

# Oral Problems Encountered by Libyan Secondary Students

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**Abstract:** Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. Second language learners are incompetent in oral communication. Secondary school students encounter great difficulties in speaking skills. Learning to speak a foreign language needs more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the speaking difficulties which encounter students at secondary stage in Misurata, Libya. It seeks to analyze the problems and factors that negatively affect their speaking skills in order to help them avoid these problems and find solutions. The research method adopted in this study was a descriptive one. This paper deals with some factors that hinder students to communicate and factors related to teachers and their role in teaching speaking skills. These obstacles will be described in details with some helpful and useful recommendations for teachers and educators to assist the students to speak the target language. The data was gathered through two questionnaires which were given to teachers of English and students at secondary schools to elicit their views concerning teaching and learning speaking skills. The samples consisted of 25 teachers and a hundred students. The samples have been chosen randomly from five secondary schools in Misurata city. The results revealed that the students do not practise speaking skills both in and out-side classrooms due to: the time is not enough to teach all the aspects of language, lack of motivation and fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, possession of limited vocabulary, and their poor backing-ground experience, students are not tested during the studying school year. Most oral activities on text- and workbooks are skipped to be taught.

**Keywords:** speaking skill, factors, speaking activities, secondary school, students.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many language learners. Learners consequently often evaluate their success in oral performance on the basis of how well they have improved in their spoken language proficiency. Learners of language often measure their success in language learning by extent to which they can use their spoken English in real life situations. Ur (1996) says that speaking is considered to be the most significant skill of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) because people who produce the language are usually remarked as speakers of that language. Learning to speak is more effectively achieved by speaking than by listening or reading. This skill is the most difficult and complex one to be mastered. Speaking is the main goal of any language learner. The major goal of English language teaching should give learners the ability to use English effectively and accurately in their everyday communication (Davies and Pearse, 2000: p. 286). However, not all language learners after many years of studying English can communicate fluently and accurately because they lack the necessary knowledge that speaking encompasses. The main reason may be is that learners rely on what being covered by teachers in the classrooms from the prescribed material during their learning process of the language and that is not enough. This may result in shortage in vocabulary and language skills and make learners face difficulties in producing correct sentences. Speaking itself contains several other skills called micro-skills. These micro-skills include: part of speaking should be mastered by a language learner in order to make communication more effective and accurate. Assessment of oral skills is a topic which has many interesting sides. First of all, final-exams/exercises in courses, for instance, are normally written and not spoken, so it would imply that evaluating spoken language has to be done during lessons. Second, it is usually thought that in secondary schools the main emphasis is to get the students through the matriculation examination where oral skills are not tested. This could mean that speaking skills are not much emphasized during studying. Moreover, speaking especially in classrooms is a

public action which might cause anxiety to some students. Third, Students do not have chance to speak outside the classroom. Speaking is confined only in the classroom. Assessment of speaking requires different kinds of exercises depending on whether one is assessing, for instance, grammar, pronunciation or talking about what has heard. (Luoma, 2004:p.5). Assessing oral skills has numerous levels which need to be taken into consideration. That is why most of teaching methods focus on writing tests more than verbal tests. Therefore, these assessments must be taken into account by educators, curriculum designers, teachers and their application in the classrooms, however, speaking problems can be great in learning language. Regardless of the extent to which learners of English as a foreign language know, they still face many difficulties and factors that are obstacles to their learning of this language. Thus, this study seeks to investigate the negative factors affecting students speaking performance when they speak English Language for the academic year (2018- 2019) at Secondary Schools in Misurata.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The aim of this study is to examine the negative factors which affect students' speaking skills at secondary schools in Misurata. It is noticeable that most students in Misurata secondary schools are unable to produce the language, although the speaking activities are available on text and workbook pages. The students study English for eight years; two at primary stage, three at preparatory stage and three at secondary stage. Some students may be tend to retain grammar or may have the ability to convey their ideas in writing , but when it comes to communicating orally or speaking to others in English, they fail to speak or express themselves in spoken language. Therefore, this study aims at identifying the obstacles and difficulties faced by students in secondary schools and how teachers deal with these hindrances.

### **1.2 Significance of the Study**

This study intends to investigate the factors that cause poor performance such as students' low ability to use English in communication during lessons. This is very useful feedback to curriculum planners to review the proper use of language in teaching English at secondary schools. The study will provide a feedback on the status of teaching and learning facilities such as; textbooks and laboratories. The feedback may guide the Ministry of Education and Learning to improve its resource allocation at secondary schools aiming at improving the quality of education in schools. The study may provide a feedback on the status of guidance and counselling as a component needed to support students' growth through effective use of time and good performance among secondary schools' students. The study expects to bring useful insights which may help in building, modifying and improving the ways of teaching/learning English language.

