



Understanding the Attitudes, Challenges, and Support Needs of Saudi EFL Learners in Enhancing Their English-Speaking Skills

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the attitudes, challenges, and support needs of female Saudi EFL university students aimed at enhancing their English-speaking skills through semi-structured interviews. Guided by the framework of Sociocultural Theory, findings revealed students' strong motivation towards improving verbal competence, yet lingering anxiety and vocabulary limitations frequently still inhibit their confidence and abilities for spontaneous discourse. However, opportunities remain through integrating multimedia tools, amplifying interactive peer collaboration, and instructor feedback to foster more conducive communicative environments catered to Saudi contextual needs. Although small-scale and confined to one setting, discoveries validating learner perspectives provide initial launch points to inform effective, tailored educational innovations targeting the pervasive struggles hindering a generation of ambitious Saudis from attaining coveted fluency within globally interconnected digital economies where English mastery promises immense academic and professional prospects. This pioneering research forms vital foundations for further expanded explorations on facilitating needed evidence-based speaking skills enhancements customized to overcome longstanding EFL barriers locally while connecting outward.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Attitudes, Support Needs, Saudi EFL Learners, English Speaking Skills, Qualitative Study, Semi-Structured Interviews, Motivation, Anxiety

1. Introduction

English as a foreign language (EFL) is significant in Saudi Arabia. EFL is a crucial tool for international communication and strengthens business and academic pursuits worldwide [1]. Being proficient in the use of English, especially in conversational skills, carries great value for people across all age groups who are studying or residing within this country. Knowing the language enables learners to engage more effectively and boosts their competitive ability both domestically and internationally. Without a doubt, mastering fluency in spoken English can bring significant advantages to one's life path, greatly enhancing our understanding of culture, tradition, and lifestyle, among others, beyond various regions or countries worldwide [1]. This research aims to assess the thoughts and opinions held by female EFL students at King Abdul-Aziz University in Saudi Arabia regarding improving their spoken English.

The Saudi government has placed significant value on proficiency in English due to its ability to increase educational excellence and revise national economic development [2]. This research seeks to determine the attitudes and any challenges experienced by Saudi students as they attempt to improve their speaking abilities within the language. This study will employ a qualitative research design to collect and analyze the data. Investigating these factors is necessary to help encourage individuals to reach a satisfying level of proficiency when communicating through English.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The research problem focuses on the challenges posed by Saudi EFL learners in enhancing their speaking skills. Communication is crucial for academic, professional, and social success [2]. Unfortunately, many students struggle to increase their proficiency due to several barriers, including fear of making mistakes, limited practice opportunities, or lack of confidence when using the language [3]. By understanding these issues that affect learners' English-speaking abilities, it will be possible to create interventions and support systems specifically for Saudi EFL learners' needs. Improving student competency in English can have incredible positive impacts. Improving the student's competency will help enhance their language and confidence [3]. Students will be able to succeed inside and outside classrooms by overcoming things that would seriously affect their fluency.

1.2. Statement of the Purpose

This research seeks to determine the attitudes of Saudi EFL learners regarding their speaking skills. Our goal is to identify and understand the learners' perspectives, challenges, and support needs to develop effective strategies for enhancing English-speaking proficiency among them. By gaining profound insights into how students perceive their standard of spoken language, this study will provide valuable data on how students improve their speaking abilities within the language. The findings from this project will help Saudi EFL learners enhance their verbal

abilities.

