



**An Analysis of Pausing Patterns in English
Presentations by Thai Undergraduate Students:
Types and Underlying Causes**

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Received 22/10/2025	ABSTRACT Pausing plays a vital role in second language speech production, enhancing fluency, cognitive processing, and discourse organization. This study investigated Thai EFL undergraduate learners' pausing patterns in their English presentations, focusing on pause types, variations across speaking tasks, and the underlying causes of pausing. The participants were twenty first-year students, selected through purposive sampling. The participants completed two speaking tasks and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while interview data were analyzed thematically. The findings showed that the participants made 412 pauses, with silent pauses being the most prominent, followed by unlexicalized and lexicalized fillers, respectively. Most of the pauses were observed at clause boundaries, reflecting their function as rhetorical organizers rather than mere hesitation markers. There were also differences across speaking tasks. Participants employed more silent and unlexicalized pauses in less familiar topics and used more lexicalized discourse markers in more familiar ones. Thematic analysis further indicated that the four major factors affecting pausing were lexical access, grammatical
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	focus, affective conditions, and rhetorical control. The pedagogical implications suggest that pause lessons should be integrated into speaking classes to improve learners' speech. Future research should increase the sample size and examine pausing in different contexts. Keywords: pausing patterns, Thai EFL undergraduate learners, English presentation, silent pauses, filled pauses
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Introduction

In today's globalized world, English is widely considered a universal language. Thus, effective English communication is vital in academic, professional, and intercultural contexts. Successful language learning does not depend solely on grammatical and lexical knowledge but also on communicative competence, including cultural understanding and the ability to handle spoken interaction (Byram, 1997). Among the many speaking features, pausing plays a crucial role in speech delivery. Pauses support comprehension and indicate speakers' cognitive processing. Additionally, speech planning is supported through pausing to structure ideas, and guide listeners through the flow of information (Skehan, 2009; Tavakoli & Wright, 2020).

Traditionally, pronunciation was a major element of speaking ability (Pourhossein Gilakjani, 2012; Bautista Garcia, 2019). However, apart from accurate articulation, intelligible speech requires proper use of prosodic features, including pausing. Using pauses accurately enhances clarity and effectiveness of communication, while using pauses improperly or excessively impacts fluency and hinders comprehension (Pourhossein Gilakjani, 2012). In the spoken English context, pausing has a universal and natural feature. According to Grosjean and Deschamps (1975), pauses can be classified into two main groups: silent pauses and filled pauses, commonly seen at word or clause boundaries. Furthermore, recent studies have elaborated the classification into silent pauses, unlexicalized filled pauses (e.g., “uh” and “um”), and lexicalized filled pauses (e.g., “you know” and “I think”). Each performs different cognitive and discourse-related roles (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020).

Pausing is fundamental to language processing and plays multiple roles in supporting effective communication. Linguistically, pauses provide speech segmentation. This allows listeners to process information better (Goldman-Eisler, 1968; Chafe, 1980). Cognitively, pausing helps speakers with vocabulary retrieval and syntactic structure organization during real-time

speech production (Chang & Windeatt, 2024; Kallio et al., 2022). Pauses rhetorically play roles as discourse markers when emphasizing key points and guiding listeners through speech and enhancing clarity and engagement. Besides, pausing is influenced by affective factors, including anxiety and self-monitoring in L2 contexts (Sun et al., 2023).

Previous studies conducted in different contexts have highlighted the role of pausing in communication. For instance, research studies in the United States and Europe have proved that inappropriate placement or pauses may interrupt listeners' processing and result in reduction in perceived fluency (Kahng, 2018; Kallio et al., 2022). Similarly, Isarankura (2013) stated that improper pause placement seems to disrupt the flow of speech and hinder listeners' comprehension. These findings, therefore, suggest that while pausing serves as a supportive function in communication, its effectiveness truly depends on how it is used.

Many studies have investigated pausing patterns in reading-aloud or conversational contexts (Anderson-Hsieh & Venkatagiri, 1994; Park, 2016; Kahng, 2018); however, very few studies have focused on real-time presentation speech produced by Thai EFL undergraduate learners. In addition, recent cross-linguistic work (Eren et al., 2020) and further experimental investigations (Kahng, 2018) highlight the need for more context-related research into how pause types, locations, and durations affect perceptions of fluency and comprehension.

