Breaking the Silence: Challenges in Spontaneous Listening and Speaking for EFL Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges faced by Libyan EFL students in spontaneous listening and speaking. Despite proficiency in grammar and reading, students struggle with real-time communication due to various linguistic, cognitive, and psychological barriers. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates quantitative data from a Likert-scale survey and qualitative insights from student interviews. Findings reveal significant anxiety, limited practice opportunities, and reliance on Arabic as a cognitive strategy. The study highlights the need for curriculum reforms that emphasize communicative competence and suggests actionable strategies to enhance oral proficiency among Libyan learners.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Spontaneous Communication, Listening and Speaking Anxiety, Libyan Students.

1. Introduction

In the rapidly globalizing world, English proficiency has become an essential skill for academic success, career advancement, and cross-cultural communication. For non-native speakers, particularly in contexts where English exposure is limited, mastering both listening and speaking skills remains a significant challenge (Richards, 2015). In Libya, where English is taught as a foreign language, students often excel in grammar and reading comprehension but struggle to perform effectively in spontaneous oral interactions. These difficulties are compounded by sociolinguistic, pedagogical, and psychological factors that shape learners' experiences in and beyond the classroom.

In Libyan higher education, spontaneous communication—defined as the ability to listen and respond in real-time without prior preparation—has received relatively little pedagogical emphasis compared to written skills. The result is a generation of students who may be capable of passing grammar-based examinations but lack the confidence and fluency to engage in authentic English conversations (Toubot, Hock Seng, & Atan Abdullah, 2018). This gap is not merely a linguistic issue but also a reflection of the broader educational and cultural environment in which English is learned.

The present study seeks to address two central research questions:

- Why do Libyan university-level students experience difficulties with listening and speaking?

- What are students' perspectives and attitudes when speaking and listening in English? Do they feel anxious, nervous, or confident during spontaneous listening and speaking?

By integrating quantitative data from a structured Likert-scale survey with qualitative insights from student interviews, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and affective factors influencing spontaneous oral

communication among Libyan EFL learners. The findings not only contribute to the growing body of literature on second language acquisition in Arab contexts but also offer practical implications for curriculum reform, teaching strategies, and student support systems in Libya's higher education sector.

2. Literature Review

In the context of Libyan higher education, English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction faces several pedagogical and sociolinguistic challenges. According to El-Sadig (2020), Libyan universities often struggle with outdated curricula and insufficient exposure to native-like conversational practice, which significantly affects students' ability to communicate effectively. Al-Issa (2019) highlights that Arab EFL learners often exhibit high levels of anxiety in speaking tasks, reducing their fluency and spontaneous interaction.

Derakhshan and Karimi (2020) emphasized the importance of pragmatic competence in ESL, noting that students must be trained not only in grammar and vocabulary but also in sociocultural norms that govern conversation. Saeed and Zyoud (2018) observed that despite having foundational grammar knowledge, students lack fluency due to limited authentic speaking opportunities and poor feedback mechanisms. These findings align with the broader literature, which shows that immersive, communicative teaching approaches yield better conversational outcomes than traditional grammar-based methods (Zhang, 2021).

In North Africa, particularly in Libya, the lack of exposure to English media and native speakers adds another layer of complexity. Mahmoud (2017) argues that while students may perform well in written tasks, they often fail in spontaneous oral settings due to inadequate listening practice and real-time speaking experience. Kassem (2018) also found that conversational fluency among university students is highly correlated with confidence and self-efficacy, which are often undermined by rigid classroom structures and teacher-centered methodologies.

Libyan EFL students often struggle with spontaneous communication due to limited authentic exposure to English in their everyday lives. Mahmoud (2017) found that while Libyan students may demonstrate competence in grammar and reading comprehension, they frequently lack fluency and confidence during unstructured speaking activities. This gap is attributed to overemphasis on written examinations and underutilization of oral proficiency tasks in the classroom. This is further supported by the fact that in the English department Tripoli university students take only two hours of oral practice per week. This is not nearly enough to help students with their fluency (listening and speaking skills)

El-Sadig (2020) further emphasized that Libya's political instability has affected educational infrastructure, leading to outdated curricula and reduced access to communicative language teaching (CLT) resources. According to his findings, many university instructors rely on traditional, teacher-centered approaches that neglect student participation, thereby hindering the development of listening and speaking skills in spontaneous settings. Furthermore, it is a widely used practice for instructors to assign preplanned oral presentations. This is a good aid for learning new vocabulary that is exclusive to a specific topic, but does not carry over to non-specific spontaneous conversations. However, prepared presentations are a good medium for alleviating anxiety. In a study carried out by Gürbüz and Cabaroğlu (2021), "The findings from the qualitative data also confirmed that the participants had benefited from their supervised oral presentations in terms of overcoming their speaking anxiety".

A significant body of literature points to language anxiety as a critical barrier. Al-Issa (2019) described Arab EFL learners as being particularly prone to communication apprehension due to cultural norms that discourage making mistakes publicly. In Libya, where English is neither widely spoken nor heard in social settings, students are reluctant to speak freely in class for fear of embarrassment or error. This was

echoed by Alsamadani (2020), who found that supportive, low-anxiety classroom environments are essential for improving oral participation and conversational competence.

Moreover, Khalifa and Shabdin (2019) suggested that ESL learners in Arab contexts often experience a lack of pragmatic awareness, which further complicates spoken interaction. Without training in turn-taking, politeness strategies, and contextual appropriateness, students may hesitate to participate even when they understand the topic at hand.

