

Vol. 5, N°18, pp. 319– 334, Juin 2026
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 ISSN : 1987-1465
 DOI
 Indexation : Copernicus, CrossRef, Mir@bel, Sudoc,
 ASCI, Zenodo
 Email : RevueKurukanFuga2021@gmail.com
 Site : <https://revue-kurukanfuga.net>

*La Revue Africaine des
 Lettres, des Sciences
 Humaines et Sociales
 KURUKAN FUGA*

ASSESSING ORAL FLUENCY OF EFL STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KINSHASA ELMOUTH MESILA MBALA

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Abstract: This study investigated the assessment of the oral English fluency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at the University of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. The research was motivated by the persistent difficulties experienced by university students in communicating effectively in spoken English despite several years of formal instruction. Specifically, the study sought to determine the learners' oral fluency level, identify the linguistic and affective factors influencing their speaking performance, examine the role of pronunciation and listening comprehension, and propose strategies for enhancing oral fluency. The study adopted a concurrent mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. A total of 65 third-year undergraduate students participated in the survey, while 15 students were purposively selected among the survey participants for semi-structured oral interviews. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and an adapted Oral Proficiency Test based on the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors for the interview. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, whereas qualitative data were examined through the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors and triangulated with the survey findings. The findings revealed that the overall oral fluency of the participants was relatively low. The majority of students reported poor speaking ability, slow speech production, and frequent hesitation. The interview data confirmed these perceptions by revealing prolonged pauses, self-corrections, fragmented responses, limited lexical variety, and recurrent grammatical inaccuracies. The participants obtained an average IELTS-equivalent speaking score of approximately Band 5, indicating that they were modest users of English who could communicate basic meanings but struggled to maintain fluent and spontaneous interaction.

Keywords: Oral fluency, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), oral proficiency assessment, University of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Résumé : Cette étude a porté sur l'évaluation de la fluidité orale en anglais des apprenants d'anglais langue étrangère (EFL) à l'Université de Kinshasa, en République Démocratique du Congo. La recherche a été motivée par les difficultés persistantes rencontrées par les étudiants universitaires à communiquer efficacement en anglais parlé malgré plusieurs années d'enseignement formel. Plus précisément, l'étude visait à déterminer le niveau de fluidité orale des apprenants, à identifier les facteurs linguistiques et affectifs influençant leur performance orale, à examiner le rôle de la prononciation et de la compréhension orale, et à proposer des stratégies pour améliorer la fluidité. La recherche a adopté un design mixte simultané intégrant des approches quantitatives et qualitatives. Au total, 65 étudiants de troisième année de licence ont participé à l'enquête, tandis que 15 d'entre eux ont été sélectionnés de manière raisonnée pour des entretiens oraux semi-structurés. Les données ont été recueillies à l'aide d'un questionnaire structuré et d'un test de compétence orale adapté des descripteurs de l'IELTS

Speaking Band pour les entretiens. Les données quantitatives ont été analysées par statistiques descriptives, tandis que les données qualitatives ont été examinées à travers les descripteurs de l'IELTS et triangulées avec les résultats de l'enquête. Les résultats ont révélé que la fluidité orale globale des participants était relativement faible. La majorité des étudiants ont signalé une faible capacité d'expression orale, une production lente et des hésitations fréquentes. Les données issues des entretiens ont confirmé ces perceptions en mettant en évidence des pauses prolongées, des autocorrections, des réponses fragmentées, une variété lexicale limitée et des erreurs grammaticales récurrentes. Les participants ont obtenu un score moyen équivalent à Band 5 de l'IELTS, indiquant qu'ils étaient des utilisateurs modestes de l'anglais, capables de communiquer des significations de base mais éprouvant des difficultés à maintenir une interaction fluide et spontanée.

Mots-clés : Fluidité orale, Anglais langue étrangère (EFL), évaluation de la compétence orale, Université de Kinshasa, République Démocratique du Congo.

