

The Impact of Lack of Fluency in English-Speaking of 3rd year Students at English Department Savannakhet University

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the causes and analyze the impact of a lack of English-speaking fluency among third-year students in the Department of English at Savannakhet University. A mixed-methods approach was employed, with data collected from 31 students through questionnaires and interviews. The quantitative findings revealed that the lack of fluency was strongly associated with several factors: anxiety ($\bar{x} = 3.51$, $SD = 1.14$), lack of self-confidence ($\bar{x} = 3.55$, $SD = 1.20$), insufficient vocabulary ($\bar{x} = 3.71$, $SD = 1.16$), and lack of background knowledge ($\bar{x} = 3.61$, $SD = 1.32$). Students reported difficulties in expressing complex ideas, retrieving appropriate words, and participating in English-speaking activities due to fear of making mistakes and limited opportunities for practice. The impact of these challenges was significant. Over 51% of participants stated that they could not fully understand lessons, while others experienced low academic performance, missed opportunities, and fear of speaking in public or in front of native speakers. Situational anxiety was particularly high when responding to unprepared questions or during classroom presentations. Interview data further emphasized that low fluency limited students' confidence in both academic and career-related communication, with 45.16% of respondents acknowledging that their inability to speak English would negatively affect their job prospects. Despite these difficulties, many students expressed strong motivation to improve, particularly through vocabulary development and more consistent speaking practice. The study concludes that improving English-speaking fluency requires addressing both linguistic and psychological barriers. Creating supportive learning environments, building students' confidence, and providing structured opportunities to practice speaking English can help learners develop the fluency necessary for academic success and global employability.

Keywords: *Impact, English-speaking fluency, Lack of fluency, Third-year students*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and problem statements

English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, ranking second after Chinese in terms of the total number of speakers. It belongs to the West Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family and originated from Anglo-Frisian dialects. English was introduced to Britain between the mid-fifth and seventh centuries Anno Domini by Germanic settlers, namely the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Today, English is used as an official language in countries such as India, the Philippines, Singapore, and several nations in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa. The English language has become a global medium for international communication, science, technology, and computing. It is spoken by more than 400 million educated individuals worldwide and is used as a second language by millions more. Consequently, English-speaking skills play a crucial role in professional contexts, particularly in workplaces that require international communication.

English has become increasingly important to master, especially among students. Students are expected to acquire English proficiency in order to compete globally Maghfiroh (2021). Spoken English plays a significant role in students' lives beyond the classroom. It is not merely about producing words but about communicating ideas clearly and effectively. Students who are fluent in spoken English tend to develop greater confidence, enabling them to actively participate in discussions, express their ideas clearly, and engage meaningfully with both peers and teachers. This increased confidence enhances the overall learning experience, making it more interactive and meaningful Supernova.ai (2024). In addition, English contributes to personal growth and development. As a rich and complex language with extensive literature, music, and artistic works, English allows individuals to access diverse cultural expressions and gain a deeper understanding of the world Beta (2023).

Despite its importance, many students face difficulties when speaking English, often due to non-linguistic or psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes, low motivation, shyness, anxiety, and reliance on the mother tongue. However, psychological factors are reported to have less influence than linguistic factors Ester Maji (2022). Speaking difficulties remain a major challenge in foreign language learning and communication. Regardless of their knowledge of English, many learners of English as a foreign language continue to

struggle with oral communication. Previous studies have indicated that oral language use in classrooms is frequently overlooked, with teachers dominating speaking activities while students have limited opportunities to practice. Even when oral language is used, it often fails to serve as a meaningful platform for students to construct knowledge and explore ideas Yoong Ork (2024).

Speaking problems can be categorized into affective-related issues (such as low self-confidence and anxiety), socially related issues (including limited opportunities to practice English and difficulties in comprehension during speaking classes), and linguistic-related issues (such as fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation). The factors contributing to these problems include a lack of general knowledge, insufficient speaking practice, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary and grammar practice, low motivation, minimal participation, poor reading habits, shyness, limited dictionary use, nervousness, fear of criticism, and unfamiliar pronunciation of words Hariswan Putera Jaya (2022).

Based on preliminary observations, students in the Department of English face considerable challenges in speaking English. The main factors identified include a lack of self-confidence, anxiety during speaking activities, insufficient vocabulary, and limited background knowledge. Therefore, this study aims to explore the causes and analyze the impact of the lack of English-speaking ability among third-year students in the Department of English at Savannakhet University.

1.2 Research questions

1. What are the causes of a lack of fluency in English-speaking skills among third-year students?
2. What is the impact of a lack of fluency in English-speaking skills among third-year students?

