فهم صعوبات التحدث باللغة الانجليزية التي يواجهها طلبة الفصل الأول بقسم اللغة الانجليزية بكلية التربية جامعة مصراتة

محمد أحمد بن نصر   M.bennasr@edu.misuratau.edu.ly

قسم اللغة الانجليزية–كلية التربية–جامعة مصراتة

الكلمات المفتاحية	الملخص
الفلسفة، التربوية، المجتمع الليبي	تبحث الدراسة في التحديات الرئيسية التي يواجهها طلاب الجامعات في ليبيا عند التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية وتقترح طرقًا لتعزيز مهاراتهم في التحدث في بيئة تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. (EFL) شمل البحث استبيانًا تم توزيعه على 20 طالبًا من طلاب الفصلين الأول والثاني بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية، جامعة مصراتة. أظهر البحث أن الطلاب يواجهون صعوبات بشكل رئيسي في النطق والقواعد والمفردات. أظهرت تحليل نتائج الاستبيان درجات متفاوتة من الثقة في مهارات التحدث، حيث أشار نسبة كبيرة من الطلاب إلى صعوبات في استرجاع القواعد النحوية والمفردات. تُبرز النتائج أنه على الرغم من سنوات من التعليم باللغة الإنجليزية، لا يزال الطلاب يواجهون تحديات في التواصل الفعّال، مما يشير إلى وجود فجوة بين المعرفة النظرية والتطبيقات العملية. تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية الأنشطة العملية في التحدث، والتعرض للمواد الإنجليزية الأصلية، والحاجة إلى بيئات تعليمية أكثر تفاعلية لتحسين مهارات التحدث لدى الطلاب. تختتم الدراسة بتوصيات لتحسين مهارات التحدث من خلال زيادة الأنشطة، وتعلم المفردات، ومشاركة معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الأصليين.

Understanding Speaking Difficulties Facing First Year Students of English at the Faculty of Education, Misurata University

Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr

M.bennasr@edu.misuratau.edu.ly

Department of English Language- College of Education- Misurata University

Abstract	Keywords
The study investigates the main challenges faced by university students in Libya when speaking English and suggests ways to enhance their speaking skill in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment. The research involved a questionnaire distributed among 20 first and second semester students from the English Department, Faculty of Education, Misurata University. It revealed that students encounter difficulties mainly in pronunciation, grammar, and *vocabulary*. The analysis of the questionnaire results showed varying degrees of confidence in speaking skills, with a significant percentage of students indicating struggles with grammar and vocabulary recall. The findings highlight that despite years of English education, students still face challenges in making effective communication, suggesting a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical applications. The study emphasizes the importance of practical speaking activities, exposure to authentic English materials, and the need for more interactive learning environments to improve students' speaking abilities. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing speaking skills through increased activities, vocabulary learning, and native English teacher involvement.	Speaking Skill, Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Speaking Difficulties, English as a Foreign Language.

Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr

passing examinations.

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the obstacles which many English students encounter in speaking classes. The paper will also suggest some techniques which could enhance speaking skills and provide possible techniques and strategies to overcome these obstacles.

Research Questions

What are the main speaking difficulties first year university students of English at the Faculty of Education, Misurata University encounter during speaking classes?

What techniques can help EFL learners of English improve their English fluency based on their speaking difficulties?

Literature Review

The term "speaking" has been defined differently according to different researchers. Baily (2002) describes speaking as "an interactive of constructing meaning that involves producing information". Brown (1994) and Burns and Joyce (1997) cite that form and meaning are dependent on the context in which a conversation occurs, including the physical environment, and the

Introduction

Developing language teaching strategies must partly depend on teachers' ability to understand the effects of their methodology. Speaking English fluently is the goal for many learners to communicate with different types of speakers in different situations. Learners often need to be able to speak with confidence, but they face challenges as they continue to improve their speaking skill. They may fail to express their simple thoughts or to express themselves appropriately. Moreover, they may miss-use the grammatical rules of the language. Therefore, such learners seem to lack exposure to more practical techniques for effective communication.

More specifically, one of the core objectives in foreign language teaching in Libyan context is to prepare learners to be able to use the language within the community. These students study English for 12 years as a general subject at school, but they still cannot conduct basic conversations in classroom at university level. In most cases, speaking activities are implemented theoretically. In other words, students attend classes only for the purpose of

Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr

area of difficulty, and this is because as explained by teachers, the learners have not yet developed an adequate level in the basic abilities of the language Al-Lawati (1995). This could be due to the curriculum that does not provide enough opportunities for learning and practicing new and varied vocabulary and does not provide enough variety in tasks designed for the teaching of grammar. (Littlewood, 1984)

Furthermore, at Libyan high schools, all subjects are delivered in Arabic, and English is only seen as an academic subject which means exposure to authentic English material is often insufficient. This lack of a target language environment can lead to a number of linguistic deficiencies, which ultimately result in a lack of involvement in real-life situations. Not allowing learners to participate in discourse can be another reason for speaking difficulties. Children need both: to participate in discourse and to build up knowledge and skills in order to learn discourse skills.

