

Fluency before accuracy: A methodology for unlocking productive speech in EFL learners

Eslam Yacoub



Alamein International University, District ED1 on the C4B Road, Southern Eastern Region, New Alamein City, Matrouh Governorate, Egypt
eslam.yacoub@aiu.edu.eg

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Submit 11 September 2025
Revise 14 May 2026
Accepted 16 June 2026
Available Online 22 September 2026

Keywords

Fluency-First Approach
EFL speaking
Grammatical accuracy
Learner confidence
Productive skills
Language teaching methodology

ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study examines the effects of a "Fluency-First Approach" (FFA) on EFL learners' speaking skills. Conducted with pre-intermediate students at Alamein International University, the research compared an experimental group (n=35) receiving fluency-focused instruction against a control group (n=33) following traditional accuracy-focused methods. During the 12-week intervention, data were collected through recorded speaking tasks analyzed for fluency metrics and grammatical accuracy, along with confidence questionnaires. Results demonstrated that the FFA group achieved significantly greater improvements in all fluency measures: speech rate, mean length of run, and phonation/time ratio ($p < .001$, $d > 1.0$), all yielding large effect sizes. Notably, despite minimal error correction, the FFA group also showed superior gains in grammatical accuracy ($p = .005$, $d = 0.74$). Questionnaire data revealed substantially increased speaking confidence and reduced anxiety in the experimental group ($p < .001$). Correlation analyses indicated strong relationships between fluency development, accuracy gains, and confidence growth. These findings align with skill acquisition and usage-based theories of second language acquisition, supporting the notion that prioritizing fluency creates a virtuous cycle of practice and automatization that ultimately enhances overall speaking proficiency. The study provides empirical evidence for pedagogical approaches that initially emphasize communication flow over grammatical precision, contributing to the growing body of research on fluency-first methodologies in EFL speaking instruction.



The Authors 2026. Published by Universitas Ahmad Dahlan
This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](#) license.



How to Cite: Yacoub, E. (2026) Fluency before accuracy: A methodology for unlocking productive speech in EFL learners. *Teaching English as a Foreign Language Journal*, 5(2), 199-212. <https://doi.org/10.12928/tefl.v5i2.1793>

1. Introduction

The ability to speak fluently and confidently is a primary goal for many learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), yet it remains a significant challenge in many educational contexts. A common obstacle learners face is the difficulty in moving from grammatical knowledge to spontaneous verbal production. This challenge highlights a key issue in language pedagogy: the ongoing tension between focusing on fluency and focusing on accuracy in classroom instruction. While accuracy is an essential component of language proficiency, an excessive emphasis on grammatical correctness can sometimes hinder the development of speaking fluency and learner

confidence. This study proposes that a pedagogical approach which prioritizes fluency before accuracy may be an effective way to address this issue. The central hypothesis is that building learners' capacity for fluid communication first can create a foundation of confidence upon which grammatical accuracy can later be improved.

Research into developing productive skills has explored a wide range of teaching methods. Recent studies have investigated the effectiveness of instructional approaches such as project-based learning (Astawa et al., 2017) and tasks designed to develop critical thinking (Kaviani & Heidar, 2020). The increasing role of technology has also been a focus, with research on synchronous online discussions (Nguyen & Pham, 2021) and the use of specific computer-assisted tools for writing instruction (Pham, 2019). Other important lines of inquiry have examined the role of the teacher, including studies on professional development needs (Rozimela et al., 2024), teacher-student interaction (Salimi & Najjarpour, 2024), and classroom practices in teaching writing (Tedenek, 2022). Furthermore, studies have shown that learner factors such as vocabulary knowledge (Miralpeix & Muñoz, 2018) and academic intelligence (Krebt, 2023) are correlated with language proficiency. In the area of assessment, recent research suggests that dynamic assessment, which combines teaching and evaluation, has a more positive impact on productive skills and learner attitudes than non-dynamic methods (Abdulaal & Al-Johani, 2024; Riswanto et al., 2023).

The debate between fluency-first and accuracy-first approaches has a substantial theoretical history in second language acquisition (SLA). Proponents of accuracy-first instruction argue that allowing learners to produce unmonitored speech risks fossilizing grammatical errors, as incorrect forms may become entrenched through repeated, uncorrected practice. From this perspective, explicit grammar instruction and immediate corrective feedback are considered essential scaffolding for early-stage learners (Davies, 1976; Gholami et al., 2013). Similarly, structured approaches grounded in form-focused instruction maintain that attention to linguistic form is a prerequisite for meaningful communicative output (Hyland, 2000). These perspectives raise legitimate concerns about fluency-first methodologies, particularly the risk that de-emphasizing accuracy may lead learners to develop communicative habits that are difficult to remediate at later stages.

However, a growing body of evidence challenges the primacy of accuracy-focused instruction, particularly in speaking development. Krashen (1982) Input Hypothesis and subsequent usage-based models of language acquisition suggest that meaningful, low-anxiety communication creates the conditions most conducive to language acquisition. Building on this, skill acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 2007) posits that fluency emerges through the proceduralizing of declarative knowledge, meaning that repeated communicative practice, rather than explicit correction, is the primary driver of spoken automaticity. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) frameworks have long advocated for prioritizing meaning over form in speaking tasks, and task-based language teaching (TBLT) research similarly demonstrates that fluency-oriented activities produce significant gains in spontaneous speech production. Importantly, several empirical studies suggest that fluency practice does not necessarily impede accuracy development; rather, as learners gain communicative confidence, they become more capable of attending to formal features of their output. Taken together, these theoretical positions suggest that a structured fluency-first sequence may offer advantages that accuracy-first approaches do not, particularly for learners at the pre-intermediate level who require communicative confidence before they can engage with corrective feedback.