1.3 Research objectives

- To explore the cause of a lack of fluency in English-speaking skills among third-year students at the Department of English, Savannakhet University
- To analyze the impact of a lack of fluency in English-speaking skills of third-year students at the Department of English, Savannakhet University

2. Literature review

2.1 Lack of Self-Confidence

According to Npistanbul (2021) mentioned that a lack of self-confidence refers to feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy regarding one's own

abilities, self-worth, or competence. Individuals with low self-confidence often develop an unbalanced perception of them and experience persistent doubt about their capabilities and personal value. Sissons (2024) explains that this lack of confidence can negatively affect various aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships, academic performance, and professional development. If left unaddressed, low self-confidence may also lead to adverse mental and physical health outcomes.

Furthermore, Peterson (2022) identifies several causes of low self-confidence, including unmet basic needs, external circumstances beyond an individual's control, and dysfunctional or irrational thinking patterns. In professional contexts, a lack of confidence can significantly hinder career development. Sanchez (2021) argues that low self-confidence may prevent individuals from seeking mentorship, advocating for themselves during promotion processes, or requesting greater visibility and leadership opportunities within organizations. As a result, individuals may avoid pursuing salary increases, role advancements, or professional growth opportunities due to fear and self-doubt.

Overall, a lack of self-confidence is characterized by feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy regarding one's abilities or self-worth. It can negatively affect personal relationships, work performance, and academic achievement, and if left unaddressed, may lead to mental and physical health problems. The causes of low self-confidence include unmet basic needs, external influences, and negative thought patterns. In the workplace, a lack of confidence can hinder career development by discouraging individuals from seeking mentorship, professional opportunities, or promotions, ultimately reducing their visibility within the organization.

2.2 Anxiety

Anxiety is a common emotional response that may produce both psychological and physical symptoms. Olele I. (2024) defines anxiety as a common emotion that can cause physical reactions such as trembling and sweating; however, when anxiety becomes persistent or excessive, it may develop into an anxiety disorder. Similarly, Wikipedia (2024) describes anxiety as an emotion characterized by an unpleasant state of inner turmoil, often accompanied by feelings of fear or dread regarding anticipated events. According to Holland (2023), anxiety is the body's natural response to stress and is commonly experienced as fear or apprehension about future situations, such as attending a job interview or delivering a speech.

MedlinePlus (2023) further explains that anxiety involves feelings of fear, dread, and uneasiness, which may result in symptoms such as restlessness, tension, sweating, and an increased heart rate. In many cases, anxiety is a normal reaction to stressful situations, including facing difficult tasks at work, taking examinations, or making important decisions.

In the context of foreign language learning, anxiety is a common issue among language learners. Azkiya (2021) notes that foreign language anxiety often arises from learners' fear of making mistakes or discussing irrelevant topics. This type of anxiety can occur at any level of language proficiency, as it is closely related to mental and emotional processes. While a certain level of anxiety may be beneficial in encouraging learners to be more attentive to the content of their speech, excessive anxiety can negatively affect oral language production and make speakers appear less fluent than they actually are.

Moreover, Lamphaiphanh (2022) identifies several factors contributing to students' anxiety in English-speaking classrooms. These include limited vocabulary, difficulty organizing ideas, lack of experience with pronunciation, and fear of making grammatical or structural errors in sentences. As a result, students may feel reluctant to speak English in class, which further hinders the development of their speaking fluency.

In conclusion, anxiety is a common emotional response that can lead to physical symptoms such as shaking and sweating. Although it is often a natural reaction to stress, anxiety may become problematic when it is persistent or excessive. In language learning contexts, anxiety frequently stems from fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and grammatical concerns. While moderate anxiety can help learners become more mindful of their language use, high levels of anxiety may negatively influence speaking fluency and overall oral language performance, particularly in English-speaking classrooms.

2.3 Insufficient Vocabulary

Insufficient vocabulary proficiency can significantly hinder students' ability to express themselves effectively in spoken communication. Irawan and Apoko (2023) state that limited vocabulary knowledge restricts learners' capacity to convey ideas clearly and confidently in verbal interactions. Vocabulary is a fundamental component of language learning and is essential for developing the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Rohmatillah (2014) emphasizes that without

adequate vocabulary, individuals cannot communicate effectively or express their feelings clearly in either spoken or written forms. The more vocabulary learners acquire, the better they are able to perform across all language skills.