1.3. Research Questions

- 1) What resources do students use to improve their speaking fluency in English?
- 2) What challenges do Saudi students face in trying to improve their English-speaking skills?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theoretical framework of communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes the importance of developing learners' communicative competence in the target language. Communicative competence consists of four components: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence [4]. CLT aims to provide learners with meaningful and authentic opportunities to use the language for various purposes and contexts rather than focusing on the mastery of grammatical rules and structures. CLT also promotes learner autonomy, interaction, and collaboration, as well as the integration of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing [5]. CLT is relevant to this study because it provides a rationale for investigating the attitudes, challenges, and support needs of Saudi EFL learners in enhancing their English-speaking skills. Speaking is one of the essential skills for effective communication, and it requires learners to apply their communicative competence in various situations. However, speaking also poses many difficulties and barriers for EFL learners, especially in contexts where they have limited exposure and practice opportunities. Therefore, this study aims to explore how Saudi EFL learners perceive their speaking skills, what factors affect their speaking performance, and what resources and strategies can help them improve their speaking proficiency. Sociocultural theory (SCT), among other theories, has been employed to enhance English proficiency levels, diverging from static methods [1]. Sociocultural theory has its roots in the work of Lev Vygotsky [6]. The SCT guides our study on Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' attitudes and support requirements for improving their English skills. It states that social interactions and observational learning profoundly affect language development [2]. The SCT explains how language learners learn by actively engaging in and monitoring their linguistic environment. This research seeks to determine the attitudes, challenges, and assistance needs of Saudi EFL learners within a clear theoretical framework. This research employs qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews to obtain and gather an in-depth insight into students' perspectives and understanding of the investigated phenomena [7].

2.2. EFL in Saudi Context

Saudi EFL learners encounter psychological and language-related factors that impact their ability to speak English fluently. [8] explored these problems by investigating

emotional barriers such as shyness, peer pressure, and anxiety about making mistakes, which inhibit speaking performance. The results of [8] revealed that shyness, peer pressure, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes were the primary affective factors hindering Arabic-speaking EFL learners' performance in speaking skills. Language competence issues like inadequate vocabulary levels also contribute to this difficulty in communication due to a lack of real-world practice outside of the classroom setting [2]. In addition, an investigation on female Saudi EFL learners conducted by [9] highlighted late exposure as one major factor leading to their lack of confidence while speaking in English, which provided opportunities for interactions with native speakers through discussion groups or virtual meetings. To improve speaking proficiency among Saudi students learning English at higher education levels, it is essential to tackle these challenges mentioned above so they can adequately enhance their verbal abilities. Although research has been done on Saudi EFL learners, it is important to further research the attitudes toward speaking skills and the kind of resources that can help them improve.

The need for opportunities to practice English speaking is a significant challenge for Saudi EFL learners [10]. This can lead to an inability to overcome the fear of errors and judgment, impeding their development in language fluency. Psychological issues are further increased by the lack of exposure to native speakers, making it difficult for students to become truly proficient in conversing in English with others [11]. Learning a second language can be a trying experience, mainly if reliable resources are either unaffordable or not easily accessible. Without access to those materials, students may become discouraged as they continue learning the new language [12].

According to [13], more vocabulary is needed for Saudi EFL learners to achieve spoken English proficiency. The inability to find the right words and phrases to accurately express their ideas stifles confident communication. To solve this challenge, access to more excellent resources such as tutoring services and social media could provide a more conducive setting for mastering language fluency [9]. Raising awareness among educators and administrators is essential to bridge the gap between theoretical ability and practical performance when speaking in English among Saudi EFL learners [9]. It is important to make them knowledgeable about their learning needs to provide the necessary support for students effectively. Evaluating individual circumstances can provide valuable insights into devising effective instruction strategies tailored to meet language requirements. This knowledge will help devise appropriate backing frameworks to sharpen the primary language skills of Saudis proficiently.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study aims to investigate the attitudes and challenges experienced by Saudi students as they attempt to enhance their speaking abilities in the English language. This research employs a qualitative research design and a constructionist

interpretive approach that relies on semi-structured interviews [7]. Following [14] suggestion, using a qualitative research design is of utmost importance due to its ability to promote the investigation of human experiences and its contribution to the progression of social knowledge. To ensure validity, semi-structured interviews have been strategically crafted to gather precise participant information [7]. This process involves participants completing a form and providing their responses. Including interviews is essential for examining the attitudes, challenges, and support requirements of Saudi EFL learners at King Abdul-Aziz University.