Though earlier studies have investigated pause behavior using different approaches, such as reading aloud and conversational speech, pause frequency and duration, and its relationship to fluency has been emphasized in many studies. Moreover, studies focusing on pausing in real-time presentation contexts have been limited, particularly among Thai EFL undergraduate learners, where both fluency and rhetorical delivery is required. Furthermore, few research studies have explored the underlying cognitive, affective, and strategic factors affecting pausing behavior, or how pausing varies across different speaking tasks.

To address this gap, this research study investigates Thai EFL undergraduate learners' pausing in English presentations, focusing on three underexplored aspects identified in previous research: the distribution of pause types (silent or filled pauses), the differences in pausing patterns across speaking tasks, and the underlying factors affecting pauses. By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to provide pedagogical implications for pronunciation and speaking instruction, particularly promoting Thai learners' speaking with fluency, confidence, and clarity through a better understanding of the role of pausing in verbal communication.

This study, therefore, focuses on the following research questions:

1. What types of pauses do the Thai EFL undergraduate learners produce during English presentations?
2. What are variations of pausing observed across different speaking tasks?
3. What are the influencing factors towards pausing behavior in English presentations by Thai EFL undergraduate learners?

Literature Review

This study employs a multidimensional framework to analyze pausing in English speech from linguistic, cognitive, affective, and rhetorical perspectives. Linguistically, pauses are analyzed in relation to their structural position and role in organizing speech into smaller units. Cognitively, during real-time production, they support lexical retrieval and speech planning. Furthermore, affective factors, particularly in second language (L2) contexts, are explored. Rhetorically, pauses serve as devices used for organizing discourse. These pauses can enhance clarity and guide listeners through the speech flow. Collectively, these perspectives provide a framework for analyzing pause types, underlying causes, and variations across speaking tasks in this study.

Pauses

Currently, second language researchers mainly follow 300 - millisecond threshold determined by Raupach (1980) to define a pause in speech. Pauses which are shorter than this threshold are excluded from the definition. This notion has been widely employed in L2 communication research.

Moreover, Lucas (2020) defines a pause as a rest or temporary stop in the middle of the speech to take a breath, think, and let audiences think of your message. According to the study by Dearení et al. (2019), pauses are brief and quiet moments that occur between language components of a speech. Those gaps might be unfilled or filled with a group of words or repeats to regain speaking fluency. Pauses can be introduced in a variety of situations; they can be added before, during, or after someone has spoken, they can be intentional or spontaneous, or they can arise without conscious effort. They can exist before or after full speech actions, phrases, clauses, or words, although they are more likely to appear in major grammatical positions.

Types of Pauses

According to Raupach (1980) and Lennon (1990), there are two types of speech pause, namely silent pauses and filled pauses (unlexicalized filled pause and lexicalized filled) as shown below.

Silent Pauses

A silent pause is distinguished by the presence of an empty interval during speech. It is the remaining time in speech output of any duration. These pauses are vital for both speakers and listeners because they assist the speaker in arranging what he or she wants to say and allow the listener time to reflect on what has been spoken. In addition to being interactional devices, they define word boundaries and indicate stress.

Filled Pauses

Filled pauses or fillers are utterances or phrases used or produced in speech to replace the silent moment in order to link thoughts or ideas. Filled pauses are categorized into unlexicalized filled pauses and lexicalized filled pauses as follows.

Unlexicalized Filled Pauses

The first category, unlexicalized filled pauses, consists of non-word filled pauses used by speakers as they choose what to say next. Examples of unlexicalized phonetic combinations include “a”, “am”, “u”, “um”, “e”, “em”, and “m”. The easiest sounds to make when speaking include “ehm”, “uh”, “err”, “ee”, “ah”, “um”, and other vocalizations which are also categorized as unlexicalized filled pauses.

Lexicalized Filled Pauses

Lexicalized filled pauses include words/phrases or statements such as “well”, “so”, “okay”, and “let’s see”. Other fillers in the form of words or short sentences are such as “well, yes”, “kind of”, “you know”, “if you see what I mean”, and “so on”. These are lexicalized filled pauses speakers tend to use.

