Authentic Materials In Enhancing Libyan EFL Students Speaking Skills

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Abstract

In the world of globalisation advancement, the role of the English language is greatly accentuated in the Libyan
education system. The capability to speak English is a prevailing tool in getting all offered fields a success. Despite the formal learning of English over years at school, Libyan EFL learners are still unable to achieve a desirable competency level of speaking proficiency. The current situation of the Libyan ESL school learners imposed a great obstacle which affects them tremendously by being incompetent in communicating English. Very limited research has been done to address the speaking problems among in Libyan context. Ideally, the usage of authentic materials should help learners to speak. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the students' perspectives of the effect of authentic technology-based learning materials. The researcher interviewed 10 Libyan undergraduate students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and the protocol was piloted and validated by experts. The data was transcribed and analysed using NVivo QSR, data was presented in form of theme and sub-themes. The findings revealed that authentic technology-based materials positively affect students learning as it increases speaking fluency, enhance speaking accuracy, develop speaking pronunciation, increase vocabulary competence, build rapport and confidence, eases anxiety and apprehension. The study recommends the integration of all types of authentic technology-based materials in developing students' speaking. Future studies might focus on implementing authentic technology-based materials. The study contributes to the limited literature of utilising authentic materials in English learning in Libya.

Keywords: *Authentic technology-based materials, learning English, E-learning, speaking skills, Libya.*

Introduction

The English language plays a major part in the Libyan educational system in this era of globalization growth. Speaking, listening, reading, and writing are the four ESL abilities that are taught in classrooms across all educational institutions. Thus, speaking and writing are referred to as output skills (p[1]roductive skills), but reading and listening are referred to as input skills (receptive skills) (Hossain, 2015). As a result, to acquire and develop the English language correctly and completely, all of these skills are required. Speaking is indeed a necessary component of learning English. This production skill allows students to effectively converse verbally with other speakers (Gunada, 2017 & Mona, 2019). In verbal communication, the speaker expresses ideas and opinions using words; nonetheless, the main objective is to ensure that the discussion occurs and the intended recipient (or recipients) understands what is being said. Speaking, according to (Gunada, 2017), is an

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interactive activity that entails creating meaning to produce, receive, and process information. These days, people have to prepare themselves to be able to interact using their English competency daily, which means that the necessity for oral communication and competency is increasing (Ahmed, 2017). To be employed, a person needs to graduate from high school, college, or university with sufficient language ability. Thus, speaking—which requires both receptive and productive skills—plays a crucial part in enabling a speaker to communicate with one another. Globalization in the present world requires people to be proficient speakers and conversationalists for them to interact with one another (Alfiani, 2020). Students who have mastered effective speaking techniques can excel in a variety of school activities and events (Alakrash et al., 2022). They will have the ability to participate actively in seminars, debates, presentations, and group discussions. Additionally, as they develop their speaking abilities and become proficient communicators, they exhibit greater confidence and offer insightful insights to their audience. To help students improve their English proficiency, the Libyan Education Blueprint 2013–2025 places a strong emphasis on the value of the English language and offers a range of cutting-edge teaching and learning strategies (Alsied, 2019). According to Saraswathy (2021), the primary goal of the Libyan education design is to develop students who can compete globally. This is achieved through the English language education system in Libya, which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This framework's primary goal is to develop students into communicatively competent speakers of the target language. Nonetheless, a variety of factors have a role in the learners' low skill attainment in speaking; for instance, decreased motivation (Kadamovna, 2021; Abdelatia et al., 2023) and worry (Mahamud, 2018).

 With reference to the Libyan Education blueprint, the main objective is to shape up learners who are internationally competitive which is fostered in the Libyan English language education system based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Saraswathy Kashinathan, 2021). The main outline of this framework emphasises shaping up learners who are communicative competent and operate effectively in the target language. However, there are many factors that contribute to low proficiency attainment in the learners' speaking competency. For example, anxiety (Mahamud, 2018), low motivation (Kadamovna, 2021, Abdelatia et al., 2023).

