## Research Article
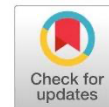
# Difficulties Encountered by Libyan EFL Students to Speak English Fluently: The Case of the Fourth-Year Students, English Department, Omar Al-Mukhtar University

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**Abstract:** Fluency remains a major challenge for many Libyan students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly at the university level. Despite years of English instruction, many students struggle to express themselves fluently and confidently, which negatively affects their academic performance and future career prospects. This study investigates the psychological and educational factors influencing oral English fluency among 29 fourth-year Libyan EFL students at Omar Al-Mukhtar University (OMU) in Al-Bayda City. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative data collected through a questionnaire and classroom observations. The results were analyzed and presented using percentages. The findings indicate that no single factor alone significantly affects students' oral fluency; rather, fluency is shaped by the interaction of multiple factors. Educational factors include student absenteeism, lecturer-dominated classrooms, limited vocabulary knowledge, grammatical errors, reliance on the mother tongue, insufficient English practice, classroom activities, and instructional resources. Psychological factors include fear of making mistakes, introverted personality traits, low motivation, and lack of self-confidence.

**Keywords**: educational challenges, Libyan EFL students, psychological challenges, oral fluency

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### الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب الليبيون متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في التحدث بطلاقة: حالة طلاب السنة الرابعة، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة عمر المختار

**المستخلص:** تُعد الطلاقة اللغوية من أبرز التحديات التي تواجه العديد من طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في ليبيا، ولا سيما في المرحلة الجامعية. فعلى الرغم من سنوات الدراسة المتواصلة، لا يزال كثير من الطلبة يواجهون صعوبات في التعبير الشفهي بطلاقة وثقة، مما ينعكس سلبًا على أدائهم الأكاديمي وفرصهم المهنية المستقبلية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقصّي العوامل النفسية والتعليمية المؤثرة في الطلاقة الشفهية باللغة الإنجليزية لدى عينة مكوّنة من 29 طالبًا وطالبة من طلبة السنة الرابعة بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة عمر المختار بمدينة البيضاء. اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج المختلط، جامعةً بين الأسلوبين الكمي والنوعي، من خلال استبانة وملاحظات صفّية. وقد عُرضت النتائج باستخدام النسب المئوية. وأظهرت النتائج أن الطلاقة الشفهية لا تتأثر بعامل واحد مستقل، بل تتشكل من خلال تفاعل مجموعة من العوامل. وتشمل العوامل التعليمية الغياب الدراسي، وهيمنة حديث المحاضر، وضعف الحصيلة اللغوية، والأخطاء النحوية، والاعتماد على اللغة الأم، وقلة فرص الممارسة، والأنشطة الصفية، والوسائل التعليمية. أما العوامل النفسية فتتمثل في الخوف من ارتكاب الأخطاء، والانطواء، وضعف الدافعية، وقلة الثقة بالنفس.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التحديات التعليمية، الطلاب الليبيون للإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التحديات النفسية، الطلاقة الشفوية

# 1. Introduction

One of the four crucial language abilities is speaking. Thus, those who are studying English as a foreign language (EFL) must acquire a high level of proficiency in order to effectively and smoothly communicate in different language-dependent situations. Interaction skills, as defined by Bygate (1987), refer to the abilities that involve the use of language to meet two specific requirements: reciprocity conditions, which entail engaging with others throughout a conversation, and internal processing criteria, which occur within certain time frames.

In addition, Nunan (1999, as cited in Colle, 2023) emphasises that acquiring speaking skills requires learners to understand the reasons, timing, and methods of language usage, as well as to excel in specific linguistic aspects such as pronunciation, syntax, and vocabulary. Furthermore, according to Thornbury (2011), speech production is a sequential and instantaneous process where phrases and words follow each other in succession. The speech patterns arise as a reaction to the recipient's statements, resulting in naturalness.

Despite time constraints, preparation can be combined with previous statements to explain the distinct language that arises from the need for "real-time processing". Thornbury (2011) further suggests that fluency encompasses more than just speaking swiftly. Pausing is also an essential element for listeners to determine the speaker's fluency. Occasional pauses are normal even for skilled speakers, but frequent pauses indicate poor speaking ability. Listeners evaluate a speaker's fluency primarily based on the frequency of their pauses rather than the duration of each pause. Fluency features encompass infrequent but extended pauses, filled pauses at important transition points, and extended sequences of syllables and words without pauses.

There are many common challenges for any student of English as a foreign language (EFL). Therefore, the current study sought to investigate the educational and psychological factors affecting the oral fluency of Libyan EFL fourth-year students at OMU in Al-Bayda city even after four years of majoring in English. The students' current condition may have been developed by what the research unfolded, and the findings are expected to help Libyan EFL students overcome these obstacles and enhance their oral English fluency. Furthermore, this study expects to discover new areas in this genre of study.