Previous Studies Related to Pausing in Different Contexts

Research studies in pausing in L2 speech have investigated linguistic, cognitive, and communicative variables. Previous psycholinguistic studies indicated that pauses are structured discourses, not randomly structured interruptions (Chafe, 1980; Goldman-Eisler, 1968). Goldman-Eisler (1968) also claimed that pauses are used syntactically setting boundaries, whereas Chafe (1980) mentioned that speakers use pauses to organize their ideas.

Later research about pausing was conducted to investigate the relationship between pausing, fluency, and listener perception. To illustrate, Chinese ESL speakers paused longer and more frequently compared to native speakers. In addition, their pauses were made improperly, negatively affecting comprehensibility (Anderson-Hsieh & Venkatagiri, 1994). Similar studies by Raupach (1980) and Lennon (1990) examined fluency variables: pause frequency, duration, and phonation ratio. It was affirmed that pausing facilitates the planning process; however, if used improperly, it can hinder listener understanding.

Recent studies have focused on cognitive and affective perspectives of pausing. According to Housen et al. (2012) and De Jong (2016), pauses were derived from accuracy and complexity and are mainly consistent with cognitive processing. Pauses within phrases reduce speech fluency (Kahng, 2018; Kallio et al., 2022), whereas pause duration is longer due to task complexity (Mareková & Beňuš, 2024). Moreover, it was reported that speakers' anxiety and self-monitoring influence L2 speaking (Chang & Windeatt, 2024). Altogether, these research studies proved that pauses are related to cognition and affection.

Eren et al. (2020) further explored cross-linguistic and pedagogical studies, and the results indicated that L2 speakers' pauses were longer and more variable than those of L1 speakers. Coulange et al. (2024) stated that comprehensibility could be influenced by pause duration together with stress. For pedagogical purposes, there should be pronunciation and prosody lessons to learn about natural pausing (Pourhossein Gilakjani, 2012; Bautista García, 2019). The findings are similar to the studies by Byram (1997) and Lucas (2020), claiming that using silent pauses strategically to achieve clear communication and audience engagement could be related to communicative competence.

Nevertheless, few researchers in Thailand have conducted studies about pausing. Isarankura (2013) reported that Thai learners with high English proficiency used pauses at sentence or clause boundaries; however, those with lower English proficiency produced excessive pauses within phrases. Tantiwich and Sinwongsuwat (2021) reported overuse of pauses as

a major problem among Thai learners when conversing with others in English, caused by lack of English exposure and prosodic awareness.

The present study is worth conducting for the following reasons. Firstly, Isarankura (2013) claimed that many Thai learners pause improperly when speaking. This can have negative consequences, as discussed by Anderson-Hsieh and Venkatagiri (1994) and Chang and Windeatt (2024), who emphasize the importance of pause awareness and instruction. It has also been seen that appropriate use of pauses promotes fluency and supports intelligibility (Coulange et al., 2024). Secondly, fluency in speaking is influenced by several factors: individual factors (proficiency and anxiety) (Sun et al., 2023), and knowing prosodic features, including pausing, can help speakers address the problem (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Lastly, understanding learners' causes of pausing can help teachers with planning speaking courses that can meet learners' cognitive and emotional needs.

To sum up, previous studies report that pausing in L2 speech is influenced by linguistic, cognitive, affective, and communicative factors. Previous research has focused on pause frequency, duration, and fluency, while more recent studies emphasize the role of pause placement and its function. Nevertheless, pausing in real-time presentation contexts has received less attention, particularly among Thai EFL undergraduate learners. This review, therefore, provides a foundation for the present study to investigate types of pauses, their underlying causes, and variations across speaking tasks.

Research Methodology

This section presents the methodology employed in this paper, including research design, research instruments, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, including descriptive data and interview information.

Participants

The population was 410 students from the Business Communication Program, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University. The participants were 20 first-year undergraduate learners, and they were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they met the required language proficiency and academic background relevant to the study.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: 1) enrollment in the Business Communication (International Program), Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, in the academic year 2024; and 2) a minimum valid IELTS overall band score of 6.0 at the time of data collection.

All participants' consent was obtained before data collection, and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Thammasat University, Social Science Branch (Protocol No. SSTU-EC 079/2568).

Research Instruments

To address the research questions, three research instruments were developed and employed: a demographic survey, speaking task prompts, and a semi-structured interview. To establish content validity, the three instruments were validated by two experts in applied linguistics and English language teaching and revised based on their feedback before data collection.

