

Exploring Speaking Skill Challenges Faced by EFL Teachers in Primary and Secondary Education

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■ Abstract:

This study investigates the challenges faced by 32 English language teachers in Zawia, Libya, in teaching speaking skills. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect data on the difficulties teachers encounter in fostering oral communication among students. The findings reveal several key obstacles, including limited classroom resources, large class sizes, and insufficient student motivation. Additionally, teachers highlight a lack of professional training opportunities and challenges stemming from cultural and linguistic barriers. The study underscores the need for targeted teacher development programs, enhanced pedagogical strategies, and supportive educational policies to address these challenges. By providing actionable recommendations, this research aims to contribute to improving the teaching and learning of speaking skills in Libyan classrooms.

● **Keywords:** Challenges, Class Room, Practice, Speaking Skill

■ المستخلص:

تُحقق هذه الدراسة في التحديات التي يواجهها 32 مدرسًا للغة الإنجليزية في مدينة الزاوية، ليبيا، أثناء تعليم مهارات التحدث. باستخدام منهجية مختلطة، تجمع الدراسة بين الاستبيانات والمقابلات شبه المنظمة لجمع البيانات حول الصعوبات التي يواجهها المدرسون في تعزيز مهارات التواصل الشفوي بين الطلاب. تكشف النتائج عن عدة عقبات رئيسية، بما في ذلك قلة الموارد التعليمية في الفصول، الكثافة العالية للصفوف، وضعف دافعية الطلاب. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يسلط

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المدرسون الضوء على نقص فرص التدريب المهني والتحديات الناتجة عن الحواجز الثقافية واللغوية. تؤكد الدراسة على الحاجة إلى برامج تطوير مستهدفة للمعلمين، استراتيجيات تربوية محسنة، وسياسات تعليمية داعمة لمعالجة هذه التحديات. ومن خلال تقديم توصيات قابلة للتنفيذ، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى المساهمة في تحسين تعليم وتعلم مهارات التحدث في الفصول الدراسية الليبية.

● **الكلمات المفتاحية:** التحديات، الفصل الدراسي، الممارسة، مهارة التحدث.

■ Introduction

English is a global language that facilitates communication across cultures and plays a crucial role in various fields, including technology, politics, and education (Crystal, 1997). In Libya, English is introduced early in education and used in business and academia. However, despite years of study, many Libyan students struggle with speaking English, as it is primarily taught to pass exams rather than for communication (Alhamroni, 2009). Mastery of English is a priority for EFL learners, who often measure their progress through speaking ability (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Effective communication requires both speaking and listening skills, making language a key tool for achieving personal and professional goals (Harmer, 2007; Gilakjani, 2017). Al-Omri and Ahmed(2019) reported that speaking is a collaborative process of meaning construction that requires the production, reception, and processing of information. Its form and meaning are determined by the context in which it takes place, including the participants, their shared experience, their specific background, and their speaking purposes.

■ Literature Review

● Definition of Speaking

There are a lot of definitions of the word 'speaking' that have been suggested by researchers in language learning Harmer (2007) defined speaking as a tool for expressing human beings who engage in various oral tasks, while Alimi, (2015) mentioned that it allows individuals to communicate their personal needs or engage in transactional processes. Muttaqin (2019) pointed out that speaking serves as a means of communication to convey meaning to others

successfully. Speaking is the most common technique used for transferring messages to others. Another definition by Saidouni (2019) states that speaking skills is the ability to express oneself correctly and fluently in a given situation. Specifically, students must demonstrate mastery in the following speaking skills: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, and pronunciation.

• The Importance of Speaking Skills in Learning

In today's global communication plays a crucial role in achieving success in all fields language serves primary tools for a perfect communication which is impossible without it (Rao, 2019). People cannot achieve their goals without using appropriate language. Thus there needs for mutual language to communicate with other people all round world. Effective communication relies heavily on the ability to speak well. English language holds great importance to serves in various fields such as economics, politics, education, science, and technology. According to Leong and Ahmadi (2017), mention that the acquisition of English speaking skills is popular goal for many learners of English as EFL/ ESL. They believe that communication relies on language which is used different situation to convey message and share thoughts and communicate to other. The need for mastery in English speaking is increasing as English becomes more widely used for international communication (Nazara, 2011). Communication relies on language, which is essential for expressing ideas, feelings, and thoughts. Language is crucial for sharing problems and adds beauty to life. Speech is necessary for communication. Effective communication fosters understanding, while a communication gap leads to problems. Productive skills are essential for effective communication. In respect, Al-Omri (2019), stated that speaking could incorporation the other skills. For example, speaking can assist learners in improving their vocabulary and grammar and later enhancing their writing skills. As well researcher mentioned that by speaking, learners could express their feelings, views, or thoughts and tell stories through conversations.

