

## **ENHANCING STUDENTS' SPEAKING ABILITY IN LIBYAN CLASSROOMS: EXAMINING TEACHERS' DIFFICULTIES WITH 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS**

**Basma Ali A. Almbabi<sup>1</sup>, Senowarsito<sup>2</sup>, Siti Nur'Aini<sup>3\*</sup>**

<sup>123</sup>Universitas Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia Semarang, Indonesia

\* *Corresponding author email: sitinuraini@upgris.ac.id*

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### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengkaji kesulitan yang dihadapi guru EFL Libya dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara siswa menggunakan buku teks English for Libya abad ke-21. Desain penelitian yang digunakan adalah desain metode campuran deskriptif. Dalam desain ini, metode kuantitatif dan kualitatif digabungkan untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif terhadap masalah yang diteliti. Untuk menyelidiki praktik pengajaran yang sebenarnya, data dikumpulkan dari 26 guru sekolah persiapan melalui kuesioner terstruktur, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan empat guru, dan tujuh observasi kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat banyak tantangan yang dihadapi guru dalam mengajarkan keterampilan berbicara secara efektif. Tantangan tersebut meliputi lemahnya kompetensi linguistik siswa, rendahnya motivasi, dan kecemasan berbicara. Kendala kontekstual mencakup ukuran kelas yang besar, keterbatasan waktu, dan kurang memadainya sumber daya teknologi. Selain itu, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi adanya kesenjangan antara tujuan komunikatif buku teks dan realitas pelaksanaannya di kelas. Para guru juga menyoroti kurangnya pelatihan profesional dan terpinggirkannya keterampilan berbicara dalam praktik penilaian formal, yang semakin mengurangi peluang untuk komunikasi lisan yang bermakna. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa buku teks dirancang untuk mendorong penggunaan bahasa komunikatif, tetapi efektivitasnya masih dibatasi oleh faktor pedagogis, institusional, dan lingkungan. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan pelatihan guru yang lebih terarah, penyediaan sumber daya kelas yang lebih baik, penyesuaian isi kurikulum dengan tingkat kemampuan siswa, serta integrasi penilaian keterampilan berbicara ke dalam sistem evaluasi guna meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara siswa di kelas-kelas Libya.

**Kata Kunci:** keterampilan berbicara; kelas-kelas libya; kesulitan; buku teks inggris abad ke-21; pendekatan komunikatif

### **Abstract**

*This research examines the difficulties Libyan EFL teachers encounter in improving students' speaking skills, using the quantitative and qualitative methods to have a comprehensive understanding of the issue. To investigate real teaching practices, data were collected from 26 preparatory school teachers using a structured questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with four teachers, and seven classroom observations. The findings show that teachers face many challenges when teaching speaking effectively. These include weak students' linguistic competence, low motivation, and speaking anxiety. Contextual constraints include large class sizes, limited time, and inadequate technological resources. Moreover, the study identifies a gap between the textbooks' communicative goals and the realities of classroom implementation. Teachers also pointed out the lack of professional training and the marginalization of speaking skills in formal assessment practices, which further diminish opportunities for meaningful oral communication. The study concludes that textbooks are designed to foster communicative language use, but their effectiveness is still constrained by pedagogical, institutional, and environmental factors. It recommends targeted teacher training, improved classroom resources,*

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*curriculum content adapted to students' proficiency levels, and the integration of speaking assessment into evaluation systems to promote students' oral proficiency in Libyan classrooms.*

**Keywords:** *communicative approach; difficulties; libyan classrooms; speaking skills; 21<sup>st</sup> century english textbooks.*



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## **INTRODUCTION**

English has long served as a global lingua franca, playing a central role in international communication, education, and economic development. In Libya, English is taught as a foreign language and has been included in the national education system since the 1950s. Over the decades, the Libyan educational system has undergone multiple reforms aimed at improving the quality of English language instruction. As noted by El'abbar (2011), these reforms have involved repeated and substantial revisions to the national curriculum, particularly in relation to English language teaching. More recently, educational authorities have modernized the English curriculum in response to rapid socio-economic changes and the increasing importance of English for global engagement.

