

Stuttering in EFL Classroom Communication: An Autoethnographic Study of Insider and Peer Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Students who stutter are often judged by the smoothness of their speech in EFL speaking activities, yet little is known about how stuttering is experienced from the inside and how it is perceived by the peers who share the classroom. This autoethnographic study examines how stuttering shaped the first author's experience of communicating in EFL classroom activities in an English education program at an Indonesian university and how two classmates perceived and evaluated that communication. Data comprised retrospective self-reflective autobiographical writing and semi-structured interviews with two purposively selected peers, analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis and interpreted with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). Four findings emerged. First, stuttering shaped self-evaluation more strongly than it reflected an actual gap in communicative ability. Second, speaking difficulty varied with preparation, spontaneity, and audience pressure. Third, word substitution and reformulation served as active communicative adjustments. Fourth, visible participation did not always reflect willingness or ability to communicate, particularly under time pressure in whole-class interaction. The study concludes that stuttering affects EFL classroom communication through self-evaluation, communicative management, and classroom conditions rather than through speech disruption alone. EFL speaking pedagogy and assessment should therefore distinguish speech fluency from communicative ability and provide sufficient response time for learners who stutter.

Keywords: Autoethnography; Inclusive EFL Pedagogy; Peer Perception; Stuttering; Willingness to Communicate

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INTRODUCTION

Stuttering is a speech disorder, and it can be seen as visible disruptions and pauses in the flow of speech (e.g., repetitions, prolongations, or blocks) (Bloodstein et al., 2021; Byrd et al., 2024; García-Pastor & Miller, 2019; Logan, 2022). This disruption can make speech less smooth and usually requires a speaker to take some time to produce an utterance. However, a speaker who stutters may still be able to communicate successfully despite having a disruption in speech. Logan (2022) and Usler (2022) both emphasize the importance of communication beyond the smoothness of speech, particularly when a speaker accomplishes their communication goal.

This distinction becomes relevant in teaching and learning contexts, especially in the EFL context, where learners are expected to participate in speaking activities. Through speaking activities, students' oral performances become observable to teachers and peers. Consequently, fluency is commonly used as one of the criteria for judging speaking ability; widely used frameworks such as the CEFR include fluency descriptors in their scales of spoken production and interaction (Council of Europe, 2020; Tavakoli & Wright, 2020), and instructors may apply it when evaluating oral performances (Werle & Byrd, 2022), which can lead to a significant disadvantage for students who have a speech disorder if observable disruptions in speech determine their performance. Moreover, visible disruption may shape how teachers and peers perceive the speaker's competence. The EFL classroom adds a further layer of pressure: foreign language speaking anxiety, commonly driven by fear of negative evaluation, is well documented among EFL learners in general (Horwitz et al., 1986) and among Indonesian EFL learners in particular (Mustamir, 2024). For students who stutter, this anxiety interacts with the stuttering itself; García-Pastor & Miller (2019) found that EFL learners who stutter experienced anxiety in foreign language learning, particularly in oral skills, and had specific needs that teachers should address. Thus, a gap exists between the current condition, in which speaking performance in EFL

classrooms is often judged through the smoothness of speech, and the expected condition, in which the communicative ability of learners who stutter is recognized and evaluated fairly.

In related studies, Werle & Byrd (2021) surveyed 246 adults who do and do not stutter and found that students who stutter (SWS) reported more negative perceptions from their professors than students who do not stutter (SWDNS) and felt less comfortable approaching them. In a related experimental study, Werle & Byrd (2022) examined 158 college instructors who viewed recorded oral presentations and found that SWS were perceived and evaluated differently from SWDNS, with these evaluations moderated by communication competence. Taken together, these studies indicate that visible disfluency can shape how instructors perceive and evaluate SWS, particularly in formal speaking tasks.