Furthermore, Amrina Rosyada AS (2023) highlights that vocabulary plays a crucial role in overall language proficiency, as it forms the foundation of effective language acquisition. Vocabulary knowledge is widely regarded as a prerequisite for learning a language, as it enables learners to comprehend input and produce meaningful output. Similarly, Startquestion (2020) notes that a lack of English vocabulary can limit learners' ability to express themselves fluently and accurately. Difficulties in selecting appropriate words, constructing sentences, and understanding subtle meanings often result in frustration and reduced confidence when using the language.

Overall, insufficient vocabulary negatively affects effective communication and the development of language skills. It influences learners' ability to read, write, speak, and listen, making it challenging to express ideas clearly and accurately. Therefore, mastery of vocabulary is essential for achieving fluency and effective language use.

2.4 Lack of Background Knowledge

Lack of background knowledge can significantly hinder students' comprehension and understanding of language, particularly in reading and communication. Malewar (2019) emphasizes that insufficient background knowledge negatively affects reading comprehension, as students may struggle to understand specific topics without the necessary contextual information. Supporting this view, Science (2019) reports that background knowledge plays a crucial role in students' reading comprehension, noting that learners who lack relevant prior knowledge are more likely to experience difficulties in understanding texts.

Moreover, Reading (2018) argues that a lack of background knowledge is situational rather than inherent to the reader. This perspective suggests that comprehension problems often arise from unfamiliar content rather than learners' inability. Therefore, teachers must identify potential obstacles and provide appropriate background information to help students comprehend reading materials more effectively. Beyond reading, background knowledge is also essential for broader language comprehension and communication. Malewar (2019) further explains that individuals without sufficient background knowledge often struggle to understand context-specific

language, which can result in misinterpretation and ineffective communication.

To address this issue, learners are encouraged to engage with a wide range of reading materials, stay informed about topic-specific and industry-related terminology, and participate actively in discussions on various subjects Science (2019). In addition, teachers and trainers play a vital role in supporting learners by incorporating real-world scenarios, multimedia resources, and interactive activities that enhance contextual understanding and build relevant background knowledge.

In conclusion, a lack of background knowledge can significantly impede reading comprehension and effective communication, as learners may struggle to understand content without sufficient contextual support. This challenge is situational rather than inherent, highlighting the importance of identifying and addressing knowledge gaps. By engaging with diverse learning materials and discussions, and through instructional support that incorporates real-life contexts and interactive strategies, both learners and educators can work together to improve comprehension and communication skills.

2.5 *The Impact of a Lack of Fluency in English-Speaking Skills*

A lack of fluency in English-speaking skills can have serious consequences for learners' academic performance and communication effectiveness. Lastiri (2023) explains that poor speaking ability often leads to ineffective communication, confusion, misunderstandings, and a lack of clarity. Students with low English fluency frequently struggle to understand lessons delivered in English because they may miss key information, find it difficult to follow the flow of ideas, or experience problems with vocabulary and grammar. As a result, these learners may become disengaged, creating a cycle that further hinders their language development.

Given the role of English as a global language, speaking proficiency is essential for both academic success and future career opportunities. Santi Andriani Putri (2020) emphasizes that English-speaking skills must be developed and performed accurately and efficiently to support higher academic achievement and professional advancement. Similarly, Admin (2025) highlights that strong speaking skills help students build confidence and enhance their career prospects, making them a crucial component of overall student development.

Empirical evidence also shows a strong relationship between speaking ability and academic performance. Lui and Huang (2019) conducted a study

on English-speaking difficulties among high school students and found that learners who experienced speaking problems tended to demonstrate lower academic achievement, particularly in reading and writing. This suggests that limited speaking fluency can negatively affect other language skills and overall academic outcomes.

In addition, pronunciation and accent-related issues may contribute to communication breakdowns. Teams (2023) notes that strong or unfamiliar accents can lead to misunderstandings, especially when listeners are unfamiliar with a particular language or dialect. In professional settings, speakers may be unfairly perceived as less competent or intelligent due to their accent, even when their English is grammatically correct. Such misinterpretations can result in frustration and confusion for both speakers and listeners.

In conclusion, poor English-speaking fluency can lead to ineffective communication, misunderstandings, and reduced clarity, particularly for students who struggle with vocabulary and grammar. These difficulties may cause disengagement and impede language development. As English functions as a global language, strong speaking skills are essential for academic success and future employment. Research indicates that speaking difficulties are closely associated with lower performance in other academic areas, such as reading and writing. Additionally, accent-related issues and speaking anxiety can further reduce learners' confidence, participation, and overall learning outcomes.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the impact of a lack of fluency in English-speaking skills among third-year students in the Department of English at Savannakhet University. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows the researchers to measure students' perceptions and speaking-related difficulties numerically, analyze patterns, and describe tendencies using statistical techniques such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation (Creswell, 2014). This design enabled the researchers to examine both the causes of speaking fluency problems and the overall level of English-speaking fluency among the target group.

