

Research Article

Linguistic and non-linguistic barriers to English speaking ability among Saudi EFL learners

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The study aims to assess the role of linguistic and non-linguistic barriers on the English-speaking abilities of Saudi EFL learners. A cross-sectional design was adopted and convenience sampling was employed to recruit the EFL learners in Saudi Universities. An online survey was conducted. Descriptive statistics, t-tests, and factor analysis were performed. The results of the study showed that non-linguistic barriers, affecting English-speaking capabilities included fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, confidence, and a lack of interest. Where the most significant factor was confidence in to impact of English speaking. Moreover, among linguistic barriers i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, vocabulary was the most significant factor to influence the English-speaking ability of the Saudi EFL students. However, no gender-wise discrepancies were found in experiencing these barriers. The study concluded that there was no significant difference between male and female learners. Both genders faced linguistic and non-linguistic barriers. However, pronunciation errors, a lack of vocabulary, and poor knowledge about grammatical structure were the linguistic barriers, faced by the students.

Keywords: Barriers; EFL; Language learners; Speaking ability; Linguistic barriers

Article History: Submitted 12 January 2024; Revised 3 April 2024; Published online 10 April 2024

1. Introduction

Globalization has created limitless opportunities for education along with challenges. This wave of diversification has led to enormous challenges worldwide. Consequently, learning English as a secondary education has acquired greater relevance, especially in the Arab region (Burden-Leahy, 2009). Among the learners of English as a secondary language [ESL] or English as a Foreign language (EFL), gaining mastery over the four language skills namely, reading, writing, listening, and speaking is indispensable around the world. It is a commonly-observed fact that learning English speaking skills is the most daunting task due to the involvement of a couple of factors i.e., social and psycholinguistic that hinder their progress to be able to speak English with proficiency (Rajendran & Yunus, 2021). It can be associated with the fact that not adequate attention is paid to developing listening and speaking skills among the students of EFL as English is not widely used in their daily lives and their surroundings (Alrasheedi, 2020).

English is the chief language that is used in communication between the Saudis and the foreign workforce working there and contributing to the economy of the country which has been

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How to cite: Mahdi, D. A. (2024). Linguistic and non-linguistic barriers to English speaking ability among Saudi EFL learners. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.202426853>

increasing its relevance as a lingua franca (Alrashidi & Phan 2015). This realization of the internationalization of English as an EFL in Saudi Arabia has led to great transformations in the educational policy of the country where it is mandatory to learn a foreign language for all residing in Saudi Arabia to make their population able to interact with the people of other cultures and country so that they could learn and propagate the message of Islam and serve humanity (Al-Seghayer, 2014). In this instance, several educational reforms have been introduced that are central to increasing the exposure of the Saudi local population to English during their academics as part of their educational course where the educational or learning outcomes are also measured to gauge the performance of all the students.

Also, the initiation of the government-backed scholarship is a considerable intervention of the government to facilitate students in studying in foreign countries while pursuing foreign degrees (Němečková & Krylova, 2014). In English language learning, four components such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking are the most important aspects of language learning. The process of language learning has been inundated by the requirements of change in the curriculum, educational reforms, the students' will, and the pedagogies. To accelerate the tendency of English learning in Saudi society, under the national vision of 2030, the country has emphasized diversification of the economy and the creation of new jobs where communication skill in English is the prerequisite for all. Despite the growing relevance, numerous studies have evidenced different challenges faced by students and teachers while learning and teaching English.

Moreover, upon examining policies theories, and discussions related to the pedagogies of EFL in Saudi Arabia, it was revealed that EFL learning had been suffering from myriad challenges owing to the lack of proper planning and organized instructions to be implemented for both the teachers and students in the county which was directly associated with the unsatisfactory outcomes in this significant domain (Al-Tamimi, 2019). Another study by Alrasheedi (2020) investigated the role of psychological factors on the speaking performance of EFL learners in Saudi Arabia. This study aimed to explore the strategies adopted to infuse speaking skills among the learners, the challenges, and the recommendations to counter these challenges. Shyness, fear of mistakes, peer pressure, and anxiety were the challenges faced by the learners. Also, the teaching methods were not effective in enriching the vocabulary of the students which created a paucity of relevant vocabulary to speak in a real-time environment. The students had a lack of exposure to the targeted language with limited opportunities for them to participate in the activities occurring outside the traditional classrooms (Alrasheedi, 2020).

Al-Khotaba et al. (2020) analyzed speaking achievements acquired by the students of English as a Foreign Language [EFL] in Saudi Arabia. The study examined the influence of anxiety on the students of EFL as a psycholinguistic challenge. The results of the study reported that there was a weak correlation between the achievements of the EFL learners and speaking anxiety which can be construed as the fact that students who had a higher level of anxiety, had limited achievements and vice-versa. It reported a significant negative impact of language anxiety on the achievements of EFL students. Furthermore, the results showed that a one percent level of anxiety was tantamount to diminishing the performance of the EFL students by 88.8%. subsequently, it was recommended to diminish the different nature of anxieties among the students which include classroom anxiety, interpersonal anxiety, and language anxiety.

Al-Samiri (2021) studied the linguistic barriers faced by EFL learners in Saudi Arabia during the pandemic. The lack of will was the biggest challenge faced by the students due to an immediate transition of education from an in-campus to an online educational model. The lack of will was further exacerbated by technical issues, inadequate skills and exposure to make use of emerging technologies and tools, ineffective learning surroundings, and an overall negative impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the students (Al-Samiri, 2021). Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that transitions in education trigger new challenges along with their vitality and utilities. Similarly, Al-Oqaily et al. (2022) conducted a review study during the pandemic to study the perceptions of using blackboards for building speaking skills among Saudi EFL learners.