Instructional strategies in many Libyan universities remain rooted in grammar-translation and rote memorization approaches which are ineffective for developing oral fluency, for example, as mentioned earlier, the use of supervised, prepared oral presentations (Alrabai, 2020). These traditional methods do little to encourage spontaneous communication or interactive practice. Instead, researchers like Derakhshan and Karimi (2020) recommend integrating pragmatics and communicative tasks into the curriculum. Their study on Iranian learners—comparable culturally to Libyan students—demonstrated that pragmatic instruction significantly improved conversational confidence and fluency.

Kassem (2018) similarly identified student self-efficacy as a key determinant of speaking success. His research found that students who were given opportunities for frequent interaction—through role plays, interviews, and open discussions—showed marked improvement in both fluency and accuracy over time. Unfortunately, such opportunities are rare in many Libyan institutions due to time constraints such as limited number of classes per week, lack of motivation and poor attendance by students, and large class sizes.

Listening skills are intrinsically linked to speaking competence, as students must comprehend input before they can respond appropriately. Saeed and Zyoud (2018) stressed the importance of integrating listening activities into speaking instruction.

They observed that students exposed to real-life listening materials (e.g., podcasts, interviews, and movies) were better able to maintain natural conversations, likely due to improved exposure to pronunciation, rhythm, and idiomatic expressions. This supports findings by Ghoneim (2019), who advocated for the inclusion of authentic audio-visual materials in ESL classrooms. His study revealed that Libyan students who listened to native English content regularly had better pronunciation and a broader lexical repertoire, which in turn increased their confidence in speaking tasks.

Libyans, in general, and students in particular, do not read books, magazines, etc., extra-curricularly. They only read for academic purposes. Reading, in general, is crucial for the development of language skills. It enhances vocabulary, improves comprehension, enhances grammar and sentence structure, improves writing skills, develops critical thinking skills, improves focus and concentration, and reduces stress. Furthermore, in a study carried out by Rizal et al. (2022), reading while listening to audio books improved listening fluency.

Beyond the classroom, sociocultural context plays a vital role in shaping ESL performance. Libya, being predominantly monolingual and Arabic-speaking, offers few opportunities for students to use English outside academic settings. According to Alammar (2021), this linguistic isolation contributes to a "practice vacuum" where learned skills quickly deteriorate without real-world use. In contrast, students in more multilingual societies often perform better in oral skills due to continual reinforcement.

Ahmed (2019) further posited that motivation to speak English is often extrinsically driven in Libya, shaped more by academic necessity than genuine communicative desire. This weak internal motivation can limit the effectiveness of even the most well-designed language programs, underscoring the need for cultural change in how English is perceived and utilized by students.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design:

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the spontaneous listening and speaking abilities of Libyan university students enrolled in the English department. A Likert-Scale survey was applied in the quantitative component to assess important oral communication skills constructs, and structured interviews were conducted in the qualitative component to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. By combining these techniques, data triangulation was made possible, which improved the validity and comprehensiveness of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.2 Participants:

The study targeted undergraduate students from the University of Tripoli's English Department. The sample was135 students, representing both genders and a range of academic years, took part in the survey phase using a convenience sampling technique. Participants had to be actively enrolled in EFL oral classes in order to meet the inclusion requirements. Five students were chosen randomly from the sample to participate in the interviews in order to offer qualitative insights into the difficulties of spontaneous listening and speaking in English.

3.3 Instruments:

3.3.1 Survey:

To evaluate the three primary domains of speaking skills (4 items), listening skills (5 items), and anxiety/confidence (8 items), an online (Google form) survey was created and presented in English. A five-point Likert scale was used to score the instrument's seventeen items (see appendix 1) (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree). Through professional examination by applied linguistics experts, content validity was confirmed. Strong internal consistency was indicated

by the reliability analysis's Cronbach's alpha coefficient of.860 for the entire instrument (Taber, 2018). All items showed a substantial association with their respective domains (p <.05), confirming the instrument's internal validity according to Pearson correlation analysis. The survey was distributed online using Google form, the link was sent to students trough WhatsApp groups of subjects that participants were enrolled in.

3.3.2 Interviews:

Five students were selected at random from the survey responses to participate in structured interviews. The interview questions (see appendix 2) covered anxiety, coping strategies, available opportunities for practicing the language, and students' perceived challenges with spontaneous speaking and listening. interviews were conducted in Arabic. To promote transparency, the interviewees took part in one-to-one meetings to ensure the authenticity of the results.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure:

3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis:

The Statistical Software for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 27) was used to examine quantitative data. In order to collect participant responses, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were calculated. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were utilized to evaluate reliability, while Pearson correlation coefficients were employed to examine the instrument's internal validity.

3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis:

Thematic analysis was used to examine the interview data, in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) methodology. Recurring topics were found by repeatedly reading the transcripts, and then, they were subsequently categorized into more general thematic categories. Listening difficulties, first-language interference, anxiety and confidence, grammatical and structural difficulties,

pronunciation and fluency problems, and limited practice opportunities were among the main themes.

4. Data Analysis

This section presents a detailed analysis of two data collection instruments: an interview conducted with Libyan university students enrolled in the (BA) English program. A survey was also collected from the same sample.

4.1 Likert-Scale Analysis:

A cross-sectional study was conducted on 135 English language students at the University of Tripoli to investigate students with spontaneous listening and speaking.

The researcher relied on the questionnaire as a study tool, as it included 3 axes with a total of 17 paragraphs. It was presented to a group of academics and specialists to ensure the level of validity of the tool. The five-point Likert scale was adopted to measure the opinions of the sample members regarding the questionnaire items.

4.1.1 Reliability Test:

The reliability test was conducted on the research sample using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to ensure internal consistency between the statements, as the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from (0-1). In order for the scale to be reliable, the minimum value of the coefficient must not be less than (0.60).

