

Factors Contributing to the Gap Between Listening and Speaking Skills Performance Among University Students Post COVID-19

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Abstract—The present study explores the improvement in speaking skill as compared to the listening skill in EFL traditional classrooms post COVID-19. In this context, the grades of 168 female students at the intermediate level at the department of English language, faculty of languages and translation, King Khalid University were analyzed. A comparative analysis of the data of both listening and speaking exams was conducted to find out the gap between both skills. The data were gathered then analyzed using the SPSS statistical analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between the variables. The results indicated that students' listening exam grades are better than their speaking grades. The investigations suggest that nonlinguistic factors (i.e. anxiety, stress because of speaking in front of the class, and other psychological fears) significantly affect the students' speaking skill. The students were also requested to complete a survey about their experiences with traditional speaking sessions and face-to-face speaking exams. The study is both descriptive as well as prescriptive. It describes the current situation of the gap between students' skills and the nonlinguistic factors resulting in students' lower grades in speaking as compared to the listening skill. It ends up with suggesting some guidelines to help teachers improve their students' speaking skill and overcome their fears of face-to-face speaking exams especially after a long period of virtual learning and examination environment. The study provides invaluable insights to make the best possible, data-based recommendations to optimize speaking skill in EFL traditional classrooms.

Index Terms—listening skill, speaking skill, gap, traditional classroom, non-linguistic factors, post COVID-19, recommendations

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of learning a language is to enable learners to communicate using the language. Listening and speaking constitute the main components of oral language, and the existence of listening skills empowers and improves speaking. However, in terms of language acquisition listening is prior to speaking. As such, listening and speaking are interrelated, and this close relationship between the two skills is studied by researchers in two fundamental ways. Firstly, listening is the cognitive process and the interpretation of the auditory codes (i.e. the semantics). Secondly, listening triggers, supervises and organizes speaking (Richards, 2008; Buck, 2001; Erickson, 2015 as cited in Demir, 2017, p. 1457).

The fundamental question about listening and speaking skills is how they could be improved in the traditional context of learning a second language. Our students listen to lectures, explanations, and read aloud material, and they also speak in small groups. Nevertheless, in every way, making students write a lot does not necessarily results into making them good writers, forcing them to listen a lot does not necessarily results into forcing them to be good listeners, and making them speak in front of the class does not guarantee that they will be effective communicators (Palmer, 2014, p. 2). There is significant work to be done to help the learners excel in both skills areas.

A. Research Significance

The purpose of this paper is to scrutinize the reasons of the gap between the students' grades in their listening and speaking exams. The study indicates that there is a gap between the students grades in both skills and proposes significant suggestions to help learners achieve more progress in the speaking skill.

B. Aim of the Study

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By examining the grades students received on final tests that included these two skills, this study seeks to determine the relationship between listening and speaking abilities. The study also explores the reasons for students' anxiety during their speaking sessions or while sitting for their speaking exam. Specifically, the study suggests certain solutions to help students overcome their fears about traditional speaking practices and face-to-face exams.

C. Research Questions

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Are the listening and speaking grades significantly correlated among the faculty of languages and translation, King Khalid University EFL intermediate levels female Students?,
2. What are the reasons contributing to the existing gap between Listening and Speaking skills?, and
3. What are the perceptions of teachers towards the solutions of this gap?

D. Limitations of the Study

The current study is limited to the faculty of languages and translation, King Khalid University EFL female students studying listening & speaking in levels 2 & 3, during the first semester of the academic year 2021- 2022.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this section, the researchers review studies on listening and speaking skills, their improvement, the gap between listening and speaking grades, the non-linguistic factors affecting speaking improvement (Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, 1982), and the impact of COVID-19 on students' face-to-face performance after a long time attending online classes.

Listening and speaking are inter-related skills and it is for this reason that they are usually delivered to students as one course. Listening is a receptive skill which precedes speaking as a productive skill. Noblitt (1995) stated that language learning begins with listening and reading (i.e. declarative knowledge). Therefore, students should engage with this knowledge so that they can generate language and adapt their spoken language. Many researchers suggest that promoting the speaking skill is deeply related to students' progress in the listening skill (Bozorgian, 2012; Richard, 2008; Feyten, 1991). In this context, a study by Zhang (2009) adopted Krashen's Input Hypothesis to highlight the impact of listening skill progress on the learners' oral fluency (i.e. speaking skill). Zhang (2009) pointed out that it is only through listening to authentic materials by native speakers learners can improve their use of features like stress and intonation and produce correct punctuation.