• Background of English Language Teaching Methods in Libya

English teaching in Libyan schools primarily relies on the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), where teachers use Arabic to explain lessons and translate texts (Owen et al., 2019). Despite the availability of other

methods like the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and the Communicative Approach (CA), GTM remains dominant, focusing on grammar and vocabulary rather than oral skills (Diaab, 2016). This lack of speaking practice limits students’ ability to communicate effectively in English (Najeeb, 2013). In 2005, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced to encourage oral proficiency, but many teachers still favor traditional methods, fearing CLT’s effectiveness (Owen & Razali, 2018). Consequently, oral activities are often skipped, as both teachers and students prioritize exams over communication skills. Experts suggest that Libyan EFL education needs to emphasize speaking and listening alongside reading and writing (Algamati, 2024; Al-Bakbak, 2019). However, the current system continues to focus more on literacy, leaving students with limited real-world English-speaking ability.

■ **Statistical Analysis instruments**

To evaluate the responses of the study sample, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS V27), which includes: frequency tables, arithmetic mean, standard deviation.

Table (1) Results of the test for the reliability of the study questionnaire (Cronbach’s Alpha)

No	Topics	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
1	<i>Accessible Audio – Aides</i>	15	0.736

Table (2) Sample distribution based on years of teaching experience

Years of teaching experience	Count	%
1-5	8	23.5%
6-10	9	26.5%
11-15	17	50.0%
Total	34	100.0%

Table 2 presents the distribution of the sample based on years of teaching experience, revealing that the majority of participants (50.0%)

have between 11 and 15 years of teaching experience. Teachers with 6 to 10 years of experience constitute 26.5% of the sample, while those with 1 to 5 years' account for 23.5%. These findings suggest that the sample consists predominantly of experienced educators, which may enhance the reliability of insights into speaking skill challenges faced by EFL teachers in primary and secondary education.

Table (3) Sample distribution based on educational level of students

Educational level of students	Count	%
<i>Primary</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>50.0</i>
<i>Secondary</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>50.0</i>
Total	34	100.0

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of the sample based on the educational level of students taught by the participants. The results show an equal representation of primary and secondary education teachers, with each group comprising 50.0% of the sample. This balanced distribution ensures that perspectives from both educational levels are equally considered.

Table (4) Responses from the sample regarding the challenges related to speaking skills experienced by EFL teachers in primary and secondary education.

Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
My students lack confidence when speaking in English	1	2.9	2	5.9	7	20.6	14	41.2	10	29.4
There is insufficient time allocated for practicing speaking skills.	3	8.8	2	5.9	6	17.6	14	41.2	9	26.5
The available teaching resources do not adequately focus on speaking skills.	1	2.9	2	5.9	5	14.7	20	58.8	6	17.6

Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
I struggle to find effective activities to develop speaking skills.	1	2.9	6	17.6	7	20.6	13	38.2	7	20.6
Students' lack of motivation hinders their participation in speaking activities.	1	2.9	4	11.8	6	17.6	14	41.2	9	26.5
Large class sizes make it difficult to give individual attention to students' speaking skills.	2	5.9	4	11.8	1	2.9	12	35.3	15	44.4
Students' weak language proficiency affects their ability to speak fluently.	-	-	1	2.9	2	5.9	19	55.9	12	35.3
The current curriculum lacks sufficient activities to improve speaking skills.	2	5.9	7	20.6	5	14.7	16	47.1	4	11.8
Limited access to technical tools (e.g., audio devices, recording tools) hinders effective teaching.	2	5.9	2	5.9	4	11.8	13	38.2	13	38.2
I find it challenging to assess speaking skills fairly and objectively.	1	2.9	6	17.6	11	32.4	15	44.1	1	2.9
Online teaching makes it more difficult to develop students' speaking abilities.	4	11.8	8	23.5	14	41.2	8	23.5	-	-
Classroom activities do not encourage students to use English enough.	1	2.9	16	47.1	8	23.5	8	23.5	1	2.9