A key component of this modernization has been the introduction of 21st-century English textbooks that integrate contemporary teaching methodologies and communicative language teaching principles. These textbooks—part of the English for Libya series—aim to develop students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Orafi & Borg, 2009). They also encourage learner autonomy through study skills guidance and provide explicit grammar support to enable students to use language independently. Speaking skills are central to students' ability to participate effectively in academic, social, and professional contexts. Scholars such as Philips (2007) and Nunan (2003) emphasize that speaking is a collaborative and productive skill essential for meaningful communication. For many EFL learners, including Libyan students, developing oral proficiency represents a primary learning goal (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

Despite the pedagogical intentions of these modern textbooks, Libyan teachers often face considerable challenges when attempting to enhance students' speaking skills. These challenges may arise from limited instructional resources, insufficient teacher training, large class sizes, and the need to adapt textbook content to students' cultural and linguistic realities. Understanding these obstacles is crucial to ensuring the potential of 21st-century textbooks is fully realized in Libyan classrooms. Identifying the specific difficulties teachers encounter will contribute to more effective instructional strategies, targeted professional development programs, and improvements in curriculum implementation. This study therefore examines the difficulties Libyan English language teachers face in using 21st-century English textbooks to enhance students' speaking skills.

It aims to identify the nature and causes of these difficulties and to offer practical recommendations that may support mechanisms to enhance the

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effective use of these textbooks and ultimately improve speaking instruction in Libyan schools. English language teaching has played an increasingly important role in Libya, serving as a gateway to global communication, academic mobility, and socio-economic advancement. Although English was first introduced during the British administration in the 1940s, systematic language instruction evolved gradually. Early teaching materials included KC Ogden's *Basic Way to English*, which emphasized controlled vocabulary learning. In the late 1950s, Michael West's new method series, incorporating elements of Arab culture, was introduced for upper primary learners.

The first locally produced series, *English for Libya*, appeared in the 1960s and reflected national cultural values, serving preparatory and secondary levels (Mohsen, 2014). These books remained in use until English instruction was suspended in 1986 for political reasons. When English returned to the curriculum in 1994, updated versions of *English for Libya* were subsequently developed, culminating in the introduction of the 21st Century English for Libya curriculum in 2018. This curriculum covers grades 1–12 and consists of three components: the coursebook, activity book, and teacher's guide.

Despite these reforms, instructional time for English remains limited, and classroom implementation effectiveness varies widely. At the tertiary level, curriculum design is largely decentralized. As Sawani (2009) noted, universities lack standardized English language syllabi; instead, department heads determine course content, resulting in significant institutional discrepancies. Many teachers have trouble due to inadequate English proficiency, limited methodological knowledge, and insufficient professional preparation (Holandyah et al., 2022; Allen, 2008). Richards (2003) notes that weaknesses in teachers' communicative competence often hinder the effective teaching of speaking. Without regular access to targeted professional development, many teachers struggle to implement modern speaking-focused pedagogies (Borg, 2015).

Furthermore, large class sizes and overcrowded classrooms significantly reduce opportunities for meaningful speaking practice (Fatiloru, 2015; Nunan, 2003). Limited teaching time further constrains teachers' ability to integrate communicative activities, a challenge common across EFL contexts. In addition, many Libyan schools lack audiovisual materials, multimedia tools, and technology that support speaking development (Shehdeh, 2010). Inadequate classroom environments hinder the successful implementation of interactive, communicative tasks (Hwaider, 2017; Spade & Lightbown, 2002).

Historically, English in Libya was taught through the Grammar-Translation Method, which prioritized memorization of grammar rules and translation tasks. This approach often produced learners who were grammatically proficient but communicatively limited (Maryslessor et al., 2014). These traditional methods contributed to students' reluctance to communicate in English (Mofareh, 2019).