Although listening is often considered a passive skill because it is developed internally or because it is a cognitive process, some studies such as Richards (2008), Vandergrift (2004), Mendelssohn (1989) have discovered that listening is an active process. This requires a variety of activities such as identifying sounds, understanding words and grammar, and interpreting intonation and other rules of phonetics. This demonstrates the need to study listening in relation to how language comprehension systems work and how language is used to convey meaning. In exploring the role of listening in language acquisition, Bozorgian (2012) conducted a study examining the relationship between listening and other skills in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). She specifically pointed out that improving listening in the classroom led to significant improvements in other skills. Based on her results, she emphasized that listening is most important for language acquisition. Furthermore, it may be deduced from this study that listening is closely related to speech development.

Speaking is a productive skill that is acquired mostly from listening. It is a form of putting ideas into speech (Alsaedi, 2012; Fulcher, 2003). In investigating the factors affecting Saudi undergraduate students' speaking skills, Alharbi (2015) indicated that practicing English in authentic situations is difficult in EFL contexts. Another factor is that the focus in education institutions is on improving writing skills. This is supported by a study by Al-Ahdal et al. (2014) who examined Saudi students' L2 speaking and writing skills. The findings revealed that participants' writing skills were better than their speaking skills. The researchers recommended that there should be cooperation between teachers and their students to create a suitable environment to practice speaking in English.

In order to investigate the attitudes of students towards English- speaking skills, Ali et al. (2019) conducted a study that found that students had positive attitudes towards speaking in English. Galindo et al. (2020) utilized the strategy of encouraging the students to individually create a video in which they explained the solution to one of their assignments. Research results showed that this activity helped improve students' oral presentation skills. Castillo (2016) used virtual world of Second Life and a distance learning course platform to develop adult learners' oral communication skills in EFL. The results show that Second Life's virtual world plays an important role in improving adult learners' listening and speaking skills. Furthermore, the results suggest that using various web-based technologies for language learning can be a useful strategy for improving student engagement, classroom practice, and complementing the interactive aspects of these tools. In another study, Volle (2005) studied the development of speaking skills in an online course of 19 students enrolled in the first semester for learning Spanish as a Second Language. The researcher measured the development of the students' Spanish speaking skills in a rigorous online course based on students' pronunciation in two recorded speaking activities and two real-time conversations. The results showed significant progress in the development of the students' speaking skills in Spanish (as cited in Al-Jarf, 2021).

A. *The Impact of Listening on Speaking*

The impact of learners' listening skill on their speaking skill has been investigated by many researchers. Celik and Yavuz (2015) conducted a study to find the correlation between speaking and listening grades at university level. To carry out this study, the participants were allowed a training of listening to short passages followed by different activities. Following the training, they set for a listening exam and an oral speaking exam. The results showed that the correlation between the speaking and listening grades proved to be very low, contrary to the researchers' expectations. Similarly, Jaiyote (2015) examined the relationship between test-takers' L1, listening proficiency and their performance on paired speaking tests. The results showed a significant correlation between the listening and speaking tests. However, no statistically significant correlation was found between listening scores and monologue performance scores. Moreover, Bozorgian (2012) explored the relationship between listening and other language skills in *International English Language Testing System* (IELTS). The descriptive analysis demonstrated that the lowest grades of all the skills were those of the speaking skill. The pairwise correlation coefficient proved the existence of a strong positive correlation between listening and speaking. The analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores demonstrated the existence of a strong relationship between listening proficiency and a "slight" improvement in the oral skills. In a similar way, Pinem (2006) examined the correlation between listening as an independent variable with speaking as a dependent variable, and the participants were found to do better in the listening exam than in the speaking exam.