3.2 Participants

The sample group consisted of 31 students from the Department of English, located in Nongphue Village, KaisonePhomvihan City, Savannakhet

Province. The sample was selected using an accidental sampling method. According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), accidental sampling is appropriate when researchers select participants based on accessibility and willingness to participate, particularly in educational settings with limited time and resources. Although this method limits generalizability, it is suitable for exploring trends and perceptions within a specific group.

3.3 Research instruments

The main research instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire, which was developed based on relevant literature related to English-speaking fluency and communication skills. The questionnaire consisted of three parts:

Part I: General Background Information. This section collected demographic data such as gender, age, class level, participation in speaking training programs, and English-speaking practice.

Part II: Factors Affecting English-Speaking Fluency. This section contained close-ended statements measured using a five-point Likert scale, where:

5 = Strongly agree

4 = Agree

3 = Moderate

2 = Disagree

1 = Strongly disagree

(Likert, 1932)

Part III: Open-ended Questions. This section allowed students to express their opinions and describe additional problems related to English-speaking fluency that were not covered in the close-ended items. To ensure clarity and comprehension, the questionnaire was prepared in both Lao and English.

3.4. Data Collection

This study employed a questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection. Two sources of information were used, namely primary data and secondary data, to investigate the impact of English-speaking fluency skills among third-year students in the Department of English at Savannakhet University.

3.4.1. Primary Data Collection

Primary data were collected through questionnaires distributed to third-year students in the Department of English at Savannakhet University, which is located in Nongphue Village, Kaisone Phomvihan City, Savannakhet Province. The questionnaire was prepared in two languages, Lao and English, to ensure clarity and understanding among the participants.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part I collected general background information about

the respondents, including gender, age, class level, participation in speaking training programs, and English-speaking practice. Part II focused on the factors affecting English-speaking fluency skills of third-year students in the Department of English at Savannakhet University. This section employed closed-ended statements measured using a five-point Likert scale, where 5 = Strongly agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Moderate, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly disagree. Part III included interview questions that allowed participants to express their opinions and identify additional problems related to English-speaking fluency.

3.4.2. Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data were collected from relevant sources such as academic documents, textbooks, internet resources, research reports, and previous studies related to English-speaking fluency and language learning.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to all selected participants. The questions were initially presented in the Lao language and later translated into English depending on the participants' preferences. Each participant was asked to describe their experiences in using English.

The data collection procedure followed these steps:

1. Permission was obtained from the Department of English.
2. The researcher introduced the study objectives and explained how to answer the questionnaire.
3. Questionnaires were distributed and completed by the participants.
4. Completed questionnaires were collected and checked for completeness.
5. All data were coded and prepared for statistical analysis.

3.6. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Completed questionnaires were carefully checked and analyzed to calculate frequencies, percentages, means (\bar{x}), and standard deviations (SD). Percentages were used to describe the general background information of the respondents.

After data collection, all questionnaire responses were coded manually and analyzed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistical methods were applied to analyze and interpret the data.

Descriptive Statistics

- Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze general background information.

- Mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (SD) were used to analyze students' perceptions of English-speaking fluency factors.

Descriptive statistics were chosen because they effectively summarize and describe numerical data in educational research Gravetter, Wallnau, Forzano & Witnauer (2020).

Means (\bar{x}) and standard deviations (SD) were used to analyze the impact of English-speaking fluency skills among students in the Department of English. A five-point Likert scale was applied to determine the level of importance of each factor, as shown below:

Mean score 5.00–4.20 = Strongly agree

Mean score 4.19–3.40 = Agree

Mean score 3.39–2.60 = Moderate

Mean score 2.59–1.80 = Disagree

Mean score 1.79–1.00 = Strongly disagree (Likert, 1932)

- *Percentage*

A percentage is a number expressed as a fraction of 100 and is denoted by the percent symbol (%). Percentages are commonly used in research because they are easy to understand and allow for effective comparison between groups. Researchers often compare percentages to determine significant differences between variables.

$$P = \frac{F}{N}100$$

P : Represents percent

F: Represent frequency changing in percent

N: Represent number

- *Average (Mean)*

The average, also known as the arithmetic mean, refers to the sum of all values divided by the total number of values. In statistics, the mean, median, and mode are collectively known as measures of central tendency.

