

Hesitation and Repair Strategies in EFL Students' Academic Presentations: A Case Study

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Abstract

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Oral presentations in EFL classrooms require students to communicate ideas fluently while managing the cognitive demands of real-time speech production. However, many learners experience hesitation and frequently repair their utterances, particularly during academic presentations in intercultural communication contexts. This study investigates the use of hesitation and repair strategies in EFL students' academic presentations in an Intercultural Communication course. Using a qualitative case study design, the study focused on two university students selected purposively due to their frequent use of hesitation during presentations. Data were collected through classroom observations and audio recordings and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings showed that students commonly used three hesitation types: filled pauses, repetitions, and silent pauses. Regarding repair strategies, self-repair was the most frequently employed, while pair-repair occurred less often. Based on Levelt's speech production model, filled pauses and silent pauses reflected difficulties in idea generation and speech planning, whereas repetitions indicated problems in lexical retrieval and grammatical formulation. Self-repair demonstrated active speech monitoring, while pair-repair highlighted the supportive role of interaction. The study concludes that hesitation and repair strategies function as important cognitive and communicative mechanisms that help EFL learners manage real-time speech production during academic presentations. These findings provide practical insights for EFL teachers in designing presentation-based learning activities that support

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students' speaking fluency, self-monitoring, and strategic communication skills, while also helping students develop greater awareness of hesitation and repair as natural aspects of spoken language production.

Abstrak

Presentasi lisan di kelas EFL menuntut mahasiswa untuk menyampaikan gagasan secara lancar sekaligus mengelola tuntutan kognitif dalam memproduksi ujaran secara spontan. Namun, banyak pembelajar mengalami keraguan (hesitation) dan sering melakukan perbaikan ujaran (repair), khususnya selama presentasi akademik dalam konteks komunikasi antarbudaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi penggunaan strategi hesitation dan repair pada presentasi akademik mahasiswa EFL dalam mata kuliah Intercultural Communication. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan melibatkan dua mahasiswa yang dipilih secara purposive karena sering menunjukkan fenomena hesitation selama presentasi. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas dan rekaman audio, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa umumnya menggunakan tiga jenis hesitation, yaitu filled pauses, repetitions, dan silent pauses. Dalam strategi repair, self-repair merupakan strategi yang paling sering digunakan, sedangkan pair-repair muncul dengan frekuensi yang lebih rendah. Berdasarkan model produksi ujaran Levelt, filled pauses dan silent pauses mencerminkan kesulitan dalam menghasilkan gagasan serta merencanakan ujaran, sedangkan repetitions menunjukkan adanya kendala dalam pemilihan leksikal dan perumusan gramatikal. Self-repair menunjukkan adanya proses pemantauan ujaran secara aktif, sementara pair-repair menegaskan peran interaksi yang mendukung kelancaran komunikasi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa strategi hesitation dan repair berfungsi sebagai mekanisme kognitif dan komunikatif yang penting dalam membantu pembelajar EFL mengelola produksi ujaran secara langsung selama presentasi akademik. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi praktis bagi pengajar EFL dalam merancang kegiatan pembelajaran berbasis presentasi yang dapat mendukung kelancaran berbicara, kemampuan memantau ujaran sendiri, dan

keterampilan komunikasi strategis mahasiswa, sekaligus membantu mahasiswa memahami bahwa hesitation dan repair merupakan bagian yang wajar dari proses produksi bahasa lisan.

INTRODUCTION

In English as a foreign language (EFL) Contexts, speaking is often the most challenging skill for students to master (Franscy & Ramli, 2022; Lestari & Nugraha, 2023; Mokhtari, 2023) Unlike other language skills, speaking requires real-time production, in which learners must rapidly generate ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, and produce grammatically accurate utterances at the same time. As a result, many EFL students experience difficulties in maintaining fluency and coherence when communicating in English (Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2022; Yonata & Saptani, 2019). These challenges may become more evident in academic presentations, where students are required to present ideas in a structured and formal manner. Academic presentations are often considered to require not only language competence but also the ability to deliver materials with logic, engage the audience, and deliver clear information. For EFL students, this task can be particularly demanding, as they need to perform these complex processes as non-native speakers, often under pressure.