B. *Speaking as a Challenging Skill*

Listening and speaking are intermingled skills and like all skills they can be greatly improved with careful instruction and focused practice (Palmer, 2014, p. 2). Although listening comprehension has not taken much interest in the considerations of several researchers, many people regard speaking skill as the central index of language skills (Dirjal et al., 2021, p. 178). It can be observed from the reviewed studies that speaking in English is challenging for EFL learners. Of the four skills in English, mastering speaking is a priority for most L2 learners (Alzamil, 2021, p.20) as a means of communication. According to previous research, people use writing in 9% of their communication while they use reading in 16% of it. Surprisingly, people spend 30% of their communication time in speaking and 45% in listening (Worth as cited in Palmer, 2014, p. 5). This highlights the significant role of the listening and speaking skills towards enhancing students' communication. Nevertheless, the speaking skill is developed with great effort in EFL classroom due to many barriers. EFL learners face a lack of exposure, input and output in English. Longcope (2010) stated that EFL learners have approximately three times less exposure to English than ESL learners. As a result, EFL learners have a limited second-language environment, and this situation creates problems in the speaker's comprehension, requiring constant repetition and recall during oral performance. Brown (2004) pointed out that some speaking activities are useful for EFL learners. These are minimal oral pair identifications, oral imitation tasks, dialogue completion, role play, and visual descriptions. Longcope (2010) stated that EFL learners have less interaction in the classroom and they rephrase messages instead of understanding them. Furthermore, EFL learners are incapable of generating spoken messages in context. On the other hand, ESL learners are exposed to more second languages over a continuous period of time; they receive information that is easier to understand (krashen, 1982) and also elicit information that is easier to understand.

Speaking is challenging skill because of the psychological barriers facing EFL students as well as other linguistic and non-linguistic factors. A study conducted by Ariyanti (2016) investigated the psychological barriers faced by Indonesian students which affect their speaking performance. The results showed that students tend to feel nervous when speaking for fear of making mistakes. On the other hand, Manurung and Izar (2019) conducted a study to investigate the students' speaking problems and seeks the underlying factors contributing those matters by analyzing 125 EFL second year students' responses to a questionnaire, individual interviews with lecturers, and class. Most surprisingly, the results showed that internal factors dominated the difficulties in students' performance, that is, students lack vocabulary and are hesitant or afraid to make mistakes and fear being judged. Another study by Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal (2013) explored possible difficulties in six Jordanian public universities by collecting data from a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that most of the students involved faced challenges related to speaking ability limitations. Poor speaking skills, lack of speaking time and overcrowded classes are the factors that get the most attention (as cited in Manurung & Izar, 2019).

The present study focuses on the impact of non-linguistic factors (i.e. psychological barrier) on students' performance in speaking sessions and consequently, how this affects their grades in speaking exams.

C. *Teaching EFL Post Covid-19*

The unique circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the shifting to online or electronic learning. However, the extent to which online learning was employed during the time of the pandemic varies from one institution to the other. Using email in communication and correspondences and E-books in teaching has become one of the common practices in many universities around the world (Harandi, 2015). Also, using all the options provide in LMS (learning management systems) as Blackboard for the delivery of virtual classes was adopted in many Saudi universities.

Many studies conducted in different educational institutes all over the world investigated the perceptions of EFL teachers and learners about using online learning. A recent study conducted by Fansury et al. (2020) explored the

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning. The results showed that students were happy with online learning and preferred online classes to traditional learning. Nevertheless, teachers and students complained about technical issues such as internet disconnections and internet data costs. Another recent study was conducted by Mahyoob (2020) to explore the challenges of e-learning experienced by EFL learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was achieved by analyzing 184 learners' responses to a survey-based questionnaire. The results show that most EFL learners are dissatisfied with continuing their online learning and are not achieving the expected progress in language production.

Rohaizat, Ang, and Yunus published a paper in 2021 describing how ESL learning via social media impacted the learning skills of students. This study concentrated on the use of online social media websites that assisted in practising the English language. Livemocha was the site that was analysed for its performance as an ESL tool. The researchers concluded that Livemocha users felt more at ease, motivated and willing to speak English via social media in comparison to participating in a classroom environment. The interactive face filter proved to be an educational asset that helped learners disguise their natural faces with the use of technology, consequently giving them a private space for speaking in English on social media without feeling embarrassed or being watched by a large live audience.

The studies reviewed above about online learning during the pandemic show the positive attitude students have towards online learning. However, it is not clear whether students prefer it simply because it is a new form of teaching, or because it is more effective. The present study fills the gap in the literature about the shift back to traditional classes post the COVID-19 and its impact on students' learning and achievement.