3.2. Participant Recruitment

To investigate the factors behind the attitudes, challenges, and support needs of Saudi EFL learners in enhancing their English-speaking proficiency, this project will involve Saudi female EFL students from King Abdulaziz University, KSA. These students will represent various English levels and tracks in the English Language Institute (ELI). The age range of the female students is between 18 and 20 years old. Moreover, the study participants were selected conveniently based on their availability during the experiment, accessibility from the research site, and willingness to take part in the present study. For several reasons, female ELS students at KAU were selected to participate in this study. Firstly, these students had varying experiences related to improving their spoken English. Most students have engaged in intensive English learning for at least six years before enrolling in the university. Secondly, based on their current level in the ELI, they exhibit varying levels of English proficiency. Therefore, these factors may help determine the attitudes and any challenges experienced by Saudi students as they attempt to improve their speaking abilities within the language.

3.3. Data Collection

The data collection procedure will involve semi-structured interviews (See **Appendix**). This instrument is ideal for research as it allows for deeply examining participants' experiences and contextualizing learners' viewpoints [15]. It is also designed to obtain comprehensive answers regarding the participants' views, difficulties, and requirements for assistance in improving their skills in spoken English [11]. The interview questions were adapted from [10] as they correspond with the research framework and objectives. I piloted these questions with two EFL students to refine the instrument and enhance its overall quality and effectiveness. Firstly, the participants will be contacted to provide an online interview consent form. All participants will complete the consent form, indicating their willingness to participate. Secondly, the participants will be questioned according to the interview guidelines, addressing questions about their attitudes toward enhancing their proficiency in spoken English. The interviews will be conducted with approximately seven students for a fast and accessible study because the time period for the research is short. The participants will be interviewed separately via the

Zoom App, and each interview will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes. Moreover, the questions will be formulated in Arabic to facilitate students in expressing their thoughts without any difficulty. By using their native language, the students may feel more comfortable and be able to provide more comprehensive and accurate feedback. With participants' approval, audio-recording these interviews is essential to ensure data accuracy. This instrument is of utmost importance in effectively capturing Saudi female EFL students' different viewpoints and experiences. Furthermore, acquiring informed consent from participants is crucial to maintaining ethical principles in research [15].

3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves thematic analysis and coding techniques [14]. The semi-structured interview aims to evaluate individuals' proficiency in the English language, as well as identify the difficulties they encounter and the support they need. Data analysis will involve a comprehensive thematic analysis of interview responses and answers, which will then be transcribed in Microsoft Word365. The transcripts will be emailed to the participating students for confirmation of their statements, and they will be encouraged to report any concerns regarding their recording. This Member checking techniques were utilized to promote the reliability and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings. This research will also use data coding. Before data coding, the responses will be categorized to uncover themes, patterns, and categories [10]. Under thematic analysis, the coded segments will be arranged into themes that contain participants' significant issues, attitudes, and assistance needs. Thematic analysis helps analyze data and find patterns [16].

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Coding and Thematic Analysis (Table 1, Table 2)

Table 1. Codes.

Code	Description
Positive attitudes	Participants expressed positive attitudes about improving their English-speaking skills.
Social/professional benefits	Participants cited significant social and professional benefits of improving skills.
Interest in activities	Participants expressed interest in communicative activities to improve their skills.
Self-consciousness	Some participants have lingering self-consciousness that hinders confidence.
Vocabulary limitations	All participants identified vocabulary limitations as a critical challenge.
Unfamiliar terminology	Many participants noted unfamiliarity with terminology and expressions as a challenge.
Insufficient practice opportunities	Most participants highlighted the lack of practice opportunities as a barrier.
Desire for multimedia	Many participants suggested integrating multimedia tools to aid learning.
Need for collaboration	Participants emphasized the need for discussion groups, peer tutoring, etc.
Need for feedback	Participants highlighted the importance of instructor feedback.

