



# A Study of the Challenges Faced by English Major Students (from Tabuk University) When Speaking English

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**Abstract**— To enhance second language acquisition, it is essential to develop an understanding of the issues faced by English major students; therefore, the primary objective of this study concerns the identification of the challenges faced by second language learners as perceived by English major students from the Department of Languages and Translation at Tabuk University. Developing fluency in English and speaking confidently in public is rapidly becoming an essential skill for students: it is fundamental to both their studies and when seeking employment following graduation. Increasingly, employers are seeking applicants who can speak English fluently and confidently; therefore, English language acquisition is increasingly perceived as one of the most challenging elements of the teaching and learning process. Via the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative data, this study analysed the factors that impede the efficacy of public speaking among undergraduate students at Tabuk University. The findings of this study highlight that several elements can impact a student's use of English in public (such as psychological factors, learning environment, educational system, educational facilities, faculty members, and the curriculum).



**Keywords**— Tabuk University, public speaking, undergraduate students

## I. INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of English and the ability to use it fluently poses several challenges for learners. Kurniawan (2014) reported that the focus placed on written English by tutors can make it challenging for students to use the language orally. This focus on the grammatical aspects of language learning, combined with a lack of opportunities to develop their oral skills results in significant challenges and students will avoid engaging with native English speakers for fear of making mistakes which limits their opportunities to practice their oral skills. Therefore, the factors related to students' inability to master oral skills as they learn English need to be identified and resolved.

Typically, students engaged in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) study the four micro-skills of language acquisition (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Although some students may be skilled at reading and

writing, Taval (2010) reports that they may face challenges when engaging with the remaining aspects (listening and speaking). Conversely, Alaraj (2017) noted that EFL learners are more challenged by the development of productive skills (writing and speaking) than receptive skills (reading and listening) because they are required to adapt their language use when applying their productive skills and engaging in actual performance.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The contemporary literature contains many examples of research which has analysed the challenges encountered by EFL students when applying their speaking skills. Alyan (2013) reported that learners' hesitation to apply their knowledge in an oral context arises from their anxiety about making mistakes. In other words, if a learner fears that their

language use is incorrect, they will avoid opportunities to interact in conversation.

Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal (2013) conducted a study consisting of Jordanian EFL students which revealed that overuse of the first language (L1), overcrowded classes, and insufficient time to practice speaking can inhibit the effective acquisition of English. Al Hosni (2014) reported that EFL students encountered several challenges that hindered their proficiency in oral English. Additionally, Zhang (2009) noted that speaking was the most challenging aspect of language learning and that many learners lacked the ability to orally communicate in English.

The aforementioned research emphasises that speaking is a fundamental aspect of language acquisition; therefore, this area requires additional analysis to develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by EFL learners. By identifying these challenges and creating effective solutions, educators can enhance learners' abilities to communicate orally in English.

A lack of fluency in spoken English can be attributed to learners' inhibitions and their lack of confidence in public speaking. Senel (2012) noted that these attitudes, combined with teacher and peer group evaluations, could be a contributing factor to students' lack of ability to communicate effectively in their language class. Hamad (2013) analysed the challenges posed by learning spoken English (as experienced by female EFL students in Saudi colleges for girls) which revealed that the excessive use of L1, a lack of time devoted to speaking in class, inefficient teaching practices, absence of effective teaching strategies, anxiety, and not employing L1 to clarify issues were the primary contributors to English-speaking skill issues.

Several psychological factors have been identified as inhibiting students' willingness to participate in spoken activities. Juhana (2012) reported that a fear of making mistakes, anxiety, shyness, and a lack of confidence and motivation were some of the psychological factors that may inhibit a student's performance. Therefore, educators should take these factors into account when attempting to understand why some students fail to participate in spoken activities. This study sought to identify the challenges encountered by English major students studying at Tabuk University when speaking English.

