

A Comparative Study of Fluency and Accuracy in Second Language Speaking for The Tenth Grade of SMKN 1 Tapaktuan

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between fluency and accuracy in second language speaking among the tenth grade students of SMKN 1 Tapaktuan enrolled in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programmes. Adopting a descriptive comparative approach, the research examines how different instructional orientations—communicative-focused and grammar-focused teaching—shape patterns of oral performance. 26 students from two classes participated in speaking tasks consisting of monologic and dialogic activities, followed by semi-structured interviews. Speaking performances were evaluated using analytic rubrics assessing continuity of speech, hesitation patterns, grammatical control, and lexical appropriateness. The findings indicate contrasting tendencies between the two groups: learners exposed to communicative-oriented instruction demonstrated greater fluency and interactional flow, whereas those receiving grammar-focused instruction exhibited stronger linguistic accuracy. The study highlights the pedagogical tension between meaning-focused communication and attention to form, suggesting that balanced instructional design may better support holistic speaking development. By situating the analysis within the Indonesian EFL context, this research contributes to applied linguistics discussions on how classroom practices influence oral proficiency.

Keywords: *Fluency, Accuracy, Second Language Speaking, EFL Instruction, Applied Linguistics, the tenth grade students of SMKN 1 Tapaktuan*

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking in a second language is widely regarded as one of the most cognitively demanding components of language acquisition because it requires real-time coordination of planning, formulation, and articulation. L2 speaking unfolds under temporal constraints that limit opportunities for self-monitoring and revision, making it a sensitive indicator of underlying linguistic competence and processing capacity (Peltonen, 2023). Research on second language oral performance consistently highlights fluency and accuracy as core dimensions that reflect different cognitive and linguistic processes in L2 speech production.

Within the Complexity–Accuracy–Fluency (CAF) framework, fluency is typically operationalised through temporal measures such as speech rate and pause phenomena, while accuracy reflects adherence to target language norms. Longitudinal studies using dynamic systems perspectives demonstrate that learners’ fluency and accuracy may interact in complex, non-linear ways throughout developmental trajectories (Li & Sui, 2025). This theoretical framework underscores that fluency and accuracy should be examined concurrently rather than in isolation to better understand the architecture of L2 speech performance.

From a cognitive perspective, L2 performance often involves attentional trade-offs between meaning and form. Strong emphasis on fluent production may limit the cognitive resources available for monitoring grammatical accuracy, whereas focusing on correctness may disrupt temporal flow. This trade-off dynamic has been observed empirically in studies that examine the interplay among complexity, accuracy, and fluency over time (Li & Sui, 2025). However, there is a scarcity of research investigating how stable instructional orientations might shape these trade-offs in naturally occurring educational settings.

Pedagogically, communicative-oriented teaching emphasises meaning-focused interaction and spontaneous language use, while grammar-focused instruction foregrounds explicit explanation and corrective practice. Empirical research suggests that instructional emphasis significantly influences the development of speaking dimensions: communicative approaches tend to enhance fluency, and form-focused pedagogies tend to support accuracy (Setyawan et al., 2026). Yet, existing studies often examine these dimensions separately or under short-term experimental conditions, limiting insights into sustained instructional effects.

This gap is particularly salient in Indonesian EFL higher education, where learners are expected to perform in both communicative interactions and formal academic discourse. Although some local research has begun to explore how fluency and accuracy function as proficiency indicators in academic speaking contexts, systematic comparative investigations within Indonesian tertiary environments remain underrepresented (Setyawan et al., 2026). Without such comparative evidence, the field lacks a nuanced understanding of how distinct pedagogical ecologies shape oral production patterns.

Beyond pedagogy, contemporary studies also emphasise affective and cognitive variables that influence L2 speaking performance. For example, motivational and emotional factors have been linked to variations in both fluency and accuracy among EFL learners, suggesting that performance outcomes are shaped by more than just instructional input (Wang et al., 2024). Alongside this, cognitive fluency research highlights the role of automatic lexical processing and attentional control in shaping temporal aspects of speech (Author, 2024).

