



## An Investigation Study into Speech Anxiety Problems faced by Elementary Learners of English at Language Centers in Al-Beida

Raja Abdelrazik<sup>1\*</sup>, Machalla M. Megaiab<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Center of Languages, Mohamed Bin Ali Al-Senussi University, Albeida, Libya

<sup>2</sup>Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Tobruk University, Tobruk, Libya

### دراسة استقصائية حول مشكلات قلق الكلام لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية بمراكز اللغات في مدينة البيضاء

رجاء عبد الرازق<sup>1\*</sup>، مشاء الله محمد مغيب<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>مركز اللغات، جامعة السيد محمد بن علي السنوسي، البيضاء، ليبيا

<sup>2</sup>قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعته طبرق، طبرق، ليبيا

\*Corresponding author: [rajaabdelrazikahmed@gmail.com](mailto:rajaabdelrazikahmed@gmail.com)

Received: July 05, 2025

Accepted: August 26, 2025

Published: September 02, 2025

#### Abstract:

This study investigates speech anxiety among elementary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Al Beida, Libya. It aims to determine how common this anxiety is, identify its main causes like fear of negative evaluation and classroom factors, and explore its effects on learners' language development Using a case study approach with 56 students from two language centers, data were collected via a survey and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings reveal a significant prevalence of speech anxiety. Key contributing factors include fear of negative evaluation (especially from teachers), linguistic insecurity (difficulties in self-expression, listening, and unfamiliar vocabulary), and situational factors (unclear teacher explanations, using English outside the classroom, attendance disruptions, and large class sizes). While the study identified these anxiety triggers, it lacked sufficient data on individual learner characteristics. Recommendations emphasize creating low-anxiety classroom environments, providing ample preparation, building communicative confidence, ensuring instructional clarity, and addressing specific skill-related anxieties. This research offers valuable context-specific insights for fostering more encouraging educational environments for developing English oral communication skills in Libya

**Keywords:** Speaking Anxiety, Fearing, Negative Evaluation, Foreign Language, Psychological Problems, Social Factors.

#### المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة قلق التحدث لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) في المرحلة الابتدائية في مدينة البيضاء، ليبيا. باستخدام منهج دراسة الحالة على 56 طالباً من مركزين للغات، تم جمع البيانات عبر استبيان وتحليلها باستخدام الإحصاء الوصفي. تكشف النتائج عن انتشار كبير لقلق التحدث. تشمل العوامل الرئيسية المساهمة في ذلك الخوف من التقويم السلبي (خاصة من المعلمين)، وانعدام الأمان اللغوي (صعوبات في التعبير عن الذات، والاستماع، والمفردات غير المألوفة)، والعوامل الموقفية (شرح المعلم غير الواضح، واستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية خارج الفصل الدراسي، وانقطاع الحضور، وأحجام الفصول الكبيرة). في حين حددت الدراسة مسببات القلق هذه، إلا أنها افتقرت إلى بيانات كافية حول الخصائص الفردية للمتعلمين. تؤكد التوصيات على خلق بيئات صفية منخفضة القلق، وتوفير الإعداد الكافي، وبناء الثقة

في التواصل، وضمان الوضوح في التعليم، ومعالجة المخاوف المتعلقة بمهارات معينة. يقدم هذا البحث رؤى قيمة خاصة بالسياق لتعزيز بيئات تعليمية أكثر تشجيعاً لتنمية مهارات التواصل الشفوي باللغة الإنجليزية في ليبيا.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** قلق التحدث، الخوف، التقييم السلبي، لغة أجنبية، مشاكل نفسية، عوامل اجتماعية

## Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively in English has become increasingly vital in today's interconnected world, serving as a key skill for scholarly, professional, and social achievement [1-4]. For young students embarking on their EFL stands for English as a Foreign Language. journey, developing verbal exchange skills is often a primary objective of language programs [5-8]. However, the path to proficiency is frequently hindered by emotional barriers, among which Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), particularly speech anxiety, stands out as a significant challenge [9-12].