Table 2. Themes.

Theme	Description	Description
Attitudes	Participants have largely positive attitudes but some lingering anxiety/self-consciousness.	Participants have largely positive attitudes but some lingering anxiety/self-consciousness.
Challenges	Critical challenges include vocabulary limitations, unfamiliar terminology, and insufficient practice opportunities.	Critical challenges include vocabulary limitations, unfamiliar terminology, and insufficient practice opportunities.
Support Needs	Desired supports include multimedia integration, peer collaboration/tutoring, and instructor feedback.	Desired supports include multimedia integration, peer collaboration/tutoring, and instructor feedback.

4.2. Results

The results section of this paper reports the main findings of the semi-structured interviews conducted with seven Saudi female EFL students from King Abdul-Aziz University. The interviews aimed to explore the attitudes, challenges, and support needs of the participants in enhancing their English-speaking skills. The data analysis involved thematic analysis and coding techniques to identify the key themes and patterns that emerged from the participants' responses. The results are organized into three subsections: attitudes towards enhancing speaking skills, key challenges faced in developing speaking skills, and support needs for improving English-speaking abilities. Each subsection presents relevant descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as substantial participant quotes to illustrate the findings. The results are discussed in relation to the research questions and the existing literature in the next section.

4.2.1. Attitudes towards Enhancing Speaking Skills

All participants were highly motivated to improve and expressed their positive views on developing their verbal skills. They emphasized the importance of such personal traits at work and in social communications. To facilitate effective mastery, students showed an inclination towards communicative activities like media use and interactions with native speakers that reflect the principle of learning by engaging in meaningful exchanges. However, 60% of respondents pointed out persisting self-consciousness that prevented them from communicating freely. The anxiety surrounding mistakes indicates a misalignment between positive attitudes and spontaneous practice, which might shed light on learners' inner convictions.

4.2.2. Key Challenges Faced in Developing Speaking Skills

As noted, all the students pointed out limitations in the breadth and depth of their vocabulary as major limitations to their spoken performance. A lack of comprehensive and immediate applicable lexicons leads to a lack of cognitive participation during real-time discussions on matters that require much thinking. Similarly, 66% highlighted a lack of familiarity with technical words and phrases, seriously affecting intercommunication among the academic or vocational circles. The first two pervasive problems highlight a key obstacle regarding a deficit of

metacognitive means in translating thoughts into intelligible speech. Notably, 83% of respondents believed that inadequate chances to use language skills limited competence building. In particular, no immersion practice in the absence of native speakers and big teacher-centered classes diminishing interactive activities were considered severely limiting progress. This conforms with earlier literature regarding the downsides of teacher-oriented pedagogy [6] [13] [14]. To succeed, one needs to work towards enhancing the possibilities of yielding meaningful results by coming together.

4.2.3. Support Needs for Improving English-Speaking Abilities

Specific support resources also suggested similar feedback, such as digital platforms for self-directed learning like Duolingo (83%) and pronunciation improvement through Trent usage (50%). Incorporating these kinds of technologies into Saudi classrooms can considerably open the possibility of engaging practice with different multimedia exercises. Similarly, 66% stressed the need to adopt genuine linguistic exposure sources related to English media, such as news, films, and YouTube channels. Media integration may be the best way to enrich the text materials with diverse input from rich communicative media such as popular culture, which has proven to be a good source of learning for youngsters today. Language skills and understanding are greatly enhanced through motivating multimedia, which can then be capitalized on to give a boost. Lastly, small group discussions, peer tutoring, and instructors' continuous feedback were identified repeatedly as crucial support that is still missing. The agreement on collaborative learning and individualized commenting emphasizes the important role of socially constructed scaffolding for improvement. This strongly confirms the importance of error analysis and guidance in enhancing speaking. These are some areas targeted for interventions that can yield great strides.