The present study addresses these theoretical and empirical gaps by adopting a **descriptive comparative design** to examine how communicative-oriented and grammar-focused instructional

orientations differentiate learners' fluency and accuracy patterns within actual classroom ecologies. By integrating quantitative speech performance measures with qualitative learner reflections, the research seeks to uncover not only observable differences but also how learners perceive the influence of instructional emphasis on their own oral competence.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do **fluency profiles** differ between learners exposed to communicative-oriented versus grammar-focused instruction?
2. How do **accuracy profiles** differ between the two instructional groups?
3. What patterns emerge when fluency and accuracy are analysed concurrently within each instructional ecology?
4. How do learners interpret the influence of instructional emphasis on their speaking performance?

The **novelty** of this study lies in three contributions: (1) it situates the comparative analysis within sustained instructional ecologies rather than short-term experimental tasks, (2) it concurrently examines fluency and accuracy to reveal interaction patterns often obscured in isolated approaches, and (3) it provides contextually grounded empirical evidence from an Indonesian EFL setting to inform theoretical debates on attentional allocation and performance trade-offs.

By clarifying how different pedagogical emphases shape oral production configurations, this research aims to contribute to SLA theory beyond simplistic dichotomies of fluency versus accuracy. Instead, it advocates a nuanced view of instructional ecology as a contextual variable that interacts with cognitive processing mechanisms to produce distinct performance outcomes — an insight with both theoretical and applied relevance in second language speaking research.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a **descriptive comparative design** to examine differences in fluency and accuracy in second language (L2) speaking among the tenth grade students of SMKN 1 Tapaktuan enrolled in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programmes. The design was selected to enable systematic comparison of oral performance profiles across two naturally occurring instructional orientations: communicative-oriented teaching and grammar-focused instruction.

Rather than testing causal hypotheses through experimental manipulation, the study aimed to identify performance tendencies within authentic classroom ecologies. Such an approach aligns with recent calls in L2 speaking research for ecologically valid, performance-based investigation beyond tightly controlled task experiments (Peltonen, 2023). Descriptive comparative designs are increasingly recognised as appropriate for examining how contextual instructional variables shape speech production patterns within real educational settings (Li & Sui, 2025).

Participants and Sampling

The participants consisted of 26 **students** drawn from two classes. All were first-year students (aged 15-16) who had completed at least 1 semester of English coursework.

Purposive sampling was used to ensure representation of learners exposed to contrasting instructional ecologies. 15 students were selected from communicative-oriented classes emphasising debates, role plays, and collaborative discussions. The remaining 11 were drawn from grammar-focused classes emphasising explicit grammar instruction, translation exercises, and controlled drills.

Such context-sensitive sampling supports ecological validity and reflects methodological recommendations for classroom-based L2 performance research (Wang et al., 2024).

All participants provided written informed consent. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was ensured through coded identifiers, and institutional ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection.

Instruments

Two primary instruments were employed.

1. Speaking Performance Tasks

Structured speaking tasks were designed to elicit spontaneous oral production while maintaining comparability across groups. The tasks included:

1. A short monologic presentation on a familiar academic or social topic
2. A peer-based dialogic interaction task

The combination of monologic and dialogic formats reflects current methodological standards in L2 speaking research, which recommend capturing both individual fluency and interactional dynamics (Lambert & Aubrey, 2022).

All performances were audio-recorded using high-quality digital devices and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants (10 from each instructional group) representing varied proficiency levels. Interview prompts explored:

- Perceived instructional emphasis
- Speaking confidence
- Attention to grammatical form
- Anxiety and cognitive load during speaking
- Perceived strengths and limitations

Interviews were conducted primarily in English, with clarification in Indonesian where necessary. This flexible approach ensured depth of response while minimising linguistic constraints.

