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Investigating Student's Ideas and Obstacles in Relation to English Language Classroom Interaction

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Abstract

Classroom interaction is an important aspect of English language learning and teaching. It affects the extent to which students can enhance their language learning process. Therefore, this research study aims to examine students' ideas and =obstacles during English language classroom interaction. Using a questionnaire as a data collection tool for this research study, findings revealed that pair and group work activities were considered substantial factors in determining classroom interaction techniques that students enjoy in the class. Thus, Lack of motivation, shyness, and students' English language was among the key obstacles which hinder students' abilities to interact actively during classroom interaction activities. This research study provides useful messages and contributions for English language teachers, students, English language teaching programs, and educational policies in Libya and elsewhere.

Keywords: *classroom interaction, students' ideas, students' obstacles, language learning, lack of motivation*

التحقيق في أفكار الطلاب والعقبات حول تفاعلهم في الفصل الدراسي للغة الإنجليزية

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المستخلص

نظرا لأهمية التواصل والتفاعل داخل الفصل في تطوير قدرات الطلاب لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية. تهدف هذه الدراسة لمعرفة أفكار الطلاب و أراءهم حول عملية التواصل والتفاعل خلال تعلم اللغة الانجليزية داخل الفصل. و تهدف أيضا إلى تحديد المعوقات التي تعيق قدرة الطلاب على التواصل والتفاعل داخل الفصل حين استخدام اللغة الانجليزية والتحدث بها. واستخدمت الدراسة استبيانا لجمع بيانات الدراسة من مائة طالب في المدارس الثانوية في منطقة المرج. وأوضحت نتائج الدراسة آن العمل في مجموعات من أهم النشاطات التي بفضلها يتواصل الطلاب ويتفاعلون داخل الفصل. وأوضحت أيضا غياب الدافعية ومستوى الطلاب اللغوي والخوف من الأخطاء والخجل من أهم المعوقات التي تعيق الطلاب عن التواصل و التفاعل داخل الفصل خلال تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية والدراسة تقدم مقترحات مهمة للطلاب والمعلمين وبرامج تطوير تدريس اللغة الانجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: *التفاعل الصفي، أفكار الطلاب، معوقات الطلاب، تعلم اللغة*، عدم وجود الحافز

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Introduction

Classroom interaction has become a key concept in the field of English language teaching and learning. Several researchers have pointed to the role of classroom interaction in enhancing students' communicative competences, the language input and output students receive during their English language learning process (e.g.Hall, and Verplatese, 2000, Wang, and Castro, 2010, Sundari, 2017). According to Hermanto (2015), interaction mediates language input and intake with meaningful activities to facilitate the process of language acquisition. Thus, as Mackey et al.,(2012) argue, language learners should be given opportunities to practice the language input they receive, to be aware of recognizing linguistic errors, and to reconstruct the production of language. Thoms, (2012) claims that language learners develop their language skills in social interactions and relationships via participation in communication with more experienced, knowledgeable, and competent participants, such as teachers and/or peers. Walash (2011) asserts that through classroom interaction, learners obtain new knowledge, build up new skills, and maintain and create relationships.

Taking the above views into account, the English language curriculum in Libyan public secondary schools emphasizes the need for the students to interact actively during classroom activities, and for the teacher to act as a monitor who manages the classroom, and provides encouragement, guidance, explanation, and feedback to allow the students to actively achieve the required tasks. It is clear from the activities described in the English textbooks that the students are expected to participate actively in the language learning process, relate some of the classroom activities to their own experiences and personal lives, and undertake a variety of tasks that involve problem-solving, classroom discussions, expressing opinions, and discussing answering together (Philips 2008, Orafi, and Borg 2009, Azzouz and Talib 2020).

However, during the implementation of this curriculum, classrooms were generally teacher-centered and Arabic was the dominant language during classroom interaction, students played little role during classroom activities (Orafi 2008). They often had difficulties using English during classroom interaction (Omar 2012, Atahawadi, 2019), and students were unfamiliar with the curriculum activities which require them to participate actively during classroom interaction (Owen, et al. 2019). Therefore, this research study aims to investigate how Libyan students learning the English language view the process of English language interaction to shed light on the various obstacles students encounter during English language classroom interaction, and how teachers deal with these obstacles in order to facilitate the

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process of English language teaching within the Libyan educational system I now proceed to discuss the key theoretical concepts which underlie this research study.