Table (1): shows the results of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient analysis

Axis	No. of statements	Cronbach's alpha coefficient	Rank
Anxiety and Confidence	8	0.735	2
Speaking Skills	4	0.757	1
Listening Skills	5	0.600	3
All axes	17	0.860	-

Table (1) shows the results of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient analysis for the items of each axis of the questionnaire, in addition to the total coefficient of the

questionnaire, where the internal consistency reliability value reached 0.860, which represents a good and acceptable value for the purposes of analysis, and the responses of the sample members can be relied upon in deriving the results related to the study community.

4.1.2 Validity Test:

The Validity test was conducted on the research sample using Pearson's correlation coefficients to ensure internal consistency validity between each statement and its corresponding axis. The following table shows the results of the internal validity test.

Table (2): shows the internal consistency validity results between each statement and its corresponding axis

Axis	Statement No.	Pearson's correlation coefficients	P-value
Anxiety and Confidence	1	0.686**	0.000
	2	0.711**	0.000
	3	0.621**	0.000
	4	0.677**	0.000
	5	0.177*	0.040
	6	0.644**	0.000
	7	0.615**	0.000
	8	0.569**	0.000
Speaking Skills	1	0.754**	0.000
	2	0.742**	0.000
	3	0.751**	0.000
	4	0.799**	0.000
Listening Skills	1	0.641**	0.000
	2	0.474**	0.000
	3	0.564**	0.000
	4	0.620**	0.000
	5	0.697**	0.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table (2) shows that the axes have a significance level of 0.01 (**) and 0.05 (*), which means that the questionnaire has internal consistency validity, and that it accurately measures the goal for which it was created.

Table (3): Shows the descriptive statistical analysis of participants' responses regarding the anxiety and confidence

No.	Statement	Mean ± SD	Degree	Level	Rank
1	I feel anxious when I have to speak English without preparation	3.30±1.059	Neutral	Medium	8
2	I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking in front of others	3.62±1.112	Agree	High	3
3	I feel nervous when I don't understand someone speaking quickly	3.37±1.164	Neutral	Medium	5
4	I feel my vocabulary is too limited for spontaneous speaking	3.35±1.017	Neutral	Medium	6
5	I have practiced listening to natural, unscripted English conversations in class	3.53±0.896	Agree	High	4
6	I need more support in listening and speaking skills	4.04±0.969	Agree	High	2
7	I need more classes for practicing spontaneous listening & speaking to increase my confidence	4.06±1.013	Agree	High	1
8	I find reading and writing easier than listening and speaking in English	3.32±1.250	Neutral	High	7
	Weighted mean	3.573	Agree	High	First
	Standard deviation	0.630			

SD: standard deviation

Table (3) shows (**Descriptive statistical analysis of participants' answers regarding the anxiety and confidence**), from which is found that the highest average was awarded to the statement 7: (I need more classes for practicing spontaneous listening & speaking to increase my confidence) with mean 4.06 and Std. Deviation 1.013, followed by statement 6: (I need more support in listening and speaking skills) with mean 4.04 and Std. Deviation 0.969, followed by statement 2: (I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking in front of others) with mean 3.62 and Std. Deviation 1.112, followed by statement 5: (I have practiced listening to natural, unscripted English conversations in class) with mean 3.53 and Std. Deviation 0.896, followed by statement 3: (I feel nervous when I don't understand someone speaking quickly) with mean 3.37 and Std. Deviation 1.164, followed by statement 4: (I feel my vocabulary is too limited for spontaneous speaking) with mean 3.35 and Std. Deviation 1.017.

While the lowest average was awarded to the statement 1: (I feel anxious when I have to speak English without preparation) with mean 3.30 and Std. Deviation 1.059.

The weighted average of axes (1) was 3.573 with Std. Deviation 0.630, which indicates that the trend of (**anxiety and confidence**) is (agree), as a general trend according to the 5-point Likert scale, since 3.573 lies in the interval [3.40–4.19].
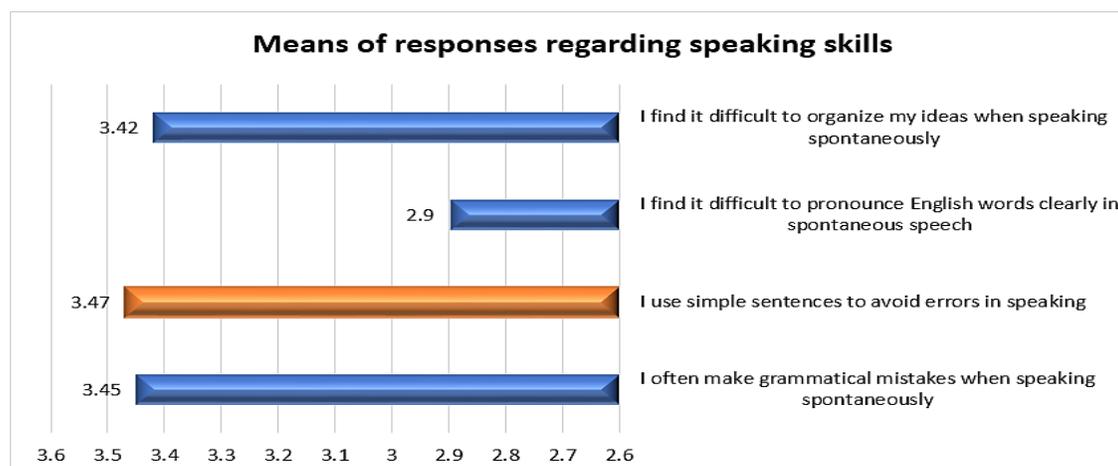
The next figure shows this result.

