

Speaking Proficiency And The Main Factors Faced By Students In Libyan Secondary Education

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Abstract

Learning an additional language has become very popular in different parts of the world due to the increasing use of English as a language of learning and teaching. This study Looks into the challenges Libyan secondary students face in developing speaking skills despite 12 years of English language education. These challenges lead to low proficiency in academic and speaking skills. The research aims to discover the factors affecting the speaking skills of secondary school students in Libya and identify the effects of each of these factors on mastering their speaking skills. A questionnaire adapted to collect data was distributed to 150 students in 10 schools to get their opinions regarding teaching and learning oral skills. The study revealed that school students lack the opportunity to speak in the classroom in the target language due to several factors, the most important of which were a lack of speaking activities in class, some teachers skipping conversation activities, a lack of vocabulary needed to practice conversation, notes, and corrections directed to students during learning English, the student's personal motivation and participation in the classroom, and insufficient time to practice oral skills.

Keywords: Speaking Skills, Hindrances, Speaking Tasks, Secondary School Students

Introduction

The mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority and dream of most learners of foreign languages (Jamshidnejad, 2020). Learners evaluate their success in language learning on the basis of how well they have improved in their spoken proficiency (Goh & Burns, 2012). Solcova (2011)

argues that language is not very useful if it is not practiced through speaking. Speaking is one of the most significant skills to be enhanced and developed as a means of successful communication. Most of the communication that takes place in real-life situations is oral, either face-to-face or telephonic. Spoken language production is often considered one of the most difficult aspects of language learning (Brown & Yule, 1983) cited in (Tuan & Mai, 2015). Hence, a large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

The ability to speak fluently in a foreign language requires using language in communicative behaviors (Rao, 2019). Speaking activities are a crucial part of language teaching and learning (Malihaha, 2010). If teachers skip teaching listening activities in classrooms, the students will not speak the language in a way that can be understood. Rao (2019) confirms that rehearsing speaking in classrooms is a crucial part of the learning process. Johnson (1996) in Burns (2019) describes speaking as a “combinatorial skill” that involves doing different things at the same time such as knowledge of language and discourse, core speaking skills, and communication and discourse strategies. If we want to teach speaking effectively, we must first understand what it entails. We frequently describe someone as a good speaker because that person speaks confidently, fluently, and grammatically (Goh 2016).

In Libya, English is considered a foreign language. Nunan (2015) explains that a foreign language (FL) context is one where the target language is not the language of communication in a particular society. Therefore, speaking skill for Libyan students is a challenge. Effective communication occurs when the receiver perceives what the sender has tried to convey (Jamshidnejad, 2020). Speaking skills give speakers the ability to transfer information verbally and in a way that the listeners can understand. Teaching and learning English is not an easy task (Wulandari et al. 2020). In a communicative class, learners should be provided with opportunities to use the language a great deal through communicative activities. The learners are then required to be skillful in using the language. In order to keep students interested and motivated throughout the teaching and learning process, the teacher has to implement proper learning strategies.

The problem is that Libyan secondary students face great problems with speaking skills (Owen et al. 2019). Richards & Renandya, (2002) point out that the ability to speak is more than knowing its semantics and grammatical rules. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), learners need the knowledge of how native speakers use the language in the context of structured interpersonal exchange, in which many factors interact. The Libyan Education Ministry has pushed teaching language for educational reform and introduced English since the primary school level. Students in Libyan secondary education have low proficiency in speaking a foreign language (Diaab, 2016., Aloreibi & Garey, 2017). Halali et al.

(2022) reported that Libyan students who studied in Malaysia struggle with academic speaking as a result of an inadequate prior English language learning experience characterized by a lack of speaking practice. They are unable to participate, argue, share, debate, or continue in a conversation. In spite of the students studying English for twelve years, six in primary education, three in the preparatory stage, and three years in secondary education, they have low speaking proficiency. Twelve years of English at school are enough time to make students produce English fluently.

Based on the above problem, the main research questions are as follows:

- What are the factors affecting the speaking skills of secondary school students in Libya?
- To what extent do these factors affect Libyan secondary school students?