According to the results of this study, the students who had prior knowledge about and exposure to Blackboard had positive perceptions of it in language learning (Al-Oqaily et al., 2022).

Factors that affect the readiness of EFL learners were inspected by Alqurashi and Althubaiti (2021). This study involved the inspection of multiple factors of verbal interaction and compared them between the undergraduate students of EFL and instructors given in the classroom. Based on the triangular methodology, the results revealed that learners had a lack of motivation on account of assumed language inadequacies, confined lexicon, and fair of mistakes while speaking English that might cause ambiguities in speech or conversation. Musabal and AbdAlgane (2023) have highlighted that EFL students are often disinclined to be engaged in oral class participation due to a poorly managed classroom, anxiety about speaking, and limited vocabulary were the impediments faced by the EFL learners in Saudi Arabia.

Through a comprehensive analysis of similarities and differences between traditional and newly adopted approaches in teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia, Ismail and Kassem (2022) figured out that the newly adopted teaching methods in EFL teaching need critical attention and appreciation to align them with the learning outcomes with an integrated role of technology.

Keeping into consideration the greater role of psycholinguistics barriers and their impacts on EFL learning, numerous studies have been published. However, the literature is scant about exploring the linguistic and non-linguistic barriers that have the potential to impact the speaking abilities of EFL learners. To bridge the gap, the present research aims to investigate both the linguistic and non-linguistic barriers affecting the speaking ability of the EFL learners in Saudi Arabia.

Based on the above-stated aim, the following are the research objectives of the present study;

RQ 1) What are the linguistic barriers faced by the Saudi EFL learner?

RQ 2) What are the non-linguistic barriers reported by the Saudi EFL learner?

RQ 3) To what extent do males and females differ in encountering linguistic and non-linguistic barriers?

RQ 4) What is the impact of linguistic and non-linguistic barriers on the English-speaking capabilities of students?

The literary significance of the study lies in extending the literature related to second language acquisition as no study has presented a comprehensive analysis of both the linguistic and non-linguistic barriers to affect the process of acquiring language skills among non-English speakers. Such findings will enable the instructors, academicians, educationists, and policymakers on a practical front in both the policy and decision-making about EFL learning not only in Saudi Arabia but also for the students of other non-English countries who have been acquiring speaking skills in English as a secondary or foreign language.

2. Literature Review

English speaking involves possessing numerous skills which are usually impacted by different complexities (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). Speaking any language is typically associated with routine communication, mostly verbal which is considered as an ever-evolving process, stretched on creating, taking, inferring, and availing of the words and their meaning in different contexts comprehensively. Thus, it is incumbent upon one to have a proper knowledge and understanding about all the linguistic rules, structures functions, and conditions to communicate in the required language (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). Alluding to the non-native speakers of English, this language has gained prominence on account of various and dominant socio-economic and political factors. It is a widely acknowledged fact that the English language has a global presence and has become an internationalized language along with reckoning as the language of international relations, science, and economics (Huo, 2020) which has led to a new field of investigation and practice in the linguistics, related to English as a foreign language [EFL]. As reported by Leonard (2018), to teach English effectively, teachers must put more emphasis on the art of communication and inculcate the skill of communicating ideas which also helps in placing the flow of ideas and arguments in a

fair and logical manner side by side encouraging communication and propagation of narratives accurately. Several authors such as Nunan (1999), Schwartz (2005), and Thornbury (2005), have concluded in their study that the process of English learning is usually halted by challenges that can be broadly characterized into two i.e., linguistic and non-linguistic such as the dearth of confidence, interest, shyness and fear. In a study by Hakim (2019), classroom anxiety was found to be one of the barriers that had a negative impact on the learning process of students. This study comprised both the qualitative and quantitative study design with the help of a focus group discussion and online semi-structured interviews with the teachers. According to the results, anxiety was reported to be the factor that created difficulty in learning English. More interestingly, the author also identified the underlying reason behind the greater level of anxiety among Arabic-speaking EFL learners and found that due to higher levels of self-consciousness, students regarded learning a new language as damaging to their self-identity; thus, they reported anxiety in an EFL learning environment (Hakim, 2019). Hence, the study of Musabal and AbdAlgane (2023) which examined the viewpoints of tertiary education teachers highlighted forming a conducive learning environment in the classrooms in order to form a positive self and insights of students, having a good learning relationship among peers and with teachers and updated pedagogies.

Linguistic barriers are described as problems encountered by non-native or international students who intend to use or speak English as a foreign language for academic purposes. Difficulty in understanding grammatical structures, inability to speak with fluency, the lack of required vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation, and intricacies in the learning materials were found as the challenges faced by students in published literature (Chen, 1996; Huang & Chang, 1998). Savaşçı (2014) investigated the hurdles encountered by non-native speakers of English and figured out that not having an appropriate vocabulary was the most impeding element. The lack of vocabulary is often reckoned as one of the leading causes of poor communication. It is also known as inadequate word power. In contrast, English is the language of rich reassurance of words. Thus, whenever, communication takes place with the delivery of an inappropriate exchange of words, it cannot achieve its objective. Having a limited vocabulary usually haunts a person's ability and confidence to express or present his ideas logically and freely. This realization affects negatively the ability of the students and creates fear of making mistakes among them due to which their focus shifts from communication and they feel discouraged. Another disadvantage of possessing a limited vocabulary includes difficulty in language production as well as reception which prevents expression of ideas. Therefore, it is right to assume that vocabulary acquisition is the most important part of language learning. Besides, vocabulary, grammar is the next important element to consider when it comes to discussing parts and parcel of language learning, especially in the context of language learning. It builds understanding about putting the right word in the right place. It exists to shape meaning with the help of combining different words in a correct and understanding manner. Hence, no language can be mastered without actual understanding and practice of grammatical structures as it is an inseparable part of any language learning. Rather, Haryanto (2007) has argued that grammar facilitates the learning process of any foreign language as different are the rules of every language, and learning, understanding, and practicing those rules help in speaking the language (Haryanto, 2007). On account of the difference between native language from second language pronunciation errors are commonly found issues. For example, many of the pronunciation sounds, produced in English are missing in Arabic which creates difficulty in pronunciation for the Arabic learners of EFL as most of them cannot produce correct pronunciation constantly and are discouraged. Arguably, working on pronunciation is not the major concern or area of teaching for most teachers (Brown, 1992; Claire, 1993; Fraser, 2000; Yates, 2001; Varasarin, 2007).