Introduction

English has become the dominant language of international communication, higher education, science, technology, diplomacy, and global business. Consequently, the ability to communicate effectively in spoken English has become an essential skill for university graduates seeking academic and professional opportunities in an increasingly interconnected world. While, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, English has a status of a foreign language. It is taught as a mandatory subject in high schools, colleges, and universities. In many Congolese universities, English is taught across different faculties, mainly in the first and second years. However, University students face trouble in speaking English. Some of them; after they graduate, they go to language schools where they easily develop their oral fluency in English. It is observed that Congolese university students, mainly those of the University of Kinshasa have a poor oral fluency. Thus, the current study is interested in assessing the oral fluency of the students concerned in order to ascertain the statement on the poor oral fluency on the side of the students.

To achieve the objectives of this study, the paper has been systematically structured into three distinct sections. The opening section outlines the research methodology, detailing the approaches and procedures employed to ensure rigor and reliability. The second section serves as the literature review, engaging with prior scholarship on the subject to situate the study within existing academic discourse and highlight its contribution. The final section presents the findings, offering a comprehensive discussion and critical analysis of the results, thereby drawing together the study's central arguments and implications.

1. Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods design to assess the current levels of EFL oral fluency of students and provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing oral fluency among English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners at the University of Kinshasa. The mixed-methods approach allows for the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, facilitating a more holistic analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative component assesses the level of oral fluency through standardized tests, while the qualitative component explores learners' perceptions and experiences through interviews. This study involved a total of 65 third year undergraduate students (L3) from the department of communication in the faculty of Arts and Human sciences at the University of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Participants were randomly selected to represent the targeted population in this study. The choice of third-year students was informed by the assumption that they had already completed at least one foundational English course and had developed a minimum threshold of communicative competence

suitable for assessing oral fluency (De Jong et al., 2012). Concerning the collection of data, the survey questionnaires were distributed online using google form. The oral proficiency tests were administered in a controlled environment to minimize external variables. All sessions were conducted in English, with the option for participants to respond in French if necessary. An adapted Oral Proficiency Test (OPT), modeled after the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors (IELTS, 2023), was used to evaluate students' oral fluency. Each participant will be rated using the four IELTS-based criteria:

- Fluency and Coherence;
- Lexical Resource;
- Grammatical Range and Accuracy;
- Pronunciation.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for research purposes.

2. Literature Review

English has become the dominant language of international communication, higher education, science, technology, diplomacy, and global business. Consequently, the ability to communicate effectively in spoken English has become an essential skill for university graduates seeking academic and professional opportunities in an increasingly interconnected world. Among the four language skills, speaking is often regarded as the most demanding because it requires learners to use vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and listening skills simultaneously while interacting spontaneously with others (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). For this reason, oral fluency is widely recognized as one of the most important indicators of communicative competence.

Oral fluency refers to the ability to express ideas smoothly, coherently, and with relatively few unnecessary pauses or hesitations. According to Lennon (1990), fluency is characterized by the smooth flow of speech, while Segalowitz (2010) explains that fluency results from the efficient processing of language during communication. Similarly, De Jong and Bosker (2013) argue that oral fluency is multidimensional because it involves cognitive processing, linguistic competence, and speech production. Therefore, learners may possess adequate grammatical knowledge yet still experience difficulties communicating orally if they hesitate frequently, lack confidence, or struggle to retrieve vocabulary during interaction.

Developing oral fluency remains a major challenge for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in contexts where English is rarely used outside the classroom. Previous studies have shown that several linguistic and affective factors influence learners' speaking performance. Vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and regular speaking practice contribute positively to oral fluency (De Jong et al., 2012; Nation & Newton, 2009). Conversely, speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and limited opportunities for authentic communication often reduce learners' willingness to communicate in English (Horwitz et al., 1986; Dörnyei, 2005).

Research conducted in African universities demonstrates that these challenges are common across many EFL contexts. In Nigeria, Bauchi, Aliyu, Yakubu, and Aminu (2024) found that university students experienced considerable difficulties in oral communication because of speaking anxiety and insufficient opportunities to practice English. Their study further demonstrated that increasing communicative speaking

activities significantly improved learners' fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and confidence.

Similarly, research conducted in Ethiopian universities revealed that speaking anxiety remains a major barrier to oral English performance. Tasisa and Teshome (2025) reported that many university students experienced moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety caused by fear of negative evaluation, limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, and minimal classroom interaction. The authors recommended creating supportive learning environments that encourage low-stakes speaking activities and constructive feedback.

