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Investigating the Correlation between EFL Libyan Students' Attitudes and their Speaking Performance in Benghazi University

By: Areege .F. Eldoumi
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Faculty of Education, English Department, Benghazi University
أريج الدومي
كلية التربية – جامعة بنغازي
قسم اللغة الانجليزية – محاضر مساعد

Email: https://edu.uob.edu.ly/ar

Abstract

This study sheds light on the speaking attitudes and performance of Adult EFL students in the Faculty of Education in Benghazi University. The instruments used in this study to investigate the potential relation between speaking habits and practice were a 15 question Likert Questionnaire and a Speaking Rubric. The number of participants in this study were a total of **70** students; (61 females and 9 males). The primary objective of this study was to examine the relation between Libyan EFL students' attitudes and their speaking performance. A Pearson product-moment correlation was computed to assess the relationship between the rubric scores and the attitudes questionnaire results. The results provide evidence of a statistically significant, positive correlation between the two variables.

Keywords: EFL, second language, speaking performance, attitudes.

ملخص الورقة البحثية

تُلقي هذه الدراسة الضوء على العلاقة بين مواقف وعادات التحدث وأداء التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية بجامعة بنغازي .استُخدم في هذه الدراسة استبيان مكون من 15 سؤالاً لدراسة العلاقة المحتملة بين عادات التحدث وممارستها. بلغ عدد المشاركين في هذه الدراسة 70 طالبًا (61 أنثى و9 ذكور). كان الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة دراسة العلاقة بين مواقف الطلاب الليبيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وأدائهم في التحدث. وتُشير النتائج إلى وجود علاقة إيجابية ذات دلالة إحصائية بين هذين المتغيرين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، اللغة الثانية، الأداء التحدثي، المواقف

Chapter One

Introduction

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, positive learning attitudes remain the driving force in successful skills achievement. Language learning is no exception to this rule. Although the significant role of addressing learners' attitudes to initiate adequate language capacity has been recognized and distinguished for centuries in the field of language learning, this topic remains underrated in many English Foreign Language (EFL) institutes around the globe.

This study stemmed from the researcher's interest in exploring the obstacles that hinder and perhaps delay EFL students appropriate speaking language growth. Hence, this study aims to obtain a deeper understanding of the learners' oral attitudes and highlight potential factors that possibly shape such attitudes which in return impact language proficiency levels.

In light of the reviewed research, speaking approvement is suspected to be aligned with the development of other English skills and reaching the intended results of improving students' overall language proficiency. A bulk number of experts in the field of Second Language teaching argue unequivocally that a good command of communicative capacity in language is key to success in future use of the targeted language (Richards, 2006).

Although the important impact of addressing the English Foreign Language Learners (EFL) attitudes is obvious, this issue remains overlooked in Libya and scarce research has been conducted to address the subject until this day.

This paper aims to address two sides of the issue. First, to identify the attitudes and barriers that Libyan EFL's face when attempting to speak English. Second, the potential relation between oral performance and students' attitudes towards learning the second language.

Research Questions:

The research questions proposed in this paper are:

1. What are the speaking attitudes of Libyan English Foreign Language Learners (LEFL) in Benghazi University?

a. What are the language boundaries that affect LEFL speaking proficiency?

2. What is the correlation between Libyan EFL students' attitudes and speaking performance?

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Over the years, language acquisition and learning scholars along with educators heavily emphasized the significant role of the continues use and acquaintance of language. Evidentially, Nunan (1999) and Brown (2000) correlate between effective oral use and successful acquisition of the learned language. Similarly, Aleksandrzak (2011) states that effective oral proficiency is an essential component in mastering a language. Further, Rao (2019) points out the significant role of effective speaking skills in acquiring a foreign language.