Speech anxiety, characterized by feelings of tension, apprehension, and nervousness specifically associated with speaking in a foreign language, can profoundly impact learners' willingness to participate, their learning process, and ultimately their communicative competence. While FLA is a well-documented phenomenon in various contexts, its specific manifestations and contributing factors among elementary-level learners in particular settings require focused investigation [13-17]. This study delves into the issue of speech anxiety among elementary learners attending language centers in Al Beida, Libya. Specifically, it focuses on learners within programs associated with Omar Al Mukhtar University and Asas Academic Consoutes.

The Libyan context presents a unique sociolinguistic environment where students are learning English as a second language, and understanding the challenges faced by young learners in this specific setting is crucial for developing effective pedagogical strategies. Research indicates that factors such as fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence, limited speaking opportunities, pedagogical approaches, and cultural influences can contribute to speech anxiety [18-25]. Investigating these factors within the Al Beida language centers will offer insightful information about the specific characteristics of speech fear experienced by these young learners. The goal of this study is to conduct an investigative study into the speech anxiety problems confronted by elementary EFL learners at the specified language centers in Al Beida. It aims to determine the prevalence and perceived reasons for speech anxiety among these learners and explore its impact on their language learning experience. By examining this issue through a case study approach involving Omar Al Mukhtar University and Asas Academic Consolutites, the study seeks to provide context-specific understanding and potentially inform targeted interventions

## Material and methods

This study employed a descriptive case study design, utilizing quantitative data collection methods. This approach was selected to facilitate an in-depth investigation of speech anxiety within its real-life context, specifically among elementary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in two language centers in Al Beida, Libya. The descriptive nature of the study aimed to accurately profile the situation and frequency of speech anxiety triggers as reported by the learners, primarily through a structured survey to systematically measure the prevalence and perceived causes of anxiety within the participant group. This design allowed for a focused exploration of factors and experiences related to speech anxiety within this bounded system.

The study was conducted in Al Beida, Libya, specifically within two language centers: one affiliated with Omar Al Mukhtar University and the other being Asas Academic Consulates. Both centers offer English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction across various proficiency levels, including the elementary level pertinent to this research. A total of 56 elementary-level EFL learners participated in this study, drawn from the two aforementioned language centers. The sample comprised 26 male students (46.4%) and 30 female students (53.6%). Participant distribution across the institutions included 31 students (55.4%) from the ASAS center and 25 students (44.6%) from the Omar Al-Mukhtar center. The selection of participants likely involved convenience or purposive sampling, focusing on accessible elementary-level classes within these specific centers. This focus on young learners at the outset of their EFL journey is crucial, as affective factors such as anxiety can significantly influence future language learning attitudes and success

## Results and discussion

The present study's findings on speech anxiety among elementary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Al Beida, Libya, resonate strongly with established literature in the field of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as demonstrated in Table (1). The observed prevalence of speech anxiety and the identification of its key contributing factors, fear of negative evaluation, linguistic insecurity, and various situational elements, underscore the universality of these phenomena while providing context-specific insights relevant to the Libyan educational landscape. This section will delve deeper into these

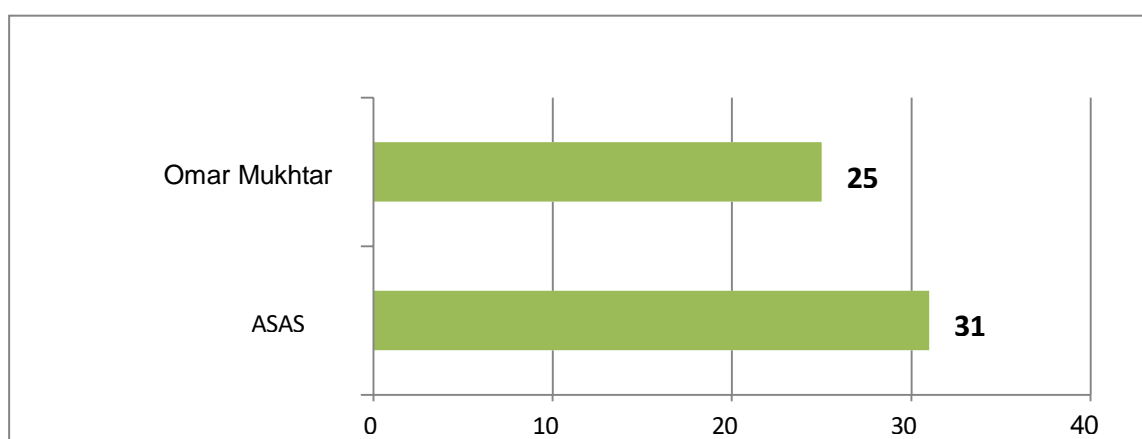
findings, drawing parallels with seminal and contemporary research to provide a comprehensive academic discussion. the shark” received only 40% correct answers, highlighting areas of weakness in deep comprehension.