Comparable findings have also been reported in other African higher education contexts. A study involving university students at the University of Juba, conducted by researchers from the University of Buea in Cameroon, found that foreign language anxiety negatively affected students' oral communication and reduced their willingness to participate in classroom discussions. The study emphasized that emotional factors, together with limited opportunities for meaningful interaction, significantly constrained learners' oral performance.

Furthermore, research undertaken in Ethiopia has shown that motivation and language anxiety are closely related. Students who reported higher levels of debilitating anxiety were less willing to participate in oral communication and experienced greater difficulty developing speaking proficiency. These findings highlight the importance of creating classroom environments that encourage interaction while reducing learners' fear of making mistakes.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into oral English fluency in African EFL contexts, little empirical evidence is available from the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the Congolese educational system, English is taught as a foreign language from secondary school through university. At the University of Kinshasa, students receive formal English instruction as part of their academic training. Nevertheless, many students continue to experience considerable difficulties communicating effectively in spoken English despite several years of formal instruction. Most available studies conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo have focused on grammar teaching, reading comprehension, or English language instruction in general, while relatively few have specifically investigated learners' oral fluency using both quantitative and qualitative evidence. This lack of empirical research represents an important gap in the literature that the present study seeks to address.

Against this background, the present study aimed to assess the oral English fluency of EFL learners at the University of Kinshasa. Specifically, the study sought to determine learners' oral fluency levels, identify the linguistic and affective factors influencing their speaking performance, examine the role of pronunciation and listening comprehension in oral communication, and propose practical strategies for improving oral English fluency. By combining questionnaire data with oral interviews assessed through the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors, the study contributes to the growing body of research on oral fluency assessment while providing empirical evidence from a context that has received limited scholarly attention.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to both theory and practice. The study enriches the limited literature on oral English fluency in the Democratic Republic of Congo and provides evidence that may assist English language teachers, curriculum developers, university administrators, and educational policymakers in designing more communicative teaching approaches. Furthermore, the study proposes practical strategies that may help improve learners' confidence, increase opportunities for authentic oral

interaction, and ultimately enhance English-speaking proficiency among university students.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- Are the participants fluent in speaking English?
- To what extent do they pay attention to pronunciation while speaking English?
- How well do they understand spoken English effortlessly?
- Are they aware of effective strategies for enhancing their oral fluency?

To answer these questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- The participants are not fluent in speaking English.
- The participants pay limited attention to pronunciation while speaking English.
- The participants do not understand spoken English effortlessly.
- The participants have limited knowledge of effective strategies for improving their oral fluency.

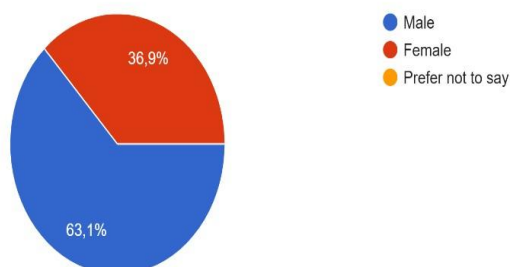
Accordingly, the study pursued the following objectives:

- To assess the current oral fluency level of EFL learners at the University of Kinshasa.
- To examine learners' attention to pronunciation during oral communication.
- To investigate learners' understanding of spoken English.
- To propose practical strategies for improving oral English fluency among EFL learners.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Gender

Gender
65 réponses



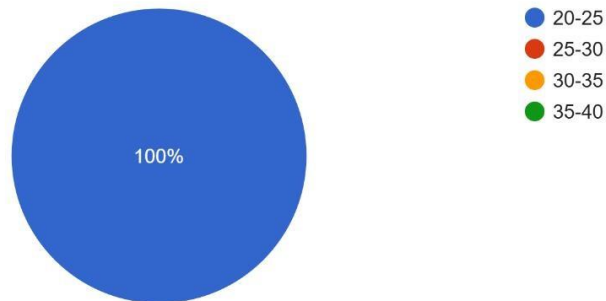
The pie chart presents the gender distribution of the 65 respondents who participated in the study.

