

Investigating the Impact of Obstacles on English Speaking Score*

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Abstract—In the past decades, English language is considered the most popular spoken language worldwide. English for second language learners aims to develop speaking skill abilities and it is a challenging task. This study aims to investigate the perceived obstacles on the English-speaking score of Zarqa University (ZU) students majoring in English language and literature through the impact of various factors on the speaking score. This study adopts a quantitative method using a survey. Therefore, a questionnaire is designed to understand the students' perception of the factors that may have an impact on the speaking score. A sample of (147) students, for whom English is a foreign language, from ZU from different nationalities are selected. The results indicate that academic and conversational English skill has a significant impact on the speaking score. However, linguistic obstacles, speech processing difficulties, speaking confidence, and access to speaking opportunities do not have significant impact on speaking score. This study provides insights to the academic institutes to focus on the improvement of their curricula and academic plans to further enhance the English speaking skill as second language learners.

Index Terms—English language, speaking skill, English as a Second Language, speaking obstacles, speaking difficulties

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, English language has been the fastest-spreading language. English is spoken by 1.75 billion people around the world, one billion speak it as a second or foreign language and around 400 million use it as their first language (Sehume, 2019). This is due to the importance of the English language as an international language which is spoken in almost every domain such as education, business, medicine, and engineering among others. Speaking is the ability to express feelings and convey information to others. Speaking English is a vital skill that is needed to broaden one's experiences and communication with the rest of the world. Thus, English for second language learners seeks to strengthen their ability to speak.

However, there are various barriers that Arab learners come across in their learning process, such as hesitating to speak and lack of confidence (Labouvie-Vief et al., 1989). In his study, Alrasheedi (2020) attempts to investigate the factors that impact speaking performance in Arabic speaking EFL learners, the results show that the factors impacting students' performance in speaking skills are fear of making mistakes, anxiety, peer pressure, and shyness. Another study by Emirza and Sahril (2021) investigated the personality (introvert) that affects students in speaking English and influences the students in their communication, the results of the study show that "From the linguistics factors, eight of thirteen students said vocabulary and grammar was the common problem, and six of thirteen students experienced difficulties in pronunciation".

In his attempt to examine the strategies used by EFL learners at the University of Bisha to enhance their speaking skills in online learning, Mohammed (2021) states that "All the learners, both males and females, use five types of learning strategies either individually or in combination, viz. in-class strategies, study-based strategies, listening-based strategies, internet-based strategies, and memory strategies, but memory strategy is used more than other strategies."

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Jordan population is a well-educated with very high percentage of Literacy for those over 15 years old. Jordanians pursue to educate themselves and improve their proficiency level to ensure their readiness for the labour market inside the country or abroad. One of the major challenges that negatively impact their readiness is the weak-to-moderate level in speaking English. This study aims at investigating the perceived obstacles on the English-speaking score of students in Zarqa University (ZU) of English as a foreign language

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking, listening, writing, and reading are the four basic language skills, and speaking has a special value in everyday life and it is an important complementary instrument in communication which has been studied thoroughly in the literature (Darcy et al., 2012). Speaking can be defined as the process of talking and expressing. Speaking consists of using lexical, grammatical, and pronunciation actions in a language in order to express any concept and ideas. The word speech was used in the past as a substitute of the newly used term; speaking in the process of teaching a foreign language. Speaking skill is an essential and a major pillar of teaching and learning any language (Johnson et al., 2009). The author stated that students believe that the product of language appears in speaking. However, similar to other teaching processes, there are various challenges that impact this process such as the model of mixed classes with different students' abilities. As a result, a proper program needs to be designed and a plan needs to be in place that can improve the learning of speaking skill. For instance, creating effective speaking strategies to improve speaking skill will have a vital impact, such as storytelling and the ability of discussing it. This discussion should be interactive and guided by the instructor to ensure the strong engagement of the students.

Speaking as one of the productive skills represents evidence to how much is the learner is competent in any language. A study indicated that speaking activities must be corrected by the teacher because it is similar to writing activities. For instance, if the teacher does not correct it, the mistakes will remain. In these mistakes, it is not important to focus on the grammatical and lexical knowledge. Moreover, educators must pay attention to develop students' self-confidence, teaching them how to avoid their mother tongue, and use curricula targeted to reach higher levels of speaking. This study also illustrates that speaking is the spirit of language. Therefore, if a person does not achieve a high proficiency level in speaking, his education is classified as incomplete. Speaking skill is the way to convey messages to others and communication is the goal of this skill (Zyoud, 2016). Additionally, a study stated that the language cannot be understood if this language is not being spoken (Brown, 2014).

The process of teaching speaking skills lacks the proper sequential stages of teaching. Also, realizing the difference between the stages of learners and their needs are not seriously considered. The sequence of tasks that forms the communication framework is important for teaching pronunciation. Teaching pronunciation consists of five tasks namely: description and analysis, listening discrimination, controlled practice, guided practice, and communicative practice. This framework is appropriate for learners in advanced stages, but learners with low and intermediate levels may require customized framework (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). Furthermore, the pronunciation elements for each of the proficiency levels have significant impact on production and perception among the learners. However, these elements need to be activated according to the types of appropriate tasks (Darcy et al., 2012).

Pronunciation is a big challenge for learners, since there are limited studies in this domain. In addition, there are various challenges facing Arab learners during learning English. Teachers should not lose interest in teaching pronunciation for a better improved future of pronunciation. Also, students should not lose the interest in learning pronunciation (Levis & LeVelle, 2010).

Leaving students to memorize language instead of providing them with a rich communication environment is what creates a gap between language experience and teaching methods. Kayi (2006) in his research provided several suggestions for teachers that can help in teaching spoken language, it included various teaching tools that have been tested, such as asking interesting questions on what the student means and what the student thinks? This would encourage the students to talk more. In addition, the researcher allowed the students to practice different methods and involve each student in every oral activity. Moreover, more time is given to the students than the teacher and the focus is turned towards observing the students' speech. It has been advised that teaching should provide positive comments in order to encourage students to participate actively. On the other hand, the teacher should not correct the student's mistakes while he is speaking, because this will create confusion for the student.