Poor speaking performance is a result of learners' insufficient target language proficiency (Grégis, 2019). Speaking activities are frequently treated leniently in ESL classes at Libyan schools since they are a standard part of the teaching and learning process (Ali, 2019). Furthermore, the existing curricular requirements place a greater emphasis on grammatical accuracy drills and practice, which limits the amount of real-world communication that occurs (Saraswathy, 2021). Learners have very few opportunities to be exposed to learning and authentic resources since they have been raised in a learning environment that prioritizes accuracy over fluency. Although authentic materials are not designed with the intention of being used in the classroom, it is precisely because they are authentic that they serve as valuable learning resources for students. Additionally, real materials support literacy activities and help students make the connection between the classroom and the outside world. Nevertheless, because the majority of studies have been conducted in face-to-face learning environments, relatively little study has been done to address the speaking issues among ESL learners at Sabah's community colleges (Hamid & Idrus). Much research has demonstrated that using authentic materials should ideally facilitate students' speaking (Alabsi, Wang 2020; Umirova, 2020; Mona M. Had et al., 2019; Gunada, 2017). Through genuine assessment, learners will gain experience with critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving techniques in real-life situations (Aziz, 2020). As far as the researcher is aware, not many studies have looked at how community college students in Sabah use authentic resources. Therefore, the goal of this study is to close this gap by implementing an intervention that involves using readily available authentic materials by teachers to teach speaking skills. To increase ESL learners' confidence when using the English language, it should equip them to apply the use of authentic materials in real-life circumstances and

support them in developing a strong speaking command (Hossain, 2018). The current study will carry out a quasi-experiment on improving students' speaking skills using authentic materials to close this gap that has been noted in the pertinent literature.

Literature Review

Speaking is among the productive skills; therefore, when learning a new language, the speaker must produce meaningful outputs. According to Yunus (2021), for speakers to participate in the speaking process, they must be able to use numerous skills at once. It is frequently seen to be the most difficult ability to learn since, once one speaks, information is communicated instantly and cannot be changed or improved (Bailey, 2003). Complexity, fluency, and accuracy are the main building blocks of a second English language speaking performance (Hasanah, 2019). Speaking requires a variety of skills based on fluency, discourse competence, pragmatic competence, and linguistic competence. According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence in linguistics is the systematic grammatical knowledge of language users with an understanding of syntax, morphology, phonology, and social knowledge. Four primary components of language competence are emphasized in the theoretical framework of communicative competence, which was created by Canale & Swain. The mastery of lexical knowledge, morphological, syntactic, semantic, phonetic, and orthographic principles in verbal or non-verbal form is emphasized by grammatical competence (Alakrash). The ability of language users to use language in social contexts with the proper style, register, and politeness is the second foundation of sociolinguistic competence. Furthermore, language users' capacity to resolve communication breakdowns while negotiating meaning through the employment of communication strategies is referred to by Canale and Swain as strategic competence. Finally, discourse competence according to Canale and Swain's concept is the ability to grasp the norms that work with forms and meaning to create a meaningful unity in spoken or written texts.

The Use of Authentic Materials in Language Learning

The printed, audio, and video materials that students come into contact with daily—such as voice mail messages, menus, job applications, change-of-address forms, radio programs, and videos—are considered authentic materials (Umirova, 2020). Although authentic materials are not designed with the intention of being used in the classroom, it is precisely because they are authentic that they serve as valuable learning resources for students. Aside from that, one of the ESL teaching tools is considered to be authentic material because it is a useful strategy for encouraging and energizing students to investigate the target language in authentic contexts and real-life situations. The use of authentic materials in language classes fosters motivation, which in turn motivates students to study and participate more in class activities. This helps students become proficient communicators and bridges the gap between the classroom and the outside world. It facilitates students' participation in literacy exercises. In contrast to the themes, language, syntax, structure, etc., which are all aimed at a target audience of native speakers and provided through media meant primarily for native speakers, authentic materials are also created by native speakers (Cambridge University Press: Landsford, 2014, Alakrash, 2022). In 2017, Losada, Insuasty, and Osorio conducted a study to examine the effects of authentic materials and tasks on the communicative competence of adult learners (all participants are older than eighteen). Through a comparison of pre-and post-test results on the Key English Test (KET), which was administered as part of the study, the researchers found that the reading and writing skills of the experimental group participants had improved. Aside from that, the analysis based on observing all five courses showed improvements in the oral speech and communication abilities of the students. The survey's most significant finding was how positively students felt about using authentic resources in the classroom. They both concurred that these resources are useful and engaging. Videos are among the greatest

authentic materials sources for teaching English in an ESL classroom (Abdalla, Aljheme & Abdulhadi, 2021).