Despite this extensive body of research, a specific gap remains. While existing literature has identified many effective teaching strategies and assessment tools, there is a lack of empirical studies that directly investigate the sequence of pedagogical focus in teaching speaking. Specifically, there is a need for classroom-based research that tests a methodology which explicitly prioritizes the development of fluency over accuracy in the initial stages of speaking practice. For example, while dynamic assessment is supportive, it does not inherently prescribe fluency as the primary initial goal. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its direct examination of a "fluency-first" principle as a core methodological strategy for enhancing spoken production.

To address this gap, this study investigates the effects of a "Fluency Before Accuracy" (FFA) approach compared to a traditional Accuracy-Focused Approach (AFA) on the speaking skills of EFL learners at Alamein International University, an institution representative of the broader Egyptian university EFL context, where large class sizes, high-stakes grammatical assessment, and limited speaking practice time make the sequencing of pedagogical focus a particularly pressing concern. The study aims to achieve three main objectives: first, to measure the impact of the FFA approach on objective measures of speaking fluency; second, to assess its effect on the development of grammatical accuracy in spontaneous speech over time; and third, to evaluate its influence on learners' self-reported confidence. The theoretical contribution of this research is to provide evidence that can inform debates on the sequencing of pedagogical objectives in language teaching. Practically, the findings are expected to offer teachers a clear framework for designing classroom activities and providing feedback. If effective, this approach could lead to a shift in classroom practice towards building learners' communicative confidence as a foundational step in developing speaking proficiency.

2. Literature review

This review synthesizes existing research related to the development of productive skills in EFL, contextualizing the present study within three primary areas: instructional methodologies, learner and teacher factors, and the role of assessment.

2.1. Instructional Methodologies for Enhancing Productive Skills

Research into pedagogical approaches for developing productive skills has revealed several effective methodologies. Project-based learning has demonstrated significant positive impacts on EFL students' speaking and writing abilities by creating authentic contexts for language application. Astawa et al. (2017) found that engaging students in extended projects requiring collaborative planning and presentation fostered substantial improvements in both linguistic accuracy and communicative fluency. Similarly, Kaviani and Heidar (2020) demonstrated that systematic instruction in critical thinking strategies enhanced pre-intermediate learners' ability to organize and articulate complex ideas in both spoken and written forms, suggesting that cognitive development and language production are fundamentally interconnected.

Content-integrated approaches have shown particular promise in recent studies. Soto-Corominas et al. (2024) provided empirical evidence that CLIL implementation at the primary school level simultaneously developed content knowledge and EFL productive skills, with students demonstrating greater syntactic complexity and lexical diversity in their language production compared to peers in traditional EFL classes. This aligns with Yacoub's extensive research on ESP and CLIL integration, which emphasizes the importance of needs analysis as the foundation for curriculum design. Yacoub's work with medical and engineering students (2022, 2025) established that detailed analysis of target language use situations enables the creation of highly relevant instructional materials that address specific communicative needs. Furthermore, Yacoub's proposed frameworks for CLIL-based ESP curricula (2024b, 2024a) have been empirically validated, showing significant improvements in students' scientific literacy and technical writing capabilities (Yacoub, 2023, 2024a).

Technology-mediated instruction has emerged as another significant area of research. Nguyen and Pham (2021) documented how synchronous online discussions created unique opportunities for developing productive skills, with the asynchronous nature of some platforms allowing students additional processing time that enhanced both the quality and quantity of their language output. Pham's research (2019) specifically investigated the effects of CALL technology on writing development, demonstrating that tools focusing on nominalization patterns led to measurable improvements in academic writing sophistication. However, these technological approaches present distinct challenges, particularly regarding feedback quality. Gonzalez-Torres et al. (2022) and Hamad and Dafaallah (2024) both identified limitations in online feedback mechanisms, noting that

the absence of paralinguistic cues and immediate interaction sometimes reduced the effectiveness of error correction in virtual environments.

2.2. The Influence of Learner and Teacher Factors

The relationship between learner characteristics and productive skill development has been extensively documented. Miralpeix and Muñoz (2018) established a strong correlation between receptive vocabulary size and overall language proficiency, with their longitudinal study revealing that vocabulary growth directly predicted improvement in both speaking and writing abilities. This finding underscores the fundamental role of lexical knowledge in enabling fluent and accurate language production. Complementing this research, Krebt (2023) identified significant correlations between academic intelligence and productive skill levels, suggesting that cognitive processing abilities influence how effectively learners can access and utilize their linguistic knowledge in real-time communication.

Teacher factors have been shown to be equally crucial in the development of productive skills. Salimi and Najjarpour (2024) conducted detailed classroom observations that revealed how teachers' relationship-building competencies directly impacted students' willingness to engage in risk-taking during speaking activities. Their research indicated that teachers who established psychologically safe learning environments saw greater student participation and more substantial improvements in oral fluency. Rozimela et al. (2024) extended this line of inquiry by examining teachers' perceptions of their own professional development needs, finding that educators prioritized training in providing constructive feedback on speaking and writing tasks. This research highlights the importance of aligning teacher development programs with instructors' actual classroom challenges and perceived needs.