### **1.3 Research Questions:**

Based on the statement of the problem, this study is an attempt to focus on the factors that affect learners' performance inside the classroom. These factors may make learners unable to speak with others. Therefore, the study is mainly based on the following questions:

1. What are the factors that contribute to creating difficulties in speaking skills?
2. What are the techniques and procedures that may develop students' speaking skills?
3. How do English language teachers attempt to deal with the problems of speaking skills?
4. What are the problems challenging the process of teaching and learning speaking skills?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study:**

Regarding the research questions above, the aim of this study is:

1. To determine the challenging factors that affecting students' speaking performance;
2. To improve students' skills of speaking performance; and
3. To assess the factors that affect students' English-speaking performance.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Definition of Speaking:**

Oral communication is a two-way process between a speaker and a listener. Speaking is one of the macro skills of English language teaching and learning. It is not easy to define what is meant by terms such as speaking skills since it has been defined in various ways in different disciplines. In language teaching and learning itself, many definitions of speaking have been made regarding to some experts. Brown (1994) and Burns and Joyce (1997) define speaking as an interactive

process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information; whereas, Harmer (2001) states that speaking is an interaction with one or more participants. Byron (1994:9) believes that the main goal in teaching the productive skill is oral fluency and this can be defined as the ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably, accurately and without too much hesitation or otherwise communication may breakdown because the listener gets impatient or not interested. Embark (2002) defines speaking as the productive skill that can be achieved through understanding three major elements: sounds, grammar and vocabulary. Speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Chaney and Burk, 1998, p. 13).

Finally, based on the definition given by experts above, speaking is a process of expressing ideas in the spoken language, and it is one of the most important aspects of language learning. Luoma (2004) stated that being able to speak to friends, colleagues, visitors and even strangers in their language or in a language which both speakers can understand. It is surely the goal of very many learners and the success of learning English can be seen and measured from learner performance in speaking and how well they present their English in communication.

## **2.2. Factors Affecting Speaking Performance:**

Language production is often seen as one of the most difficult aspects of language learning. Many students find it difficult to express themselves in a second language. There are many factors which have impacts on language learning. These factors are classified into groups, internal and external factors:

### **2.2.1. Internal Factors:**

Internal factors refer to the factors that come from the learner himself. They include physiological aspects and learners' language competence (ability). They comprise the following:

#### **a. Psychology:**

Burns and Joyce as cited in Nunan (1999), Schwartz (2005), and Thornbury (2005), argue that psychological factors such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of committing mistakes are the factors commonly hinder students from speaking. Furthermore, Brown (2002), claimed that no successful cognitive or affective activity can be carried out without some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence to perform the activities. From his observation of classroom learning, he could find that learners with high self-esteem manifest more confidence and giving more positive evaluations in themselves will promote their language learning. Some students fail in oral English learning or feel less willing and less confident in speaking English in class because they have a low self-esteem. Ariyanti (2016) investigated psychological barriers faced by Indonesian Students which affect their speaking performance. The researcher noticed through his observation and interview that the learners tended to feel anxious when performing speaking activities because they were afraid of making mistakes. This fear as a result of shortcoming of self-esteem in using English. Consequently, the students accompanied their speaking with mother tongue. They prefer to keep silent instead of speaking in the class.

A study conducted by Sato (2003) cited in Minghe and Yuan (2013), found that students of English were not highly competent in speaking because of their fear of making mistakes. The same finding was also shared by another research conducted by Ballard (1996) cited in Yan (2007) who found that students failed to join in the English discussion because of their vocabulary problems and fear of making mistakes resulting in their inability to speak English well. Yan (2007) added that students found speaking English a stressful activity, especially, when they had to express something using English. Moreover, motivation is an important factor in language learning success. Brown (1980: p.112) defines motivation as an inner drive, emotion or desire that moves one to a particular action. It is known to all that proper motivation will draw learners' attention and arouse their interests to learn. Thus, they are more likely to succeed in language learning. Erlam (2015) states that engaging students in speaking tasks means treating students as language users rather than as language learners.

#### **b. Language Competence:**

According to Chomsky (1965), competence is the ideal language system that enables speakers to produce and understand numbers of sentences in their language, and to distinguish grammatical sentences and ungrammatical ones. Canale & Sawin (1980) categorized communicative competence into three components which comprises grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Waring (2018) conducted a study dealing with teaching interactional competence. His study outlines problems and possibilities of three issues with regarding to teaching L2 interactional competence. Waring (2018) classified the problems into specifying interactional competence, standardizing

interactional competence and translating conversation analytic insights in the classroom practices. Kung (2012) conducted a study concerning with L2 speaking competence through news broadcasts for Taiwanese EFL learners. He explored students communicative competence in Taiwan EFL settings using news broadcasts in class helped students to be more willing to speak and elaborate on more complicated ideas in English and their interest confidence, motivation and speaking proficiency levels increased.

In this study, the language factors in speaking performance refer to the ability of the speaker to master the aspects of language while communicating. These aspects include: fluency, intonation, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. The role of vocabulary in oral performance is crucial. The more vocabulary the learners have, the more they can speak the language. The researchers of language view that the failure to produce L2 is due to limited vocabulary. Florez (1998) highlights some skills underlying speaking which include:

1. Using grammar structures accurately.
2. Assessing characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge, status and power relations or contrasts in point of view.
3. Selecting appropriate and understandable vocabularies and the topic being discussed for the listeners.
4. Applying strategies to enhance comprehensibility.
5. Paying attention to the success of the interaction and adjusting components of speech as vocabulary, rate of and complexity of grammar structures to increase listeners' comprehension and involvement in speaking process.