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Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
I feel the need for additional training to enhance my ability to teach speaking skills.»	1	2.9	8	23.5	4	11.8	18	52.9	3	8.5
Students prefer reading and writing activities over speaking tasks.	2	5.9	7	20.6	5	14.7	16	47.1	4	11.8
Students find it difficult to use English naturally in real-life situations.	1	2.9	1	2.9	4	11.8	14	41.2	14	41.2

Table 4 presents the challenges related to speaking skills as reported by EFL teachers in primary and secondary education. The results indicate that a significant proportion of teachers perceive students' lack of confidence (70.6% agreed or strongly agreed) and weak language proficiency (91.2%) as major obstacles to speaking fluency. Additionally, insufficient time allocated for speaking practice (67.7%) and inadequate teaching resources (76.4%) were highlighted as barriers to effective instruction. Large class sizes (79.7%) and students' lack of motivation (67.7%) were also commonly reported concerns. Furthermore, 61.8% of teachers expressed difficulty in finding effective activities to develop speaking skills, while 61.8% also noted limited access to technical tools as a hindrance. Regarding assessment, 47.0% of teachers found it challenging to evaluate speaking skills fairly and objectively. The responses also suggest a need for professional development, as 61.4% of teachers felt additional training would enhance their ability to teach speaking skills. Notably, 58.9% agreed that students struggle to use English naturally in real-life situations. However, opinions were more divided on the impact of online teaching and the effectiveness of classroom activities in promoting spoken English, with 41.2% remaining neutral on the former and 47.1% disagreeing with the latter statement. Overall, these findings highlight the multifaceted challenges faced by EFL teachers, emphasizing the need for improved resources, training, and pedagogical strategies to enhance students' speaking proficiency.

Table (5) Mean and standard deviation of the challenges related to speaking skills encountered by EFL teachers in primary and secondary education.

Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Level of agreement
<i>My students lack confidence when speaking in English</i>	3.88	1.008	High
<i>There is insufficient time allocated for practicing speaking skills.</i>	3.71	1.194	
<i>The available teaching resources do not adequately focus on speaking skills.</i>	3.82	0.904	High
<i>I struggle to find effective activities to develop speaking skills.</i>	3.56	1.106	High
<i>Students' lack of motivation hinders their participation in speaking activities.</i>	3.76	1.075	High
<i>Large class sizes make it difficult to give individual attention to students' speaking skills.</i>	4.00	1.231	High
<i>Students' weak language proficiency affects their ability to speak fluently.</i>	4.24	0.699	Very high
<i>The current curriculum lacks sufficient activities to improve speaking skills.</i>	3.38	1.129	Moderate
<i>Limited access to technical tools (e.g., audio devices, recording tools) hinders effective teaching.</i>	3.97	1.141	High
<i>I find it challenging to assess speaking skills fairly and objectively.</i>	3.26	0.898	Moderate
<i>Online teaching makes it more difficult to develop students' speaking abilities.</i>	2.76	0.955	Moderate
<i>Classroom activities do not encourage students to use English enough.</i>	2.76	0.955	Moderate

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Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Level of agreement
<i>I feel the need for additional training to enhance my ability to teach speaking skills.»</i>	3.41	1.048	High
<i>Students prefer reading and writing activities over speaking tasks.</i>	3.38	1.129	Moderate
<i>Students find it difficult to use English naturally in real-life situations.</i>	4.15	0.958	High
Over all	3.60	0.379	High

Table 5 presents the mean and standard deviation of challenges related to speaking skills encountered by EFL teachers in primary and secondary education. The overall mean score ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.379$) indicates a high level of agreement among teachers regarding the difficulties they face in teaching speaking skills. The highest-rated challenge was students' weak language proficiency ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.699$), categorized as "very high," suggesting that limited language ability significantly affects students' fluency. Other major challenges included large class sizes ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.231$), students' difficulty in using English naturally in real-life situations ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.958$), and limited access to technical tools ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.141$), all of which were rated at a high level of agreement. Additionally, students' lack of confidence ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.008$) and motivation ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.075$) were also significant barriers.