These studies concluded that the reason behind the ill focus of teachers on pronunciation was the lack of confidence of students as they used to avoid practicing in front of Teachers during classroom learning. hence, it can be inferred that emphasis by teachers and practice of students are two essential strategies to counter this challenge. In addition, another challenge arises out form the

lack of confidence which is the fear of making mistakes. It contributes to the reluctance of the students to speak with fluency and without any interruption in the classroom (Nunan, 1999; Robby, 2010). The fundamental reason behind the fear of making mistakes is the perception that students lose respect and look naïve in front of their peers. This has been illustrated by Middleton (2009) who revealed that most of the EFL learners were afraid to practice a foreign language as the study confirmed that students were worried about looking foolish, about their sound and pronunciation. These linguistic barriers are associated with other elements such as shyness. Shyness is an emotional state that usually students face during a conversational or participatory class when they are required to take part in the class. Therefore, paying attention to this critical element may drive favourable results for EFL learners while boosting their performance in the classroom (Gebhard, 2006). Baldwin (2011) described that fear of speaking and shyness are a few of the most commonly found phobias, faced by students. In state, as characterized by the author, students feel their minds blank and cannot recall, what they intended to say or express. Consequently, it can be said that shyness has a critical role in building students; habits of effectively communicating and interacting in an ESL setting.

Most of the published studies, regarding foreign language learning have found anxiety to have a negative impact on the overall performance of students (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Anxiety involves feeling tension nervousness and apprehension (Januariza & Hendriani, 2016). It is part of human behaviour which is associated with self-esteem, empathy, extroversion, and inhibition, and leaves a greater impact on the ability to responsiveness of an individual. Subsequently, it is also an impacting variable on the learning process of students and has been investigated as one of the factors that impede the second language learning process in the form of affecting the quality of oral communication, word formations, intonation, and pace of expression of ideas which is typically erratic if a student gets anxiety during its learning process.

Hence, concentrated efforts are required to make the learning environment free from anxiety through positive reinforcement and encouragement and make it more non-threatening for students. However, the factors that lead anxiety include the lack of or ill-preparedness, the loss of interest, or negative reinforcement by the instructor, peers, or teachers in a threatening environment. Also, sometimes, teachers without considering time constraints allot excessive assignments, activities, and homework to students. Since students are not good stress managers, they feel anxiety due to their limitations as they cannot satisfy their teachers or meet that standard. Apart from this, students are directed to make more efforts on passive learning and not on practical or active part of learning, they feel anxiety which eventually damages the self-confidence of students as mentioned by the study of Ayres et al. (1998), students who presumed skills deficiency and loss of trust and confidence to take part in public speaking which resulted in anxiety. The loss of confidence is linked with the trust in skills and abilities required when it comes to language learning for students. When they feel that they are unable to present their point of view in a manner that their seniors or peers can understand, they feel a loss of confidence remain reluctant to take part in direct communication, and prefer to be unresponsive to the situation or learning setting. Nunan (1999) has termed it "communication apprehension." Referring to the causes of the lack of confidence, Bilgiç and Tekin (2023) stated poor skills and understanding of English and reported that the majority of the students assumed that their English-speaking capabilities were substandard and were convinced that they could not ever speak English fluently and correctly. From the previous study, the lack of engagement was also found as a stimulus of poor English-speaking skills (Brown, 2001) as teachers had no attention to encourage students to take part in active conversations.

Tatar (2005) contended that interests serve as a potential factor in instilling linguistic competence among EFL learners in classroom activities. It leads to the involvement and participation of students during the language acquisition process as "the more utterances the learners offer, the better their spoken language is and vice versa." (Hamouda, 2012, p.18). As reported by Sayadi (2007), "when something isn't interesting, most people are not willing to talk

about it, while one can talk as much as he can on his interests". Subsequently, students can lose interest owing to the incapability of understanding what lessons and instructions teachers provide. In case students fully understand these instructions, students take an interest, raise their questions, and provide feedback which leads to an active involvement and participation of students in the form of comprehensible input and the construction of comprehensible output, which are vital to language acquisition. Resultantly, the active involvement of students derives higher levels of satisfaction and higher persistence rates (Tsui, 1996). Another study has stressed upon learner's active participation (Jackson, 2002), and asserted that it helps knowledge formation and transfer for effective learning (Tsui, 1996). However, it can only be achieved if the students are concentrated and directed to their goals and the process of learning has been effectively and pragmatically designed.