### **2.2.2. External Factors:**

#### **a. Performance Condition:**

According to Nation and Newton (2009) cited in Tuan and Mai (2015), students perform a speaking task under a variety of conditions, and they believe that performance conditions can affect speaking performance. They suggest four types of performance conditions including: time pressure, planning, standard of performance and amount of support. Brown (2004) mentions five components of speaking skill which are: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and pronunciation. Morozova & Yeltsin (2013) point out in their study that Russian students had the following inhibitions to speak English. (1) They are afraid of making mistakes. (2) The students use their native language when they work in pairs. (3) The students do not have information on the topics discussed. (4) Lack of verbal and resources for solving the given task. They also gave the following steps to enhance speaking skills:

1. Placing more emphasis on the quality of study books at the basic level.
2. Giving enough time to speaking and phonetic drill to students.
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. Classes should not be overcrowded.

#### **b. Learning Environment:**

Minghe and Yuan (2013) stated that 'another external factor that affects students' oral English learning is the lacking of good language learning environment. The environment does not support the students to speak English frequently. In this study, the environment means the people outside the class. Those people may think that the students just want to show off when they speak English for daily conversation and the response that the students makes them lose their self-confidence to improve their speaking. Since the students do not want to be rejected by the people around them, so they use their native language in daily conversation. That makes the students unable to communicate in English fluently outside the class. Kubanyiova (2018) states that students tend to measure their own competence in English through their ability to speak it. ESL teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communications, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This can occur when students collaborate in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task. According to Tuan and Mai (2015), learners' oral performance is affected by factors like performance situation, affective factors, listening skills and feedback during speaking. In the same direction, one way of overcoming problems that students encounter in learning to speak is for teachers to apprehend these factors. Adding to

that, Rababah (2005), puts forwards that there are a lot of factors that cause difficulties in speaking English amongst EFL learners. A few of these factors are connected to the learners themselves, the teaching techniques, the curriculum and the environment. To exemplify, many learners stand in need of the necessary terminology to convey their meaning; therefore, they cannot maintain the interaction going. Moreover, Urrutia and Vega (2010) state that students speaking proficiency is affected by their insufficient vocabulary, hesitation, and the worry to be judged by the others. Oxford (1990) asserts that one of the most important influences or factors of language learning success or failure is probably the affective side of the learner. Affective factors include inhibition, shyness, lack of self-confidence, pressure, family or friends support, motivation and anxiety. Dornei & Hafield (2013) present a new theory of motivation centred around the notion of the "Ideal Future Language Self" arguing that if the students have a rich and inspiring vision of themselves as successful future learners and users, they will be motivated to work hard to actualize the vision and become that learner.

### **2.3. The Role of Teacher:**

Teaching philosophy is based on the teachers' roles and the students as active participants in a student-centred communicative classroom. The effective role of the teacher depends on his/her perspective and personal variables such as motivation, interest, experience, and attitude towards teaching profession in the second or foreign language classroom context. A teacher has a crucial role for successful learning. Teachers have to create best conditions for learning. Byrne (1994) confirms that the main task of teachers is not to inform students about the language, but they have to develop their abilities to use the language for a variety of communicative purposes. Teaching speaking needs a competent teacher who is fluent in a conversation. One of the basic problems in the field of teaching second language is to prepare students to be able to use the language. Successful preparation depends on how teachers understand the goals. Hindi (2012) has argued that teaching English as a foreign or a second language is a challenge for every teacher whether beginner or experienced. One central role of the teacher is to create and develop communicative activities. Speaking skill is considered to be the most important skill by language learners. The main aim of a language teacher is to encourage learners to use English not only in the classroom but also in their daily interaction with their classmates, with teachers or any other English speaking people if it is possible. Speaking skill needs a competent teacher. Teachers should train learners to use and practise the different strategies that can help them to face difficult situations. A good teacher plays different roles to help his/her learners for better understanding and achievement. He can aid the learners to construct a conversation or show interest by nodding, making eye contacts, asking for clarifications or adding more information. Scrivener (1994:227) provides some communicative techniques that a teacher might use in teaching speaking fluently such as scaffolding technique, i.e. to provide spontaneous correction without interfering much and by aiding the student-speaker to construct her/his conversation by her/himself. The teacher has the following roles when performing speaking activities:

#### **a. Controller:**

The teacher is the responsible one in the teaching and learning processes. The interaction in classrooms should be teacher-learner interaction. Harmer (2010: p. 25) asserts that the teacher is the one who transmits the knowledge of himself to his learners.

#### **b. Assessor:**

The assessment of the student's competence is one of the most important tasks facing the teacher because good teachers know how they must assess their learner's achievements. The teacher should tell their students strengths and weaknesses by giving corrections or by praising them for their performance. As Harmer (2010) said that this is where teachers have to act as assessor, offering feedback, correction and grading students in various ways.

#### **c. Organizer:**

The teacher acts in a classroom where many things must be set up; such as organizing pair/group work, giving learners instructions about how well they interact, and finally stopping everything when the time is over. The teacher in such a role spends much time in engaging all the classes in the interaction and ensures the students' participation. Once the students are involved in the interaction, the teacher can stop interacting and let the learners speak and listen to each other, exchange views and they may correct each other.

Speaking usually involves interaction with one or more participants, and therefore, involves a lot of listening, and an understanding of how the other participants feel. It is also necessary to know how to linguistically take turns, and allow others to do the same. Harmer (2001: pp. 271-274) lists some good and most widely used communicative exercises. In these acting exercises, students are asked to act out scenes from plays or course books, or dialogues which they have

written themselves. In case the students should perform their senses in front of the class, the teacher needs to make sure not to choose the shyest students first, and pay special attention to creating a supportive atmosphere in the class.

