

## Exploring the Types and Causes of Pauses in Students' English Oral Presentations

Wiranto Idris

*Universitas Negeri Gorontalo*

*wirantoidris@ung.ac.id*

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the types and causes of pauses in students' English presentations at a Senior High School in Gorontalo, Indonesia, with a focus on understanding how pauses affect fluency in public speaking. Drawing on Schroeder and Sonderegger (2014), the study explores the relationship between pause occurrence and speech rate in both spontaneous dialogues and read speech. The study provides insights into how pauses function in natural speech and the factors that influence their frequency and type. Specifically, it categorizes pauses into two primary types: silent pauses and filled pauses. This research analyzes the frequency and nature of pauses during classroom presentations. The study involved ten 12th-grade students, who were observed during their presentations, with data collected through audio recordings, questionnaires, and direct observations. The findings revealed a total of 84 pauses, with 45 silent pauses and 39 filled pauses. Silent pauses were more frequent, often resulting from students struggling to recall words or organizing their thoughts. The study identified several factors contributing to pauses, including nervousness, concerns about grammar, and lack of vocabulary. The results suggest that pauses are not only a natural aspect of speaking but also indicative of underlying psychological and linguistic challenges. This research has implications for language instruction, highlighting the importance of addressing anxiety, improving vocabulary, and reinforcing grammar to help students enhance their fluency and confidence in public speaking.

**Keywords:** Pauses; silent pause; filled pause; factors

---

Received: 07-08-2024	Revised: 14-10-2024	Accepted: 30-10-2024
-------------------------	------------------------	-------------------------

---

### INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is a vital skill, particularly in academic settings, where students are often required to present ideas, research, and findings to peers and instructors. Being able to speak clearly, confidently, and coherently is essential for students to succeed in both educational and professional contexts. However, many students struggle with aspects of public speaking, including fluency and confidence, which can lead to interruptions in speech, such as pauses. Pauses, which may seem

like simple breaks in speech, can carry significant meaning, as they can indicate hesitation, uncertainty, or an attempt to organize one's thoughts. Understanding the types of pauses and the factors influencing them is crucial in helping students develop better speaking skills and increase their fluency.

Pauses in speech are a natural and common feature of communication. They can occur for various reasons, such as taking a breath, gathering thoughts, or filling gaps while searching for the right word or phrase. Schroeder and Sonderegger (2014) offer valuable insight into the types of pauses speakers make during conversations and presentations, categorizing them into two primary types: silent pauses and filled pauses. Silent pauses occur when the speaker takes a complete break in speech to gather their thoughts, breathe, or recall information. Filled pauses, on the other hand, are characterized by verbal fillers like “uh”, “um”, and “you know”, which speakers use when they need more time to find the right word or structure their thoughts.

Schroeder and Sonderegger's research highlights the relationship between speech rate and the occurrence of pauses, explaining that faster speech rates generally result in fewer pauses, while slower rates often coincide with more frequent pauses. The study suggests that cognitive load plays a significant role in the increase of pauses, especially in public speaking situations where the speaker might feel nervous or unsure. Pauses can therefore be seen as both a natural part of speech and a reflection of a speaker's cognitive processing during speech production. This framework is particularly relevant for analyzing students' speaking behavior during presentations, as pauses can indicate the difficulties they face in terms of fluency, vocabulary retrieval, and the anxiety they may experience in front of an audience.

Research on pauses in speech has shown that both linguistic and psychological factors can influence the frequency and type of pauses speakers make. From a linguistic perspective, pauses often occur when speakers encounter difficulties with grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structure. For instance, students may hesitate when they are unsure about the correct use of a word or when they are trying to formulate a grammatically accurate sentence. Psychologically, factors such as anxiety, nervousness, and self-consciousness can also contribute to pauses in speech. Students, especially in a second language context, may feel nervous when presenting in front of an audience, which can disrupt their speech flow and increase the occurrence of pauses. Understanding the balance between linguistic challenges and psychological factors is key to helping students overcome these obstacles and speak more fluently.