The findings indicate that male participants constituted the majority of the sample, accounting for 63.1% of the participants, while female participants represented 36.9%. No participant selected the option “Prefer not to say,” showing that all participants were willing to disclose their gender identity.

3.2. Age

Please tick your age

65 réponses



The chart shows the age distribution of the 65 participants who participated in the survey. The findings reveal a completely homogeneous age profile among the participants that is to say all participants (100%) belonged to the 20–25 age group, represented by the blue section of the chart.

3.3. Level of Education

Please tick your student level

65 réponses

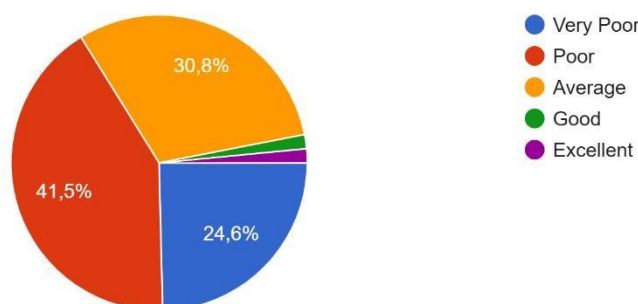


The chart shows the level of education distribution of the 65 participants who participated in the survey. The findings reveal a completely homogeneous level of education among the participants that is to say all participants (100%) were third undergraduate students, represented by the blue section of the chart.

3.4. Self-assessment of oral fluency

1. How would you rate your overall ability to speak English?

65 réponses

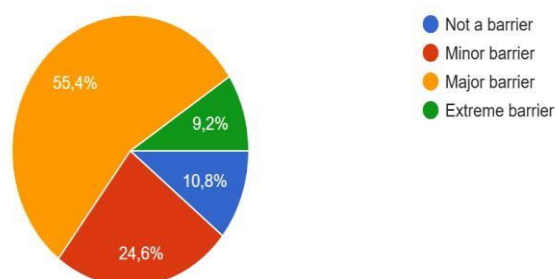


The chart illustrates the respondents' self-assessment of their overall ability to speak English among the 65 participants surveyed. The findings indicate that most participants perceive their English-speaking ability as either poor or average, while only a very small number consider themselves proficient speakers. The largest proportion of respondents (41.5%) rated their speaking ability as poor. This suggests that many learners experience difficulties in oral communication and may lack confidence in using English effectively in real-life situations. In addition, 30.8% of the participants evaluated their speaking ability as average, indicating that although they possess some communicative competence, they may still face challenges in fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, or grammatical accuracy. Furthermore, 24.6% of respondents considered their English-speaking ability to be very poor. These findings highlight that nearly one quarter of the learners perceive themselves as having serious limitations in spoken English performance. Only a very small percentage of respondents rated their ability as good or excellent.

3.5. Barriers to oral fluency

SECTION F: BARRIERS TO ORAL FLUENCY DEVELOPMENT Please indicate how much each of the following factors creates barriers to your English s...ment 1. Limited time for English speaking practice

65 réponses

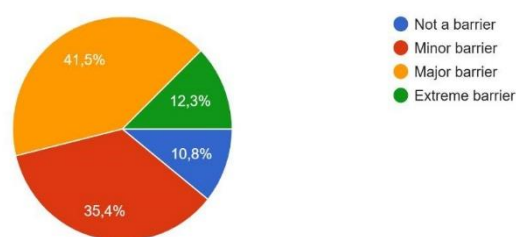


This pie chart illustrates participants' perceptions of the amount of time available for speaking practice in English classes and the extent to which limited practice time affects the development of their oral fluency. The findings indicate that insufficient speaking practice time is perceived as a significant challenge by the majority of respondents. A substantial proportion of the participants (64.6%) regarded limited speaking practice time as a serious obstacle to improving their oral fluency. More specifically, 55.4% identified it as a major barrier, while 9.2% considered it an extreme barrier. These findings show that

many students believe they are not provided with adequate opportunities during class sessions to actively engage in speaking activities and develop their communicative competence. Furthermore, 24.6% of the respondents viewed limited speaking practice time as a minor barrier. Although these students did not perceive it as their most pressing challenge, they nevertheless acknowledged that inadequate speaking opportunities have a negative impact on their fluency development. Overall, the findings highlight the critical importance of providing learners with sufficient classroom speaking time to facilitate the improvement of their oral communication skills.