This study aimed to examine the psychological and educational challenges faced by Libyan fourth-year students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) at Omar Al-Mukhtar University in Al-Bayda City. Specifically, the study focused on how these challenges impacted the students' speaking fluency, despite having studied English for four years. It diligently strives to address the following research question:

1. What are the educational and psychological obstacles that hinder Libyan EFL fourth-year students at Omar Al-Mukhtar University from speaking the language fluently, despite four years of study?

## 2. Literature Review

Baker and Westrup (2003) emphasise the importance of genuine interaction in English language development, focusing on building students' responses rather than memorising, as well as English proficiency, which combines accuracy and fluency, and recommend allocating time in language classrooms for further improvement. According to the Oxford University Press (n.d.), fluency is the effortless and natural ability to speak or write in a foreign language. While accuracy is described as "the fact of being correct and without any mistakes" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), both are essential for effective language learning.

Additionally, the interactionist theory supports the aim of this study, introduced by Bruner in 1983, which suggests children have inherent language learning competence but require extensive face-to-face interaction for fluency enhancement. It contrasts with Noam Chomsky's Nativist Theory, which neglects social settings. The interactionist perspective suggests that children learn language through intrinsic interaction with their surroundings, with progress influenced by societal context and principles like scaffolding and child-directed speech (Bruner, 1983; Study Smarter, n.d.).

Moreover, relevant studies have explored factors affecting students' speaking competence in English. Al Hosni (2014) found that fifth-grade students in Oman face three main challenges: mother tongue use, linguistic barriers, and inhibition. According to Asswail (2020), Libyan EFL university students encounter obstacles due to a lack of motivation, fear of mistakes, limited exposure, teachers' focus on dialogue, textbooks prioritising reading and writing, and varying English proficiency levels. The following section will detail the method employed in this research to explore the psychological and educational barriers affecting the oral fluency of Libyan EFL fourth-year students at OMU in Al-Bayda.

## 3. Methodology
### 3.1 Design

This research is mixed-method, which is defined as a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods with philosophical presumptions in a single research project, resulting in greater effectiveness than using either methodology alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009). Hence, in order to investigate the educational and psychological barriers that fourth-year EFL students at Omar Al-Mukhtar University in Al-Bayda City face when speaking English fluently, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were utilised. Our research question was based on a questionnaire given to students at a university in Libya about exploring the problems they face in an English-speaking classroom (Asswail, 2020). We also employed participant and non-participant covert classroom observations to get the information we needed to answer the question. There are several advantages to merging the two approaches in this study; for example, each contradicting quantitative finding was investigated, explained more extensively, then defended using data obtained from the classroom observations.

### 3.1.1 Instruments
### 3.1.2 Students' Questionnaire

This study adopted the students' questionnaire from Asswail's (2020) master's thesis, *An Investigation into the Challenges EFL Libyan University Students Encounter in the English-Speaking Classroom.* It consisted of fifteen closed-ended questions. (See Appendix A.) Brown (2001, as cited in Dörnyei, 2003) defines a questionnaire as any written form that asks participants a number of statements or questions, and they can either write their own responses or choose from pre-existing ones. We obtained the participants' responses to the questionnaire from 29 fourth-year students in the English department at OMU in Al-Bayda city. The majority of these students were female, as there are just six male students throughout both the translation and applied linguistics branches. We analysed the data using SPSS Version 27 and presented it as percentages in tables and figures.

### 3.1.3 Covert Classroom Observations

Researchers carry out covert observations in a discreet manner, revealing participants' normal actions. While covert observations may not be particularly moral due to the researcher's need to choose between acting as someone else or concealing, they are considered more valid because they are less likely to influence the participants' actual behaviour, making the observed behaviour more representative of real life (Brain, 2000). Therefore, the researchers opted for covert classroom observations to mitigate the potential impact of participants' awareness of observation on the analysis and their actual behaviour, and to verify if the students' questionnaire responses aligned with the actual events in the classroom. The researchers conducted both participant and non-participant covert classroom observations without the participants' awareness. In participant observations, the observer joins the group, while in non-participant observations, the researcher sits at the back of the classroom without participating in the activities (Brain, 2000). We analysed those using inductive methods and conceptual content analysis.

### 3.2 Participants

This study involved 29 EFL fourth-year students in applied linguistics and translation at Omar Al-Mukhtar University in Al-Bayda City. The researchers employed non-probability sampling because we chose the total number of the target participants and didn't choose them randomly. Non-probability sampling is a method used by researchers to select individuals from a population based on their subjective perceptions. It is often used in smaller-scope investigations, such as those involving educational institutions or learners, to target specific groups rather than generalising (Dhivyadeepa, 2015). And from the non-probability sampling, the researchers selected purposive sampling in relation to the research aim and question, which is to identify the educational and psychological barriers that affected the oral fluency of the target participants.

Purposive sample strategy is defined as involving instances or units that are chosen on the basis of predetermined criteria rather than at random. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003, as cited in

Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). And from the purposive sampling, the researchers utilised homogeneous sampling because the participants shared the same characteristics; they have specialised in English for four years, and they are studying in the same year. Homogeneous sampling guarantees that groups share the same characteristics and is frequently employed when the research issue is relevant to the particular group's features (Dhivyadeepa, 2015).