Peer perceptions of SWS, by contrast, appear more varied and are not always negative. In a middle school context, Evans et al. (2008) found that the frequency of stuttering was associated with peer evaluation in some behavioral and cognitive domains, suggesting that the higher the stuttering, the less favorable the evaluation and vice versa. A more recent university-based study by Otrębski et al. (2025) examined the feelings and attitudes of 342 college students towards SWS and found that some gender-academic-major combinations were associated with less negative attitudes and feelings. Together, these findings indicate that peers' evaluations of SWS may vary with the characteristics of the listener and the interaction rather than being determined solely by the presence of stuttering. Similarly, Adriaenssens et al. (2017) examined 22 SWS and 403 SWDNS across 22 secondary-school classes. They found that in terms of acceptance and rejection, SWS were generally well accepted within classrooms, although SWS tended to be more careful in nominating peers, which resulted in fewer reciprocated friendships. In addition, Ma et al. (2024), using the “*Public Opinion Survey of Human Attributes–Stuttering*” (POSHA-S) with 199 college students in China and the United States, found cross-cultural differences in attitudes towards stuttering, with Chinese college students reporting less positive attitudes than their American counterparts and the global median. These findings suggest that peer responses are context-dependent rather than dependent on the existence of stuttering itself. However, these studies largely measured attitudes towards hypothetical or unfamiliar speakers or relied on sociometric data; no study has captured how peers who know a specific SWS evaluate his or her communication in real EFL classroom events.

Listeners can hear and judge SWS. However, they may not fully capture the internal experience. Sheehan, (1970) likened stuttering to the metaphor of an iceberg. In this metaphor, the physical stuttering is only the tip of the iceberg; other aspects such as emotions, thoughts, and concern about being judged are probably not visible to listeners. Adults who stutter similarly define stuttering not only as disrupted speech but also as the affective, cognitive, and social experiences that accompany it (Tichenor & Yaruss, 2019). Qualitative studies have similarly shown that the experience of SWS in educational settings is far more than observable disruptions. It also includes internal experiences (Cobb et al., 2019; Daniels et al., 2012). Daniels et al. (2012), based on interviews and focus groups with adults reflecting on their school experiences, identified themes involving emotional and psychological experiences, academic and learning experiences, classroom participation, and also teacher and peer relationships. More recently, He et al. (2025) examined the experience of 22 university SWS in China and Japan. They found that participants experienced communication barriers across academic, social, and career-related contexts, alongside psychological experiences, coping strategies, and concerns about attitudes toward stuttering on campus. In addition, Luckman & Jackson (2025), in interviews with 15 adults who stutter, found that participants were often uncertain about how listeners would respond, frequently felt judged, and felt pressure to speak fluently. However, most of these studies were conducted in first-language schooling or general higher-education contexts. Even He et al. (2025), the study closest to the present one, examined communication barriers across academic, social, and career-related contexts rather than in foreign-language classrooms. The present study differs by focusing on an EFL classroom, where English is both the medium and the object of learning, and by pairing one insider account with peers' accounts of the same classroom events.

These experiences are particularly relevant to classroom participation. For SWS, classroom participation is not simply about how smoothly they speak. It involves when they choose to speak and how their ability to manage communication becomes difficult when speaking (Daniels et al., 2012). It can be challenging for SWS, particularly when stuttering happens in the middle of speaking. Previous research has shown that these difficulties can influence students' active participation in educational settings. For example, Yalley et al. (2025) used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of senior high school SWS during classroom instruction and found that SWS experienced difficulties with active

participation associated with their learning and broader educational development. In higher education, Hamdan, (2024) reported that undergraduate students who stutter at a Palestinian university faced difficulties with in-class performance and self-presentation, and that art-mediated drama training in a supportive learning environment was associated with their linguistic growth, confidence, and social command of communication. These findings suggest that stuttering may not only shape the experiences of SWS in classroom communication but also their willingness to participate in the classroom. In EFL research, such readiness to speak is conceptualized as willingness to communicate (WTC), a situational construct shaped by anxiety, self-perceived competence, and the immediate interactional context (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Although previous lines of research have examined stuttering in educational settings, including EFL learning, classroom participation, and the perceptions of students and lecturer/teacher towards SWS, they have generally approached the phenomenon from the perspective of researchers who do not stutter, instructors, peers, and other external observers. In contrast, the present study takes an insider perspective by examining stuttering through my own experience as an EFL learner and the subject of this study. As an EFL learner who stutters, my experience alone cannot be fully understood by examining speech disruption only. It also involves how I perceive my own communication within interactions with others and how these experiences relate to my classroom participation. However, a first-person account of my experience may not reflect how my communication is perceived by those around me. Therefore, the perceptions of peers who regularly interact with me in the classroom and in the EFL learning context are needed to provide a complementary perspective on my stuttering. Autoethnographic accounts of stuttering have begun to emerge; for instance, Wu et al. (2024) examined the videoconferencing experience of a person who stutters. However, to our knowledge, no study has combined an insider account of stuttering in an EFL classroom with peers' accounts of the same classroom events. The novelty of this study therefore lies in four aspects: (1) it offers an insider account of stuttering in a foreign-language classroom, where speaking is both the medium and the object of learning; (2) it juxtaposes this account with the perspectives of peers who witnessed the same events (a dual-lens design); (3) it is situated in an Indonesian teacher-education context; and (4) the insider is a pre-service English teacher who will later assess learners' speaking. Theoretically, the study contributes to understanding the difference between speech fluency and communicative ability; methodologically, it shows how peer interviews can complement autoethnographic data; and practically, it informs inclusive speaking pedagogy and assessment in EFL classrooms.