In an interesting study among Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, the relationship between anxiety and speaking skill for English language has been investigated. Anxiety is a feeling that overwhelms and distracts a person, and of course it has a negative effect in all areas of life. This objective was achieved by investigating 80 of EFL English learners in language learning centres. The researchers used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) as a research instrument for quantitative analysis. The results of this research show that anxiety has a negative relationship with the students' learning score of the English language. Furthermore, written language is completely different from oral language for several reasons. The most important reason is the process of speaking production. By conducting a survey, the research studied and observed the anxiety that occurs with students while they are speaking English, and discovered the causes of this anxiety. The study confirmed that language anxiety totally affects students in several ways, especially during speaking activities. In this study, the linguistic anxiety is defined as a

feeling that confuses students during the speech production process precisely, when speaking in a language other than the mother tongue. Also, the results revealed three different levels of anxiety among students (Azizifar et al., 2014).

Similarly, a study by Hanton et al. (2004) aimed to investigate the relationship between three main constructs namely, symptom interpretation, competitive anxiety, and self-confidence and their impact toward the overall performance. The study was carried out by conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. The results show that two causal networks confirmed the influence of self-confidence on the two other constructs. Thus, self-confidence is a vital quality that is required to acquire towards possibly devastating thoughts and emotional states that are experienced in various competitive situations. Moreover, this highlights the importance of inner- and outer-confidence in learning English, especially speaking. Inner-confidence is the individual's feelings and the ideas that prove the level of satisfaction a person has with himself. The elements of the capability of controlling communication and feelings are used to represent outer-confidence. People who are extremely inner-confident are gratified with themselves and show a high self-appreciation.

With respect to Arab learners, there are several challenges that have been acknowledged by researchers in both speaking and writing (Rababah, 2002). These challenges have been revealed in a study by Al-Khairy (2013). This study aimed at investigating the key demotivating factors that are perceived by Saudi undergraduates. The researcher conducted a quantitative analysis using a 23-item self-structured questionnaire to analyse the student's demotivating factors with respect to learning EFL. The collected data in this research is statistically analysed and an independent t-test sample is carried to mark any significant variations in terms of demotivating factors for English and non-English learners. This study concluded the various challenges that negatively impact the proficiency level of English Learners (EL). For instance, poor teaching methods, short teaching curricula, demotivating, low familiarity with English, and lack of information related to the institutes in which the student's study would have negative impact on the proficiency level. Azmi and Alqaryouti (2021) found that "students' incorrect use of syntactic structures happens by disordering certain elements, omitting necessary, or adding unnecessary, elements as a result of their incomplete application of rules of L2."

Lastly, there are various challenges that may have an impact on English speaking skills namely, Speech Processing Difficulties, Linguistic Obstacles, Conversational and Academic English Language Skills, Negative Affect, and Access to Speaking Chances were studied in China and Hong Kong. These challenges were studied on students who are speaking English as a foreign or second language. The research was conducted on two students' groups from two different universities. The study adopted a quantitative approach using a questionnaire to analyse the impact of the mentioned challenges on the speaking level of the students. The results of the study clarified the difficulties that are faced by students in both groups, and proved that the lack of vocabulary, linguistic processes, emotional arousal, and speaking opportunities influence and affect the level of speaking for students. The study revealed that language learners in China tend to speak their native language and move away from speaking English because of the aforementioned factors, which explains the reason for the weakness in their speaking skills (Gan, 2013).

Together these studies highlight the significance of studying various difficulties and challenges on the English-speaking proficiency level of students of English as a foreign or second language. This is an important topic that needs to be explored in different settings. This study aims to investigate the perceived obstacles on the English-speaking score of students of English as a second language for students studying in Zarqa University in Jordan.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objective of this study, a quantitative method through a survey is adopted. The survey is an effective and efficient instrument and it is the most suitable approach for testing theories with respect to quantities and perceptions for participants (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). In this approach, the aim is to investigate a sample as a part of the whole target population. Therefore, the findings of the targeted sample can represent the whole population.

A purposeful sample is selected in this study to ensure that the sample adequately represents the desired group within the complete target population. The sample group is selected from 147 individuals ($n=147$) and it includes English as a foreign language students from ZU with different nationalities.

A. Research Question and Hypotheses

This study tries to find an answer to the following research question: What are the perceived obstacles that impact the English-speaking score of students of English as a foreign language?

The aim is to study and investigate the perceived obstacles on the English-speaking score of ZU students of English as a foreign language. In the present study, the concern is to find out the impact of five factors on the speaking score. The factors are Linguistic Obstacles, Speaking Processing, Conversational and Academic English Skills, Speaking Confidence, and Access to Speaking Chances. The formulated hypotheses form the foundation of this study is as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Linguistic Obstacles significantly impact Speaking Score.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Speaking Processing Difficulties Significantly impact Speaking Score.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Academic and Conversational English Skills Significantly impact Speaking Score.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Speaking Confidence Significantly impact Speaking Score.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Access to Speaking Chances Significantly impact Speaking Score.

B. Questionnaire Design

Questionnaire responses in this study are described according to the defined five constructs, namely Linguistic Obstacles (LO), Speaking Processing Difficulties (SPD), Academic and Conversational English Skills (ACES), Speaking Confidence (SC) and Access to Speaking Opportunities (ASO). Each construct is measured by a set of questions that are computed based on five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire of the current study is adopted from a study by Gan (2013). This questionnaire is slightly re-designed to serve the aim of this study. The questionnaire is revised to be more effective and serve the desired goals of this study.

The questionnaire includes the Personal Information section that contains details related to the sample characteristics. The questionnaire also includes (19) questions that fall under (5) constructs. The first construct is the “Linguistic Obstacles” which consists of (4) questions. The second construct is “Speaking Processing Difficulties” which consists of (4) questions. The third construct is “Academic and Conversational English Skills” which consists of (5) questions. The fourth construct is “Speaking Confidence” which consists of (3) questions. The last construct is “Access to Speaking Opportunities” which consists of (3) questions.