## 3.3 Procedures
### 3.3.1 Pilot Study

The pilot study is conducted to demonstrate the effectiveness of methods and processes before a larger-scale implementation (Porta, Greenland, Hernán, Silva, & Last, 2014). On January 24, we conducted the pilot study for the students' questionnaire to evaluate its acceptability and determine any necessary modifications. The pilot study involved 25 participants from the applied linguistics and translation branches. The pilot study found that the questionnaire did not require any modifications except for question nine, where one participant wrote his own answer instead of choosing any option. Therefore, the researchers included the option "others" to allow participants to write their own answers. And the same pilot study involved pre-testing for covert classroom observations, which the researchers conducted without disclosing to the students that they were conducting an observation on February 14.

### 3.3.2 Main Study

The researchers first followed the ethical guidelines by giving the dean of the English department an authorisation letter from the Libyan Academy in order to conduct the research. We also provided the students with a consent form to secure their participation in this study. The researchers conducted a pilot study for the adopted questionnaire and covert classroom observations for both branches. The researchers pilot-tested and modified the adopted questionnaire before distributing it to the target participants. The researchers provided oral guidance to students in both English and Arabic, ensuring their comprehension of the questionnaire and obtaining reliable data.

The researchers then conducted covert classroom observations, particularly four weeks and one day after the pilot study of the two data collection tools and the distribution of the students' questionnaires. The three covert classroom observations that the researchers observed for speaking skills were two participant-covert classroom observations, one for the applied linguistics branch and the other for the translation branch, in which the researchers played the role of the lecturer and led the lecture, and one non-participant covert classroom observation for the translation branch, in which the researchers sat in the back and took notes. The researchers documented all the data from the covert classroom observations in a separate, detailed report for each observation, ensuring confidentiality. Finally, we prepared both data sets for analysis.

## 4. Limitations of the Study

The study has two main limitations: most participants were absent during covert classroom observations, and the number of lectures in the applied linguistics branch was insufficient for covert classroom observations. The researchers tackled the students' absence from the speaking skills lectures by taking into consideration the total number of students who attended the five speaking skills lectures for the covert classroom observations. The total number of students that attended these five speaking skills lectures for covert classroom observations and the pilot study was 22 out of 29, despite the fact that not all of them did so on a regular basis. We addressed the insufficient number of speaking skills lectures in the applied linguistics branch by analysing data from both the participant's covert classroom observation and the pilot study's covert classroom observation. Therefore, the researchers recommend further research in the same area with a larger sample.

## 5. Findings
## 5.1 Data Analysis

This section displays and evaluates data acquired through both quantitative and qualitative methods. It also compares the qualitative and quantitative data to identify discrepancies and parallels between the students' replies and what happened in the classroom. We used SPSS version 27 to analyse quantitative data from 29 fourth-year EFL students at OMU in Al-Bayda city. The questionnaire, consisting of fifteen closed-ended questions, aimed to determine psychological and educational factors affecting their English oral fluency after four years of specialisation. We also used figures and tables with corresponding explanations to illustrate the data and analysis.

### 5.1.1 Results of the Students' Questionnaire
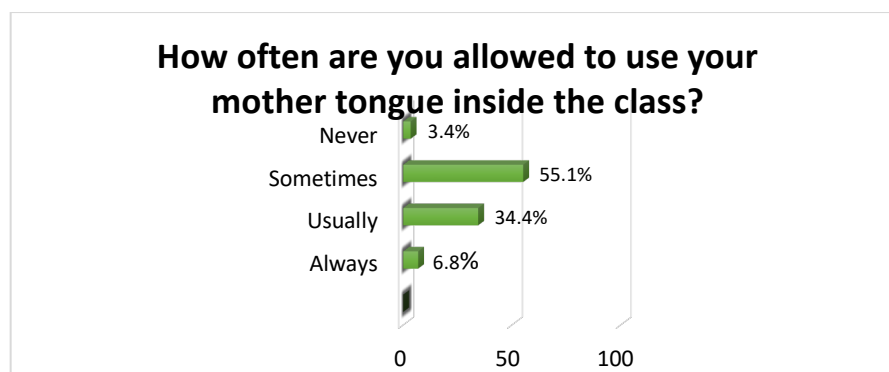
Table 1: Learning English Duration

| How long have you been learning English? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Under 3 years | 6 | 20.7% |
| 3-5 years | 15 | 51.7% |
| More than 5 years | 8 | 27.6% |

Most of the participants have been learning English for between 3 and 5 years (51.7%). Eight students have been learning English for more than five years (27.6%). Only six students have been learning English for three years (20.7%) (see Table 1).