Conversely, the lowest-rated challenges were related to online teaching ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.955$) and classroom activities not encouraging English use ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.955$), both classified as moderate concerns. Similarly, difficulties in fairly assessing speaking skills ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.898$) and the adequacy of the curriculum ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.129$) were rated at a moderate level. The need for additional teacher training ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.048$) also received high agreement, suggesting that professional development could help address some of these challenges. Overall, the results highlight that linguistic barriers, classroom size, and resource limitations are primary concerns for EFL teachers, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to improve speaking instruction.

■ Summary of the Results

The findings of this study highlight the significant challenges faced by EFL teachers in primary and secondary education when teaching speaking skills. The sample distribution indicates that the majority of participants have extensive teaching experience, with equal representation from primary and secondary education. The most prominent challenges reported include students' weak language proficiency (91.2% agreement), lack of confidence (70.6%), and low motivation (67.7%), all of which hinder fluency development. Additionally, large class sizes (79.7%) and insufficient time for speaking practice (67.7%) were identified as major obstacles. The results also indicate that available teaching resources and technical tools are inadequate for fostering speaking skills. While most teachers reported struggling to find effective activities (61.8%) and expressed the need for additional training (61.4%), assessing speaking skills fairly and objectively was a moderate concern. The overall mean score ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.379$) suggests that the challenges related to teaching speaking skills are substantial, with language proficiency, classroom constraints, and curriculum limitations being the most critical barriers.

What Challenges do Libyan Teachers in Primary and Secondary Schools face while Teaching Speaking?

Based on the study's findings, Libyan EFL teachers in primary and secondary schools face several challenges when teaching speaking skills.

1. Linguistic Challenges

- The most significant challenge reported was students' weak language proficiency, with 91.2% of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing (Table 4). This issue had the highest mean score ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.699$), indicating a "very high" level of concern (Table 5).
- Many students hesitate to speak in English due to fear of making mistakes, as 70.6% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their students lack confidence (Table 4). The mean score for this challenge was $M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.008$, indicating a high level of agreement (Table 5).

- 82.4% of teachers stated that students struggle to use English naturally in real-life situations (Table 4), with a high mean score of $M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.958$ (Table 5).

2. Classroom and Instructional Challenges

- 79.7% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that large class sizes make it difficult to provide individual attention (Table 4). This issue had a high mean score ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.231$) (Table 5).
- 67.7% of teachers reported that there is not enough time allocated for speaking activities (Table 4). The mean score was $M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.194$, indicating a significant concern (Table 5).
- 76.4% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that available materials do not adequately support speaking skills (Table 4). The mean score was $M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.904$ (Table 5).
- 58.8% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they struggle to find appropriate activities for developing speaking skills (Table 4), with a mean score of $M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.106$ (Table 5).

3. Student-Related Challenges

- 67.7% of teachers reported that students' lack of motivation hinders their participation in speaking activities (Table 4). This was reflected in a high mean score of $M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.075$ (Table 5).
- 58.9% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that students prefer reading and writing tasks over speaking activities (Table 4), with a moderate mean score of $M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.129$ (Table 5).

4. Curriculum and Assessment Challenges

- 58.9% of teachers stated that the curriculum lacks sufficient activities to improve speaking skills (Table 4). This concern had a moderate mean score of $M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.129$ (Table 5).
- 47.0% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that assessing speaking skills fairly and objectively is challenging (Table 4). The mean score was $M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.898$, indicating a moderate level of concern (Table 5).

5. Technological and Environmental Challenges

- 76.4% of teachers reported that the lack of technical tools (e.g., audio devices, recording tools) hinders effective speaking instruction (Table 4). This issue had a high mean score of $M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.141$ (Table 5).
- 41.2% of teachers remained neutral on the effectiveness of online teaching for speaking skills, while 35.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 4). This concern had a moderate mean score of $M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.955$ (Table 5), suggesting that online platforms are not perceived as highly effective for speaking instruction.