Equally important, the integral role of attitudes on acquiring a language has been highlighted by a respective number of researchers in the field of Education. In 1972, Gardner and Lambert claimed that "Attitudes are merely one of types of factors that give rise to motivation which eventually results in attainment of proficiency in a second language". Equivalently, Krashen (2007) found that students with positive attitudes constructively serve the growth of the second language learning. Such notion has been approved in several studies. For example, Bui (2013) concluded that students majoring in English Language in Vietnam who held positive attitudes towards English learning performed well in oral tasks and reported significantly higher scores than those who had negative attitudes towards the targeted language. Zeinivanda et al. (2015), explained that factors which affect speaking proficiency among EFL students could be chiefly restricted into the four following variables:

A. Lack of general knowledge.
B. Lack of practice.
C. Anxiety.
D. Low motivation.

Notably, motivation, anxiety and confidence along with the level of general knowledge and practice have been suspected to chiefly assist or interfere with language learning (Putra & et al. (2021). In their research Putra & et.al. (2021) found that “there is a significant association between the speaking problems and the factors causing the problems.”. Likewise, poor speaking skills have been associated with high levels of anxiety (Tuan & Mai, 2015; Ansari, 2015; Savasci, 2013) .

Aligned with the notion that both oral proficiency and positive attitudes directly impact language growth, a respectful number of studies highlighted the importance of out- of -class English use on language proficiency. In fact, Rajendran et al. (2025) claim that minimum exposure to the language may cause anxiety, and lack of confidence hindering students' involvement in speaking tasks in the English classroom. Stickler and Emke (2011) found that students who devoted more time to out- of class English use achieved higher language proficiency progress in comparison with their peers. Similarly, Larsson (2012), investigated the scores of students on the National English Test in Sweden. The results showed that those who did not perform out- of- class English received lower test scores than those who did. In a parallel study, Pearson (2004) investigated the potential relationship between out-of-school exposure and academic performance, the researcher found a positive correlation between the two variables on language skills.

As demonstrated from the perception of Gardener (1985) motivation is a major influential drive that affects students' language growth in Second language learning (L2). Gardener explains that motivation is "a combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language” (1985). Such findings mirror the viewpoint of Steven Krashen's **Second Language Acquisition Theory** which emerged in the 1980's.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis: (Krashen, 1982)

When mentioning students’ attitudes in learning a foreign language the chief hypotheses that rises to the surface is the **Affective Filter hypothesis** proposed by Stephen Krashen (1982).

In the **Affective Filter hypothesis** Krashen believes that there are three variables that directly affect the success of language learning; motivation, self-confidence and anxiety levels. Krashen claims that students with high motivation levels and low anxiety rates tend to succeed in language learning as opposed to their peers who lack motivation, suffer from anxiety and low self-esteem. The hypothesis has been favored by numerous educators. For instance, Rebecca Oxford (1996) claims that the learners' perceptions and development in learning a foreign language heavily relies on the influence of the affective side. Oxford (1996), emphasized that the learners' success and failure is chiefly associated and determined by the emotional impact in the learning environment.

While on the other hand, it is noteworthy to mention that a number of studies found little to no evidence of the role of attitude on EFL speaking performance, for instance, ŞENGÜL & BÜYÜKKARCI (2023) investigated the correlation between foreign language speaking anxiety and the students' attitudes with 32 eleventh-grade EFL students. The researchers found that there was no correlation between foreign language speaking anxiety and attitude. Similarly, (Karagöl & Başbay, 2018) found a weak correlation among foreign language anxiety, attitude towards English speaking skills among students. Likewise, in a study conducted on 55 eleventh grade senior high school students in Ukui Indonesia, the researcher Riantika (2021) concluded that there is no significant correlation between students' attitude in learning English and their speaking ability.

On balance to the above, this study will examine the potential link between EFL speaking efficiency and the learners' attitudes towards the targeted language.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In this study a mixed- method approach (quantitative and qualitative) method was followed to investigate the targeted issue in an attempt to answer the research questions proposed in this paper.

Participants and Setting:

This study took place in the English department- Faculty of Education in Benghazi University/Libya. The number of participants was a total of 70 students; 61 females and 9 males. The sample consists of fourth and fifth semester students. It is noteworthy to mention that the participants completed all four obligatory courses of the Listening and Speaking Comprehensive subject at the English department/ Faculty of Education in Benghazi University.

Data Collection:

First, the researcher made copies of the questionnaire (see appendix1). A number of 70 surveys were distributed over two days. The method of answering the survey was explained and the researcher monitored the procedure. Evidentially, the students were assured that their names and personal information will not be mentioned. The students were given ten minutes to answer and the questionnaires were collected.

Second, the students' speaking performance was assessed by using a Speaking Rubric (see appendix 2).