**Table 2: Educational Obstacles**

| Item Number& Description | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 4. Does your teacher praise you when you answer correctly? | 96.6% | 3.4% |
| 10. Does your teacher use a mixture of English language and Arabic during teaching speaking? | 72.4% | 27.6% |
| 11. Does your teacher ask you to make presentations in English language? | 65.5% | 34.5% |
| 12. Does your teacher use extra materials and exercises in speaking classes? | 79.3% | 20.7% |
| 13. Does the course curriculum contain enough exercises for speaking skills? | 65.5% | 34.5% |

Question four asked respondents if their teacher praises them when they answer correctly or not. The answers showed that 96.6% of participants claimed that their tutor compliments them when they answer correctly, while 3.4% reported that their teacher does not. Secondly, the table reflects the responses provided by participants to question number ten, which displayed that 72.4% of the students selected "yes" and that their lecturer used both Arabic and English to teach speaking abilities, while 27.6% chose "no". Thirdly, in response to question number eleven, 65.5% of the students confirmed that their instructor requests them to perform presentations in English, while 34.5% responded negatively. Fourth, in response to question twelve, 79.3% of students stated that their educator uses supplementary materials and exercises in the speaking lectures, whereas 20.7% claimed no. Finally, the replies to question thirteen revealed that 65.5% of them declared that their speaking subject curriculum included enough communicative exercises to practise speaking skills, while 34.5% asserted no (see Table 2).

Figure: *Use of Mother Tongue language in the Class*



**How often are you allowed to use your mother tongue inside the class?**

- Never 3.4%
- Sometimes 55.1%
- Usually 34.4%
- Always 6.8%

We asked participants in question number three how often they could use their native Libyan Arabic language during the speaking lecture. Figure 1, shown below, depicts the outcomes. The majority of respondents (55.2%) claimed they were "sometimes" allowed to utilise Libyan Arabic. 34.5% of the respondents stated that they typically received certification to speak Libyan Arabic in the speaking class. On the other hand, 6.9% of them confirmed that they were 'always'

allowed to talk in Libyan Arabic, whereas 3.4% indicated that he or she was 'never' licensed to switch to Libyan Arabic during the speaking session (see Figure 1).

Figure 2: *Speaking Activities in The Classroom*
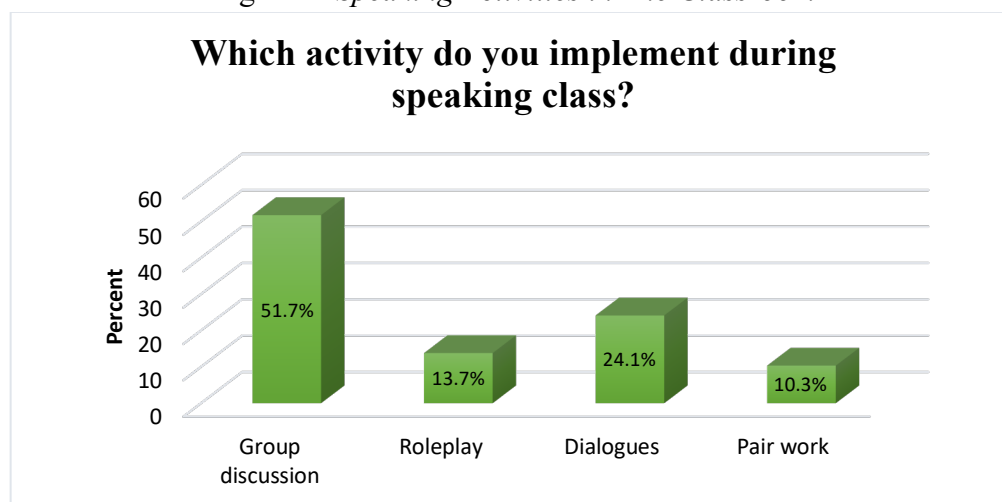


The students in question number eight responded about the kind of speaking activity that their tutor employs to teach speaking skills. 51.7% of participants reported that the lecturer used group discussion as a speaking skill practice, while 13.8% said they used role play, 24.1% selected dialogues, and 10.3% chose pair work (see Figure 2).