Each of these questions is assigned with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Always” (5) for complete agreement to “Never” (1) for complete disagreement. The personal information questions consist of five (5) elements including year of study, gender, nationality, and the speaking score and the assurance that the student is a language learner. The questionnaire was built using Google Forms and an online form link has been sent to the participants to answer the questions electronically.

C. Measurement Validation

To empirically validate the Perceived Obstacles questionnaire, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is used and research hypotheses were tested through SEM using AMOS 24. There are two models in SEM: Measurement Model and Structural Model.

The measurement model defines relations between the observed (i.e., questionnaire items) and unobserved (latent; i.e., questionnaire constructs). So, the measurement model represents the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), as it specifies the pattern by which each measure loads on a particular factor (i.e., construct). CFA is used only to validate the model. On the other hand, the structural model defines relations among the unobserved variables; that is, it explains how well the constructs are related to each other and therefore they are used for hypotheses testing.

In this study, data is analysed using the two-step approach of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), whereby the estimation of the confirmatory measurement model precedes the estimation of the structural model. Before evaluating the model, it is necessary to present the analysis of the psychometric properties of the instrument using the measurement model. This is presented in the next section, where the validation and reliability checks of the instrument are presented.

(a). Validation of the Measurement Model: Psychometric Checks

A CFA is performed using AMOS 24 on two stages: first order measurement model, and second order measurement model. In the first order measurement model, the questionnaire items (observed variables) are plotted being attached by arrows to their hypothesized constructs (latent variables); five constructs are plotted: LO, SPD, ACES, SC, and ASO, see the diagram in Figure 1. In the second order model, a higher construct is added to the diagram, in Figure 2, which is the Perceived Obstacles (PO). Both models are validated by running the validity and reliability checks: Convergent Validity, Composite Reliability, Discriminant Validity, and Construct Reliability.

(b). Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is established when each measurement item correlates strongly with its assumed theoretical construct. Factor loading values range between zero and one (0 – 1). The ideal level of standardized loadings for reflective indicators is 0.70 but 0.50 is considered to be an acceptable level (Mattsson and Elmqvist, 1997). Standardized factor loadings for questionnaire items and their corresponding constructs are reported in Table 1, ranging between 0.466 and 0.952, indicating that all items (observed variables) are statistically significantly loading on their hypothesized constructs, where $p < 0.001$.

TABLE 1
FACTOR LOADINGS OF CONSTRUCTS AND ITEMS; FROM CFA

Construct/Item	Factor Loading*
Linguistic Obstacles	.882
"I am not good at using complex structures when speaking English"	.638
"I get stuck with grammar or vocabulary when speaking English to my teachers"	.640
"I make grammatical errors when speaking English"	.582
"I encounter pronunciation problems when speaking English"	.474
Speech Processing Difficulties	.924
"I think in my mother tongue when speaking English"	.549
"I avoid using difficult words and structures when speaking English"	.508
"I struggle to communicate effectively in English with my teachers"	.679
"I feel difficulty attending to both fluency and accuracy when speaking English"	.815
Academic and Conversational English Skills	.912
"I feel difficulty leading class discussions in English"	.758
"I feel difficulty giving speeches in English in front of the whole class"	.808
"I feel difficulty participating in whole-class English discussions"	.831
"I feel difficulty participating in small-group English discussions during class"	.745
"I am not good at joking and chatting in English"	.518
Speaking Confidence	.952
"I am nervous when speaking English"	.690
"I do not feel confident when speaking English"	.810
"I keep silent in class because of lack of confidence in speaking English"	.820
Access to Speaking Opportunities	.887
"I feel lack of opportunities to speak English outside class"	.466
"I feel lack of opportunities to speak English in class"	.781
"I feel lack of opportunities to find someone to speak English with"	.613

*. Significant at $p < 0.01$.

In SEM, "for the convergent validity the factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.5" (Fornell and Larcker, 1981, p.p 39-50). The AVE for each of the factors is manually calculated for all the constructs using the formula suggested by Gefen and Straub (2005).

The AVE scores for the all the factors of Perceived Obstacles are displayed in Table 2. In the present study, the AVE values ranged from 0.345 to 0.602. Although LO, SPD, and ASO have AVEs less than 0.50, but composite reliability is higher than 0.60; therefore, the convergent validity of the constructs is still adequate (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

(c). Composite Reliability

Composite Reliability (CR) measures the overall reliability of a set of items loaded on a latent construct. The value ranges between zero and one, and values greater than 0.70 reflect good reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Between 0.60 – 0.70 is also acceptable if other indicators of the construct's validity are good. Also, according to (Awang, 2012), CR should be more than 0.60 to be considered as acceptable. The internal reliability of the measurement models was tested using Fornell and Larcker (1981) composite reliability.

The Composite Reliability values are presented in Table 2, which shows that all composite reliabilities of constructs have a value higher than 0.70, indicating adequate internal consistency of the latent constructs, except for LO and ASO having CR below 0.70; however, greater than 0.60, which is acceptable.

TABLE 2
FACTOR LOADINGS, AVE, CR, CRONBACH'S ALPHA FOR CONSTRUCTS

Constructs	FL	AVE	CR	Alpha	No. of Items
Linguistic Obstacles	.882	.345	.675	.680	4
Speech Processing Difficulties	.924	.421	.738	.733	4
Academic and Conversational English Skills	.912	.548	.856	.838	5
Speaking Confidence	.952	.602	.818	.820	3
Access to Speaking Opportunities	.887	.401	.658	.763	3
Perceived Speaking Obstacles	-	.831	.961	.923	19

(d). Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity, on the other hand, determines whether the construct is sufficiently distinct from other constructs. The discriminant validity is assessed using Fornell and Larcker (1981) by "comparing the square root of each AVE in the diagonal with the correlation coefficients squared (off-diagonal) for each construct in the relevant rows and columns"; i.e., each latent variable (construct) square root of AVE should be larger than the latent variable correlations squared. As depicted in Table 3, for the LO-SPD, LO-ACES, LO-SC, SPD-ACES, SPD-SC, ACES-SC, and SC-ASO, there are disputes and the differences are not small and not negligible. Therefore, based on this criterion, discriminant validity is not established. Another requirement for discriminant validity is the correlation between latent

constructs that should not exceed 0.85. As can be seen in Table 4, correlation coefficients between latent variables (constructs) range from 0.370 to 0.738, which do not exceed the cut-off of 0.85. This indicates that the latent constructs are neither redundant nor have multicollinearity issues (Awang, 2012). Recent researches that critically examined the performance of Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion for discriminant validity assessment has found that this approach reliably detects discriminant validity issues (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