**Table (1):** Distribution of gender.

	Count	Percentage%
Male	26	46.4
Female	30	53.6
Total	56	-

### Fear of Negative Evaluation

One of the most prominent findings of this study, consistent with a vast body of research in FLA, is the significant role of fear of negative evaluation (FNE) as a primary trigger for speech anxiety among EFL learners. This aligns directly with the foundational work of Horwitz, and Cope (1986), who identified FNE as a core component of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). Their seminal Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) includes items directly addressing concerns about being evaluated negatively by teachers. In the context of the Libyan elementary EFL learners, this fear manifested particularly strongly concerning teachers. This suggests that the perceived authority and evaluative role of the instructor can significantly amplify anxiety levels. Students may fear making mistakes, mispronouncing words, or failing to articulate their thoughts coherently, leading to apprehension about potential criticism, ridicule, or a perceived decrease in their academic standing. This is further supported by research indicating that FNE can be triggered by the teacher as a fluent speaker and by classmates. The classroom, therefore, transforms from a learning environment into a performance arena where the stakes of linguistic imperfection feel exceptionally high. Figure (1) presents distribution of English centers.



**Figure (1):** Distribution of English centers.

In this direction, the pressure to conform to perceived linguistic standards and the apprehension of appearing less competent than others can create a debilitating cycle of anxiety, inhibiting spontaneous communication and risk-taking essential for language acquisition. The paralyzing effects of anxiety, where students 'freeze up' during speaking tasks, have also been noted by Horwitz (personal communication), further underscoring the profound impact of FNE.

### Linguistic Insecurity

Another critical factor identified in this study contributing to speech anxiety among Libyan EFL learners is linguistic insecurity. This concept, broadly defined as a speaker's feeling of discomfort or anxiety regarding their language use, particularly when they perceive their own way of speaking as 'non-standard' or inferior. In the context of foreign language learning, linguistic insecurity manifests as difficulties in self-expression, challenges in listening comprehension, and struggles with unfamiliar vocabulary.

For elementary EFL learners, the nascent stage of their language acquisition makes them particularly vulnerable to linguistic insecurity. They are still grappling with the fundamental building blocks of the language, and the pressure to produce accurate and fluent speech can be overwhelming. The fear of making grammatical errors, mispronouncing words, or using inappropriate vocabulary can lead to a reluctance to participate in oral activities, even when they possess a conceptual understanding

of the material. This internal self-evaluation of their linguistic abilities as inadequate directly impedes their willingness to communicate.

The study's findings indicate that linguistic insecurity extends beyond mere grammatical accuracy to encompass broader communicative challenges. Difficulties in self-expression suggest a struggle to translate thoughts into coherent English, while listening comprehension issues can lead to a feeling of being lost or unable to follow classroom discourse. The constant encounter with unfamiliar vocabulary further exacerbates this insecurity, as learners may feel ill-equipped to engage in meaningful conversations or understand complex instructions. These interconnected linguistic challenges create a formidable barrier to oral communication, fostering a sense of inadequacy and anxiety.

### **Situational Factors**

Beyond individual psychological predispositions, the study revealed that various situational factors within and outside the classroom significantly contribute to speech anxiety among elementary EFL learners in Al Beida, Libya. These factors, often intertwined with pedagogical practices and environmental contexts, create an atmosphere that can either mitigate or exacerbate learners' anxieties.

### **Unclear Teacher Explanations and Instructional Clarity**

One critical situational factor identified was the impact of unclear teacher explanations. Effective instructional clarity is paramount in language learning, as it directly influences learners' comprehension, confidence, and willingness to participate. When instructions are ambiguous, explanations are convoluted, or expectations are ill-defined, learners are left feeling confused and uncertain. This uncertainty can quickly translate into anxiety, particularly when they are expected to perform tasks based on incomplete or misunderstood information. The fear of making mistakes due to a lack of clarity, rather than a lack of ability, can be highly demotivating and anxiety-inducing.