**Figure 3:** *Teaching Aids in Speaking Class*
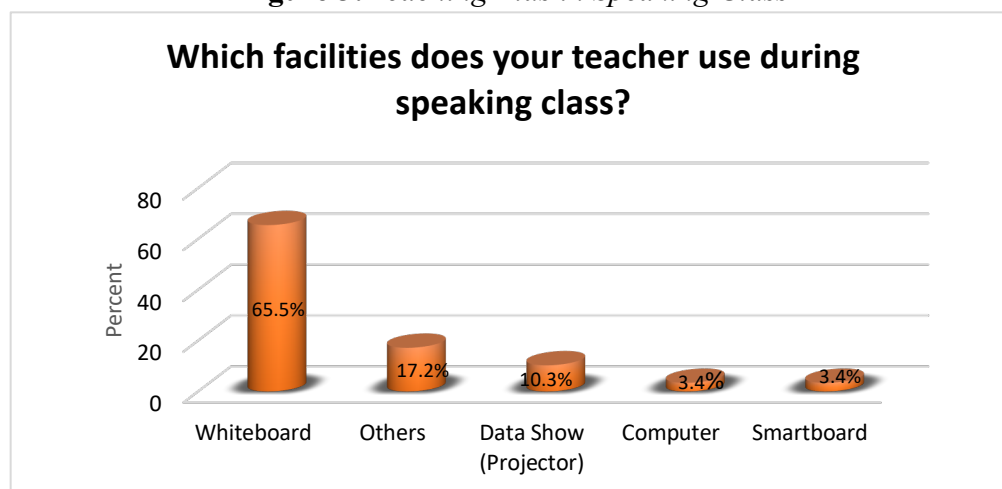


Question nine asked the participants about the facilities their speaking tutor used during the speaking lecture. Figure 3 reveals that the largest percentage of respondents (65.5%) indicated their educator used a "whiteboard", while 17.2% answered "others" and added their own ideas like "small circles and talking groups", "dialogues", "speaking groups", "conversations", and "pair

work". In contrast, 10.3% selected "Data Show (a projector)", 3.4% a "computer", and 3.4% a "smart board" (see Figure 3).

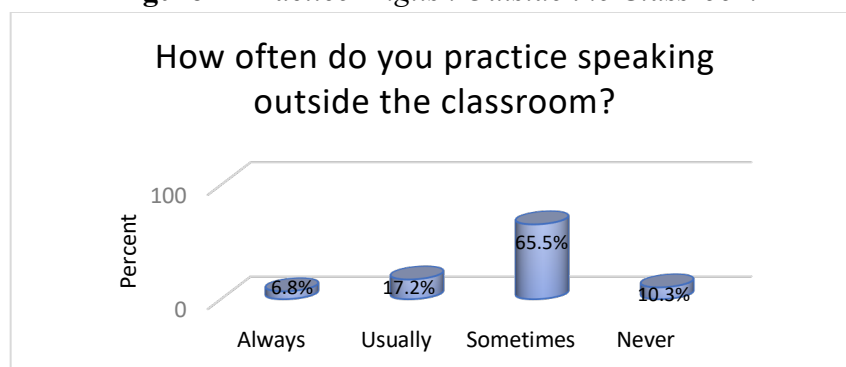**Figure 4**: *Practice English Outside the Classroom*



Figure 4 demonstrates the students' responses to question number two, which is about the frequency of practising speaking English outside of the classroom. 6.9% of participants chose "always", 17.2% indicated "usually", 65.5% affirmed "sometimes", and 10.3% outlined that they "never" practise speaking English outside of the classroom (see Figure 4).

Table 3: Feelings in Speaking Class

| How do you feel during speaking classes? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Anxious | 7 | 24.1% |
| Motivated | 16 | 55.2% |
| Confident | 6 | 20.7% |

We also asked participants about their feelings while speaking English in question number five. Table 3 clarifies that 24.1% of those polled reported feeling "anxious" while speaking English, 55.2% expressed feeling "motivated", whereas just 20.7% felt "confident" when speaking English (see Table 3).

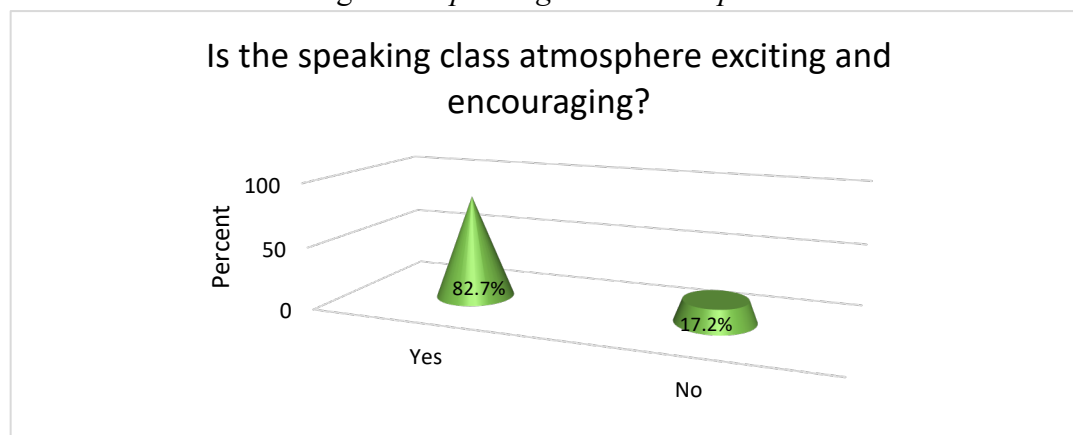Figure 5*: Speaking Class Atmosphere*

Figure 5 displays the participants' responses to question fourteen, which pertains to whether their speaking class environment is encouraging and exciting or not. The vast majority of the participants (82.8%) said "yes", with only 17.2% choosing "no", meaning that it was neither exciting nor encouraging (see Figure 5).