The shift to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in modern Libyan textbooks marked a significant pedagogical transformation. CLT emphasizes meaningful interaction, authentic language use, and the integration of the four language skills. It positions learners as active participants and encourages pair

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work, discussions, and communicative tasks (Thompson, 1996; Widdowson, 1990). Research supports the role of CLT in improving speaking proficiency (Mislawiyadi, 2023; Soliha & Dheasari, 2023), though some studies indicate that teachers often rely on limited strategies, such as repetition and modelling, which reduce opportunities for authentic interaction (Toro et al., 2019).

Interactionist perspectives on language acquisition focus on social interaction, meaning negotiation, and scaffolded support. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development emphasizes guided participation for enhancing learners' skills. Key concepts include comprehensible input and output, vital for communicative competence. However, creating interaction-rich classrooms is challenging in Libyan schools due to large class sizes and resource limitations.

Furthermore, sociocultural Theory (SCT) views learning as socially mediated, shaped by cultural context, collaboration, and dialogue. Learners construct understanding through interaction with peers and teachers (Allahyar & Nazari, 2012). SCT aligns with communicative approaches by emphasizing authentic communication, mediation, and social support—elements not always readily available in Libyan classrooms.

Moreover, the Integrative Approach promotes holistic language learning, incorporating all language skills and authentic materials to build communicative competence. It stresses learner motivation, engagement, and the integration of cultural context (Alaye, 2019; Wan, 1996; Wambui, 2013). This approach highlights the need for well-designed activities, visual aids, and real-life tasks—resources that many Libyan teachers lack.

A substantial body of research highlights the challenges EFL teachers face in improving learners' English-speaking skills in Libya. Studies indicate systemic, pedagogical, and learner-related obstacles, such as inadequate teacher training, poor coordination, insufficient infrastructure, and low student motivation (Pathan & Marayi, 2016). Additionally, issues like a shortage of qualified teachers, limited access to teaching resources, and insufficient training in educational technology have been reported (Mohsen, 2014). A focus on speaking skills reveals that limited exposure to English, excessive reliance on Arabic, an emphasis on accuracy over fluency, and inadequate speaking practice hinder effective learning.

The research highlights significant challenges faced in English instruction across various contexts. Hamed and Fadhil (2019) noted that large class sizes, inadequate exposure to English, outdated methods, and poor course materials hinder primary-level teaching. Allafi (2023) found that Libyan secondary teachers strive to use English but face challenges such as student motivation, language anxiety, and teachers' proficiency. Similar struggles are reported in other studies, such as those by Songbatumis (2017) in Indonesia and Desta (2019), where large class sizes are reported to impact speaking skills. Common themes include limited resources, insufficient training, and reliance on traditional methods, affecting teachers' ability to foster speaking skills. The current study specifically examines the challenges faced by Libyan English teachers in Tripoli, focusing on the

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implementation of contemporary textbooks to improve students' speaking abilities.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The study employed a descriptive mixed-methods design to investigate the challenges Libyan EFL teachers face in improving students' speaking skills in preparatory schools. It used a combination of quantitative (structured questionnaire) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews and classroom observations) methods to achieve a holistic understanding. Data were collected from 26 teachers through questionnaires and four thorough interviews, with seven classroom observations to assess teaching practices and interactions. The study focuses on female public-school teachers, with most (61.5%) having 5-10 years of experience, indicating sufficient exposure to evaluate speaking issues. A majority (80.8%) hold a bachelor's degree, providing a solid academic base for teaching English. However, over half (57.7%) lack specialized training, which could hinder their ability to perform expressive speaking tasks effectively. Additionally, session sizes of 20-30 participants may limit individual speaking practice and opportunities for teacher feedback. This research aimed to comprehensively analyze teachers' perceptions of speaking-related difficulties.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The quantitative analysis of the closed-ended questionnaire indicates a significant consensus among teachers, with 74.4% acknowledging major issues in teaching speaking skills using the prescribed textbook. Question 4 showed the highest agreement ( $M = 4.73$ ), while Questions 6 and 15 also showed significant consensus, citing limited time, low student proficiency, and inadequate support tools as common challenges. Moderately agreed-upon tasks indicate recognition of specific speaking issues that vary depending on factors such as school facilities and teacher training. Disagreement arose in Question 10 (11.1% agreement,  $M = 2.50$ ) and Question 7, showing that perceptions of challenges are not uniform across educational contexts.