A clear and well-structured lesson provides a scaffold for learners, reducing cognitive load and allowing them to focus on language production rather than struggling to decipher instructions. Conversely, a lack of clarity can lead to increased cognitive anxiety, as students expend mental energy trying to understand what is expected of them, diverting resources away from language processing and production. This is particularly true for young learners who rely heavily on direct and explicit guidance.

### **Using English Outside the Classroom**

The study also highlighted the anxiety associated with using English outside the formal classroom setting. For many EFL learners, the classroom is a controlled environment where mistakes are expected and often tolerated. However, the prospect of using English in real-world situations, where the communicative demands are higher, and the support structures are absent, can be a significant source of anxiety. This is particularly true in contexts where English is not widely spoken in daily life, such as Al Beida, Libya. The lack of opportunities for authentic communication outside the classroom can lead to a feeling of unpreparedness and a fear of embarrassment or misunderstanding in public interactions. This finding underscores the importance of bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. When learners perceive a disconnect between what they learn in class and its utility in their daily lives, their motivation and confidence can wane, leading to increased anxiety when faced with situations requiring spontaneous English communication. The limited exposure to English in natural settings can also hinder the development of fluency and pragmatic competence, further contributing to linguistic insecurity and, consequently, speech anxiety.

### **Attendance Disruptions**

Attendance disruptions were identified as another situational factor contributing to anxiety. Irregular attendance can lead to gaps in learning, missed instructions, and a feeling of being left behind. For language learners, consistent exposure and cumulative learning are crucial. When attendance is sporadic, students may struggle to keep pace with their peers, understand new concepts, or participate effectively in classroom activities. This can result in a sense of inadequacy and increased anxiety, as they constantly feel they are playing catch-up. The cumulative nature of language acquisition means that even short periods of absence can have a disproportionate impact on a learner's confidence and overall progress.

Moreover, attendance disruptions can affect the social dynamics of the classroom. Students who are frequently absent may feel less connected to their peers and teachers, exacerbating feelings of isolation and reducing their willingness to engage in communicative tasks. This can create a vicious cycle where anxiety leads to avoidance, which in turn leads to further anxiety and reduced learning opportunities.

### **Large Class Sizes**

The study also identified large class sizes as a significant situational factor contributing to speech anxiety. In large classes, individual students often receive less personalized attention, fewer opportunities for direct interaction with the teacher, and limited chances for individual speaking practice. This can lead to a feeling of being overlooked or, conversely, an increased fear of making mistakes in

front of a large audience. The sheer number of peers can amplify the pressure of performance, making students more hesitant to speak up for fear of negative judgment from a wider group.

Research suggests that smaller class sizes can be beneficial for foreign language learning, as they allow for more individualized feedback, increased student participation, and a more supportive learning environment [8]. In large classes, teachers may struggle to provide timely and constructive feedback to every student, which is crucial for language development. Moreover, the reduced opportunities for one-on-one interaction can hinder the development of a strong teacher-student rapport, which is vital for creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere. The anonymity offered by a large class might seem appealing to some anxious learners, but it often comes at the cost of reduced speaking opportunities and a diminished sense of belonging, ultimately perpetuating anxiety.

### **Administrative Attention and Assessment Practices**

Beyond classroom-level pedagogical interventions, the study's findings necessitate administrative attention to systemic factors that contribute to speech anxiety. Specifically, the impact of class size and the need to foster collaboration to mitigate social comparison anxiety require consideration at the institutional level. Large class sizes, as discussed, inherently limit opportunities for individualized attention and speaking practice, thereby exacerbating anxiety. Educational administrators in Libya should explore strategies to reduce class sizes, where feasible, or implement alternative instructional models that can effectively manage large groups while still providing ample communicative opportunities and personalized feedback. This might involve:

- Resource allocation: Investing in more qualified EFL teachers and additional classroom spaces to allow for smaller class divisions.
- Innovative scheduling: Exploring flexible scheduling options that permit more frequent, shorter speaking sessions or dedicated small-group activities.
- Technology integration: Utilizing educational technologies that can facilitate individualized practice and feedback, even in larger settings, though this should complement, not replace, direct teacher-student interaction.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the role of social comparison in fostering anxiety. While teachers can implement strategies to promote a collaborative classroom culture, administrative support is crucial for creating an overarching environment that values collective learning over individualistic competition. This could involve:

- Curriculum design: Reviewing curriculum frameworks to ensure they emphasize collaborative projects and group-based assessments that encourage peer support rather than direct comparison.
- Teacher training: Providing professional development for teachers on strategies to manage social dynamics in the classroom and foster a sense of community among learners. Finally, the study suggests that assessment practices require review to reduce associated negative emotions.

