EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECTING QASSIM UNIVERSITY EFL STUDENTS' ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPEAKING SKILLS

Mustafa Mohammed Sadek Elsayed

Dr, .Department of English Language and Translation, College of Sciences and Arts in Unaizah, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia, mustafasadek2000@gmail.com

Abstract

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the factors affecting Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. Thirty students enrolled in the Intensive Course Program (ICP) in the English Language and Translation Department of the Sciences and Arts College in Unaizah, Saudi Arabia, participated in this study. Information on the factors affecting students' acquisition of English Language speaking skills was gathered using semi-structured interviews with students who were usually active participants in the classroom. A qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the interview-generated data. The qualitative data was interpreted using manual coding, which requires thoroughly in-depth reading of the transcripts and assigning codes and themes. The findings of the study revealed that Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills is affected by a variety of factors including psychological factors such as motivation, lack of confidence, second language anxiety, shyness and introversion, pedagogical factors like classmates' behaviors, teaching methods and materials, instructor's feedback, classroom atmosphere, topical knowledge and interest, class size, and linguistic factors such grammatical understanding, vocabulary knowledge, and correct pronunciation. It can therefore be assumed that the factors affecting English language speaking acquisition among EFL students have to be considered within multidimensional aspects rather than simply originating from students themselves. In light of the findings, some pedagogical implications were offered, as well as suggestions for future research.

Keywords: speaking skills acquisition, EFL learners, intensive course program, psychological factors, pedagogical factors, linguistic factors

1. INTRODUCTION

Among all languages spoken all over the world, English is currently the most commonly used language for international trade, popular media and entertainment, global telecommunications, publication of newspapers and books, and, most significantly, for the internationalization of education (Rahman & Singh, 2021). English has been referred to as the "operating system" of global conversation by Mark Robson, the Director of English and Exams at the British Council (Robson, 2013, p. 2). He added that more people than ever before are learning and speaking English, particularly those who are involved in economic affairs, the thought leaders, and decision-makers in business. There has been a great need for learning the English language among many non-native English speakers in numerous countries that have no history with Britain or the US because English has become the lingua franca of the world (Safotso, 2018). The English language has spread globally and has become a lingua franca, with a rapid increase in both its speakers and its learners (Lwin, 2016). According to Al-Sobhi and Preece (2018), spoken English has gained significant recognition for its use in academia, work, and economy. By the same token, Crystal (2003) asserted that those who are

fluent in spoken English have a wide range of opportunities in social, academic, and professional life. Consequently, effective communication in spoken English has become most desirable in this globalized world as a result of its status as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2007). Still, to master spoken English proficiency is not an easy task as students as well as common people spend a long time to acquire the desired proficiency (Luoma, 2004). In accordance with this, Lazaraton (2014) stated that speaking is a notoriously complex and perplexing skill.

Speaking, as a productive skill, is frequently regarded as one of the most difficult aspects of language acquisition (Brown & Yule, 1983). However, in order to be successful in their education and future careers, students must have a strong command of all English language skills in general and speaking skills in particular. Baker and Westrup (2003) supported this by stating that learners who speak English very well have a better chance of getting a better education, finding good jobs, and getting a promotion. Despite many years of study, many language learners still lack the ability to speak English effectively due to a variety of influencing factors. Tuan and Mei (2015) discovered that many factors such as topical knowledge, listening ability, motivation to speak, teacher feedback during speaking activities, listeners' support, anxiety, self-confidence, the pressure to perform well, time for preparation, and time allowed to perform speaking can all have an impact on students' speaking performance. According to the researcher's experience in teaching the four English language skills to ICP EFL Saudi students, particularly listening and speaking skills, it could be noted that the majority of ICP students at Qassim University lack English speaking proficiency which is one of the objectives of the English language Intensive Course Program.

Early observations of students enrolled in the English language Intensive Course Program at the College of Sciences and Arts in Unaizah indicated that some of the students have some difficulties in participating in speaking activities because they experience fear when speaking English. The students initially believe that speaking in English during class is challenging. Second, when called upon to take part in oral presentations, the students experience anxiety. Third, because of being worried about making mistakes when participating in speaking activities, the students avoid and limit their participation. Last but not least, students continue to be embarrassed and hesitant to take part in oral activities because they fear that if they make mistakes, their teachers will correct them and their classmates would make fun of them. These early classroom observations revealed that EFL students' English proficiency could be influenced by a variety of factors, including psychological factors such motivation, lack of confidence, second language anxiety, shyness and introversion, pedagogical factors like classmates' behaviors, teaching methods and materials, instructor's feedback, classroom atmosphere, topical knowledge and interest, class size, linguistic factors such as grammatical understanding, vocabulary knowledge, and correct pronunciation. Exploring factors influencing Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills is thus critical to raise students' and instructors' awareness of the existence of these influencing factors in the English language learning process. Students enrolled in the English Language Intensive Course Program need to improve their English speaking skills in order to interact with their instructors and classmates during the teaching and learning process, as well as because they will be future English teachers. According to the researcher's early observations, when ICP students had to give oral presentations in front of the class, they appeared less confident, shy, and afraid of making mistakes. They also occasionally mispronounced words. Grounded on the explanation provided above, the researcher is interested in conducting research to explore the factors influencing the acquisition of speaking skills by English language Intensive Course Program students.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

As an English language lecturer at Qassim University, the researcher noticed that the majority of ICP EFL students find it difficult to maintain simple conversations in English for a long period of time and struggle to perform speaking at an upper-intermediate level as required in a university ICP context. Moreover, during casual chats about the speaking skills of the ICP EFL students, the researcher heard from his colleagues that the students find it difficult to communicate in English and prefer to use Arabic language rather than English language when communicating with their lecturers or with each other in the classroom. Taking into account the existing gap in the Saudi higher education context and the tremendous academic and professional significance of English speaking skills acquisition, this study intends to explore the factors affecting Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. Despite the fact that researchers have explored the factors influencing EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills in various parts of the world as well as at various educational levels and contexts in Saudi Arabia, no study, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has examined this important topic in the ICP EFL context in Saudi Arabia, In order to fill this gap, the following research question is addressed in this study.

1.2. Research Question

To explore the factors that affect Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills, the following research question was raised: What are the factors that affect Qassim University ICP EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills during classroom interaction?

1.3. Hypothesis

Based on the aforementioned question, the researcher put forth the following hypothesis:

1-The factors affecting ICP EFL students' acquisition of speaking skills are pedagogical related factors, psychological related factors, and linguistic related factors.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the factors that affect Qassim University ICP EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills in the hope of providing some practical solutions and recommendations to help lecturers and ICP EFL students at Qassim University.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The current study's significance stems from its endeavor to shed light on some reasons behind ICP EFL students' weak performance in speaking. Therefore, if these reasons are well clarified and better understood, lecturers, and researchers will be able to expect the challenges and anticipate the problems and do their best to work on finding effective remedies and urgent solutions for them. The findings of the study will be useful to EFL researchers, who are interested in English language education in general and in the Arab World countries such as Saudi Arabia in particular.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

To highlight the limitations of the study, it is worth mentioning that due to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's gender-segregated higher education system, only male ICP EFL students were allowed to take part in the study. Therefore, any further generalization from this study should be done with caution. Results of the study are limited to the academic year 2021-2022, during which the study was carried out. The results are likewise limited to those factors that affect the speaking skills of College of Sciences and Arts ICP EFL students at Qassim University in Saudi Arabia. In addition, semi-structured interview was the only employed instrument in the current study to investigate factors influencing Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. Even while semi-structured interviews give researchers the chance to probe students' self-reported perceptions or attitudes, further research can be carried out to explore other factors affecting speaking skills using other different instruments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section covers six main aspects: definition of speaking, characteristics of speaking, the importance of speaking skills acquisition, psychological, pedagogical and linguistic factors affecting EFL students' speaking skills acquisition.

2.1. Definition of Speaking

Speaking has been defined by Bygate (1987) as the process of making auditory signals to construct different verbal responses in listeners. It is the combination of sounds in a systematic way to produce meaningful sentences. By the same token, Chaney (1998) defined speaking as the process of producing and exchanging meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols in different contexts. Speaking is also defined by Burns & Joyce (1997) as an interactive process of building sense that contains information production, reception, and processing. Additionally, speaking is regarded as a form of oral communication in which an individual communicates with other people in order to express themselves. It is essential for people to communicate and exchange knowledge, ideas and information in everyday life (Maulidar et al., 2019).