D. Affective Filter Hypothesis and the Speaking Skill

Krashen (1985) pointed out that certain affective filters have impact on language acquisition. An "affective filter" is a mental block that prevents the receiver from fully using the intelligible input they receive to acquire a language (Krashen, 1985, p.3). When the affective filter is high, successful acquisition is largely impossible because although the learner may comprehend what is being learnt, the input will not reach the LAD (i.e. language acquisition device). According to Krashen, this may occur when the learner experiences high anxiety, low self-esteem, and low motivation. When the filter is low, comprehensible input will easily reach the LAD and this will positively affect the learner's improvement.

Many studies were conducted to find the impact of such affective filters on the improvement of the speaking skill. Grieve et al. (2021) conducted a study in which a qualitative investigation has indicated that public speaking tasks have an overall negative effect on learning for those students with a fear of public speaking and oral presentations. The findings of the study have indicated that many students' main anxiety is mainly due to the fear of being judged, being uncertain about the topic and the physical symptoms students experience while taking part in a speaking session (p. 1287).

Alrasheedi (2020) examined the factors that affected Saudi students and inhibited them from progressing satisfactorily in the skill of speaking English. This study discovered the main causes that led to low ability and performance in the speaking skill. Five factors that influenced this lack of academic progress included a poor language immersion rate, unwillingness to learn to speak English, insufficient ESL understanding and a weak teaching infrastructure. The researchers concluded that individual attention should be given to students, teacher training should incorporate appropriate methodologies, ESL materials should be easily accessible and students should be encouraged to speak the target language outside and beyond the academic circle.

Campbell and Larson (2013) analysed the variable stress levels in students whilst giving a speech in a traditional classroom context as compared to a speech given via technology. The audience in the traditional classroom was present physically however the speeches given via technology had a remote audience. The second aim of the study was to determine whether traditional classrooms should incorporate an aspect of web based learning or not. The results of the heart rate data underlined a slight difference between stress levels during online and off-line speeches. It found that the heart rate of speakers was faster when they presented their topic before an audience which was physically in the same place. However, the student survey concluded that students felt more nervous whilst giving online speeches. The study concluded that understanding stress was an area which needed further conclusive research.

The above review of literature showed that there are no studies that explore the progress of speaking skill as compared to the listening skill in EFL classroom post COVID-19 at Saudi universities with an investigation about the non-linguistic factors students' encounter in the process of speaking practice sessions and face-to-face exams. The present study aims to fill a gap in this area and propose some recommendations to help both teachers and students in EFL classrooms to cross the barrier of anxiety and the possible fears in the speaking practices and small speeches in front of the class or during the speaking exams.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using the grades of students of intermediate level (both level 2 & 3) at the department of English, KKU. A total of 168 female students' grades were included in the analysis. The participants in this study are 168 female students enrolled in the ENG114 & ENG compulsory courses. The participants' ages range between 18-22 years old. Moreover, the participants were requested to complete a survey about their experiences with face-to-face

speaking sessions, their fears and the possible solutions to the non-linguistic factors affecting their performance. A total of 145 students participated in the survey.

A. Instrument

The researchers utilized the grades obtained from the final listening and speaking exams. The students' results in listening and speaking exams were analyzed to find the progress in both skills and the correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability. The sample which consisted of the results obtained by (168) female students registered in levels two & three (ENG 114 & 210) was analyzed via the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), using both descriptive and informational statistics.

In order to investigate students' perceptions about their speaking practices, speaking exams, their fears, and possible solutions, an online survey was sent to students using Google forms. The survey items were adapted from Grieve et al. (2021), and Kongi (2015), with some changes in order to meet the aim of the present study. Some survey items were also designed by the researchers to answer the research questions.

The survey is composed of 22 closed-ended questions using 5 points Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree), and is sub-divided into three parts. It begins with section one; "demographic information", to get data about students' age and level, and students were ensured in the survey that their personal data were not collected. Section two is designed to figure out the levels of anxiety among the students during their speaking practice. It is also designed to point out the aspects that make the students more worried about sitting for their face-to-face speaking exam. The third section consists of items to explore the possible solutions to reduce students' levels of fear in speaking practice sessions and speaking exams.