2. Literature Review.

Speaking skill has received a significant place in the field of teaching and learning a second or a foreign language. Learning to speak a foreign language is a fundamental process that involves making mistakes, misjudgments, miscalculations, and erroneous assumptions form an important aspect of learning practically any skill or acquiring information (Brown 2017). Learning to speak a foreign language is not an easy task. It is challenging for foreign language learners (Bygate, 2003., Owen & Razali, 2018). Richards (1990) points out that the conversation class is something a mystery in language teaching. In some language programs, it is an opportunity to get students to talk for the duration of a class period, using whatever resources and techniques the teacher can think of. Oral skills are one of the most significant skills the students learn, as they allow them to communicate with others and convey thoughts and feelings to receivers. Goh (2016) points out that speaking comprises dynamic mental, articulatory, and social interactions.

To express a message, speakers are required to decide what to say and utilize their linguistic knowledge to construct utterances and encode this message in sounds and sound patterns that can be known and comprehended by their listeners. For two reasons, Nunan (2003) points out that speaking is harder than reading, writing, or listening. First, unlike reading or writing, speaking occurs in real time. The person the speaker is talking to is waiting for the speaker to speak right then. Second, when the speaker speaks, the listener is unable to edit and revise what the speaker wishes to convey, as one can if he is writing. He (2003) adds that “the language generated by the learner in speech or writing is referred to as productive” (p.48). Bygate (2003) cited in Nadesan & Shah (2020) mentions two elements of speaking which are knowledge and skill. Nunan (2003) clarifies that in order to communicate well in another language, speakers must make themselves understood by the people they are

talking with, and this is not an easy task, especially at the beginning and intermediate levels. He (2003) provides principles for teaching speaking:

- 1) English teachers must be conscious of the differences between second language and foreign language learning contexts.
- 2) Teachers have to give students practice with both fluency and accuracy.
- 3) Students have to be provided opportunities to communicate by using group work or pair work and limiting teacher talk.
- 4) Speaking activities have to involve negotiation for meaning.
- 5) Classroom activities must be designed to contain guidance and practice in transactional and interactional speaking (pp.54-56).

Morozova & Yeltsin (2013) provided some steps to improve oral skills: **(1)** Placing more emphasis on the quality of study books at the basic level. **(2)** Giving enough time to students' speaking and phonetic drills. **(3)** Not scolding but rather providing a friendly environment. **(4)** Using practical and applicable strategies by teachers for students while speaking in English most of the time. **(5)** Developing boldness and confidence in students to ask questions of their teachers. **(6)** The classes should not be overloaded. **(7)** Awards and motivation for students. **(8)** Encouraging listening to English channels for keeping up-to-date and constantly retraining teachers. **(9)** Arranging various activities and balancing the courses concerning literature and language.

Harmer (2010) gives three main reasons for engaging students to speak in the classroom. **(1)** Speaking activities provide rehearsal opportunities. Chances to practice real-life situations- like in the classroom. **(2)** Speaking tasks in which students attempt to utilize the language they know provide feedback for both teacher and students. Students can notice how successful they are doing, and also what language factors they are experiencing **(3)** The more students have opportunities to activate the different elements of the language they have stored in their brains, the more automatic their use of these elements becomes. Therefore, students gradually become autonomous language users. i.e., they will be able to use words and phrases fluently without much conscious thought (p. 123).

Good speaking tasks can engage students in the learning process, make them active, and give positive results. Teachers can participate in the conversation for assistance. According to Blum (1998) cited in (Dhakal 2015), the teacher can create an effective learning experience in the classroom and create a purposeful and calm atmosphere in which the 'momentum' for learning can be built (p. 18). Doff (1998) cited in Leong and Ahmadi (2017) points out that students cannot develop their speaking ability unless they develop their listening ability because the roles are exchangeable. The speaker becomes a listener and the listener becomes a speaker. The listener should always be on the mind of the

speaker to make speech comprehensible and intelligible. Learners should comprehend what is uttered to them in order to have a successful conversation. Shastri (2010) argues that Speaking is an interactive skill, which involves both listening and speaking.

When one speaks, he/she may initiate the speech or respond to another's speech. Burns (2013) mentions three components of speaking competence. **(1)** Knowledge of Language and discourse that needs mastering the sound patterns of the language. This refers to the ability to produce the language intelligibly at segmental and suprasegmental levels, knowing the grammar and vocabulary of the language (spoken structures, grammatical features, lexis), and understanding how stretches of connected speech are organized. So that they are socially and pragmatically appropriate. **(2)** Core Speaking Skills which means developing the ability to process speech quickly to increase fluency. **(3)** Communication Strategies include developing cognitive strategies to compensate for limitations in language knowledge, metacognitive strategies, and interaction strategies such as asking for clarification/ repetition, reformulating, rephrasing, and checking comprehension.