To interpret the findings, this study draws on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (WHO, 2001) as a conceptual framework rather than a grand theory. The ICF describes functioning as the interaction of body functions, activities, participation, environmental factors, and personal factors. It therefore allows stuttering to be understood not only as a speech impairment but also in terms of what a person can do and take part in within a particular context, and it has recently been used to study the experiences of university students who stutter (He et al., 2025). The ICF is used to organize how stuttering, as an impairment, relates to my communication activities, my participation in EFL classroom activities, and environmental factors such as peer responses and classroom climate. This framework helps situate the findings within a broader structure of how the impact of stuttering unfolds, without generalizing causal explanations. The ICF was chosen because it connects the individual, activity, and environmental levels in one framework; the EFL-specific constructs of foreign language anxiety and WTC are used alongside it to interpret the classroom dimension of the findings.

Two research questions guide the study: (1) How does stuttering shape my experience of communicating in EFL classroom activities? (2) How do my peers perceive and evaluate my communication when I stutter in classroom activities? By bringing these perspectives together, the study seeks to understand not only how stuttering is experienced from the researcher's personal experiences but also how it is perceived by peers, which may offer broader insights for inclusive speaking pedagogy in the EFL classroom. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how stuttering shapes an EFL learner's classroom communication from both the insider's and peers' perspectives and to derive implications for inclusive EFL speaking pedagogy and assessment.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach and autoethnography as its methodology. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study aimed to examine my experience of how stuttering shaped my communication in EFL classroom activities and how my peers perceive my communication when I stutter. Autoethnography

is particularly appropriate because it allows a researcher to examine their personal experience in relation to the social and cultural context in which it occurs (Chang, 2008). In this study, I positioned my own experiences as the primary focus while also incorporating peers' perspectives to examine how my communication is perceived in the EFL classroom. Specifically, the study adopted analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006), in which the researcher is a complete member of the setting studied, is visible in the text, and engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self, in this case, the peers. Unlike evocative autoethnography, which primarily seeks emotional resonance with readers (Ellis et al., 2011), analytic autoethnography aims to connect personal experience with broader theoretical understanding. The first-person voice in this article refers to the first author, who is both the researcher and the participant; the co-authors supervised the research process and provided feedback on the design, analysis, and drafts of this article.

Research Context

The study was situated in the English education study program of a public university in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, which prepares pre-service English teachers. Most content courses in the program are taught in English, although some lecturers switch to Indonesian for explanations. A typical class consists of 33 students. Classroom speaking activities include individual and group presentations, whole-class discussions, small-group discussions, and question-and-answer sessions. The autobiographical data cover my experiences from the first semester to the sixth semester (3 years).

Self-Reflective Autobiographical Data

In this study, two data sources were used: self-reflective autobiographical data and peer interview data. The self-reflective data consisted of my own reflections on past experiences of communicating in EFL classroom activities. I reconstructed my experiences through personal memories guided by Chang (2008). I first identified and inventoried experiences relevant to the first research question and then selected and expanded significant experiences through detailed self-reflective writing. These written reflections, referred to as my reflective journal in the Results and Discussion, constitute the self-reflective autobiographical data. They were written between 8 June and 10 August 2026 and comprise five narrative entries (approximately 1900 words). As this reconstruction relies on retrospective recall rather than real-time journaling, the resulting data may be shaped by the selectivity and fallibility of memory. The reflections focused on classroom situations in which I communicated in English, particularly presentations, discussions, speaking activities, and question-and-answer sessions in which stuttering occurred. The final self-reflective data addressed the first research question.