Additionally, because speaking is not tested, it is less emphasized by both teachers and students. This is consistent with Al-Lawati's (2002) findings in her study where students reported giving special attention to writing, reading, and listening tasks that are similar to exam items, and

purposes for speaking.

One of the most important pillars in speaking language is to prepare learners to be able to use the language. It is clear that in order to be able to speak the language clearly, the learner should know enough about grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. As any other language, English is not just a group of words uttered by mouth. To speak a good English, speakers have to know how to connect words, and how to produce these words correctly to construct clear and meaningful sentences in their speech.

Rababa'h (2005) pointed out that there are many factors that cause difficulties in speaking English among English learners. Some of these factors are related to the learners themselves, the teaching strategies, the curriculum, and the environment. For example, many learners lack the necessary vocabulary to get their meaning across, and consequently, they cannot keep the conversation going.

One important study investigated the difficulties encountered by Omani students in their oral production of English and found out that the linguistic domain (vocabulary, grammar ,pronunciation, and discourse) constitutes the most serious

Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr

native language (i.e. Arabic). Suggesting such problems does not mean it is impossible for EFL learners to master English structures and rules (Thornbury: 2000). Through continuous practice of English structures and forms orally, foreign learners can achieve a good level of proficiency in speaking.

The Vocabulary Issue

Vocabulary is one of the most important elements when learning a language. It is an essential skill. Students use vocabulary to understand, receptive and expressive words to acquire and convey meaning. It is an important condition for developing speaking English fluently. When a student does not have a strong vocabulary he/she may struggle to gain meaning of new concepts presented in oral discussions, or they may have problems in finding right words to express their ideas or thoughts. Most learners feel that they do not know enough words which might have serious effects on their confidence as speakers (Nation: 1990).

The Pronunciation Issue

Pronunciation is one of the areas which nearly all learners of English agree is problematic. There are sounds in English which do not

both teachers and students reported that they gave least attention to speaking tasks in the textbooks because speaking is completely excluded from exams.

The Grammar Issue

One of most challenging problems in speaking English is the use of verbs. Although learners might have studied a lot about verbs, they are still problematic, and the main reason behind this is the effect of speaker's mother tongue. For example, according to different teachers' experiences in the field of English as foreign language, many EFL learners drop the suffix "s" in case of verbs with third person singular: *(*He study French)* instead of (*He studies French*). Moreover, most of learners forget to add the suffix "_ed" for the past with regular verbs: (*I want to play football*) instead of (I *wanted to play football*) (Shanklik: 1994).

These kinds of grammatical mistakes which might not be made in writing may not lead to a misunderstanding on the part of receivers. Other common grammatical mistakes which can be made by learners of English may appear in the use of tenses and prepositions. These two topics are quite confusing for many EFL Arab learner due to the interference of their

Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr

the speaking process to highlight the main and most important words. That's to say, words which carry the meaning into English sentences stressed. Two types of stress are presented as a word stress which is a magic key to understand spoken English. Native speakers of English use word stress naturally. Non-native speakers who speak English to native speakers without using stress have problems. They find it difficult to understand native speakers, especially those who speak fast. In addition, each word has one, two, or more syllables contain at least one vowel: a, e, i, o, or u (Brown & Yule: 2001).

The other type is sentence stress; it the music of spoken English. It can help learners understand English even if spoken fast. Sentence stress is what gives English in rhythm, and when word stress is accented on one syllable within a word. Sentence stress is an emphasis on certain words within a sentence (Avery & Ehrlich: 1992).

Finally, teaching strategies also seem to contribute to speaking deficiency as they are inadequate, and they do not pay sufficient attention to the development of speaking sub-skills. Therefore, this often results in the poor development of this skill. Besides, vocabulary items are taught in isolation, and listening materials

exist in many languages that is why learners have difficulty with pronunciation, even though their vocabulary and grammar are sufficiently good. Pronunciation is often a difficult area for students and teachers, and is a fundamental element for any language. It is a real necessity in speaking English, but foreign learners of English do not need to a quire a perfect pronunciation (Avery & Ehrlich: 1992).

However, the main problem is with the features of phonetic structures in the mother tongue. Pronunciation problems happen when speaking a foreign language because most people are used to hearing and making sounds which only exist in their mother tongue (Avery & Ehrlich: 1992).

One of the problems that the Arab learners of English might face, for instance, is to produce some sounds /p/ and /v/. They usually confuse between these sounds with their pairs /b/ and /f/. This leads to change the meaning of works. In this way, each learner has some problematic sounds which may result in producing wrong words (Watson: 2002)

On the other hand, students have difficulties in understanding stress. Stress means to emphasize certain words or syllables and this happens in

Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr

learners. While some studies have explored the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) activities and language games, there appears to be limited research specifically focusing on how technology, such as language learning apps, online platforms, and virtual classrooms, can improve speaking skills in the Libyan context.

Research Methodology

Introduction

This paper investigates the problems of speaking in English that first and second semester students of English Department at The Faculty of Education, Misurata University encounter.