Figure (2): Shows the means of responses regarding speaking skills

Table (4): Shows the descriptive statistical analysis of participants' responses regarding the Speaking Skills

No.	Statement	Mean ± SD	Degree	Level	Rank
1	I often make grammatical mistakes when speaking spontaneously	3.45±0.944	Agree	High	2
2	I use simple sentences to avoid errors in speaking	3.47±1.057	Agree	High	1
3	I find it difficult to pronounce English words clearly in spontaneous speech	2.90±1.043	Neutral	Medium	4
4	I find it difficult to organize my ideas when speaking spontaneously	3.42±1.075	Agree	High	3
	Weighted mean	3.311	Neutral	Medium	Third
	Standard deviation	0.784			

SD: standard deviation

Table (4) shows (**Descriptive statistical analysis of participants' answers regarding the Speaking Skills**), from which is found that the highest average was awarded to the statement 2: (I use simple sentences to avoid errors in speaking) with mean 3.47 and Std. Deviation 1.057, followed by statement 1: (I often make grammatical mistakes when speaking spontaneously) with mean 3.45 and Std.

Deviation 0.944, followed by statement 4: (I find it difficult to organize my ideas when speaking spontaneously) with mean 3.42 and Std. Deviation 1.075. While the lowest average was awarded to the statement 3: (I find it difficult to pronounce English words clearly in spontaneous speech) with mean 2.90 and Std. Deviation 1.043.

The weighted average of axes (2) was 3.311 with Std. Deviation 0.784, which indicates that the trend of (**Speaking Skills**) is (neutral), as a general trend according to the 5-point Likert scale, since 3.311 lies in the interval [2.60–3.39].
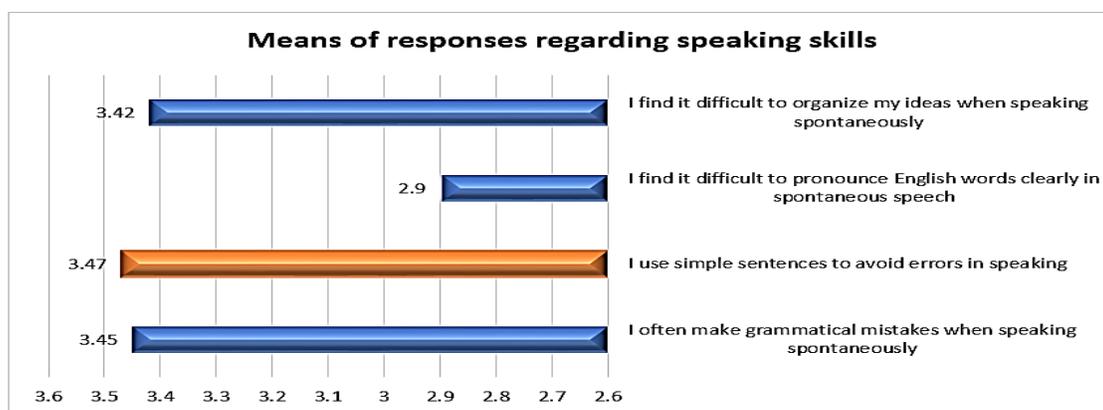
The next figure shows this result.

Figure (1): Shows the means of responses regarding speaking skills

Table (5): Shows the descriptive statistical analysis of participants' responses regarding the Listening Skills

No.	Statement	Mean ± SD	Degree	Level	Rank
1	I struggle to understand different English accents (e.g., British, American, etc.) in movies, songs, etc.	2.95±1.135	Neutral	Medium	4
2	I focus on key words to understand the main idea when listening	3.93±0.883	Agree	High	1
3	I can ask for clarification or repetition when I don't understand something	3.81±0.857	Agree	High	2
4	I sometimes switch to Arabic when I don't know how to say something in English	3.36±1.163	Neutral	Medium	3
5	I usually think in Arabic, then translate into English during spontaneous, listening, and speaking	3.36±1.076	Neutral	Medium	3
	Weighted mean	3.484	Agree	High	Second
	Standard deviation	0.619			

SD: standard deviation

Table (5) shows (**Descriptive statistical analysis of participants' answers regarding the Listening Skills**), from which is found that the highest average was awarded to the statement 2: (I focus on key words to understand the main idea when listening) with mean 3.93 and Std. Deviation 0.883, followed by statement 3: (I can ask for clarification or repetition when I don't understand something) with mean 3.81 and Std. Deviation 0.857, followed by statement 4: (I sometimes switch to Arabic when I don't know how to say something in English) with mean 3.36 and Std. Deviation 1.163 and statement 5: (I usually think in Arabic, then translate into English during spontaneous, listening, and speaking) with mean 3.36 and Std. Deviation 1.076.

While the lowest average was awarded to the statement 1: (I struggle to understand different English accents (e.g., British, American, etc.) in movies, songs, etc.) with mean 2.95 and Std. Deviation 1.135.

The weighted average of axes (3) was 3.484 with Std. Deviation 0.619, which indicates that the trend of (**Listening Skills**) is (agree), as a general trend according to the 5-point Likert scale, since 3.484 lies in the interval [3.40–4.19].

The next figure shows this result.