Peer Participants and Interviews

For the second research question, peer perspectives were obtained through semi-structured interviews with two classmates. The participants were selected using purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) based on their repeated interactions with me in EFL classroom activities and direct observation of my communication when I stutter. Participants were required to (1) have been classmates since the beginning of my university studies, (2) have directly observed my English communication when I stutter, and (3) be willing to share their perceptions through a semi-structured interview. A small number of participants was considered appropriate given that the aim of these interviews was to gain in-depth perspectives from peers, rather than to generalize findings. Following the concept of information power (Malterud et al., 2016), a small sample was considered sufficient because the aim of the interviews was narrow, the participants held highly specific knowledge of the phenomenon (they had repeatedly witnessed the same classroom events described in my reflections), and the interviews were analyzed in dialogue with rich autobiographical data. The profiles of the two peers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of the peer participants

Code	Gender	Age	Semester	Relationship with the first author	Interview (date, mode, language, duration)
CM1	Male	21	7	Classmate since the first semester; close friend; study partner	15 August 2026, in person semi-structured interview, English, 13 minutes
CM2	Female	21	7	Classmate since the first semester; close friend; study partner	16 August 2026, in person semi-structured interview, English, 19 minutes

Note. CM = classmate.

The semi-structured interview guide was adapted from Osterman (2014), whose study explores students' experience of oral English participation in classroom settings. The original questions were modified to suit this study by shifting the perspective from participants' own participation to their perceptions and evaluations of my communication when I stutter in the EFL classroom. The interview questions addressed how my peers describe my communication during EFL classroom activities, particularly in situations when stuttering occurs; how they perceive and evaluate my communication when I stutter; how they respond to my stuttering; and whether my stuttering influences their interaction with me during classroom activities. With the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The full interview guide is provided in the Appendix. The interviews were conducted in English by the first author. Because the peers were describing the communication of a classmate, social-desirability and face-saving responses were possible; to reduce this risk, the peers were told before each interview that critical or negative observations were welcome and would be treated confidentially.

Data Analysis

Data analysis employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) following Braun & Clarke, (2021). In this approach, themes are not treated as patterns that simply emerge from the data; rather, they are actively developed through the researcher's systematic and reflexive engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analytical approach was applied to both the self-reflective autobiographical and peer interview data and involved six phases of analysis: familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial codes, developing candidate themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analytical account based on the research questions. Coding was inductive and addressed both semantic and latent meanings. The two datasets were first coded separately and then juxtaposed to identify convergence and divergence between my account and the peers' accounts. The ICF (World Health Organization, 2001), introduced in the Introduction, was used only at the interpretation stage as a set of sensitizing concepts, after the inductive coding had been completed. Coding was conducted manually.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, the trustworthiness of this study was supported through reflexive engagement with the autobiographical data, inclusion of peer perspectives, and methodological coherence drawing on Lincoln & Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness. In practice, this involved peer debriefing with the co-authors, who acted as critical friends; member checking, in which CM1 and CM2 reviewed the interpretation of their accounts; and an audit trail of reflective notes and coding decisions. Reflexive engagement involved considering my position as both researcher and participant. I reflected on how my memories, interpretations, and relationship with peer participants could influence the research process and data interpretation. Methodological coherence was maintained by aligning the research questions, data sources, participant selection, interview procedures, and the analytical approach. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation. Both peers gave verbal informed consent by telephone before the interviews, after I explained the purpose of the study, the use of their interview excerpts in this publication, their right to withdraw at any time, and the limits of anonymity. No written consent form was used. Both peers confirmed their consent again at the start of the audio-recorded interviews. The identities of peer participants were protected by using participant codes (CM1 and CM2, where CM stands for classmate) in the Results and Discussion section. Because the narrator of an autoethnography is identifiable, complete anonymity of the peers cannot be guaranteed; this relational-ethics limitation (Ellis, 2007) was explained to both peers before they gave consent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Four themes were developed from the two datasets. Table 2 summarizes each theme, its data sources, the research questions it addresses, and the ICF components used to interpret it.