B. Statistical Analysis

In order to answer the research questions and measure the gap between the speaking ability and listening comprehension in EFL classroom, students final results in both written and oral tests were used. The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) software, version 19. The study examines the correlation between listening as an independent variable with speaking as a dependent variable. The students performed better on the listening test ($M = 17,295$) than on the speaking test ($M = 11,7693$). Pearson correlation was used and the results showed the presence of a positive correlation between the two variables, ($=.000$) (i.e. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed), which proves that learners' ability in listening influences the way they responded in the speaking exam.

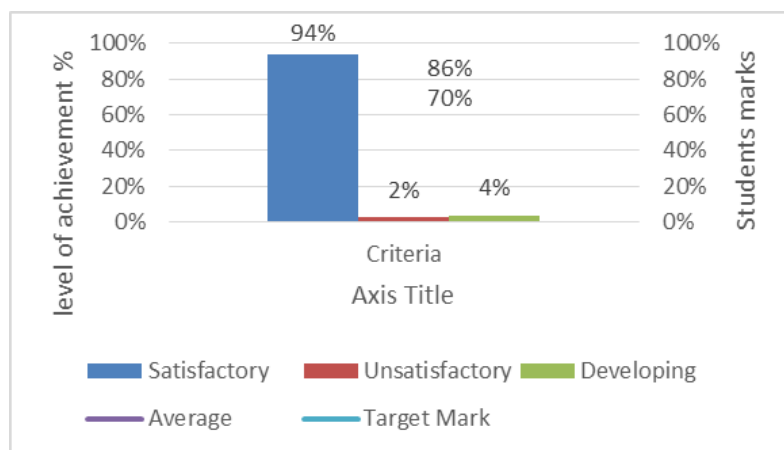


Figure 1. Listening Final Exam Analysis

Figure 1 above shows the listening exam results. The target that should be achieved in the course learning outcomes is 70%, and the average successfully achieved is 86%. This clearly indicates that the outcome has been achieved. According to Table (1) below, the results showed that 94% of the students achieved satisfactory level, 4% of them were at developing level, while 2% of the students achieved unsatisfactory level.

TABLE 1
LISTENING FINAL EXAM LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT

Number of student	Criteria	level of achievement %	Average	Target Mark
158	Satisfactory	94%	86%	70%
4	Unsatisfactory	2%	86%	70%
6	Developing	4%	86%	70%

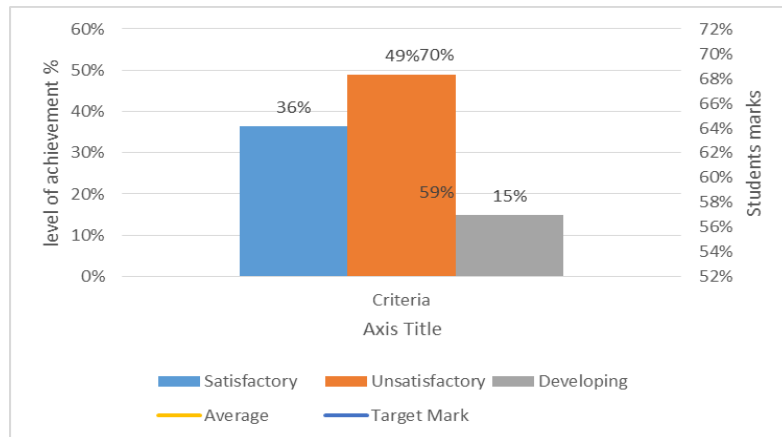


Figure 2. Speaking Final Exam Analysis

Figure 2 shows the speaking exam results. According to the course learning outcomes, the target is 70%. It appears that the achieved average is 59%. This clearly indicates that the outcome has not been achieved. As clarified in Table (2) below, the results showed that 36% of the students achieved satisfactory level, 15% of them were at developing level, while 49% of the students achieved unsatisfactory level.

TABLE 2
SPEAKING FINAL EXAM LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT

Number of student	Criteria	level of achievement %	Average	Target Mark
61	Satisfactory	36%	59%	70%
82	Unsatisfactory	49%	59%	70%
25	Developing	15%	59%	70%

C. Summary of Results and Discussion

A summary of the listening and speaking results analysis is presented in this section. Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics for listening comprehension results. The mean score of listening comprehension is 17.295. It means that the average score that the students obtained is 17. The highest score of the listening test is 20 out of 20 while the lowest is 5.0. The standard deviation is 2.3903.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION RESULTS

Statistics		
Listening		
N	Valid	168
	Missing	0
Mean		17.295
Std. Deviation		2.3903
Skewness		-1.409-
Minimum		5.0
Maximum		20.00

Table 4 reflects the descriptive statistics of the speaking results. As shown in Table 4 below, the mean is 11.7693, which is lower than the mean of listening results. The highest score is 20.00 whereas the lowest score is 3.0. The standard deviation is 3.96561.