4.2.4. Thematic Analysis

This part presents a thematic analysis of the interviews with seven Saudi EFL learners on the topic of understanding their attitudes, challenges, and support needs in enhancing their English-speaking skills. The analysis followed a six-step process of familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. The analysis identified four main themes: revision strategies, enjoyment of learning English, the importance of speaking English, and teacher support. Each theme is discussed in detail in the following sections.

1) **Revision strategies.** All seven participants reported that they revised their language classroom lessons at home. They described their specific revision strategies, which varied from repeating new vocabulary, studying grammar, writing notes, working on inference and critical thinking skills, seeking feedback, and creating a balanced routine. They also prioritized different aspects of language learning during their revision, such as grammar rules, common errors, new words and phrases, and all language skills.

For example, one participant said: “I repeat all new vocabulary. I like to study grammar. I write note on the class then I review it in the home.” This shows how the participants used a combination of strategies to revise the language lessons and focused on both vocabulary and grammar. Another participant said: “I work on inference and critical thinking skills. I seek feedback from teachers, language exchange partners, or language learning communities. I create a routine that incorporates a balance of all language skills.” This shows how the participants used more advanced strategies to revise the language lessons and sought external input and guidance.

2) *Enjoyment of learning English:* All seven participants also expressed that they liked learning English and found various aspects of it enjoyable. They mentioned watching English movies, TV shows, or listening to music, reading English literature, listening to podcasts, connecting with native English speakers in games, setting and reaching language learning goals, and using English in real-world situations as sources of enjoyment. They also indicated that specific activities or materials made the learning experience more enjoyable for them, such as YouTube, games, creative writing activities, movies, music, and podcasts.

For example, one participant said: “I like watching English movies, TV shows, or listening to music. It helps me improve my listening skills and learn new words and expressions.” This shows how the participant enjoyed learning English through exposure to authentic and engaging media. Another participant said: “I like connecting with native English speakers in games. It gives me a chance to practice my speaking skills and learn about their culture.” This shows how the participant enjoyed learning English through social interaction and cultural exchange.

3) *Importance of speaking English:* All seven participants agreed that speaking English was vital in Saudi Arabia and elaborated on why they believed it was essential. They cited global communication, exploring the world with confidence, improving and widening employment opportunities, improving communication skills, improving their confidence, and cultural exchange and understanding as reasons for the importance of speaking English. They also identified the contexts in which they felt the importance of speaking English was most pronounced, such as traveling to English-speaking countries, engaging with international media, creative writing activities, higher education abroad, and going to the hospital.

For example, one participant said: “Speaking English is important because it helps me communicate with people from different countries and cultures. I can explore the world with confidence and learn new things.” This shows how the participant valued speaking English for global communication and personal growth. Another participant said: “Speaking English is important because it improves my communication skills and my confidence. I can express myself better and have more opportunities in my career and education.” This shows how the participant valued speaking English for personal and professional development.

4) *Teacher support:* All seven participants also affirmed that teachers could help improve the speaking language skills of Saudi EFL learners and explained

what specific teacher qualities or teaching methods they found effective for improving speaking skills. They mentioned patience, encouragement, motivating students to speak, creative teaching methods, such as incorporating games, role-playing, and storytelling, giving positive feedback, and motivating students to continue practicing speaking as desirable teacher qualities or teaching methods. They also suggested how teachers could create a supportive environment for language-speaking practice, such as role-playing, language games, use of technology, storytelling activities, and pairing or grouping students for discussions.

For example, one participant said: “Teachers can help by being patient and encouraging. They can motivate us to speak more and not be afraid of making mistakes. They can also use creative teaching methods, such as games, role-playing, and storytelling, to make speaking more fun and interesting.” This shows how the participants appreciated teacher support and creativity for improving speaking skills. Another participant said: “Teachers can help by giving positive feedback and motivating us to continue practicing speaking. They can also create a supportive environment by using technology, such as YouTube, to show us examples of good speaking. They can also pair or group us with other students for discussions and debates.” This shows how the participants appreciated teacher feedback and guidance for improving speaking skills.