Demographic Survey

A descriptive survey was emailed to students to complete online. It was designed to collect information about students' backgrounds, including age, nationality, language proficiency (overall IELTS scores), and other related academic history. This is to ensure the eligibility of participants based on their profile.

Speaking Task Prompts

To address Research Questions 1 and 2, two speaking tasks were created and adapted following the IELTS speaking task 2 format. The tasks were designed to examine pause types and variation across different topics. This enhanced the simulation of authentic language production, including pausing. The participants were already familiar with the topic themes, as they had seen and studied them in their university courses. The two topics are:

- Topic 1: Business and Influencer
- Topic 2: Online Learning

Participants were given one minute to prepare for each task and were then required to speak for 1.5 to 2 minutes. All speaking sessions were audio-recorded to enable later analysis of pausing patterns. The prompts were designed to elicit longer monologic speech and to enhance learners'

spontaneous speech so that the researcher could explore natural pausing behavior.

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

A semi-structured interview was developed to explore the possible cognitive, linguistic, and emotional causes of pauses observed during the speaking tasks. Four (20%) of the total participants were randomly selected for follow-up interviews. The interview focused on collecting insightful data about related aspects such as vocabulary retrieval, idea generation, self-monitoring, and anxiety. Interviews were conducted online and audio-recorded for transcription and thematic analysis.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate the underlying cognitive, affective, and strategic factors that influence pausing behavior, addressing Research Question 3.

Data Collection Procedure

The section presents how the data were collected. It is divided into 3 stages.

Demographic Survey

Participants were asked to complete a survey including age, IELTS score, and academic background.

Speaking Tasks

Each participant performed two speaking tasks following IELTS speaking tasks. The tasks were administered outside regular class time in a controlled environment, where each participant performed individually under the same conditions to ensure consistency in data collection. The participants were familiar with the speaking themes and topics, as they had studied them in high school and their first year in the Business Communication Program. Here are the necessary details.

- Tasks
 - Topic 1: Business and Influencer
 - Topic 2: Online Learning
- 1-minute preparation; 1.5–2 minutes speaking time per task
- Half an hour break between the two tasks
- Each session was audio-recorded.

Semi-structured Interviews

One week after students completed the speaking task, the participants were randomly chosen for interviews. The participants were informed that the interview was recorded to explore insightful and underlying causes of their pausing production, and the records would be kept confidentially for research purposes.

Data Analysis

For quantitative analysis, the recorded speech data were coded and analyzed using Praat. The audio recordings were coded by two trained raters in English studies and English language instruction. The coded pauses were categorized into three groups: silent pauses, unlexicalized filled pauses (e.g., “um”, “uh”), and lexicalized filled pauses (e.g., “I think”, “you know”).

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the distribution of pause types from speech production of the two speaking tasks (Research Question 1). Moreover, pausing patterns were also analyzed and compared across the two speaking tasks to explore pause variation between the speaking tasks (Research Question 2).

For qualitative analysis, recorded interview data were transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify underlying causes influencing pause production based on recurring themes. The obtained data addressed Research Question 3 regarding factors influencing pausing.

To ensure reliability among the raters, inter-rater reliability was analyzed using Cohen’s kappa, and the agreement in pause duration was calculated using Krippendorff’s alpha.

Inter-rater reliability was high across the two coders. The pause-type coding agreement among the coders was 92.4%, with a Cohen’s kappa of 0.87, and the pause duration bins using Krippendorff’s alpha were 0.80, confirming that the coding process was conducted in a systematic and reliable manner.

Results

This section reports the findings of the study in response to the three research questions. The results include the types of pauses produced by Thai EFL undergraduate learners, variations in pausing across the two different speaking tasks, and the underlying factors affecting pausing behavior. Qualitative findings are reported to provide insightful information for the quantitative findings.

Research Question 1: What types of pauses do the Thai EFL undergraduate learners produce during English presentations?

Types of Pauses

A total of 412 pauses were produced in the recoded speech data obtained from the 20 participants. Silent pauses were found to be the most prominent, followed by unlexicalized filled pauses (“um”, “uh”, etc.) and lexicalized filled pauses (“I think”, “you know”, etc.)