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

\bar{X} : The average

$\sum X$: The summation

N: The number of sources

- *Standard Deviation*

Standard deviation (SD) is a statistical measure used to determine the extent of variation or dispersion in a set of data values. A low standard deviation indicates that the data points are close to the mean, whereas a high standard deviation indicates greater variability.

Standard deviation (SD) measures the degree of variability or dispersion of scores around the mean. A low SD indicates that the scores are clustered

closely around the mean, while a high SD indicates greater variability (Gravetter et al., 2020).

$$S.D. = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(X - \bar{X})^2}{N - 1}}$$

S.D: The standard deviation

Σ: The summation

x: Each value in the population

\bar{x} : The mean of value sample

N: The number of the sample

4. Results

4.1. Results of Respondents' General Information.

The results of the respondents' background information were analyzed and categorized according to gender, age, classroom, participation in English-speaking training programs, and frequency of English-speaking practice. The findings are presented in the following tables.

Gender

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

No	Gender	N	Percentage (%)
1	Female	22	71
2	Male	9	29
Total		31	100

Table 1 shows that most respondents were female (71%), while male students accounted for 29%.

4.1.1. Age

Table 2: Age of Respondents

No	Age	N	Percentage (%)
1	18–20	12	39
2	21–23	19	61
Total		31	100

Table 2 indicates that the majority of respondents were aged 21–23 years (61%).

Classroom

Table 3: Classroom Distribution

No	Classroom	N	Percentage (%)
1	EL 3.1	16	52
2	EL 3.2	15	48
Total		31	100

The table presents the distribution of participants across the two classrooms involved in the study. Classroom EL 3.1 included 16 students, representing 52% of the total sample, while Classroom EL 3.2 consisted of 15 students, accounting for 48%. Overall, the study involved 31 participants, with the distribution indicating a relatively balanced representation between the two classrooms.

4.1.2. Participation in English-Speaking Training Programs

Table 4: Participation in English-Speaking Training Programs

No	Participation	N	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	15	48
2	No	16	52
Total		31	100

Table 4 shows the participants' engagement in the study. Out of the total 31 students, 15 students (48%) actively participated, while 16 students (52%) did not participate. This indicates that slightly more than half of the sample did not engage in the activity, reflecting a nearly balanced distribution between participation and non-participation.

4.1.3. Practice Speaking English

Table 5: Frequency of English-Speaking Practice

No	Frequency	N	Percentage (%)
1	Rarely	10	32
2	Once a week	6	19
3	A few times a week	8	26
4	Every day	7	23
Total		31	100

Table 5 presents the frequency of [specify the behaviour, e.g., students' participation, study habits, or activity engagement]. Among the 31 participants, 10 students (32%) reported engaging rarely, 6 students (19%) reported once a week, 8 students (26%) reported a few times a week, and 7 students (23%) reported engaging every day. The results indicate a varied pattern of frequency, with the largest group participating rarely and a smaller proportion engaging daily.

4.2. Causes of a Lack of Fluency in English-Speaking Skills

4.2.1. Lack of Self-Confidence

The analysis revealed that lack of self-confidence was a significant factor affecting students' English-speaking fluency. The overall mean score was 3.55 with a standard deviation of 1.20, indicating general agreement among respondents. Students

reported nervousness when speaking English in front of others, fear of making mistakes, and self-comparison with peers, all of which negatively influenced their speaking performance.

4.2.2. Anxiety

Table 7: Anxiety

No	Anxiety	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levels
1	Experience symptoms (sweating, shaking)	3.42	1.18	Agree
2	Feel pressured in front of classmates/teachers	3.45	1.12	Agree
3	Anxiety prevents effective communication	3.55	1.12	Agree
4	Mind goes blank when speaking	3.74	1.09	Agree
5	Anxious when answering unprepared questions	3.71	1.22	Agree
6	Avoid participating due to anxiety	3.19	1.11	Moderate
Total		3.51	1.14	Agree

The study involved 31 students from two classrooms, with EL 3.1 comprising 16 students (52%) and EL 3.2 comprising 15 students (48%), indicating a balanced distribution. Participation in classroom activities was nearly evenly split, with 15 students (48%) engaging and 16 students (52%) not participating. Engagement frequency varied: 32% participated rarely, 19% once a week, 26% a few times a week, and 23% daily, reflecting diverse involvement patterns. Students generally reported moderate to high anxiety levels during classroom activities (M = 3.51, SD = 1.14). Highest anxiety was observed for “mind goes blank when speaking” (M = 3.74, SD = 1.09) and “anxious when answering unprepared questions” (M = 3.71, SD = 1.22), while the lowest was “avoid participating due to anxiety” (M = 3.19, SD = 1.11). Other aspects, including physical symptoms and feeling pressured, also indicated agreement that anxiety affected performance.