Instruments:

1. **Questionnaire:** The questionnaire is designed to reflect and identify the participants perceptions in English use that are suspected to impact the students' speaking performance. The self-designed Inquiry form in this study contained a five-point Likert scale for a total of fifteen questions focusing on **Students' Speaking Attitudes** in and out of the classroom. Options ranged between "Always" and "Never" (see appendix 1).

2. **Speaking Evaluation Rubric:**
The *Speaking Evaluation Rubric* proposed in this study is a self-designed rubric. It contains a five-point Likert scale. The options ranged from between "Excellent" and " Inarticulate " (see appendix 2). The students' overall presentation was evaluated out of a total of 20 points, measuring (body language, language clarity, eye contact, vocabulary and grammar). The purpose of integrating this tool was to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the participants oral proficiency use in terms of the four variables given in the rubric**.**

Procedures:

First, the questionnaire was distributed to the targeted group. Before answering, the researcher explained the purpose of the survey along with monitoring the answering process for 10 minutes. The questionnaires were collected and statistically analyzed using the Simple Linear Regression Analysis for Attitudes Predicting Speaking Performance.

Next, a ten-minute preparatory open discussion addressing ***The Challenges of Learning a Foreign Language*** was made available to all participants before the individual rubric assessments. All the discussions were facilitated by the researcher and field notes of the relative data were recorded.

Subsequently, the participants were invited to a two- minute face-to-face interview with the researcher over a period of five separate days (due to the large number of participants). The interview topic was ***Challenges of Learning a Foreign Language***. These interviews provided quantitative (rubric results) and rich qualitative insights that enhanced the findings of this paper.

A. Speaking Rubric Scoring Process:

- First, the researcher assigned grading marks based on the responses as following:

➢ **5 marks:** Excellent

➢ **4 marks:** Satisfactory

➢ **3 marks:** Fair

➢ **2 marks:** Poor

➢ **1 mark:** inarticulate

- Second, the sum of each rubric was calculated to reach a total raw score for each student's speaking performance.

B. Questionnaire Scoring Process:

♦ First, the raw scores were converted into percentile ranks and the interpretation of the results was based on the following:

1. Higher score: a respectfully positive attitude towards speaking English (from 50% - 100%).
2. Lower scores indicate a relatively negative attitude towards speaking English.

In the final phase, the researcher made ties between the oral performance and the attitudes questionnaire responses for each student by running a descriptive statistic analysis (Pearson product-moment correlation test) and an inferential statistic analysis (Regression Analysis test).

Chapter Four

Results

In this chapter the results were distributed in tables and the relationship between the students' speaking performance and their attitudes were calculated and included.
The following presents the statistical analysis conducted to investigate the relationship between scores from a 20-point rubric (rubric/20) and an overall measure (Attitude). The analysis was performed to assess data normality, determine the strength and significance of the relationship between the two variables, and evaluate the predictive capability of the rubric score on attitude.

1. Questionnaire Percentage Analysis:

	Always		**Often**		**Sometimes**		**Rarely**		**Never**	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Q1	8	11.4%	6	8.5%	35	50%	15	21.4%	6	8.5%
Q2	22	31.4%	23	32.8%	17	24.2%	4	5.7%	4	5.7%
Q3	3	4.2%	13	18.5%	23	32.8%	17	24.2%	14	20%
Q4	14	20%	17	24.2%	26	37.1%	10	14.2%	3	4.2%
Q5	17	24.2%	13	18.5%	21	30%	8	11.4%	11	15.7%
Q6	23	32.8%	16	22.8%	23	32.8%	7	10%	0	0%
Q7	15	21.4%	15	21.4%	16	22.8%	7	10%	17	24.2%
Q8	40	57.1%	15	21.4%	12	17.1%	1	1.4%	2	2.8%
Q9	8	11.4%	19	27.1%	21	30%	14	20%	9	12.8%
Q10	8	11.4%	19	27.1%	14	20%	16	22.8%	13	18.5%
Q11	5	7.1%	14	20%	17	24.2%	15	21.4%	19	27.1%
Q12	20	28.5%	13	18.5%	15	21.4%	11	15.7%	11	15.7%
Q13	20	28.5%	15	21.4%	13	18.5%	9	12.8%	14	20%
Q14	15	21.4%	13	18.5%	24	34.2%	16	22.8%	4	5.7%
Q15	28	40%	11	15.7%	13	18.5%	14	20%	4	5.7%

(Table 1: Students' Attitudes frequency and percentage)

2. Tests of Normality

The assumption of normality for both variables was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. A non-significant result (Sig. > .05) indicates that the data distribution does not significantly deviate from normality. The results are presented in Table 1.