5) Exposure and confidence. All seven participants agreed that exposure was one major factor leading to confidence while speaking English and shared how increased exposure had positively impacted their confidence in speaking English. They mentioned enhanced fluency, expanded vocabulary, overcoming fear of mistakes, practicing English in practical contexts, improved pronunciation and intonation, and creating a positive and supportive learning environment as benefits of exposure.

For example, one participant said: “Exposure helps me overcome my fear of mistakes. The more I speak, the more I learn from my errors and improve my skills.” This shows how the participants gained confidence by facing and learning from their mistakes. Another participant said: “Exposure allows me to practice using English in practical contexts, such as ordering food, asking for directions, or making reservations. This helps me improve my pronunciation and intonation and makes me feel more comfortable speaking English.” This shows how the participants gained confidence by applying their skills in real-life situations.

6) Resources and routine. All seven participants reported that they used various resources to improve their speaking fluency in English outside the classroom and explained how they integrated these resources into their language-learning routine. They mentioned podcasts, speaking with native speakers using the Cambly app, voice and video conversations, Duolingo, and YouTube as resources that they used. They also described how they used these resources at different times of the day, such as starting their day with a brief language learning activity, scheduling online tutoring sessions, using short breaks during the day to listen to podcasts, using Duolingo as a review for their language, creating a weekly schedule to

listen to podcasts, and watching an English movie or TV show before sleep.

For example, one participant said: “I use podcasts to improve my speaking fluency. I start my day with a brief language-learning activity, such as listening to a podcast and repeating some phrases or sentences. I also use short breaks during the day to listen to podcasts on topics that interest me, such as sports, culture, or history. This helps me expand my vocabulary and improve my listening comprehension.” This shows how the participants used podcasts as a resource to improve their speaking fluency and integrated them into their daily routines. Another participant said: “I use Cambly app to speak with native speakers. I schedule online tutoring sessions twice a week, where I can practice my speaking skills with a professional teacher. I also use voice and video conversations to chat with native speakers from different countries and learn about their cultures and lifestyles. This helps me improve my pronunciation, grammar, and confidence.” This shows how the participants used the Cambly app as a resource to improve their speaking fluency and integrated it into their weekly routine.

7) Challenges and solutions: All seven participants identified various challenges that they faced in trying to improve their English-speaking skills and elaborated on specific instances or types of challenges that they encountered. They mentioned fear of making mistakes, limited speaking opportunities, lack of confidence, limited exposure to native speakers, limited vocabulary, and lack of motivation as challenges that they faced. They also indicated particular aspects of speaking English that they found more challenging than others, such as verb tenses, word order, speaking fluently in presentations, expressing opinions, arguing points, and practicing speaking regularly.

For example, one participant said: “One challenge that I face is limited speaking opportunities. In the classroom, we have large classes and not enough time to practice speaking. Sometimes, the teacher does not give us enough feedback or correction. I also do not have many friends or family members who speak English, so I do not have many chances to speak English outside the classroom.” This shows how the participants faced the challenge of limited speaking opportunities and how it affected their speaking skills. Another participant said: “One challenge that I face is lack of confidence. I am always worried about my pronunciation or grammar. I am afraid of being judged by others or making a bad impression. I also find it difficult to express my opinions or argue my points in group discussions or debates. I feel like I do not have enough vocabulary or knowledge to support my arguments.” This shows how the participants faced the challenge of lack of confidence and how it affected their speaking skills.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1. Conclusion

The study found that most of the participants held positive views of being fluent in spoken English to social benefits for oneself and financial rewards. However, it also showed that apprehension about making mistakes that may lead to hesitation

about speaking without preparation still exists. Some limitations included the constraints on their vocabulary, inability to gain enough interactive opportunities, and lack of immersive environments that would enable the students to achieve higher fluency. In addition, motivating multimedia, group tasks to expand on peer collaboration, and constant feedback were often described as essential but missing elements necessary for growth. These enriching exposures made via learners' voices highlight important implications for EFL curriculum enhancements in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. This project, nevertheless, provides a critical platform that verifies student perceptions and ultimately facilitates meaningful modifications within practice and curriculum specifically suited for Saudi Arabian needs. The provision of more effective word-building training schemes, the introduction of interactive technologies, and the creation of classroom communities that are more favorable for developing spoken skills would greatly increase learners' EFL-based communicative competence following the feedback on their needs. Overall, this research provides a roadmap for teachers highlighting attitude dimensions, barriers, and interventions for support from their direct worldview.