Assessment Criteria

Fluency and accuracy were evaluated using an **analytic rubric grounded in the Complexity–Accuracy–Fluency (CAF) framework**. The rubric design was informed by contemporary operationalisations of fluency and accuracy in L2 speech research (Peltonen, 2023; Li & Sui, 2025).

Fluency Indicators

- Speech rate (words per minute)
- Frequency and duration of pauses
- Smoothness and continuity of delivery

Accuracy Indicators

- Grammatical error ratio
- Lexical appropriateness
- Morphosyntactic precision

Two experienced EFL instructors independently rated all performances. To ensure reliability, inter-rater agreement was calculated using **Cohen's Kappa coefficient**, which is widely recommended in applied linguistics research for categorical rating consistency (Han, 2024). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was achieved.

This multi-rater procedure strengthens construct validity and interpretive credibility.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted over four weeks:

- **Week 1:** Participant briefing and task familiarisation
- **Weeks 2–3:** Speaking task administration in controlled classroom environments
- **Week 4:** Semi-structured interviews

All recordings were transcribed verbatim by trained research assistants. Transcriptions were cross-checked against audio files to ensure accuracy prior to coding and scoring.

Data Analysis

Performance Analysis

Speaking data were analysed descriptively to identify comparative patterns of fluency and accuracy across instructional groups. Rather than inferential hypothesis testing, the analysis focused on observable tendencies reflected in rubric scores and transcript-based indicators.

This analytic strategy aligns with recent CAF-based research emphasising performance profiling and pattern identification in ecologically grounded settings (Li & Sui, 2025).

Interview Analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed thematically using an inductive coding approach. Data were read iteratively to identify emerging themes related to:

- Attentional allocation
- Confidence and anxiety
- Instructional influence
- Perceived trade-offs between fluency and accuracy

Codes were grouped into broader thematic categories and compared across instructional groups.

The integration of quantitative performance analysis and qualitative thematic interpretation enabled **methodological triangulation**, strengthening interpretive robustness and ecological validity (Wang et al., 2024).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to institutional research ethics guidelines. Participation was voluntary, data confidentiality was maintained, and all digital recordings were securely stored. Participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Rationale for Methodological Choices

A descriptive comparative approach was selected to capture how sustained instructional orientations shape oral performance architectures in authentic classroom contexts. By integrating CAF-based performance analysis with learner perceptions, the study bridges psycholinguistic models of speech production with ecological classroom realities.

Such integration reflects current directions in L2 speaking research that prioritise dynamic, context-sensitive analysis over purely experimental generalisation (Peltonen, 2023; Li & Sui, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

The comparative analysis revealed systematic contrasts between the two instructional groups. Learners exposed to communicative-oriented instruction demonstrated stronger fluency profiles, whereas those trained through grammar-focused instruction exhibited higher levels of linguistic accuracy. These findings suggest that sustained pedagogical orientation shapes oral production architecture rather than merely influencing isolated performance features.

Such differentiation aligns with recent research demonstrating that fluency and accuracy development is dynamically shaped by contextual and attentional factors (Li & Sui, 2025). Rather than functioning independently, these dimensions appear sensitive to instructional ecology, supporting performance-based interpretations within contemporary CAF research.

Fluency Outcomes

Transcript analysis and rubric evaluation indicated that learners in the communicative-oriented group produced speech characterised by greater continuity, shorter pauses, and smoother delivery. They demonstrated a higher tolerance for minor grammatical imprecision while maintaining interactional momentum. Fluency gains were particularly salient in dialogic tasks requiring spontaneous negotiation of meaning.

This pattern is consistent with recent task-based and interaction-driven research suggesting that meaning-focused instructional practices enhance utterance fluency by strengthening real-time processing efficiency (Lambert & Aubrey, 2022). Increased exposure to communicative tasks may facilitate proceduralisation of linguistic knowledge, allowing learners to allocate attentional resources toward message construction rather than grammatical monitoring.