3.5.1. Lack of speaking opportunities

2. Lack of speaking opportunities in English classes
65 réponses

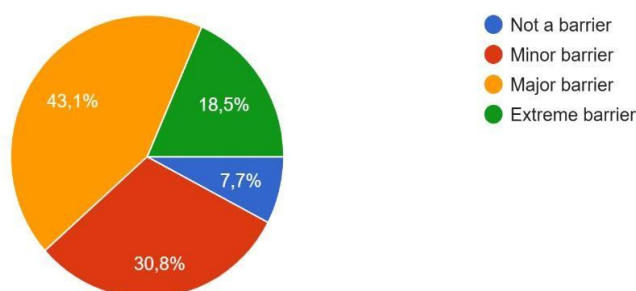


This pie chart illustrates participants' perceptions of the availability of speaking opportunities in their English courses and the extent to which the lack of such opportunities affects the development of their oral fluency. The findings reveal that insufficient opportunities to engage in spoken English constitute a significant barrier to fluency development for the majority of the respondents. More than half of the participants (53.8%) considered the lack of speaking opportunities to be a serious obstacle to improving their oral fluency. Specifically, 41.5% identified it as a major barrier, while 12.3% regarded it as an extreme barrier. These results reveal that many students attribute their speaking difficulties to the limited opportunities available for meaningful oral interaction and communicative practice within the classroom environment. In addition, 35.4% of the respondents perceived the lack of speaking opportunities as a minor barrier. Although these students did not consider it their most significant challenge, they nevertheless acknowledged that the limited availability of speaking activities negatively influences their progress in developing oral fluency. Conversely, only 10.8% of the participants indicated that the lack of speaking opportunities was not a barrier to their fluency development. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of creating more interactive and communicative learning environments that provide students with frequent opportunities to practice speaking English and enhance their oral communication skills.

3.5.3. Poor grammar knowledge

6. Poor grammar knowledge

65 réponses

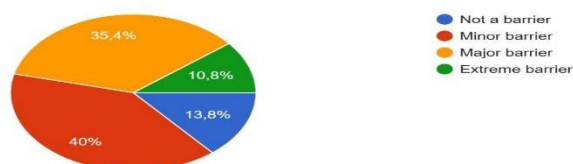


This chart illustrates participants' perceptions of poor grammar knowledge and the extent to which it affects the development of their oral fluency in English. The findings indicate that grammatical limitations constitute a major obstacle to effective spoken communication for the majority of the respondents. A substantial proportion of the participants (61.6%) regarded poor grammar knowledge as a significant barrier to their oral fluency development. More specifically, 43.1% identified it as a major barrier, while 18.5% considered it an extreme barrier. These findings reveal that many students experience difficulties constructing grammatically accurate sentences during oral communication, which may reduce their confidence and hinder their ability to speak fluently. Furthermore, 30.8% of the respondents perceived poor grammar knowledge as a minor barrier. Although these students did not view grammar as their most serious challenge, they nevertheless 11 acknowledged that grammatical difficulties sometimes cause hesitation and slow down their speech production. Conversely, only 7.7% of the participants indicated that poor grammar knowledge is not a barrier to their oral fluency. Overall, the findings demonstrate that grammatical competence plays a crucial role in the development of speaking fluency and that deficiencies in grammar remain a significant challenge for most learners. These results underscore the importance of strengthening grammar instruction while simultaneously providing learners with opportunities to apply grammatical knowledge in meaningful communicative contexts.

3.5.5. Large class size

9. Large class size

65 réponses



The pie chart illustrates participants' perceptions of large class size as a barrier to the development of English-speaking fluency among the 65 respondents.