Speaking tasks should also provide students with a proper level of challenge. Teachers need to force students to deploy their communication resources as extensively as possible. Teachers sometimes takes apart in performing oral activities with the students to aid them and provide the learners the required vocabulary. Accordingly, the students will experience achievement and even excitement about the task. However, if the degree of challenge is too high, it can inhibit students' use foreign language, and make them use their first language instead. Ellis (2003) in Erlam (2015) provides four key criteria that differentiates a task from the types of situational grammar exercises that are found in the more traditional language classroom. These are:

1. The main focus should be on meaning, i.e. students should be mainly concerned with encoding and decoding messages without focusing on linguistic form.
2. There should be some kind of gap in order to convey information to express an opinion or infer meaning.
3. Learners have to depend on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources to complete the activity.
4. There is defined outcome rather than the use of language, i.e. the language serves as means for achieving the outcome.

Thornbur (2005: p. 91) points out that teachers need to be careful, and adjust the activities according to individual learners. Teachers' commitment is closely connected to teacher work performance and their ability to innovate and to integrate new ideas into their own practice. Absenteeism and staff turnover have an important influence on students' achievement, and attitudes towards school. Joffress and Haughey (2001) wrote that teachers' commitment is a crucial factor that effect school, teacher satisfaction and retention. They claim that low levels of teacher commitment result in decreased student achievement test, higher teacher absenteeism, and increased staff turnover. Rosner (1985) mentions that reducing the workload of teachers can lead to better quality education provided for learners. However, Fatai (2005) says that only the teachers who are qualified, certificated, competent and of a good moral standing need to be employed to teach the students. They should be dedicated teachers who would serve as role models in matters of punctuality, self-discipline, accountability, integrity and sound leadership styles. Effective schools have teachers who have a strong sense of efficacy. The knowledgeable teacher is one who knows what to teach and has some idea about how to do it. He/She constantly looks for better, more effective methods for teaching, uses the new procedure and assesses its effects (Rosner, 1985). Teachers' subject-matter knowledge, teaching skills, dedication to teaching and openness to new ideas, all can play a significant role in determining the success of learning process (Posner, 1992). Says that studies have shown that a teacher's qualification impacts directly on the quality of education imparted upon the learners.

Absenteeism among teachers contributes immensely to the learners' poor performance, a phenomenon that makes teachers not to cover the syllabus adequately (Nyabuto, 2007). The argument is that if the syllabus is not covered adequately, students are likely to be examined in a content have not been fully covered and comprehended. As a result, this leads to poor performance. Teacher absenteeism was established by Nakhanu (2009) as one of the factors that affect syllabus coverage. Nakhanu's findings show that there is a strong relationship between syllabus coverage and students' performance.

#### **2.4. Assessment of Oral Performance:**

Assessment of speaking is challenging. Brown (2004) defines assessing as a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge or performance in a given domain. Hughes (1989: 101) believes that successful interaction involves both comprehension and production. He adds that it is essential that the task elicit performance which actually represent the test taker's speaking competence; whereas, Brown (2004) provides two major challenges in assessing speaking ability: (1) interaction of listening and speaking can make it difficult to treat speaking a part, (2) speaking's strategy to evade certain form to convey meaning may make it difficult for test makers to design a solid elicitation technique. Syllabus for secondary schools currently determines that rehearsing oral skills are included in all courses. This means that assessing oral skills need to be examined in all courses, as well. However, the syllabus does not give detailed guidelines for the assessment. The student should be able to use the language independently and be able to use the language in an argumentative way. Bachman (1991) provides two main ways of assessing spoken language: (1) one can either look at language in a holistic way, i.e. assessing the situation overall, and how the subject handles and performs in a situation that is being assessed. Holistic way of assessing is based on the idea that we cannot see grammatical, or other language functions that take place inside one's mind, so we cannot judge them. We have to judge the functions that can be observed

by the learner's ability to perform in a given task. (2) One can divide the language into pieces (grammar, pronunciation) and look at them separately which is called an analytic way of assessing. Analytic way of assessing means to look at certain predetermined points, for instance, pronunciation. According to Knight (1992: 300), states that teachers should focus on using the latter way of assessing, since it is important that teachers know what needs to be improved in the learner speech, and consequently, they would be able to give a positive feedback. Brown (2004:142-143) provides a list of micro- and macro-skills of oral skills to help determine test-makers as what to assess (whether to assess on smaller chunks of language or speaking's larger elements). They are as following:

**a. Micro-skills**

1. Produce differences among English phonemes and allophonic variants.
2. Produce chunks of language of different lengths.
3. Produce English stress patterns, words in stressed and unstressed positions, rhythmic structure, and intonational contours.
4. Produce reduced forms of words and phrases.
5. Use an adequate number of lexical units in order to accomplish pragmatic purposes.
6. Produce fluent speech at different rates of delivery.
7. Monitor one's own oral production and use various strategic devices such as pauses, fillers, self-corrections, backtracking to enhance the clarity of the message.
8. Use grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), systems (e.g., tense, agreement, word order, patterns, rules, forms.
9. Produce speech in natural constituents in appropriate phrases, pause groups, breath groups, and sentences.
10. Express a particular meaning in different grammatical forms.