Means of responses regarding speaking skills

- 3.42 — I find it difficult to organize my ideas when speaking spontaneously
- 2.9 — I find it difficult to pronounce English words clearly in spontaneous speech
- 3.47 — I use simple sentences to avoid errors in speaking
- 3.45 — I often make grammatical mistakes when speaking spontaneously
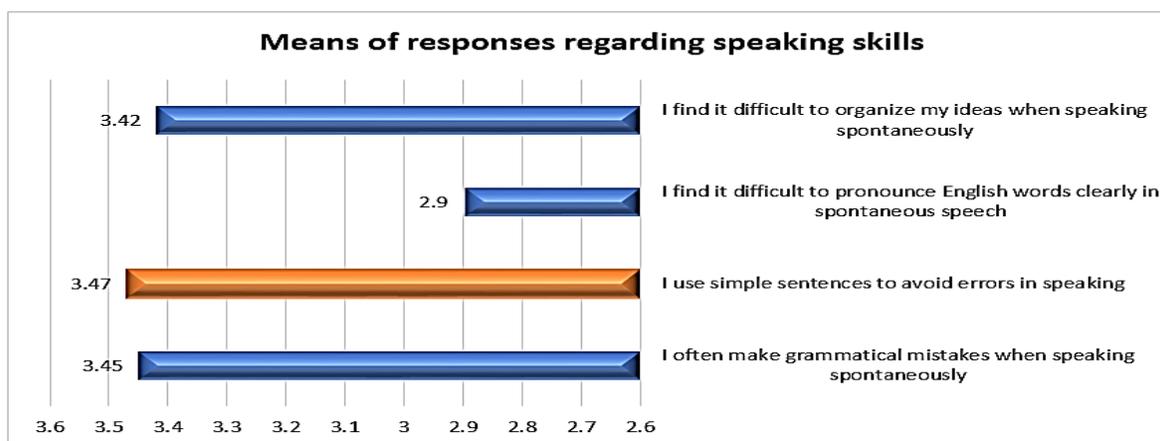
Figure (2): Shows the means of responses regarding listening skills

4.2 Interview Analysis:

The interviews were conducted with 5 students who were chosen randomly from the sample of the study, and were analyzed thematically. The qualitative data collected from five student interviews revealed several recurring themes regarding the challenges faced in spontaneous English speaking and listening. These themes reflect linguistic, cognitive, and psychological barriers that impact learners' oral communication skills.

Grammatical and Structural Challenges:

One of the most commonly reported issues among participants was difficulty in constructing grammatically correct sentences during spontaneous speech. Although some students expressed familiarity with English grammar rules and vocabulary, they found it challenging to apply this knowledge in real-time speaking situations. This disconnects between receptive knowledge and productive use suggests a need for more communicative practice to reinforce grammar in context.

> *"I know a lot of vocabulary, but I struggle with structuring it."* (Student 1)

> *"Although I'm good at grammar, I find it hard to apply it verbally."* (Student 2)

> *"When speaking English, I struggle with sentence structure and pronunciation."* (Student 4)

Pronunciation and Speaking Fluency:

Pronunciation emerged as another significant concern. Several students noted that their uncertainty regarding the correct pronunciation of words affected their ability to speak fluently and confidently. This issue was often linked to a broader lack of fluency, particularly when speaking in front of others or in unfamiliar settings.

> "I sometimes struggle with correct pronunciation and feel nervous when speaking to someone." (Student 2)

"I face difficulty in pronunciation and forming sentences." (Student 3)

"*I feel like I don't have enough confidence to speak fluently.*" (Student 4)

Listening Difficulties: Speed and Accent:

Students consistently reported difficulties understanding spoken English, particularly when native speakers used fast-paced speech or unfamiliar accents. These challenges interfered with comprehension, especially when speakers used slang or idiomatic expressions. While some participants indicated a basic understanding of English, the speed and accent variation often hindered their ability to follow details in conversation or media.

> *"Sometimes I find it hard to understand native speakers due to the speed of their speech and the different accents." (Student 3)*

> *"I find it very hard to understand the American accent… I can't understand fast speech." (Student 2)*

> *"Listening is difficult when the speaker talks too fast or uses unfamiliar vocabulary." (Student 4)*

Cognitive Processing: Thinking in Arabic:

All participants acknowledged a tendency to think in Arabic before translating their thoughts into English. This cognitive process slowed down their speech production and often resulted in hesitation or errors. Students were aware that this habit negatively impacted their fluency and natural expression.

> *"Yes, I always think in Arabic first, then translate to English." (Student 5)*

> *"Most of the time, yes, I think in Arabic, and that's a mistake." (Student 1)*

> *"Yes, I often think in Arabic and then try to translate into English, which slows me down." (Student 3)*

Anxiety and Lack of Confidence in Spontaneous Speaking:

A prominent theme across all interviews was the presence of anxiety and reduced confidence during spontaneous conversations. Students described feeling nervous when unexpectedly asked to speak, particularly in academic settings or when interacting with more proficient speakers. This anxiety often stemmed from fear of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes, which in turn limited their willingness to participate in English conversations.

> *"Yes, I feel nervous in spontaneous conversations, especially when I speak with someone who is better than me in English." (Student 5)*

> *"I feel nervous and hesitant when speaking English, especially in front of others." (Student 3)*

> *"Yes, especially when someone suddenly asks me something in English — I freeze and feel shy." (Student 4)*

Limited Opportunities for Practice:

Despite these challenges, students expressed strong motivation to improve their spoken English. However, they reported a lack of speaking opportunities within their academic and social environments. Some expressed disappointment that English was not commonly used among peers, which limited their chances to practice and develop fluency in authentic contexts.

> *"I thought that in university students would speak English, but I didn't find anyone to talk with except my girlfriends." (Student 1)*

> *"We meet and try to improve our language, but even they [my friends] make mistakes." (Student 1)*

5. Discussion

This study comprehensively examined the spontaneous listening and speaking abilities of English language students at the University of Tripoli by integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The purpose was to understand not just the level of students' proficiency in real-time English communication, but also the psychosocial, pedagogical, and linguistic factors that contribute to or hinder their performance. Through interviews and an extensive survey instrument, several recurring patterns emerged, indicating persistent barriers to oral proficiency.