Nomatova (2021) proposed a novel set of pedagogies that comprised interactive activities while integrating innovative technologies in EFL learning and teaching. The approach was proposed after group discussions with students and online surveys with teachers along with studying case studies about EFL learning. The proposed strategy involved the adoption of a personality activity approach to make it the core of EFL pedagogies. It included realizing students' personalities to address different challenges, maximizing the interests of students by creating interesting learning situations and stimulating environments, and emphasizing positive emotional reinforcements to combine all the components of learning. Kustati et al. (2023) asserted that during the process of learning a particular language, cultural factors must not be overlooked. To increase students' understanding of meaning, they must comprehend their cultural context to retain them for a long time. Kustati et al. (2023) in their study addressed the challenges students faced during English language learning and understanding Western cultures vis-à-vis Islamic beliefs. This descriptive qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews for collecting data. The researcher conducted interviews with eight representatives of the Islamic boarding school Ar-Risalah, located in West Sumatra. Upon thematic analysis of the interviews, cross-cultural challenges were found frequently because of cultural insensitivities, misinformation of cultural contours, and the lack of formal communication and flow and exchange of ideas. Moreover, students also reported difficulty in distinguishing between Islamic beliefs and values and Western cultures as they were not properly documented in English schoolbooks or study materials. Thus, the researchers suggested addressing cultural insensitivities to ease the process of language acquisition as it is a greater part of culture and civilization in a broader perspective.

Nugroho et al. (2022) studied the speaking barrier faced by students, studying in the sports department at a private higher education institution, situated in Indonesia. 24 participants were conducted in this study five students were interviewed as part of a mixed-method study to obtain diverse data to study the research objectives. The study questionnaire was central to identifying attitudes and barriers to students' attitudes in a language-learning classroom. The study's results revealed that linguistic barriers, psychological barriers, and material barriers were the three speaking barriers impeding the learning process. Ghafar and Amin (2022) viewed that speaking helps to measure the linguistic ability of a person and makes him a skilled speaker. Ghafar and Amin (2022) conducted a study in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq -KRI where English was studied and imparted as a foreign language. It was part of learning from elementary level to university and identified that English learning of Kurdish students was affected by challenges and the attitudes of students were not even toward learning English-speaking skills due to facing environmental, personal, social, and linguistic challenges where the lack of effective practices and activities, instructor enthusiasm, fear, reluctance and anxiety exacerbated these challenges which caused students facing speech problems. The researchers recommended a rewrite of the curriculum, modification in pedagogies, and focus on vocabulary acquisition.

The study of Kheryadi and Hilmiyati (2021) underscored difficulties, faced during an oral presentation by students in the fifth semester, studying at the English Education Department of Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten. Through adopting a mixed-method

approach, surveys and interviews were conducted to collect data. The findings unveiled that the oral presentation of the students was significantly affected by the missing element of explanation and self-control of students due to loss of confidence, higher level of nervousness, and anxiety. Similarly, in the context of EFL learning in Indonesia, Franscy and Ramli (2022) conducted research to examine linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties confronted by Indonesian EFL learners during the process of becoming skilled at speaking English. Based on a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis, informants and observers were part of the study. Results of the study revealed that in the context of linguistic challenges, the students had been facing issues in understanding comprehension, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and grammar. In contrast, non-linguistic factors included nervousness, fear, and the lack of participation and engagement of students. However, the study measured that 77% of challenges were linguistic in comparison with 23% of non-linguistic aspects. Highlighting the significance of authentic material, Yuyun and Simamora (2021) conducted research in English as a Foreign Language and investigated the role of YouTube as a source of authentic material to bolster the student's interests and motivation in the learning process. Eight participants were recruited from the Department of Linguistics of a private higher education institute in Jakarta. The researcher conducted interviews and observations of EFL learners and observed the trajectory of their learning. Various benefits of using this tool were documented which included an improvement in the level of confidence, interest in the learning process, and greater engagement of students.

Yosintha et al. (2021) examined the linguistic and nonlinguistic challenges to students in the learning structure and written expression section of the Test of English as a Foreign Language [TOEFL]. This qualitative study was conducted in two higher education institutes located in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia. The answer sheets of TOEFL of 42 students were analyzed as part of the data analysis along with interviewing four students, using the difficulty index [IF] formula anticipated by Brown and Abeywickrama (2004) and the interactive model given by Huberman and Miles (1994). The results showed that students faced three linguistic constraints in the form of grammatical issues such as the usage of double comparatives, active-passive verbs, and pronoun-noun agreement. However, non-linguistic factors such as unsatisfactory performances in the past, and partial exposure to secondary language had the worst impact on their language learning. Abramova et al. (2020) discussed the transition to a knowledge-based economy and discussed the requirement of learning different languages with learning speaking competencies. The main focus of the study was English language skills, which aid individuals to survive and sustain in the international professional community. The author underscored the importance of formulating and adopting an effective unconventional strategy at a massive scale for EFL teaching and learning. Through statistical analysis and in light of the survey results, using unconventional activities with major emphasis on social interaction, formation of heterogeneous groups, and planning and implementing interdisciplinary language activities were found promising to increase students' participation, engagement, and interest in learning English and practice it in their routine and professional life. Based on the literature reviewed above, it can be illustrated that although a plethora of studies have attempted to investigate linguistic and non-linguistic barriers faced by the students of EFL in different contexts. No study has ever examined these barriers in the context of Saudi Arabia where the native language of the population is entirely different from English. Keeping the Saudi Vision 2030 in consideration, it is an undeniable fact that the prominence of learning English has grown at an accelerated pace. Therefore, it has become more appropriate to scrutinize the potential and nontraditional hurdles faced by Saudi EFL students. Therefore, to fill this gap, the present study attempts to conduct an empirical study to figure out those linguistic as well as non-linguistic barriers. Also, it encapsulates some practical suggestions to be adopted by teachers to make the process of learning more interesting, engaged, and participatory.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Setting

A cross-sectional study design was adopted by the study as this type of study design is usually adopted in medical studies and social sciences. It is a type of observational study wherein data was collected and analysed from a population or a representative sample of the population at a specified point in time (Setia, 2016). The study was conducted on EFL learners enrolled in Saudi Universities.