2.4 The Use of Videos in Language Learning

Video is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as a combination of digitally and electronically captured moving images; video offers a vibrant, dynamic, and active multimedia resource. Additionally, (Umirova, 2020) stated that videos are regarded as one of the multimedia components that include audio, texts, and moving images. According to Agnes and Kellerman (1997), a video is a type of digital media that uses picture movements to create an illusion and display a series of static images. Therefore, it is thought that lowering students' emotional filters in an audio-visual learning environment can help them learn a target language more efficiently. Video, in the opinion of Nurul Afifah Binti Azlan, 2019; Razak et al., 2022, is essential for altering and impacting the current educational system. Technology integration in the classroom has transformed instruction in the modern era. Since then, a lot of teaching and research has been done on the use of videos to help ESL students get better. When language is taught through videos, students gain confidence because it encourages them to communicate with their classmates in the target language (Nurul Afifah Binti Azlan, 2019; Jensen, Mattheis, & Johnson, 2012). Rahim and Afnizul (2020) believed that using captioned videos to teach English has proven to be effective in assisting students in expanding and strengthening their vocabulary in the language. During the intervention, learners can increase their vocabulary in English by watching movies with captions. With the help of the intervention, students can accelerate their advancement in English language competency. In a 2017 study, Yükselir & Kömür found that when learners watched videos with subtitles from YouTube, the BBC, VOA, and TED, their speaking scores improved. The study effectively demonstrated how, in addition to improving learners' capacity to contextualize recently learned material, videos might aid students in learning about various cultures. Another study supports the efficacy of using videos to enhance the speaking abilities of EFL students. In 2019, Hamad, Metwally, and Alfaruque carried out a study to look into how learners' performance and fluency in English were affected by YouTube videos and Audio Tracks Imitation (YATI). Even though students had limited freedom to express themselves, repetition exercises involving imitating the intonation, tone, and even gestures of native speakers improved students' speaking fluency while also boosting their confidence in participating in class. Additionally, the YATI method succeeded in expanding the vocabulary of the students. According to a study (Nurul Afifah Binti Azlan, 2019), the use of task-based activities in conjunction with YouTube integration has improved students' English proficiency levels and helped them become future competent English speakers. The usage of videos in the classroom motivates students to participate and engage. Thus, it is crucial to employ video in education since it enables educators to use adaptable teaching methods and enhance the diversity of their lesson plans (Ramadan, 2019).

Methodology

The study adopted the fully qualitative research design to investigate the effectiveness of authentic technology-based materials in developing speaking skills among Libyan EFL undergraduates speaking skills at Tripoli University. The sample of the study was 10 students from the second year at the English department at Tripoli University, the interview sessions took place in the studying year of 2022-2023. The interview sessions were conducted after the students went through experiment of learning using authentic technology-based materials. Semi-structured interview protocol was prepared by the research and validated by two experts in the field of technology-based language learning. The data was transcribed and analysed using NVivo QSR software. The interview protocol was piloted to validate is the reliability and suitability. The data were presented in form of emerging themes and sub-theme.

Findings and Discussion

This research question tackles the ways to use technologies in developing speaking skills. To answer this research question, in-depth interview data for the participants were analysed thematically to identify emerging patterns and themes. The themes were added systematically to the codes' data means and rearranged as per the thematic structure. Once the major topics were illustrated, a structure of categories for each transcript was developed. Data collection adopted a system in which transcripts were obtained from all and then grouped into groups. A category, as defined in this study, is a group or collection of related findings with specific themes identifying and impacting the study's research issues. Consequently, each category was formed from several topics and each topic was formed from several lists of coded subjects.

Participants' responses were given in the order of in-depth interview responses for each of the topics based on the thematic categories that was developed throughout the evaluation to create an impression of coherence in the data presented. Furthermore, the qualitative methods proposed by (Morrow 2007) were used in this research to examine the transcripts of the discourse, including categorising, evaluating, and presenting the information according to themes. This is because within and across interview sessions, responses elicited by the questions and comments were grouped under six major themes. The findings of the qualitative data are presented in the following sections. The following figure presents the word-cloud of the findings of ways of enhancing speaking skills using authentic technology-based materials.

Figure NVivo Word cloud of ways authentic technology-based materials improve speaking skills

Increase Speaking Fluency

The students reported that the use of digital platforms help them to reduce speaking anxiety as speaking skill is considered to be the most difficult skill due to lack of exposure in the EFL context. Student 2 highlighted that using correct intonation helps him in being less anxious.

> "I learn how to speak properly with clear intonation pattern and proper phrasing of the sentence because I practice it online before I use it in the conversation"

> "I was able to overcome my speaking anxiety (and even I am nervous at first) but with the online activity, with the teacher talking to us like she's like (only) a student, it eased me up and made me comfortable in speaking

Theoretically, speaking fluency is measured by syllables spoken and the number of pauses while speaking. Thus, student 4 mentioned that by practising online speaking, he is able to produce long sentences in conversation saying that:

> After I practice online using the applications, I become more confident to make longer sentences in conversation. Before, that I tend to use short sentences because I need to think of the meaning and the structure of each word.