■ Findings

The literature review establishes that speaking skills are fundamental to effective communication and that English plays a crucial role in education and global communication (Harmer, 2007; Gilakjani, 2017). However, previous studies indicate that English language learners, particularly in Libya, face challenges in acquiring speaking proficiency due to various factors, including teaching methods, limited oral practice, and a focus on reading and writing over speaking (Alhamroni, 2009; Owen & Razali, 2018). The findings of this research align with these prior studies, reinforcing that Libyan EFL learners struggle with oral communication due to weak language proficiency, lack of confidence, and insufficient speaking practice. As reported in Table 4, 91.2% of teachers agreed that students' weak language proficiency affects fluency, supporting Leong and Ahmadi's (2017) claim that students often measure their progress in English through speaking ability. Additionally, 70.6% of teachers observed a lack of student confidence, which echoes Saidouni's (2019) assertion that speaking requires fluency, accuracy, and self-assurance.

The study also confirms that teaching methods significantly impact speaking skill development. The dominance of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in Libya, as highlighted in the literature (Elabbar, 2011; Najeeb, 2013), correlates with teachers' concerns about the lack of communicative speaking practice in classrooms. Findings from Table 5 indicate that large class sizes (79.7%) and insufficient time for speaking activities (67.7%) further restrict opportunities for oral practice, reinforcing the limitations

of GTM as a primarily text-based approach (Diaab, 2016). Moreover, the study's findings validate previous research regarding the curriculum's lack of focus on speaking skills (Al-Bakbak, 2019; Algamati, 2024). Teachers in this study noted that the current curriculum does not provide sufficient speaking activities (58.9%), leading to a preference for reading and writing tasks over speaking. This is consistent with past findings that Libyan students study English primarily to pass exams rather than to develop speaking proficiency (Alhamroni, 2009). Another significant challenge highlighted in both the literature and the findings is the role of technology and resources. Studies by Owen et al. (2019) and Esgaiar (2019) emphasize the need for modern teaching tools to support speaking instruction. Correspondingly, 76.4% of teachers in this study reported a lack of technical tools (e.g., audio devices, recording tools) as a major barrier to speaking practice, reinforcing the argument that inadequate resources hinder effective language instruction.

Lastly, the research findings support the argument that teacher training plays a crucial role in enhancing students' speaking skills. According to Akhter et al. (2020), teachers need specialized training to implement communicative techniques effectively. This is confirmed by the study's results, where 61.4% of teachers expressed a need for additional training to improve their ability to teach speaking skills. By comparing the literature with the study's findings, it is evident that the challenges identified—weak language proficiency, large class sizes, curriculum limitations, and lack of technological resources—are consistent with previous research on English language education in Libya. The study strengthens existing claims while providing updated insights into the pressing need for pedagogical reforms, improved classroom resources, and enhanced teacher training to foster effective speaking skill development among Libyan EFL learners.

■ Conclusions

Students' weak language proficiency is the most significant challenge affecting their ability to speak fluently in English, as it limits their capacity to construct sentences accurately and communicate effectively. Additionally, a lack of confidence and motivation further inhibits their participation in speaking activities, making it difficult for them to practice and improve

their oral skills. These challenges are compounded by large class sizes and insufficient time for speaking practice, which restricts teachers' ability to provide individualized support and targeted feedback. Furthermore, inadequate teaching resources, including a lack of technical tools, hinder effective speaking instruction by limiting opportunities for interactive and engaging language practice. Teachers also face difficulties in designing effective speaking activities and express a strong need for additional training to enhance their instructional skills and methodologies. Moreover, the current curriculum does not provide sufficient activities to develop speaking skills, highlighting the necessity for improvements in lesson design to better support students' oral proficiency. Lastly, online teaching is perceived as less effective for speaking skill development compared to traditional classroom settings, as it reduces face-to-face interaction and opportunities for spontaneous verbal communication, further exacerbating the existing challenges in teaching and learning spoken English.

■ Recommendations

1. Implement intensive English language support programs to improve students' fundamental language skills.
2. Incorporate confidence-building activities, such as role-plays and group discussions, to encourage student participation.
3. Advocate for smaller class sizes or implement strategies for more personalized attention within large classrooms.
4. Schools should invest in teaching aids and technical tools, such as audio-visual materials and digital platforms, to facilitate speaking practice.
5. Revise the curriculum to include more interactive and communicative speaking activities that reflect real-life language use.
6. Develop online resources and methodologies specifically designed to enhance students' speaking proficiency in virtual environments.

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