Academic presentations in an Intercultural Communication course provide a particularly relevant context for examining speech production. In this course, students are expected not only to demonstrate English proficiency but also to explain cultural concepts, compare different cultural perspectives, and respond appropriately to intercultural issues. These tasks require learners to organize complex ideas, select culturally appropriate expressions, and communicate accurately in real time. As a result, the cognitive demands of both language production and intercultural meaning-making may increase the occurrence of hesitation and repair during presentations. Therefore, the Intercultural Communication course offers an appropriate setting to investigate how EFL students manage speech production while presenting academically in English.

During Academic Presentations, EFL students frequently use hesitation and repair strategies as part of their presentation performance (Laila et al., 2023;

Ramadhani et al., 2025). Hesitation is a psycholinguistic phenomenon that language learners use in relation to language processing (Ajani, 2021). Hesitation is commonly reflected through pauses, fillers, and repetitions, which often occur when students encounter difficulties in lexical retrieval or sentence formulation. Meanwhile, repair strategies, such as self-correction and reformulation, are used by students to resolve communication problems and ensure that their intended meaning is conveyed accurately. The phenomenon of hesitation can be explained through the speech production model proposed by Levelt (1989), which suggests that speech production involves stages of conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. Disruptions in these stages may result in hesitation, while the monitoring system allows speakers to detect and repair errors during speech.

Several previous studies have examined the use of hesitation and repair strategies in EFL contexts. A study on student informal interactions found that learners frequently employed self-repair strategies such as rephrasing, hesitation, and repetition to manage communication difficulties and maintain the flow of conversation. Among these, self-initiated repair emerged as the most dominant strategy, indicating learners' active monitoring of their speech production during interaction (Beshir & Yigzaw, 2022; Ramadhani et al., 2025; Susilowati & Kusumaningtyas, 2025).

Previous studies have primarily focused on identifying and classifying hesitation and repair phenomena or measuring their frequency in various EFL speaking contexts, such as classroom interaction, informal conversation, and interviews. However, relatively limited attention has been given to examining hesitation and repair strategies in academic presentation settings, where students are required to produce organized, formal, and spontaneous speech simultaneously. Furthermore, few studies have interpreted these phenomena through Levelt's speech production model to explain the cognitive processes underlying hesitation and self-monitoring during real-time speech production. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the forms of hesitation and repair strategies employed by EFL students during academic presentations in an Intercultural Communication course and interpreting the findings using Levelt's speech production Framework.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the use of hesitation and repair strategies in EFL students' academic presentations. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and underlying reasons related to their speech production processes. The study adopted a case study approach, focusing on a small number of participants within a specific academic context to obtain rich and detailed data.

The participants of this study were selected from Class A of an Intercultural Communication course at one university in Pekalongan, Indonesia. The class consisted of 25 EFL students who were required to deliver individual academic presentations in English as part of the course requirements. Prior to participant selection, the researcher conducted a preliminary observation of presentations delivered by all students in the class. Classroom observations and audio recordings were used to identify hesitation markers, including filled pauses, repetitions, and silent pauses. Based on the frequency of these hesitation markers, two students who exhibited the highest number of hesitation occurrences were purposively selected as the participants of this study. This purposive sampling approach enabled the researcher to select information-rich cases that provided detailed insights into the use of hesitation and repair strategies during academic presentations. This selection aimed to ensure that the participants could provide relevant and meaningful insights into the phenomenon being investigated. All participants were fully briefed on the objectives of the study and agreed to participate on a voluntary basis. To maintain confidentiality, their identities were anonymized in accordance with ethical standards, ensuring that no personally identifiable information could be traced back to them in any real-world context (Fox et al., 2015).

The data were collected through audio recordings of the participants' academic presentations. Audio recording was employed to capture the participants' spoken language accurately and comprehensively, enabling repeated listening and detailed transcription for the identification and analysis of hesitation and repair strategies. This method ensured that naturally occurring speech was documented

without interrupting the presentation process. To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied a verification process to identify consistent patterns that emerged during the thematic analysis process (Noble & Heale, 2019).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed several steps. First, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings and read the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the data. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying relevant segments related to hesitation, repair strategies, and their underlying reasons. Next, the codes were grouped into broader categories or themes, such as types of hesitation, forms of repair, and contributing factors. After that, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and relevance to the research objectives. Finally, the findings were interpreted by linking the themes to existing theories of speech production.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that EFL students frequently employed various types of hesitation and repair strategies during their academic presentations. These hesitation phenomena include filled pauses, repetitions, and silent pauses, while the dominant repair strategy observed was self-repair, with occasional occurrences of pair-repair. These findings can be explained through the speech production model proposed by Levelt (1989), which consists of three main stages: conceptualization, formulation, and articulation, along with a monitoring system.