One participant detailed that:

> "We talk[ed] in the group at night using Skype video especially during our home reading activity.

> "When our instructor miss[ed] the class, she conducted makeup classes through video conference on messenger and she starts[ed] to lecture and instructs. . . "

Video conferencing on Skype and messenger for example were one of the digital technologies that enhance speaking fluency as what the participants stated above was done by the instructor to cope with the missed classes and as a supplemental activity to give way for the lecture and instruction. This implies that the instructor is making use of the available technology resources to cope with classes and to reach out to students in any way possible. It also explains that technology has become an avenue for the instructor to be with students in doing their home reading activities.

Enhance Speaking Accuracy

The student reported on the accuracy of the grammar aspect in speaking stating that he needs to think of the correct grammar to use prior to speaking. However, having no time to think while speaking, he ends up making grammatical mistakes.

> I always think of the grammar items involved before I speak and when I have no time to think I will make mistakes and I feel embarrassed but now I can practice by recording myself and listening again to check my mistakes and train myself to use complex sentences with no mistakes.

This quotation indicates that digital platforms are able to improve students' accuracy and fluency at the same time. Further, social media conversation was also employed by the instructor as what participants revealed. They stated:

> "Our instructor replies to our comments on Facebook using the English language."

> "She was actually talking to us in the comment section of the post and on private message."

> "Usually she posted intriguing posts on Facebook that as I understood she just wanted to ignite ideas and to encourage online conversation."

With conversation on social media amongst students and instructor, the instructor replied to comments, answered private messages and talked to students in public posts. This

implies that the instructor is making use of the technology to cater the communication online. This explains that they make themselves available for online communication with their students to encourage them to converse.

> "During the online lessons, I made a lot of grammatical errors. For example, I started a sentence talking about student 1 or student 3 and I ended up talking about me as the subject of the sentence"

> "Using the social media, deletes my being conscious talking to my instructor and classmates."

> "It allows me to talk without being nervous."

> "Online and casual communication builds friendship between me and my instructor."

With the use of technology in teaching speaking, students are able to increase their speaking fluency and accuracy as they communicate. So, they can address their speech difficulty, learn to speak properly and think before they engage in actual conversation online. This implies that students are given enough time to repair their own speech faults may it be in pronunciation, words or phrases thus increasing their speech fluency and accuracy.

Develope Pronunciation

Majority of the students reported that in the EFL context, exposure to practice speaking and listening to English is low. Therefore, the correct pronunciation is a major issue for EFL students. In the Libyan context, there is no specific accent followed and students will end up pronuncing words wrongly. The students also lack knowledge on different accents between American and British accents. However, the use of digital platforms to learn pronunciations.

> ....I always used to be confused about the pronunciation of the words, when i learn new vocabulary, i pronounce them wrong, especially in the stressed syllabus or parts of the words. Now I can easily check the pronunciation online and also I learn the pronunciation in American and British accents.

> "I have not ever been experienced in using technology to improve my speaking skills. Of course, I have used English dictionaries, but they were hard copies and not prepared for advanced learners which are helpful for college students. For example, my previous dictionary had no CD to be installed on desktops. Now, I have experienced on how to use the speaking technologies. Even, I feel that I pass time with native speakers when I use digital applications".

Among twelve of the interviewees, most of them, ten students reported that the digital technologies helped them to practice pronunciation, learn grammar and accuracy, lexical resource and supported them to develop their fluency and coherence. When one of the interviewees illustrated this point, she said:

Increase Vocabulary

In learning any of the language skills, students encounter difficulties in learning new vocabularies. However, vocabulary is needed the most in learning speaking skills as speaking requires extensive amount of voabularies.

> The benefits obtained of using the online applications are knowing the meaning of new vocabularies and how to use them in the conversations."

> "My teacher always asks us to memorise the new vocabularies in the texts from the textbook in the traditional way, now I learn in more fun ways online by playing vocabulary games online."

> Instead of coping with the new words multiple times in my notebook, now I can learn new vocabulary in more fun ways and can learn the vocabulary, it is spelling, pronunciation and examples on how to use it in context all together at one time.