TABLE 3
DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

	LO	SPD	ACES	SC	ASO
LO	.587				
SPD	.781	.649			
ACES	.616	.769	.740		
SC	.716	.724	.753	.776	
ASO	.493	.558	.717	.812	.633

TABLE 4.
CORRELATION MATRIX OF LATENT VARIABLES (CONSTRUCTS)

	LO	SPD	ACES	SC	ASO
LO	1				
SPD	.552**	1			
ACES	.619**	.706**	1		
SC	.568**	.647**	.738**	1	
ASO	.370**	.533**	.579**	.610**	1

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

As a remedy, Dijkstra and Henseler (2015) propose assessing the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of the correlations. Henseler's HTMT criterion suggests that all variables are distinctively different at HTMT 0.90 cut-off point. As shown in Table 5, the HTMT values for all variables are in the range from 0.533 to 0.888, except the latent construct SPD with ACES, which is greater than the HTMT cut-off of 0.90 by a slight value; 0.006. Therefore, these indicate that all variables are distinctively different at values below HTMT 0.90. Importantly, the result of HTMT infers that the variables are distinctively different from one another, which also confirms the discriminant validity.

TABLE 5
HETEROTRAIT-MONOTRAIT RATIO (HTMT)

	LO	SPD	ACES	SC	ASO
LO					
SPD	.795				
ACES	.826	.906			
SC	.775	.835	.888		
ASO	.533	.716	.733	.781	

(e). Construct Reliability

The reliability of the study instrument is determined by the Cronbach's Alpha value. For the five constructs of this study, Cronbach's Alpha values are reported in Table 2, ranging from 0.680 to 0.838, with overall alpha of 0.923 for the entire questionnaire variables. This indicates that the internal consistency of the factors (> 0.60) of the measurement model is good and acceptable (Awang, 2012).

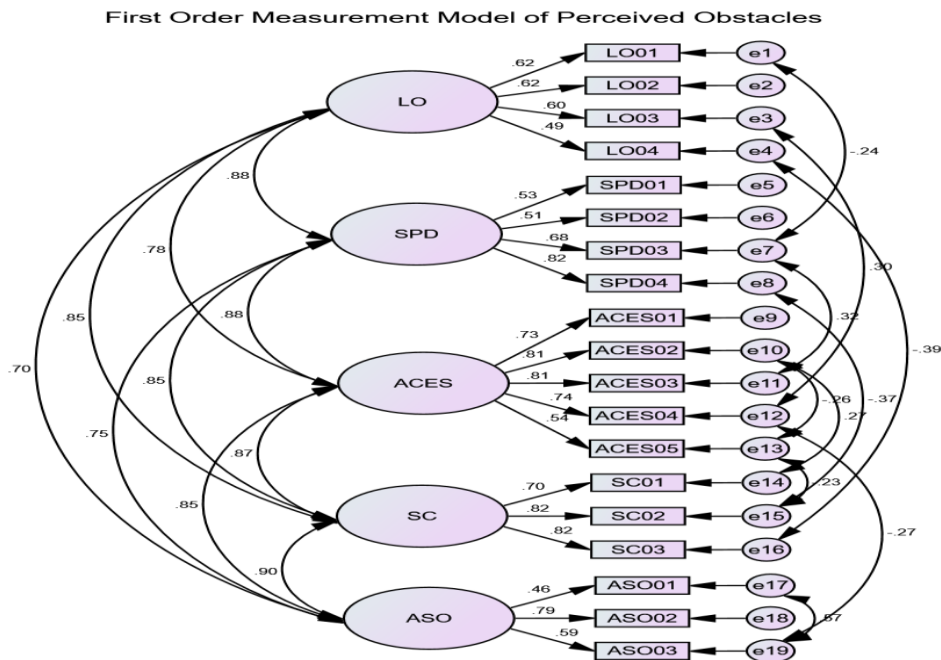


Figure 1. First Order Measurement Model of Perceived Obstacles

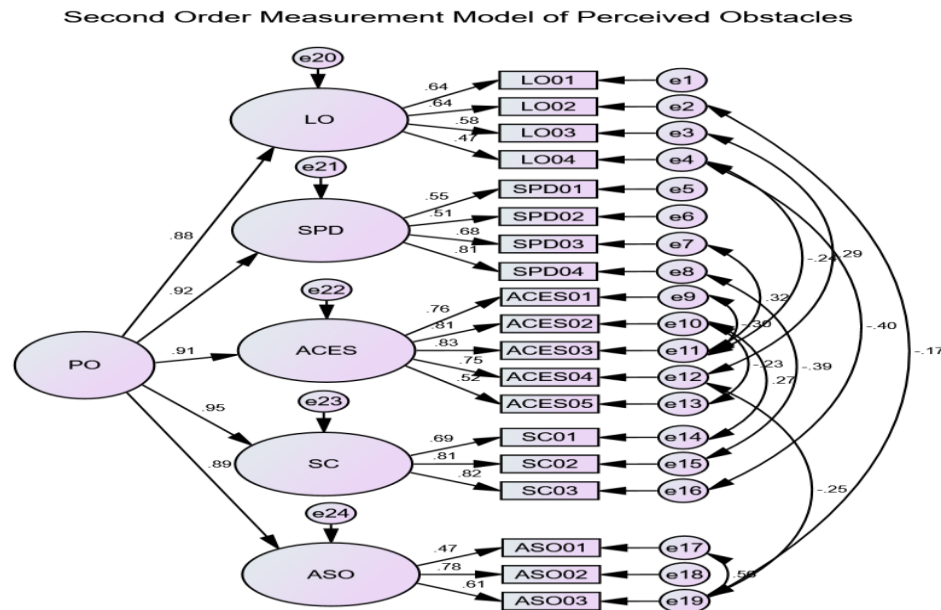


Figure 2. Second Order Measurement Model of Perceived Obstacles

(f). Model Fit: Construct Validity

According to Awang (2012), construct validity is assessed through the fitness indexes. There are three fit categories to fulfil; namely, Absolute Fit, Incremental Fit, and Parsimonious Fit. These three fitness indexes obtained from the CFA results in Figure 1 and Figure 2 for first order and second order models are presented in Table 6. The fitness indices for both CFA models have achieved the minimum requirement of construct validity; thus, Perceived Obstacles is a valid construct. The values of CMIN (χ^2/df) are 1.329 and 1.320, for the first and second order CFA model, respectively, which shows acceptable model fit. Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.967 for both models as against the recommended level of above 0.90. Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value is 0.048 and 0.047 for both the first order and second order models, respectively, which is less than 0.06, so the model has a good fit Hu and Bentler (1999).

