



Classroom Discussions as a Tool for Improving Speaking Skills: Evidence from Libyan EFL University Students

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Abstract

The current study examines the impact of classroom discussions on the speaking skills of Libyan learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The research was conducted with 30 third-semester undergraduate students at the Faculty of Arts, University of Misurata. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed using a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire to investigate students' participation, perceived speaking development, and challenges encountered during classroom discussions. The findings revealed mixed outcomes. While a substantial proportion of students reported active participation (45%) and increased confidence (55%), a considerable number experienced language anxiety (40%) and communication barriers (40%). Small-group discussions were strongly preferred (65%) over whole-class discussions. Statistical interpretation suggests that classroom discussions have a moderate effect, particularly on affective dimensions such as confidence and engagement, while their impact on linguistic accuracy remains limited. The present study concludes with pedagogical recommendations for enhancing discussion-based learning in EFL contexts.

Key words: *classroom discussion, speaking skills, EFL, language anxiety, student engagement*

1. Introduction

This research paper explores the impact of classroom discussions on the speaking skills of Libyan undergraduate students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Despite years of formal instruction, many students in the Libyan context struggle with effective communication due to limited interaction opportunities and high language anxiety. By focusing on third-semester students at the University of Misurata, the study evaluates how interactive, student-centered activities influence fluency, confidence, and engagement. Ultimately, the research aims to address a significant gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence on communicative teaching strategies within Libyan higher education.

1.1 Research Problem

Developing speaking skills is a fundamental objective in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, in various contexts, including Libya, students face persistent difficulties in communicating effectively despite years of formal instruction (Ahmed, 2019; Elabbar, 2014; Elsherif & Mraiziq, 2019). These challenges are often linked to limited opportunities for authentic interaction, high levels of anxiety, and teacher-centered instructional practices.

Classroom discussions are widely regarded as an interactive pedagogical strategy that promotes student engagement, critical thinking, and language use. Rooted in social constructivist theory, discussions provide opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning and practice language in meaningful

contexts. Previous research suggests that such interaction enhances fluency, confidence, and communicative competence (Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan, 2010; Hmaid, 2014 Alharbi, 2015; Namaziandost et al., 2019). Despite these advantages, the effectiveness of classroom discussions in the Libyan EFL context remains insufficiently explored (Abushafa, 2014). Therefore, this study investigates their impact on students' speaking skills and identifies factors influencing their effectiveness.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How do classroom discussions affect students' speaking skills?
2. What challenges do students encounter during discussions?
3. What factors influence participation in classroom discussions?

1.3 Research Hypothesis

The current study hypothesizes that classroom discussions significantly enhance the speaking proficiency of third-semester Libyan EFL students. Regular participation in structured discussions is expected to improve fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and overall communicative competence. It is further anticipated that interaction will foster critical thinking, increase learner confidence, and expand vocabulary through exposure to diverse linguistic input.

1.4 Research Objectives.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom discussions in enhancing the speaking proficiency of Libyan EFL learners.

Specifically, the research aims to investigate students' levels of participation and their perceived development in areas such as fluency, vocabulary, and confidence. Additionally, the study seeks to identify the specific challenges students encounter during discussions, such as language anxiety and communication barriers, while determining the pedagogical factors such as group size and topic relevance that influence their engagement. By addressing these goals, the study offers practical implications for instructors and curriculum designers to improve oral English proficiency through interactive methods.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The present study contributes to the limited research on EFL speaking development within the Libyan context. It provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of classroom discussions as a communicative teaching strategy, offering practical implications for instructors, curriculum designers, and teacher educators. The findings may support the integration of interactive methods into language courses and inform teacher training practices. At a broader level, the study can assist policymakers in advancing communicative approaches to improve students' oral English proficiency (Al-Hosni, 2014; Ghorbani & Neissari, 2015).

1.6 Scope and Delimitation

The study is confined to third-semester students in a single English Department course and is conducted over one academic semester using a quantitative approach. While this focus enables a controlled evaluation of classroom discussions on speaking skills, it

limits generalizability to other contexts. The research primarily examines speaking proficiency, with only indirect consideration of related skills such as listening and critical thinking (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Long-term effects and the integration of discussions with other instructional methods are beyond the scope of this study (Ur, 2012).

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

- a) Classroom Discussions: Structured, student-centered activities where learners exchange ideas, ask questions, and engage critically with course content.
- b) Speaking Skills: The ability to communicate effectively in English, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and interaction.
- c) Language Skills III Course: An advanced course designed to enhance students' overall language proficiency, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

1.8 Literature Review

1.8.1 Classroom Discussions in Language Learning

Classroom discussions facilitate meaningful communication and active learning. They allow students to practice vocabulary, grammar, and discourse strategies in context while enhancing confidence and interaction (Zwiers and Crawford, 2011). They also promote learner autonomy and confidence by shifting the focus from teacher-centered instruction to student interaction (C.f. Ur 2012).