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
rubric/20	.094	70	.200*	.977	70	.212
Attitudes	.064	70	.200*	.987	70	.712
*Note: * indicates a lower bound of the true significance.*						

(Table 2: Tests of normality)

As shown in Table 2, all test statistics are non-significant ($p > .05$) for both variables. This confirms that the data for rubric/20 and Attitudes (questionnaire) meet the assumption of normality, validating the use of subsequent parametric tests (Pearson correlation and linear regression).

3. Correlation Analysis

A Pearson product-moment correlation was computed to assess the relationship between the rubric/20 score and the Attitudes measure. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Variable		rubric/20	Attitude
rubric/20	Pearson Correlation	1	.255*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.033
	N	70	70

(Table 3: Pearson Correlations)

The interpretation of the analysis reveals a statistically significant, positive correlation between the two variables, *r*(68) = .255, *a* = .033. This indicates a weak, but significant, linear relationship where higher rubric scores are associated with higher attitude scores.

4. Regression Analysis

A simple linear regression was conducted to predict Attitudes based on the rubric/20. The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 68) = 4.75$, *a* = .033. The rubric score accounted for approximately 6.5% of the variance in the Attitudes measure ($R^2 = .065$).

The detailed coefficients for the regression model are presented in Table 4.

Model	Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	2.912	.175	16.606	.000
	rubric/20	0.029	.013	2.179	.033

(Table 4: Regression Coefficients)

The resulting regression equation is:
Predicted Attitudes= 2.912 + 0.029 × (rubric/20)

The interpretation of the of 2.912 is the predicted attitudes score when the rubric score is zero. The slope for rubric/20 (B = 0.029) is statistically significant (*a* = .033), indicating that for every one-point increase on the rubric, the attitudes measure is expected to increase by 0.029 points.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between EFL students' attitudes and their speaking performance. The results provide evidence of a statistically significant, positive correlation between these two variables, thereby confirming the research hypothesis.

Interpretation of Findings

First: Questionnaire Analysis:

As shown in (Table 1), Q1 " I speak English outside the class" ranked the highest score. Half the students' (50%) responds indicated "Sometimes" revealing the limited exposure to English use on a daily basis. Such findings make parallel to the results of Stickler and Emke (2011) and, Rajendran et al. (2025), who explain that insufficient exposure to out-of-class English has been considered a delaying factor of language growth.

Further, in (Table 1), Q8 " I don't want to make mistakes" achieved the highest rank. Over half of the students (57.1%) responded " Always". Such findings infer that a chief language boundary found amongst the students in this study is the fear of making mistakes while speaking. These findings align with the research results of Tuan and Mai (2015), Ansari (2015) and Savasci (2013) . It has been suspected that such barriers reduce motivation and may lead to reluctant speaking (Leong & Ahmadi, 2016).

The lowest percentage was scored in (Table 1), Q6 "I forget words when I begin to speak". None of the students chose " Never". This indicates that it is likely to happen when speaking English among all participants.

Second: Statistical Analysis: The statistical analysis confirms the following:

1. The data for both variables are normally distributed.
2. There is a statistically significant, weak positive correlation between rubric scores and attitude.
3. The rubric score is a significant, though modest, predictor of performance, with the regression model explaining 6.5% of the variance in performance scores.

The regression model indicates that attitude serves as a significant predictor of speaking performance, accounting for the rubric accounted 6.5% of the variance in the Attitudes measure ($R^2 = .065$). While this effect is statistically significant, it basically underscores that speaking performance is a complex construct influenced by a multitude of factors beyond attitude. Variables such as language anxiety, self-efficacy, grammatical competence, vocabulary knowledge, and quality of instruction likely play critical and potentially more influential roles.

The data met the assumption of normality for parametric testing. The analysis revealed a statistically significant, though weak, positive correlation between rubric scores and attitudes. Furthermore, the regression model confirms that the rubric score is a significant predictor of attitudes. For each point earned on the rubric, performance is predicted to increase by 0.029 units.