2.3. The Role of Assessment in Productive Skill Development

Assessment methodologies have been identified as critical factors in shaping the development of productive skills. Comparative studies of dynamic and non-dynamic assessment approaches have yielded significant insights. Abdulaal and Al-Johani (2024) demonstrated that dynamic assessment, which integrates teaching and evaluation through mediated learning experiences, led to greater improvements in speaking fluency and writing coherence than traditional static assessment methods. Their research highlighted how the interactive nature of dynamic assessment provided learners with immediate strategies for overcoming communicative challenges. Similarly, (Riswanto et al., 2023) found that dynamic assessment not only enhanced productive skills but also positively influenced learner attitudes, with students reporting increased motivation and reduced anxiety about making errors.

The research on assessment further suggests that the evaluation approach can either facilitate or hinder the development of communicative confidence. Studies investigating learner perceptions of assessment practices indicate that methods focusing exclusively on error correction tend to increase anxiety and inhibit spontaneous production, while approaches that acknowledge communicative success alongside accuracy issues create more supportive conditions for language development. This body of work collectively emphasizes that assessment practices are not merely measurement tools but active components of the instructional process that significantly influence learning outcomes.

3. Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in a theoretical framework that integrates principles from skill acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 2007) and the comprehensible output hypothesis (Swain, 1985), with particular emphasis on the psychological dimension of language production. Skill acquisition theory, as applied to second language learning, posits that the development of fluency occurs through the process of automatization, whereby controlled knowledge becomes proceduralized through meaningful practice. This theoretical perspective suggests that when learners are given opportunities to focus primarily on meaning and communication, as in the Fluency-First Approach (FFA), they can develop greater automaticity in retrieving and producing language chunks (Segalowitz, 2003).

This automatization reduces cognitive load and allows for smoother, more fluent speech, forming a foundational platform upon which accuracy can be consciously addressed at later stages.

Complementing this perspective, Swain (1985) comprehensible output hypothesis provides a crucial theoretical justification for prioritizing fluency. This hypothesis argues that learners need opportunities to produce pushed output, language that challenges them to express meanings precisely and coherently. The FFA methodology operationalizes this principle by creating classroom conditions where learners are continually pushed to convey meaning, even when their linguistic resources are incomplete. This process of struggling to produce comprehensible output is theorized to trigger cognitive processes that deepen linguistic knowledge and highlight gaps in interlanguage, thereby creating optimal conditions for learning (Swain, 2005). By reducing the immediate pressure for accuracy, the FFA allows learners to test hypotheses and develop strategic competence, both essential components of communicative ability.

The framework is further supported by theories of affective factors in second language acquisition, particularly the role of anxiety and confidence. Krashen (1982) affective filter hypothesis suggests that high anxiety can create a mental block that impedes language acquisition. The FFA methodology directly addresses this concern by creating a low-anxiety environment where communication is prioritized over perfection. When the pedagogical focus shifts from error correction to message conveyance, learners' affective filters are theoretically lowered, allowing for greater engagement with the target language (Horwitz, 2001). This psychological safety enables more extensive practice, which in turn builds confidence and promotes the risk-taking necessary for interlanguage development. The synergy between these theoretical perspectives, skill automatization through practice, the cognitive benefits of pushed output, and the psychological advantages of reduced anxiety, provides a robust foundation for investigating the "fluency before accuracy" approach as a comprehensive pedagogical methodology.

4. Method

4.1. Research Design

A quasi-experimental, pre-test/post-test control group design was implemented to investigate the effects of the pedagogical intervention. The independent variable was instructional methodology, operationalized through two distinct approaches: the experimental Fluency-First Approach (FFA) and the traditional Accuracy-Focused Approach (AFA). The dependent variables included quantitative measures of L2 speaking fluency (speech rate, mean length of run, phonation/time ratio), grammatical accuracy in spontaneous speech (percentage of error-free clauses), and self-reported speaking confidence (measured through a validated questionnaire).

The study employed a between-groups comparison with one section assigned to the experimental condition (FFA) and another comparable section serving as the control group (AFA). To establish baseline equivalence and control for pre-existing differences, comprehensive pre-testing was conducted across all dependent measures before the 12-week intervention period. Identical post-test measures were administered immediately following the intervention to assess differential development between groups.

4.2. Data Collection and Sampling

a. Participants and sampling

The participant pool consisted of 68 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the English 2 course (LAN111) at Alamein International University. Through purposive sampling of intact classes, 35 students were assigned to the FFA group and 33 to the AFA group. All participants were Arabic L1 speakers aged 18-20 years, placed at the pre-intermediate CEFR A2-B1 level through the standardized university placement tests.