The quantitative analysis of the closed-ended questionnaire showed a significant agreement among teachers, with 74.4% acknowledging serious issues in teaching speaking skills. The qualitative responses highlighted three main themes: additional challenges for teachers, the reasons behind these problems, and training requirements. A key concern was the lack of educational technology and audio resources for effective communication. Teachers noted low student proficiency in English, particularly in the early stages, affecting engagement. Factors such as an emphasis on grammar, short class time, large class sizes, anxiety, and insufficient aids exacerbated these issues, revealing a gap between the textbook's communicative approach and classroom practice. Lastly, teachers expressed the need for training in modern technology, workshops on communicative methods, support for low-level learners, and more time for speaking lessons.

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This text highlights that teachers acknowledge the necessity for professional development and institutional reform. It identifies key challenges in speaking instruction, including inadequate resources, large class sizes, limited time, low learner proficiency, a focus on grammar, and insufficient training. The issues are multidimensional, touching on pedagogical, curricular, and infrastructural aspects. Despite the textbook's communicative design, its effectiveness in improving speaking skills is limited by conditions in Libyan public school classrooms.

The qualitative analysis of interviews with four Libyan EFL teachers reveals significant challenges in teaching speaking skills using the 21st Century English for Libya textbook series. Six main themes were identified: the critical role of speaking skills; student-related barriers (such as limited vocabulary and low confidence); classroom constraints (including large class sizes and a lack of teaching aids); challenges with the textbook itself (notably its complexity); teacher preparation issues; and influences on assessment. Teachers emphasized the importance of speaking for language acquisition, but noted that contextual factors and mismatched curricula hindered effective teaching and the execution of speaking activities.

Professional development is essential for effective speaking instruction, with a focus on specialized training in communicative strategies, technology use, and classroom management. Teachers express concern over the neglect of speaking in formal assessments, which emphasize grammar and writing instead. Suggested solutions include integrating speaking into exams, awarding participation marks, and implementing mini assessments. Teachers have developed various techniques to enhance speaking skills, such as positive reinforcement, peer support, and strategically pairing students, demonstrating their commitment to improving speaking despite challenges.

An observation of seven classrooms indicated that Arabic was predominantly used by both teachers and students, thereby reducing students' exposure to English and hindering their oral fluency. The classrooms lacked audiovisual technologies and resources, leading to a reliance on textbook methods that limited interactive speaking activities. Time management issues prevented teachers from completing speaking exercises, resulting in incomplete oral tasks. Additionally, low student engagement and reluctance to participate were noted, reflecting issues with linguistic foundations and speaking anxiety, corroborating earlier survey findings related to confidence and fear of making mistakes.

The discussion aims to interpret quantitative and qualitative findings on the challenges Libyan EFL teachers encounter when enhancing students' speaking skills through the 21st Century English for Libya textbook series. It is structured around key themes derived from questionnaires, teacher interviews, and classroom observations, including learner-related barriers, environmental constraints, curriculum challenges, teacher preparation, and assessment issues. The analysis is framed through Interactionist Theory, Sociocultural Theory, and

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Integrative Approach, providing a holistic understanding of speaking instruction in Libyan EFL classrooms.

One of the study's prominent findings was students' weak linguistic foundation, particularly in vocabulary, grammar, and oral fluency. Teachers reported that students struggled to express themselves in English, often resorting to Arabic, a trend supported by classroom observations of hesitation and silence. This reflects the interactionist theory, which posits that language development requires meaningful interaction and active participation. Without a solid linguistic foundation, students fail to engage effectively in communicative activities.