Table 1: Presentation Student A

Student A Presentation	Kind Hesitation	Kind Of Repair
Basically, global community in community engagement	Repetition (community in community)	Self-repair
Is aaaaa how we interact	Filled pause (aaaa as a pause to thinking)	Self-repair
It's not just aaaa, different countries	Filled pause (aaaa as a pause for thinking)	Self-repair
But it's also aaaa different culture	Filled pause (aaaa as a pause to thinking)	Self-repair
The goal to main understanding... and cooperation...	Silent pause (..... as a silent moment to think about what the next words)	Self-repair
Because the world the world is connected with peoples	Repetition (the world, the world)	Self-repair
Many jobs require us to...to	Repetition (t0..to)	Self-repair

Culture culturers background	Repetition (culture culturers) to correct the grammar	Self-repair
And so... if we are no	Silent pause (..... as a silent moment to think about what the next words)	Self-repair
Open-minded and mmmm Audience says respect? yeah and respect	Filled pause (aaaa as a pause to thinking)	Pair-repair
How to develop it aaaa we can start	Filled pause (aaaa as a pause to thinking)	Self-repair
We can watching movies watch movies	Repetition (watching movies watch movies) grammar correcting	Self-repair

Table 2: Presentation Student B

Student B Presentation	Kind Hesitation	Kind Of Repair
This eeee the point eee how to do	Filled pause (eee as a pause to thinking)	Self-repair
Sometimes eee ww judge people eee to quickly	Filled pause (eee as a pause to thinking)	Self-repair
It will be difficult eee to build relationship	Filled pause (eeee as a pause to thinking)	Self-repair
And then eee what we need to do	Filled pause (eeee as a pause to thinking)	Self-repair
It become aware become aware	Repetition	Self-repair
All of attitude.... And some improving it	Silent pause (..... as a silent moment to think about what the next words)	Self-repair
Many people many people would be angry	Repetition	Self-repair
Not just not just intension	Repetition	Self-repair
Especially eeee after conflict we need for reconciliation	Filled pause (eeee as a pause to thinking)	Self-repair
It is not easy mmmm espicialy when we are	Filled pause (mmm as a pause to thinking)	Self-repair
We need to look eeee our self	Filled pause (eeee as a pause to thinking)	Self-repair
Number three we need...admit mistake	Silent pause (..... as a silent moment to think about what the next words)	Self-repair

Filled Pauses as Indicators of Conceptualization Difficulty

From the results of this investigation, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of filled pauses, including “aaaa,” “eee,” and “mmmm,” was observed quite often in the students’ utterances when delivering their academic speeches. In other words, these phenomena of hesitation occurred regularly in the cases of Student A and Student B, especially when the students tried to express their

ideas or comment on what had already been said. The examples of these phenomena are presented below, *"Is aaaa how we interact," "Sometimes eee we judge people," and "Open-minded and mmmm."* It can be said that students used filled pauses in order to overcome uncertainty and hesitation when delivering their speeches (Gósy, 2023). Instead of pausing at a certain point, they preferred making such sounds in order to continue their speech smoothly because the students were trying to think about what to say next while speaking (Karina et al., 2023).

From the perspective of Levelt (1989), the occurrence of filled pauses can be closely associated with the conceptualization stage of speech production. At this stage, speakers are required to generate ideas, determine communicative intentions, and structure messages before they are transformed into linguistic forms. The frequent use of filled pauses in this study indicates that students experienced difficulty in this initial stage, particularly in deciding what information to convey next and how to organize it logically within the context of an academic presentation. This difficulty may stem from several factors, including limited topic familiarity, lack of confidence, or insufficient practice in spontaneous speaking. As a result, filled pauses emerge as a natural consequence of cognitive processing, reflecting the speaker's attempt to bridge the gap between thought and speech (Gósy, 2023).

Repetition as a Strategy for Formulation Problems

One of the features that stood out was the frequent use of repetitions in the students' academic speeches. Examples of such repetition are evident in phrases like *"the world, the world," "many people many people," "not just not just," and "watching movies watch movies."* In most instances, the repetition is employed by the speaker as an attempt to continue speaking and at the same time correct themselves. Repeats are the immediate repetition of one or more words in a sequence (Boonsuk et al., 2019). The repetitions, therefore, were not always randomly done, but they served a certain purpose. This implies that repetition acts as a compensatory strategy, which allows the speaker to continue speaking without a long pause despite the difficulties they face with language (Beshir & Yigzaw, 2022).