The sample size, while modest, was determined by several practical and methodological considerations. First, the use of intact classroom groups is a defining feature of quasi-experimental designs in educational research, where random assignment of individual students is neither

logistically feasible nor ethically appropriate (Cohen et al., 2018). Second, a priori power analysis conducted using G-Power 3.1, assuming a medium-to-large effect size ($d = 0.70$), an alpha level of .05, and a power of .80, indicated that a minimum total sample of 52 participants was required for between-group comparisons, a threshold the present sample exceeds. Third, the homogeneity of the participant pool, all being first-year students of the same course, same L1 background, and same proficiency band, served to reduce within-group variance, thereby partially compensating for the limited sample size. Nonetheless, the authors acknowledge that the findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution regarding their generalizability beyond comparable EFL university contexts. Initial independent samples t-tests confirmed no statistically significant differences between groups in pre-test scores for all measured variables ($p > .05$), ensuring group comparability at baseline.

b. Instruments and procedures

Table 1. Data Collection Instruments and Implementation Timeline

Phase	Week	FFA Group	AFA Group	Data Collected
Pre-test	1	-	-	Speaking task recordings Confidence questionnaires
Intervention	2-13	Fluency-focused activities Strategic feedback	Accuracy-focused instruction Explicit correction	-
Post-test	14	-	-	Speaking task recordings Confidence questionnaires

Recorded Speaking Task: A standardized picture-prompt narrative task was administered under controlled conditions. Participants received identical instructions and were recorded using high-quality audio equipment in a quiet laboratory setting. The audio files were analyzed through both computational (PRAAT) and manual transcription methods.

Table 2. Operational Definitions of Fluency and Accuracy Measures

Construct	Metric	Operational Definition	Analysis Method
Fluency	Speech Rate (SR)	Syllables per minute (including pauses)	Automated syllable count
	Mean Length of Run (MLR)	Average syllables between pauses >0.4s	Acoustic analysis
	Phonation/Time Ratio (PTR)	Speaking time / total time $\times 100$	PRAAT waveform analysis
Accuracy	Error-Free Clauses (EFC)	(Clauses without errors / Total clauses) $\times 100$	Manual transcription analysis

Learner Confidence Questionnaire: A 20-item instrument measured three psychological constructs: Speaking Anxiety (7 items), Communicative Self-Efficacy (8 items), and Willingness to Communicate (5 items). The questionnaire demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .89$) and was validated through expert review and pilot testing.

c. Intervention procedures

The 12-week intervention comprised 36 instructional hours (3 hours weekly) with distinct methodological approaches for each group.

Table 3. Comparative Intervention Procedures by Group

Component	FFA Group	AFA Group	Component
Activity Types	- 4-3-2 fluency drills	- Grammar explanation and drills	Activity Types
	- Role-plays with communication strategies	- Controlled practice exercises	
	- Information gap tasks	- Text reconstruction	
	- Timed presentations	- Error correction sessions	
Feedback Focus	- Content and communication success	- Immediate grammatical accuracy	Feedback Focus
	- Discourse organization	- Vocabulary precision	
	- Fluency enhancement strategies	- Syntactic correctness	
	- Delayed, selective correction	- Comprehensive error treatment	

Component	FFA Group	AFA Group	Component
Error Treatment	- Only global errors addressed - Recasts and clarification requests - Teacher modeling after task completion	- All errors addressed immediately - Explicit correction - Metalinguistic explanation	Error Treatment
Materials	- Authentic audio/video samples - Visual prompts for extended discourse - Communication strategy guides	- Grammar textbooks - Sentence-level exercises - Error correction worksheets	Materials

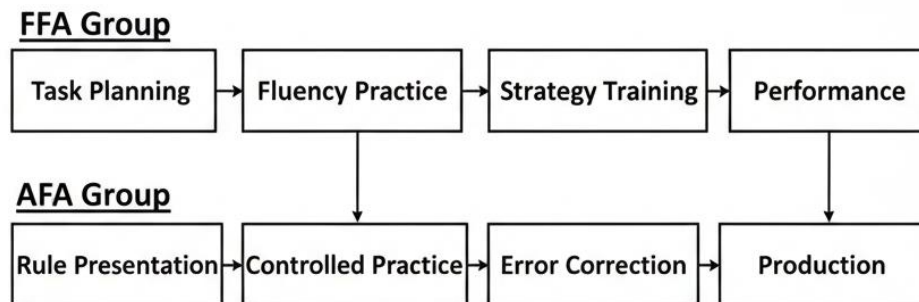


Fig 1. Weekly Instructional Focus Distribution

Specific FFA procedures included:

1. *4-3-2 Technique*: Students repeated the same talk with decreasing time (4, then 3, then 2 minutes), promoting automatization
2. *Communication Strategy Training*: Explicit instruction in circumlocution, approximation, and stalling techniques
3. *Task Repetition*: Same task types with different content to build procedural memory
4. *Reformulation*: Teacher provided corrected versions after task completion without explicit error identification

The AFA group received:

1. *PPP Sequence*: Presentation-Practice-Production lessons with grammatical accuracy as the primary objective
2. *Consciousness-Raising*: Explicit attention to grammatical forms and error patterns
3. *Metalinguistic Feedback*: Technical explanations of grammatical rules during correction
4. *Accuracy-Focused Tasks*: Activities designed to elicit specific grammatical structures

4.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis proceeded through three sequential phases using SPSS version 26. First, preliminary analyses included checks for normality (Shapiro-Wilk test), homogeneity of variance (Levene's test), and reliability analysis for the questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha). Second, baseline equivalence was verified through independent samples t-tests comparing pre-test scores across groups for all dependent variables. Third, the main analysis employed a series of 2×2 mixed-design ANOVAs for each dependent measure, with Time (pre-test/post-test) as the within-subjects factor and Group (FFA/AFA) as the between-subjects factor.