Recent studies have further expanded on the role of grammatical junctures and how pauses occur at syntactic boundaries. For example, Hirschberg and Ward (2017) and Reitter, Demberg, & Keller (2011) have demonstrated that pauses tend to occur at natural linguistic junctures—such as between phrases, clauses, or after significant shifts in the information being presented. These pauses allow the speaker time to process information and plan their next utterance. The studies also show that such pauses are not simply for linguistic organization but also serve to manage cognitive load, particularly when the speaker is under pressure to organize complex thoughts or navigate through unfamiliar vocabulary.

Hirschberg and Ward (2017) argue that the boundary of constituents (e.g., noun phrases, verb phrases) is one of the most frequent locations for pauses in spontaneous speech. When speakers encounter complex sentence structures or new ideas, pauses occur more frequently at these junctures as they prepare to continue speaking. This aligns with Reitter, Demberg, and Keller's (2011) findings, which suggest that pauses are also strategic tools used to manage the flow of speech and the cognitive load associated with speech production.

In the context of public speaking, this theoretical framework helps explain why pauses may be more frequent in presentations, especially for students who are navigating multiple cognitive challenges—such as speaking in a second language, retrieving vocabulary, and structuring grammatically correct sentences. This research builds upon the understanding that pauses are not random interruptions but are structured and influenced by both linguistic and cognitive factors.

Despite the significance of pauses in public speaking, limited research has been conducted on the specific challenges faced by non-native speakers and young learners, particularly in the context of classroom presentations. Most existing studies have focused on adult speakers or native speakers, leaving a gap in our understanding of how pauses impact second language learners, especially high school students. This research aims to fill this gap by investigating the types of pauses students make during English presentations at a Senior High School in Gorontalo. The study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) What are the types of pauses produced by students during presentations in the speaking class; (2) What are the underlying factors contributing to the occurrence of pauses during students' presentations in the speaking class? These questions aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the students' speech patterns and the cognitive or psychological factors influencing their pauses in public speaking.

By examining the frequency and causes of these pauses, the study aims to provide insight into the factors that affect students' speaking abilities and suggest ways in which these issues can be addressed in language teaching practices. Understanding the role of pauses is crucial not only for improving students' speaking fluency but also for their overall language development. Pauses can signal moments of hesitation that reflect a lack of confidence or gaps in knowledge. By identifying the underlying causes of pauses, teachers can tailor interventions that address specific challenges, such as providing more vocabulary support, creating opportunities for speaking practice, and helping students manage anxiety during presentations. As public speaking is an integral part of language learning, particularly for students learning English as a second language, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how pauses function and how educators can better support students in overcoming these challenges.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive and exploratory research design to examine the types of pauses made by students during English presentations at a Senior High School in Gorontalo. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), descriptive research is used to describe and interpret the current status of a phenomenon by gathering detailed information about the situation or behavior being studied. The method for analyzing pauses in this study is informed by the approach outlined by Schroeder and Sonderegger (2014), who categorize pauses into silent and filled types as a way to analyze cognitive processes in speech. According to their framework, silent pauses typically indicate moments when the speaker is processing information or searching for words, reflecting cognitive load or hesitation. Filled pauses, on the other hand, are used to maintain speech flow and avoid awkward silences, often occurring when the speaker is unsure or needs time to formulate their next thought. This expert-driven approach provides a foundation for analyzing the students' pauses in the current study, allowing the researcher to interpret the underlying causes of hesitation, such as language processing difficulties or psychological factors like nervousness. It allows researchers to

gain a deep understanding of the characteristics of the subject or phenomenon, such as the types and frequency of pauses in students' speech during presentations.

The research aims to identify and categorize the different pauses, such as silent or filled pauses, and explore the factors contributing to these pauses. Data were collected through multiple methods: direct classroom observations, voice recordings of the presentations, and questionnaires completed by the students. The recordings help analyze the frequency and type of pauses, while the questionnaires provide insights into students' perceptions of the causes of these pauses. The data were then systematically categorized and analyzed to uncover patterns and potential factors influencing the students' speaking behavior.

### **FINDINGS**

The results of the study, involving 10 participants, indicate a total of 84 pauses during their presentations, with 45 silent pauses and 39 filled pauses. Silent pauses occurred more frequently than filled pauses, suggesting that students often experienced moments of uncertainty or hesitation while speaking. The primary cause of silent pauses was students forgetting their next words or struggling to find appropriate words to link sentences. These findings are supported by voice recordings of the presentations, which show the students pausing briefly while searching for words or organizing their thoughts. As noted by Darjowidjojo (2012), speakers often pause as they search for the right word or attempt to organize their thoughts before continuing.