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF SPEAKING SKILL RESULTS

Statistics		
Speaking		
N	Valid	168
	Missing	0
Mean		11.7693
Std. Deviation		3.96561
Skewness		.073
Minimum		3.00
Maximum		20.00

The following two diagrams show the mean, standard deviation and skewness of both skills.

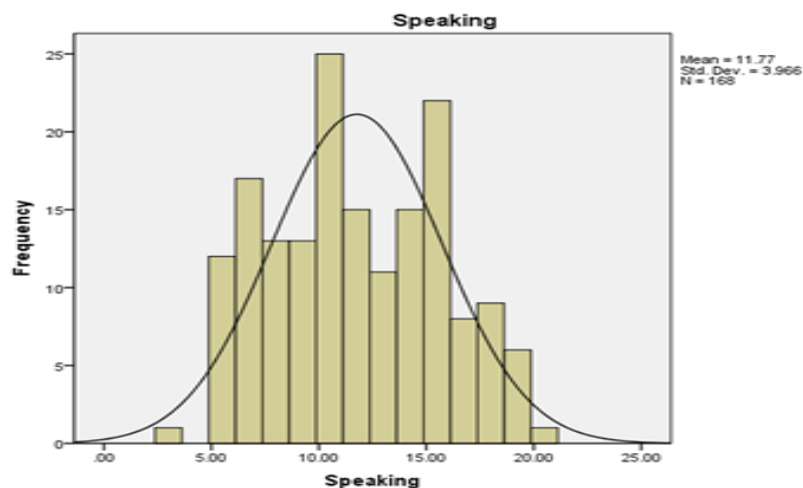


Figure 3. Histogram of Speaking Results

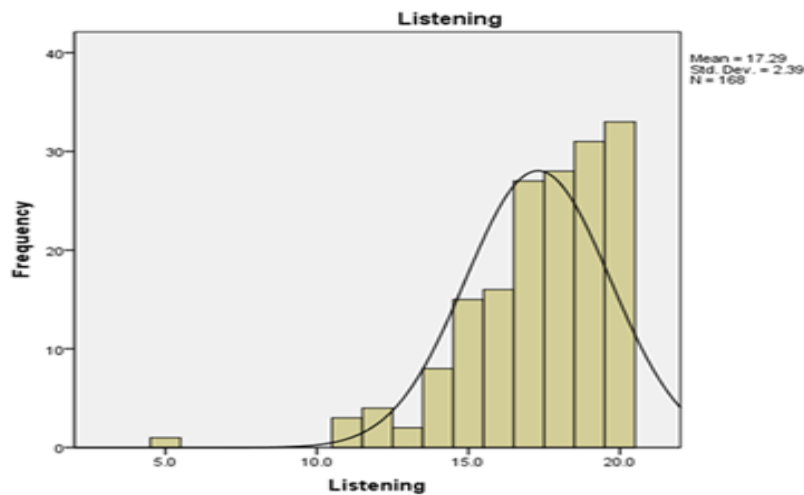


Figure 4. Histogram of Listening Results

The Pearson correlation below (Table 5) means from the 168 students shows that the correlation between listening and speaking results is 0.688, which means that the correlation is positive or there is a correlation between the two variables (listening comprehension and the speaking ability).

TABLE 5
CORRELATION BETWEEN THE TWO SKILLS

		Listening	Speaking
Listening	Pearson Correlation	1	.688**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	168	168
Speaking	Pearson Correlation	.688**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	168	168

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Consequently, the researchers found that an online survey should be sent to the students to unveil the reasons behind the gap between speaking and listening exams. The survey was sent to the students after the end of the semester. 145 students responded to the 22 question survey, and their responses were analyzed. The results of the survey analysis revealed that many students suffer from anxiety about speaking practice sessions and speaking exams. 90.3% students revealed that they feel worried about making mistakes when they speak in a speaking practice session. 86% stated that they feel worried when they know that they will be asked to participate during a speaking session. The same number of students also indicated that it makes them panic if they have to speak up without preparation time in a speaking session. When asked about the fear of getting low marks in the speaking exam, 96.5% students agreed that they had such fears. 85.5% students indicated that they could feel so nervous to the extent that they forget even things they already knew before. 77% of students also revealed that they feel more insecure in speaking practice sessions than in other lectures.