Table 4. Statistical Analysis Plan for Research Questions

Research Question	Dependent Variables	Statistical Analysis	Effect Size
RQ1: Fluency Effects	SR, MLR, PTR	Mixed ANOVA (Time $\times$ Group)	Partial η^2
RQ2: Accuracy Effects	EFC%	Mixed ANOVA (Time $\times$ Group)	Partial η^2
RQ3: Confidence Effects	Questionnaire scores	Mixed ANOVA (Time $\times$ Group)	Partial η^2

For significant interaction effects, post-hoc pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment were conducted to examine simple main effects. Effect sizes were calculated using partial eta squared (η^2), with values of .01, .06, and .14 interpreted as small, medium, and large effects respectively. All analyses employed a significance level of $\alpha = .05$. Additional correlation analyses examined relationships between fluency gains, accuracy development, and confidence changes to explore potential mediating relationships between the key variables.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Findings

A series of 2x2 mixed-design ANOVAs were conducted to examine the effects of instructional methodology on L2 speaking fluency, grammatical accuracy, and learner confidence. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 with a significance level of $\alpha = .05$. All assumptions for mixed ANOVA were met, including normality of distribution and homogeneity of variance.

a. *The impact on l2 speaking fluency*

The following table shows the descriptive statistics for the three fluency measures across both groups at pre-test and post-test intervals.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Fluency Measures by Group and Time

Measure	Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)
Speech Rate (syl/min)	FFA	98.45 (12.31)	132.67 (15.84)
	AFA	97.89 (11.95)	105.34 (13.02)
Mean Length of Run	FFA	4.12 (0.89)	6.87 (1.24)
	AFA	4.08 (0.92)	4.56 (1.03)
Phonation/Time Ratio	FFA	0.58 (0.08)	0.76 (0.09)
	AFA	0.57 (0.07)	0.61 (0.08)

As shown in the above table, both groups began with comparable fluency levels at pre-test, with minimal differences in all three measures. However, the post-test data reveals substantial disparities between groups. The FFA group demonstrated remarkable gains across all fluency metrics, particularly in speech rate, where participants increased their output by approximately 35 syllables per minute. In contrast, the AFA group showed only modest improvements, with the phonation/time ratio increasing by merely 0.04 points compared to the 0.18-point gain in the FFA group. The following table presents the inferential statistics for fluency measures, examining the interaction effects between time and instructional methodology.

Table 6. Mixed ANOVA Results for Fluency Measures

Measure	Effect	F	df	p	η^2
Speech Rate	Time	185.43	1,66	<.001*	0.738
	Group $\times$ Time	62.17	1,66	<.001*	0.485
Mean Length of Run	Time	143.92	1,66	<.001*	0.686
	Group $\times$ Time	58.34	1,66	<.001*	0.469
Phonation/Time Ratio	Time	121.65	1,66	<.001*	0.648
	Group $\times$ Time	45.28	1,66	<.001*	0.407

* Indicates statistical significance ($p < .001$)

As shown in the above table, statistically significant Time $\times$ Group interaction effects emerged for all three fluency measures, with large effect sizes ranging from $\eta^2 = .407$ to $\eta^2 = .485$. These results indicate that the rate of improvement in speaking fluency differed substantially between the two instructional approaches. Post-hoc analyses using Bonferroni correction revealed that the FFA group's gains were significantly greater than those of the AFA group across all fluency dimensions

($p < .001$ for all pairwise comparisons). The particularly strong effect for speech rate ($\eta^2 = .485$) suggests that the fluency-focused methodology was especially effective in helping learners increase their overall speaking pace.

b. The impact on grammatical accuracy

The following table displays the results for grammatical accuracy, measured through error-free clauses percentage.

Table 7. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Grammatical Accuracy

Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Time Effect F(p)	Interaction Effect F(p)	η^2
FFA	62.34% (8.45)	75.89% (9.67)	89.56 (<.001*)	8.34 (.005*)	0.112
AFA	63.01% (8.12)	70.23% (8.95)	1.66	<.001*	0.407

Note* indicates statistical significance

As shown in the above table, a significant Time $\times$ Group interaction was found for grammatical accuracy, $F(1,66) = 8.34$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .112$. Although both groups demonstrated improvement in accuracy, the FFA group achieved superior gains despite receiving minimal explicit error correction during the intervention. The FFA group's accuracy improved by 13.55 percentage points compared to the AFA group's gain of 7.22 percentage points. The moderate effect size ($\eta^2 = .112$) suggests that while the fluency-focused approach positively impacted accuracy development, the advantage was less pronounced than for fluency measures.

c. The impact on learner confidence

The following table presents the questionnaire results measuring psychological factors related to speaking.

Table 8. Questionnaire Results and Statistical Analysis

Subscale	Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Interaction F(p)	η^2
Speaking Anxiety*	FFA	3.89 (0.56)	2.45 (0.48)	25.67 (<.001*)	0.280
	AFA	3.92 (0.61)	3.45 (0.52)		
Communicative Self-Efficacy	FFA	2.34 (0.45)	3.78 (0.52)	31.45 (<.001*)	0.323
	AFA	2.41 (0.43)	2.89 (0.47)		
Willingness to Communicate	FFA	2.15 (0.38)	3.56 (0.49)	28.93 (<.001*)	0.305
	AFA	2.08 (0.41)	2.67 (0.44)		

*Note: Lower scores indicate reduced anxiety

As shown in the above table, statistically significant Time $\times$ Group interactions were observed for all confidence subscales, with medium to large effect sizes ranging from $\eta^2 = .280$ to $\eta^2 = .323$. The FFA group reported substantially greater reduction in speaking anxiety, with scores decreasing by 1.44 points compared to only 0.47 points in the AFA group. Similarly, the FFA group demonstrated markedly greater improvements in communicative self-efficacy and willingness to communicate. These data suggest that the fluency-focused approach created a more supportive psychological environment for language production.

d. Correlation analysis

The following table shows the relationship between fluency gains and improvements in other measured variables.