3.2. Study Sampling

Convenience sampling was adopted by the researchers to recruit the participants. According to Creswell (2012), convenience sampling is more feasible for the researcher to recruit participants, especially in the case when a large pool of the required study population is accessible to recruit. Responses from the EFL learners enrolled in Saudi Universities were collected. A total of 480 students were recruited for the study. Table 1 presents the demographic details of the participants.

Table 1

Demographic details

<i>Description</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Age		
21-23	339	70.6
24-26	141	29.3
Gender		
Male	317	65.9
Female	163	33.9
Education		
3rd Year	277	57.7
4rth Year	203	42.2
Total	480	100.0

The majority of the study participants were male (317), aged between 18-20 (21 and 23). Most of them were enrolled in their 3rd semester (57.7%). However, 203 participants were from the 4rth year of their degree program.

3.3. Study Instrument

A questionnaire based on the five-point Likert scale was distributed to all the students of EFL. It comprised a total of 35 statements with eight sections. The researcher designed the study questionnaire based on the published studies (Appendix A). For face validity, the researcher acquired services from the three field experts for further accuracy and corrections. In light of their corrections and feedback, the questionnaire was modified. Factor analysis results of the instrument were presented in results section.

3.4. Data Collection and Procedure

The data were collected through an online survey. The data were gathered in the spreadsheets. In this regard, a close-ended questionnaire was structured based on a 5-point Likert rating scale for measuring the responses of participants. Furthermore, the objective of structuring a close-ended questionnaire was to provide a comprehensive insight into the linguistic and non-linguistic barriers. A total of 560 students were sent the questionnaire. Out of which 80 responses were incomplete; thus, discarded. Hence 480 responses were included in the study.

3.5. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics for an overview of the barriers reported by the participants, Principle Component matrix, and convergent validity were measured for the validity of the questionnaire.

An independent sample t-test was performed to examine any significant statistical difference between gender and the barriers. The data was analysed through the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS] v.27.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

All the participants were informed about the purpose and significance of the study and provided their written consent for their voluntary participation with an unconditional right to withdraw from the study without any consequences. The participants were assured that the information would be kept confidential and would be destroyed after the permissible use of the data.

4. Results

As summarized before, a total of 480 students were participated for the study. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test was performed for the validity of the sampling. The results presented in Table 2.

Table 2

KMO and Bartlett's Test

<i>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.</i>	.971
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	
Approx. Chi-Square	10298.389
df	561
Sig.	.000

As per the rule of thumb, the KMO values between 0.8 and 1 show that the sampling is adequate. The value 0.6 indicates inadequate sampling, necessitating remedial action to be taken. However, KMO values of 0.8 or higher are ideal for running the factor analysis (Table 2). Bartlett's test of Sphericity is used to assess if the correlations in the data are strong enough to use a dimension-reduction technique such as principal components or common factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity is considered significant when the p-values are less than 0.05. In the present study, the value of Bartlett's test of sphericity is .00 which is highly significant. The Principal Component Method was used as the factor Extraction Method. Table 3 shows that all the factors have a quite high weight. The fear of making mistakes, shyness, confidence, and anxiety with factor loadings more than 0.7, are considered higher. It shows that the nonlinguistic barriers were more prevalent among the EFL students in comparison with the linguistic barriers such as pronunciation, lack of interest, vocabulary grammar.

These results in Table 3 revealed the relationships between various items (FMM1 to LOI3) and rotated components (labelled 1 to 4). Factor loadings, represented by numerical values in the cells, elucidate the strength and direction of associations between each item and the identified components. These patterns include the multi-dimensional nature of items, indicating influences from multiple latent factors, and varying magnitudes of loadings signifying the intensity of these relationships. Items like FMM1 to FMM6 cluster predominantly around Component 1, implying a shared underlying factor. Conversely, items such as VOCAB2 and PRN2 exhibit weaker connections to their respective components (Table 5). Average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) were assessed to ensure the quality of the measurement model and validate convergent validity and internal consistency and reliability (Table 5). The AVE should not be lower than 0.5 to demonstrate an acceptable level of convergent validity which shows that the latent construct explains no less than 50% of the indicator variance (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In case the measurement model is tau-equivalent, CR is equal to Cronbach's alpha. According to Hair et al. (2009) CR values of 0.7 or higher represent good reliability (Table 4). In other words, the total error variance should consist of less than 30% of the variance of the latent variable.

Table 3
The Rotated Component Matrix

Items	Components			
	1	2	3	4
FMM1	.814			
FMM2	.826			
FMM3	.801			
FMM4	.819			
FMM5	.809			
FMM6	.801			
SHY1	.813			
SHY2	.794			
SHY3	.800			
ANX1	.806			
ANX2	.829			
ANX3	.831			
CON1	.769			
CON2	.804			
CON3	.820			
CON4	.793			
GRM1	.793			
GRM2	.782			
GRM3	.774			
GRM4	.801			
VOCAB1	.790			
VOCAB2	.520			
VOCAB3	.799			
VOCAB4	.808			
VOCAB5	.748			
VOCAB6	.827			
PRN1		.489		
PRN2		.371		
PRN3		.460		
PRN4		.521		
PRN5		.698		
LOI1			.830	
LOI2		.605		
LOI3			.574	

Table 4
Validity and reliability measure

Factor Loadings	AVE	CR
Fear of Making Mistakes (FMM)		
0.814	0.658886	0.920559
0.826		
0.801		
0.819		
0.809		
0.801		
Shyness (SHY)		
0.813	0.643802	0.844279
0.794		
0.8		