Goh and Burns (2012) Proposed a holistic approach to instructing speaking skills, i.e., an approach that addresses language learners' cognitive, affective, and social requirements as they work towards acquiring effective speaking competence. This approach is based on a socio-cognitive perspective on language learning which takes the view that learning is not just a cognitive but also a social process. The holistic approach as pointed out by Goh and Burns (2012) emphasizes four main factors of learning:

- 1) Learning is an active, strategic, and constructive process.
- 2) It is guided by learners' introspective awareness and control of their mental process.
- 3) It follows developmental trajectories.
- 4) It is facilitated by social, collaborative settings that value self-directed student dialogue.

They (2012) mentioned three factors that lead to successful language learning: Teachers, material, and learners.

- Teachers

Teachers have a crucial role in helping learners to acquire language skills that they will not be able to achieve on their own. Teachers need to be aware of their students' needs and the demands they face when communicating through spoken language. Instructors can understand more about language learners' cognitive, affective, and social needs from theoretical ideas, as well as personnel observations.

- Material

Materials have to fall into three categories:

- a. Those that provide speaking practice
- b. Those that promote language skills learning.
- c. Those that facilitate metacognitive development.

- Learners

Learners have to be encouraged to have responsibility for managing their learning and improving their speaking. This can be developing awareness about themselves as second language speakers by better understanding the nature and demands of speaking, and by critically considering strategies that can facilitate their oral communication. Learners have to support each other's speaking development not as just communication partners in a speaking task role, but as learning partners who share their learning plans and goals (pp. 4-6).

Students' achievement highly depends on their willingness to communicate in a second or foreign language (Cao, 2022). Learners who grudgingly communicate in the target language will be unable to achieve desirable language outcomes (Menezes and Juan-Garau, 2015) cited in (Cao, 2022). Goh and Doyle (2006) provide features of spoken language:

- 1) Spoken language is typically produced spontaneously and constructed together by partners in an interaction. The meaning communicated is negotiated for clarity through strategies such as asking for repetition or paraphrasing.
- 2) Spoken language is mainly produced in face-to-face interactions in which the speaker can refer to the objects, people, places, etc. that are in the context of interaction without explicitly mentioning them.
- 3) Natural speech tends to be 'messy': Not all sentences are well formed and there are redundancies, repetitions, and hesitations.
- 4) Clauses in spoken language are linked by simple conjunctions such as and, but, or. This is because speech is said in real time and speakers often might not have the cognitive capacity to build very elaborate utterances while monitoring what they are saying. Speech that tends to be highly contextualized also includes many ellipses, i.e., words or phrases are left out because the meaning is already clear from the context.

Tuan and Mai (2015) investigated the speaking problems of the students at Le Thanh Hien High School, in Vietnam and the factors affecting their speaking performance. The results of their study showed that students' speaking performance was affected by topical knowledge, listening ability, confidence to perform well, and little time to practice speaking skills. Whereas Khan et al. (2018) explored the problems of lack of vocabulary that Saudi EFL students face with a special focus on their

speaking proficiency. The researchers found that lack of vocabulary has an influence on EFL (English Foreign Language) students' performance in listening and conversation classes in expressing their ideas and feelings, and especially in speaking skills. Uchihara and Clenton (2018) investigated the extent to which receptive vocabulary size test scores can predict second language (L2) speaking ability. Their study showed that vocabulary size was significantly associated with vocabulary rating. The two researchers mentioned that learners with large vocabulary sizes did not necessarily produce lexically sophisticated L2 words during the conversation.

Halali et al (2022) conducted a study that investigated the academic challenges that Libyan students faced during their study in Malaysian universities. Libyan students showed a low ability in comprehending academic spoken language due to inadequate prior English language learning experience. Their study revealed that Libyan students encountered challenges in speaking performance as a result of lacking enough linguistic knowledge and inadequate prior speaking practice.

Owen & Razali (2018) conducted a study to explore whether implementing communicative activities affects Libyan secondary students' speaking performance or not. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between the pre-test compared to the post-test. Students' speaking performance improved after implementing communicative activities in the classroom.

The communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was introduced through the Libyan English language curriculum of 1999-2000 by the Libyan Ministry of Education to develop students' oral skills (Abidin et al. 2012., Abukhattala, 2015). He (2015) added that Libyan English instructors have not been able to assist their students in achieving the objectives of the new curricula because the teachers predominantly utilize the traditional approach (GTM) and teacher-centered pedagogy. Effective teaching in schools is a major concern for successful learning. Teachers often play a significant part in the classrooms. The teaching methodology is a factor that influences learners' performance. Teaching English as an oral skill has always been, and remains, challenging for language teachers. Teachers cite their inadequate pedagogical knowledge which views them carrying out incidental, rather than explicit teaching of speaking (Goh et al., 2005) cited in (Sabnani & Renandya, 2019). An ineffective teaching approach leads to failure in grasping speaking skills. Hande et al. (2014) argue that effective teaching is crucial for increasing student achievement.

Research Methodology

The method applied in this study is quantitative in nature. The study tool was designed based on previous studies, as the scale consisted of 15 items that measure potential factors affecting students' proficiency in speaking English. A five-point Likert scale was adopted to measure students'

opinions at the secondary stage (Never 1, Rarely 2, Sometimes 3, Usually 4, Always 5). The survey questionnaire was distributed among 150 students in Misurata Secondary Schools, Libya

Table 1 shows the items of the questionnaire, their coding, and the sources of the study.

Table 1: Instrument of the Study

Code	Statement	Sources
Var1	Speaking activities are important in rehearsing speaking.	Qasim, A. Y. (2021)
Var2	Limited vocabulary hinders me to share in a conversation.	Manurung, Y. H. & Izar, S.I. (2019) Pasarlay, M. N. (2018).
Var3	Teachers of English skip performing speaking tasks that are available on text and workbook pages.	Burns, Anne. (2019)
Var4	I practice English by speaking with others.	Nguyen, H. T, & Fehring, H. (2014)
Var5	The Teacher pays attention to pronunciation to speak better.	Goh, C. (2007)
Var6	I have a chance to speak outside the classroom	Al-Zoubi, S. M. (2018).
Var7	I have a will to improve my speaking skills.	Tuan. N. H & Mai. T. N. (2015).
Var8	I participate in speaking activities in the classroom.	Tuan. N. H & Mai. T. N. (2015).
Var9	The teacher uses pair and group work techniques to teach speaking skills.	Merla, M. (2019).
Var10	The teacher encourages you to speak in English.	Tuan. N. H & Mai. T. N. (2015).
Var11	Corrective feedback In front of classmates makes me hesitant to speak.	Tuan. N. H & Mai. T. N. (2015).
Var12	Speaking skill is tested during the studying school year.	Pathan, M. M., Khaiyali, A. A., & Marayi, Z.E. (216).
Var13	The teacher uses the target language in the classroom.	Tuan. N. H & Mai. T. N. (2015).
Var14	I learn English for the sake of speaking ability	Vista, A. (2022). Ramadan, M. O. (2020).
Var15	The time allotted to teaching English language is enough	Tuan. N. H & Mai. T. N. (2015).

Data Analysis

Data were collected from 150 students in secondary schools in the city of Misurata in Libya. The data were transcribed into Excel and then into SPSS

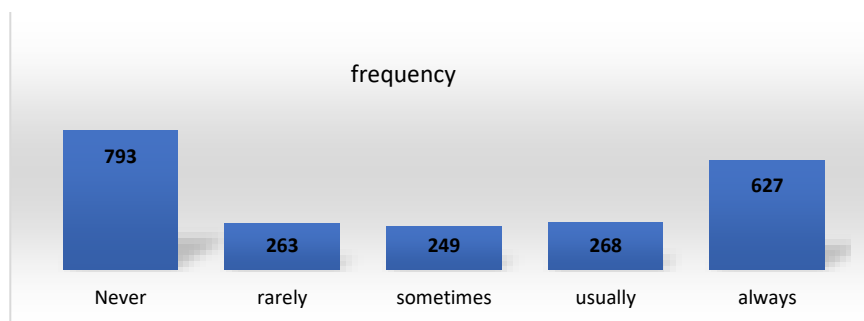
in preparation for conducting the appropriate analysis to answer the research questions. Several types of tools were used on the SPSS program to analyze the results. Frequencies, weighted arithmetic mean, and percentages were used, and the results of the analysis were presented graphically. The following table shows the frequencies and the percentage of five-point Likert scale scores.