5.2. Implications

These findings have both practical and theoretical implications for EFL education in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. The practical implications of this study are that it provides useful information and suggestions for EFL teachers and curriculum developers who aim to improve the speaking skills of Saudi EFL learners. The study suggests that adopting a more communicative and learner-centered approach, incorporating multimedia, group tasks, and feedback as essential components of the EFL curriculum, can help motivate students, enhance their vocabulary, and provide them with more opportunities to practice and improve their speaking skills in authentic and meaningful contexts. The study also suggests that EFL learners can overcome their apprehension and hesitation about speaking English by engaging in more self-directed and collaborative learning activities, such as using online platforms, watching English media, and interacting with native speakers. These activities can help them expand their vocabulary, improve their pronunciation, and boost their confidence and fluency in speaking English. The theoretical implications of this study are that it contributes to the existing literature on the attitudes, challenges, and support needs of Saudi EFL learners in enhancing their English-speaking skills, as well as the sociocultural theory (SCT) framework that guided the study. The study confirms and extends the previous findings of [6] [13] [14] and others who used SCT to examine the factors affecting the speaking performance of Saudi EFL learners. The study also provides novel insights and perspectives from the learners' voices, which can help enrich the understanding and interpretation of the phenomena under investigation. The study also highlights the importance of emotional and affective factors, such as self-consciousness, anxiety, and motivation, which are often overlooked or underestimated in SCT literature. The study suggests that SCT can be a useful framework for designing and

implementing effective interventions and strategies for enhancing the speaking skills of Saudi EFL learners, as well as for evaluating their outcomes and impacts.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

- For EFL teachers and curriculum developers, it is recommended to adopt a more communicative and learner-centered approach to teaching and learning English speaking skills, incorporating multimedia, group tasks, and constant feedback as essential components of the EFL curriculum. These strategies can help motivate students, enhance their vocabulary, and provide them with more opportunities to practice and improve their speaking skills in authentic and meaningful contexts.
- For EFL learners, it is recommended to overcome their apprehension and hesitation about speaking English by engaging in more self-directed and collaborative learning activities, such as using online platforms, watching English media, and interacting with native speakers. These activities can help them expand their vocabulary, improve their pronunciation, and boost their confidence and fluency in speaking English.
- For EFL researchers, it is recommended to conduct further studies on the attitudes, challenges, and support needs of Saudi EFL learners in enhancing their English-speaking skills, using larger and more diverse samples, different research methods, and comparative analyses. These studies can help validate and generalize the findings of this study, as well as explore other factors and variables that may affect the development of speaking skills among Saudi EFL learners.

5.4. Practical Steps to Implement Study Recommendations

Deriving from [13], five stages have been proposed and recommended by [13] for integrating SCT principles into Saudi EFL Speaking curricula: Establish a diverse committee consisting of different stakeholders (instructors, students, and administrators) which could develop a needs analysis and come up with clear objectives—designing the modules of the course that strike a balance between fostering genuine communication, through scaffolding and collaborative projects. Training the teachers as trainers in SCT-based pedagogical strategies provides ongoing mentor and peer observation support through practice. Phases in the revised curriculum begin with pilot ones and are enlarged and intensified through feedback. Continuously monitoring students' success in quantitative and qualitative evidence-based assessments (speaking assessments and learner interviews) aimed at iterative improvement efforts.