### III. METHODOLOGY

To identify and analyse the English-speaking challenges encountered by English major students from the Department of Languages and Translation at Tabuk University, this research adopted a survey methodology. The survey was distributed to 113 English major students and contained 30 open-ended questions (covering nine separate areas) concerning the challenges posed by acquiring spoken English language skills.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Quantitative data analysis

After quantitative data were collected it was revised, coded, and fed to statistical software IBM SPSS version 25. The reliability of the tools was determined by Cronbach's alpha. Frequency tables and cross-tabulation were used to illustrate the results. Quantitative data were summarized by the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and mean score per cent. All statistical analysis was done using two-tailed tests and an alpha error of 0.05. A P-value less than or equal to 0.05 was considered to be statistically significant.

Table 1: Validity and reliability of the students' questionnaire

	Cronbach's Alpha	Spearman-Brown
Reliability	0.785	0.850
Validity	0.89	0.92

It is clear from Table (1) for the Validity and reliability of the students' questionnaire that the value of the coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha (0.785) and the value of Spearman-Brown (0.850) and these values greater than 0.70, which indicates the Reliability of the questionnaire, and the value of Validity ranged between (0.89, 0.92), which indicates the Validity of the questionnaire.

Table 2: Reasons Related to Psychological Factors

Questionnaire items	Test Value =3					Reality of 0.05	Predication
	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)		
1 Low self-confidence affects the development of speaking skills.	4.35	0.89	15.98	110	0.00	Function p<0.05	Significant

2	Feeling anxious when asked by the professor to speak or present affects the development of your speaking skills.	4.08	0.94	12.18	110	0.00	Function $p < 0.05$	Significant
3	Feeling shy is an obstacle to developing speaking skills.	4.12	0.92	12.77	110	0.00	Function $p < 0.05$	Significant
4	Fear of making mistakes while speaking English negatively affects the development of speaking skills.	4.33	0.91	15.47	110	0.00	Function $p < 0.05$	Significant
5	Having motivation to improve speaking skills impacts the progress made by students.	4.25	0.86	15.38	110	0.00	Function $p < 0.05$	Significant

It is clear from Table (2) that Reasons Related to Psychological Factors there are statistically significant differences in all items, where the value of (T) ranged between (12.18 and 15.98) and these values are greater than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level less than 0.05( $p < 0.05$ )

Table 3: **Reasons Related to Classroom Environment**

Questionnaire items		Test Value =3					Reality of 0.05	Predication
		Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.(2- tailed)		
6	The lack of opportunities to speak in the classroom hinders the development of students' speaking skills.	3.85	1.13	7.90	110	0.00	Function p<0.05	Significant
7	The lack of cooperation among students to practice English in the classroom negatively affects the development of speaking skills.	3.88	1.10	8.44	110	0.00	Function p<0.05	Significant
8	The reluctance of your classmates to speak English outside the classroom slows down your mastery of speaking skills.	3.73	1.26	6.11	110	0.00	Function p<0.05	Significant
9	A relatively large number of students in the class negatively affects the development of speaking skills.	3.58	1.11	5.48	110	0.00	Function p<0.05	Significant

It is clear from Table (3) that Reasons Related to Classroom Environment there are statistically significant differences in all items, where the value of (T) ranged between (5.48 and 8.44) and these values are greater than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level less than 0.05( $p < 0.05$ )

Table 4: Reasons Related to the Education System

Questionnaire items	Test Value =3					Reality of 0.05	Predication
	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)		
10 The education system may impact language skills, for example, the department does not emphasize improving speaking skills.	4.05	1.06	10.47	110	0.00	Function $p<0.05$	Significant

It is clear from Table (4) that Reasons Related to the Education System there are statistically significant differences in all items, where the value of (T) (10.47) and this value is greater than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level less than 0.05( $p<0.05$ )

Table 5: Reasons Related to Educational Facilities

Questionnaire items	Test Value =3					Reality of 0.05	Predication
	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)		
11 Having adequate facilities (e.g., phonetics labs) in the department helps in developing speaking skills.	3.71	1.26	5.95	110	0.00	Function $p<0.05$	Significant
12 Teachers use all available facilities effectively to improve students' language skills.	3.75	1.07	7.33	110	0.00	Function $p<0.05$	Significant
13 The language club in the department creates a comfortable environment for students to practice speaking outside the classroom.	3.09	1.18	0.80	110	0.42	No Function $p>0.05$	Not Significant