Interview findings further reinforced this interpretation. Participants frequently described classroom environments that encouraged risk-taking and spontaneous participation. Such affect-supportive contexts have been shown to reduce speaking anxiety and enhance willingness to communicate, indirectly promoting smoother speech production (Wang et al., 2024).

Together, these findings support contemporary conceptualisations of fluency as an emergent property of processing efficiency, task familiarity, and affective regulation rather than merely temporal speed (Peltonen, 2023).

Accuracy Outcomes

In contrast, learners in grammar-focused classes demonstrated stronger control over linguistic form. Their speech contained fewer morphosyntactic errors, more consistent verb tense application, and more precise lexical choices.

However, transcript analysis revealed that heightened attention to form frequently coincided with disruptions in speech continuity. Learners paused to self-monitor, reformulated incomplete utterances, or restarted sentences to ensure grammatical precision.

This pattern reflects cognitive load associated with form-focused monitoring during real-time speech production. Contemporary psycholinguistic research suggests that conscious grammatical attention may temporarily compete with processing fluency under time constraints (Li & Sui, 2025).

Interview responses corroborated these observations. Participants reported increased metalinguistic awareness due to explicit corrective feedback but acknowledged hesitancy in spontaneous contexts. Such findings are consistent with recent empirical evidence indicating that intensified focus on accuracy can constrain fluency when attentional resources are limited (Wang et al., 2024).

Comparative Insights: Dynamic Interplay Between Fluency and Accuracy

Rather than supporting a rigid trade-off interpretation, the findings suggest a dynamic interplay between fluency and accuracy shaped by instructional emphasis. Communicative-oriented learners prioritised interactional flow, while grammar-focused learners prioritised structural precision.

Recent CAF-based research emphasises that complexity, accuracy, and fluency operate as interdependent dimensions influenced by context, task conditions, and learner variables (Li & Sui, 2025). Instructional orientation appears to guide how attentional resources are distributed during speech production.

When meaning-making is foregrounded, learners allocate cognitive resources toward sustaining discourse. When grammatical monitoring dominates, attentional distribution shifts toward linguistic form, potentially affecting speech continuity.

This interpretation aligns with contemporary reconceptualisations of fluency as context-sensitive and shaped by both cognitive efficiency and pedagogical ecology (Peltonen, 2023).

Discussion in Relation to Contemporary Research

The present findings resonate with recent empirical studies demonstrating that communicative and task-based instruction tends to enhance fluency development (Lambert & Aubrey, 2022), whereas form-focused instruction strengthens linguistic accuracy (Wang et al., 2024).

By examining both dimensions concurrently within a single comparative framework, this study extends existing literature in three ways. First, it provides ecologically grounded evidence from Indonesian vocational school. Second, it demonstrates that instructional orientation shapes performance configuration

rather than simply improving one dimension. Third, it reinforces the theoretical proposition that L2 speech development is dynamic and context-sensitive (Li & Sui, 2025).

These results contribute to ongoing discussions in applied linguistics concerning whether fluency and accuracy development represents a trade-off or a co-adaptive system influenced by instructional variables.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings underscore the importance of instructional balance in EFL contexts. Exclusive prioritisation of fluency or accuracy may produce asymmetrical performance profiles.

Recent assessment-oriented research suggests that optimal speaking development involves strategic sequencing: meaning-focused interaction followed by reflective attention to linguistic form (Peltonen, 2023). Such integration allows learners to maintain communicative confidence while gradually refining structural precision.

Furthermore, affective variables emerged as significant mediators of performance. Supportive classroom environments encouraging risk-taking, combined with constructive feedback, may foster more holistic speaking competence (Wang et al., 2024).