In this context, traditional assessment methods, often heavily weighted towards summative evaluations of discrete linguistic elements, can be a significant source of anxiety. For elementary EFL learners, a more holistic and formative approach to assessment is recommended. This includes:

- Process-oriented assessment: Evaluating not just the final product but also the learning process, including effort, participation, and progress over time.
- Low-stakes assessment: Incorporating frequent, low-stakes speaking tasks that provide opportunities for practice and feedback without the pressure of high-stakes grading.
- Self and peer assessment: Empowering learners to reflect on their own progress and provide constructive feedback to peers, thereby fostering met cognitive skills and reducing reliance on external evaluation.
- Clear rubrics and expectations: Ensuring that learners understand the criteria for success and how their performance will be evaluated, which can reduce uncertainty and anxiety.

By reevaluating assessment paradigms, educational institutions can transform assessment from a source of fear into a valuable tool for learning and growth, thereby contributing to a more encouraging educational environment for developing English oral communication skills in Libya.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated speech anxiety among elementary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Al Beida, Libya, focusing on its prevalence and contributing factors within the Libyan context. Conducted as a case study with 56 students from two language centers, the research utilized a questionnaire to gather data. The primary objective was to identify key variables leading to speech anxiety and explore the potential influence of individual learner characteristics, ultimately synthesizing findings, discussing implications, acknowledging limitations, and offering recommendations for future studies.



In addition, the analysis revealed significant speech anxiety among participants, driven by linguistic, pedagogical, situational, and affective factors. Key triggers included fear of negative evaluation, particularly from teachers, and linguistic insecurity stemming from difficulties in self-expression, listening comprehension, and unfamiliar vocabulary. Situational and pedagogical elements like unclear teacher explanations, attendance issues, large class sizes, social comparison, and testing methods also contributed to anxiety, extending even to English use outside the classroom. While the study effectively identified these triggers, it lacked sufficient quantitative data to draw detailed conclusions regarding individual learner characteristics, indicating a need for further research in this area. In conclusion, this research highlights the substantial challenge of speech anxiety for young EFL learners in Al Beida, Libya, arising from a complex interplay of evaluation fears, linguistic insecurity, and classroom dynamics.

The findings underscore the necessity for teachers and administrators to cultivate supportive, confidence-building learning environments. Addressing the affective dimension is crucial for mitigating anxiety and enabling young Libyan learners to succeed in English communication, which is vital for their future endeavors. The study's limitations include its reliance on self-report, limited generalizability due to sample size, and a cross-sectional design, suggesting future research could benefit from mixed-method approaches and longitudinal studies.