2.2. Characteristics of Speaking

Speaking characteristics were divided into five categories by Luoma (2004): range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence. However, communication is mostly dependent on both fluency and accuracy. According to Mazouzi (2013), students' achievement of fluency and accuracy should be equivalent because both of these characteristics aid in the development of students' communicative skills. Hughes (2002) defined fluency, the first most important characteristic, as the ability to express ideas, feelings, and opinions in an adequate and precise manner that enables the listener to understand what the speaker wants to say,

leading to effective communication between them. Additionally, Hedge (2000) pointed out that fluency refers to a speaker's competence to answer clearly by uniting between words and phrases, saying sound distinctly, and use of stress and tone. Similarly, Richards et al (2002: 204) described speaking fluency as "the features which give the speech the qualities of being natural and normal, including the native-like use of pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, the rate of speaking, and use of interjections and interruptions." By the same token, Zhang (2009) indicated that speaking fluency can be defined as the ability to deliver messages in normal speed without using awkward words, as well as exchanging ideas in a clear and understandable way, and using simple words with the intention of helping listeners understand.

Accuracy, as the second most important characteristic, requires control over the speaker's use of structure. According to Gower & Phillips & Walter (1995), accuracy is the students' ability to produce correct sentences in terms of correct pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary to be understood. The accuracy function demonstrates the speaker's ability to select the correct sentence pattern in light of the condition of the conversation. Learners must concentrate on using the correct and comprehensive language form, which includes grammatical rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Mazouzi, 2013). Likewise, Thornbury (2005) claimed that achieving grammatical accuracy requires the right use of structures, the complexity of the sentences, and the well-organized clauses, besides vocabulary, which is the essential communication tool that carries meaning. According to Harmer (2001), knowledge of word classes is necessary for forming well-structured utterances and good performance in speaking. Students must therefore use accurate words and expressions, which require using suitable vocabularies in appropriate settings. Pronunciation, according to Richards & Renandya (2002), refers to the students' correct use of sounds and their features to convey meanings, so that their utterances are understandable to achieve the intended objective. It includes both segmental and suprasegmental features (rhythm, timing, stress placement, and intonation).

2.3. The Importance of Speaking Skills Acquisition

Speaking, when used in the ESL or EFL contexts, appears to be the most important of the four language skills (Shabani, 2013). Speaking may be regarded as the most important skill in second language acquisition (Lazaraton, 2014). According to Lazaraton (2014), speaking is used as a vehicle to acquire other skills such as listening, reading, and writing. Speaking, according to Goh and Burns (2012), facilitates and enhances the acquisition of other language skills. They demonstrated how speaking is frequently used to determine whether or not we effectively listened to something, or how reading comprehension is verified through speaking. Because the student needs feedback from instructors and peers, writing also involves speaking. Furthermore, success in a career is largely determined by how proficiently and effectively we use spoken English to communicate our thoughts and ideas with people in the organization's management (Pandey & Pandey, 2014). Additionally, spoken English gives people the ability to express their feelings and thoughts to others, as well as to participate in various social dynamics (Wierzbicka, 2006).

Gillis (2019) asserted that speaking is primarily utilized in daily communication with both native and non-native English speakers. Since speaking is the primary means by which individuals interact with one another, speaking is regarded as the most important skill in everyday life. To become an effective communicator, one must be proficient in all four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Speaking, though, is the most crucial of the four language skills. It gives a speaker the ability to inform, convince and influence listeners. Speakers will be able to capture and keep the audience's attention while conveying their message if they speak clearly and confidently. Speaking also gives one the ability to be distinctive from others. A person who is good at speaking will be able to stand in front of others, communicate clearly and speak effectively. A speaker can also become well-known if they have the talent to speak. The speaker who is good at speaking will get some respect as their reputation for excellent speaking can grow over time. Speaking also helps you enhance your career. Speaking has always been a useful skill that is worth in fully developing because most employers have always placed a high priority on speaking proficiency. Speaking eventually allows speakers to feel satisfied. When giving a presentation and getting feedback from receptive audiences, speakers often experience a great sense of fulfillment that is uncommon in other communication styles (Gillis, 2019). Similar to this, Johnson (1995) asserted that in order for English-language students to engage in and benefit from the classroom experience, they must possess communicative competence.

During speaking, students are expected to orchestrate a) knowledge of language and discourse (grammatical knowledge, phonological knowledge, lexical knowledge, and discourse knowledge), b) core speaking skills (pronunciation, speech function, interaction management, and discourse organization), and c) communication strategies (cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and interaction strategies) (Goh & Burns, 2012). Despite the importance placed on speaking English fluently, many non-native English learners throughout the entire world encounter challenging factors that affect their acquisition of speaking skills. Due to some affecting factors, speaking becomes a barrier for both teachers and students (Bouzar, 2019)

because teachers struggle to identify an effective method of instruction while students struggle to adopt the appropriate process to master the skill. The difficulty encountered by teachers creates a quandary for them in guiding students to learn to talk (Brown & Yule, 1983). Some of the factors affecting EFL students' speaking skills acquisition are discussed in the following sections.

2.4. Psychological Factors Affecting EFL Students' Speaking Skills Acquisition

Learners' acquisition of English language speaking skills is affected due to some psychological factors. EFL learners often experience a variety of psychological factors, such as motivation, lack of confidence, second language anxiety, shyness and introversion. These psychological issues reduce students' willingness to participate in speaking events (Burns, 2017). According to Thornbury (2005), psychological factors like anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, low motivation and fear of making mistakes prevent students from speaking in class. According to Park & Lee (2005), students' levels of anxiety have a negative effect on their performance in speaking. The performance and language acquisition of students may be hindered by their feelings of tension, anxiety, worry, or unease. They indicated that the more anxious you are, the worse your performance will be. According to Nunan (1999), any learner who lacks confidence in themselves and their ability to communicate in English will experience communication problems. Students who lack self-confidence are more likely to have a low expectation, which leads to lower spoken English achievement (Toujani & Hermessi, 2018). According to Humphries (2011), the most common enemy to students' development of spoken English is anxiety. Moreover, MacIntyre & Gardner, (1994) stated that anxiety destroys students' self-efficacy which is essential for them to express their ideas and thoughts with confidence and motivation. Ibna Seraj and Habil's (2021) systematic review of the literature revealed a number of psychological factors influence learners' improvement of spoken English, including shyness, anxiety, self-efficacy, reluctance, emotions, and confidence. According to Humaera (2015), speaking in front of others is a common phobia that makes people shy, causes their minds to go blank, and makes them forget what they want to say, which results in most of them failing to perform well. According to Asif's (2017) research, Saudi EFL students experience fear when speaking English. According to Patil (2008), a priority for teachers to take into account in order to help students feel comfortable with their language use is building up their confidence so they no longer have a fear of making mistakes.

2.5. Pedagogical Factors Affecting EFL Students' Speaking Skills Acquisition

In relation to the pedagogical factors, the related literature indicate that classmates' behaviors, teaching methods and materials, instructor's feedback, classroom atmosphere, topical knowledge and interest, and class size are examples of pedagogical factors that affect students' acquisition of speaking skills. According to Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012), poor speaking skills can be attributed to a number of pedagogical factors including a lack of emphasis on speaking skills in the curriculum, teachers' limited English proficiency, lack of classroom oral activities, and the lack of opportunities for English language practice outside of the classroom. Aeni et al. (2017) stated that peer teasing of students who struggle to express themselves accurately and appropriately in spoken English class is possibly a common phenomenon in EFL contexts. According to Méndez and Pea (2013), many language learners are worried about making mistakes in a spoken class since they experience anxiety about receiving negative comments from their teachers, and mockery from their classmates. In contrast to learner-centered and skills-based instruction, Alhaisoni and Rahman (2013) claimed that rote learning and teacher-centered instruction still dominate most classes in Arab countries. As a result of their observations that the teaching strategies used by teachers in the Arabian Peninsula were not effective and did not foster motivation, these researchers have recommended using student-centered approaches of instruction. Additionally, they emphasized the need for providing students with adequate knowledge of basic skills and suggested that English teachers in the Kingdom must give up old-fashioned methods of instruction like "the lecture mode of instruction and the dictation of notes" (p. 117).