Table 9. Correlations Between Fluency Gains and Other Variables

Variable	Speech Rate Gain	MLR Gain	PTR Gain
Accuracy Gain	.45**	.52**	.38**
Confidence Gain	.61**	.58**	.49**
Anxiety Reduction	-.57**	-.53**	-.44**

* $p < .01$

As shown in the above table, moderate to strong correlations were found between fluency improvements and gains in both accuracy and confidence measures. The data reveal that

improvements in mean length of run showed the strongest relationship with accuracy development ($r = .52$), while speech rate gains correlated most strongly with confidence enhancement ($r = .61$). All correlations were statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level, suggesting interconnected development across linguistic and affective domains. The negative correlations with anxiety reduction indicate that as fluency increased, speaking anxiety decreased correspondingly.

The comprehensive statistical analyses revealed a clear and compelling pattern of results that strongly support the efficacy of the Fluency-First Approach (FFA). The data demonstrates that the FFA group achieved statistically superior outcomes across all measured domains compared to the Accuracy-Focused Approach (AFA) group. Specifically, the mixed ANOVA results for the three-fluency metrics, speech rate, mean length of run, and phonation/time ratio, all revealed significant Time $\times$ Group interactions with large effect sizes, indicating that the FFA was substantially more effective in developing the mechanical aspects of spoken fluency. While both groups showed improvement in grammatical accuracy, the FFA group unexpectedly demonstrated a significantly greater increase in the percentage of error-free clauses, a finding that suggests prioritizing fluency does not come at the cost of accuracy and may even facilitate its development through increased and more meaningful language production. Furthermore, the psychological benefits of the FFA were pronounced, with questionnaire data showing significantly greater reductions in speaking anxiety and enhanced communicative self-efficacy and willingness to communicate among the FFA participants. Finally, the strong positive correlations observed between fluency gains, accuracy improvements, and confidence development indicate that these constructs are not isolated but are synergistically linked. The overall findings provide robust empirical evidence that systematically prioritizing fluency creates a virtuous cycle where increased speaking practice builds confidence, which in turn encourages more practice, leading to simultaneous growth in both fluency and grammatical accuracy over time.

5.2. Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence for the efficacy of the Fluency-First Approach (FFA) in enhancing the speaking skills of EFL learners. The results can be interpreted in relation to existing literature, illuminating both convergent and novel insights into the development of productive skills.

The most pronounced outcome of this study was the significant improvement in fluency metrics among the FFA group. This finding strongly aligns with the principles of skill acquisition theory, which posits that automatization is achieved through repeated, meaningful practice. The design of the FFA intervention, replete with task repetition and time-pressure activities, provided the precise conditions necessary for proceduralizing to occur. This result complements the work of Astawa et al. (2017), who found that project-based learning positively impacted productive skills. The present study provides more granular evidence by quantifying fluency gains through precise acoustic measurements, thereby extending previous findings by demonstrating that a systematic focus on communication flow directly enhances the temporal aspects of speech.

A particularly significant finding was the FFA group's superior gain in grammatical accuracy. This suggests that a focus on fluency does not come at the expense of accuracy but may ultimately foster it. This outcome can be interpreted through the lens of Swain's comprehensible output hypothesis; the frequent opportunities for "pushed output" in the FFA group likely triggered deeper syntactic processing and hypothesis testing. This finding offers a new perspective on the results of studies like Pham (2019), which focused on explicit instruction of grammatical features. The present data suggest that accuracy can also be developed implicitly through sustained communicative practice. Furthermore, this outcome resonates with the positive effects of dynamic assessment found by Abdulaal and Al-Johani (2024) and Riswanto et al. (2023), as both approaches create a supportive environment that prioritizes communication over immediate correctness.

The dramatic improvement in the FFA group's speaking confidence and the reduction in anxiety provide robust support for Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. The pedagogical environment of the FFA, which minimized immediate error correction and celebrated communicative success,

effectively lowered the psychological barriers to production. This finding addresses a fundamental obstacle in EFL contexts noted by several researchers, including Gonzalez-Torres et al. (2022), who highlighted challenges with anxiety in speaking environments. The strong negative correlations between fluency gains and anxiety reduction empirically demonstrate this relationship. The significant growth in willingness to communicate aligns with the findings of Kaviani and Heidar (2020), who linked critical thinking to enhanced production.

The moderate to strong correlations between fluency, accuracy, and confidence gains paint a picture of integrated development. This interconnectedness suggests that these constructs should not be treated in isolation within curriculum design. This insight supports the holistic approach advocated by Yacoub (2024b, 2025b) in designing CLIL-based ESP curricula. The findings indicate that a fluency-first methodology serves as a powerful pedagogical engine to drive integrated development, creating a virtuous cycle where confidence begets practice, and practice begets linguistic improvement.