Table 4 continued		
Factor Loadings	AVE	CR
Anxiety (ANX)		
0.806	0.675813	0.862121
0.829		
0.831		
Confidence (CON)		
0.769	0.634757	0.874179
0.804		
0.82		
0.793		
Grammar (GRM)		
0.793	0.620263	0.867241
0.782		
0.774		
0.801		
Vocabulary (VOC)		
0.79	0.571533	0.886992
0.52		
0.799		
0.808		
0.748		
0.827		
Pronunciation (PRN)		
0.4892	0.0478242	0.638349
0.371		
0.46		
0.521		
0.698		
Lack of interest (LOI)		
0.83	0.461467	0.714138274
0.605		
0.574		

Table 5 exhibits the results of t-statistics to explore any relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic barriers and gender. The results showed no difference between males and females in encountering linguistic and non-linguistic barriers due to fear of making mistakes. Since the *t*-value is 9.253 which is higher than the second group, resulted in a Sig. (*p*) value that was less than our alpha of .05 ($p < .05$), it is concluded that males and females did not differ significantly in fear of making mistakes. However, the majority of the females reported shyness as a non-linguistic barrier in comparison with the males. More importantly, no statistical difference was found based on gender in encountering the lack of interests, and pronunciation. In contrast, there were statistical differences between males and females related to experiencing grammatical difficulties as a linguistic barrier.

Table 6 presents the association between linguistic and non-linguistic barriers to English speaking capabilities of the students of EFL in Saudi Arabia. The findings showed that among nonlinguistic barriers, the lack of confidence had an impact on the English-speaking capabilities of the EFL students ($p = \text{CON1} = .048$; $\text{CON2} = .031$; $\text{CON3} = .039$; $\text{CON4} = .022$). While not having appropriate and adequate vocabulary also affected students' capability to speak in English ($p = \text{VOCAB1} = .005$; $\text{VOCAB2} = .009$; $\text{VOCAB3} = .046$; $\text{VOCAB4} = .053$; $\text{VOCAB5} = .053$; $\text{VOCAB6} = .043$). Besides, no significant impact was reported of the linguistic and non-linguistic variables on English-speaking capabilities.

Table 5
Comparison of non-linguistic barriers among gender

		Mean	SD	F	t	p
FMM1	Male	5.00	.00	416.087	9.253	.000
	Female	4.25	1.45			
FMM2	Male	5.00	.00	234.763	19.036	.000
	Female	3.97	.96			
FMM3	Male	4.48	.75	1653.124	13.971	.000
	Female	2.72	1.98			
FMM4	Male	4.03	1.13	100.392	38.747	.000
	Female	1.24	.42			
FMM5	Male	2.71	1.05	1001.477	-15.660	.000
	Female	4.00	.00			
FMM6	Male	5.00	.00	188.334	6.063	.000
	Female	4.79	.61			
SHY1	Male	4.54	.74	445.440	-7.858	.000
	Female	5.00	.00			
SHY2	Male	4.74	.80	50.355	7.438	.000
	Female	4.11	.91			
SHY3	Male	4.30	.84	12.446	14.065	.000
	Female	2.98	1.04			
ANX1	Male	3.56	1.36	147.486	-8.325	.000
	Female	4.48	.50			
ANX2	Male	4.42	.58	159.969	10.572	.000
	Female	3.45	1.09			
ANX3	Male	3.46	1.40	189.940	-9.031	.000
	Female	4.49	.50			
CON1	Male	4.29	.69	105.143	10.169	.000
	Female	3.37	1.27			
CON2	Male	4.52	.50	.002	-0.020	.968
	Female	4.52	.50			
CON3	Male	5.00	.00	1514.685	21.594	.000
	Female	4.34	.54			
CON4	Male	4.50	.86	97.733	4.500	.000
	Female	4.17	.49			

Table 5 continued

		Mean	SD	F	t	p
GRM1	Male	4.05	1.23	116.702	1.793	.000
	Female	3.87	.33			
GRM2	Male	3.27	1.36	389.653	-16.143	.000
	Female	5.00	.00			
GRM3	Male	2.72	1.36	5.811	-12.649	.016
	Female	4.36	1.29			
GRM4	Male	3.77	1.16	44.475	-7.694	.000
	Female	4.50	.50			
VOCAB1	Male	4.92	.30	78.605	68.676	.000
	Female	2.12	.59			
VOCAB2	Male	5.00	.00	1514.685	21.594	.000
	Female	4.34	.54			
VOCAB3	Male	4.30	.70	128.673	8.116	.000
	Female	3.54	1.34			
VOCAB4	Male	4.03	1.13	100.392	30.287	.000
	Female	1.24	.42			
VOCAB5	Male	3.27	1.36	389.653	-16.143	.000
	Female	5.00	.00			
VOCAB6	Male	5.00	.00	1514.685	21.594	.000
	Female	4.34	.54			
PRN1	Male	4.50	.86	97.733	4.500	.000
	Female	4.17	.49			
PRN2	Male	4.50	.86	97.733	4.500	.000
	Female	4.17	.49			
PRN4	Male	4.24	.68	161.039	9.826	.000
	Female	3.32	1.36			
PRN5	Male	5.00	.00	1514.685	21.594	.000
	Female	4.34	.54			
LOI1	Male	5.00	.00	1514.685	17.851	.000
	Female	4.25	1.45			
LOI2	Male	5.00	.00	389.653	15.963	.000
	Female	3.97	.96			
LOI3	Male	4.48	.75	100.392	14.321	.000
	Female	2.72	1.98			