TABLE 6
FIT STATISTICS OF MEASUREMENT MODEL FOR PERCEIVED OBSTACLES QUESTIONNAIRE CONSTRUCTS

Fit Indices		Acceptance Level	First Order		Second Order	
			Obtained	Result	Obtained	Result
Parsimonious	χ^2/df	< 3.0	1.329	Achieved	1.320	Achieved
Incremental	CFI	> .90	.967	Achieved	.967	Achieved
Absolute	RMSEA	< .06	.048	Achieved	.047	Achieved

The confirmatory factor analysis shows an acceptable overall model fit and hence, the theorized model fits well with the observed data. It can be concluded that the hypothesized factor CFA model fits the sample data very well.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, a descriptive summary is discussed for the study variables; dependent and independent. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations are descriptive statistics used to summarize participants' responses to the questionnaire. The dependent variable 'Speaking Score' is measured on a continuous scale, so it is summarized using the mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, minimum, and maximum values. Histogram and boxplot are used to graphically represent the dependent variable, while stacked bar charts are used to represent the independent variables.

A. Sample Profile

The descriptive summary indicates that the majority of survey participants are Jordanians (58%) and Syrians (25%), while 14% of the samples are Palestinians and only three students, who are females in the fourth year of study, from Bangladesh participated. Generally, the majority of participants are females representing 79% of the sample, 39% of the sample are in the third year of study and 33% are in the second year. Most of the Jordanian participants are females in the second year (16%) and females in the third year (18%) of total participants.

B. Dependent Variable: Speaking Score (SS)

The descriptive statistics show that the distribution of Students' Speaking Scores is positively skewed, $Sku = -0.888$, with a mean score of 76.45 and standard deviation of 13.012. The Speaking Scores range between 30 and 98 (on the 0-100% scale). Moreover, the distribution has a platykurtic kurtosis, $Ku = 0.758$. The median is 78, which is greater than the mean, confirming the negative skewness of the score distribution. This can be attributed to the three outliers existing on the left tail of the distribution.

C. Independent Variables (IV)

The current study has five independent variables: Access to Speaking Opportunities, Academic and Conversational English Skills, Speech Processing Difficulties, Speaking Confidence, and Linguistic Obstacles. The bar chart in Figure 3 shows the mean scores for the five independent variables, indicating an overall overview of the difficulties that students have in speaking English. All means are around the score (3) that refers to 'Sometimes', indicating that the majority of students have these difficulties, however, not much often. More details about the IVs responses are presented below.

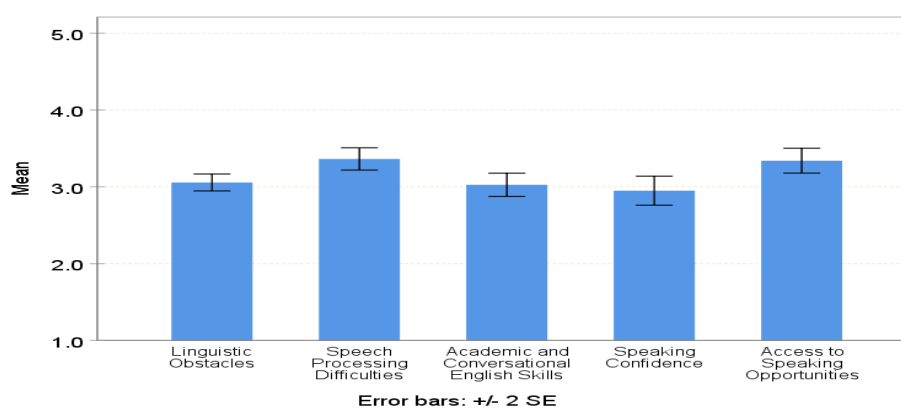


Figure 3. Bar Error Chart of the Independent Variables

D. Linguistic Obstacles (LO)

LO is measured in the questionnaire by the responses of four items. In Table 7, descriptive statistics of LO are reported, indicating that 76% of students responded with at least option (3) referring to 'Sometimes', and 28% responded with at least (4) referring to 'Often', with a grand mean of 3.06 and a standard deviation of 0.666. That is, the

majority of students ‘Sometimes’ have linguistic obstacles. The four items’ means range between 2.78 and 3.19, indicating that the students’ responses are scattered around the mean of (3).

Using the relative percentage (R %), the top obstacle students have with the maximum R% of 64% is that they get stuck with vocabulary or grammar when speaking English to their teachers. The second obstacle, with R% of 63% is that students are not good at using complex structures when speaking English. The third obstacle with R% of 62% is that students make grammatical errors when speaking English. Finally, with R% of 56%, students encounter pronunciation problems when speaking English, which is the least frequent obstacle among all. The results can be more investigated through the stacked bar chart drawn in Figure 4.