Based on the result of the interview, the researcher can conclude that some elements that can enhance students' learning English speaking skills are pronunciation, vocabulary and comprehension. In the pronunciation element, the students can use the media to check the correct pronunciation and automatically they practice orally until the pronunciation is correct or at least almost the same as the native speaker or the sound from the tools. Therefore, in the vocabulary element, the students can learn new vocabulary about the different scopes and can remind some vocabulary that they got in the previous time. Next in the comprehension element, the students gain a lot of references from the internet and media then they can explore and speak well and comprehend the topic.

Building Rapport and Confidence in Speaking English

Participants as what they detailed above said that the use of technology in teaching speaking builds rapport between them and their instructor. This implies that friendship is developed which eventually allowed them to feel that they belong to the group. They feel comfortable with the friendship being developed.

> "We learn how to speak properly with clear intonation pattern and proper phrasing of the sentence because we practice it before the actual task."

> "It gives us time to think first what we are to utter so we minimize errors and mistakes."

> "Casual communication eased us in talking. We are not intimidated."

> "…I am able to correct my own speech difficulty."

With the use of technology in learning speaking, students are able to increase their speaking fluency and accuracy as they communicate. This is so for they can address their speech difficulty, they learn to speak properly and they think before they engage in actual conversation online. This implies that students are given favorable time to repair their own speech faults may it be in pronunciation, words or phrases thus increases their speech fluency and accuracy.

Besides, the use of technology in teaching speaking builds confidence as what participants typically have shared. They said:

> "It boosts our confidence and fluency because the activity we had built rapport between us and our instructor."

> "With the activity we had, it builds my confidence. I am able to speak now and overcome my stage freight because we practice a lot before the actual task."

Technology in teaching speaking as what participants detailed above builds confidence. It allows students to boost and build their confidence. It has become a way that students overcome their speaking difficulty in a crowd for technology allows them to practice before the speaking engagement.

Eases Anxiety and Apprehension

In speaking, anxiety and apprehension are already built-in. In like manner with the students learning to speak in English, it is expected that students may be anxious when performing oral performances and communication. They have fears and doubts in them especially when they will be talking using a second or foreign language like English. But with the technology, the instructor used in teaching speaking, eases the students' anxiety and apprehensions. This implies that students perform well in speaking and communication when there is a channel of communication like technology for it does not require face-to-face interaction in which students do not see the instructor's facial expression, preferences and manner that can add up to their fears and apprehensions.

Further, the technology used in teaching speaking eases the anxiety and apprehension of students. They said:

> "I was able to overcome my speaking anxiety (and even I am nervous at first) but with the activity, with ma'am talking to us like she's like (only) a student, it eased me up and made me comfortable in speaking."

> "With the activities, we had (with oral reading as our final exam, we were not that very conscious anymore and we feel not anxious) because we already had series of activities that really had taken our guilt (in) speech. It has really taken our nervousness and the being conscious.)

In speaking, anxiety and apprehension are already built-in. In like manner with the students learning to speak in English, it is but expected that students may be anxious when performing oral performances and communication. They have fears and doubts in them especially when they will be talking using a second or foreign language like English. But with the technology, the instructor used in teaching speaking, eases the students' anxiety and apprehensions. This implies that students perform well in speaking and communication when there is a channel of communication like technology for it does not require face-to-face interaction in which students do not see the instructor's facial expression, preferences and manner that can add up to their fears and apprehensions.

Conclusion

This paper proposed that the usage of authentic materials with the combination of task-based approach should help learners to speak and link the gap between the classroom and the outside world and help them to engage in literacy activities. It should aim at equipping students to apply the use of authentic materials in real-life situations in order to help learners to develop a good command of speaking skills to boost up ESL learners' confidence level while utilising the English language. Over the course of three different phases in a duration of three months in 2023, the participants were engaged in online instruction using specific designed courses that hinged on the integration of a diverse array of technology-driven authentic materials. These resources were thoughtfully curated to establish a direct connection with genuine language usage and native speakers, serving as a means to assess the potential for this cohort to acquire and cultivate their oral communication skills. An analysis of the accumulated data revealed consistent and significant progress throughout each phase of the comprehensive experiment. These findings strongly substantiate the efficacy of the implemented approach, affirming its constructive influence on students' performance levels and oral aptitude. The outcomes realized serve as tangible validation and realization of the initial objectives set forth at the outset of this research endeavour. The overarching aims of this study were twofold: first, to investigate the causal relationship between the use of authentic materials and the development of students' oral performances; and second, to highlight the inherent benefits derived from the integration of such materials within oral instruction. Furthermore, this study sought to investigate the extent to which online exposure to such language inputs translates into heightened engagement levels and amplified achievements in the realm of oral performances.

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