesian EFL learners often pause or lose fluency when asked to speak without preparation. This occurs generally because they need more time to arrange

their thoughts and retain terms. Safitri and Misdi (2021) noted that these issues often arise during class discussions or presentations, particularly when students speak without proper preparation. In this case, one of the most frequently occurring phenomena is the use of common words like *uh*, *um*, *you know*, *like*, or *well*, which are categorized as filler (Clark & Tree, 2002). This study suggests that students use fillers because academic speaking performance requires quick thinking and effective idea organisation, allowing fillers help them to manage hesitation and maintain fluency.

For years, fillers were seen as indicators of poor preparation or disfluency. However, the study of discourse analysis and pragmatics has demonstrated that fillers play crucial roles in cognition and communication. Numanovich et al. (2020) argue that fillers help speakers pause, show that they want to continue talking, and keep the listener's interest. According to this opinion, fillers are significant language tools rather than simply mistakes. Jo and John (2018) also, explain that fillers are a component of a linguistic pattern that helps speakers manage their cognitive load. This discovery is essential to academic settings, as EFL students must organise concepts in formal settings and under time constraints.

A study by Fatimah (2017) showed that filler words have distinct communicative functions and are commonly used in classroom interactions. Additionally, when lecturers and students require more time to regulate the flow of the conversation or plan their next concept during a speaking assignment, they naturally use filler words. According to Seals and Coppock

(2022) fillers help speakers maintain their turn in conversation and often accompany hesitant moments. Although these results feature the beneficial function of fillers in impromptu speech, excessive use may also cause issues with message clarity or distract the listener. Considering fillers in academic speech requires a balanced viewpoint that acknowledges both their functional advantages and potential drawbacks in light of these different impacts. This knowledge is essential for evaluating how fillers really affect student speaking abilities.

From a pedagogical perspective, fillers can be seen as communication strategies, not just obstacles. Syamsudin et al. (2024) show that using fillers can help boost students' confidence by giving them time to process ideas before speaking. This internal processing is important for learners who are still developing fluency in a foreign language. A study by Awang et al. (2022) confirms that lexicalized and unlexicalized fillers function as communication strategies that help maintain the flow of conversation and prevent speech breakdowns. These findings suggest that fillers may contribute to students' strategic competence, which is an important aspect of communicative performance in EFL learning.

The researcher conducted pre-observations in an EFL classroom, which showed that many students frequently used fillers during academic speaking performance, such as when responding to questions, expressing opinions, or presenting ideas. Fillers are a natural component of students' spoken performance, as seen by their regular appearance across various speaking tasks (Ranti et al., 2023). These preliminary findings emphasise

the necessity of investigating the kinds of fillers generated and their use in academic discourse.

A number of studies have examined how fillers appear in academic or instructional speaking contexts. Efendi and Anggrarini (2024) found that lexicalized fillers were more commonly used than unlexicalized fillers when examining the types and purposes of fillers employed by undergraduate students during academic presentations. Similarly, various types of fillers that students used to manage thinking time, correct speech, initiate ideas, and emphasize points during presentations (Seals & Coppock, 2022). Other studies have explored different speaking contexts. Asyifah (2025) found that fillers were most common in transactional speaking due to its formal demands, while Awang, et al. (2022) stated the strategic role of fillers in maintaining fluency during academic interviews.

In particular, previous studies have not specifically examined how EFL students use filler words during academic speaking performance by interpreting their functions and type of fillers. Most studies have concentrated on presentation situations, mixed-language conversational genres, or professional academic interviews rather than classroom-based academic speaking performance. This gap is important because academic speaking performance requires students to think and speak simultaneously while organizing ideas in real time. By understanding how filler words function in this context, teachers can design more effective speaking activities to support students in organizing ideas, maintaining fluency, and planning their speech during communication.

Based on this gap, this study offers novelty through a focused analysis of the types and functions of filler words used by EFL students during academic speaking performance. This analysis is supported by classroom data and pre-observation findings that indicate the frequent use of filler words when students are engaged in spontaneous academic tasks. Therefore, this study, with the title “An Analysis of Fillers in Academic Speaking Performance Among EFL Students,” aims to identify the types and functions of filler words used in academic speaking performance.

1.2 Identification of the problem

Based on the research background, several problems have been identified. EFL students often experience difficulties in speaking English spontaneously because they need to organize ideas, select vocabulary, and construct sentences simultaneously. As a result, students often use filler words such as *uhh*, *umm*, *so*, and *okay* during academic speaking performance. Furthermore, filler word are generally only considered as a sign of disfluency, where as filler words can also function as a communication strategy to maintain fluency, organize ideas, and maintain interaction during communication. Therefore, it is important to analyze the types and functions of filler words used by EFL students in academic speaking performance.