Table 2. Themes, data sources, research questions, and ICF components

Theme	Data sources	RQ addressed	ICF components used in interpretation
1. Communication Beyond Speech Smoothness	Reflective journal; CM1; CM2	RQ1, RQ2	Personal factors (self-evaluation, anticipated judgment); Activity (communicating a message)

Theme	Data sources	RQ addressed	ICF components used in interpretation
2. Effort, Pressure, and Speaking Conditions	Reflective journal; CM1; CM2	RQ1, RQ2	Body functions (speech disruption, physical tension); Activity demands (preparation, spontaneity); Environmental factors (audience); Personal factors (tiredness, stress)
3. Communicative Adjustments	Reflective journal; CM1; CM2	RQ1, RQ2	Activity (lexical substitution, reformulation, turn handover, self-disclosure) used to sustain participation
4. Classroom Conditions, Participation, and Visibility of Communicative Ability	Reflective journal; CM1; CM2	RQ1, RQ2	Participation; Environmental factors as facilitators (peer patience, response time, small groups) or barriers (fast turn-taking, immediate response demands)

Note. RQ1 = insider experience; RQ2 = peers' perceptions; ICF = International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (WHO, 2001).

Communication Beyond Speech Smoothness

My autobiographical data show that stuttering shaped how I evaluated my own communication more than it reflected any actual gap in knowledge. During my first semester in the English education program, I began comparing my speech to classmates who seemed more comfortable expressing their ideas in spontaneous English-speaking activities. This comparison became particularly noticeable during classroom questioning, when a lecturer or classmate asked a question and I had to respond on the spot. This led me to question my ability as an English learner, even though I understood the content I wanted to convey. This concern became explicit in my journal: *"This was the point where I first identified myself as an incompetent learner, despite understanding the content I intended to express."* The problem I felt was never really about what I knew; it was about how that knowledge came out when I spoke. This self-evaluation was also connected to concerns about how lecturers or peers perceived my English ability. I wrote, *"I also felt concerned about how my classmates or lecturers evaluated my communication, wondering whether my speech difficulties affected their view of my English ability."* The statement shows that my negative evaluation of my communication was partly based on anticipated judgment rather than on direct evidence from the classroom.

This experience is consistent with Blood et al.'s (2001) findings; they found that adolescents who stuttered had lower self-perceived communication competence and higher communication apprehension than their non-stuttering peers. Although their study focused on adolescents rather than EFL learners, the finding helps contextualize my experience in evaluating my communication through my speaking performance. In my case, difficulty producing speech became connected to how I evaluated myself as an English learner, even when I understood the message I intended to communicate. In the EFL classroom, this self-evaluation may be further intensified by foreign language anxiety, of which fear of negative evaluation is a central component (Horwitz et al., 1986). García-Pastor and Miller (2019) similarly showed that EFL learners who stutter experience anxiety in oral skills, which suggests that stuttering and foreign language anxiety may reinforce each other when these learners are required to speak English on the spot.

Peers' accounts, however, provide a different perspective than my own self-negative judgment. CM1 recalled a presentation: *"I remember one presentation. The lecturer asked a question, and you actually looked like you knew the answer immediately. But you didn't answer immediately. You waited for a few seconds, then started answering."* And concluded, *"You explained it pretty well. So that's why I don't think the problem was that you didn't understand the question."* Asked to describe my communication, CM1 said, *"I think your communication is still good. The speech may not always be smooth, but I can understand the idea."* CM1 also added that *"If someone only looks at the smoothness, maybe they might think you are struggling more than you actually are."* CM2 added a similar explanation close to CM1: *"I think your English is good. Your communication is also good, but I think the speech difficulty sometimes makes you appear less active than you actually are,"* and more directly, CM2 also added *"I think your speech difficulty is more noticeable than the actual communication problem."*

Taken together, CM1 and CM2 show a similarity in recognizing the delayed speech, and they interpreted its significance in a similar way. CM1 interpreted my delayed response as a feature of speech production, and CM2 similarly distinguished the visibility of speech difficulty from an actual communication problem. This

distinction between my self-evaluation and my peers' evaluations is also consistent with Usler (2022) and Logan (2022), who emphasize that communicative fluency cannot be reduced to speech smoothness. This study also provides a more nuanced perspective on previous research. Werle & Byrd (2022) show that speech fluency can influence how SWS are perceived in academic contexts. In this study, however, the two peers did not appear to use speech smoothness as the main basis for evaluating my communication effectiveness. Instead, they focused on how they could understand the main ideas of my speech.