The positive relationship found in this study aligns with the established body of literature in second language acquisition, notably supporting Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, which posits that positive attitudes and motivation are fundamental to language learning success. The finding suggests that students who exhibit more positive attitudes towards the English language, its learning process, and its cultural context are likely to demonstrate higher proficiency in speaking tasks. This can be explained through the lens of motivation: students with favorable attitudes are more likely to engage in voluntary practice, participate actively in class, and persist through the challenges of achieving oral fluency, thereby directly enhancing their performance.

Evidentially, the discussion prior the rubric assessment revealed a number of factors that perhaps play a role in developing the speaking performance of EFL students. Upon proposing the discussion topic *" What are the Challenges that Students face when learning a foreign language*?" the following themes emerged:

a. environmental influences.
b. emotional influences.

Student remark #1 "I receive high marks on grammar tests but when speaking I mix tenses".

[emotional influence]

Student remark #2 "I always have the fear of people laughing at me because of my accent in English." [emotional influence]

Student remark #3 " We have no place/ labs, to practice speaking". [environmental influence]

Student remark #4 " Speaking sessions in classes are majorly teacher centered, and participation to speak is little" [environmental influence].

Clearly, amongst the concerns that delay speaking skills according to the students' comments above were: (interference of first language, lack of confidence, lack of labs and language facilities in the institute, and inadequate speaking opportunities during class sessions).

Along with the fact that field notes taken during the preparatory open discussion emphasizes the results found in the statistical analysis and aligns with the reviewed research in this paper, such comments present deep authentic evidence that mirrors the barriers which perhaps hinder EFL students' speaking growth.

Chapter Six

Limitations and Implications

A primary limitation of this study is the female participants overcame the number of males. Another drawback of this study is the fact that the number of participants is relatively small. Despite these limitations, the findings have practical implications for EFL pedagogy.

Conclusion and Future Research

In conclusion, this study confirms that a significant positive relationship exists between EFL learners' attitudes and their speaking performance. Attitude is a meaningful, though not exhaustive, predictor of success in oral production.

Future research should aim to build upon these findings by employing longitudinal designs to explore the causal pathways of this relationship. Furthermore, incorporating the other variables mentioned (e.g., anxiety, motivation types, linguistic competence) into a multivariate regression or structural equation model would provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors that collectively determine EFL speaking proficiency. Noticeably, conducting future research with a wider sample including the two genders over a longer period of time may provide deeper insights on the matter and introduce rich notions that serve positively in the world of EFL pedagogy.

Instructors should be encouraged to invest time in fostering positive attitudes in the classroom. This can be achieved by creating a low-anxiety environment, assigning engaging collaborative projects among students and integrating lessons relevant to real world context. In addition, encouraging inviting communication themes, setting achievable goals to build self-confidence, and providing positive reinforcement all assist in reaching the practical benefits of English proficiency. All in all, by strategically nurturing positive student attitudes, educators may indirectly facilitate improvements in oral communication skills.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Dear student, kindly answer the following questions. Your responses will provide rich information needed for the research titled "Investigating the Correlation between EFL Libyan Students' Attitudes and their Speaking Performance in Benghazi University**".** It is noteworthy to mention that your personal information is confidential and will not be used neither mentioned in the study.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1.I speak English outside the class.	○	○	○	○	○
2.I listen to English programs and films.	○	○	○	○	○
3. I speak English with friends.	○	○	○	○	○
4. I have plenty words to use when speaking.	○	○	○	○	○
5. I feel confident when speaking in English in class.	○	○	○	○	○
6. I forget words when I begin to speak.	○	○	○	○	○
7. I fear that my accent isn't clear.	○	○	○	○	○
8. I don't want to make mistakes.	○	○	○	○	○
9. I get plenty of opportunities to speak in class.	○	○	○	○	○
10. I get plenty of opportunities to speak outside class.	○	○	○	○	○
11. I read English books during my free time.	○	○	○	○	○
12. I listen to English songs in my free time.	○	○	○	○	○
13. I feel nervous when speaking in a group.	○	○	○	○	○

14. I mix tenses when speaking. ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

15. I look at the audience while speaking. ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Thank you!

Appendix 2

Speaking Rubric

Speaking Rubric

Student name: _____

5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Satisfactory	Fair	Poor	Inarticulate

Body language	
Language clarity: (Enunciation and articulation)	
Eye Contact	
Vocabulary & grammar	

TOTAL: /20