It is clear from Table (5) that Reasons Related to Educational Facilities there are statistically significant differences in items (11-12), where the value of (T) ranged between (5.95, 7.33) and these values are greater than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level less than 0.05( $p<0.05$ ), It is also clear that there are no statistically significant differences in item (13) where the value of (T)(0.80) and this value is less than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level bigger than 0.05( $p>0.05$ )

Table 6: Reasons Related to Faculty Members (Teachers)

Questionnaire items	Test Value =3					Reality of 0.05	Predication
	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)		
14 Speaking skills are greatly influenced by listening skills and how we receive language from teachers.	3.77	1.17	6.91	110	0.00	Function $p<0.05$	Significant
15 Teachers' mispronunciation of vocabulary sometimes affects students' speaking skills.	4.08	0.96	11.81	110	0.00	Function $p<0.05$	Significant

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16	Teachers' lack of concern about embarrassing students for their pronunciation errors negatively affects students and hinders their speaking development.	4.03	1.07	10.07	110	0.00	Function $p < 0.05$	Significant
17	Teachers ensure mastery of speaking skills through some classroom exercises such as reading sentences and texts.	3.59	1.10	5.61	110	0.00	Function $p < 0.05$	Significant
18	Forcing students to speak in class negatively affects the development of speaking skills.	3.50	1.19	4.47	110	0.00	Function $p < 0.05$	Significant
19	Ignoring students in class and not giving them the opportunity to speak or participate affects the development of speaking skills.	4.14	0.95	12.61	110	0.00	Function $p < 0.05$	Significant

It is clear from Table (6) that Reasons Related to Faculty Members (Teachers) there are statistically significant differences in all items, where the value of (T) ranged between (4.47 and 12.61) and these values are greater than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ )

Table 7: Reasons Related to Program Curriculum

Questionnaire items		Test Value =3					Reality of 0.05	Predication
		Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.(2- tailed)		
20	The courses or activities related to speaking skills are appropriate in terms of level.	3.27	1.17	2.44	110	0.02	Function p<0.05	Significant
21	Students can build a sufficient vocabulary repertoire by studying various courses in the department.	3.75	1.16	6.77	110	0.00	Function p<0.05	Significant
22	Grammar courses help refine speaking skills by providing adequate knowledge of language rules.	3.83	1.16	7.53	110	0.00	Function p<0.05	Significant
23	There are enough courses and classroom activities to help students improve their speaking skills.	2.99	1.25	0.08	110	0.94	No Function p>0.05	Not Significant
24	There are enough extracurricular activities to help students improve their speaking skills.	2.53	1.26	3.91	110	0.00	Function p<0.05	Significant

It is clear from Table (7) that Reasons Related to the Program Curriculum there are statistically significant differences in most items, where the value of (T) ranged between (2.44 and 7.53) and these values are greater than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). It is also clear that there are no statistically significant differences in item (23) where the value of (T)(0.08) and this value is less than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level bigger than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ )

Table 8: Reasons Related to the Impact of the Native Language

Questionnaire items	Test Value =3					Reality of 0.05	Predication
	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)		
25 My native language (Arabic) significantly slows my mastery of speaking skills.	2.83	1.27	1.42	110	0.16	No Function $p>0.05$	Not Significant
26 Listening to English outside the classroom intensively (e.g., watching movies or programs) positively affects language development.	4.60	0.70	23.99	110	0.00	Function $p<0.05$	Significant
27 Speaking English for extended hours outside formal study times positively impacts refining your language skills.	4.47	0.77	20.03	110	0.00	Function $p<0.05$	Significant

It is clear from Table (8) that Reasons Related to the Impact of the Native Language there are statistically significant differences in items (26-27), where the value of (T) ranged between (20.03, 23.99) and these values are greater than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level less than 0.05( $p<0.05$ ), It is also clear that there are no statistically significant differences in item (25) where the value of (T)(1.42) and this value is less than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level bigger than 0.05( $p>0.05$ )