Peers also noticed that I frequently checked how peers understood the message I conveyed. CM1 recalled, *"Because sometimes after you finish speaking, you ask, 'Did you understand?' But usually, yes, I understood."* CM2 similarly stated, *"Because sometimes after speaking, you ask me, 'Was that okay?' or 'Did I stutter?' But from my perspective, I was listening to what you were saying, not counting the repetitions."* CM2 therefore concluded, *"Maybe you don't realize that you actually communicate better than you think."* These comprehension checks can be read in two ways. On the one hand, they function as a communication strategy through which I confirmed that my message had been understood, which is a legitimate resource in L2 interaction. On the other hand, questions such as 'Did I stutter?' reveal reassurance seeking and heightened self-monitoring, suggesting that my attention was directed toward the form of my speech rather than toward whether the message had reached the listener. The peers' answers show that they attended to the message, which reinforces the gap between self-perceived and externally observed communicative effectiveness discussed in this theme.

These gaps show that the same speech behavior can be perceived differently depending on who perceives it. From my perspective, repetitions, pauses, and blocks could be seen as evidence that I was not communicating well. Meanwhile, from my peers' perspective, these disruptions did not prevent them from understanding the message I conveyed in the EFL classroom context. This distinction can be understood through Spitzberg & Cupach's (1989) distinction between communicative skill and communicative effectiveness. In second language research, a similar distinction is drawn between utterance fluency, that is, the measurable speed, breakdown, and repair features of speech, and perceived fluency, that is, the listener's impression of how smoothly and effectively the speaker communicates (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). In the EFL classroom, this distinction is important for understanding stuttering in an educational context, as it highlights the gap between self-perceived communicative competence and externally observed communicative effectiveness.

Effort, Pressure, and Speaking Conditions

The findings further show that the difficulty of communicating did not consistently appear in every classroom situation. My journal data showed that speaking required effort, including effort that was both visible and invisible to peers. I described experiencing *"a physical sensation in my neck just before a block, a sign that seemed to come before the disruption itself became audible."* I also noted, *"These difficulties became more noticeable when I had to speak without much preparation... rushing seemed to intensify the stuttering rather than help me move past it."* Beyond observable disruptions, I also noted mental exhaustion, because I actively monitor both my speech and how others might respond to my speech: *"After speaking activities, I also often felt mentally exhausted, having spent effort not only on the ideas I wanted to communicate but also on monitoring my speech and anticipating how others might respond."*

The peer interviews support this finding by identifying similar differences across speaking situations. CM1 distinguished prepared presentations from spontaneous responses: *"Presentations are interesting because you've prepared what you're going to say, so sometimes you're actually quite fluent... but if there's a question afterward, that's when I notice more difficulty."* CM1 further explained, *"It's more about the situation. If twenty people are listening but you're presenting something you've prepared, you're okay. If twenty people are waiting for you to answer a question, that's different."* CM2 also described spontaneous responses as a difficulty because *"you have to answer immediately. There's no time to prepare the exact sentence."*

These findings support Bloodstein et al.'s (2021) view of stuttering as a dynamic and multifactorial phenomenon rather than a fixed speech difficulty (see also Smith & Weber, 2017). Moreover, this finding extends Daniels et al.'s (2012) perspective into an EFL classroom by showing how specific demands of classroom activities can make the difficulty more or less noticeable. In an EFL classroom, this variability can be explained by the additional demands of second language speech production. L2 speakers must retrieve lexical items and grammatical forms that are less automatized than in their first language, which increases the processing load during conceptualization and formulation (Kormos, 2006). Spontaneous responses leave little

time for this planning, whereas prepared presentations allow much of the formulation to be completed in advance. For a speaker who stutters, the increased processing load and time pressure of spontaneous L2 speech may therefore coincide with the conditions under which disruptions become more noticeable, which is consistent with both my reflections and the peers' observations.