Table 6
Impact of barriers on English-speaking capabilities

<i>Pearson Chi-Square</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</i>
FM1	4.102	.848
FM2	4.332	.363
FM3	2.610	.625
FM4	11.213	.082
FM5	4.102	.848
FM6	9.980	.125
SHY1	1.813	.770
SHY2	.199	.905
SHY3	9.493	.050
AN1	7.397	.494
AN2	4.147	.844
AN3	13.082	.109
CON1	6.630	.048
CON2	7.132	.031
CON3	6.166	.039
CON4	5.418	.022
GR1	9.789	.280
GR2	3.277	.513
GR3	11.294	.023
GR4	9.146	.166
VOCAB1	6.938	.005
VOCAB2	3.149	.009
VOCAB3	15.761	.046
VOCAB4	6.938	.053
VOCAB5	3.277	.053
VOCAB6	5.496	.043
PRN1	4.102	.848
PRN2	4.102	.848
PRN3	14.954	.060
PRN4	3.277	.513
PRN5	11.294	.023
LOI1	14.954	.060
LOI2	11.294	.023
LOI3	5.688	.682

5. Discussion

The findings of the study have revealed no difference between males and females in encountering linguistic and no-linguistic barriers. These findings are similar to the study of Nadesan et al. (2020) which has reported no discrepancies based on gender among students while facing these linguistic barriers. In addition, the gender difference between males and females was revealed by the study of Al-Tamimi et al. (2020). Also, shyness was more common among female students as compared to male students. Similarly, there were differences based on gender in the context of reporting grammatical difficulties. These findings are congruent with the other published studies by Maranatha and Sengkey (2023) that have reported the willingness of students to speak English, is hindered by shyness or the lack of grammatical competence. Nadila et al. (2022) asserted that students were reluctant to speak English in routine owing to the factor of fear and shyness.

Also, the present study has reported the statistical impact on English speaking capabilities of the students where the lack of confidence and limited vocabulary were found with a statistically significant impact. These findings are aligned with Ramli et al. (2021) limited knowledge of

appropriate vocabulary was the hurdle in expressing or communicating in English. Referring to the study of Allen (2002) that asserted the cultural impact of study abroad on the linguistic skills of the students learning the French language through integrative levels of motivation led to a substantial decrease in the anxiety level of the students. In this study, students were interviewed who highlighted two types of language anxiety; one was caused by insecurities induced by linguistics; other was endangered by cultural discrepancies. Thus, the researcher suggested taking a broader shift into language language-teaching approach. Deducing from these findings, it was pinpointed to also increase the focus on non-academic factors by adding up the activities for raising cultural harmony and initiating programs for informal learning for the students, studying abroad (Allen, 2002).

Furthermore, in the light of the results of the present study vocabulary was the determinant factor that had an impact on the English-speaking capabilities of students. These findings are supported by the results of Al-Tamimi et al. (2020) which indicated that vocabulary knowledge was one of the most important elements for gaining mastery over a language. Zakhary (2022) attempted to assess the challenges faced by Indonesian teachers in teaching the Indonesian language to Egyptian-speaking students. The study scrutinized the reason for students' failure to complete all the levels of linguistic learning. Through descriptive statistics and primary data, the findings validated that having a focus on linguistics led to inefficient learning. Whereas, no attention was given to non-linguistic barriers (Zakhary, 2022). The findings of the present study are also related to the results of Alrabai (2016) who investigated the role of external linguistic factors such as the influence of the Arabic language as the first language, cultural barriers, the lack of technology, pedagogical styles and the systematic issues of the educational system of Saudi Arabia as impeding elements in the way of EFL learners.

Another study was conducted by Hwaider (2017) which aimed to examine the challenges faced during instilling listening skills among EFL learners in Yemen. The researcher adopted a mixed-method study design which included classroom observation and a survey with teachers as potential participants of the study. Based on the qualitative and quantitative results, the study figured out that numerous challenges hampered teachers to instill listening skills in students. The researchers classified them into linguistic and non-linguistic challenges where the process of learning was mainly plagued by linguistic factors. In addition, these were characterized as learning problems with learners, skill inadequacy of teachers, and the environment of the classroom. The teachers reported that most of the students faced difficulties in pronouncing the words correctly, and asserted that stress also played a role in impeding the process of quality learning. Furthermore, intonation, the lack of syntactic structures, and the acquisition of the right vocabulary were the other difficulties highlighted by the teachers in the study that led to a negative impact on the listening skills of the Yemeni EFL students (Hwaider, 2017). The scope of the study by Muhammed, (2017) was to assess the role of non-linguistic barriers across different gender among the learners of EFL. The study was conducted with Kurdish students of different levels at the English department of the University of Sulaimani. The findings revealed that linguistic difficulties varied across genders and ages. These findings are contradictory to the results of the present study that reported no difference across gender in facing linguistic and non-linguistic barriers. Thus, based on the findings, Muhammed (2017) suggested adopting different pedagogical interventions, different for female and male students of different levels and ages to make the process of learning more effective and uninterrupted by such reported difficulties.

Contrary to the present study, Nugroho et al. (2022) have identified three major categories of barriers, faced by EFL students which included linguistic, material, and psychological barriers psychological barriers were identified as the lack of familiarity with the topic, the difficulty of the content and the loss of interest of the students in the topic studied. Pratama and Zainil (2020) figured out different communication strategies by the teachers of EFL and documented the efficacy and usefulness of pause fillers, and hesitation devices to improve language learning and communication process. Kustati et al. (2023) have suggested cultural intervention and awareness

during the language acquisition process. Ghafar and Amin (2022) investigated EFL learning of Kurdish students and found social, interpersonal, environmental, linguistic, and psychological issues, impacting the way students learn language and stressed improving the classroom environment to provide a conducive atmosphere to promote knowledge, expedite vocabulary acquisition and address speaking inadequacy. Thus, it is suggested that EFL teachers in the colleges and universities of Saudi Arabia acquire intensive training in teaching English as a foreign language to improve their mastery of English teaching. Training of the Saudi EFL college and university teachers must be provided by native speakers and experts with an emphasis on instruction of those aspects of English that set it apart from Arabic. A particular focus must be given to the sounds and patterns which are not familiar in both languages to train students of EFL at their early stage, to increase their understanding of differences. In addition, due to the apparent role of willingness to communicate [WTC] in promoting English speaking among EFL learners, it has been suggested that teachers adopt such strategies to end the fear of public speaking among the students (Mahdi, 2014) which will help them to build communication competence [CC] validated by the research of Mahdi (2015) who has found an association between oral communication apprehension and CC for EFL students. The study concluded that students could get mastery over grammatical construction, and intonation via practicing oral communication in English.