Significantly, 71% students asserted that the traditional speaking class is more stressful than the virtual speaking class. Also, 69% of the students indicated that they have fears of being judged in their speaking practice. 90.3% students agreed that it makes them anxious when they are uncertain about the topic of discussion. In responding to different questions about anxiety, 92.4% students indicated that they feel anxious about forgetting parts of what they need to say, 91.7% feel anxious about using incorrect vocabulary, and 88.9% feel anxious about not using grammatical structures. Significantly, 77.9% students indicated that they mess up even more when they forget what they are supposed to say.

In responding to questions about possible solutions to speaking anxiety, 89.6% students agreed that opportunities to practice are important to improve their speaking skills. 93.7% students also agreed that it is important to be given the chance to choose the topic they will speak about in a speaking session. 87% of the students indicated that scaffolded instructions are helpful to improve their speaking skills. When asked whether recording their speaking practice is helpful to get ready for their speaking exams, 76.5% students agreed that this could be a helpful strategy. However, only 37% students agreed that rehearsal in front of their peers will help them do better in their speaking exam. 64.8% students think that using digital tools designed for speaking practice is important to improve their skill. However, only 57% of the students consider using cooperative activities in speaking sessions is important. 69.6% of the students think that role-plays, discussions, and self-made dialogues will help them to reduce stress before a speaking session.

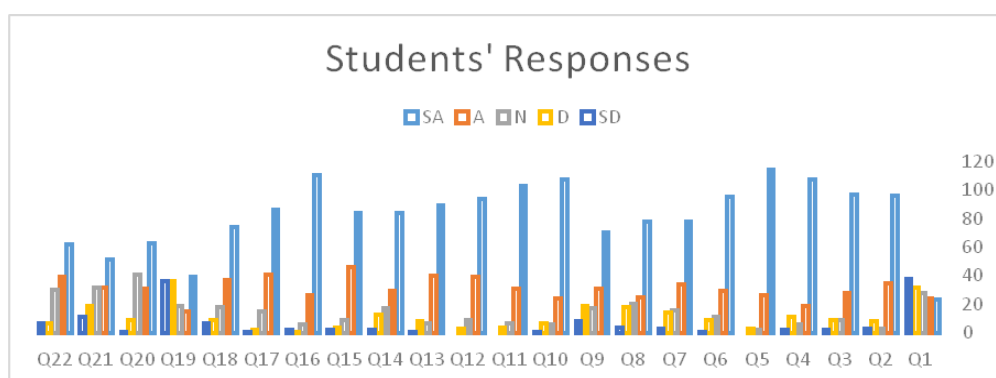


Figure 5. Number of Students' Responses to the 22 Survey Questions

IV. CONCLUSION

Listening and speaking skills are so deeply embedded in so many aspects of our lives that most of educators don't think about them much, and they are mostly taken for granted. It is time to bring them to the forefront of educators' minds (Palmer, 2014, p. 10), investigate the reasons of students' anxiety, propose solutions and implement the recommendations to purposefully teach them towards better communication and effective language use.

The present study explored the gap between the students' grades in their listening and speaking exams. The results indicated that students' grades in their listening exam are higher than their grades in their speaking exam. 94% of the students got satisfactory grades in their listening exam while only 36% of the students got satisfactory grades in their speaking exam. Accordingly, the researchers needed to explore the factors contributing to such gap by designing an online survey which indicated that the shift back to traditional face-to-face classes post COVID-19 had negative impact on students' performance in their speaking face-to-face assessments. The students revealed that they had anxiety, fear of being judged, messing up, and forgetting parts of what they needed to say in their speaking exams. Specifically, the survey declared that there are non-linguistic factors constituting a barrier to actual improvement in the speaking skill. The recommendation section proposed pedagogical solutions to educators towards reducing the psychological gap and effectively employing speaking sessions in scaffolded activities to motivate learners and prepare them for their speaking exams and the actual use of the language in their communication.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the statistical analysis show that there is a significance correlation between the listening and speaking grades among intermediate level students at the Department of English, faculty of languages and translation at KKU. In the light of the current findings, pedagogical and technical recommendations are found to be of significance for further research. Teachers can help learners achieve more progress in the speaking skill in many different ways. More time should be devoted to the speaking practice sessions. Scaffolded instructions during a speaking session are recommended. Moreover, students should be encouraged to take part in debates and discussions, and the teacher can help them with stimulating questions or clues.