What is classroom interaction?

There has been a growing number of research with respect to classroom interaction which involves teachers and students. Ellis (1990, p.11) for example, states that classroom interaction is a " verbal exchange, which happens in the classroom containing those, which emerge in the path of official drilling'. If efficient, classroom interaction strategies could be operated to improve learners ' communicative competence" .Tsui (1995, p.6) refers to classroom interaction as "a collaborative work between participants in that everyone shares in specifying the orientation and result of the collaboration". Brown (2011) notes that, "interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other" (p.165). According to Hall (2017, p.11), "classroom interaction is an expression that applied to test what goes on among people in the classroom while language is implicated". Walsh (2011) has defined the concept of Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC), as the ability "to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning" (p.158). The concept of CIC includes the key features of classroom interaction which can hinder or facilitate the teaching/learning process. These features are (a) maximizing interactional space; (b) shaping learner contributions (seeking clarification, scaffolding, modeling, or repairing learner input); (c) effective use of eliciting; (d) instructional idiolect (i.e. a teacher's speech habits); and (e) interactional awareness.

The importance of classroom interaction

Classroom interaction plays an important role in enhancing the process of students' language learning outcomes. Communicative competence theories confirm the significance of interaction as a way to utilize language in several contexts to "negotiate to mean", or to obtain a concept from each other. The frequent use of the target language during classroom interaction provides the language input to help students figure out the various forms of the target language, gaps in the language, and the mismatch between the input and output (Wang and Castaro, 2010). Walsh (2011) claims that students access new knowledge, acquire and develop new skills, identify problems, and establish and maintain relationships through language in interaction. Classroom interaction is essential to facilitate the process of language learning since it provides students with meaningful activities to negotiate language input and intake (Hermanto, 2015). According to Seedhouse & Jenks (2015), during classroom

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interaction, elements of language are learnt and taught, method, syllabus and materials are applied, theories and practices are met. The teacher plays an important role during classroom interaction as he/she expected to encourage students , provide feedback, and give correction when students make mistakes during classroom activities.

Obstacles facing students during classroom interaction

As mentioned above, classroom interaction is an important aspect of the process of language learning. However, many students still encounter many obstacles which hinder their ability to interact effectively, particularly during classroom speaking activities. lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation, and shyness and hesitations are considered among others as key difficulties which might discourage students from taking an active role during classroom interaction. Students with low self-confidence are often considered less successful language performers in comparison with those who have high self-confidence (Preston, 2001). They often lack confidence in their ability to interact in a foreign language particularly if they have poor language knowledge and skills.

Lack of motivation is also another crucial factor that affects students' classroom interaction. It refers to losing the affection, desire, and enthusiasm to achieve certain missions(Mauliya et al. 2020). Having positive motivation and a desire to learn a language are essential aspects of the process of foreign language learning (Gardner, 1985). Students with high motivation are considered risk-takers in their endeavor to learn languages even if they lack the linguistic abilities to do so (Mauliya et al. 2020).

Shyness and hesitation are psychological factors that many students suffer from especially when a teacher asks them to communicate in English (Juhana, 2012). This influential sensitive psychological factor poses a large barrier for students who do not have confidence in themselves and their capabilities to talk particularly if they are asked to respond to a question, give a presentation, and share their opinions with others during classroom activities.

Research questions

Given the importance of classroom interaction in enhancing students' English language learning, the research studies mentioned above highlight the need to uncover students' ideas in relation to aspects of English language classroom interaction, and the obstacles facing them during classroom interaction. The following research questions are suggested:

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1. What are students" ideas in relation to English language classroom interaction?
2. What are the obstacles students encounter during classroom interaction

Data collection

To answer the research questions of this research study, a questionnaire was designed as a data collection tool for this study. According to Brown (2001, p.6). "Questionnaire is a written question given to the respondents for choosing from the ready answers or can write their answers" One hundred students from different secondary schools around the Elmarj area were chosen randomlySaunders et al. (2009), participated in this questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part aims to understand students' ideas about classroom interaction. This part included five questions. The second part included eight questions to understand students' obstacles during classroom interaction. Considering the English level of the students the questions of the questionnaire questions were written both in English and Arabic. The questionnaire was distributed with the help of the teachers. Initially, one hundred and twenty questionnaires were distributed, but only one hundred were completed and returned. The way that I used to analyze the data is $100 \times \frac{\text{value}}{\text{the total number}}$ such as $32\% = 100 \times \frac{32}{100}$.