5.1 Research Question 1: Problems Facing Libyan University Students in Learning Spontaneous Listening and Speaking:

The findings of this study point to a complex set of interrelated barriers—linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and environmental—that are consistent with patterns identified in prior research.

Linguistic Limitations emerged as a significant concern, with students reporting persistent grammatical inaccuracies, a restricted lexical range, and challenges in pronunciation. These results align with Saeed and Zyoud's (2018) and Derakhshan and Karimi's (2020) assertions that structural and phonological weaknesses hinder Arab EFL learners' communicative competence. The tendency of students to rely on simplified sentence structures to avoid errors (M = 3.47) reflects Mahmoud's (2017) observation that insufficient engagement in authentic communicative contexts often promotes avoidance strategies at the expense of language development.

Listening Comprehension Difficulties were also prominent, particularly in relation to varied accents and rapid speech. This finding reinforces Ghoneim's (2019) argument that limited exposure to authentic English input—especially across diverse varieties—restricts learners' auditory discrimination and

comprehension abilities. The lowest-rated listening skills item (M = 2.95) identified accent variation as a major obstacle, underscoring the literature's emphasis on diversified listening practice.

Cognitive Constraints, most notably the habitual translation from Arabic before producing speech in English (M = 3.36), further hinder fluency. This pattern corresponds with Jarvis and Pavlenko's (2018) work on cross-linguistic interference, and corroborates the literature review's recognition of L1 processing as a factor that increases cognitive load and impedes spontaneous speech.

Finally, **environmental factors** such as the limited time allocated to oral practice and the scarcity of authentic speaking situations exacerbate these challenges. Students' reports of receiving only two hours of oral practice per week mirror Alrabai's (2020) and El-Sadig's (2020) critiques of exam-focused, teacher-centered instruction in Libyan universities—an approach that is insufficient for developing the communicative competence required for spontaneous interaction.

5.2 Research Question 2: Students' Perceptions of the Challenges in Learning Spontaneous Listening and Speaking:

Students demonstrated clear self-awareness regarding the challenges they face, with **anxiety and lack of confidence** emerging as the most frequently cited concerns. This finding supports Al-Issa's (2019) discussion of the socio-cultural roots of communicative apprehension among Arab learners. The highest-rated statement— "I need more classes for practicing spontaneous listening and speaking to increase my confidence" (M = 4.06)—parallels Alsamadani's (2020) call for psychologically supportive environments that provide sufficient practice opportunities.

Emotional barriers such as fear of making mistakes, dissatisfaction with traditional teaching methods, and frustration over the lack of English use beyond the classroom reflect the affective and motivational factors described in Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. The observation that peers predominantly speak Arabic outside formal instruction further confirms the gap between classroom learning and authentic language use highlighted by Alammar (2021).

Notably, despite these difficulties, students expressed **strong motivation and a willingness to improve,** contingent on the provision of more interactive, low-anxiety learning experiences. This finding reinforces the literature's recommendation for communicative, learner-centered pedagogies that actively engage students in authentic language use.

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings with the literature review highlights the systemic nature of the challenges faced by Libyan EFL learners. High mean scores indicating a need for greater spontaneous practice (M = 4.06) and additional support in listening and speaking skills (M = 4.04) validate Alammar's (2021) and El-Sadig's (2020) critiques that current curricula inadequately emphasize interactive competence.

Recurring themes such as grammatical inaccuracies, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties reinforce the conclusions of Saeed and Zyoud (2018) and Derakhshan and Karimi (2020), while the consistent finding of L1 interference supports Jarvis and Pavlenko's (2018) research on bilingual language processing. Listening-related challenges, particularly with accent and speech rate, parallel Ghoneim's (2019) argument that restricted exposure to varied input limits listening proficiency.

Anxiety-related results, such as the mean of 3.62 for fear of making mistakes, align with Al-Issa's (2019) claim that socio-cultural norms intensify

performance-related apprehension. The recurrent issue of limited authentic speaking opportunities mirrors Alrabai's (2020) and El-Sadig's (2020) critique of the outdated, exam-oriented instructional paradigm.

5.3 Interpretation of Key Findings

5.3.1 Anxiety and Confidence:

Anxiety emerged as a dominant theme across both data sets. Quantitatively, the mean for the item "I need more classes for practicing spontaneous listening and speaking" (M = 4.06) was the highest overall. Similarly, the statement "I need more support in listening and speaking skills" also scored highly (M = 4.04). Student responses confirmed that this anxiety is not limited to formal settings; even informal conversation triggers nervousness, especially when peers or instructors are involved. This supports existing research on the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that emotional factors like anxiety impede language acquisition (Krashen, 1982).

Speaking Skills:

In the speaking domain, students frequently cited grammatical insecurity and idea organization as significant barriers. The statement "I use simple sentences to avoid errors in speaking" (M = 3.47) underscores a defensive strategy where learners simplify their language to avoid mistakes. Such strategies, while helpful in reducing anxiety, may inhibit linguistic development over time. Student 2 illustrated this with the comment: "I find it hard to apply [grammar] verbally... I struggle with correct pronunciation and feel nervous when speaking to someone."

Listening Skills:

The survey results for listening skills were generally more positive, but challenges remained. The item "I focus on key words to understand the main idea when listening" received a high mean score (M = 3.93), suggesting that students rely on

strategies like selective attention to compensate for their limitations. However, difficulties with understanding slang, fast speech, and different accents were consistently noted. Student 2 explained, "I find it very hard to understand the American accent... I can't understand fast speech." These issues are consistent with Goh's (2017) findings on the cognitive load involved in second-language listening.