Table 1

Overall Pausing Patterns (N = 20)

Pause Types	Subtypes	Total	Percentage
Silent Pauses	–	187	45.4%
Filled Pauses	Unlexicalized filled pauses	118	28.6%
	Lexicalized filled pauses	107	26.0%
Total		412	100%

Table 1 reveals that silent pauses were the most common, accounting for nearly half of all the pauses made (45.4%), and suggesting that pausing could be linked to speech planning. Filled pauses, both unlexicalized and lexicalized aspects, make up just over half of the total. This result shows that hesitation markers play roles as fluency-maintaining devices in speech. This finding aligns with previous research revealing that silent pauses often reflect cognitive processing and planning in L2 speech (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020).

Structural Position of Pauses

To obtain more insights, the location of pauses within the speech was investigated. Mostly, pauses were made at the clause boundaries, showing transitions, or signaling the upcoming information.

Table 2

Position of Pauses

Position	Total	Percentage
Clause-boundary pauses	256	62.1%
Within-clause pauses	156	37.9%
Total	412	100%

Table 2 demonstrates that pauses were mostly made at clause boundaries (62.1%), prior to transitions such as “first” or “in conclusion.” This suggests that participants used pauses as discourse markers when making shifts in speaking.

To illustrate, one participant produced the following utterance:

P5: I think... (pause) online learning is effective because...

This utterance shows that the pause was observed at a clause boundary before the main idea was introduced.

A further example is:

P10: First... (pause) I will talk about the advantages of influencers.

Here, the pause preceded a discourse marker utilized for organizing the presentation.

In contrast, pauses within a clause were also observed, as in:

P15: Online learning is... (pause) sometimes difficult for students.

In this case, the pause interrupted the clause.

Filled Pause Inventory

An in-depth analysis revealed the use of both lexicalized and unlexicalized fillers. These markers revealed hesitation and served as the participants’ strategies to manage fluency within discourses. The lexical items shown in Tables 3 and 4 were identified through analysis of word frequency from the recorded speech data, and words were then categorized.

Table 3

Lexicalized Filler Inventory

Lexicalized Fillers	Total	%	Business and Influencer	%	Online Learning	%
I think	31	29.0%	14	31.8%	17	27.0%
you know	28	26.2%	8	18.2%	20	31.7%
like	19	17.8%	9	20.5%	10	15.9%
actually	12	11.2%	6	13.6%	6	9.5%
well	9	8.4%	4	9.1%	5	7.9%
basically	5	4.7%	2	4.5%	3	4.8%

I mean	3	2.8%	1	2.3%	2	3.2%
Total	107	100%	44	100%	63	100%

Table 3 illustrates the use of lexicalized fillers across two tasks. It could be seen that “I think” (29%) and “you know” (26.2%) were found the most. Differences were evident, as “I think” was produced more in the Business and Influencer task (31.8%), while ‘you know’ was used more in the Online Learning task (31.7%). This also shows the impacts of topic familiarity on lexicalized filler production.

Table 4

Unlexicalized Filler Inventory

Unlexicalized Fillers	Total	%	Business and Influencer	%	Online Learning	%
um	41	34.7%	23	37.7%	18	31.6%
uh	28	23.7%	15	24.6%	13	22.8%
yeah	19	16.1%	9	14.8%	10	17.5%
ah	15	12.7%	8	13.1%	7	12.3%
tsh	6	5.1%	6	9.8%	0	0.0%
er (๕๐๐ in Thai)	9	7.6%	0	0.0%	9	15.8%
Total	118	100%	61	100%	57	100%

As shown in Table 4, several unlexicalized fillers were used in the two speaking tasks. The words “um” (34.7%) and “uh” (23.7%) were dominant across both tasks. The Business and Influencer prompted the participants to produce more unlexicalized fillers. Particularly, the proportion of the filler “um” was 37.7%, while there was a slightly more balanced distribution of the filler usage in the Online Learning. The filler “tsh” accounted for 9.8% of Business and Influencer fillers. Last, “er” or “๕๐๐” showed the impact of L1 transfer and made up 15.8% of all fillers used in the Online Learning task.

Research Question 2: What are variations of pausing observed across different speaking tasks?

Regarding the participants’ pausing between the two speaking tasks, clear differences were observed. The participants used more unlexicalized fillers and longer silent pauses for the Business and Influencer topic, whereas they employed more lexicalized fillers when giving a speech about Online Learning.