TABLE 7
DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF LINGUISTIC OBSTACLES, N = 146

Linguistic Obstacles Items	Scale*, n (%)					Statistics	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	M(SD)	R%**
“I am not good at using complex structures when speaking English”	5(3.4)	20(13.7)	78(53.4)	31(21.2)	12(8.2)	3.17(.889)	.634
“I get stuck with grammar or vocabulary when speaking English to my teachers”	5(3.4)	21(14.4)	73(50)	35(24)	12(8.2)	3.19(.905)	.638
“I make grammatical errors when speaking English”	6(4.1)	25(17.1)	72(49.3)	37(25.3)	6(4.1)	3.08(.867)	.616
“I encounter pronunciation problems when speaking English”	17(11.6)	40(27.4)	56(38.4)	24(16.4)	9(6.2)	2.78(1.054)	.556
Total	33(5.7)	106(18.2)	279(47.8)	127(21.7)	39(6.7)	3.06(.666)	.611

*. Scale: (1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often, (5) Always

** . R% = Relative Percentage, computed as Mean/5

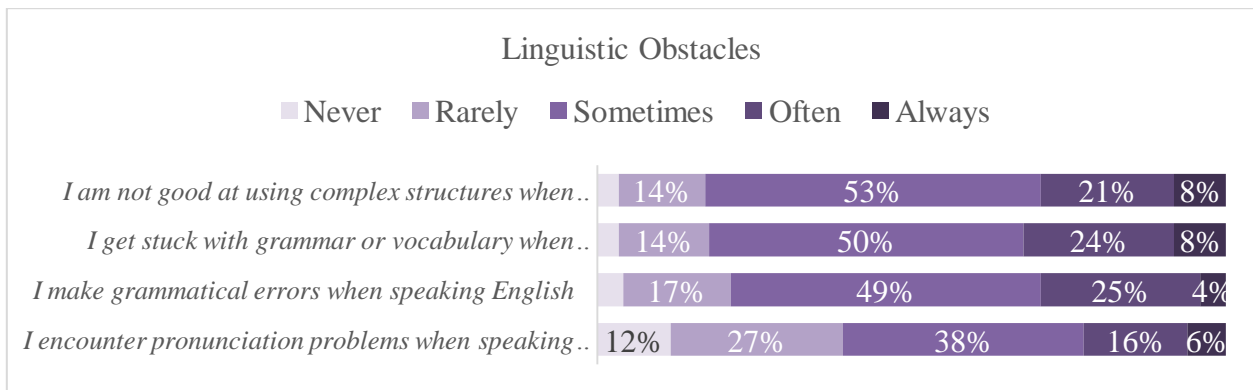


Figure 4. Stacked Bar Chart of Linguistic Obstacles

E. Speech Processing Difficulties (SPD)

SPD is measured by the responses of four items. The four items are shown to have higher frequency ranges than the previous variable (LO), as the grand mean is 3.36 with a standard deviation of 0.874, and 79% of students responding with at least (3) referring to ‘Sometimes’. Moreover, 45% of students responded with at least (4) referring to ‘Often’. Item means range between 3.27 and 3.45, with the difficulty “students avoid using difficult words and structures when speaking English” being on top with R% of 69% as shown in Table 8. The stacked bar chart in Figure 5 shows the percent distribution for SPD item responses.

TABLE 8
DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF SPEECH PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES, N = 146

Speech Processing Difficulties Items	Scale*, n (%)					Statistics	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	M(SD)	R%**
“I think in my mother tongue when speaking English”	16(11)	16(11)	50(34.2)	30(20.5)	34(23.3)	3.34(1.256)	.668
“I avoid using difficult words and structures when speaking English”	10(6.8)	17(11.6)	45(30.8)	46(31.5)	28(19.2)	3.45(1.133)	.690
“I struggle to communicate effectively in English with my teachers”	16(11)	22(15.1)	46(31.5)	31(21.2)	31(21.2)	3.27(1.261)	.654
“I feel difficulty attending to both fluency and accuracy when speaking English”	6(4.1)	17(11.6)	60(41.1)	39(26.7)	24(16.4)	3.40(1.027)	.680
Total	48(8.2)	72(12.3)	201(34.4)	146(25)	117(20)	3.36(.874)	.673

*. Scale: (1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often, (5) Always

** . R% = Relative Percentage, computed as Mean/5

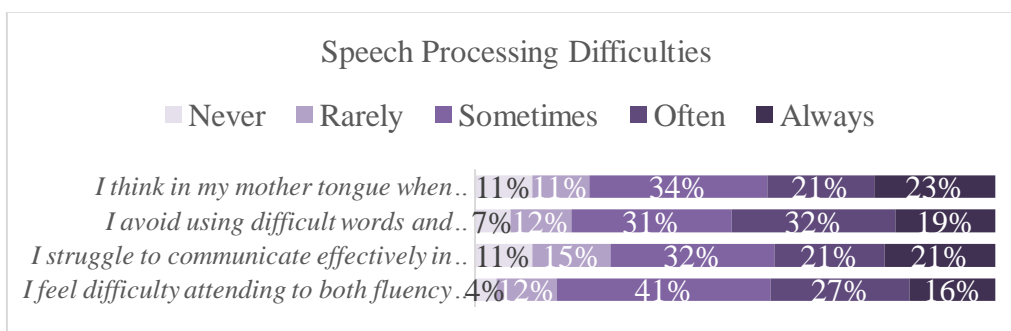


Figure 5. Stacked Bar Chart of Speech Processing Difficulties

F. Academic and Conversational English Skills (ACES)

The findings of the descriptive analysis of ACES are reported in Table 9, which reveal that the grand mean of ACES score is 3.03 with a standard deviation of 0.913. Item means range between 2.73 and 3.18. On average, 71% of students responded with at least (3) referring to ‘Sometimes’, indicating that the majority of students have academic and conversational English skills difficulties. Moreover, a large proportion 34% responded with at least (4) referring to ‘Often’, which indicates that they face these difficulties more often. See Figure 6.

The R% values indicate that the most frequent difficulty students have is “giving speeches in English in front of the whole class” with R% of 64%, followed by the difficulty “participating in whole-class English discussions” with R% of 63%, and ‘leading class discussions in English’ with R% of 63%.