Overall, while classroom representation was balanced, students’ participation and engagement were variable, and anxiety was a notable factor influencing involvement in activities.

4.2.3. Insufficient Vocabulary

Table 8: Insufficient Vocabulary

No	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levels
1	Struggle to find the right words	3.9	1.27	Agree
2	Cannot understand some words in conversation	3.77	0.93	Agree
3	Want to learn more vocabulary	3.77	1.43	Agree
4	Limited vocabulary affects expression of ideas	3.65	1.02	Agree
5	Repeat same words due to lack of alternatives	3.81	0.95	Agree
6	Frustrated when cannot find correct word	3.35	1.33	Moderate
Total		3.71	1.16	Agree

The table presents students' perceptions of their vocabulary skills. Overall, students agreed that limited vocabulary affected their communication ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.16$). The highest agreement was reported for "struggle to find the right words" ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.27$), followed by "repeat same words due to lack of alternatives" ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.95$) and "cannot understand some words in conversation" ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.93$). Students also expressed agreement with "want to learn more vocabulary" ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.43$) and "limited vocabulary affects expression of ideas" ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.02$). Only the item "frustrated when cannot find correct word" scored slightly lower ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.33$), reflecting a moderate level of agreement. These findings indicate that vocabulary limitations influence students' ability to express ideas effectively and contribute to communication challenges.

4.2.4. *Lack of Background Knowledge*

Table 9: Lack of Background Knowledge

No	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levels
1	Difficulty understanding long/complex conversations	4.03	0.98	Agree
2	Struggle with cultural references	3.45	1.12	Agree
3	Belief more knowledge would improve fluency	3.97	1.08	Agree
4	Feel lost with unfamiliar topics/current events	3.84	1.13	Agree
5	Difficult to maintain conversation due to lack of knowledge	3.52	1.12	Agree
6	Avoid discussions due to lack of context understanding	2.87	1.34	Moderate
Total		3.61	1.32	Agree

4.2.5. *Academic Impact*

Participants reported how English-speaking difficulty affects academic performance.

Table 10: Academic Impact

No	Impact	N	Percentage (%)
1	Do not understand the lesson	16	51.61
2	Causes low scores/fail exam	8	25.81
3	Afraid to answer questions	7	22.58
Total		31	100

The table summarizes students' perceptions of their comprehension difficulties during classroom communication. Overall, students **agreed** that comprehension challenges affected their participation ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.32$). The highest agreement was for "difficulty understanding long or complex conversations" ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.98$) and "belief that more knowledge would improve fluency" ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.08$). Students also agreed that they struggled with cultural references ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.12$), felt lost with unfamiliar topics or current events ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.13$), and found it difficult to maintain conversation due to lack of knowledge ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.12$). The lowest agreement was for "avoid discussions due to lack of context understanding" ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.34$), reflecting a moderate level. These results suggest that comprehension difficulties, especially with complex language and cultural content, impact students' classroom communication.

4.2.6. *Confidence Barriers*

Table 11: Confidence Barriers

No	Factor	N	Percentage (%)
1	Know few vocabulary words	7	22.58
2	Lack self-confidence	12	38.71
3	Afraid of incorrect grammar	6	19.35
4	Lack consistent practice	4	12.9
5	Lack basic English knowledge	2	6.45
Total		31	100

The table presents the factors influencing students' participation in classroom activities. Among the 31 participants, the most frequently reported factor was lack of self-confidence (12 students, 38.71%), followed by knowing few vocabulary words (7 students, 22.58%) and fear of using incorrect grammar (6 students, 19.35%). Fewer students indicated lack of consistent practice (4 students, 12.9%) or lack of basic English knowledge (2 students, 6.45%) as barriers. These findings suggest that psychological factors, particularly self-confidence and vocabulary limitations, are major contributors to students' reluctance to participate.

4.2.7. Speaking Anxiety Situations

Table 12: Speaking Anxiety Situations

No	Situation	N	Percentage (%)
1	Speaking in front of many people	7	22.58
2	Speaking with native speakers	8	25.81
3	Being around fluent peers	2	6.45
4	Presenting lessons	7	22.58
5	Called to answer questions by teacher	7	22.58
Total		31	100

The table shows the situations in which students experienced anxiety during classroom activities. The most commonly reported situation was speaking with native speakers (8 students, 25.81%), followed by speaking in front of many people (7 students, 22.58%), presenting lessons (7 students, 22.58%), and being called to answer questions by the teacher (7 students, 22.58%). Only a few students (2 students, 6.45%) reported anxiety being around fluent peers. These results indicate that public speaking, teacher-directed questions, and interaction with native speakers are the primary sources of classroom anxiety for students.