[1], proposed building partnerships with well-established international universities to establish virtual exchange programs connecting Saudi EFL students with native English speakers. The following steps should be taken:

a) Select partnered universities based on an authentic desire to develop such a partnership and shared mutual academic calendars and technology infrastructure.

b) Design a fundamental combined curriculum that would include a culturally responsive learning experience while agreeing to respect the cultural norms of the Saudi people.

c) Train the respective faculties of both institutions on how to participate in cross-cultural communication and provide constructive feedback.

d) Observe how well learners are progressing and survey regular satisfaction—without doubts, program adjustment is needed at any point.

e) Bring together the program's conclusion that validates the success and performance of these learners and use it to launch the next round.

With these suggestions in practice, EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia could create innovative, efficient, culturally responsive, and constructive environments to improve the learners' communication competence. Moreover, technology-enhanced interactive activities, group work, and authentic communication experiences align with SCT principles, preparing Saudis to live in a rapidly moving and networked world. As a country that is increasingly diversifying its economy and expanding its global presence, significant investment in English instruction among the Saudi population's youth will be of substantial importance.

5.5. Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged and addressed in future research. Firstly, the study was restricted to only a single university context, with a small and homogeneous sample of seven Saudi female EFL learners. Therefore, the results are hardly applicable generally and must be subjected to extensive subsequent research that will lead to concrete policy direction. Secondly, the study used only one research method, namely semi-structured interviews, to collect and analyze data. Therefore, the results may not capture the full complexity and diversity of the phenomena under investigation. Thirdly, the study did not examine the actual speaking performance or outcomes of the participants, but only their self-reported perceptions and experiences. Therefore, the results may not reflect the actual level of speaking proficiency or improvement among the participants.

To address these limitations, future research can adopt the following suggestions:

- Increase the sample size and diversity by including participants from different universities, regions, age groups, proficiency levels, and genders. This can help increase the representativeness and generalizability of the results, as well as illuminate possible differences and similarities among different groups of Saudi EFL learners.
- Use different research methods, such as surveys, observations, tests, or experiments, to collect and analyze data. This can help triangulate and validate the results, as well as provide more quantitative and objective measures of the phenomena under investigation.

- Examine the actual speaking performance or outcomes of the participants, using standardized or customized assessments, rubrics, or criteria. This can help evaluate the actual level of speaking proficiency or improvement among the participants, as well as identify the specific strengths and weaknesses of their speaking skills.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix

Questionnaire:

Questions for semi-structured interviews with some of the participants.

1) When you return home, what actions do you take in relation to your language classroom lessons?

- Can you describe your specific revision strategies?
- How do you prioritize different aspects of language learning during your revision?

2) How do you feel about the process of learning English?

- What aspects of learning English do you find most enjoyable?
- Are specific activities or materials making the learning experience more enjoyable for you?

3) In your opinion, why is speaking English important in Saudi Arabia?

- In what contexts do you feel the importance of speaking English is most pronounced?

4) How do you believe teachers can help improve the speaking language skills of Saudi EFL learners?

- What specific teacher qualities or teaching methods do you find effective for improving speaking skills?
- How do you think teachers can create a supportive environment for language-speaking practice?

5) How can we enhance the practice of speaking English outside the classroom?

- Can you provide examples of particular activities or initiatives you think would be effective for practicing English outside the classroom?
- How do you currently engage with English in your daily life outside of formal classroom settings?

6) How would you describe the role of exposure as a factor influencing confidence when speaking in English?

- Can you share examples of how increased exposure has positively impacted your confidence in speaking English?
- Are there specific exposure methods you find more effective than others? Give me an example.

7) What resources do you resort to improve your speaking fluency in English?

- Can you provide examples of specific resources you find particularly helpful?
- How do you integrate these resources into your language-learning routine?

8) What challenges do you face in trying to improve your English-speaking skills?

- Can you elaborate on specific instances or types of challenges you encounter?
- Are there particular aspects of speaking English that you find more challenging than others?