The strengths of the study are the empirical evidence provided by teachers about experiencing different barriers based on gender. Also, the study underscored two factors that had a significant impact on the English-speaking capabilities of Saudi EFL learners. Despite these stated strengths, the limitations of the study include sample size from a limited study setting and the absence of a mixed-method study design. Thus, future studies can be conducted with a larger sample size representing populations from different study settings with interviews or focus group discussions to further dig into the matter.

6. Conclusion

The study found that not only linguistic but also non-linguistic barriers impact EFL learning. The results provided novel findings; for instance, unlike the previous study, in the context of Saudi EFL learners, no differences were reported in facing linguistic and non-linguistic barriers. More importantly, among linguistic barriers, vocabulary was the most important element that had a substantial impact on English-speaking capabilities along with confidence among non-linguistic barriers. These findings extend to the linguistic literature and add up the role of different factors, in particular from the Saudi perspective. Based on these results, it can be inferred that in the earlier stage of learning, there is a need to redesign the curriculum at the core place of vocabulary acquisition and enrichment compulsory at every stage from stage one. Along with this, it has been assessed that the lack of confidence was another most impacting element to plagued the learning process. Thus, it is imperative to emphasize practice sessions for the students and provide them with real-life opportunities to interact in English. Cross-cultural talks and exchange visits can reap various benefits in this instance as effective and pragmatic solution strategies.

Acknowledgements: The author would like to express his gratitude to King Khalid University for providing administrative and technical support. Furthermore, the author is very thankful to all the associated personnel and students that contributed to the purpose of this research.

Declaration of interest: The author declares that no competing interests exist.

Funding: The author would like to extend his appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Khalid University for funding this work through Small Groups Project under Grant Number RGP1/23/45.

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Appendix A. Study Questionnaire

a) Demographic Information

Age: _____

Gender:

- ✓ Male
 ✓ Female

Factors and Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
Fear of Making Mistakes					
1. FFM1 - I am too afraid to answer voluntarily to the teacher's questions owing to the fear of mistakes.					
2. FFM2 - I fear being stigmatized as incompetent if I speak English unpleasantly.					
3. FFM3 - While speaking in class, I will be called foolish if I commit mistakes in speaking English.					
4. FFM4 - Making mistakes in class damages my self-esteem.					
5. FFM5 - If I keep on mistaking during my class participation, my mistakes will have a crippling effect on my performance and the result of the entire course.					
6. FFM6 - I have to think carefully before answering in class to eliminate the negative perception caused by the mistakes.					
Shyness					
7. SHY1 - It causes shyness when I am assigned to participate in an English class discussion.					
8. SHY2 - I feel ashamed to participate in class discussions rigorously and talk less.					
9. SHY3 - I prefer to sit in the back rows of the class to prevent my participation.					
Anxiety					
10. ANX1 - I have a feeling of anxiety whenever my teacher or a student tries to correct me in front of the entire class.					
11. ANX2 - The harsh way of teaching while correcting makes me more stressed.					
12. ANX3 - I am overwhelmed by nervousness during oral presentations in class.					
Confidence					
13. CON1 - I am concerned about the opinions of my fellows regarding my weak English-speaking skills.					
14. CON2 - I don't feel enough confident to speak in English in class.					
15. CON4 - I only talk after assuring the accuracy of my conversation in English.					
16. CON5 - I care about what people say and think about my speaking performance.					
Grammar					
17. GR1 - I lack expertise in understanding the correct use of tense.					
18. GR2 - I have no sound knowledge of sentence construction which affects my participation negatively.					
19. GR4 - I have a lack of knowledge about word order, patterns, rules, and elliptical terms.					
20. GR5 - I prefer not to participate owing to unfamiliarity with the tense agreement, grammatical structures, and singular/plural vocabulary.					

Appendix A continued

<i>Factors and Items</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>
Vocabulary					
21. VC1- I don't find the right words when I intend to express my ideas and opinions.					
22. VC2 - I feel nervous to speak in English as my vocabulary of English is not rich.					
23. VC3 - While speaking, my word choices are not relevant to the context.					
24. VC4 - I deliberate upon the phrases and words I am taught in my English class to be familiar with them and use them.					
25. VC5 - Despite learning new words, I don't use new words due to hesitation.					
26. VC6- When I speak English, I need to translate certain words to understand and present them in my class.					
Pronunciation					
27. PR1 - I am anxious regarding my pronunciation when I speak in class.					
28. PR2 - Mispronouncing words cause embarrassment to me.					
29. PR4 - I am puzzled regarding the mispronunciation of certain consonants such as /p/, /v/, /ch/...etc.					
30. PR5 - I don't feel confident due to the lack of a foreign accent.					
Lack of Interest					
31. LOI1 - If the lesson is less appealing to me, I refrain from class participation.					
32. LOI2 -I am not eager to participate in the English class due to my lack of interest in it.					
33. LOI4 - I'm not interested in having a conversation in English with native English speakers.					

Note. SD: Strongly disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly agree

Please provide us with the other suggestion you want.

End of Questionnaire