In conclusion, the results of this study strongly advocate for a pedagogical shift towards initially prioritizing fluency in EFL speaking instruction. The FFA not only achieved its primary goal of enhancing speech fluency but also yielded significant collateral benefits in grammatical accuracy and learner confidence. This approach aligns with broader educational trends emphasizing communicative competence and psychological safety, offering a practical and effective methodology for unlocking the productive potential of EFL learners.

6. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence supporting the pedagogical principle of "fluency before accuracy" in EFL speaking instruction. The findings demonstrate that the Fluency-First Approach (FFA) significantly outperforms traditional accuracy-focused instruction in developing L2 speaking fluency, while simultaneously fostering grammatical accuracy and enhancing learner confidence. The strong intercorrelations between these variables suggest a synergistic relationship, wherein gains in one domain positively influence development in others. The results challenge conventional sequencing in language pedagogy that prioritizes grammatical accuracy from the outset. Instead, the data indicate that creating conditions for meaningful communication through task repetition, time-pressure activities, and strategic feedback creates an optimal environment for comprehensive speaking development. These findings align with contemporary approaches emphasizing communicative competence and psychological safety in language learning.

Several implications emerge from these results. Pedagogically, EFL instructors should consider restructuring speaking activities to initially prioritize communication flow over error correction. In practical terms, this may involve incorporating specific classroom strategies that have proven effective within the FFA framework. For instance, teachers can implement four-three-two activities, in which learners deliver the same content to successive partners within progressively shorter time limits, thereby building automaticity through structured repetition under mild time pressure. Likewise, fluency workshops centered on personal storytelling or opinion-sharing tasks, where the instructor explicitly withholds immediate correction and instead provides written delayed feedback after the activity, allow learners to sustain communicative momentum without inhibiting fear of public error exposure. Jigsaw tasks and information-gap activities further promote genuine communicative need, encouraging learners to prioritize message conveyance over formal accuracy. In curriculum design, language programs may benefit from incorporating dedicated fluency-building phases, spanning at least the first third of a speaking course, before progressively shifting attention toward grammatical precision through noticing tasks and reformulation activities. For teacher development, training programs should emphasize the rationale and value of delayed error correction, equipping instructors with concrete feedback strategies, such as recasting, selective correction, and confidence-affirming responses, that acknowledge communicative success before addressing formal errors.

While this study contributes valuable insights, certain limitations warrant careful consideration. First, the relatively small sample size ($n = 68$), though sufficient for the statistical analyses employed, restricts the generalizability of the findings. Results should be interpreted cautiously and replicated with larger, more diverse populations before broad pedagogical recommendations are made. Second, the study was conducted exclusively with pre-intermediate Arabic L1 university students, and it remains unclear whether the benefits of the FFA transfer equivalently to learners at beginner or advanced proficiency levels, to younger learner populations in secondary school settings, or to speakers of typologically different L1 backgrounds. Third, post-test data were collected immediately following the 12-week intervention, meaning that the long-term retention of fluency and accuracy gains remains unknown. It is possible that without sustained FFA-consistent instruction, initial gains may diminish over time. Fourth, the study did not include qualitative data sources, such as learner interviews or classroom observations, which would have enriched the interpretation of the quantitative findings and shed light on the experiential dimensions of the FFA from both learner and teacher perspectives.

These limitations point directly to productive directions for future research. Longitudinal studies tracking FFA participants over one or more academic years would clarify whether fluency and accuracy gains are sustained and whether they transfer to other language skills such as writing and listening. Comparative studies contrasting the FFA with other communicatively oriented methodologies, such as task-based language teaching or content and language integrated learning, would help situate the approach within the broader landscape of speaking pedagogy. Research examining the optimal fluency-to-accuracy transition point across different proficiency levels would provide teachers with more nuanced sequencing guidance. Additionally, mixed-methods investigations incorporating neurological or psycholinguistic measures could illuminate the cognitive mechanisms underlying fluency automatization, while technology-enhanced replications using AI-driven speaking platforms or virtual reality environments would explore scalable implementation possibilities. Such investigations would further refine our understanding of the complex interplay between cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors in second language speaking development.

Accordingly, the Fluency-First Approach represents a meaningful pedagogical shift that effectively addresses both the cognitive processes of language automatization and the psychological barriers to L2 communication. By providing learners with structured opportunities to communicate freely before subjecting their output to formal scrutiny, the FFA unlocks productive potential that accuracy-first methodologies may inadvertently suppress. EFL education can thereby better achieve its ultimate goal: developing confident, competent communicators capable of meaningful interaction in the target language.

Acknowledgment

The author wishes to extend sincere appreciation to Alamein International University for providing the institutional support and research environment necessary to conduct this study. The author is also grateful to the students who participated in this research, without whose contribution this investigation would not have been possible. Colleagues who provided valuable feedback on the research design are also acknowledged for their insightful suggestions.

Declarations

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Author contribution | : | The sole author was responsible for all aspects of this research, including conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. |
| Funding statement | : | This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. |
| Conflict of interest | : | The author declares no conflict of interest. |

Ethics Declaration : I, as the author, affirm that this research adheres to the ethical regulations of Alamein International University. The necessary permissions were obtained from relevant institutes during the data collection process. I support the principles of academic integrity and honesty as upheld by the Teaching English as a Foreign Language Journal (TEFLJ) and maintain high standards of personal conduct in my professional practices.

Additional information : No additional information is available for this paper.