Teachers' adoption and implementation of teacher centered traditional teaching methods, such as grammar translation method which focuses on teaching grammar in isolation and neglects giving learners opportunities to speak English in real life situations, appeared to be a common problem that hindered the development of students' spoken English proficiency (Seraj et al., 2021). According to Richards (2014), the grammar translation method, which focuses on reading written texts and translating them into the students' native tongue, places a greater emphasis on learning grammar than on pronunciation and spoken language. These traditional methods limit students' opportunities to become competent and confident English speakers (Gomleksiz, 2007). Teachers can sometimes be barriers to students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. According to Zhang and Head (2010), teachers' controlling behavior is the reason students are hesitant to participate in classroom interactions and prefer to remain silent. Even more concerning is some teachers' lack of spoken English proficiency. According to Afshar and Asakereh's (2016) study, teachers' poor pronunciation made it difficult for students to understand their teachers' instructions and

guidance; additionally, teachers' inaccurate pronunciation made it difficult for them to motivate students. In terms of using the students' first language inside the class, some researchers claimed that learners' first language is a barrier to the development of spoken English (Ahmed & Qasem, 2019; Seraj et al., 2021), whereas others asserted that students benefit from first language transfer while learning English (Bouangeune, 2009; Mart, 2013). The findings of Bouangeune's (2009) study in Laos favored first language transfer for improving English proficiency among experimental group students. Furthermore, some students may suffer from a lack of background knowledge on a variety of topics. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), adequate topical knowledge allows speakers to connect to the context and thus continue a conversation or develop a speech. They stated that how much knowledge and ideas learners have on the topic at hand has a significant impact on their speaking performance. The large class size is one of the most commonly cited problems in teaching and learning English speaking skills (Seraj et al., 2021). Chowdhury and Shaila (2011) discovered in their study that engaging students in various speaking activities in the classroom is difficult due to the large class size.

2.6. Linguistic Factors Affecting EFL Students' Speaking Skills Acquisition

In addition to the psychological and pedagogical factors mentioned above, the linguistic factors such as insufficient vocabulary knowledge, a limited range of grammatical structures, and a lack of correct pronunciation are obstacles to learners' attempts to develop their speaking skills. Goh and Burns (2012) discovered that lack of grammar knowledge and a limited vocabulary restrict learners from accurately expressing their thoughts. A recent survey study conducted in a Chinese university by Xie (2020) discovered that the obvious barrier to learners' improvement in spoken proficiency is their inadequate repertoire of grammar and vocabulary. According to Humaera (2015), learners are prevented from speaking because they fear making some phrases that are not grammatically correct. According to Putri et al. (2020), one of the main factors contributing to academic failure among students is a lack of vocabulary. Likewise, Liu and Jackson (2009) claimed that Chinese English language learners considered a limited vocabulary to be the greatest barrier to oral communication. According to Kelly (2006), proper pronunciation is crucial for producing accurate information and meaningful communication when speaking. Listeners may find it challenging to comprehend the meaning when students pronounce a variety of phonemes incorrectly.

After reviewing the related studies on the psychological, pedagogical and linguistic factors affecting EFL students' acquisition of speaking skills, the researcher came to the conclusion that there are numerous factors that affect students' EFL speaking skills. The literature review has also provided the researcher with a clear image to further explore these affecting factors, and to offer suggestions, recommendations, remedies, and solutions to them.

3. METHOD

This study was carried out during the second semester of 2021-2022 school year. The current study used a qualitative research approach to acquire a deeper understanding of the factors that affect students' acquisition of English speaking skills from the point of view of ICP EFL students. When little is known about a topic or phenomenon, the qualitative approach is employed to understand people's experiences and represent their point of view (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Likewise, Maykut and Morehouse (2005) asserted that "research studies that are qualitative are designed to discover what can be learned about some phenomenon of interest, particularly social phenomena where people are the participants" (p. 39). Qualitative approaches allow participants to express their experiences, opinions, thoughts and feelings about a particular topic. This is consistent with this study, which focuses on factors that affect ICP EFL students' speaking skills acquisition.

3.1. Participants

Unlike quantitative sample building, where participants are selected randomly, the participants involved in this study were selected purposively. This is due to the research purpose of exploring factors that affect ICP EFL students' acquisition of English speaking skills. According to Maykut and Morehouse (2005), "qualitative researchers set out to build a sample that includes people selected with a different goal in mind: gaining deep understanding of some phenomenon experienced by a carefully selected group of people" (p. 51).To select a sample of participants with similar characteristics and traits, the homogeneous sampling method was used. The purposive sample of this study included 30 ICP EFL students of College of Sciences and Arts in Unaizah, Qssim University, Saudi Arabia. Crossman, (2020) stated that "*A purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. This type of sampling can be very useful in situations when you need to reach a targeted sample quickly, and where sampling for proportionality is not the main concern*" (Crossman, 2020). The participants' ages range from 18 to 20. They have been learning EFL for more than 9 years. They were enrolled in the

ICP in the second semester of the 20212022 school year. The data was collected by the researcher who is the coordinator and tutor of the ICP students. Based on the students' interest to participate in the semi-structured interviews, the 30 participants out of 60 ICP students were selected. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty students to learn about their perspectives on the factors affecting their acquisition of speaking skills during their taught English language listening and speaking course.

3.2. Data Collection Instrument (Semi-structured Interviews)

In order to explore factors affecting the acquisition of English language speaking skills among Qassim University EFL students, semi-structured interviews were developed and used. According to O'Reilly (2005), interviews are considered powerful tools for information gathering as participants are allowed to express their views freely on a specific topic (O'Reilly, 2005). Before carrying out the interviews, the participants were kindly asked to sign a consent form that explained the aim of the study, their rights during the data collection procedures, and the estimated time it would take to complete the interviews. The interviews included predetermined questions that focused on the factors that affect acquisition of English language speaking skills among EFL students. The interviews were carried out face-to-face with the participants. For data analysis, interviews held with participants in the researcher's office were taped and transcribed. Interviews were guided by an interview protocol. According to Creswell (2012), the interview protocol is "a form designed by the researcher that contains instructions for the process of the interview, the questions to be asked, and space to take notes of responses from the interviewee" (p. 225). This protocol is a kind of organizer that contains questions to be asked during the interviews as well as information on the interviewees and the study. It ensures that the interviews flow smoothly. Each interviewee was asked open-ended questions exploring factors affecting acquisitions of English language speaking skills. According to Creswell (2012), open-ended questions allow interviewees to provide open-ended responses that are not forced or oriented by the researcher, as opposed to leading questions that may lead participants to response in favor of or against the expected results. Interviews were carried out with students who were normally active participants in class. Each interviewee was asked the same set of questions by the researcher.

The interview questions focused on the main factors affecting EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. The interview questions for the student participants included 14 items (See Appendix A).The researcher developed the interview questions in light of the literature on factors affecting EFL learners' speaking skills acquisition. The interview questions' validity was ensured after they were sent to five assistant professors of applied linguistics to revise them and their feedback was positive. The questions were piloted with five ICP EFL students who were not participants in the main interviews to see how well the instrument worked in practice and to identify any potential practical problems in the research procedure. The interview questions appeared to be well-formulated during the pilot interviews; however, there were few questions that had similar responses. Those questions were removed from the list, and the interview questions for the main study were revised and redesigned. Using translation and back translation methods, the interview questions were translated into Arabic. The interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of their responses as well as their identities protection. The researcher informed the student participants that their classroom attendance sheet numbers would be used to protect their identities. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide that included open-ended questions, elaboration probes, and follow-up questions. Each participant's interview lasted 30 minutes and was conducted in Arabic. With the participants' permission and consent, the interviews were audio-recorded by using an audio recorder to record the students' interview responses, opinions and comments. The interviews were audio-recorded in order to let the participants relax while answering the questions. Following the researcher's listening to the recorded audio, the interview collected data were transcribed and translated into English. The interview's gathered data were then coded and categorized.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

The TESOL International Association's "ethics in research" (2014) served as guidance for the ethical considerations of the current study. Prior to the start of the study, the purpose and the potential outcomes of the study were explained to the participants. The student participants were informed that their classroom attendance sheet numbers, rather than their names, would be used in order to ensure confidentiality and protect their identities and that participating in the study would not hurt them. Once the participants' consent was obtained, they were briefed about the purpose, the protocol and the procedures of the interview implementation. Finally, the participants were informed that the findings of the study will be disseminated through research publications in order to maximize its societal impact.