TABLE 1. Total of type of pause

<b>Types of Pauses</b>		
<b>Silent Pause</b>		<b>Filled Pause</b>
45	84	39

Further analysis of the pauses, based on both voice recordings and direct classroom observation, revealed that silent pauses occurred most often when students were considering what to say next, particularly when they encountered difficulties in recalling specific vocabulary.

#### **The reason students make pause during presentation**

The study also explored the underlying factors contributing to pauses made by students during their presentations. The findings, supported by both student interviews and self-reported questionnaires, indicate that three primary factors contribute to the pauses: nervousness, grammar concerns, and vocabulary limitations. Many students reported pausing due to one or more of these difficulties. Nervousness, particularly when speaking in front of peers, was a common cause of hesitation.

#### *Nervous*

The first factor contributing to pauses was nervousness. Several students cited anxiety as a major reason for their pauses during presentations. One participant shared, "*I'm very nervous, and when I'm nervous, I often forget everything that I am going to say.*" This nervousness stemmed from the pressure of speaking in front of classmates. Another student noted, "Standing in front of people,

and being nervous" made it difficult to continue speaking fluently. Many students feared making mistakes and were concerned that their peers would laugh at them. These feelings of anxiety often hindered their ability to think clearly and articulate their ideas. Video recordings of the presentations confirmed that many students paused frequently, especially during moments of visible anxiety, making it clear that nervousness disrupted their ability to recall and organize their thoughts.

### ***Grammar concerns***

The second significant cause of pauses was grammar. Many students mentioned they struggled with grammatical accuracy during their presentations. One participant explained, "*Nervousness, of course, and sometimes I get confused with the grammar*". Even students with relatively high English proficiency experienced hesitation due to complex grammatical rules. Grammar challenges are not unique to non-native speakers; even advanced learners often find it difficult to recall and apply grammatical rules under pressure. The hesitation linked to grammar suggests that students' cognitive load increases when focusing on sentence structure rather than fluently delivering content. These findings are corroborated by both the participants' responses in interviews and analysis of the voice recordings, where pauses occurred often when students were forming complex sentences.

### ***Vocabulary Limitation***

The third factor contributing to pauses was vocabulary limitations. Many students admitted to experiencing difficulty recalling specific words or expressions during their presentations. One student mentioned, "*I always forget the sentence and vocabulary*". This challenge was especially noticeable when students struggled to recall specific vocabulary items or had difficulty finding the right words to convey their ideas. Vocabulary retrieval issues often led to cognitive blocks, causing students to pause. Additionally, the pressure to speak perfectly in front of peers exacerbated the issue, as students felt anxious about making mistakes and were unable to continue speaking when they encountered vocabulary gaps. These insights were supported by the data collected from both interviews and the questionnaires, where students consistently reported challenges related to vocabulary retrieval during presentations.

## **DISCUSSION**

A pause is often characterized as a moment of hesitation or uncertainty in speech, typically marked by sounds such as "eh", "um", "em", or "aaa". These sounds signal a speaker's lack of clarity or an inability to continue speaking smoothly, reflecting cognitive processes such as confusion, hesitation, or even anxiety. Based on the data collected, the study identifies two main types of pauses: silent pauses and filled pauses. The majority of the participants produced more silent pauses than filled pauses, with 45 silent pauses and 39 filled pauses recorded. Silent pauses were typically associated with moments when the speaker experienced a lapse in memory, often due to nervousness or uncertainty about how to proceed with their presentation. In contrast, filled pauses, such as "um", "aaa", "em", "apa", "eep", and "sss", were used as verbal fillers during moments of

hesitation or when searching for the next word or idea. As noted by Dardjowidjojo (2012), speakers frequently pause when searching for the right word, resulting in a brief moment of silence. Silent pauses were also observed when participants were attempting to remember specific information related to their presentations.

The data also reveals several underlying factors that contribute to these pauses during presentations. The primary causes identified by the participants were nervousness, concerns about grammar, and vocabulary limitations. Students reported feeling anxious when speaking in front of their peers, which led to nervous pauses. One of the most common reasons for pauses was the pressure to speak fluently and correctly, particularly regarding grammatical accuracy. Many students also cited a lack of sufficient vocabulary as a key factor contributing to pauses. The anxiety associated with speaking in front of others, combined with uncertainties regarding grammar and vocabulary, inhibited their ability to speak confidently and fluently. As such, pauses often occurred when students could not recall or articulate the appropriate words or structures to convey their thoughts.