Therefore, pedagogical design should not frame fluency and accuracy as competing goals, but as complementary dimensions that can be integrated through calibrated instructional sequencing.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite offering meaningful comparative insights, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the sample was restricted to two Indonesian schools. Although the findings illuminate contextual patterns, generalisability across diverse EFL environments remains limited. Multi-site studies across different sociolinguistic contexts would strengthen external validity.

Second, the study examined speaking performance within structured task conditions. While monologic and dialogic formats were included, naturalistic discourse may exhibit different performance dynamics. Longitudinal research tracking sustained development over semesters would provide deeper insight into non-linear trajectories of fluency and accuracy (Li & Sui, 2025).

Third, although rubric-based evaluation and thematic analysis offered interpretive depth, speaking performance is multidimensional. Future research may incorporate finer-grained measures such as automated temporal analysis, discourse cohesion indices, or interactional alignment metrics to enrich analysis (Peltonen, 2023).

Finally, intervention-based research testing integrated pedagogical models that combine communicative practice with systematic focus on form would provide stronger causal evidence regarding balanced instructional design.

Addressing these areas will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of L2 speech development and refine theoretical models of attentional allocation and instructional ecology in linguistics research.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how differing instructional orientations influence the development of fluency and accuracy in second language (L2) speaking within Indonesian EFL vocational school. The findings demonstrate that communicative-oriented instruction tends to facilitate smoother and more continuous speech production, whereas grammar-focused instruction strengthens formal linguistic control. These outcomes align with recent scholarship indicating that task-based and communicative pedagogies promote proceduralization and speech flow, while explicit form-focused instruction enhances accuracy and rule-based control (DeKeyser, 2020; Lambert & Aubrey, 2021). The results further support the view that instructional emphasis shapes how learners allocate cognitive and attentional resources during real-time speech production, particularly under conditions of limited processing capacity (Skehan, 2022).

It's very important that the findings do not suggest an inherent opposition between fluency and accuracy. Rather, they reveal a dynamic and context-sensitive relationship in which each dimension develops in response to pedagogical focus. Recent theoretical discussions in applied linguistics emphasize that fluency, accuracy, and complexity are interdependent dimensions that fluctuate depending on task conditions and instructional design (Housen & Kuiken, 2021; Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Communicative environments appear to enhance processing efficiency and interactional confidence, both of which are central to spontaneous oral production, while explicit form-focused instruction promotes structural precision and metalinguistic awareness (Suzuki & DeKeyser, 2020). However, overreliance on a single instructional orientation may result in asymmetrical development, either privileging speech rate and continuity at the expense of grammatical control, or prioritizing correctness while constraining communicative momentum (Skehan, 2022).

The study therefore underscores the pedagogical value of integrative instructional models. Emerging research advocates for balanced frameworks that combine meaning-focused interaction with timely, structured feedback on linguistic form, particularly in EFL contexts where exposure outside the classroom is limited (Ellis et al., 2020; Lambert & Aubrey, 2021). Sequencing communicative tasks with targeted form-focused episodes may facilitate both automatization and restructuring processes in L2 development (DeKeyser, 2020). Such integration acknowledges that communicative competence entails not only expressive flexibility but also grammatical control and discourse appropriateness, consistent with contemporary models of L2 speaking development (Housen & Kuiken, 2021).

Beyond pedagogical implications, this research contributes to applied linguistics by offering contextualized evidence from Indonesian EFL vocational school, a setting that remains underrepresented in high-impact empirical studies. Recent calls in the field emphasize the importance of expanding research beyond traditionally dominant Anglophone contexts in order to refine theory through diverse ecological conditions (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). The findings demonstrate that speaking performance is not merely a function of individual learner aptitude, but is shaped by instructional ecology, classroom discourse norms, and affective dimensions of participation (Suzuki & DeKeyser, 2020). By foregrounding the interplay between fluency and accuracy within a specific instructional context, the study advances a more ecologically grounded understanding of L2 oral development and supports balanced pedagogical frameworks that cultivate speaking competence that is both communicatively effective and linguistically precise.

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