4.2.8. Missed Opportunities

Table 13: Missed Opportunities

No	Reason	N	Percentage (%)
1	Did not try hard enough	7	22.58
2	Weak English missed opportunities	4	12.9
3	Could not write essay	2	6.45

4	Though not good enough	7	22.58
5	Never participated	4	12.9
Total		31	100

The table presents the reasons students reported for not participating in classroom activities. The most frequently cited reasons were "did not try hard enough (7 students, 22.58%) and though not good enough (7 students, 22.58%). Other reasons included weak English causing missed opportunities (4 students, 12.9%), never participated (4 students, 12.9%), and could not write essays (2 students, 6.45%). These findings suggest that both self-perception and language proficiency contribute to students' reluctance to participate in class activities.

4.2.9. Career Impact

Table 14: Career Impact

No	Impact	N	Percentage (%)
1	Definitely impacted, cannot speak English	14	45.16
2	Impact if work in academic field	2	6.45
3	Impact for international companies	7	22.58
4	Impact due to fear of failing job interviews	8	25.81
Total		31	100

The table shows students' perceptions of the impact of low participation in English classroom activities. Nearly half of the students (14 students, 45.16%) reported that it definitely impacted their ability to speak English, while 8 students (25.81%) felt it affected them due to fear of failing job interviews. Seven students (22.58%) believed it would impact them when working for international companies, and a smaller group (2 students, 6.45%) perceived an impact if they worked in the academic field. These findings indicate that low participation is seen as a significant barrier to both language development and future professional opportunities.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal several interrelated psychological, linguistic, and contextual factors affecting students' English-speaking skills. Beyond confirming consistency with previous studies, these results can be explained by the learning environment, instructional practices, and students'

limited exposure to authentic English use in an EFL context such as Savannakhet University.

Lack of Self-Confidence

The results indicated that 38.71% of students identified lack of self-confidence as a major factor affecting their participation in English-speaking activities. This finding can be explained by the fact that English is used primarily as a classroom subject rather than a daily communication tool in the local context. Students have limited opportunities to practice speaking English outside the classroom, which restricts their ability to develop confidence through repeated use. Furthermore, English major students often experience high self-expectations. Because they are expected to perform better than non-English majors, fear of making mistakes becomes stronger, leading to hesitation and avoidance of participation. This explains why students may remain silent even when they understand the content. These contextual pressures help explain why low self-confidence persists despite students' awareness of the importance of English (Npistanbul, 2021; Sissons, 2024; and Sanchez, 2021).

Anxiety

Students reported moderate to high anxiety levels when speaking English, particularly during presentations or interactions with peers. This result may be attributed to form-focused instructional practices, where accuracy in grammar and pronunciation is emphasized more than communicative meaning. In such environments, students may associate speaking with evaluation and error correction rather than expression, increasing anxiety.

Additionally, limited exposure to spontaneous speaking activities means students are not accustomed to real-time language processing, causing cognitive overload during speaking tasks. This explains why students experience physical symptoms such as sweating or mental blocking. These contextual factors clarify why anxiety remains high and support findings by Olele (2024), Lamphaiphanh (2022), and Azkiya (2021), while also explaining *why* anxiety manifests strongly in this study.

Insufficient Vocabulary

Although students recognize the importance of vocabulary, 22.58% reported limited vocabulary as a key barrier. This finding may result from vocabulary learning practices that focus on memorization rather than contextualized use. When vocabulary is learned in isolation and not practiced through speaking tasks,

students struggle to retrieve appropriate words during communication.

Moreover, students are often exposed to academic texts rather than spoken input, which limits their acquisition of functional and conversational vocabulary. As a result, students may understand written content but struggle to express ideas orally. This explains why vocabulary limitations persist and supports Irawan and Apoko (2023), Rohmatillah (2014), and Amrina Rosyada (2023), while also revealing the instructional causes behind the problem.

Lack of Background Knowledge

The findings showed that students' fluency decreased when discussing unfamiliar topics. This can be explained by the fact that English instruction often prioritizes language form over content knowledge. When students lack exposure to diverse topics, current events, or cultural contexts, they struggle to generate ideas even if they know the language structures.

In addition, limited reading habits in English reduce students' ability to activate prior knowledge during speaking tasks. This explains why students avoid participation in discussions involving unfamiliar themes, supporting Malewar (2019) and Reading (2018) while also clarifying why topic unfamiliarity directly affects fluency in this study.