Table 5*Pausing Distribution by Task*

Pause Type	Subtype	Business and Influencer	%	Online Learning	%
Silent Pauses	–	97	46.9%	90	43.9%
Filled Pauses	Unlexicalized filled pauses	66	31.9%	52	25.4%
	Lexicalized filled pauses	44	21.2%	63	30.7%
Total		207	100%	205	100%

As shown in Table 5, the participants' pausing in the less familiar Business and Influencer task exhibited higher proportions of silent pauses (46.9%) and unlexicalized pauses (31.9%, accounting for 78.8% of the total pauses in this task. This reflected participants' effort in processing speaking. On the contrary, pausing in the Online Learning task observed a higher proportion of lexicalized fillers (30.7%), indicating that topic familiarity could be one of the main factors encouraging the use of discourse markers to keep fluency.

The observed differences might be influenced by the nature of the task. It might be necessary for the participants to provide abstract reasoning and evaluative language in the Business and Influencer topic during speech production, whereas participants were required to share their personal experiences in the Online Learning task, possibly reducing processing difficulty and enhancing more fluent speech.

This interpretation aligns with previous research claiming that task types and cognitive complexity can impact L2 speakers' pausing behavior (De Jong, 2016).

Research Question 3: What are the influencing factors towards pausing behavior in English presentations by Thai EFL undergraduate learners?

The findings from the interviews presented three major types of influencing factors towards pausing behavior: cognitive, affective, and strategic factors.

Vocabulary Retrieval (Cognitive Factor)

The participants frequently stated that pauses were made when they were trying to retrieve precise vocabulary. This struggle was mainly observed in the Business and Influencer task, where less familiar vocabulary could lead to difficulties, as one of the participants said:

P5: I could think of the idea in Thai, but it was hard for me to think of the right word. That was why I paused one to two seconds and said “um”.

This theme is consistent with the quantitative result that the Business and Influencer task showed a higher rate of silent and unlexicalized pauses (see Table 2). As a result, these pauses can be interpreted as a real-time lexical search process. Some participants also stated that rather than producing inaccurate words, phrases, or sentences in their speech, their preference is to have brief silence, showing that pauses function for face-saving purposes.

Grammatical Monitoring (Cognitive Factor)

Another evident cause of pausing was the participants' intention and attempt to control grammatical accuracy. Most participants made pauses during their presentations to check whether their grammatical structure, including verb tenses, articles, voices, or order, was accurately produced, as one of them claimed:

P20: I'm sure I had the idea about the topic, but I made pauses to verify whether my sentences were correctly produced.

This result aligns with previous research that observed clause-boundary pauses when the speakers were uncertain of syntactic complexity (Kahng, 2018). It was claimed that learners use pauses to mentally think and plan their utterances. More importantly, the participants did not consider pauses as negativities. Instead, they regarded pauses as tools to ensure grammatical accuracy and prevent error from occurring.

Anxiety and Confidence (Affective Factor)

Emotional conditions were a significant factor in pausing production. The participants consistently indicated that silent pauses were made when they were nervous during speaking, whereas confidence enhanced the use of filler pauses. One participant said:

P15: I felt nervous when I made long pauses, as people are waiting for me. Then, I chose to use “you know” to keep my speech going.

The results prompted a reflection on the factors that influence pauses. Pauses were not only derived from cognitive factors, but they could also be affected by affective conditions. Silent pauses could be in connection with anxiety-induced breakdowns, while lexicalized fillers such as “I think” or “you know” promoted fluency and concealed hesitation. Therefore, this insight shows a direct connection between the higher rate of lexicalized fillers and the more familiar speaking context, the Online Learning task (Table 4). In this case, the participants seemed to be more relaxed and confident in speaking.

Strategic Pausing (Strategic Factor)

The most noteworthy theme was that some pauses did not reflect hesitation, but they were deliberately employed for rhetorical impacts. As one participant noted:

P10: Before my main point, I paused briefly. So, everyone would listen carefully.

This argument suggests that they may reflect emerging rhetorical awareness and audience orientation. Before signposts or examples (Table 4), the participants used strategic pauses at clause boundaries to show intentional planning. The information also illustrates that silence was used as a tool to highlight key information and direct audience attention; nonetheless, it was less frequent than pauses signaling hesitation. This practice relates to public speaking principles stressed in training materials by Lucas (2020).