## References

- [1] F. Xiao, S. Zhu, and W. Xin, "Exploring the landscape of generative AI (ChatGPT)-powered writing instruction in English as a Foreign Language education: A scoping review," *ECNU Review of Education*, 2025.
- [2] Q. Zhang, H. Nie, J. Fan, and H. Liu, "Exploring the dynamics of artificial intelligence literacy on English as a foreign language learners' willingness to communicate: The critical mediating roles of artificial intelligence learning self-efficacy and classroom anxiety," *Behav. Sci. (Basel)*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2025.
- [3] S. Arslan, "English-as-a-foreign language university instructors' perceptions of integrating artificial intelligence: A Turkish perspective," *System*, vol. 131, no. 103680, p. 103680, 2025.
- [4] W. A. A. Mktad, "Exploring bilingual educational systems in the western communities and exploring bilingual education in Libya; Case study in Al jabal Al garghbii," *NAJSP*, pp. 31–41, 2025.
- [5] Y. Yuan, "An empirical study of the efficacy of AI chatbots for English as a foreign language learning in primary education," *Interact. Learn. Environ.*, vol. 32, no. 10, pp. 6774–6789, 2024.
- [6] F. Ni and W. Xu, "How do English Proficiency and learning motivation shape EFL students' emotions toward written corrective feedback?," *System*, vol. 131, no. 103681, p. 103681, 2025.
- [7] B. J. Sherman, A. Teemant, and J. Prada, "Teachers as the nexus of theory and practice with multilingual learners: A teacher's journey of becoming," *System*, vol. 131, no. 103664, p. 103664, 2025.
- [8] F. Liu, L. Xu, and H. Huang, "Strategies of teaching knowledge in English-medium instruction lectures: A Legitimation Code Theory perspective," *System*, vol. 131, no. 103667, p. 103667, 2025.
- [9] J. Du and B. K. Daniel, "Transforming language education: A systematic review of AI-powered chatbots for English as a foreign language speaking practice," *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence*, vol. 6, no. 100230, p. 100230, 2024.
- [10] Q. Sun, L. J. Zhang, and S. Carter, "English as a foreign language learners' metacognitive experiences and writing development: Unraveling the process of learning EFL writing," *Learn. Individ. Differ.*, vol. 115, no. 102540, p. 102540, 2024.
- [11] R. Fisher, Q. Tran, and E. Verezub, "Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Higher Education using flipped learning/flipped classrooms: a literature review," *Innov. Lang. Learn. Teach.*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 332–351, 2024.
- [12] H. A. Qaddumi and M. Smith, "Implementation of learning management systems (Moodle): Effects on students' language acquisition and attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language," *Trends in Higher Education*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 260–272, 2024.
- [13] K. Dai and Q. Liu, "Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes: Challenges and opportunities in the spotlight," *Comput. Human Behav.*, vol. 159, no. 108354, p. 108354, 2024.
- [14] E. M. Omar and G. A. A. Ali, "The implementation of Total Physical Response method in teaching English language in Libyan primary schools in Al-Marj region," *NAJSP*, pp. 69–75, 2025.

- [15] H. Liu, Z. Shen, Y. Shen, and M. Xia, "Exploring the predictive role of students' perceived teacher support on empathy in English-as-a-foreign-language learning," *New Dir. Child Adolesc. Dev.*, vol. 2025, no. 1, 2025.
- [16] J. A. W. Aomr and S. A. N. Abdalla, "English speaking communication apprehension among Arabic - speaking learners in a study abroad context in Malaysia," *NAJSP*, pp. 44–49, 2025.
- [17] M. K. B. Khalifa, "The application of ChatGPT to English Language Teaching: Opportunities and challenges," *NAJSP*, pp. 98–108, 2025.
- [18] S. M. Mohammed, "Metaphor translation between literal and interpretive rendering: A comparative analytical study," *NAJSP*, pp. 152–161, 2025.
- [19] H. S. Elzunni, "The effect of SMS texting on ESL learners' writing skills: Case study of Derna University," *aajsr*, pp. 226–233, 2025.
- [20] G. L. Liu, A. Soyoof, J. S. Lee, and L. J. Zhang, "Informal digital learning of English in Asian English as a Foreign Language contexts: A thematic review," *RELC J.*, 2025.
- [21] M. S. M. Mahmoud, "Towards an eclectic approach to the translation of lexical differences between Arabic and English: The sand memory as a case study," *NAJSP*, pp. 281–287, 2023.
- [22] A. Alamaría, "Perceptions of EFL lecturers about using the Internet in teaching English language in Libyan universities during the COVID-19 pandemic," *aajsr*, pp. 207–218, 2023.
- [23] I. Elwerfalli, H. Mahmoud, and A. Mohammed, "The influence of function words on oral proficiency among first semester EFL students at the university of Benghazi," *aajsr*, pp. 368–377, 2024.
- [24] S. Shahani and A. Tahriri, "The impact of silent and freeze-frame viewing techniques of video materials on the intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension," *SAGE Open*, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 215824401558599, 2015.
- [25] H. K. Saleh and M. M. Megaiab, "Designing and developing an English language test for secondary certificate in Libya: A case of study on Libyan teachers and students in two secondary schools in albeida city," *NAJSP*, pp. 291–297, 2025.