Participants

Grammar				
Questions	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Q1	%20	%20	%45	%15
Q2	%15	%25	%25	%30
Q3	%10	%30	%25	%35

The study included 20 first and second semester participants from The English Department, Faculty of Education, Misurata University, during the academic year (Spring 2023). They were twelve females and eight males. The students were chosen randomly during their class time or between classes.

are not used by the majority of school teachers because of the large number of teachers compared with the number of cassettes available (Chamot: 1993).

In the Libyan context, there have been a limited number of studies which focused on investigating the development of the speaking skill for university students. One study conducted by Owen (2019) to determine the causal effects of certain teaching methods, in particular the communicative approach on Libyan students' speaking performance. It was found that communicative activities based on CLT principles in the Libyan English language classroom could lead to a better performance in English. Another important study by Hmeid and Shawish (2022) explains that many university students of English are unable to speak English fluently although they have been learning English for several years. This deficiency was due to the lack of sufficient practice inside and outside the classroom. They concluded that learners can gain confidence through the use communication strategies. Based on the current literature available, one potential gap could be the impact of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) on enhancing English speaking skills among Libyan EFL

Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr

percentages by multiplying it by 100 and dividing it by the total number of participants.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the questionnaire shows that the students face different problems when they speak English. In order to determine the average percentage of the data collected, the number of participants whose answer was for example (always) is divided into twenty and multiplied by 100. In other words, the average score for first statement has been calculated as follows:

$$((\text{always})) \ 4 \div 20 \times 100 = 20\%.$$

Vocabulary				
Questions	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Q4	%10	%10	%30	%45
Q5	%10	%10	%30	%45
Q6	%20	%35	%30	%15
Q7	%40	%5	%30	%25
Q8	%30	%30	%20	%20
Pronunciation				
Questions	always	often	Sometimes	Never
Q9	%20	%10	%25	%45
Q10	%15	%10	%30	%45
Q11	%10	%15	%25	%50

The Discussion:

This paper aims to find answers for

Research Tools

The instrument implemented in this study is a questionnaire. Statements in the questionnaire are adapted from a study which investigated Indian students speaking skills. It contains eleven multiple choice items and two subjective questions. The answers to the items are based on adverbs of frequency.

1-always 100%   2-often 70%   3-sometimes 50% 4- never 0%

Data collection:

The questionnaire was distributed to the students during their regular classes by the researcher. The students answered the questionnaire voluntarily. It was clarified to students how to answer the questionnaire, and explained that the result would not affect their marks as their names were not an obligatory option. The questions are divided as questions 1,2,3 for grammar issues ,4,5,6,7,8 for vocabulary issues and 9,10,11 for pronunciation issues.

Data Analysis:

The study was conducted based on a closed-ended questionnaire. The data was analyzed by the quantitative analysis method manually. First, the frequency of the responses was determined, then converted into

Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr

results show that students faced most linguistic problems. The most common problem which students faced however is related to pronunciation. It makes the highest percentages with (never) answers, for example: 50% of participants cannot produce the words with exact intonation. While 45% of them don't feel comfortable in talking with native speakers because their pronunciation is not understood. Whereas the highest percentage is represented in participants who answered with (always) maintaining that it is easy to express themselves in English, because they have already prepared themselves to express their thoughts. Generally, most of participants chose the (never) answer. This means that they face most of the problems when they speak English.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Communication is essential in interacting and building contacts with people. Some EFL Students have limited opportunities to learn English in class. While others still do not have enough encouragement to practice English inside and outside the classroom. This case brings a problem that creates challenges or difficulties for EFL students to speak fluently or to communicate effectively in English.

two questions, namely:

What are the main problems and difficulties that university students encounter in speaking English?

What techniques can help EFL learners of English improve their English fluency?

As an answer for the first question, students gave different answers. For example, for the first question, participants replied " I have difficulties in memorizing the new vocabulary" and some others replied "I have difficulties in grammar". For the second question, students suggested " we need more activities ", " we need to learn more vocabulary". Whereas, some participants did not answer or wrote "I do not know ". Other students propose that they need native English teachers. According to Devi and Rao (2018), developing the speaking skill is not an easy task. It requires exposure to knowledge of some concepts, linguistic structures, expressions in addition practice.

Understanding speaking techniques is crucial not only because they may help to overcome the problems and help them to speak English well; but also they help teachers to have a deeper understanding of their students. The

Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr

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To solve these issues, there are some techniques to encourage students overpass their problems. First of all, it is considered necessary for the teachers to force the students to speak only English during speaking classes. It does not matter if they make mistakes. This technique will reinforce students' confidence to try to speak English with no fear.

Hopefully, a perfect environment will be available to help both the teacher and employ more techniques for enhancing students' fluency. Classrooms should be provided with modern equipment in order to help the teacher create different activities that can be used to improve the students speaking skill and allow a better chance to communicate in the target language.

Another final point to add is authenticity. Teachers should provide their students with authentic material such as newspapers, magazines, videos...etc. Authentic material can help learners become familiar with different accents and topics. Finally learner's need should be taken into curriculum designers' consideration when they plan to design curriculum.

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Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr

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Mohammed Ahmed Ben Nasr