Table 9: Reasons Related to Other Factors

Questionnaire items	Test Value =3					Reality of 0.05	Predication
	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)		
28 The time allocated for phonetics and speaking courses is appropriate.	3.63	1.09	6.07	110	0.00	Function $p<0.05$	Significant
29 The lack of encouragement from your family, relatives, or society negatively affects your speaking skills.	3.60	1.22	5.23	110	0.00	Function $p<0.05$	Significant

It is clear from Table (9) that Reasons Related to Other Factors there are statistically significant differences in all items, where the value of (T) ranged between (5.23 and 6.07) and these values are greater than the tabular value (T) at the level of 0.05 and with a significance level less than 0.05( $p<0.05$ )

#### 4.2 Qualitative data analysis :

The interview data were analysed using an inductive-thematic analysis: identifying natural units of meaning, labelling, categorizing, and organizing them, constructing narratives, and interpreting the findings. The following section details the challenges encountered by the participants when speaking English.

##### 4.2.1 Psychological Factors

Several students reported that self-confidence, anxiety, and a fear of making mistakes prevented them from communicating orally in English. One student noted that "Self-confidence and linguistic abilities play a significant role in mastering the skill of conversation in English," while another student reported that "One of the psychological factors that affect the development of English conversation skills is the fear of making mistakes and the feeling of embarrassment when committing an error." Additionally, students revealed that "Anxiety leads to discomfort and, consequently, stress and worry hinder the development of the skill."

#### 4.2.2 Classroom Environment

The students reported that the classroom environment had negatively impacted their development of linguistic skills and their ability to converse in English. For example, the substantial number of students in a classroom reduces the amount of time available for practising their speaking skills: one student noted “I want to improve my conversation skills, but there isn't enough time due to the large number of students in the classroom.” Additionally, the respondents reported that they had experienced an uncollaborative atmosphere among students which had limited their opportunities to practice their oral skills and improve their proficiency in this aspect of language acquisition: one participant reported that “Everyone speaks Arabic outside the classroom, so how can I improve my English language skills?”

#### 4.2.3 Education System

Due to the constraints of the education system, several participants noted that the department's approach was specialised (rather than skills-based); therefore, the curriculum follows the same approach. One of the students stated that “The subjects focus on literature and linguistics, rather than language skills.”

#### 4.2.4 Educational Facilities

The participants reported the provision of phonetic labs and student clubs to facilitate their language learning; however, due to the lack of extra-curricular study time, these facilities are rarely utilised effectively.

#### 4.2.5 Faculty Members

Typically, the participants responded that the faculty members were extremely cooperative. However, they noted that the lack of time available to practice their oral skills, combined with significant class sizes and the students' inhibitions and anxiety about making mistakes, had negatively impacted the development of their spoken language skills. One participant reported that “the faculty members are cooperative, but we need time to practice the language.”

#### 4.2.6 Program Curriculum

The participants reported that some of the course activities placed an additional emphasis on writing (rather than speaking) skills. Additionally, it was noted that the curriculum relies entirely on written assessment. Although certain activities (such as oral presentations for some subjects) emphasise students' conversational skills, their duration is limited. One of the students stated, “I wish there was a course dedicated solely to conversation.”

#### 4.2.7 Impact of the Native Language

The acquisition and development of English language skills (particularly conversation) necessitates extensive practice, repetition, and a significant amount of time. The native language of the students (Arabic) plays a pivotal role for all students, particularly those in non-English-speaking environments. The use of the native language, whether domestically, in university, or outside of the classroom significantly impacts the progress of EFL students. One student noted, “I can only practice English inside the classroom for a limited time, and I wish I could practice for a longer period.”

### V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research reveal that anxiety, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and shyness, combined with a lack of creative teaching approaches, practice, and attention from teachers, can hinder the public speaking proficiencies of EFL students. These factors may result in students experiencing elevated levels of anxiety when speaking in public. Additionally, this research found that insufficient time to practice, large class sizes, the structure of the curriculum, and a lack of encouragement from family members inhibit the language acquisition of EFL students. This research provides valuable insights to educators for overcoming the challenges faced by undergraduate EFL learners and enhancing their learning outcomes.

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