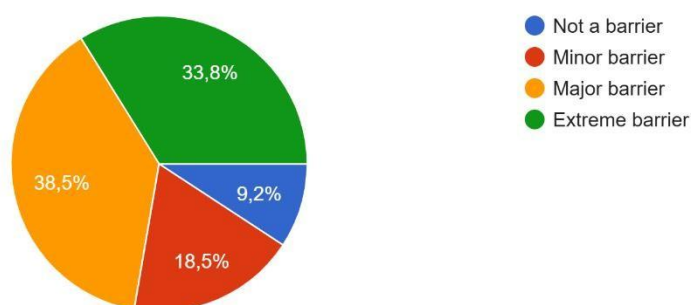
The findings reveal that overcrowded classrooms are perceived as a significant challenge by a considerable proportion of the students. Nearly half of the respondents (46.2%) regarded large class size as a serious obstacle to improving their oral fluency. More specifically, 35.4% identified it as a major barrier, while 10.8% considered it an extreme barrier. These findings reveal that many students believe that overcrowded classrooms limit

their opportunities to participate actively in speaking activities, interact with their teachers, and receive individualized feedback on their oral performance. In addition, 40% of the participants perceived large class size as a minor barrier. Although these students acknowledged that classroom overcrowding affects their learning experience, they did not consider it to be the most significant factor hindering their oral fluency development. Conversely, only 13.8% of the respondents reported that large class size was not a barrier to the development of their English-speaking fluency. This indicates that relatively few students feel unaffected by the number of learners present in their English classes. 14 Overall, the findings show that class size plays an important role in shaping students' opportunities for oral interaction and participation. Overcrowded classrooms may reduce the amount of speaking practice available to individual learners and limit teachers' ability to provide personalized support.

3.5.6. Lack of English speakers to practice with

10. Lack of English speakers to practice with

65 réponses



The pie chart illustrates students' perceptions of the shortage of English-speaking partners as a barrier to developing speaking fluency among the 65 respondents. The results show that limited opportunities for interaction in English represent a significant challenge for the majority of students. Overall, a large proportion of respondents (72.3%) identified the lack of English-speaking partners as a serious obstacle to their fluency development. In particular, 38.5% rated it as a "Major barrier," while 33.8% considered it an "Extreme barrier." These findings show that many learners have few chances to engage in authentic spoken communication, which may hinder their confidence, limit vocabulary growth, and slow the development of speaking proficiency. In addition, 18.5% of the participants viewed this issue as a "Minor barrier," indicating that although they face some difficulties accessing English-speaking partners, the impact is relatively limited for them. By contrast, a small minority (9.2%) reported that the lack of English speakers to practice with is "Not a barrier" to their fluency development. These results underscore the need to expand opportunities for meaningful English interaction both inside and outside the classroom.

3.6. Oral Interview Findings

The oral interview data were analyzed using the adapted IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors. Among the 15 participants, each participant was evaluated according to four assessment criteria: Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy, and Pronunciation. The Interview data were first recorded and transcribed for a better analysis after the IELTS Band descriptors.

3.6.1. Overall Speaking Performance of Participants

The table below presents the overall estimated speaking band scores obtained by the participants.

Participant	Fluency & Coherence	Lexical Resource	Grammar	Pronunciation	Overall Estimated Band
P1	5.5	5.0	5.0	5.5	5.0
P2	4.5	4.5	4.0	4.5	4.5
P3	5.5	5.5	5.0	5.5	5.5
P4	5.5	5.5	5.0	5.5	5.5
P5	5.0	5.0	4.5	5.0	5.0
P6	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.5	4.0
P7	5.0	5.0	4.5	4.5	4.0
P8	5.0	5.0	4.5	5.0	5.0
P9	4.5	5.0	4.5	4.5	4.5
P10	6.5	6.5	6.0	6.0	6.0

P11	5.5	5.5	5.0	5.5	5.5
P12	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
P13	6.0	6.0	5.5	5.5	5.5
P14	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
P15	6.5	6.5	6.0	6.0	6.0

The overall mean score of the participants was calculated using the arithmetic mean formula:

$$\frac{5.0 + 4.5 + 5.5 + 5.5 + 5.0 + 4.0 + 5.0 + 4.5 + 4.5 + 6.0 + 5.5 + 4.0 + 5.5 + 4.0 + 6.0}{15}$$

15

≈ 5.0

The findings reveal that the participants obtained an average overall speaking band of approximately 5.0. According to IELTS speaking descriptors, Band 5 corresponds to a “modest user” who is capable of communicating basic meanings in familiar situations despite frequent linguistic inaccuracies and communication limitations. The results indicate that most participants were able to express simple ideas related to personal information, family background, education, leisure activities, and perceptions of artificial intelligence. However, the majority experienced difficulties in maintaining fluent interaction, extending responses, and using grammatically accurate and lexically varied language.