These findings align with recent studies on English speaking anxiety, which highlight the critical role of nervousness in disrupting students' fluency during oral presentations (Fatahillah, 2022). Similarly, Mentari et al. (2022) emphasize that second language learners often struggle with vocabulary retrieval and grammatical accuracy, which can further contribute to feelings of anxiety and a greater frequency of pauses. This study reinforces the idea that both cognitive challenges, such as difficulty with vocabulary and grammar, and emotional factors, such as nervousness, play a significant role in the pauses students make during presentations. Additionally, the findings suggest that addressing these factors, through targeted language support and anxiety-reducing strategies, could significantly improve students' speaking fluency and confidence in public speaking contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the types and causes of pauses made by students during English presentations at a Senior High School in Gorontalo. The results showed that students made a total of 84 pauses, with silent pauses (45) occurring more frequently than filled pauses (39). Silent pauses were mainly due to students struggling to recall words or organize their thoughts, while filled pauses, such as "um" or "ah", were used to buy time when searching for the right word. The main factors contributing to these pauses were nervousness, grammar concerns, and vocabulary limitations, with nervousness being the most significant. These findings highlight the role of both cognitive and psychological factors in public speaking, suggesting that pauses reflect moments of uncertainty and anxiety. To help students improve fluency, educators should address these challenges by providing vocabulary support, reducing anxiety, and offering more speaking practice opportunities.

While the study provides valuable insights into the nature of pauses in student presentations, several limitations should be considered. First, the sample size of 10 students may not be sufficiently representative of the broader student population at Senior Highschool in Gorontalo, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study relies on a single method of data collection-observational analysis of recorded presentations-which may not fully capture all of the factors influencing students' speech. Future research could expand the sample size and incorporate additional methods, such as interviews with teachers or peer feedback, to obtain a more

comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to pauses in speech. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how pauses evolve over time as students gain more experience and practice in public speaking. In conclusion, the findings of this study offer valuable insights into the causes and types of pauses that students make during oral presentations. By understanding these factors, educators can develop more targeted interventions to support students in overcoming challenges related to speaking anxiety, grammar, and vocabulary. Ultimately, these interventions could enhance students' speaking fluency, boost their confidence, and improve their overall communicative competence.

## **REFERENCES**

- Babbie, E. (2021). *The practice of social research* (15th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Cuthill, Michael. "Exploratory Research: Citizen Participation, Local Government, and Sustainable Development in Australia." *Sustainable Development 10 (2002): 79-89*
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dardjowidjojo, S. (2012). *Psycholinguistik: Pengantar pemahaman bahasa manusia*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.
- Djajasudarma, T. F. (2010). *Metode Linguistik: Ancangan Metode Penelitian dan Kajian*. Bandung: PT Refika Aditama.
- Fatahillah, M. E., & Agustina, S. (2022). "Speak Up Please!" Teachers' strategies in teaching speaking skills at a vocational high school in Sidoarjo. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 5(1), 137-148. <https://doi.org/10.37905/jetl.v5i1.24650>
- Hirschberg, J., & Ward, G. (2017). *The pragmatics of speech timing and prosody*. In R. J. P. Shuy, K. K. Kormos, & R. W. White (Eds.), *The Handbook of Linguistic Approaches to the Study of Prosody* (pp. 313-341). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Mentari, M., Abid, A., & Bay, I. W. (2022). Unveiling the sources of English speaking anxiety of a vocational school student: A narrative study. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 5(2), 211-224. <https://doi.org/10.37905/jetl.v5i2.30245>
- Reitter, D., Demberg, V., & Keller, F. (2011). *Processing the structure of discourse: A cognitive model of prosody and its implications for dialogue*. In J. C. van der Goot & J. R. F. S. M. A. P. B. M. (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2011 Workshop on Discourse in Dialogue* (pp. 95-105). Association for Computational Linguistics.
- Schroeder, S., & Sonderegger, M. (2014). "Pause and Speech Rate in Dialogues and Read Speech". *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 136(5), 2671-2684.