Peer observations also associate greater difficulty with *“Nervousness, maybe. Pressure. And when you're tired.”* Based on regular interaction before class, CM2 also observed, *“When you're tired or stressed, you sometimes say that speaking feels harder.”* Thus, the internal experience of increased effort corresponded with observable changes in speech under particular conditions. This observation is tentatively consistent with Mohammadi et al. (2023), who reported that adults who stutter experienced poorer sleep than adults who do not stutter and that stuttering and social anxiety were associated with sleep disturbances. Because this evidence rests on a single peer comment and the cited study did not examine classroom speaking, physical tiredness is treated here only as a possible personal factor rather than as an established cause of moment-to-moment stuttering.

The findings of this theme can also be explained through the ICF framework (World Health Organization, 2001). The same individual may experience different levels of difficulty depending on the activity, demands, and surrounding context. In this case, limited preparation, immediate speaking activity, audience pressure, physical tiredness, and stress were associated with the speaking difficulty. Mapped onto the ICF components, the speech disruption itself and the physical sensation before a block relate to body functions; limited preparation and the demand for immediate responses are characteristics of the activity; the size and attentiveness of the audience constitute environmental factors; and tiredness, stress, and anticipation of judgment are personal factors that modulate performance. It was the interaction of these components, rather than the impairment alone, that determined how much difficulty I experienced in a given speaking situation (see Table 2).

Communicative Adjustments

My journal data show that I adjusted my communication actively when speech became difficult. I wrote, *“I sometimes replaced it with an easier one, even substituting an advanced word for a simpler, more familiar one in the middle of a sentence.”* I also described temporarily handing the speaking turn to a co-presenter. On other occasions, I directly acknowledged the difficulty: *“Sorry, wait, I stutter,”* before pausing and continuing. From an ICF perspective, these mixed strategies worked together to manage environmental demands rather than eliminate disruption.

The peer interviews support my own observations. CM1 stated, *“I don't remember the exact word, but I remember you starting a word and then saying a different word that had almost the same meaning.”* CM2 similarly observed, *“The speed changes. You become slower. Sometimes you also simplify what you're saying... You use an easier word instead of the word you originally wanted to use.”* CM2 also provided an important example from a presentation: *“During one presentation, you forgot a word. You looked worried for a moment, but then you explained it using another expression. And actually it was fine.”* These responses show that word substitution is not merely an internal strategy, but an observable way to maintain communication.

However, the findings also show that not all preparation necessarily facilitates communication. CM2 stated, *“If you try to remember every exact sentence, then when you forget one word, you become more stuck.”* Preparation can support speaking, but excessive dependence on a fixed script may reduce flexibility when the learner encounters difficulty. In contrast, the ability to reformulate an idea can allow communication to continue even when the originally planned wording is unavailable. These findings are consistent with Wu et al. (2024), who documented similar management as a way of staying in a conversation rather than leaving it. This also extends Logan's (2022) model: sustained participation, not the absence of disruption or avoidance, is what kept communication effective overall.

In an EFL context, these findings are particularly relevant because lexical substitution and reformulation are part of communicative resources. For SWS, these resources may also function as a coping mechanism to manage speech disruption. However, teachers should distinguish between flexible reformulation that supports communication and avoidance that progressively restricts what learners are willing to say.

Classroom Conditions, Participation, and Visibility of Communicative Ability

The last theme brings the previous findings together by showing how classroom conditions affected the visibility of my communicative ability. My journal data indicated that stuttering did not completely prevent

my participation. I wrote, *"I did not stop participating in class, but there were situations in which I became more hesitant to speak, especially when required to speak spontaneously."* I also described the importance of listener patience: *"When the people around me were patient and gave me enough time to speak, I felt more comfortable continuing my explanation... In contrast, when I felt pressured to respond quickly, speaking became more difficult."* Consistent with Cobb et al. (2019), who found that SWS reported varied academic experiences, this study extends this perspective to an EFL classroom by showing that participation is also shaped by the amount of time available to produce a spoken response.