TABLE 9
DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF ACADEMIC AND CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH SKILLS, N = 146

Academic and Conversational English Skills Items	Scale*, n (%)					Statistics	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	M(SD)	R%**
<i>“I feel difficulty leading class discussions in English”</i>	16(11)	15(10.3)	66(45.2)	30(20.5)	19(13)	3.14(1.12)	.628
<i>“I feel difficulty giving speeches in English in front of the whole class”</i>	18(12.3)	17(11.6)	54(37)	34(23.3)	23(15.8)	3.18(1.203)	.636
<i>“I feel difficulty participating in whole-class English discussions”</i>	15(10.3)	27(18.5)	45(30.8)	39(26.7)	20(13.7)	3.15(1.182)	.630
<i>“I feel difficulty participating in small-group English discussions during class”</i>	31(21.2)	26(17.8)	48(32.9)	34(23.3)	7(4.8)	2.73(1.177)	.546
<i>“I am not good at joking and chatting in English”</i>	24(16.4)	21(14.4)	56(38.4)	32(21.9)	13(8.9)	2.92(1.175)	.584
Total	104(14.2)	106(14.5)	269(36.8)	169(23.2)	82(11.2)	3.03(.913)	.605

*. Scale: (1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often, (5) Always
 **. R% = Relative Percentage, computed as Mean/5

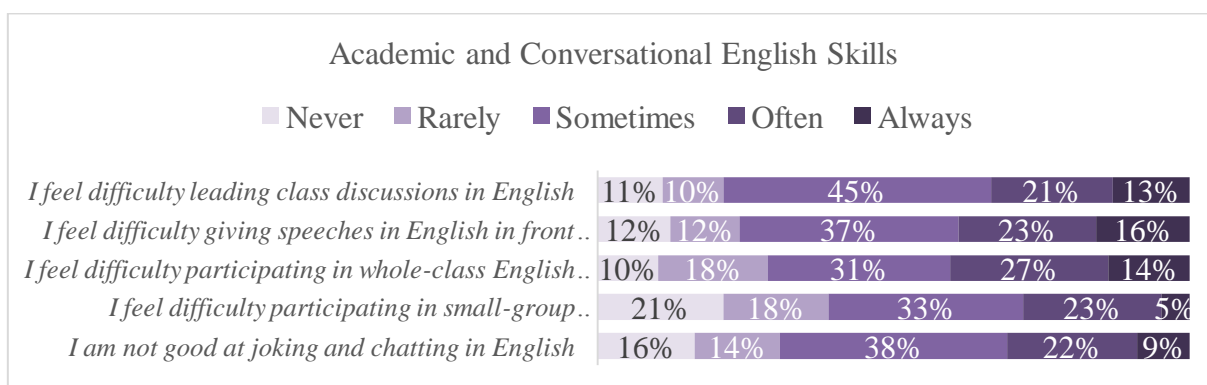


Figure 6. Stacked Bar Chart of Academic and Conversational English Skills

G. Speaking Confidence (SC)

Based on the descriptive analysis results stated in Table 10, on average 64% of students have speaking confidence difficulties at least ‘Sometimes’, with a mean response of 2.95 and a standard deviation of 1.139. Mean response for SC items ranges between 2.80 and 3.12. Moreover, 36% of students have SC difficulties at least ‘Often’. On top of the list, with R% of 62%, the majority of students are nervous when speaking English. Second, with R% of 58% the majority of

students do not feel confident when speaking, and finally with R% of 56%, the majority of students keep silent in class because of lack of confidence in speaking English. Investigate Figure 7 for more detailed overview of the distribution of response percentages.

TABLE 10
DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF SPEAKING CONFIDENCE, N = 146

Speaking Confidence Items	Scale*, n (%)					Statistics	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	M(SD)	R%**
<i>"I am nervous when speaking English"</i>	24(16.4)	25(17.1)	33(22.6)	37(25.3)	27(18.5)	3.12(1.349)	.624
<i>"I do not feel confident when speaking English"</i>	31(21.2)	18(12.3)	51(34.9)	23(15.8)	23(15.8)	2.92(1.329)	.584
<i>"I keep silent in class because of lack of confidence in speaking English"</i>	34(23.3)	24(16.4)	40(27.4)	33(22.6)	15(10.3)	2.80(1.306)	.560
Total	89(20.3)	67(15.3)	124(28.3)	93(21.2)	65(14.8)	2.95(1.139)	.590

*. Scale: (1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often, (5) Always
 **. R% = Relative Percentage, computed as Mean/5

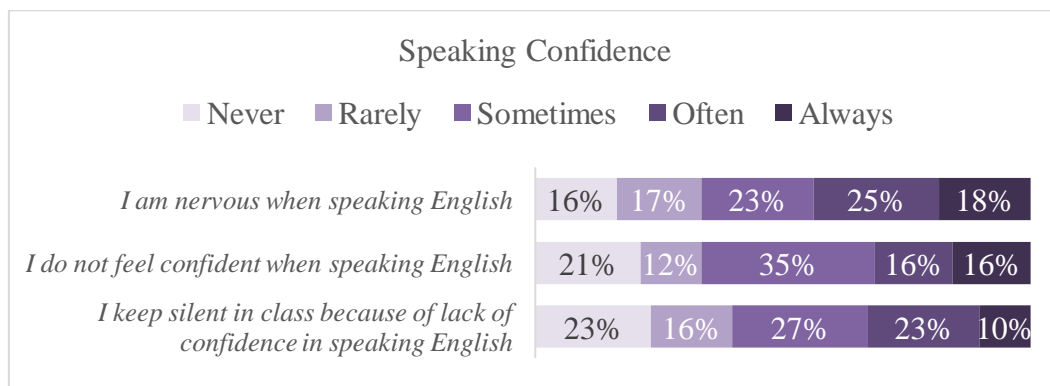


Figure 7. Stacked Bar Chart of Speaking Confidence

H. Access to Speaking Opportunities (ASO)

As seen in Table 11, on average, 77% of students at least responded with (3) referring to ‘Sometimes’, and 45% responded with at least (4) referring to ‘Often’, with a mean response of 3.34 and a standard deviation of 0.978. Item means range between 3.03 and 3.58, indicating that there is high likelihood of ASO among students. Based on the R% values, the item “I feel lack of opportunities to find someone to speak English with” has the highest value of 72%, followed by the item “I feel lack of opportunities to speak English outside class” with R% of 68%, and the item “I feel lack of opportunities to speak English in class” with R% of 61%. See the distribution of percentages in Figure 8.