Findings

As I mentioned previously, the questionnaire is divided into two parts. Part A discusses students' ideas about classroom interaction. Part B examines students' obstacles during classroom interaction.

Part A: Students' Ideas about class interaction

1. Who conducts the talk in the class mostly?

Personalities	**Number**	**Percentage**
Teacher	32	32 %
Students	11	11 %
Teacher and students	57	57 %
Total	100	100 %

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It is clear that teachers and students had taken the highest scores of 57%, the teacher was in the middle range of 32% and the lowest was students at 11 %.

2. Which language does your teacher use in the classroom?

Language	Number	Percentage
English language	6	6 %
Arabic language	30	30 %
English and Arabic language	64	64 %
Total	100	100 %

The above figure shows that the use of English and Arabic scored the highest while the use of English scored the lowest during classroom interaction.

3. How often does your teacher let you share ideas in the classroom?

Opinions	Numbers	Percentage
Always	34	34%
Sometimes	47	47%
Seldom	14	14%
Never	5	5%
Total	100	100%

The above figure illustrates that sometimes scored 47 %, 34 % for always, after that seldom taken 14 %, the lowest one was 5 % never.

4. Does regular interaction in the classroom help you to improve your learning? why, please?

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Answer	Number	Percentage
Yes	94	94 %
No	6	6 %
Total	100	100%

The previous figure shows that the majority of the students agreed that classroom interaction helps them to improve their English language learning process.

5. Which of the following interaction techniques do you enjoy the most?

Interaction techniques	Number	Percentage
Pair and group work	44	44.9 %
Communication games	16	16. 3 %
Discussion activities	35	35. 7 %
Oral presentations	16	16. 3 %
Roleplay	9	9. 2 %

It is obvious from the above figure that pair and group work activities and discussion activities were the most preferred interaction techniques by the students. While role-play and oral presentation techniques were the least preferred interaction techniques by the students.

Part B: Students' Obstacles during classroom interaction

1. I felt frustrated during the class.

Answer	Number	Percentage
Agree	42	42 %
Neutral	34	34 %
Disagree	24	24 %
Total	100	100 %

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The above figure shows that 42 %, of the students felt frustrated during classroom interaction while 34% were neutral and 24 % did not feel frustrated.

2. I felt bored during class and therefore I had a problem staying alert.

Answer	Number	Percentage
Agree	55	55 %
Neutral	24	24 %
Disagree	21	21 %
Total	100	100 %

The above figure illustrates that most of the students picked out agree 55 %, others selected neutral 24% and only 21 % of the students selected disagree.

3. The physical environment in the classroom is not suitable for study.

Answer	Number	Percentage
Agree	43	43 %
Neutral	31	31 %
Disagree	26	26 %
Total	100	100 %

The above figure indicates that agree had taken highest score 43 %, neutral was the middle range 31 % and the lowest was disagree 26%.

4. Negative students affect your interaction in the classroom.

Answer	Number	Percentage
Agree	54	**54 %**
Neutral	13	**13 %**
Disagree	33	**33 %**
Total	100	**100 %**

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The above figure shows that 54 % agree that negative students had an impact on their classroom interaction, 33 % disagree and 13 % were neutral.

5. Does the teacher give you wait time to think and arrange your answers?

Answer	Number	Percentage
Yes	64	64 %
No	36	36 %
Total	100	100 %

The above figure illustrates that Yes had taken the highest score 64 % and the lowest was No 36 %.

6. Do the types of questions affect your interaction?

Answer	Number	Percentage
Yes	73	73 %
No	27	27 %
Total	100	100 %

The above figure shows that 73% answered that the type of questions can affect their abilities to interact during classroom activities, while 27 % of the students did not feel that the type of question can affect their classroom interaction.