1.3 Limitation of the problem

This study is limited to analyzing filler words used by EFL students in academic speaking performance during classroom communication. It focuses only on lexicalized and unlexicalized filler words and their functions in spontaneous speaking activities such as discussions, presentations, and question-and-answer sessions.

1.4 Formulation of the problem

Based on the background of the study, the research problems are formulated as follows:

1. What types of fillers are used by EFL students in their academic speaking performance?
2. What are the functions of fillers in EFL students' academic speaking performance?

1.5 Aim(s) of the study

In line with the research questions, the aims of the study are:

1. To identify and categorize the types of filler words used by EFL students during academic speaking performance.
2. To identify the communicative functions of filler words used by EFL students during academic speaking performance.

1.6 Research Benefits

The writing of this research is expected to help improve insight and achieve the following benefits:

- a. Theoretically

1. This study is expected to enrich the theoretical understanding of fillers as part of discourse markers and communication strategies in EFL academic speaking performance.
2. This study is also expected to contribute to future research related to fillers and academic speaking performance in EFL contexts.

b. Practically

1. For Students

This study is expected to help students understand the role of fillers in maintaining speaking fluency, organizing ideas, and sustaining communication during academic speaking performance.

2. For Teachers

This study is expected to provide insights for teachers in designing more effective speaking activities and helping students manage spontaneous communication in the English classroom interaction.

3. For Future Researchers

This study is expected to serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in analyzing fillers, discourse markers, and academic speaking performance in EFL contexts.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

Based on the findings and discussion in the previous chapter, this study shows that fillers play a significant role in EFL students' academic speaking performance. Fillers do not appear randomly or meaninglessly, but are used as part of students' communication strategies when speaking English in direct academic situations. The use of fillers is closely related to students' thinking process, organizing ideas, and maintaining communication during speaking.

1. First, related to the first research problem, this study found two types of fillers used by EFL students: unlexicalized fillers such as *uhh* and *umm*, and lexicalized fillers such as *so*, *okay*, *right*, and *yeah*. The findings revealed that lexicalized fillers were more dominant than unlexicalized fillers. This indicates that students use fillers not only to gain time for thinking during language production difficulties, but also to organize explanations and maintain communication continuity during academic speaking. Therefore, the use of fillers reflects both students' cognitive processes and communicative strategies in spontaneous English production.
2. Second, regarding the second research problem, this study found that fillers serve several important functions in students' academic speaking performance. Based on the data analysis,

only four functions of fillers were identified, namely Exchange Structure, Ideational Structure, Action Structure, and Participation Framework. Among these functions, exchange Structure appeared frequently in students' speaking performance, indicating that students frequently used fillers to maintain the flow of communication, gain additional planning time, search for vocabulary, and organize their ideas before producing utterances. In addition, fillers also function to organize ideas, manage communication actions, and maintain interaction with listeners during academic speaking performance. Overall, this study shows that fillers are not just indicators of problems with speaking, but they are a natural and useful part of using a foreign language. The use of fillers reflects students' cognitive processing, discourse organization, and communication strategies during spontaneous academic speaking performance. Therefore, fillers should be understood as an integral part of EFL students' academic communication rather than merely as indicators of speech disfluency.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the research findings, the researcher acknowledges that this study still has several limitations, particularly the relatively limited number of participants and the research context, which focused solely on the academic speaking performance of EFL students. Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed to support the development of learning and further research.

1. For Students

Students should be encouraged to pay more attention to how fillers are used in academic speaking. Fillers can be useful for keeping the conversation flowing and giving students additional time to think, but using too many of them can make your ideas less clear. So, students should work on their ability to speak freely, learn more words, and build their confidence in using English. This will help them use fillers in a more controlled and thoughtful way.

2. For Lecturers or Instructors

Lecturers are encouraged not to see fillers as mistakes in speaking right away. Instead, they should view them as a normal part of learning to speak a foreign language. Lecturers can help students control their use of filler words by engaging them in speaking activities that involve discussions, presentations, and learning through tasks. Moreover, lecturers should give helpful comments on how students use filler words. This will help students find a good balance between speaking smoothly, being correct, and organizing their ideas well when communicating in an academic speaking performance.

3. For Future Researcher

The researcher recognizes that this study examined speaking in a university with a small group of participants, so the findings cannot be generalized. So, future researchers should examine

how fillers are used in various contexts, such as casual conversations, online interactions, and among people with different levels of language proficiency. Additionally, future studies might consider using a combination of methods or including more participants to get more complete results. Future researchers might also look into fillers by using different methods to gain a deeper understanding of their role in foreign language communication.



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