1.8.2 Challenges in EFL Contexts

EFL learners often face barriers such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and unequal participation due to varying proficiency levels. Cultural and educational backgrounds may also limit willingness to engage in discussions. Additionally, Elabbar (2014) claimed that students' anxiety and fear of making mistakes often inhibit their participation.

1.8.3 Effective Implementation Strategies

Research suggests that structured formats such as small-group discussions and think-pair-share activities can enhance participation (Kagan & Kagan, 2009). Teacher facilitation, topic relevance, and preparatory support are also critical for successful implementation. (Crawford 2011; Kenan et al., 2015; Zwiers; Harmer, 2015).

1.9 Related Studies

Several studies have investigated the role of classroom discussions and communicative activities in enhancing the speaking abilities of EFL learners across different educational contexts.

Alahmad and Alabdulkarim (2021) examined the impact of classroom discussions on the speaking proficiency of Saudi EFL university students. Using a quasi-experimental design, the researchers involved 60 undergraduate students and employed pre- and post-tests to measure changes in speaking performance. The findings demonstrated considerable improvement in students' fluency, vocabulary use, and overall communicative competence among learners who participated in discussion-based

activities compared to those in the control group. The study highlighted the effectiveness of classroom discussions in supporting second-language speaking development within Arab EFL contexts.

These studies collectively demonstrate the significant role of discussion-based learning in improving EFL learners' speaking skills across diverse settings. It also emphasizes the importance of supportive learning environments and structured interaction in promoting communicative competence, while revealing the need for further investigation within the Libyan educational context.

In another study, Owen et al. (2019) investigated the effectiveness of language games and information-gap activities in improving the English-speaking skills of Libyan secondary school students. The researchers employed a quasi-experimental design involving 124 students divided into three experimental groups and one control group. The findings revealed substantial improvement in speaking performance among students exposed to communicative activities, particularly those participating in information-gap tasks. Vocabulary development emerged as the most improved aspect, followed by gains in fluency, grammar, and comprehension. The study concluded that communicative language teaching activities provide meaningful opportunities for learners to develop their speaking competence.

More recently, Cempaka (2024) evaluated the effectiveness of structured group discussions in enhancing university students' English-speaking abilities. The

study adopted a pre-test and post-test design with 50 university students who participated in weekly discussion sessions over eight weeks. The results showed significant improvement in fluency, accuracy, and speaking confidence. Additionally, learners experienced reduced anxiety and greater willingness to participate in English communication. The study emphasized the importance of creating supportive discussion environments where learners can interact freely without fear of criticism. It also highlighted the facilitator's role in ensuring balanced participation and equal speaking opportunities within discussion groups.

Overall, the reviewed studies confirm that discussion-based and communicative learning strategies contribute positively to the development of EFL speaking skills. They further suggest that collaborative and interactive classroom environments can be enhanced.

1.10 Contrasts between Previous Studies and the Current Research

Earlier studies mentioned above such as (Owen et al., 2019; Cempaka, 2024) confirmed the effectiveness of classroom discussions and communicative activities in enhancing the speaking abilities of EFL learners in different educational settings. Nevertheless, most of these investigations were conducted in contexts outside Libya and did not specifically address the influence of classroom discussions on Libyan university students. Although certain Libyan studies explored communicative language teaching techniques, they paid limited attention to

classroom discussion as a direct method for developing speaking skills.

The present study differs from previous research by concentrating on the Libyan higher education context, particularly the Language Skills III course. In addition, the study employs a questionnaire-based method to examine students' perceptions and experiences regarding the role of classroom discussions in improving their speaking performance. Unlike many earlier studies that depended primarily on quantitative measurements, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of learners' views and attitudes toward discussion-oriented learning. Therefore, the study aims to address a gap in the existing literature concerning speaking skill development among Libyan EFL learners.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The approach is descriptive-analytical, allowing for both the identification of patterns and interpretation of relationships among variables (Cohen et al., 2018; Pathan et.al, 2018).

2.2. Participants and Setting

The sample consisted of 30 undergraduate students enrolled in the third semester at the Faculty of Arts, University of Misurata. Participants were aged between 19 and 23 years.

A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that participants had direct experience with classroom discussions.