Repetition is closely related to the formulation stage of speech production, where conceptualized ideas are encoded into linguistic forms, including lexical selection and syntactic structuring Levelt, (1989). The occurrence of repetition suggests that students experienced difficulty in selecting appropriate vocabulary or constructing grammatically accurate sentences in real time (Susilowati & Kusumaningtyas, 2025). As a result, they repeated certain words or phrases while reprocessing their utterances before moving forward. This reflects the non-linear nature of speech production, in which speakers may need to revise or reconstruct parts of their speech during articulation. Therefore, repetition should not be viewed merely as a sign of disfluency, but rather as evidence of active cognitive processing and ongoing formulation efforts in EFL learners' speech production.

Silent Pauses and Speech Planning

Silent pauses were also identified as a significant form of hesitation in the students' academic presentations. These pauses, indicated by moments of silence ("..."), appeared in utterances such as "*The goal to main understanding... and cooperation...*" and "*And so... if we are no.*" Unlike filled pauses, silent pauses involve a complete stop in speech, which suggests a deeper level of cognitive processing. When students are thinking about what they want to say, they often suddenly stop (Karina et al., 2023). In these moments, students temporarily stopped speaking to think about what to say next, often when they were transitioning between ideas or attempting to construct more complex statements. Silent pauses are breaks that typically occur before an utterance and help the speaker organize their thoughts before speaking (Kharismawan, 2017). The presence of silent pauses indicates that students were not simply struggling with pronunciation or vocabulary, but were engaged in higher-level planning of their speech, particularly in organizing ideas and ensuring coherence within their presentations.

Silent pauses can occur during both the conceptualization and formulation stages of speech production. During conceptualization, speakers pause to generate and organize ideas, while during formulation, pauses may arise when they encounter difficulties in encoding those ideas into appropriate linguistic forms. The

findings of this study suggest that students frequently experienced challenges in managing these two processes simultaneously, especially under the pressure of delivering academic content in a second language. Pauses in spontaneous speech production are highly variable; they reflect individual differences, respond to social and task demands, and tend to decrease as speakers gain experience or as the speech becomes less spontaneous (Karina et al., 2023). As a result, silent pauses function as a cognitive strategy that allows speakers to momentarily suspend speech in order to allocate more processing time (Levelt, 1989). Therefore, similar to other hesitation phenomena, silent pauses should not be interpreted merely as a lack of fluency, but rather as an indication of the complexity of real-time speech planning and the cognitive demands faced by EFL learners during academic presentations.

Self-Repair and Pair-Repair in Speech Monitoring

The results of the current research indicate that self-repairs were the most prominent repairing strategies employed by the participants during their academic speeches. A repair mechanism is an important component for maintaining clear and meaningful communication (Noor et al., 2025). As evident in such phrases as *“culture culturers background,” “we can watching movies watch movies,”* and *“real life examples... for a real-life example,”* the speakers have instantly recognized their mistakes and tried to fix them in the course of their speeches. In other words, such attempts at fixing possible mistakes were performed right after moments of hesitation, which proves that the participants have been conscious of the inaccuracies in their language use and have tried to eliminate them on the spot. In this respect, self-repairs were vital in terms of achieving clear communication between the speaker and the listener (Ramadhani et al., 2025). The students did not simply abandon their statements but rather tried to make them better.

According to Levelt (1989), self-repair is associated with the monitoring process, which aims at evaluating and controlling the output speech. self-repair is crucial to uphold the conversation mutually (Noor et al., 2025). This process helps the speaker to be aware of errors either before or after the output and correct them accordingly. Given the number of times when the phenomenon of self-repair

appeared in the experiment carried out, it can be argued that the students were actively involved in the monitoring of their own speech during the process of communication. Thus, one can claim that the subjects possess some level of metalinguistic awareness since they have the ability to notice and try to fix any kind of errors they might have made.