Table 4: Affective Issues in Speaking

| Which one of the following affective issues do you face the most? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Lack of self-confidence | 4 | 13.8% |
| Lack of motivation | 7 | 24.1% |
| Fear of making mistakes | 13 | 44.8% |
| Anxiety | 5 | 17.2% |

Table 4 displays the responses provided by each of the surveyed students to question number fifteen, which asks which affective factor from the available options they encounter the most when speaking English. 13.8% of respondents reported that "lack of self-confidence" is the biggest psychological challenge they face when speaking English. While 24.1% selected "lack of motivation", 44.8% of the participants chose "fear of making mistakes", and 17.2% reported that "anxiety" is the most affective factor that affects their speaking skill (see Table 4).

Table 5: Affective Factors in Speaking

| Which factor affects your speaking performance? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Topical knowledge | 12 | 41.4% |
| Listening ability | 4 | 13.8% |
| Time for preparation | 3 | 10.3% |
| Listeners' support | 1 | 3.4% |
| Pressure to perform well | 7 | 24.1% |
| Time allowed to perform speaking tasks | 2 | 6.9% |

Table 5 displays the students' answers to question number six, which asked which of the provided options influences their English-speaking skills. A large portion of respondents (41.4%) indicated that "topical knowledge influences their English-speaking performance." 13.8% said "listening ability" had an impact on their speaking skills. On the other side, 10.3% of respondents mentioned "time for preparation" as a factor that could impede their ability to speak English. 3.4% thought that "listeners' support" affected the way they performed. 24.1% confirmed that "pressure to perform well" influenced the results, while 6.9% identified "time allowed to perform speaking tasks" as a factor limiting their ability to speak English. 24.1% said that "pressure to perform well" impeded their performance, while 6.9% said "time allowed for speaking" (see Table 5).

Table 6: Challenges During Speaking Class

| Which challenges do you encounter during speaking class? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| You lack vocabulary | 8 | 27.6% |
| You are afraid of criticism or losing face | 7 | 24.1% |
| You cannot think of anything to say | 5 | 17.2% |
| You speak very little or not at all | 3 | 10.3% |
| You are shy | 6 | 20.7% |

Table 6 finally presents the responses provided by participants to question number seven regarding the challenges they encounter during speaking classes. The biggest proportion, 27.6%, reported that their lack of vocabulary made it difficult to speak during their lectures. 24.1% said they were afraid of criticism or losing face. 17.2% claimed that they couldn't think of anything to say. The lowest percentage, 10.3%, chose "they speak very little or not at all." And 20.7% are really shy (see Table 6).

## 5.1.2 Findings from the Classroom Observations of Students

Qualitative data analysis is the process of organising and understanding information, such as words or images, to uncover both obvious and hidden meanings. It seeks to explore personal and social interpretations, as well as to identify important themes and processes in specific contexts. Several methods can achieve these aims, and this type of analysis often combines general methods, like summarising data, with more detailed techniques that focus on developing categories and deep interpretations. The ultimate goal is usually to draw broader conclusions by comparing different pieces of data or various cases (Flick, 2014).

The researchers transcribed the data from the five classroom observations into separate Word file documents and subsequently employed inductive methods and conceptual content analysis to examine each document. Every document that contained the transcribed data from the classroom observations underwent content coding. We utilised the inductive approach, whereby we determined the categories after gathering the data. An inductive approach entails the collection of pertinent data, the examination of said data for recurring patterns, and the development of a theory based on the observed patterns. The process starts with observations and then advances from specific occurrences to more general concepts, enabling a thorough comprehension of the subject matter (Blackstone, 2012, as cited in Laraia, 2023).

Conceptual analysis is employed by researchers as a technique to discern and classify concepts in a given piece of content, facilitating their comprehension of the meanings and repeating patterns within the subject matter (Costa, Moreira, Freitas, Costa, & Bryda, 2023). The researchers originally transcribed data from covert classroom observations into separate word files and subsequently categorised them into educational or psychological categories using content

coding. This facilitated the examination of inconsistencies and similarities using numerical information. The researchers then conducted the conceptual content analysis using the following five steps (Columbia Public Health, 2023):

1.  The researchers selected the five detailed reports of each classroom observation and prepared them for analysis.
2.  The researchers reduced the data in each report by selecting the best factors that answered the research question and deleting the unimportant factors.
3.  The researchers determined the level of analysis by coding the categories into specific phrases.
4.  The researchers determined the coding process based on the existence of the factors, not their frequency in each report.
5.  The researchers identified the categories in each report without any need for paraphrasing, exactly as they were presented. This was attributed to their unambiguous and precise meaning, except for one component. The researchers paraphrased the statement "the lecturer's talking time is longer than the student's talking time" as "the lecturer's speaking dominance" and thereafter made conclusions for each factor.