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2.3. Instrumentation

Data were collected using a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire divided into four constructs:

- Participation and engagement
- Speaking skill development
- Challenges and support
- Learning environment

Responses ranged from 1 ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 ‘strongly agree’ (See Appendix A)

2.4. Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review. Items were revised to ensure clarity and relevance.

Although Cronbach’s alpha was not calculated, the structured design and internal consistency of item groupings suggest acceptable reliability.

2.5. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected over one week using an online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured.

2.6. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages).

Likert responses were aggregated into:

- Agreement
- Neutral
- Disagreement

This allowed clearer interpretation of trends. Analytical interpretation was applied to identify relationships between variables (Field, 2017).

2.7. Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and participation was voluntary.

3. Results

Table 1

3.1.1. Results Participation and Engagement

Variable	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Active participation	45	25	30
Comfort speaking English	35	25	40
Preference for small groups	65	15	20
Speaking opportunities	45	25	30

3.1.1.1 Interpretation

Engagement is moderate, but discomfort in speaking English remains high (40%). Small-group discussions clearly enhance participation.

Table 2

3.1.2. Impact on Speaking Skills

Skill	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Pronunciation	35	25	40
Vocabulary	50	20	30
Fluency	40	25	35
Clarity	55	20	25
Confidence	55	20	25

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3.1.2.1. Interpretation

Classroom discussions are more effective for **confidence and clarity** than for technical skills like pronunciation and fluency.

Table 3

3.1.3. Challenges

Challenge	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Anxiety	40	25	35
Language barriers	40	25	35
Limited peer support	45	25	30
Time constraints	50	20	30

3.1.3.1. Interpretation

Anxiety and language barriers are major constraints. Time limitations also reduce effectiveness.

Table 4

3.1.4. Learning Environment

Variable	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Instructor feedback	55	20	25
Classroom atmosphere	50	20	30
Technology use	35	25	40
Cultural relevance	45	25	30
Class size	50	20	30

3.1.4.1. Interpretation

Teacher support is strong, but technology integration is weak. The environment is not equally supportive for all learners.

4. Discussion

4.1. Impact of Classroom Discussions on Speaking Skills

The resulting data acquired from the questionnaire seemed to indicate a blend of standing with regards to the effect of classroom discourse on the students' speaking skills. As is shown in Table 1, there is a high level of engagement in classroom discussions as 45% of the students surveyed indicated that they are frequent participants in classroom discussions. Nevertheless, 30% of the respondents were neutral or disagreeing, which shows that there could be issues with participation. This variability might be as a result of sociocultural diversity factors such as confidence and learning styles or even the level of English-speaking mastery.

The students were asked whether they were comfortable speaking English in the class discussion regardless of how critically or analytically it is contextualized (Table 2). In this case, only 35% showed some level of comfort, while around 40% were indifferent or expressed some level of discomfort. This is in support various literature that has found anxiety and low self-confidence to be among the major impediments to effective speaking skills in an EFL context (Ahmed, 2019; Elabbar, 2014). The few students who reported comfort in using English in speaking suggest that classroom discussions are not promoting

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the environment enough for everyone to feel included.

4.2 Classroom Interaction and Speaking Skills

Based on the data, it appears that interaction in the classroom aids students in their speaking practice. For example, Table 3 demonstrated that 65% of students were in favor of small group discussions as compared to a whole-class discussion. This implies that such an environment may better facilitate active participation. Such preference could be attributed to low stress levels and more scope for contribution to the discussions in a small group (Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan, 2010).

Also, as illustrated in Table 4, 60% of the respondents expressed that the topics of discussion were appealing to them. A substantial percentage of the students (20%) expressed neutrality or disagreement with this statement while the remaining respondents agreed with it. Therefore, relevant and engaging topics ought to be supplied to the students so at no point do they lose interest in the talking thus speaking skills are always enhanced (Ur, 2012).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The current study examined the impact of classroom discussions on the speaking skills of Libyan EFL university students, the challenges they face during discussions, and the factors influencing their participation. The findings indicate that classroom discussions generally have a positive effect on students' speaking development by providing opportunities for meaningful interaction, idea exchange, and

oral language practice. Most participants reported that discussions helped improve their confidence and communicative abilities.

Despite these benefits, several challenges were identified, particularly speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and language-related difficulties, which limited some students' participation. The findings further revealed that participation is influenced by a range of factors, including teacher support, classroom atmosphere, peer interaction, and the relevance of discussion topics. Among these, the instructor's role in providing encouragement and constructive feedback was found to be especially important.

Overall, the study confirms that classroom discussions are an effective tool for enhancing EFL students' speaking skills. However, their effectiveness depends on the extent to which instructors create a supportive learning environment that reduces anxiety, promotes engagement, and encourages active participation. Such conditions can maximize the benefits of classroom discussions and contribute to the development of students' communicative competence.