4. Discussion

The quantitative findings indicate that the majority of participants perceived themselves as having low oral fluency. More specifically, 41.5% rated their speaking ability as poor, while 24.6% considered it very poor. Similarly, 41.5% rated their speaking speed as poor and 36.9% as very poor. Furthermore, 84.6% reported poor or very poor smoothness of speech, indicating frequent interruptions and difficulties maintaining continuous speech. The qualitative findings strongly corroborate these results.

The interview analysis revealed frequent hesitation, repetition, self-correction, and prolonged pauses. Many participants produced fragmented responses such as "Um... Um..." or incomplete statements, 20 demonstrating limited ability to sustain spontaneous communication. The average IELTS-based speaking score of approximately Band 5 further suggests that participants are only modest users of English who could communicate basic meanings but struggled with fluency and interaction. The convergence of both datasets suggests that the oral fluency level of the participants remains relatively low despite several years of English learning for many respondents.

In addition, the quantitative data reveal considerable levels of speaking anxiety. Approximately 69.2% of respondents felt uncomfortable or very uncomfortable speaking English with classmates, while another 69.2% reported discomfort when delivering presentations. Similarly, 72.3% felt uncomfortable speaking English with their professors. The qualitative findings

support these results. Participants frequently hesitated, produced short responses, and required interviewer support to continue speaking. Such behaviors are typical manifestations of foreign language anxiety and lack of communicative confidence. These findings align with the theory of Foreign Language Anxiety proposed by Horwitz (1986), which argues that anxiety negatively affects oral performance by limiting learners' willingness to communicate.

Furthermore, the quantitative findings show that 44.6% of participants rarely practice speaking English outside the classroom and 38.5% never do so. In addition, more than half of the participants spend only 2–4 hours per week in English classes. The qualitative findings support this observation. Participants frequently relied on basic vocabulary, produced short utterances, and demonstrated limited ability to elaborate on ideas, all of which are characteristics associated with insufficient oral practice. The findings therefore suggest that lack of meaningful speaking opportunities significantly contributes to weak oral fluency among EFL learners.

Moreover, several quantitative indicators reveal important fluency challenges:

- 56.9% frequently experience long pauses while speaking.
- 49.2% often or always use fillers.
- 50.7% often or always speak slowly to avoid mistakes.
- 49.2% frequently avoid speaking English.

The interview data clearly confirm these findings. Participants exhibited hesitation, pauses, repetition, and fragmented speech during interviews. Such behaviors indicate difficulties in retrieving vocabulary rapidly, organizing ideas, and producing language automatically. This corroboration strengthens the conclusion that learners experience significant breakdowns in speech production processes.

To conclude, the quantitative results indicate that participants perceive vocabulary (64.6%), grammar (66.2%), and pronunciation (60%) as helping their oral fluency. However, substantial proportions also viewed these variables as hindrances. The qualitative findings provide a clearer picture. Interview responses showed limited lexical variety and frequent repetition of basic words such as "good," "bad," and "important." This reveals that vocabulary limitations contribute to fluency problems and frequent grammatical errors were identified, including incorrect tense usage, omission of auxiliary verbs, and subject-verb disagreement. These errors often interrupted the flow of communication. In addition, the interview findings revealed that pronunciation difficulties existed but rarely caused communication breakdowns. Participants were generally understandable despite accent influence and occasional articulation problems. Therefore, while vocabulary and grammar emerged as significant barriers to fluency, pronunciation appeared less problematic than initially assumed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the oral English fluency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at the University of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. It aimed to determine students' level of oral fluency, identify the linguistic and affective factors influencing their speaking performance, examine the role of pronunciation and listening comprehension, and propose strategies for improving oral communication skills among university learners.