7. Are you afraid form participating in speaking activities?

Answer	Number	Percentage
Yes	49	49 %
No	51	51 %
Total	100	100 %

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51 % of the students answered that they were not afraid of participating in speaking activities, while 49 % of the students appeared to be afraid of taking part in the speaking activities.

If yes, is it because of:

Answer	**Number**	**Percentage**
Lack of vocabulary	13	14.1%
Fear of making grammatical mistakes	27	29.3 %
Fear of making pronunciation mistakes	30	32.6%
Shyness and hesitation	36	39.1%
Anxiety	16	17.4%

The above figure shows that shyness and hesitation and fear of making pronunciation mistakes were the most important factors which affected students' abilities to participate in classroom interaction during the speaking activities.

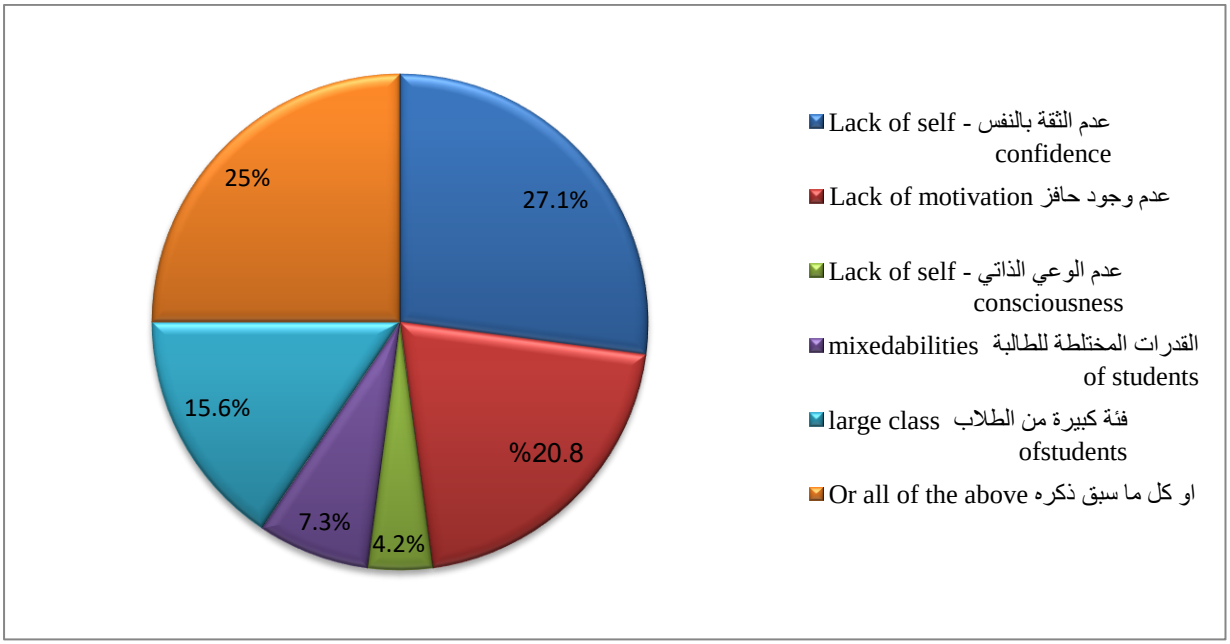
8. Other reasons which prevent you from classroom interaction such as:-

Answer	**Number**	**Percentage**
Lack of self–confidence	26	27. 1 %
Lack of motivation	20	20. 8 %
Lack of self – consciousness	4	4. 2 %
Mixed abilities of students	7	7. 3 %
A large class of students	15	15. 6 %
Or all of the above	24	25 %
Total	96	100 %

As Figure 1 below shows, lack of self-confidence was the most important factor which had a negative impact on students' abilities to participate in classroom interactions.

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Figure 1. Other obstacles hinder students' classroom interaction.



Discussion

In this section, I discuss the key findings of this research study in light of the existing literature. The findings of this study revealed that students had a positive attitude towards pair and group work during classroom interaction. Different studies have pointed to the advantages of using these activities to enhance the process of English language teaching. For example, Nunan (2003, p.55) argues that "pair and group work could be utilized to boost the quantity of time which students earn to speak in the English language during lessons that reflects extra language production process" McDonough (2004. P.207) confirms the significance of pair and group work activities, "pair and group work activities produce education chances by diverse interactional features which happen while students share in the communication of meaning".