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages of the Items of the Questionnaire

Var 1 to 15					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	793	36 %	36.0	36.0
	Rarely	263	12 %	12.0	48.0
	Sometimes	249	11.3 %	11.3	59.3
	Usually	268	12.2 %	12.2	71.5
	Always	627	28.5 %	28.5	100.0
	Total	2200	100 %	100.0	

In general, the previous table presents the factors affecting the mastery of high school students. The data were presented based on the five-point Likert scale. The results show that the percentage of students' disagreement with the mentioned factors amounted to 48% (Never 36%; Rarely 12%), while the "Sometimes" option was 11.3%. Finally, the students' agreement on the influencing factors reached their English proficiency was 40.7% (Usually 12.2%; Always 28.5%). The following figure shows the frequency of responses for all the factors affecting English-speaking proficiency based on the five-point Likert scale.

Figure 1: Frequency of the five-pointed Likert scale



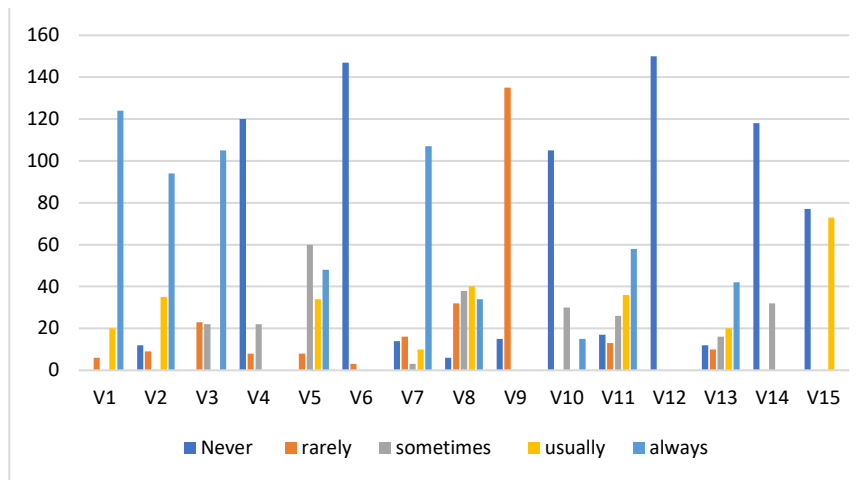
The following table shows the extent of students' agreement on the factors affecting mastery of the speaking skill shown on the five-point Likert scale (Never 1, Rarely2, Sometimes3, Usually4, Always5). The results of the analysis show that there is a general trend to agree on most of the factors influencing students' mastery of the English language skill, such as variables 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, and 15. While there was a tendency to disagree, such as variables 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, and 14. The following table shows the frequency of students' answers according to the Likert scale and their percentages.

Table 3: Frequencies and Percentages of the Items of the Questionnaire

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Total
Var1	0	6	0	20	124	150
	0%	4%	0%	13.33%	82.67%	100%
Var2	12	9	0	35	94	150
	8%	6%	0%	23.33%	62.67%	100%
Var3	0	23	22	0	105	150
	0%	15.33%	14.67%	0%	70%	100%
Var4	120	8	22	0	0	150
	80%	5.33%	14.67%	0%	0%	100%
Var5	0	8	60	34	48	150
	0%	5.33%	40%	22.67%	32%	100%
Var6	147	3	0	0	0	150
	98%	2%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Var7	14	16	3	10	107	150
	9.33%	10.67%	2%	6.67%	71.33%	100%
Var8	6	32	38	40	34	150
	4%	21.33%	25.33%	26.67%	22.67%	100%
Var9	15	135	0	0	0	150
	10%	135%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Var10	105	0	30	0	15	150
	70%	0%	20%	0%	10%	100%
Var11	17	13	26	36	58	150
	11.33%	8.67%	17.33%	24%	38.67%	100%
Var12	150	0	0	0	0	150
	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Var13	12	10	16	20	42	150
	8%	6.67%	10.67%	13.33%	28%	100%
Var14	118	0	32	0	0	150
	78.67%	0%	21.33%	0%	0%	100%
Var15	77	0	0	73	0	150
	51.33%	0%	0%	48.67%	0%	100%
Total	793	263	249	268	627	2200
	36%	12%	11.3%	12.2%	28.5%	100%

The following figure graphically shows the students' opinions on all the factors affecting students' mastery of speaking skills.