3.4. Data Analysis

Following the researcher's collection of raw qualitative data through interviews, the process of data analysis

began with the audio-taped interviews transcription. Each interview was transcribed, which involved converting audio-taped information into written form in order to make data analysis easier. Because qualitative data were analyzed by hand, enough space on paper was left to write memos throughout the transcription process. After completing the transcription of audio-taped materials, the researcher read the written text many times to obtain a sense of the situation and determine whether additional information was required. The process of qualitative data analysis continued with the coding of the data. According to Creswell (2012), the coding of data is defined as "a process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (p. 243). First of all, the researcher identified the text segments which are a collection of similar expressions mentioned by the interviewees and attempted to code them using terms taken from the literature related to the research question. During this procedure, specific quotes were selected from the interviews to promote the codes. After completing coding of the entire text, the researcher reviewed the related codes and grouped them together as much as feasible to get the bare minimum of themes in order to get an in-depth understanding of the factors affecting Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. The qualitative data were analyzed for themes and categories using the thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For qualitative data analysis, offering extensive discussion for a small number of themes, rather than reporting superficially with a bunch of themes at the end of the research, seems more practical. In findings section, the themes were summarized one-by-one in details. The data from the interviews were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) suggested four phases for undertaking the analysis: Generating natural units of meaning; labeling, categorizing, and ordering the natural units; constructing narratives; and interpretation. In contrast to numerical analysis, Cohen et al. (2007) stressed that qualitative analysis is certainly interpretive. The coding process comprised reading through the interview data, identifying, categorizing, and interpreting themes based on the participants' responses.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The focus of this study was to explore factors affecting Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. The factors that Qassim University EFL students considered as affecting their acquisition of English language speaking skills are shown in Table 1 which summarizes the codes and themes identified as findings of the current study. It demonstrates that three themes (main factors) and 14 more specific codes (sub-factors) within the themes were identified in the data analysis as affecting factors for speaking skills acquisition. These themes can be categorized into three main factors: psychological factors, pedagogical factors, and linguistic factors. Five themes were of psychological factors: motivation, lack of confidence, second language anxiety, shyness, and introversion; six others were of pedagogical factors: classmates' behaviors, teaching methods and materials, instructor's feedback, classroom atmosphere, topical knowledge and interest and class size; three other factors were of linguistic factors: grammatical understanding, vocabulary knowledge and correct pronunciation.

Table1. Factors affecting Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills

1. Psychological Factors	2. Pedagogical Factors	3. Linguistic Factors
motivation, lack of confidence, second language anxiety, shyness, introversion	Classmates' behaviors, teaching methods and materials, instructor's feedback, classroom atmosphere, topical knowledge and interest, class size	grammatical understanding, vocabulary knowledge, correct pronunciation

As shown in Table 1, the factors affecting Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills can be generally classified into three categories: psychological, pedagogical, and linguistic factors.

4.1. Psychological Factors

Psychological factors were reported to have an impact on the participants' learning of English language speaking skills. According to the participants, there are five sub-factors that affect their ability to speak English in the class; motivation, lack of confidence, second language anxiety, shyness, and introversion.

More than half of the participants mentioned that their language learning *motivation* influenced their readiness to participate in the oral activities in class. On the one hand, participant 5 showed his strong

motivation to improve his English language abilities in general, and his speaking skills in particular, by saying,

> *"To me, learning English is important. I like to speak English with my instructors and classmates in the class".*

On the other hand, Participant 7 expressed his lack of motivation to learn English, by saying,

> *"I was not interested in learning English when I was in secondary school. Now, I do not feel like speaking English in the class, all I want is to pass the final exam of the Intensive Course Program".*

Motivation for learning English has an impact on the participants' acquisition of English language speaking skills, as seen in the two excerpts above. While the unmotivated students have no interest to speak English in the classroom, the motivated ones are eager to do so

Lack of confidence is another psychological factor that emerges from the interviews of the participants. Nine of the interviewees believe that lack of confidence is a major obstacle in their way to speak English in class. Participant 19 expressed his lack of confidence by saying,

> *"Sometimes I feel afraid of making mistakes while engaging in speaking activities in class. That's why I prefer to keep my mouth shut".*

Second language anxiety was also mentioned by ten of the students as a sub-factor affecting their English language speaking skills. They revealed that when participating in speaking activities in class, anxiety can disrupt their concentration and reduce their confidence. While some students credited their improved English language speaking skills to their feeling of relaxation and comfort in the class, others openly acknowledged their fear of not being able to communicate in English in the class. Participant 6 explains his second language anxiety in a clear way when he says,

> *"I forget all I have learned when it's my turn to participate in speaking exercises in class".*

On the contrary, participant 9 expressed his peace and relaxation while participating in oral activities in class by saying,

> *"I feel comfortable and relaxed while taking part in speaking activities in class. It is my opportunity to express myself".*

Another psychological factor that was found to have an impact on Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills is their *shyness*. Five of the participants mentioned their feeling of being shy as a major factor affecting their willing to engage in English language speaking activities in the classroom. Participant 24 described himself as a shy person when he says

> *"As I a shy person, I feel nervous to speak in front of others and as a result. I do not feel like to take part in English Language speaking activities in class".*

Introversion is the final factor in this regard to have impact on students' speaking skills acquisition as reported by six of the interviewees. Participant 26 mentioned that he does not like taking part in any oral activities whether in English class or in other classes because of being introvert. He explained his case by saying,

> *"For being an introvert person, I am always not interested in engaging in any kind of oral presentation activities not only in English classes, but in other classes as well. I do not like to participate orally unless I have to".*

4.2. Pedagogical Factors

Pedagogical factors in the English Language classroom environment were also mentioned as having an effect on students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. Six significant sub-factors have an impact on the learners' acquisition of English language speaking skills in the English language classroom environment: classmates' behaviors, teaching methods and materials, instructor's feedback, classroom atmosphere, topical knowledge and interest, and class size

More than half of the interviewees (16 out of 30) cited their *classmates' behaviors* effect on their readiness to speak English in class. For example, participant 10 firmly claimed that,

> *"Inside the classroom, my classmates always speak Arabic. They lack interest and desire to communicate in English".*

This was stressed by other participants. For example, participant 30 stated,

"*I am not interested in speaking English in class because some of my classmates often laugh at me when I make mistakes*".

Likewise, participant 25 added,

"My classmates' comments on my pronunciation discourage me from speaking English inside the classroom".

Similarly, participant 15 stated,

"In order to avoid any criticism by my classmates, I always like to sit silent in the classroom and just listen to the instructor."

The participants' above comments demonstrate that their classmates' disrespectful and mocking indications have a significant impact on their acquisition of English language speaking skills.

The *teaching methods and materials* were cited by some students as a factor affecting their English language speaking skills acquisition. Regarding the teaching methods used to deliver the content, some students stated that teacher-centered traditional instruction was still prioritized in the classroom. When asked about the teaching methods, activities, and materials used in the speaking classroom, the students stated that they are constantly engaged in grammar and vocabulary activities. Participant 22 explained,

"In speaking class, I kept doing grammar and vocabulary exercises, but I didn't learn how to use them in speaking."

Participant 12 stated,

"*Our instructors normally begin by speaking in English, then switch to Arabic when students ask them to translate new words*".

In a similar way, participant 1 added,

"*If our instructors make us speak English in class. It will assist in developing our English language speaking skills*".

As shown in the preceding explanations, the participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of teaching techniques that allow them to speak English in class. Some interviewees consider the *materials* utilized to teach content as an important factor affecting their acquisition of English language speaking skills. Six of them consider the textbooks as a key factor affecting their level of motivation to speak English inside the classroom. This was made clear by participant 3, who stated:

" *The listening and speaking textbook that we use is not so interesting that I am not keen on speaking English in the English class".*

Another interviewee, participant 28 claimed that they have a basic level which does not cope with the textbook they use; He expressed his notion by saying,

"The textbook we use is written at a high level. The English language department should select a textbook that is more suitable for our basic English level".