Regarding the first research question, which sought to determine the level of oral English fluency among EFL learners, the findings revealed that students generally demonstrated a moderate level of oral fluency. Although participants showed some ability to express ideas in English, their performance was affected by difficulties related to hesitation, limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems, and insufficient opportunities for authentic communication. These findings partially confirm the first hypothesis, which assumed that university EFL learners would experience significant challenges in oral fluency despite several years of formal English instruction.

The second research question examined the linguistic and affective factors affecting students' speaking performance. The results indicated that vocabulary limitations, grammatical difficulties, pronunciation challenges, fear of making mistakes, and speaking anxiety were among the major factors restricting learners' oral production. Therefore, the second hypothesis, which predicted that linguistic competence and affective factors would significantly influence oral fluency, was supported by the findings. The results suggest that improving speaking ability requires attention not only to language knowledge but also to learners' confidence and willingness to communicate.

Concerning the third research question, which focused on the role of pronunciation and listening comprehension in oral fluency development, the findings highlighted the importance of both components. Students who had greater exposure to spoken English and better pronunciation awareness demonstrated stronger confidence and smoother oral performance. These findings support the hypothesis that listening input and pronunciation skills contribute significantly to the development of oral fluency. Consequently, English instruction should integrate more activities involving authentic listening materials, pronunciation practice, and interactive speaking tasks.

The fourth research question explored strategies that could enhance learners' oral English fluency. The findings suggest that increasing opportunities for meaningful communication is essential. Traditional approaches that emphasize grammar explanations and written exercises alone appear insufficient for developing effective speaking abilities. Learners need regular opportunities to interact, negotiate meaning, and use English spontaneously in realistic contexts. Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed for students, English as Foreign Language teachers, and future researchers.

Recommendations for Students

Students should take greater responsibility for developing their oral English skills by engaging in regular speaking practice beyond the classroom. They are encouraged to participate in peer conversations, English discussion groups, and online language exchange activities where they can communicate naturally with others. Learners should reduce their dependence on memorized answers and focus instead on spontaneous communication and expressing ideas independently. Furthermore, students should increase their exposure to authentic spoken English through podcasts, interviews, movies, academic lectures, and other real-life materials. Self-recording techniques can also be useful because they allow learners to identify weaknesses related to fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and delivery. Students should also adopt effective fluency-development strategies such as shadowing, repeated speaking tasks, storytelling, and role-playing activities to gradually improve their confidence and speaking speed.

Recommendations for English as a Foreign Language Teachers

English teachers should adopt more communicative teaching approaches that place oral interaction at the center of language learning. Classroom activities should provide more opportunities for students to speak through debates, presentations, pair work, role plays, and group discussions.

Teachers should also provide constructive and encouraging feedback to help learners overcome fear of mistakes and speaking anxiety. Rather than focusing immediately on grammatical accuracy, teachers should prioritize fluency development by allowing students to express their ideas freely before correcting errors. Creating a supportive and non-threatening classroom environment is essential because students are more likely to participate actively when they feel comfortable taking risks in communication.

At the institutional level, universities should consider establishing practical programs such as peer speaking clubs, English conversation groups, pronunciation workshops, and smaller discussion-based classes. Such initiatives would provide additional spaces for students to practice spoken English outside regular classroom hours. Language departments could also organize English-speaking events, debates, and public speaking activities to promote continuous oral communication practice.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future studies should involve larger samples from multiple universities across the Democratic Republic of Congo to provide a broader understanding of EFL learners' oral fluency challenges. Further research should also investigate listening comprehension as a possible predictor of oral fluency development and examine the relationship between speaking anxiety and students' oral performance.

Moreover, intervention studies should explore the effectiveness of specific fluency-development approaches, including task-based language teaching, shadowing techniques, mobile-assisted language learning, peer interaction programs, and pronunciation training. Such research would provide empirical evidence on the most effective strategies for improving English oral proficiency in the Congolese higher education context.

In conclusion, developing oral English fluency among university EFL learners requires a shift from a predominantly knowledge-based approach toward a more communication-oriented model. While students possess foundational English knowledge, they need more opportunities for meaningful interaction, authentic exposure, and confidence-building activities. Through collaborative efforts among learners, teachers, and educational institutions, English instruction can better prepare students to communicate effectively in academic, professional, and international contexts.

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