## 6. Discussion

The primary categories have been classified into two distinct groups:The educational factors encompass various elements such as students' attendance, the lecturer's speaking dominance over the class, the range of vocabulary that students possess, the frequency of grammatical errors, the extent to which students use their native language in the classroom, the scarcity of opportunities for English practice both inside and outside the classroom, the effectiveness of instructional activities, and the quality of teaching facilities. The psychological elements encompass "perfectionism", "introversion", "low drive", and "inadequate self-assurance".

## 6.1 Educational Factors

Initially, the qualitative data indicated that the English fluency of 24 students was impacted due to their inability to participate in speaking skills sessions as a result of lenient policies implemented by the English department. This was attributed to the insufficient immersion in the English language during classroom instruction. Additionally, the questionnaire revealed that 19 pupils admitted to only occasionally utilising English outside of school, further indicating their limited exposure to the language beyond the educational setting.

In addition, the lecturers' predominance in verbal communication has had an influence on the students' fluency in speaking. This is because students are only given the opportunity to speak during lectures and are limited to answering questions or completing assignments, resulting in a restricted exposure to the language. Likewise, both classroom observations and student

questionnaires produced identical findings: the educational factor known as "vocabulary repertoire" was identified as the most difficult aspect encountered in the classroom. The results also indicated that their restricted lexicon originates from their inadequate English language practice, both within and outside the educational setting, despite their exposure to a wide array of vocabulary during their university studies and their active attempts to acquire new words.

What is more, the data obtained from the students' questionnaire and discreet classroom observations revealed that the instructional aspect of "grammatical mistakes" had the greatest impact on their classroom experience. The data also demonstrated that the participants' grammatical errors were a result of their psychological element known as "fear of making mistakes" and their inability to apply the norms of English when speaking. This was due to their desire to examine their utterances before speaking.

Similarly, the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that students and lecturers in the field of applied linguistics utilise both English and Libyan Arabic during classroom instruction. However, students in the translation field were not allowed to utilise either language. One of the three elements that influenced the educational aspect of "using the mother-tongue language in the classroom" was the students' restricted vocabulary, their apprehension about making errors in English, or their sense of ease while speaking their home language.

By contrast, the observational data on the educational factor "lack of practice of English inside and outside the classroom" contradicted the students' questionnaire responses regarding English practice in class. Only three out of 29 students indicated that "speaking little or not at all" was a challenge they faced in class. However, in reality, none of the students had enough time to speak English in class. This is consistent with the preceding educational aspect known as "the lecturer's speaking dominance". Nevertheless, the responses to the questionnaire regarding the practice of English outside the classroom corroborated the participants' claims made during the covert classroom observation. Out of the 29 participants, 19 indicated that they practise English outside the classroom on occasion. This finding aligns with the previously mentioned factor of "vocabulary repertoire", which suggests that their limited vocabulary is a result of their infrequent practice.

On the other hand, the observations provided data that contradicted the students' responses to the questionnaire regarding the educational aspect "activities utilised within the classroom". The students' responses to the questionnaire were as follows: Out of the total of twenty-five students who responded, nineteen students selected "yes" to indicate that their teachers required them to engage in English presentations. Fifteen students chose group discussions, seven students preferred dialogues, four students opted for roles, three students preferred pairs, two students selected gathering in circles, and three students preferred student talks. However, both branches failed to include any of these activities in their curriculum. The branch of applied linguistics utilised small group discussions incorporating both English and Libyan Arabic, whereas the professor in the

translation branch focused only on delivering comprehensive vocabulary education during the whole session.

Ultimately, the classroom observations revealed that both speaking skills lecturers did not utilise a curriculum or instructional resources, save for the lecturer from the translation branch, who employed a whiteboard to teach a wide array of terminology. The students' questionnaire responses were in line with this approach, as 19 out of 29 students chose "a whiteboard". Consequently, the empirical data contradicted the students' questionnaire responses. Out of the 29 students, 19 claimed to have interactive assignments in their speaking skills curriculum, despite the fact that they did not have any. Additionally, 10 students picked facilities that they had never actually utilised. This implies that they had insufficient time to engage in English language practice within the classroom, a circumstance that was previously noted as a contributing element in the educational aspect of "insufficient English practice both inside and outside the classroom".

## 6.2 The Psychological Factors

Initially, the empirical data indicated that the psychological element known as "fear of making mistakes" was a consequence of two educational variables that were previously mentioned: "grammatical mistakes" and "the utilisation of the native language within the classroom". The combination of these reasons prompted pupils to revert to their native language, in addition to their psychological trait of "shy personality", which will be elaborated upon later.

Moreover, the qualitative data regarding the psychological trait of "shy personality" revealed that three translation branch students, who were observed to be skilled speakers, possessed an inherent shyness that significantly influenced their social interactions. These students expressed concern that this shyness might have a negative impact on their future English fluency. Additionally, the two female students studying applied linguistics expressed shyness because they are afraid of making mistakes when speaking. On the other hand, the male student who is fluent in English is timid not because of the language, but because he finds it challenging to communicate with his female classmates, as he is the only male in his fourth year. The results aligned with the responses provided in the questionnaire, as all six students identified their shyness as the primary obstacle they faced in the classroom.