Figure 2: Frequency of the five-pointed Likert scale for Variables



The results of the current study indicate that all of the aforementioned factors affect students' mastery of the English language skill, but the impact of these factors on mastering the speaking skill varies according to their importance. The current table presents a comparison of these factors in order of importance.

Table 4: Arranging the Factors Affecting English Proficiency According to Their Importance

Variables	Average	Relative Weight Percent	Remark
Var 1	4.74	94.93 %	High Acceptance
Var 2	4.26	85.33 %	High Acceptance
Var 3	4.24	84.93 %	High Acceptance
Var 7	4.2	84 %	High Acceptance
Var 5	3.81	76.26 %	High Acceptance
Var 11	3.7	74 %	High Acceptance
Var 8	3.42	68.53 %	High Acceptance
Var13	2.46	49.33 %	Low Acceptance
Var 15	2.46	49.2 %	Low Acceptance
Var 9	1.9	38 %	Low Acceptance
Var 10	1.8	36 %	Low Acceptance
Var14	1.42	28.53 %	Low Acceptance
Var 4	1.34	26.93 %	Low Acceptance
Var 6	1.02	20.4 %	Low Acceptance
Var 12	1	20 %	Low Acceptance
Total		55.76 %	

It is clear from the previous table-4 that the arrangement of the factors influencing the English language proficiency skill according to its importance is in the variables order 1, 2, 3, 7, 5, 11, 8 and where the arithmetic average of these variables is more than 3, which is the arithmetic mean of the Likert scale, and therefore it can be said that there

is a high degree of agreement on these factors according to the opinions of secondary school students in Libya. On the other hand, it is clear that there are factors that are less important according to the students' opinions, and they are, respectively, var 13, 15, 9, 10, 14, 4, 6, 12

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the challenges faced by Libyan secondary students in developing their speaking proficiency in the English language despite 12 years of formal learning. The study aimed to identify the key factors influencing students' speaking skills and understand the impact of each factor on their ability to master this essential skill.

Through the administration of a questionnaire to 150 students across ten schools, valuable insights were gained into the prevailing conditions in Libyan classrooms. The findings reveal that students lack sufficient opportunities to engage in spoken English within the classroom setting. Several factors contribute to this limitation, including the scarcity of speaking activities, teachers who overlook conversation-based exercises, insufficient vocabulary to practice speaking, minimal feedback and corrections provided to students, and the student's own motivation and involvement in speaking activities. These identified factors not only hinder the development of students' academic speaking skills but also impact their personal communication abilities. The research underscores the importance of fostering a conducive environment that encourages students to actively participate in speaking activities, engage in meaningful conversations, and expand their vocabulary.

Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts from various stakeholders within the education system. School administrators should prioritize the incorporation of speaking activities in lesson plans, ensuring that teachers allocate dedicated time for interactive discussions and conversations. Additionally, teacher training programs should emphasize the significance of oral proficiency and equip educators with effective strategies to promote speaking skills in the classroom. Moreover, it is crucial to develop comprehensive language curriculum frameworks that emphasize the cultivation of speaking proficiency alongside other language skills. These frameworks should emphasize the importance of vocabulary acquisition, encourage peer-to-peer interactions, and provide opportunities for real-life communication experiences.

Lastly, students themselves play a vital role in their language development. Encouraging self-motivation, active participation, and a willingness to take risks in speaking English will significantly contribute to their overall progress. It is essential for students to understand that speaking a second language is a process that requires consistent practice and effort. By recognizing and addressing the factors highlighted in this research, the Libyan education system can strive towards improving the speaking proficiency of secondary students. Enhancing their ability to communicate effectively in English will not only empower individuals in

their academic pursuits but also open doors to various opportunities and global connections. This study serves as a starting point for further research and a call to action to bridge the gap between language learning theory and practice in Libyan secondary education. With continued dedication, collaboration, and a focus on creating an immersive English language environment, Libyan students can develop the necessary speaking skills to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

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