**b. Macro-skills**

1. Appropriately accomplish communicative functions according to situations, participants and goals.
2. Use appropriate styles, registers, redundancies, pragmatic conventions, conversation rules, floor-keeping and yielding, interrupting, and other sociolinguistic features in face to face conversations.
3. Convey links and connections between events and communicate such relations as focal and peripheral ideas, events and feelings, new information and given information, generalization and exemplification.
4. Convey facial features, kinesics, body language, and other nonverbal cues along with verbal language
5. Develop and use several speaking strategies, such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing, providing a context for interpreting the meaning of words, appealing for help, and accurately assessing how well your interlocutor is understanding.

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS

The research instrument employed to collect data for this study is a questionnaire. A questionnaire is a means to gather data which is considered as the most efficient way to get information. The researchers designed two questionnaires for teachers who teach in secondary schools and another for students to elicit their views about the obstacles that hinder learners their oral communication in classroom and out of it. The research questions focused on the speaking factors that prevent students to communicate effectively. Questionnaires help in gathering data more quickly, and they take much less effort than interviews from the part of the participants. A questionnaire also makes data processing faster and more straightforward. Furthermore, the level of anonymity in questionnaires is a lot higher than in interviews, which contributes to finding the participants easier. This descriptive survey is to find out the negative factors affecting the instruction of oral skill in secondary stage in Misurata, Libya. The questionnaires were given to 25 teachers, males and females and hundred students. All the teachers have bachelor degree in English language major to elicit their views towards teaching speaking skill. The samples were chosen randomly. The purpose of using the questionnaire is to allow the respondents to answer questions freely as they fill the questionnaire forms. This instrument is necessary for this study as the teachers have time to provide well-taught information. Qualitative method is adopted to analyze data obtained.

**3.1. Section one: Teachers' Questionnaire****Q.1. Are speaking activities available on text and workbooks pages?****Table (1)**

Options	Yes	No
No. of teachers	25	0
Percentage %	100%	0%

The results mentioned in Table one show that all the teachers (100%) who are given the questionnaire answered with **yes**. But nobody (0%) answered with **No**. This means that the text-books and workbooks contain speaking activities. Oral skills have hardly been neglected in ESL textbooks. English textbook does not only become a guide to the teachers when delivering the materials, but also presents necessary input through various explanations and activities. The existence of the oral activities on the textbooks pages are for the enhancement of Speaking Skills. Becker & Roos (2016) point out that the main focus of early foreign language learning in Europe is on the development of oral skill. Ellis (2009) describes a communicative activity as a meaning-focused activity, which involves a need to convey information and enables learners to use the linguistic means available to them in order to work towards a clearly defined outcome. The desired outcome of the language learning process is the ability to communicate competently, not the ability to use the language exactly as native speakers do. Teachers should use a lot of English speaking activities to motivate learners to study and speak in English.

**Q.2. I encourage students to speak in the classroom. (often, sometimes, rarely, never)****Table (2)**

Options	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
No. of teachers	5	15	5	0
Percentage %	20%	60%	20%	0%

The above table clarifies that 20% of teachers said that they often encourage students to speak in English in classrooms; whereas, only 15% of them answered with sometimes they advise the learners to talk in class, but only 5% of teachers advocate students to produce language and no one said never. Encouragement occurs not only by ordering students to talk in English, but encouraging the learners may be happen by talking of the teachers themselves in English as much as possible in class to overcome the students' fears about speaking English. Swain (1985) wrote if the teachers of English not completely fluent or do not have that elusive perfect native accent, students can learn to speak by speaking. The more teachers practise, the more they will improve their own skills as well as they will help the students to improve theirs too.

**Q.3. Limited vocabulary is the main obstacle for students to perform oral activities effectively in classroom.****Table (3)**

Options	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
No. of teachers	0	3	4	18
Percentage %	0%	12%	16%	72%

The aim of question (3) is to know if the students have large of vocabulary or not. According to the results of table (3) show that (72%) of the teachers strongly agreed the main problem that hinder students to perform oral activities is limited vocabulary. Only (16%) agreed that limited vocabulary is the main problem. (12%) percent disagree and no one strongly disagreed that the number of vocabulary is the main cause of failure of speaking in classrooms. Wells (1986:87) states that successful oral communication depends on speaking ability and on effective listening. Vocabulary is considered an important part of learning a foreign language. Second language learning largely depends on vocabulary. The more vocabulary the students have, the more they have chance to produce language. Schonell, et al (1956) in Schmitt, et al (2001) point out that knowledge of the most frequent 2000 words in English provides the bulk of lexical resources required for basic everyday oral communication and additional 1000 words is the threshold which allow learners to read authentic texts. Limited vocabulary prevents learners to use the language and at last teachers resort to other activities



instead of teaching oral skills. Vocabulary serves as basic building blocks of second language acquisition. Many researchers have advocated that vocabulary is a key aspect in second language acquisition. Therefore, we uphold that the importance of vocabulary instruction should precede that of grammar instruction in the process of learning a foreign language since a robust of vocabulary improves all areas of communication, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

**Q.4. The time allotted to teaching speaking skills is (not enough, enough, more than enough)**

**Table (4)**

Options	Not enough	Enough	More than enough
No. of teachers	20	5	0
Percentage	80%	20%	0%

The above question is intended to obtain the teachers' opinion about the time allotted to teaching speaking comprehension at secondary schools in Misurata. According to the results in Table 4, none of the teachers (0%) said more than enough. Five teachers (20%) said enough, whereas, twenty teachers out of twenty-five (80%) believe that the time is not enough. Teaching speaking comprehension is time consuming. The degree of performing spoken language depends on the time allotted to teaching this skill. Teachers cannot cover all the aspects of the language because of inadequate time given to teaching English language. The implementation of the methodology according to the students requirements to speak effectively needs enough time to get proper results. The insufficient time contributes to shortcomings of producing conversation because the students are not given enough time to practise the language through the oral skills. Time and management of speaking tasks are very important. Its noticeable that some teachers of English skip teaching some activities in text and workbooks due to inadequate time such as reading, pronunciation and speaking activities and focus on aspects that they think on test pages and exclude the others. As researchers, we have noticed this procedure in our sons' textbooks, especially in first and second year because the exams are done by teachers themselves who teach English at this stage.