The peer interviews reveal that visible participation did not always represent actual willingness to participate. CM2 stated, *"Sometimes you even tell me what you want to answer before you actually say it in class. But then when it's time to speak, you hesitate."* CM2 further explained, *"I think sometimes the bigger problem is not that you cannot communicate. It's that you become less willing to speak because you expect that you might have difficulty."* Most importantly, CM2 stated, *"Sometimes you already have the answer. But you don't say it because you're thinking, 'What if I get stuck?' So from the outside, people might only see that you don't participate. They may not know that you actually have an answer."*

The pattern in my journal and in my peers' perspectives matches Yalley et al.'s (2025) study, which reported that SWS encounter difficulties with answering questions, participating in peer learning, and engaging in interactive instruction because they often withdrew their participation due to fear of being evaluated or negatively judged, and also anticipate speech difficulty. This suggests that SWS may need more response time to express their thoughts fully, an implication discussed further in the Conclusion.

Interesting findings can also be found in the context of interaction format, particularly the small-group and whole-class interaction. CM1 stated, *"Probably in group discussions, I saw that you could talk normally and contribute ideas. So I didn't associate the speech difficulty with your ability to understand the topic."* CM2 similarly observed, *"I noticed that you're actually quite talkative in small groups. So when I saw you being quiet in a large class, I didn't interpret it as you having nothing to say."* These observations match Bloodstein et al.'s (2021) view that stuttering is not a fixed characteristic of the learner, but it depends on many situations. Similarly, Akmesse et al. (2024) indicate that teachers and peers influence students' access to education and social acceptance. Thus, classroom participation depends not only on whether a learner is willing to speak, but also how the interaction provides a realistic opportunity to do so.

The data also reveal a structural dimension that cannot be explained by peer attitudes alone. CM2 stated, *"Sometimes the group discussion moves quickly. So if you're taking longer to say something, the topic may move to another point."* CM2 further explained, *"Sometimes someone asks a question, and you start answering, but then you get stuck. While you're trying to continue, another person may start talking. So your answer can get interrupted."* The data show that, although peers did not evaluate my stuttering negatively, the difficulty did not come only from how peers responded; it could also emerge from the temporal organization of classroom discussion.

This aspect is also found in Yalley et al. (2025), where participants described situations where teachers did not call on them because SWS were perceived as taking too much time and negatively impacted their academic grade. This study extends these findings by showing that time pressure can operate at the level of peer interaction as well. Therefore, providing additional response time is not simply an interpersonal courtesy; it can affect whether an opportunity for classroom participation remains available. The ICF (World Health Organization, 2001) provides an interpretation of this pattern. Peer patience and sufficient response time can function as environmental facilitators, whereas immediate turn-taking and immediate response demands can be a barrier to SWS.

In the EFL classroom, visible participation should not automatically be treated as a direct indicator of communicative ability and willingness. Therefore, classroom participation should be understood not simply in terms of how often a student speaks, but also in terms of whether the classroom conditions allow the student's communicative ability to become visible.

CONCLUSION

Read together, this autoethnographic study shows that stuttering shapes EFL classroom communication not only through speech disruptions but also through how learners evaluate, manage, and participate in classroom interaction. Although speech disruptions can make speaking more effortful, they do not necessarily prevent SWS from being able to communicate effectively. The findings also show that spontaneous speaking

activities, limited time for SWS to react, and large group interactions can make speech disruptions more noticeable and reduce SWS' visible participation.

Practically, EFL classrooms should assess linguistic competence separately from speech fluency, for example, by allowing extended response time, offering prepared alternatives to spontaneous questioning, and using rubric criteria that credit content and interactional effectiveness rather than smoothness alone. They should also read a stuttering student's silence as a possible response to environmental pressure rather than as low motivation. Limited or delayed participation should not automatically be interpreted as limited English proficiency or unwillingness to communicate. Providing sufficient response time and opportunities to reformulate ideas can help learners who stutter demonstrate their communicative ability more fully. Thus, EFL classroom participation should be understood not only by how smoothly or frequently students speak, but also by whether classroom conditions allow their communicative ability to become visible.

This study has several limitations. It draws on the insider experience of one EFL learner who stutters and the perspectives of two peers in one undergraduate program at one institution, so its findings describe these experiences rather than a generalizable pattern. The autobiographical data were reconstructed retrospectively and may be shaped by the selectivity of memory. The peers' accounts may have been influenced by their friendship with the first author and by social desirability.

Future research could extend this design to multiple learners who stutter across institutions, include peers with less close relationships to the learner, combine retrospective accounts with real-time journaling or classroom recordings, and examine how EFL teachers interpret and respond to stuttering in the classroom.

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