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into Thai EFL undergraduate learners’ pausing patterns in their monologic speech production. It can be seen from the overall findings that silent pauses were mostly used, followed by unlexicalized filled pauses and lexicalized fillers. The results aligned with the previous research results indicating prominent use of silent pauses in L2 speaking, and the pauses primarily serve as planning steps during cognitive processes (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). This study shows that silent pauses between clauses accounted for more than 60% of all pauses observed, a result that was in connection with the idea that L2 speakers are

reliant on pauses to manage discourse organization and ideas when dealing with a longer speech (Housen et al., 2012).

Notably, the data suggested that not all pauses signified hesitation or breakdown. Strategically, lexical fillers (“I think” and “you know”) functioned as devices to maintain fluency, signal stance, and engage the listener. These markers were fluently integrated in syntactic frames, showing such markers were used for pragmatic and stylistic purposes rather than spontaneous hesitation. Studies by Tavakoli and Wright (2020) also reported that advanced L2 speakers’ use of discourse markers is commonly found, as they can manage their time and interaction when they are processing their cognitive load. In this case, lexicalized fillers were more notable in the Online Learning task, as they were more familiar with the topic, allowing the participants to shift focus from language processing toward managing rhetorical delivery. However, the participants made more silent pauses together with unlexicalized fillers in the Business and Influencer task, highlighting participants’ lexical retrieval demands and cognitive effort.

The comparison of data obtained from the two tasks additionally confirms the impact of topic familiarity on speakers’ pauses (Albino, 2017). Even though both tasks share similar requirements, the participants seemed to use unlexicalized fillers such as “um” and “uh” and markers in their L1 like “er” or “เออ” in Thai when giving a speech on a less familiar topic – Business and Influencer. This observation is in line with recent research studies claiming that topic familiarity truly influences speaking fluency (De Jong, 2016). When speakers are more familiar with the topic, their language processing seems automatic, and they can better manage cognitive resources towards discourse organization and coherence, rather than emphasizing lexical retrieval and grammatical aspects.

The findings from the interviews provided valuable information to support the quantitative data. The participants repeatedly stated they paused silently when they were searching for the right word or when considering grammatical accuracy. Many of them also said that fillers such as “I think” or “you know” were used to keep the speech fluent and to hold the audience’s attention. The findings support the idea that the use of L2 pauses serves cognitive, affective, and rhetorical purposes and is not only used for hesitant expressions (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Particularly, participants intend to use pauses when main ideas or examples are emphasized, demonstrating participants’ increasing awareness of audience engagement and speech rhythm, aligning with public speaking principles (Beebe & Beebe, 2009; Lucas, 2020).

Another interesting point worth noting is the participants’ English proficiency. All of the participants in this study had received an IELTS score of at least 6.0. According to the CEFR level, this IELTS score is at the CEFR

B2 level, meaning that the participants' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is sufficient. Despite this level of English proficiency, the participants were still mainly reliant on silent and unlexicalized pauses, especially when producing a speech on unfamiliar topics or when facing pressure. This evidence is closely related to Mareková and Beňuš's findings (2024) that when the speaking task is more complicated and requires more cognitive loads, speakers tend to make longer pauses when speaking. This reflects the idea that speaking fluency is not dependent only on English proficiency but is also affected by cognitive load, task familiarity, and communicative ability.

Finally, the findings indicated participants' use of lexicalized fillers and strategic pauses at clause boundaries, suggesting that L2 speakers of English at the B2 proficiency level gradually develop discourse competence. Rather than only serving as markers of disfluency, pauses were beneficially used to support speech planning, rhetorical organization, and audience engagement. Therefore, these findings contribute to existing L2 fluency research that emphasizes pausing as a multifunctional communicative resource in real-time presentation contexts (Housen et al., 2012; Suzuki & Kormos, 2023).

Conclusion

This study investigates Thai undergraduate learners' pausing patterns during their English presentations through speaking tasks and semi-structured interviews. The analysis observed 412 pauses made across two tasks, which reflected how learners manage fluency through their use of silent pauses for speech planning, unlexicalized fillers for support in language processing, and lexicalized fillers for maintaining speech continuity.