Impact on Fluency and Communication

The findings indicate that poor fluency negatively affects students' academic participation and perceived career readiness. This occurs because speaking fluency develops through sustained practice, which many students lack due to anxiety, low confidence, and limited opportunities. Reduced participation further limits practice, creating a cycle of avoidance and stagnation.

In professional contexts, students are aware that English-speaking ability is linked to employability. This awareness may intensify pressure, making students more cautious and less willing to take risks during speaking activities. This explains why students perceive fluency problems as barriers to future opportunities, reinforcing findings by Lastiri (2023) and Lui and Huang (2019).

Integration of Factors

The findings suggest that psychological, linguistic, and situational factors do not operate independently but reinforce one another. Limited vocabulary and background knowledge increase anxiety, which reduces confidence and participation. Reduced participation, in turn, limits speaking

practice, further weakening fluency. This interaction explains why students report high awareness of English importance but still demonstrate speaking difficulties. The results reflect a vicious cycle common in EFL contexts, where insufficient practice, fear of error, and instructional constraints collectively hinder communicative development. This integrative explanation supports Peterson (2022) and Lamphaiphanh (2022) and provides a deeper understanding of *why* the findings emerged in this study. The findings reveal that students' English-speaking difficulties are not caused by a single factor but by the interaction of limited exposure, instructional practices, affective barriers, and insufficient communicative practice. While students value English highly, contextual constraints restrict their ability to transform positive attitudes into fluent performance. Addressing these underlying causes through communicative teaching, supportive feedback, and increased exposure is essential for improving students' speaking competence.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the causes and impacts of a lack of fluency in English-speaking skills among third-year students at the Department of English, Savannakhet University. The findings revealed that psychological factors (lack of self-confidence and anxiety), linguistic factors (limited vocabulary), and situational factors (insufficient background knowledge) were the primary causes of low fluency. These factors negatively affected students' participation, engagement, and ability to communicate effectively in English. The impacts of low fluency were significant, influencing academic performance, classroom participation, and future career opportunities. Students reported difficulties in expressing ideas, comprehending discussions, and maintaining confidence during oral activities. Anxiety and low self-confidence further exacerbated these challenges, creating a cycle of reduced practice and hindered language development.

Overall, the study confirms that English-speaking fluency is influenced by an interplay of psychological, linguistic, and situational factors. To improve students' fluency, educators should implement holistic interventions, including confidence-building activities, anxiety management strategies, vocabulary enhancement, and contextual learning opportunities. Such approaches can enhance students' participation, communicative competence, and readiness for academic and professional success.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is evident that the lack of fluency in English-speaking skills among third-year English majors is a significant concern at Savannakhet University. Students face challenges due to a combination of low self-confidence and speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary and background knowledge, and fear of grammatical errors coupled with insufficient speaking practice.

These issues result in academic underperformance, missed development opportunities, and reduced career readiness. However, the data also indicate that students are motivated to improve, as many express a strong desire to expand their vocabulary and engage in more frequent speaking practice.

To address these issues and enhance students' English-speaking fluency, the following recommendations are proposed:

7.1. Recommendations for Students

1. **Regular Speaking Practice:** Engage in English clubs, group discussions, or record them speaking at home. Consistent practice helps reduce anxiety and gradually builds fluency.
2. **Systematic Vocabulary Development:** Use vocabulary notebooks, flashcards, or mobile apps such as Quizlet. Students should also compile a list of useful expressions for daily conversations.
3. **Mindset and Confidence Building:** Set small, achievable speaking goals, reflect on progress, and celebrate improvements. Students should recognize that making mistakes is a natural part of language learning.

7.2. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of interventions such as confidence-building activities or fluency-focused curricula on students' speaking performance.
2. Investigate psychological factors affecting speaking fluency using qualitative methods, such as interviews or case studies, focusing on learners' anxiety, motivation, and self-perception.
3. Compare findings across different student groups, departments, or universities to identify patterns and variations in English-speaking challenges and solutions.

8. Limitations

8.1. Limitations of the Study

1. **Small Sample Size:** The study involved only 31 third-year students from the Department of English at Savannakhet University. This relatively small sample may limit the generalizability of the findings to other student populations or universities in Laos.

2. Single Institution: Data were collected from a single department in one university, which may not represent the experiences of English learners in other academic contexts or regions.
3. Cross-Sectional Design: The research provides a snapshot of students' English-speaking skills at one point in time. It does not account for changes over time or the long-term effects of interventions on fluency and confidence.
4. Limited Scope of Variables: While the study considered anxiety, self-confidence, vocabulary, and background knowledge, other influential factors such as teaching quality, peer interaction, and cultural exposure were not examined.

9. References

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