Furthermore, teachers are recommended to adopt active learning in teaching these two skills, namely; listening and speaking. Teachers should motivate their EFL students to interact during the speaking sessions by applying the techniques of learning by doing (i.e. to be involved in the design of the activities, the choice of their roles in role-play, etc.). When students find that they are decision makers in taking part in different activities during the speaking session,

they will be more willing to participate and it will also lower their anxiety when it comes to this skill (i.e. speaking). A procedure that was found to be very useful in helping students to speak loud and express themselves is to ask the class to have a session in the form of a round-table discussion. For instance, the teacher asks the students to set in a round table classroom setup in order to face their colleagues which will bolster their courage to speak and express themselves.

Another recommended technique to strengthen students' perceptions about themselves during the speaking session is to start with brainstorming. The teacher may allow a 3- minute time for the students to think of the ideas they will talk about in a specific topic. This technique helps the students to get confident and believe that they can find ideas and put these ideas into words. In addition, teachers should make sure that students are exposed to authentic listening tracks that could provide students with the vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structure they need to use in their speaking sessions. It is also recommended to provide the students with online websites that could help them in practicing their speaking skill.

New research may focus on the role of technology in boosting students' speaking skills by employing ICALL (Intelligent Computer-Assisted Language Learning) tools. The results support the finding of Côté and Gaffney (2018) who indicated that online learners were largely less anxious than those who attended traditional classrooms. Also, future studies can compare the results of both male and female students to find how students of different gender are achieving progress in the speaking skill to present a fuller profile of speaking skill improvement as compared to listening post the pandemic in face-to face contexts. Particularly, the results of the present study have implications for rethinking the foundations of future research towards the improvement of the speaking skill.

APPENDIX. ONLINE SURVEY

Section One: Demographic Information

Age :

Level :

Section Two: Anxiety about Speaking practice Sessions & Speaking Exams

1. Do you feel fine when you have to speak up in a speaking practice sessions? ²
2. Are you worried about making mistakes when you speak in a speaking practice session? ²
3. Does it make you worried when you know that you will be asked during a speaking session? ²
4. Does it make you panic if you have to speak up without preparation time in a speaking session? ²
5. Are you worried about getting low marks in your speaking exam? ³
6. Can you get so nervous in the English class that you forget even the things you knew before? ²
7. Do you feel more insecure in speaking practice sessions than in other lectures? ²
8. Do you think the traditional speaking class more stressful than the virtual speaking class? ²
9. Do you have fears of being judged in your speaking practice? ¹
10. Does it make you anxious when you are uncertain about the topic of discussion? ¹
11. Do you feel anxious about forgetting parts of what you need to say? ¹
12. Do you feel anxious about using incorrect vocabulary? ³
13. Do you feel anxious about not using grammatical structures? ³
14. When I forget what I'm supposed to say, I mess up even more. ¹
- 3. Possible Solutions to Anxiety**
15. Do you think opportunities to practice are important to improve your speaking skills? ³
16. Do you find that it is important to choose the topic you will speak about in a speaking session? ²
17. Do you think Scaffolded instructions are helpful to improve your speaking skills? ³
18. Do you think recording a practice presentation for yourself is helpful to get ready for your speaking exam? ¹
19. Do you think rehearsal in front of your peers will help you to do better in your speaking exam? ³
20. Do you think using digital tools designed for speaking practice is important to improve your skill? ³
21. Do you consider using cooperative activities in speaking sessions is important? ²
22. Do you think role-plays, discussions, and self-made dialogues will help you to reduce your stress before a speaking session? ²

¹ Adapted from Grieve, Woodley, Hunt, & McKay (2021)

² Adapted from Kongi (2015),

³ Developed by the researchers

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