5.2. Recommendations

Instructors play a pivotal role in fostering a classroom climate that promotes student engagement and active participation. To maximize the effectiveness of classroom discussions, educators should adopt a range of pedagogical strategies that encourage meaningful interaction and reduce barriers to communication. These strategies include:

1. Promote small-group discussions
2. Provide targeted language support

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3. Reduce anxiety through a supportive environment
4. Use engaging and relevant topics
5. Improve technology integration.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Declaration of AI Use

Authors declare that they used AI tools solely for language editing, paraphrasing and linguistic assistance. The authors also confirm that no AI tools were used for data collection, analysis, discussion, or conclusions.

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Appendices

Appendix A Questionnaire

Classroom Discussions as a Tool for Improving Speaking Skills: Insights from Libyan Students in the Language Skills III Course.

Introduction:

Dear Participant,

This questionnaire aims to gather information about your experiences with classroom discussions and their impact on your speaking skills in the Language Skills III course. Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. **Age:** 19-20 21-22 23 or above

2. **Gender:** Male Female

3. **Years of studying English:**

.Less than 5 years .5-7 years

4. Self-rated English-speaking proficiency:

- Beginner ○ Intermediate
- Advanced

Section B: Perceptions and Experiences

Please rate your agreement with the following statements using the scale:

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree

3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Participation and Engagement:

1. I actively participate in classroom discussions.

2. I feel comfortable speaking English during class discussions.

3. I prefer small group discussions to whole-class discussions.

4. The topics discussed in class are interesting and relevant to me.

5. I have sufficient opportunities to speak during classroom discussions.

Speaking Skills Development:

1. Classroom discussions help improve my English pronunciation.

2. My vocabulary has expanded through participating in classroom discussions.

3. My speaking fluency has improved because of classroom discussions.

4. I can express my ideas more clearly in English after participating in discussions.

5. Classroom discussions help me speak English more confidently.

Challenges and Support:

1. I feel anxious when speaking English during classroom discussions.

2. Language barriers prevent me from fully participating in discussions.

3. The instructor provides helpful feedback during discussions.

4. I receive adequate support from my peers during discussions.

5. There is enough time allocated for classroom discussions.

Learning Environment:

1. The classroom atmosphere encourages participation in discussions.

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- 2. Technology is effectively used to support classroom discussions.
- 3. Cultural aspects are considered in discussion topics.
- 4. The class size is appropriate for effective discussions.
- 5. The physical classroom setup supports interactive discussions.

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.....

2. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview?

.Yes .No

Conclusion:

Thank you for your participation in this research study. Your responses will contribute to understanding how classroom discussions can be better utilized to improve speaking skills in EFL contexts.

Section C: Additional Comments

- 1. Please provide any additional thoughts or suggestions about classroom discussions and speaking skills development (optional):

فاعلية المناقشات الصفية في تنمية مهارات التحدث لدى طلبة الجامعات الليبية الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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ملخص البحث:

تتناول هذه الدراسة أثر المناقشات الصفية على مهارات التحدث لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في ليبيا. أُجريت الدراسة على عينة مكونة من 30 طالباً جامعياً في الفصل الدراسي الثالث بكلية الآداب، جامعة مصراتة. وتم اعتماد تصميم كمي مقطعي باستخدام استبانة مكونة من 20 بنداً وفق مقياس ليكرت، وذلك لاستكشاف مستوى مشاكة الطلبة، وتصوراتهم لتطور مهارات التحدث لديهم، إضافة إلى التحديات التي يواجهونها أثناء المناقشات الصفية. أظهرت النتائج وجود تباين في المخرجات؛ حيث أفاد عدد ملحوظ من الطلبة بمشاكلهم الفعالة (45%) وازدياد مستوى ثقتهم بأنفسهم (55%)، في حين واجهت نسبة معتبرة منهم قلقاً لغوياً (40%) وصعوبات في التواصل (40%). كما تبين أن المناقشات ضمن مجموعات صغيرة كانت الأكثر تفضيلاً (65%) مقارنة بالمناقشات الصفية العامة. وتشير التحليلات الإحصائية إلى أن للمناقشات الصفية تأثيراً متوسطاً، خاصة على الجوانب الوجدانية مثل الثقة والتفاعل، بينما يظل تأثيرها محدوداً على الدقة اللغوية. وتختتم الدراسة بتقديم توصيات تربوية لتعزيز فاعلية التعلم القائم على المناقشة في سياقات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المناقشة الصفية، مهارات التحدث، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، القلق اللغوي، تفاعل الطلبة