Silent pauses were most frequently used. The silent pauses reflect their main function of planning during speaking. However, the frequent use of lexicalized fillers (26%) shows that the participants did not mainly rely on silent pauses; nevertheless, they seemed to use discourse markers such as "I think" and "you know" to maintain speaking fluency and to promote audience engagement. Comparing two speaking tasks showed longer pauses and more unlexicalized fillers were used in the less familiar Business and Influencer task, while more lexicalized fillers were employed to make the speech smoother in the more familiar Online Learning task.

Further information about the functional role of pauses was revealed through analysis of pause placement. Over 60% appeared at clause boundaries, as seen in Table 3, often preceding signposting expressions or illustrations. This highlights the use of pauses as rhetorical organizers rather than simple markers of hesitation. Besides, the fillers in Table 4 proved that

lexicalized pauses were integrated in grammatical structures and often seen as stance markers (“I think that...”, “you know it’s...”), so it shows that the participants were developing rhetorical competence.

The interviews provided insight that a pause was influenced by four major factors, namely retrieving vocabulary, monitoring grammar, experiencing anxiety, and achieving rhetorical intent. These findings confirmed that cognitive, affective, and strategic factors together affect how pauses were made. While silence could be triggered by nervousness, confidence had a connection with the use of fillers. In some cases, the participants intentionally paused during speech to highlight main points. These insights suggest that pauses were not seen as weakness but as communicative tools.

The findings of this study reflect that pausing has multiple functions in L2 speech production. These include cognitive processing, affective regulation, and discourse organization. From these findings, this study offers three main contributions. Firstly, it provides empirical data from a Thai EFL context that a pause is used multifunctionally, with processing, affective, and rhetorical benefits. Secondly, the familiarity is considered a significant factor, leading to different pausing behaviors. This idea is supported by the previous research on fluency development in L2 contexts. Lastly, the qualitative evidence shows that participants were aware of pauses. The study also reflects on how participants perceive and manage pauses.

With regard to instruction, the findings of this study prove the advantages of combining pause awareness into oral communication courses. The participants should be guided to differentiate between hesitation-driven silences and purposeful pauses, to use lexicalized fillers as communicative tools, and to use strategic pauses for emphasis so that they can appropriately use fillers in contexts. For the Thai context, a study by Sukrutrit (2023) focuses on anxiety and public speaking training; it is acceptable for teachers to adopt practices including modeling. Teachers could adopt practices such as modeling professional speeches (e.g., TED Talks) so that the participants can transform pauses into rhetorical tools.

Future research should broaden the scope by including a larger size of samples and putting more emphasis on acoustic analysis to gain insight into pause thresholds. Furthermore, future research might focus on studying and analyzing speakers’ pausing in various types of oral genres, such as debates, interviews, or classroom discussions. A longitudinal study, highlighting the development of pause use with sustained practice and advanced language competence, is also advised.

In short, the present study presents how pauses were made in L2 speaking tasks and the results showed that pauses were not only interruptions to fluency but functioned as communicative resources employed by speakers.

for planning, monitoring, managing anxiety, and structuring discourse. Acknowledging the multifunctionality of pauses helps us to broaden our perspectives from considering pauses as markers of weakness signs of students' developing communication strategies. For L2 speakers of English, pausing serves as both a challenge and opportunity in confident English communication.

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Appendix A

Speaking tasks

No.	Tasks
1.	Task 1: Business and Influencer Describe a time when you were influenced by an online personality to make a purchase. You should say: • Who the influencer was and what they promoted • Why you followed their content • What product or service you bought because of them And explain how this experience made you think about the power of influencers in business.
2.	Task 2: Online Learning Describe a challenge you faced while studying through online learning platforms. You should say: • What the challenge was • How it affected your learning experience • What you did to overcome it And explain how this challenge changed your attitude toward online education.

Appendix B

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Item	Question
1	When you made a pause during a speech, what are the most significant reasons for your pause?
2	How do you feel about making filled pauses like ‘um’, ‘ah’, ‘eh’ and etc during a speech?
3	How do you feel about making filler words with meanings like ‘you know’, ‘ok’, ‘well’ etc. during a speech?
4	How do you feel about making a silent pause during speech?
5	Do you think different speaking topics/tasks bring different impacts on your pausing?