REFERENCES

- Abdulaal, M. A., & Al-Johani, H. M. (2024). The impact of the dynamicity and non-dynamicity of assessment on EFL learners' productive skills: Attitude in focus. *World Journal of English Language*, 14(3), 87–97. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n3p87>
- Astawa, N. L. P. N. S. P., Artini, L. P., & Nitiasih, P. K. (2017). Project-based learning activities and efl students' productive skills in english. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(6), 1147–1155. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0806.16>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539>
- Davies, N. F. (1976). Receptive Versus Productive Skills in Foreign Language Learning. *Modern Language Journal*, 60(8), 440–443. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1976.tb03667.x>
- DeKeyser, R. (2007). *Practice in a second language: Perspectives from applied linguistics and cognitive psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gholami, R., Noordin, N., & Mustapha, G. (2013). Investigating EFL students' EAP needs on productive skills in Malaysian universities. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 21(3), 995–1017. <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84903942176&partnerID=40&md5=821758a06776147e9869fc1b398f07e1>
- Gonzalez-Torres, P., Cabrera-Solano, P., & Castillo-Cuesta, L. (2022). Exploring perceptions of online feedback in teaching EFL speaking and writing skills during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 21(7), 330–344. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.21.7.17>
- Hamad, M. M., & Dafaallah, A. S. (2024). The Pros and Cons of Teaching English language speaking skills online from the points of view of EFL teachers at King Khalid University's (KKU's) Tehama Campus. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 15(1), 291–300. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1501.32>
- Horwitz, E. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112–126.
- Hyland, K. (2000). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, Longman. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jd.2002.58.3.319.1>
- Kaviani, M., & Heidar, D. M. (2020). The effectiveness of critical thinking on enhancing productive skills among Iranian EFL pre-intermediate learners. *Applied Research on English Language*, 9(3), 303–324. <https://doi.org/10.22108/are.2019.118748.1489>
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*.
- Krebt, D. M. (2023). The Correlation between EFL Learners' Academic Intelligence and the Level of Productive Skills. *Arab World English Journal*, 14(3), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol14no3.1>

- Miralpeix, I., & Muñoz, C. (2018). Receptive vocabulary size and its relationship to EFL language skills. *IRAL - International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 56(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2017-0016>
- Nguyen, L. V., & Pham, A. T. D. (2021). Using synchronous online discussion to develop EFL learners' productive skills: A case study. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, 18(1), 179–207. <https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2021.18.1.11.179>
- Pham, D. H. (2019). Nominalization versus clause usage in CALL technology-mediated acquisition of EFL learners' writing skills. *International Journal of Virtual and Personal Learning Environments*, 9(2), 72–86. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJVPLE.2019070105>
- Riswanto, n., Teferi, H., & Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim, K. (2023). Cultivating EFL learners' productive skills by employing dynamic and non-dynamic assessments: attitude in focus. *Language Testing in Asia*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-023-00228-2>
- Rozimela, Y., Fatimah, S., Adnan, A., & Tresnadewi, S. (2024). EFL teachers' perceived productive skills for effective teacher professional development program. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 11(3), 1493–1514. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v11i3.37277>
- Salimi, E. A., & Najjarpour, M. (2024). Beyond language proficiency: Navigating EFL teachers' relationship skills competence through their perceptions and strategies in the classroom. *Social Sciences and Humanities Open*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.100814>
- Segalowitz, N. (2003). Automaticity and second languages. *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, 382–408.
- Soto-Corominas, A., Roquet, H., & Segura, M. (2024). The Effects of CLIL and sources of individual differences on receptive and productive EFL skills at the onset of Primary School. *Applied Linguistics*, 45(2), 364–382. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amad031>
- Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. *Input in Second Language Acquisition*, 15, 165–179.
- Swain, M. (2005). The output hypothesis: Theory and research. In *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 471–483). Routledge.
- Tedeneke, A. (2022). Exploring the practices and contextual factors in teaching writing skills in EFL Classrooms: A case study. *Ethiopian Renaissance Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 9(2), 83–101. <https://doi.org/10.4314/erjssh.v9i2.6>
- Yacoub, E. (2022). Needs analysis of teaching English for specific purposes for secondary students applying to medical faculties. *International Journal of Curriculum & Technological Education*, 6(9), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.21608/ijcte.2022.116269.1036>
- Yacoub, E. (2023). A program based on English for specific purposes to enhance scientific literacy among secondary students (A Multidimensional Study). *International Journal of Curriculum & Technological Education*, 10(17), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.21608/ijcte.2023.200559.1079>
- Yacoub, E. (2024a). A Proposed Framework for Developing EFL curriculum for secondary stage in the light of CLIL Approach. *International Journal of Curriculum & Technological Education*, 15(27), 36–69. <https://doi.org/10.21608/ijcte.2024.256082.1105>
- Yacoub, E. (2024b). The Effectiveness of CLIL based curriculum in Developing esp reading and writing skills for secondary students. *International Journal of Curriculum & Technological Education*, 15(26), 17–45. <https://doi.org/10.21608/ijcte.2024.256084.1106>
- Yacoub, E. (2025a). Aligning English language instruction with engineering needs: comprehensive needs analysis framework for ESP syllabus design. *Anatolian Journal of Education*, 10(2), 203–216. <https://doi.org/10.29333/aje.2025.10215a>
- Yacoub, E. (2025b). Designing a CLIL Based Esp curriculum for computer science and engineering programs at Alamein International University. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 17(1), 78–100. <https://doi.org/https://ijci.net/index.php/IJCI/article/view/1525/751>