**Q.5. The number of the students in the class is (large, appropriate, small).**

**Table (5)**

options	large	appropriate	Small
No. of teachers	25	0	0
percentage	100%	0%	0%

This question aims at knowing the number of the students in the classrooms. The large number has a negative impact on the learning process. It is not easy to provide effective oral practice in large classes. Table five presents the answer. According to the results in table five, all teachers (100%) acknowledged that the number of the students in the classroom is large; whereas, none of them (0%) answered with other choices. This means that teachers need a lot of time on speaking activities. The students do not have enough chance to practise oral language. Some students are selected to do the speaking activities and the others are left. The students do not have equal chance to practise the language. It seems that English teachers have no doubt that large size of classes is a prime impediment for efficient English teaching and learning. Large size of classroom has a negative influence on students' improvement in speaking skills.

**Q.6. I assess students' speaking performance during the school year. (always, often, sometimes, rarely, never)**

**Table (6)**

Options	never	Rarely	sometimes	Often	always
No. of teachers	25	0	0	0	0
Percentage %	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The results mentioned in table six show that all the teachers (100%) who were given the questionnaire answered that they do not assess students in oral performance during the school year. But nobody (0%) selected the other choices. Assessing speaking during studying school year is not included in the curriculum of teaching English language at secondary stage. Testing speaking skills force teachers to focus on oral performance activities. Assessment is a key component of learning

because it helps students learn. Speaking is often one of the areas of learning English that is never assessed; however, oral performance is important for students to develop and it is significant to include activities in the English classroom that provide opportunities for student to speak in English. Assessing speaking activities can tell teachers about students' progress in learning English such as what they have learned, how confidently they perform in English or whether they have problems in speaking performance. Most students studying English in secondary schools as a compulsory subject are overloaded with grammar rules and exercises that are usually done via textbooks, quizzes or worksheets. It is clearly the emphasis is given to linguistic competence rather than linguistic performance. As a result, this procedure hinders the students speaking the language in and out the classroom.

**Q.7. Students do not engage in speaking activities because they are fearful of making mistakes and shy. (always, often, sometimes , never)**

**Table (7)**

Options	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
No. of teachers	10	3	10	2
Percentage	40%	12%	40%	8%

Table seven indicates that (40%) of the students fall shy when they speak in front of others; whereas, only (12%) of the teachers respond with often. The teachers also said that (40%) of the students avoid to perform oral activities, but (8%) of the teachers replied with (never). Fearful of making mistakes and shyness usually prevent students to do the speaking activities in classroom. They are afraid of their friends in the class laugh at them when they commit mistakes or take long time to produce language trying to retrieve or remember suitable words or phrases. Therefore, students are reluctant to use L2 in EFL speaking classes. Teachers of English complain of their students silence during oral communication courses. Students may participate in other skills, but they are unwilling to engage in speaking activities. Students sometimes are confused of which tenses to use when speaking, so they prefer to keep silent.

**Q.8. Students do not have chance to speak outside the classroom. ( never, rarely, sometimes, usually, always)**

**Table (8)**

Options	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
No. of teachers	25	0	0	0	0
Percentage %	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%

This item revealed that all the teachers (100%) negated that the students have any chance to practise language outside the classroom, since they live in an Arabic speaking country and there are not foreign people to speak with. English teachers agreed that the progress of their learners' oral performance is slower because they never speak English outside the classroom. Many students master the fine points of English grammar but find themselves at a loss when it comes to actually having a conversation with speakers. In reality, the only way to develop speaking is by practising. Large exposure to a language plays a significant role in English learning and teaching. It helps a lot in case learners have a great opportunity to practise language outside the classroom. It is considered a good motivation for learners to learn in and out the class.

**3.2. Section Two: Students' Questionnaire**

**1. Does your teacher encourage you to speak in English? (Always, Sometimes, Never)**

**Table (1)**

Options	Always	Sometimes	Never
No. of students	15	20	65
Percentage	15%	20%	65%

This table reveals that (65%) percent of the students claimed that their teachers never encourage them to speak, participate or communicate in English. Whereas (15%) percent of students argued that their teachers always ask them to speak in English. Only twenty percent of the students said that the teachers sometimes ask them in English. Teachers has to let the students to speak as much as possible. Teachers sometimes do little in teaching speaking. The effective role of the teacher

depends on a teacher's perspective and personal variables such as motivation, interest, experience and attitude towards teaching. A teacher can aid students to construct a conversation or show interest by nodding, making eye contacts, asking for more clarifications of unclear information. Harmer (2010) provides three main reasons for encouraging students to speak in the classroom: (1) speaking activities provide rehearsal opportunities to practise real-life speaking in the safety of the classroom. (2) Speaking tasks, in which students try to use the language they know, provide a feedback for both teacher and students. Everyone can see how well they are doing; how successful they are; and also what language problems they are experiencing. (3) The acquired language knowledge can be activated as long as the learners speak English in the classroom. Moreover, some linguistic elements can become automatic resulting in the learners' ability to use them unconsciously and in this way the fluency can be improved. Learners learn to speak by speaking.