Additionally, the findings align with sociocultural theory, particularly regarding mediated learning. Students with weak language skills need scaffolding from teachers and peers within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Some teachers implement peer support and mixed-ability grouping to facilitate this, consistent with sociocultural principles of guided participation. Prior studies by Diaab (2016) and others echo this sentiment, indicating that limited vocabulary and language competence hinder the development of speaking skills. In Libya, this suggests that speaking struggles are tied to students' preparedness for communicative tasks rather than solely to textbook design.

Another critical finding was the impact of affective barriers such as shyness, fear of making mistakes, and low motivation. Questionnaire results indicated significant learner anxiety, which interviews linked to peer judgment and confidence issues. Classroom observations confirmed that many students avoided oral participation due to these feelings. This aspect underscores the importance of a supportive social environment in learning, as highlighted by sociocultural theory. A classroom that discourages risk-taking leads to passive students who shy away from speaking opportunities.

Moreover, the integrative approach emphasizes the need to establish positive, authentic, and motivating learning environments. The lack of willingness to communicate indicates an unsupportive and unengaging classroom atmosphere. Findings from Allafi (2023) and others reflect that anxiety and low motivation significantly impede speaking participation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Consequently, the challenge extends beyond linguistic issues to psychological ones, necessitating a classroom culture that normalizes mistakes and promotes active oral engagement.

The study identified significant barriers to effective speaking instruction in Libyan public schools, including large class sizes, limited instructional time, and inadequate teaching aids. Questionnaire data, interviews, and classroom observations indicated that teachers often rushed or omitted speaking tasks due to time constraints. The interactionist theory highlights the necessity of frequent interaction and feedback, which are hindered by overcrowded classrooms and short lesson periods. Additionally, the integrative approach stresses the importance of organized activities and authentic resources, which are lacking due to the absence of language laboratories and audio tools. These limitations have led to a shift toward teacher-centered lessons, reducing opportunities for real

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speaking practice, a trend consistent with previous research by Mohsen (2014) and others.

Despite being created for communicative purposes, the 21st Century English for Libya textbook poses challenges for classroom implementation. Teachers noted that certain speaking activities are too complex for pupils, do not provide adequate scaffolding, or require modifications to be effective. Observations found that assignments were frequently shortened, skipped, or translated into Arabic, thereby undermining their communicative goals. This emphasizes the importance of meaningful activities aligned with students' competency levels, as outlined in the principles of the integrative approach. The findings highlight a vacuum in existing research on teachers' experiences with these activities, demonstrating that issues stem from the interaction between textbook demands and classroom realities.

An important study found that teachers have a high demand for specialized professional training in areas such as communicative teaching strategies and classroom management. This accords with sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the teacher's function as a mediator. Inadequate training impedes effective scaffolding, replicating prior research that found that insufficient professional growth hampered Libyan EFL education. Teachers are aware of their training needs and seek practical techniques to demonstrate professional reflection. A major finding was the absence of speech assessment in formal evaluations, leading to a focus on grammar and writing tasks. This negative feedback underscores the need for both pedagogical and institutional reform in assessment policy to improve speaking education.

The classroom observations indicated a significant reliance on Arabic among teachers and students, with teachers often providing word-for-word translations and students responding in Arabic. This aligns with findings from Diaab (2016) and Hamed and Fadhil (2019), who recognized Arabic interference as a key barrier in Libyan EFL classrooms. The excessive use of the first language (L1) may hinder exposure to English input and limit opportunities for output, as per interactionist and sociocultural theories. It suggests a need for teacher training in strategic L1 use to enhance comprehension while promoting meaningful English communication.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The study investigated the difficulties Libyan EFL teachers face in enhancing students' speaking skills using the 21st Century English for Libya textbook series. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, it identifies key issues such as weak vocabulary and grammar, speaking anxiety, low motivation, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient lesson time, lack of technology, a mismatch between textbook activities and student proficiency, inadequate teacher training, the marginalization of speaking in assessments, and reliance on Arabic during English classes. The findings suggest that, while the textbook is designed for communicative learning, its effectiveness is hampered by learner readiness, classroom conditions, teacher preparedness, and assessment practices.

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