The same idea was confirmed by participant 17, who stated,

"My motivation level to participate in oral activities in class changes based on the materials used in class. When our instructor uses some audio-visual materials in class, I am more motivated to participate".

Half of the interviewees mentioned *instructor's feedback* impact on their motivation to speak English inside the classroom. Participant 8 commented by saying

"Instead of focusing on improving our English language speaking skills, our instructors concentrate on correcting our grammatical, lexical and pronunciation mistakes".

Participant 13 claimed,

"*Some of our instructors do not inspire us to speak English*". *"Some instructors focus on high-proficient students more than less-proficient ones during the lecture,"*

Participant 14 blamed some of his instructors for not providing equal opportunities for all students to participate. Some students blamed their Arab instructors for always correcting their spelling, grammatical and pronunciation mistakes, which in turn, reduces their motivation for taking part in speaking activities. This was made evident by Participant 20 when he said:

"My motivation to speak English increased when we had a foreign instructor last semester. He helped us to express ourselves in English. Unlike Arab instructors, he did not care about our grammatical, lexical or pronunciation mistakes."

As the example above shows, having a foreign instructor increases the students' motivation to speak English in class.

Some interviewees seemed to believe that the *classroom atmosphere* has a significant impact on their English language speaking acquisition. They indicated their willingness to speak English in a calm classroom atmosphere with a good relationship between the instructor and the students. This was stated explicitly by participant 2, who claimed:

"Generally speaking, my willingness to speak English depends on the classroom atmosphere. When there is a tense classroom atmosphere, I do not like to engage. I only like to speak English in a warm and friendly classroom atmosphere".

Another important pedagogical factor that some of the participants mentioned is *topical knowledge and interest.* Six of the interviewees emphasized the importance of the topical knowledge and interest in making them keen on or unwilling to take part in English speaking activities in class. According to three interviewees, students are more interested in discussing any topic in English when they have enough knowledge about it. They stated that if they are familiar with the topic, they will able to speak about it. This was made obvious by participant 4 when he stated:

"Speaking in English about topics that I know much about makes me more excited, however, I am not interested in talking about topics I am not familiar with".

Topical interest was another aspect of the topic that the participants stated. The participants believed that their willingness to discuss a topic increases or decreases depending on their interest or lack of interest in it. Participant 16 made this clear in his statement.

"I enjoy talking about interesting topics, but I don't like talking about boring ones".

The participants' acquisition of English language speaking skills was also reported to be affected by the *class size.* Participant 11 verified the effect of class size on their acquisition of English language speaking skills, saying,

"When there are few students in the class, I feel relaxed and enjoy participating in oral activities. When the class is full, I avoid any kind of participation".

4.3. Linguistic Factors

Some of the participants stated that *linguistic factors* influenced their acquisition of English language speaking skills. For example, participant 18 stated,

"Actually I make great efforts to remember a proper word and to arrange words into a correct grammatical form in the limited time that we have when I take part in oral presentations."

Participants' learning of English language speaking skills is influenced by three main linguistic factors: grammatical understanding, vocabulary knowledge, and correct pronunciation.

Six out of the thirty participants emphasized the importance of *grammatical understanding* in their English language speaking skills learning. This was particularly evident in the instance of participant 21, who stated:

"I think we lack grammatical knowledge and understanding. The more grammatical rules we learn and practice, the better we can speak and write in English".

Nine participants identified *vocabulary knowledge* as a linguistic factor that has a significant impact on their learning of English language speaking skills. Participant 29 expressed this by saying,

"The more new English words I know, the better I can speak English in class".

Lack of vocabulary knowledge was one of the factors that made participant 23 feel hesitant to speak English in class. He stated,

"I think that my vocabulary knowledge is not sufficient enough to speak in English. That is why I am hesitant to speak English in class".

Finally, eight of the interviewees referred to *correct pronunciation* as a linguistic factor that has a significant impact on their ability to master English speaking skills. Participant 27 clearly stated this when he said:

"*Incorrect pronunciation makes me feel embarrassed and ashamed; therefore, I am hesitant to speak English in class*".

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The focus of this study was to explore factors affecting Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. The factors affecting EFL learners' speaking skills can be generally classified into three main factors, namely, psychological, pedagogical, and linguistic factors. According to the findings of the qualitative content analysis of the interviews, many sub-factors such as motivation, lack of confidence, second language anxiety, shyness, introversion, classmates' behaviors, teaching methods and materials, instructor's feedback, classroom atmosphere, topical knowledge and interest, class size, grammatical understanding, vocabulary knowledge, and correct pronunciation contribute to the learners' acquisition of English language speaking skills. In general, the findings of this study are consistent with those of previous studies.

5.1. Psychological Factors

In terms of motivation, and as it could be noted from the students' responses during the semi-structured interviews, on one hand, some students lacked the motivation to do some oral presentation tasks. According to Rogers (1996, as cited in Harmer 2001), a lack of intrinsic motivation can lead to course failure. This is one of the challenges the instructor has to overcome. On the other hand, many other students were highly motivated to take part in the speaking activities in class. Furthermore, data from interviews revealed that some students considered motivation as an important factor in raising and strengthening their strong desire to participate in class speaking activities. In their study, Nurjannah et al. (2013) discovered that students with very high motivation have better speaking ability than students with low motivation.

When it comes to second language anxiety as a sub-factor of psychological factors, it was clear from the participants' body language in general and their facial expressions in particular when they were called upon to participate in oral presentations that they were quite anxious. This was particularly evident when they were hesitant and apprehensive about doing speaking tasks in front of their peers. Anxiety, according to MacIntyr and Gardner (1991), can create a variety of difficulties in language learning, retention, and production. Similarly, Ozturk and Gurbuz (2014) investigated the factors affecting speaking anxiety in Turkish EFL students and discovered that pronunciation, immediate questions, fear of making mistakes, and negative evaluation are the most common causes of speaking anxiety in EFL students. This type of speaking anxiety was similarly confusing to the participants in this study. Due to their inability to form sentences in English on their own, the students were unable to adequately practice and prepare for the oral activities.

Due to their high levels of second language anxiety, the students struggled to accomplish oral activities in front of the class, resulting in unintended consequences such as a fear of speaking in front of others, not being understood by others, and a sense of inferiority complex. In line with this finding, Park and Lee (2005) discovered that students' levels of anxiety were negatively related to their oral performance. The more anxious students are about speaking English, the lower their oral performance scores.

Lack of confidence resulted in discouragement by classmates inside and outside the classroom seems to be a central psychological sub-factor in the study. Jianing (2007) explained this sub-factor by saying, "To protect themselves from being laughed at, the students are reluctant to speak English….the less they speak, the less they improve their speaking skills, and the more they are afraid of speaking" (p.1). When they tried to start oral presentation in English in front of their classmates, they were afraid of being laughed at or offended. Some of the participants appeared to suffer from the feeling of being unsecure when speaking in English. The lecturer tried to help participants overcame their psychological barriers by motivating them, encouraging them, and creating an enjoyable classroom environment. This finding supported the findings of a previous study by Park and Lee (2005) who found out that the more confident students are, the better their oral performance.

The participants also mentioned *shyness* and *introversion* as significant psychological factors that influenced their interest in participating in English language speaking activities in class. As was found to be the case in earlier studies, (Fallah, 2014; Riasati, 2012), shyness was reported to negatively affect students' desire to participate in speaking activities in class. Due to their extreme self-focus, lack of confidence, and low self-esteem, shy students may purposefully avoid engaging in class discussions (Fallah, 2014). Due to the lost opportunities for speaking practice, students are less motivated to learn the language, which has a negative impact on developing their English language speaking skills. Introversion was also found to reduce the EFL students' participation in speaking exercises in class. Extrovert learners typically have lower levels of communication anxiety and are more ready to communicate in English. They are also more likely to be socially active individuals, which gives them more opportunities to practice speaking (MacIntyre, Babin, &

Clément, 1999). Due to some students' shyness, hesitation, and lack of confidence, they were unable to talk effectively and had a lower vocal volume. During the oral presentation sessions, some students were notably unwilling to participate. Even when they were called upon to participate, some of them avoided eye contact with the audience and kept their faces down due to their lack of confidence and their feeling of shyness and introversion.