Similarly, the data obtained from classroom observations regarding the psychological aspect of "lack of motivation" indicated that the male student in the translation branch, despite being a proficient speaker, experienced a deficiency in extrinsic motivation. This was attributed to his classmates' lack of participation in the classroom, which stemmed from their shyness and language difficulties. However, his oral fluency remained unaffected. Moreover, the atmosphere of the speaking skills lecture in the translation branch was unstimulating. The lecture was entirely teacher-centred, lacking any interactive engagement from the students. In addition, the students only acquired a substantial amount of vocabulary terms in each lecture.

Conversely, In the field of applied linguistics, the male student expressed that he lost his motivation due to personal issues, leading him to consistently disengage from university activities. Nevertheless, this did not affect his fluency in the subject. Furthermore, the two female participants expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of positive feedback they received from their English major instructors, which resulted in a loss of their external drive. However, they noted an exception with the current speaking skills instructor, who regularly provided inspiration. Nevertheless, the findings derived from the observations did not align with the responses provided by the students in the questionnaire, as 16 of the participants claimed to feel inspired in the class, despite this not being true.

Ultimately, the data from observing the classroom revealed that the male student in the applied linguistics branch demonstrates a high level of self-assurance when speaking English, despite his decreased internal motivation. On the other hand, the two female students in the same branch lack self-confidence, which can be attributed to their previous encounters with a teacher who consistently corrected their errors during speaking activities. Their limited lexicon, apprehension of making errors, and reluctance to appear foolish in front of peers due to grammatical inaccuracies were the primary causes that led to their diminished self-assurance.

## 7. Conclusions and Implications

The primary aim of this study was to identify the educational and psychological elements that influenced the proficiency in spoken English of Libyan fourth-year students studying English as a foreign language at OMU in Al-Bayda city, even after four years of majoring in English. To begin with, the data obtained from the students' questionnaire and covert classroom observations revealed that the students encountered several psychological and pedagogical obstacles that had an impact on their proficiency in the English language. There was no prevailing factor, as each component was either a derivation or closely connected to another. The statistical study indicated that there was no significant deviation from the average proportion.

We categorised the primary findings into two distinct groups. Firstly, the educational factors encompassed various aspects, including student absenteeism, the lecturer's verbal dominance, vocabulary proficiency, grammatical errors, use of the native language within the classroom, insufficient English practice both inside and outside the classroom, classroom activities, and the quality of teaching facilities. Secondly, the psychological elements encompassed apprehension towards making errors, an introverted disposition, a dearth of drive, and a deficiency in self-assurance. The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Fitriani et al. 2015, Al-Esaifer and Alshareef 2018, Al Hosni 2014, Santiwatthanasiri 2018, Huwaria 2019, Asswail 2020, and Elbashir 2022).

Furthermore, Bruner's interactionist theory highlights the crucial role of active interaction and supported learning in language development. Although he did not explicitly establish a theory

on motivation and confidence. These psychological aspects can be considered as natural and expected outcomes of successful scaffolding and LASS. In other words, when the students are motivated and encouraged and engaged in meaningful interaction, they are more likely to develop their self-confidence and motivation. In this study many students struggled to speak English confidently due to fear of making mistakes, and their motivation also decreased because of the boring classroom environment, inadequate teaching facilities, and limited exposure to English. All of these conditions showed a lack of effective scaffolding, which Bruner believed is a key element for learning and developing a language (Bruner, 1983).This deficiency hindered their English fluency and limited their participation. Therefore, the findings of this research not only prove that Bruner's theory is highly relevant but also give a clear explanation for why the target participants struggled. In the absence of effective scaffolding and active interaction, their ability to enhance fluency was significantly limited.

As a result, the study's findings have various consequences for instructors, the English department, and students:

- ✓ Instructors should provide students with the chance to engage in English presentations to assist them in overcoming their reticence to speak English in public and enhance their self-assurance.
- ✓ Instructors should prohibit the use of Libyan Arabic in the classroom and instead promote the use of English among students.
- ✓ To create a more engaging classroom environment, teachers should incorporate a variety of speaking skills activities, such as role-playing, group discussions, partnered projects, and dialogues, into their lectures rather than relying simply on one activity for each lecture.
- ✓ To improve student involvement in lectures, teachers should utilise diverse teaching resources, such as "smart boards" and "data projectors", to successfully teach speaking skills.
- ✓ It is crucial to require students to attend lectures, and the English department should establish a strict strategy to deal with student absences.

Finally, students must comprehend the significance of the speaking skills lesson and actively acquire language skills for the aim of effective communication, rather than being silent. In order to prevent future forgetfulness, students might expand their vocabulary by learning new terms related to various areas and integrating them into their daily conversations. Students should actively participate in extracurricular English activities, such as engaging in conversations with their peers or communicating with native speakers on social media platforms.

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