L1 Interference:

The habitual translation from Arabic to English emerged as a major cognitive barrier. Several students admitted thinking in Arabic before responding in English, which slows down processing and reduces fluency. The survey item "I usually think in Arabic, then translate into English" had a mean of 3.36, indicating that this is a widespread issue. Such cross-linguistic interference has been well-documented in SLA research (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2018).

Strengths of the Study

- **Mixed-Methods Approach:**

    A key strength of this study lies in its mixed-methods design, which allowed for the collection of both numerical data and in-depth qualitative insights. By combining a structured survey (administered to 135 students) with open-ended interview questions, the study offers a multidimensional view of spontaneous communication challenges. The convergence of quantitative patterns with qualitative evidence increases the validity of the findings and enables a deeper understanding of the students' experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

    For instance, high levels of agreement with survey items related to anxiety were mirrored in the interviews, where students described feelings of nervousness, particularly in classroom or exam settings. Student 3 reported, "I face difficulty in pronunciation and forming sentences. I also feel nervous and hesitant when

speaking English, especially in front of others." This mixed-method validation reinforces the centrality of anxiety in shaping communication outcomes.

- **Validity and Reliability Measures:**

The questionnaire used in the study underwent rigorous psychometric evaluation. Cronbach's alpha values were high across all axes, with an overall reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.860$, suggesting excellent internal consistency (Taber, 2018). Additionally, Pearson correlation tests showed significant alignment between individual items and their respective constructs, confirming the instrument's internal validity.

These robust measures support the claim that the questionnaire accurately captures constructs related to anxiety, speaking, and listening skills. This level of methodological rigor ensures that conclusions drawn from the data are both reliable and replicable in similar educational settings.

- **Alignment with Student Needs:**

The content of the questionnaire and interviews directly addressed the skills most relevant to spontaneous English use—an area often underdeveloped in traditional language instruction models that dominate in Libyan higher education. By focusing on listening and speaking under spontaneous conditions, the study reflects the current global emphasis on communicative competence and real-time interaction (Derakhshan, 2021).

The alignment with student needs is further evident in the participants' responses. The highest-scoring items indicated a desire for more spontaneous practice opportunities and greater support, suggesting a readiness for curricular reforms that prioritize communication over grammar drills.

Weaknesses of the Study

- **Limited Generalizability:**

  While the sample size (n=135) is sufficient for exploratory purposes, the restriction to a single institution (University of Tripoli) limits the generalizability of the findings. Other universities in Libya, especially in rural or under-resourced areas, may face different challenges due to varying levels of institutional support and English exposure (Elabbar, 2017).

- **Over-Reliance on Self-Report Measures**:

  The exclusive use of self-report data introduces potential biases. Participants may provide socially desirable answers, overestimate their comprehension abilities, or downplay their speaking anxieties (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). While the qualitative data offers some balance, the absence of observational or performance-based measures is a notable weakness.

- **Lack of Objective Language Proficiency Measures**:

  No direct assessments of students' speaking or listening abilities (e.g., recorded interviews, comprehension quizzes) were used to corroborate the self-reported data. This disconnect makes it difficult to determine the extent to which perceived difficulties reflect actual performance gaps. Including such assessments would have enhanced the diagnostic precision of the study (Fulcher & Davidson, 2017).

Limitations of the Study

Contextual Factors:

One significant limitation lies in the contextual challenges facing English education in Libya. Political instability, under-resourced educational institutions, and limited access to modern teaching tools significantly affect student learning outcomes. For

example, the lack of access to language labs, native speakers, or authentic English materials constrains the potential for immersive learning. These systemic issues were not directly measured in this study but are likely contributing to the high levels of anxiety and low confidence reported by students (Alrabai, 2020).

Gender and Sociocultural Dynamics:

The absence of gender-specific analysis is another limitation. Although both male and female students were included in the study, it did not investigate gender-based differences in anxiety, confidence, or communication strategies. Previous research indicates that sociocultural norms in conservative settings like Libya may restrict female students' participation in oral activities due to fear of embarrassment or societal expectations (Mahmoudi-Gahrouei et al., 2021). Incorporating gender analysis in future research would offer a more inclusive understanding of the learning context.

Lack of Longitudinal Perspective:

The current study is cross-sectional, capturing a single snapshot in time. This design limits our understanding of whether students' skills and attitudes improve or deteriorate over time. Longitudinal studies would allow for a better assessment of the impact of interventions, instructional changes, or increased exposure to English media. For instance, tracking a cohort of students over multiple semesters could reveal patterns of language development and help identify effective practices.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides a thorough investigation into the spontaneous speaking and listening challenges faced by Libyan university students. Both qualitative and quantitative data reveal widespread anxiety, insufficient speaking practice, and overreliance on Arabic as a cognitive crutch. Despite these challenges, students expressed a strong desire to improve and a clear awareness of their linguistic needs.

Beyond the specific classroom setting, the study's conclusions suggest that Libya's language education program needs to undergo more extensive structural adjustments. The University of Tripoli is not alone in the persistent patterns of concern, insufficient practice, and excessive reliance on Arabic; rather, they are representative of a national educational system that places a low value on oral communicative proficiency. To bridge these deficiencies, Decision-makers, academics, and university administrators must work together to reframe learning English as a talent for authentic communication rather than just an academic necessity. Including English in extracurricular activities, exchange programs, and community service projects could help close the gap between classroom learning and practical application, creating an atmosphere that encourages natural speaking and listening.