5.2. Pedagogical Factors

The sub-factors that come under pedagogical factors affecting Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills include, but not limited to, teaching methods used in teaching the listening and speaking course, such as lecturers' use of their native tongue, Arabic, in English classes, the absence of interactive English sessions, and the lack of exposure to the target language. Peer attitudes are also important in the learning process (Harmer, 2001). This is clear from the findings of this study. First and foremost of the pedagogical factors, the classmates' behaviors have the greatest influence on the learners' acquisition of English language speaking skills. Classmates' different language skills levels, attitudes, and relationships between them were reported to have an impact on how much they engaged in oral activities in class. It was noted that unlike few discouraging students, many students were extremely helpful and encouraging to one another. They helped each other by filling in word gaps when their classmates forgot an English word during their oral presentation.

Some participants complained that they would like to speak English with their level-equal classmates, but that they were unable to do so since their more advanced peers used all the available speaking time. This is consistent with the findings of Svensson's (2016) research study which indicated that the differences in English language proficiency between classmates often affect their oral production skills development negatively. This was further supported by Yu (2015) who argued that language learners with high proficiency levels encroach on the communication space of students with low proficiency levels, which further hinders the development of their oral production. As a consequence, there is a risk that learners with high language proficiency will take over the entire conversation and discourage other students (Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015).

Additionally, the participants claimed that their acquisition of English language speaking skills relies on teaching methods and materials employed to teach the listening and speaking content. They expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of teaching methods and resources that would have allowed them to communicate in English in the classroom. They claimed that because their instructors only use the textbook in English listening and speaking sessions, which makes them get bored quickly and not interested in taking part in the speaking activities in the class. Dörnyei (2007) asserted that in order for students to learn a second language for the long term, it is not enough to provide them with education that is cognitively adequate alone; the environment in which they are learning should also be enjoyable and motivating for them. Peng (2007) confirmed that higher levels of willingness to communicate in English are frequently a result of increased motivation.

The learners' acquisition of English language speaking skills was also found to be influenced by instructor's feedback. The findings of this study show that learners' development of English language speaking skills declines when their instructor does not provide adequate support. Kang (2005) and Peng (2007) emphasized the significance of social support from instructors in promoting a secure classroom environment and fostering situational second language desire among their students to interact in English inside the classroom. The participants also stated that they prefer speaking with instructors who are native speakers of English over instructors who are not. This is consistent with Miller and Pearson's (2013) study, which found that, when compared to a Chinese teacher, students preferred to speak with a native English-speaking teacher. The participants claimed that English native speaking instructors simply value their capacity for self-expression and give little consideration to whether or not they use proper grammar. On the contrary, the participants stated that their Arabic English instructors always correct their grammatical errors, and they added that this decreases their motivation for taking part in English language speaking activities in class. This is in favor of the study by Zarrinabadi (2014) who drew the conclusion that when the instructor's correction immediately follows the students' errors, it is expected to reduce their second language willing to communicate in English. The important influence of instructor's error correction on second language willing to communicate in English was also stated in Kang's (2005) study. Overall, the instructor's feedback has a considerable impact on students' learning of English language speaking skills.

The findings of the current study are in line with findings of earlier studies (Joe, Hiver, & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Khajavy, MacIntyre, & Barabadi, 2017) that the classroom atmosphere has a significant impact on students' learning of English language speaking skills. The participants confirmed that they are interested in taking part in English language speaking activities when there is a stress-free, noisy-free and comfortable

atmosphere and when there is a good rapport between students and instructor. According to Joe and associates (2017), the social climate in the classroom has a direct impact on the satisfaction of students' basic mental needs, which in turn has a positive impact on the growth of the more self-directed forms of motivation that lead to higher levels of willingness to communicate in English. In addition to fostering enjoyment and willing to communicate in English, a positive classroom atmosphere lowers anxiety among students (Khajavy et al., 2017).

Another factor that was found to have an effect on the learners' learning of English language speaking skills is topical knowledge and interest. The participants in this study believed that both topical knowledge and topical interest have significant impact on students' interest to participate in English language speak activities. Consequently, a learner's rate of engagement in speaking activities may decrease if he lacks knowledge about or interest in a particular topic. This study confirms the results of a previous study, by Tuan and Mai (2015) who stated that the majority of students indicated that the topical knowledge is the most influential factor that affects their speaking performance (81%). This is confirmed by other studies (Kang, 2005; Riasati, 2012; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015) in relation to impact of the topical knowledge and interest on students' ability to communicate in English. An increase in topical knowledge and interest could result in a learner's linguistic self-confidence, whilst a lack of topical knowledge and interest could make communication more difficult. This is similar to the findings of Shabani's previous study (2013). He discovered that prior knowledge about a topic has a significant impact on speaking ability. Similarly, students seem to participate most actively when discussing a topic they are interested in, but they avoid talking about topics they feel boring (Kang, 2005).

Another finding was that the EFL learners' in-class involvement in speaking exercises was impacted by the class size. According to the findings, student participation declines as class size rises. This finding supports the claim made by Wells and Chang-Well (1992) that smaller classrooms are more conducive to fostering higher rate of participation. Additionally, according to Aubrey (2010), students in larger classes may have fewer opportunities to talk with one another than those in smaller classes. A smaller class size, on the other hand, gives students more time to practice and build their confidence, which in turn boosts their excitement for speaking English (Khazaei et al., 2012).

5.3. Linguistic Factors

In this study, in regard to linguistic factors, grammatical understanding, vocabulary knowledge and correct pronunciation were found to affect students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. Many students lacked vocabulary understanding and grammatical knowledge. Their lexical and grammatical errors in oral task performance were reflected in mispronounced words and using wrong words and grammatical structures. Additionally, they experienced language limitations, such as a lack of consistency in their speech, difficulties with pronunciation, a lack of vocabulary, a lack of grammatical knowledge, and so on. The lecturer assisted the participants in overcoming the limitations they encountered in their oral presentation task performance by allowing them to write their ideas in their mother tongue, Arabic, and then helped them approach an English language equivalent. In their study, Liu and Jackson (2009) claimed that a lack of vocabulary was the most common barrier to oral communication among Chinese English learners. By the same token, the participants in this study also saw their lack of vocabulary as a major roadblock to their oral tasks completion. This is in accordance with the findings of a study by Baran-Lucarz (2014) who concluded that lack of self-confidence and high hesitation to speak English are caused by low self-assessment in pronunciation and fear of receiving negative evaluation. Likewise, Tokoz-Goktepe (2014) investigated the speaking problems of ninth-grade high school Turkish EFL learners and discovered that the students' problems in speaking English were generally due to inadequate language and content knowledge, limited contact with English outside the classroom, and the misdirected methods and materials used in the classroom.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to explore factors affecting Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. The findings showed that a number of factors, including motivation, lack of confidence, second language anxiety, shyness, introversion, classmates' behaviors, teaching methods and materials, instructor's feedback, classroom atmosphere, topical knowledge and interest, class size, grammatical understanding, vocabulary knowledge, and correct pronunciation have an impact on Qassim University EFL learners' acquisition of English language speaking skills. The findings of the study have some pedagogical implications for researchers and instructors of English as a foreign language. The findings suggest that Qassim University EFL students need much more participation in speaking activities in the class as most instructors focus primarily on correcting grammatical, lexical and pronunciation mistakes and neglect developing other important skills like speaking. Instead of employing the grammar translation method in EFL

classrooms, a communicative approach with a focus on speaking rather than grammar should be used if the primary goal of second language learning is to develop learners' English language speaking skills. English language instructors should be aware of the fact that frequency and amount of second language communication increases students' willingness to communicate in English (Yashima et al., 2004).

According to the findings of the study, second language anxiety is a significant factor that negatively affects EFL learners' willingness and motivation to participate in English speaking activities in the class. EFL students avoid taking part in speaking activities in class and instead choose to stay silent due to their fear of making mistakes. A non-threatening and comfortable learning environment should be existed in the classroom so that students feel safe and unafraid of making errors or being teased by their classmates. Instructors should accept their students' grammatical, lexical, and pronunciation mistakes as a normal part of the second language learning process in order to motivate them to participate in speaking activities in class and boost their confidence.