In addition to self-repair, pair-repair was also observed, although less frequently. An example can be seen in the interaction “*Audience says ‘respect?’ yeah and respect,*” where the speaker received assistance from the audience to complete or correct the intended expression. This type of repair indicates that communication in academic presentations is not entirely an individual process, but can also involve collaborative interaction. While Levelt, (1989) primarily emphasizes internal monitoring mechanisms, the occurrence of pair-repair suggests that external support can also play a role in resolving communication difficulties. This finding highlights the importance of the social dimension of communication, where meaning can be co-constructed through interaction. Therefore, both self-repair and pair-repair demonstrate how EFL learners manage communication breakdowns, either independently through internal monitoring or collaboratively with others, to maintain the effectiveness of their speech.

Discussion

From the analysis of the results of this research, it is evident that hesitation phenomena are crucial for the oral communication of EFL learners when making a presentation in their academic field. It becomes clear from the high frequency of filled pauses, repetitions, and silent pauses used by students that they face considerable challenges when constructing language. As Levelt (1989) states, speech production consists of two main processes, conceptualization and formulation. Any disruptions in either process result in hesitation phenomena, thus implying that students have challenges not only with linguistic accuracy but also with idea delivery in the second language. These results confirm the claims made (Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2022; Yonata & Saptani, 2019).

Filled pauses and silent pauses were widely used by the students as strategies to manage cognitive processing. A filled pause clearly indicates that a segment in the flow of speech, regardless of how it is physically produced, is a pause that is occupied or marked by a vocal sound (Belz, 2023). Filled pauses allowed students to maintain the flow of speech while thinking about what to say next, whereas silent pauses indicated deeper planning, especially when constructing more complex ideas. This finding supports previous research (Beshir & Yigzaw, 2022; Susilowati & Kusumaningtyas, 2025), which argues that hesitation functions as a strategy to gain time rather than simply reflecting disfluency. In this sense, hesitation becomes a natural and functional part of speech production, particularly in academic contexts where students are required to present structured and meaningful content.

Hesitation strategies such as repetition were also employed, especially for the learners struggling with lexical access and grammatical formulation. In this case, repetition is associated with formulation as proposed by Levelt (1989). This enables learners to maintain fluency as they attempt to modify their utterance. Indeed, the use of repetition among language learners has been noted in other studies (Laila et al., 2023; Ramadhani et al., 2025). Repetition helps EFL learners cope with communication barriers while maintaining the flow of speech.

The dominance of self-repair indicates that the learners are self-aware regarding the quality of their speech production and therefore monitor their speech to avoid errors. This observation supports the notion of the monitoring system in the model proposed by Levelt (1989). The dominance of self-repair as an EFL learner's hesitation and repair strategy was also revealed in the study conducted by Beshir and Yigzaw, (2022). Pair-repair, which is less common compared to self-repair, also shows that communication can be interactive in nature, involving others.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that hesitation and repair strategies are integral components of EFL students' speech production during academic presentations. Rather than reflecting a lack of speaking ability, these phenomena represent cognitive and communicative processes that enable learners to manage the demands of real-time language production. Interpreted through Levelt's speech production model, the findings highlight that hesitation and repair emerge as students plan, formulate, monitor, and modify their utterances while presenting in English. This study contributes to the growing body of research on EFL speaking by extending the analysis of hesitation and repair to academic presentations in an Intercultural Communication course, a context that has received limited attention in previous studies. The findings also provide practical implications for EFL educators by emphasizing the importance of creating presentation-based learning environments that foster students' speaking fluency, self-monitoring, and strategic communication skills. Future research is encouraged to involve a larger number of participants and multiple educational settings to obtain a broader understanding of hesitation and repair strategies in diverse EFL contexts.

The findings suggest that hesitation and repair strategies should be understood as natural and productive aspects of EFL speaking rather than merely as indicators of weakness. The frequent use of self-repair demonstrates students' active monitoring of their language production, while pair-repair reflects the supportive role of interaction in maintaining communication. These findings provide practical implications for EFL teaching by encouraging lecturers to design presentation-based activities that allow students to practice speaking spontaneously, develop self-monitoring skills, and receive supportive feedback during communication. Such learning environments may help students improve their speaking fluency, confidence, and strategic communication abilities in academic contexts.

However, this study has some limitations. The sample size of this research is relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of EFL learners. In addition, the study focuses on a specific context of

academic presentations, which may not fully represent other types of speaking situations. For future research, it is recommended to involve a larger and more diverse sample to obtain more comprehensive and generalizable results. Future studies may also explore hesitation and repair strategies across different speaking contexts, proficiency levels, or instructional settings. Moreover, investigating the relationship between hesitation phenomena and speaking performance or fluency development could provide deeper insights into how these strategies contribute to language learning.

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