The study also emphasizes how crucial it is to teach EFL using a learner-centered, evidence-based methodology that complies with international best practices. This entails creating peer-to-peer learning networks, utilizing technology to provide immersive exposure, and providing continuous professional development for teachers who specialize in communicative language instruction. Giving Libyan pupils the self-assurance and ability to communicate in English naturally is not just an academic objective but also a cultural and economic necessity as globalization continues to increase the demand for fluent English speakers. University staff members, Instructors, and teachers can empower a new generation of learners who can confidently, fluently, and culturally navigate a variety of linguistic environments by implementing these results.

6.1 Recommendations

The mixed-methods approach strengthened the validity of the findings and painted a multidimensional picture of learners' struggles. To bridge the gap between passive knowledge and active use, educators and institutions must revise teaching strategies, enrich language exposure, and prioritize confidence-building. Such efforts are

essential for developing fluent, autonomous English speakers ready to engage in global academic and professional contexts.

Pedagogical Recommendations:

Based on the findings, a number of actionable steps can be taken to improve spontaneous listening and speaking skills:

- **Increase Opportunities for Spontaneous Speaking:**

  Teachers should regularly include unstructured and semi-structured speaking tasks in their lessons. Activities such as impromptu speeches, peer interviews, and storytelling can reduce anxiety and foster natural communication.

- **Accent Familiarization and Listening Strategies:**

  Students struggle with understanding fast speech and different accents. Listening activities should therefore include exposure to diverse English dialects (e.g., American, British, Australian) and formats (e.g., movies, podcasts, live conversations). Tasks that focus on gist comprehension, note-taking, and paraphrasing can also improve listening outcomes.

- **Integrate Grammar and Communication**:

  Grammar instruction should be embedded in communicative tasks rather than taught in isolation. Role-play, dialogue writing, and problem-solving tasks can help students apply grammatical structures in real-time, thus reducing the gap between written accuracy and spoken fluency.

- **Establish Peer Learning Networks**:

  Facilitating English-speaking clubs, peer tutoring, and informal conversation groups can create safe spaces for practice. As interview responses highlighted, many students lacked partners to practice with. Encouraging peer interaction outside of formal lessons can significantly boost confidence.

- **Teacher Training on Affective Strategies**:

  Instructors should receive training on how to reduce student anxiety and increase participation. This includes techniques such as praise and encouragement, setting realistic goals, and promoting a non-threatening classroom environment. Teacher awareness of affective factors can substantially influence student engagement and motivation.

Recommendations for Future Research:

The study opens up several promising avenues for future investigation:

- **Longitudinal Intervention Studies:**

  Research that tracks students over time while implementing interventions (e.g., English clubs, speaking labs) can offer insight into what pedagogical strategies yield lasting improvements in communication.

- **Integration of Digital Tools:**

  Future studies should explore the effectiveness of digital platforms such as language-learning apps, AI-powered chatbots, and speech recognition software in reducing anxiety and improving fluency (Golonka et al., 2017).

- **Comparative and Multisite Studies:**

  To enhance external validity, future research should involve multiple universities across Libya or neighboring countries. This would enable researchers to assess regional differences and contextual challenges more comprehensively (Mahboob & Elyas, 2017).

- **Sociolinguistic and Psychological Factors:**

  Variables such as personality type, motivation, prior exposure to English, and family support should be incorporated to understand the individual learner profile.

These factors are known to significantly impact language learning success (Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015).

Broader Educational Recommendations:

The study's findings emphasize the need for systemic changes in EFL instruction in Libyan higher education:

- Curriculum Reform: Move away from test-based, grammar-heavy syllabi toward communicative and task-based approaches.

- Resource Allocation: Establish well-equipped language centers with internet access, multimedia materials, and speaking spaces.

- Policy Advocacy: Encourage the Ministry of Education and university administrators to support programs that enhance communicative competence, including teacher training, exchange programs, and extracurricular language clubs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Likert-Scale Survey Statements:

I feel anxious when I have to speak English without preparation.

I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking in front of others.

I feel nervous when I don't understand someone speaking quickly.

I feel my vocabulary is too limited for spontaneous speaking.

I have practiced listening to natural, unscripted English conversations in class.

I need more support in listening and speaking skills.

I need more classes for practicing spontaneous listening & speaking to increase my confidence.

I find reading and writing easier than listening and speaking in English.

I often make grammatical mistakes when speaking spontaneously.

I use simple sentences to avoid errors in speaking.

I find it difficult to pronounce English words clearly in spontaneous speech.

I find it difficult to organize my ideas when speaking spontaneously.

I struggle to understand different English accents (e.g., British, American, etc.) in movies, songs, etc.

I focus on key words to understand the main idea when listening.

I can ask for clarification or repetition when I don't understand something.

I sometimes switch to Arabic when I don't know how to say something in English.

I usually think in Arabic, then translate into English during spontaneous, listening, and speaking.

Appendix 2

Interview Questions

الاستماع والنطق العفوي لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية

الرجاء الإجابة على هذه الأسئلة بصيغة واضحة

الاسم: ....   رقم القيد: ....

1. ما الصعوبات التي تواجهها عند التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية؟
....
....
2. ما الصعوبات التي تجدها عند الاستماع (فهم) للغة الإنجليزية؟
....
....
3. هل تفكر باللغة العربية ثم تترجم إلى الإنجليزية؟
....
....
4. هل تشعر بالتوتر في المحادثات العفوية؟
....
....

Translated interview questions
Please answer the following questions clearly
Name: .... **Registration Number:** ....
1. What difficulties do you face when speaking English?
....
....
2. What difficulties do you find when listening (understanding) English?
....
....
3. Do you think in Arabic first and then translate into English?
....
....
4. Do you feel nervous during spontaneous conversations?
....
....