**2. Does your teacher praise you when you participate in oral activities?**

**Table (2)**

Options	Always	Sometimes	Never
No. of students	40	35	25
Percentage	40%	35%	25%

The aim of question two is to know whether teachers of English praise students when they perform speaking activities or not since praise is one of motivational tools that has a positive impact to increase engagement and eagerness to learn and share in performing speaking activities. The results of this inquiry show that (40%) percent of the students think that their teachers keep praising them when they share in oral activities. This is a positive reinforcement to help the students and will of course increase them to be more confident. On the other hand, (35%) percent of students declare that their teachers sometimes praise and encourage them to speak in the classroom; whereas, only (25%) of the students said that their teacher never praise them when they respond or participate in speaking discussions. Teachers have to praise students for their engagement even if they give wrong answers. Praise can make students to respond positively to tasks. It can encourage students in many positive ways such as helping them pay more attention and giving them incentive to try harder in oral production tasks. It is considered a path towards their educational achievement and a significant factor in the process of learning language.

**3. What type of speaking activities do you prefer most?**

**Table (3)**

Options	Discussion	Role-play	Language game	storytelling
No. of students	30	20	30	20
Percentage	30%	20%	30%	20%

The table above summarizes that most of teachers use different techniques in performing classroom activities. The table shows that thirty students (30%) prefer language-game activities. Thirty students (30%) like discussion activities to share ideas about an event through pair or group work. A discussion can bring out the students' interests and motivate them. It is a chance for them to talk about the things they really care about. Giving and justifying opinions in English can also bring students a sense of accomplishment, as they are using the language to express complex ideas. Table three also clarifies that only thirty students (30%) prefer role-play activities. This technique is to stay into somebody else's shoes. It is an imaginary situation. Role plays are used to allow students to practise speaking in a conversational situation, build confidence and fluency, assess progress, and put learning into action. The story telling technique is only preferable by twenty students of the sample (20%) to improve speaking skill and make the lesson more exciting. Thus, the teachers' role should be adapted with various techniques to encourage learners to participate in conversation.

**Q.4. I do not participate in speaking activities because of my limited vocabulary.**

**Table (4)**

Options	Agree	Disagree
No. of students	70	30
Percentage %	70%	30%

The results of table four show the role of vocabulary size in speaking the language. Most students (70%) agree that their main inability to engage in speaking activities is limited vocabulary; whereas, only thirty students (30%) disagree that the amount of vocabulary is the main problem that prevent them to share in oral activities. A robust vocabulary improves all areas of communication. It has a fundamental role in oral production. More possession of vocabulary serves as the basic building blocks of a language. By having many words at their disposal for describing an event or emotion, students can be explicit when sharing their ideas and opinions. It helps them understand what other people are saying. Vocabulary is the foundation for a comprehension. To understand and to be understood, one must have a lot of vocabulary.

**Q.5. How does your teacher behave in the class? ( As a controller, As a guide).**

**Table (5)**

Options	A guide	As a controller
No. of students	40	60
Percentage %	40%	60%

This table clarifies that forty students (40% ) described their teachers as a guide, while sixty students (60%) described him as a controller, and consequently, this makes them less confident and more anxious in the class. Many researchers believe that good and strong relationships between teachers and students are essential components to make healthy academic development of students at school environment. Teachers are expected to act as facilitators in order to make learners feel more confident and relax to create a communicative atmosphere between learners inside the classroom. The authority and control tend to be in the hands of the teacher who favour a didactic transferable style of teaching, while the students' main classroom role seems to involve listening to the teacher and the they have limited opportunities to negate meaning with peers. Saghair (2006) believes that in Libya, the activities implemented in the classroom are teacher dominated and the traditional way of teaching is still used in the classroom. Nunan (1991) wrote that success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language. Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the language classroom, they may soon get de-motivated and lose interest in learning. On the other hand, if the right activities are taught in the right way, speaking in class can be a lot of fun, raising general learner motivation and making the English language classroom more interesting and dynamic place to be. ESL teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communications, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This can occur when students collaborate in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task.

**Q.6. I am unable to participate in speaking activities because of shyness and fearfulness of making mistakes in front of my classmates.**

**Table (6)**

Options	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
No. of students	25	35	15	25
Percentage	25%	35%	15%	25%

Table six shows the feeling of students during performing oral activities. The main reasons of poor speaking skills of the students is their unwillingness to communicate due to shyness and fearfulness of making mistakes in front of their colleagues. It says that twenty five students (25%) answered with always. Only thirty five students said that they usually afraid and shy of making mistakes in front of their colleagues in the classroom during performing oral activities. Fifteen students (15%) replied that they had these problems during their participation in oral activities. Only twenty five (25%) said that they were never shy or afraid of making mistakes during conversation activities. Teachers have to encourage shy students out of their shells. Students' engagement should be paramount in any speaking activities. Helping these students overcome a fear of participating is essential in terms of their success in learning a language. Students must be aware that making mistakes can be a learning experience. Learners have to be aware that errors are allowed in the whole process of learning oral communication to aid them raise their self-esteem and remove their fears of participation in oral production in and out of the classroom.