The finding that emerged from this study indicated that discussion activities are important aspects of interaction techniques that learners enjoy during classroom interaction. Similar studies have highlighted the effect of discussion activities in enhancing students' classroom interaction. For example, Celce-Murcia (2001, p.3) suggests that " in discussion activities, learners work in groups or pairs to negotiate meaning in the case where the student has information that others have not". Matthew (2006) calls for teachers to adapt classroom

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activities which enable learners to use the language skills that they have learned to interact with each other in class.

With respect to the obstacles facing students during classroom interaction, Lack of motivation was a crucial factor that had an impact on students' abilities to interact actively during classroom activities. These findings echoes Dişlen's et al. (2013) argument in which they claim that lack of motivation is an essential factor that might prevent students from taking an active role during classroom activities. According to Hall (2017, p.10), motivation has "a power which drives students to gain the better accomplishment. On the contrary, they shall not be capable to impart the target language while they lose their motivation". To enhance students' motivation in order to participate actively during classroom activities, Huitt (2011**)** emphasizes the need for teachers to explain to the students the significance of actively taking part in classroom activities, and how this, in turn, will enhance their English language process. The idea of explaining the advantages of learning foreign languages is also shared by Bellil (2020, p.26), who argues that "motivation to understand a foreign language is an essential role to fulfill success in gaining the language".

The data that emerged from this research study pointed out that students' shyness is among the obstacles which impact students' classroom interaction negatively. Juhana (2012, p.101) refers to shyness and hesitation as emotional elements which a lot of learners suffer from when they are asked to talk in the English language. Several research studies also considered students' shyness as one of the psychological factors which numerous students suffer from when they are requesting to communicate in English language classes (for example, Gebhard 2006, Findlay et al. 2009, Zhao et al. 2013). In addition, the findings of this study illustrated that students' level of pronunciation plays a major role in classroom interaction. Burns & Claire, (2003, p.11) assert that "learners are evaluated on their pronunciation while they talk with little accuracy in grammar and vocabulary, learners would interact when they govern pronunciation and intonation efficiently".

This study's findings also demonstrated that the types of questions and the questioning strategies teachers use during classroom activities were important factors. According to Brown (2001), the questioning strategies of the teachers provide learners with chances to produce language and give teachers feedback about students' language understanding, and the language learning support students need. Cotton (2003, p.10) states that" teacher questions

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and learners responses are deemed a strong teaching method if they are utilized to display conflicts, challenge hypothesis, and produce to new prudence and learning".

Clearly, the findings of this study and the studies mentioned above show that different obstacles and factors affect how students interact during classroom activities. These findings also provide certain implications and suggestions for English language teaching which I will address in the following section.

Conclusion and recommendations

As mentioned in the previous sections, this research study aimed at investigating students' ideas and obstacles in relation to classroom interaction. The key finding of this study showed that interaction techniques that students enjoy the most in the classroom are pair and group, communication games, discussion activities, and oral presentations. The study also highlighted various obstacles which prevent learners from taking an active role during classroom interaction. These obstacles include a lack of students' motivation, shyness, pronunciation, large class, students' mixed ability, and lack of self-confidence. The finding of this research study showed that teachers use different strategies to develop students' classroom interaction abilities such as interactive activities, using translation, pronunciation, question type and wait time, and motivation strategies.

Although this research study provided significant information to enhance our understanding of the factors which enhance students' classroom interaction, further research studies are needed to conduct classroom observations to document what happens during classroom interactions and to show how teachers and students deal with the different aspects of classroom interaction. The findings of this study also underline several recommendations for the process of English language teaching and learning in Libya and elsewhere. First, teachers are required to provide chances for the students to increase students motivation and involvement during classroom activities. Second, teachers should accommodate the various language levels and abilities of the students, and make sure that students are given equal chances to take an active part in classroom activities. Finally, it is important for the students to realize that language learning is not just a matter of memorization and grammar analysis. They need to understand that classroom interaction is an important aspect to develop their English language skills. Therefore, they need to take risks, and get more confidence in order to have more active role during classroom interaction.

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