TABLE 11
DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF ACCESS TO SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES, N = 146

Access to Speaking Opportunities Items	Scale*, n (%)					Statistics	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	M(SD)	R%**
<i>"I feel lack of opportunities to speak English outside class"</i>	13(8.9)	18(12.3)	47(32.2)	32(21.9)	36(24.7)	3.41(1.236)	.682
<i>"I feel lack of opportunities to speak English in class"</i>	14(9.6)	33(22.6)	49(33.6)	35(24)	15(10.3)	3.03(1.126)	.606
<i>"I feel lack of opportunities to find someone to speak English with"</i>	12(8.2)	11(7.5)	42(28.8)	42(28.8)	39(26.7)	3.58(1.196)	.716
Total	39(8.9)	62(14.2)	138(31.5)	109(24.9)	90(20.5)	3.34(.978)	.668

*. Scale: (1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often, (5) Always
 **. R% = Relative Percentage, computed as Mean/5

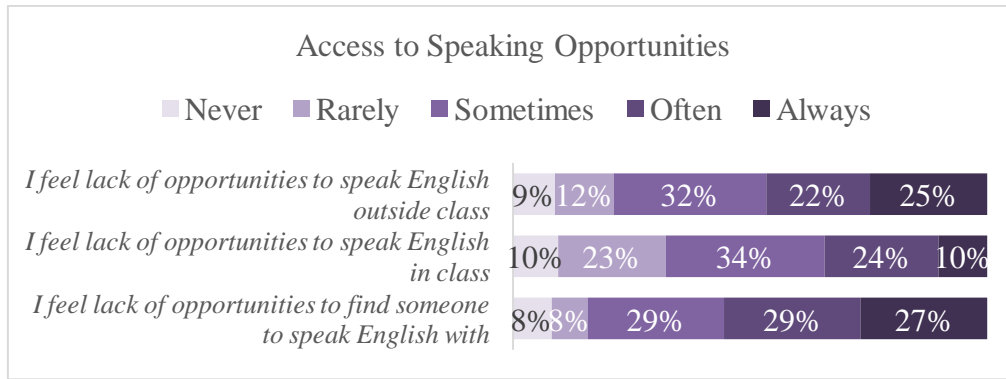


Figure 8. Stacked Bar Chart of Access to Speaking Opportunities

I. Structural Equation Modelling: Path Analysis

The model can now be tested utilizing SEM for hypotheses testing purposes when the proposed model has been validated by the CFA. The diagram in Figure 9 shows the structural model tested using SEM technique, in the form of Path Analysis, where the mean score of each construct items is used as the observed variable.

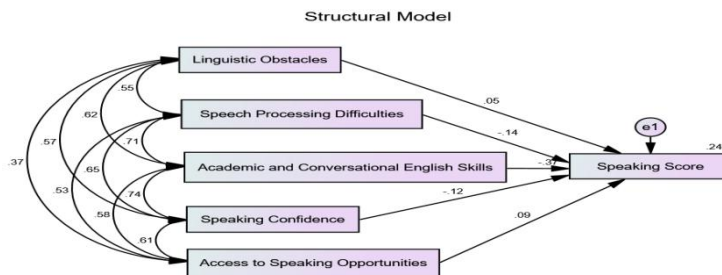


Figure 9. Structural Model for Perceived Obstacles: Hypotheses Testing

The overall model fit for structural model was examined. The same set of fit indices utilized to assess measurement model to test the full structural model. The chi-square was significant as expected, and the CFI index was substantially above the preferred 0.90 threshold. The absolute fit measure of RMSEA was also well below the recommended cut-off of 0.06 to be indicative of good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). These overall fit indices indicated acceptable fit of the model to the observed data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The analysis of SEM Path Analysis on the proposed model has generated results which are illustrated in Table 13.

TABLE 12
STRUCTURAL MODEL FIT

Fit Indices	Acceptance Level	Structural Model	
		Obtained	Result
Parsimonious	$\chi^2/df < 3.0$	1.483	Achieved
Incremental	CFI > .90	.999	Achieved
Absolute	RMSEA < .06	.058	Achieved

TABLE 13
SEM PATH ANALYSIS RESULTS [DEPENDENT VARIABLE: SPEAKING SCORE]

Hypothesis	Path	Regression Weight		S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
		Unstandardized	Standardized				
1	LO \square SS	1.000	.051				
2	SPD \square SS	-2.065	-.138	1.596	-1.294	.196	NS ^a
3	ACES \square SS	-5.244	-.367	1.730	-3.032	.002**	S
4	SC \square SS	-1.428	-.125	1.332	1.072	.284	NS
5	ASO \square SS	1.190	.089	1.268	.938	.348	NS

a. NS = Not Supported, S = Supported
**. Significant at $\alpha = 0.01$.

Path analysis results show that the Hypothesis (3) only was supported, $p = 0.002$, while Hypotheses (1), (2), (4), and (5) were not supported, $p > 0.05$.

V. CONCLUSION

Speaking English language as a foreign language is the main objective of learners. English learners as a foreign language around the globe strive to develop their proficiency level in speaking English language. However, the development of the speaking skill is a very difficult task for most of the language learners. This study aims at analysing and understanding the perceived obstacles on the English-speaking score of ZU students of English as a foreign language. In this study, the concern is to find out the impact of five factors on the speaking score. This study adopts a quantitative methodology using a survey. Thus, a questionnaire is designed to analyse the student's perception towards the factors that may have an impact on the speaking level. A purposeful sample is selected to ensure that particular groups within the target population are sufficiently represented through the sample. The sample size is 147 individuals ($n=147$) and it includes English as a foreign language learners from ZU from different nationalities. The results revealed that LO, SPD, SC and ASO obstacles do not have significant impact on the speaking score. While, the ACES obstacle has significant impact on the speaking score. This study provides useful insights for the academic institutes to pay further attention in the development of the proper curricula and plans that will enhance the speaking skill for English as a second language learners with respect to speaking obstacles and difficulties. Although this study aims to investigate the impact of these obstacles on speaking score of English as a foreign language, the majority of the students are facing these obstacles, which indicates that this requires further investigation and analysis.

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