**Q.7. Do teachers of English skip doing speaking activities that are available on textbook pages? ( always, often, sometimes, never)**

**Table (7)**

options	always	Often	Sometimes	never
No. of students	40	20	40	0
percentage	40%	20%	40%	0%

The aim of question seven is to know whether teachers of English teach students oral activities or ignore teaching some of them. The above table shows that forty students (40%) said that teachers skip performing speaking activities. Only twenty students (20%) said that teachers often leave teaching them; whereas, forty teachers of English sometimes neglect doing the oral activities, but nobody answered with never. Teachers' efforts in having learners learn grammar rules and memorize a lot of vocabulary do not seem to help in learning speaking skills. Knowing a language involves more than knowing its forms. One needs to know how it functions. Teachers focus on teaching aspects that they think will be available on test pages and leave the other activities. They justify of leaving speaking activities that are not important. Teachers have to realize that tests are means to measure students how much information learners could get during the school year and not just to pass the exams .Teachers think that their success of teaching is to make students pass.

**Q.8. Do teachers of English speak in Arabic more than English in the classroom?**

**Table (8)**

Options	Yes	No
No. of teachers	75	25
Percentage %	75%	25%

The results of table eight clarifies that most teachers of English (75%) speak Arabic more than English in the classroom. Learners in secondary stage are incompetent in oral communication. It is widely acknowledged that the majority of English foreign language contexts are characterized by their formal environment of teaching and learning where there is not a chance for learners to use the language in a real communication situations. Speaking is considered to be the most important skill by language learners. The primary job of English teachers is to encourage learners to use English as much as possible not only in classroom but also in their daily interaction with their classmates, especially, in the English classroom. Teacher talk is one of the aspects in second language learning in which his talk functioned as input for the learners. The interaction between the teacher and the learner plays a significant roles in classroom speaking activities. The main provider of the language in the classroom context is the teacher. Teachers have to realize the benefits of using target language in the classroom but many beginning second language teachers may find it difficult about using it themselves. Students learn from the talk of the teachers.

#### **4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The study was conducted to investigate some problems that encounter students at secondary stage. It was hypothesized that students at secondary schools are unable to speak the language although they studied English for six years due to some factors. Accordingly, the researchers found out the following:

1. The majority of students at secondary stage lack the opportunity to speak in the classrooms. They do not engage in speaking activities because they are fearful and shy of making mistakes. The ability to produce language depends largely on performing a lot of speaking activities in the classrooms since the learners do not have chance to practise it out of the classes.
2. Teachers skip teaching oral activities that are available on text and workbook pages. Most students confirmed that some teachers leave teaching some activities concerning oral skills. Teachers of English focus only on teaching the aspects that they think will be on test pages. The aim of teachers and students is not to learn and speak the language, but their goal is to pass the exam which is a compulsory subject.
3. The time allotted to teaching speaking skills is inadequate. Communication activities are time consuming. Students require much time to rehearse speaking. Four periods a week is not enough to cover teaching all the aspects of language on text and workbook pages.

4. Testing speaking skills are excluded during the studying school year. Assessing students in speaking skills force teachers and students to perform communicative tasks. Consequently, both of them will put more emphasis on performing oral activities.

5. Students find it really hard to engage in oral activities using appropriate and correct English because of limited vocabulary. Limited vocabulary in a second language impedes successful oral communication. The lack of comprehension in the enhancement of vocabulary through speaking skills makes the students feel inferior in the English acquisition.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

To improve the speaking ability of the students in secondary schools, the following steps should be taken into consideration by curriculum designers in ministry of education, educators and classroom English teachers: It is a common knowledge that learning language as an adult is difficult. It is recommended that teachers and students have to treat English as a living language rather than a subject for studying. Learning and developing speaking skill is a long term process. Students have to keep learning vocabulary every day to understand other speakers and be understood by others. English teachers should try to create a convenient atmosphere in oral English classroom. The environment of the class demonstrates a large impact on the students' desire and interest in learning and practice. English teachers should encourage students to participate in various interesting speaking activities in the class and advocate them to watch English programs on TV or listen to the radio such as news to get access to native English or idiomatic expressions and try to use them in their own communication. Assessing speaking skills should be on English curriculum since testing force teachers and students to place more emphasis on speaking skills and they cannot avoid teaching and performing them. Proper testing is necessary in oral skills development because without assessing productive skills, the process of achieving competence remains incomplete. Testing makes students sincere enough to learn speaking properly. Inadequate time is also a major factor in teaching language aspects. Teachers feel frustrated by the lack of time. They need more time for teaching all the aspects of language to meet the needs of the students in classrooms.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

This paper was carried out to examine speaking problems of the students from the perspective of students and teachers of English. The objectives of the present study are to know the factors behind the inability of secondary students to speak English language. Teachers of English are considered the most important variables in a foreign language teaching and learning. By their skills, they can create the best environment in which learning situation takes place. It has been revealed that the students had speaking obstacles and the reasons for these hindrances were somewhat the same with some variations among teachers and students. Learners find it very difficult to use the language. Teachers have to place more emphasis on developing students' oral communication skills. Some factors have been shed light on to reach the main reasons that make students fail to produce the language. Developing students' oral communication is highly demanding.

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