The findings of this study make it clear that a variety of factors influence Qassim University EFL students' acquisition of English language speaking skills. It seems important for instructors to understand how various psychological, pedagogical, and linguistic factors interact and how this interaction affects students' desire to participate in speaking activities in the classroom in an EFL setting like Saudi Arabia. All these factors should be taken into account when planning or carrying out speaking activities in the class. To build students' self-confidence and willingness to participate in class speaking activities, instructors must create a relaxed and comfortable classroom atmosphere and use interesting teaching methods and materials. It is recommended that researchers study and investigate each factor influencing speaking skills separately and in depth. Furthermore, they can employ other qualitative and quantitative methods and tools to achieve better results.

REFERENCE LIST

Aeni, N., Jabu, B., Rahman, M. A., & Strid, J. E. (2017). English Oral Communication Apprehension in Students of Indonesian Maritime. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 7*(4), 158. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v7n4p158.

Afshar, H. S., & Asakereh, A. (2016). Speaking skills problems encountered by Iranian EFL freshmen and seniors from their own and their English instructors' perspectives. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 13*(1), 112–130 https://eflt.nus.edu.sg/v13n12016/afshar.pdf.

Ahmed, S. T. S., & Qasem, B. T. A. (2019). Problems of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in South Yemen: a case study of Lahj Governorate. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies on Humanities, 2*(4) http://journal.unhas.ac.id/index.php/jish.

Alhaisoni, M., & Rahman M. (2013). Teaching English in Saudi Arabia: Prospects and challenges. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistic, 26*(1), 112-118.

Al-Sobhi, B. M. S., & Preece, A. S. (2018). Teaching English-speaking skills to the Arab students in the Saudi school in Kuala Lumpur: problems and solutions. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 6*(1), 1–11 http://www.journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJELS/article/view/4178.

Asif, F. (2017). The anxiety factors among Saudi EFL learners: A study from English language teachers' perspective. *Canadian Center of Science and Education, English Language Teaching, 10*(6) 160-173.

Aubrey, S. C. (2010). *Influences on Japanese students' willingness to communicate across three different sized EFL classes.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Bachman, L., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baker, J., & Westrup, H. (2003). *Essential Speaking Skills: A Handbook for English Language Teachers.* London: Continuum.

Baran-Lucarz, M. (2014). The link between pronunciation anxiety and willingness to communicate in the foreign-language classroom: The Polish EFL context. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, *70*(4), 445-473.

Bouangeune, S. (2009). Using L1 in teaching vocabulary to low English proficiency level students: a case study at the University of Laos. *English Language Teaching Journal, 2*(3), 186–193.

Bouzar, S. (2019). Issues in teaching speaking to EFL Learners. *Education and Linguistics Research, 5*(1),

70-79.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Brown, G. & Yule, G. (1983). *Teaching the Spoken Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burns, A. (2017). Research and the teaching of speaking in the second language classroom. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning, Volume III*. New York: Routledge.

Burns, A. & Joyce, H. (1997). *Focus on speaking*. Sydney: National Center for English Language Teaching and Research.

Bygate. (1987). Speaking. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chaney, A. (1998). *Teaching oral communication in grades k-8*. US: A Viacom Company.

Chowdhury, N., & Shaila, S. M. (2011). Teaching speaking in large classes: crossing the barriers. *Stamford Journal of English, 6*, 68–85.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education*. London and New York: Routledge.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.

Crossman, Ashley. (2020, August 27). Understanding Purposive Sampling. Retrieved from https://www.thoughtco.com/purposive-sampling-3026727

Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language (2nd edition)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486999.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fallah, N. (2014). Willingness to communicate in English, communication self-confidence, motivation, shyness and teacher immediacy among Iranian English-major undergraduates: A structural equation modeling approach. *Learning and Individual Differences*, *30*, 140-147.

Gillies, A. (2019). *Consecutive interpreting: A short course.* London: Routledge.

Goh, C. C. M., & Burns, A. (2012). *Teaching speaking: A holistic approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gomleksiz, M. N. (2007). Effectiveness of cooperative learning (jigsaw II) method on teaching English as a foreign language to engineering students (Case of Firat University, Turkey). *European Journal of Engineering Education, 32*(5), 613–625. https://doi.org/10.1080/03043790701433343.

Gower & Phillips & Walter. (1995). *Teaching Practice*. Oxford: Heineman.

Harmer, J., 2001. *The practice of English language teaching.* 3rd ed. Harlow: Longman

Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and learning in the language classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Humaera, I. (2015). Inhibition in speaking performance. *Journal of The Association for Arabic and English, 1*(1), 31-50. https://ejournal.iainkendari.ac.id/langkawi/article/view/379

Humphries, R. (2011). Language anxiety in international students. Griffith Working Papers in Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication, 4, 1/2, 65-77.

Ibna Seraj, P. M., & Habil, H. (2021). A systematic overview of issues for developing EFL learners' oral English communication skills. *Journal of Language and Education, 1*(1), 229–240 https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2021.10737.

Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a lingua franca: attitude and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jianing, X. (2007). Storytelling in the EFL Speaking Classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, *13*(11), Retrieved on April 10, 2022 from www.iteslj.org.

Joe, H. K., Hiver, P., & Al-Hoorie, A. H. (2017). Classroom social climate, self-determined motivation, willingness to communicate, and achievement: A study of structural relationships in instructed second

language settings. *Learning and Individual Differences*, *53*, 133-144.

Johnson, K. E. (1995). *Understanding communication in second language classrooms.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, R.B. and Christensen, L.B. (2008) *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches*. 3rd Edition, Sage Publications, Inc., Lose Angeles.

Kang, S. J. (2005). Dynamic emergence of situational willingness to communicate in a second language. *System*, *33*(2), 277-292.

Kelly, G. (2006). *How to teach pronunciation.* India: Pearson Education.

Khajavy, G. H., MacIntyre, P.D., & Barabadi, E. (2017). Role of the emotions and classroom environment in willingness to communicate: Applying doubly latent multilevel analysis in second language acquisition research. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 1-20.

Khazaei, Z. M., Zadeh, A. M., & Ketabi, S. (2012). Willingness to communicate in Iranian EFL learners: The Effect of Class Size. *English Language Teaching*, *5*(11), 181-187.

Lazaraton, A. (2014). Second language speaking. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. M. Brinton, & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, (4th ed., pp. 106–120). Boston: National Geographic Learning.

Liu, M. & Jackson, J. (2009). Reticence in Chinese EFL students at varied proficiency levels. *TESL Canada Journal, 26*(2), 65-81.

Luoma, S. (2004). *Assessing speaking.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lwin, S. M. (2016). Promoting language learners' cross-cultural awareness through comparative analyses of Asian folktales. *Teflin Journal, 27*(2), 166-181.https://journal.teflin.org/index.php/journal/article/view/330

MacIntyre, P. D., Babin, P. A., & Clément, R. (1999). Willingness to communicate: Antecedents & consequences. *Communication Quarterly*, *47*(2), 215-229.

MacIntyer, P.D. & Gardner, R.C. (1991). Language anxiety. Its relationship to other anxieties and to processing in native and second languages. *Language Learning, 41*, 513-534.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning, 44*, 283–305 https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103.x.

Mart, Ç. T. (2013). The facilitating role of L1 in ESL classes. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 3*(1), 9–14.

Maulidar, K., Gani, S. A., & Samad, I. A. (2019). Teacher's strategies in teaching speaking for Cadets. *English Education Journal, 10*(1), 80-94. https://doaj.org/article/c3e27a9c55ea46109047c68ab72e6ea6?

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (2005). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide*. The Falmer Press e-library.

Mazouzi, S. (2013). *Analysis of some factors affecting learner's oral performance. A case study*: 3rd Year Pupils of Menaa's Middle Schools. M. A. Dissertation Department of Foreign Languages, English Division, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Mohamed Khider University of Biskra, People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Méndez, M. G., & Peña, A. (2013). Emotions as learning enhancers of foreign language learning motivation. *Profile Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, 15*(1), 109–124.

Miller, A., & Pearson, J. (2013). Can I talk to you? The effects of instructor position, nationality, and teaching style on students' perceived willingness to communicate and on teacher evaluations. *Communication Quarterly*, *61*(1), 18-34.

Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching & learning*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Nurjannah, A. et. al. (2013). The Effect of Motivation on Students' Speaking Ability. *Jurnal Fkip Unila.* 2 (9).

Öztürk, G., & Gürbüz, N. (2014). Speaking anxiety among Turkish EFL learners: The case at a state university. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 10*(1), 1-17. Retrieved from http://jlls.org/index.php/jlls/article/viewFile/178/165

Pandey, M., & Pandey, P. (2014). Better English for better employment opportunities. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach and Studies, 01*(4), 93–100.

Park, H., & Lee, A. R. (2005). *L2 learners' anxiety, self-confidence and oral performance.* In *Proceedings of the 10th Conference of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 107-208).

Patil, Z.N. (2008). Rethinking the objectives of teaching English in Asia. *Asian EFL Journal.10* (4), 227-240. http://www.asianefl-journal.com/December_08_zn.php

Pawlak, M., & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, A. (2015). Investigating the dynamic nature of L2 willingness to communicate. *System*, *50*, 1-9.

Peng, J. E. (2007). Willingness to communicate in the Chinese EFL classroom: A cultural perspective. In J. Liu (Ed.), *English language teaching in China: New approaches, perspectives and standards* (pp. 250-269). London: Continuum.

Putri, I. C., Damri, D., Engkizar, E., Asril, Z., & Efendi, E. (2020). The use of Android Game to improve impaired hearing student vocabulary mastery. *Journal of Research and Educational Research Evaluation, 9* (2), 85-93. http://repository.unp.ac.id/30951/

Rahman, M. M., & Singh, M. K. M. (2021). English Medium university STEM teachers' and students' ideologies in constructing content knowledge through translanguaging. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2021.1915950.

Riasati, M. J. (2012). EFL learners' perception of factors influencing willingness to speak English in language classrooms: A qualitative study. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, *17*(10), 1287-1297.

Richards & Renandya. (2002). *Methodology in Language. Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Robson, M. (2013). *THE ENGLISH EFFECT: the impact of English, what it's worth to the UK and why it matters to the world.* London: British Council.

Safotso, G. T. (2018). A study of Chadian learners/speakers of English's pronunciation. *English Language Teaching, 11*(10), 1-9. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1191154.pdf

Seraj, P. M. I., Habil, H., & Hasan, M. K. (2021). Investigating the problems of teaching oral English communication skills in an EFL context at the tertiary level. *International Journal of Instruction, 14*(2), 501–516 https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2021.14228a.

Shabani, M.B. (2013). The Effect of Background Knowledge on Speaking Ability of Iranian EFL Learners. *Journal of Marketing and Management.* 1(1)

Shanmugasundaram, S. (2013). *Factors Affecting the Spoken English of Tertiary Level Students from Arts and Science Colleges in the District of Tiruchirapalli and Thanjavur- A Study*, PhD Thesis, Department of Humanities, NITT

Soureshjani, K. H., & Riahipour, P. (2012). Demotivating factors on English speaking skill: A study of EFL language learners and teachers' attitudes. *World Applied Sciences Journal, 17* (3), 327-339. https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.389.7467&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Svensson, J. (2016). *The influence of classmates on students' willingness to communicate in English: A study based on teacher and student views and experiences at a Swedish upper secondary school.* (Unpublished degree project). Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden.

TESOL International Association. (2014). *TESOL International Association Research Agenda 2014.* https://www.tesol.org/docs/default-source/pdf/2014_tesol-research-agenda.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to Teach speaking.* Harlow, England: Longman.

Tokoz-Goktepe, F. (2014). Speaking problems of 9th grade high school Turkish learners of L2 English and possible reasons for those problems: Exploring the teachers and students' perspectives. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *116*, 1875-1879. Retrieved from http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042814005047

Toujani, M. M., & Hermessi, T. (2018). English language teaching research in the Middle East and North Africa: multiple perspectives. In S. Hidri (Ed.), *Self-esteem, self-expectancy and oral achievement in*

the Tunisian EFL context. Springer International Publishing https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98533-6.

Tuan, N.H. & Mai, T.N. (2015). Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Performance at Le Thanh Hien High School. *Asian journal of Educational Research.* 3(2).

Wells, G., Chang-Wells, G.L. (1992). *Constructing knowledge together: classrooms as centers of inquiry and literacy.* Heinemenn, Portsmouth, NH.

Wierzbicka, A. (2006). *English: meaning and culture.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Xie, Q. (2020). Teaching English oral communication for China's English minor undergraduates: barriers, challenges and options. *The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 7*(1), 73–90 ISSN 2308-6262, http://caes.hku.hk/ajal.

Yashima, T., Zenuk-Nishide, L., & Shimizu, K. (2004). The influence of attitudes and effect on willingness to communicate and second language communication. *Language Learning*, *54*(1), 119-152.

Yu, M. (2015). An examination of the dynamic feature of WTC through dyadic group interaction. *System*, *55*, 11-20.

Zarrinabadi, N. (2014). Communicating in a second language: Investigating the effect of teacher on learners' willingness to communicate. *System*, *42*, 288-295.

Zhang, X., & Head, K. (2010). Dealing with learner reticence in the speaking class. *ELT Journal, 64*(1), 1–9 https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccp018.

Zhang, Y. (2009). Reading to speak: Integrating oral communication skills. *English Teaching Forum, 1*(1), 31-34

Appendix A

Questions for semi-structured interviews

English	Arabic
1- Do you want to improve your English speaking skills? Why or why not?	هل ترغب في تحسين مهاراتك في التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية؟ لما و لما لا؟
2- Do you feel confident when participating in speaking activities in class?	هل تشعر بالثقة عند المشاركة في أنشطة التحدث في الفصل؟
3- Do you get anxious when you have to participate in speaking activities in class?	هل تشعر بالقلق عندما تضطر إلى المشاركة في أنشطة التحدث في الفصل؟
4- Do you feel comfortable or worried when communicating with your classmates in English?	هل تشعر بالراحة أو القلق عند التواصل مع زملائك باللغة الإنجليزية؟
5- Are you satisfied with the teaching methods and materials used in the English language speaking class? Why or why not?	هل أنت راضٍ عن طرق التدريس والمواد المستخدمة في فصل التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية؟ لما و لما لا؟
6- Do you prefer learning English with an Arabic instructor or a foreign instructor? Why?	هل تفضل تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية مع مدرس عربي أو مدرس أجنبي؟ لماذا ؟
7- Does the classroom atmosphere encourage or discourage your participation in English speaking activities? How?	هل جو الفصل الدراسي يشجع أو لا يشجع على مشاركتك في أنشطة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية؟ كيف؟
8- Do you believe your knowledge and interest in the topic will improve your participation in English speaking activities in class? How?	هل تعتقد أن معرفتك واهتمامك بالموضوع سيحسن مشاركتك في أنشطة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية في الفصل؟ كيف؟
9- Do you believe that the size of your English class influences your willingness to participate in English speaking activities? How?	هل تعتقد أن حجم صفك في اللغة الإنجليزية يؤثر على رغبتك في المشاركة في أنشطة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية؟ كيف؟

10- Do you think that understanding grammatical rules affect your willingness to participate in English speaking activities in class?	هل تعتقد أن فهم القواعد النحوية يؤثر على رغبتك في المشاركة في أنشطة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية في الفصل؟
11- Do you think that vocabulary knowledge affect your willingness to participate in English speaking activities in class?	هل تعتقد أن معرفة المفردات تؤثر على رغبتك في المشاركة في أنشطة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية في الفصل؟
12- Do you think that correct pronunciation affect your willingness to participate in English speaking activities in class?	هل تعتقد أن النطق الصحيح يؤثر على رغبتك في المشاركة في أنشطة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية في الفصل؟
13- Do you feel shy when you have to participate in English language speaking activities in class?	هل تشعر بالخجل عندما تضطر إلى المشاركة في أنشطة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية في الفصل؟
14- Do you have a personality that differs from that of your classmates? Do you consider yourself to be an introvert or an extrovert? Is this influencing your willingness to engage in English speaking activities?	هل لديك شخصية تختلف عن شخصية زملائك في الفصل؟ هل تعتبر نفسك انطوائيًا أم منفتحًا؟ هل يؤثر هذا على رغبتك في الانخراط في أنشطة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية؟