

The Importance of Exposure to English Outside the Classroom in Libya

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أهمية التعرض للغة الإنجليزية خارج الفصل الدراسي في ليبيا

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Abstract:

This theoretical research paper investigates the critical role of English language exposure beyond formal educational settings within the Libyan English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Despite various curriculum updates and the introduction of interactive teaching methodologies aimed at enhancing linguistic skills, Libyan students continue to struggle with spoken English proficiency and communicative competence. The study posits that the primary reason for this persistent gap is the minimal presence of English in everyday interactions outside academic spaces, which significantly shrinks opportunities for active practice. Drawing on prominent Second Language Acquisition (SLA) frameworks, such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Long's Interaction Hypothesis, and Swain's Output Hypothesis, the research explores how reduced access to authentic input and real-life engagement leads to slower progress and uneven development of communication skills. The analysis highlights that while classroom instruction provides structured study, informal experiences and extramural English—such as engaging with digital content, films, songs, and online communication—are essential for achieving advanced fluency and vocabulary growth. Furthermore, the paper examines the systemic and cultural barriers in Libya, including overcrowded classrooms, test-driven evaluations, and limited teacher preparation, which often push educators toward traditional grammar-based instruction rather than dialogue-rich methods. By synthesizing comparative research from other low-exposure environments, this study underscores that proficiency is not merely a product of rules taught but of uses discovered through repeated informal contact. The findings suggest that bridging the gap between formal instruction and communicative mastery requires a shift in focus toward the sociolinguistic environment and the integration of outside-class exposure into the broader educational strategy.

Keywords: English exposure, SLA, communicative competence, EFL, extramural English, Libyan context.

المخلص

تبحث هذه الورقة البحثية النظرية في الدور الحاسم للتعرض للغة الإنجليزية خارج الأطر التعليمية الرسمية ضمن سياق تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية في ليبيا. على الرغم من التحديثات المختلفة في المناهج وإدخال منهجيات التدريس التفاعلية التي تهدف إلى تعزيز المهارات اللغوية، لا يزال الطلاب الليبيون يواجهون

صعوبات في إتقان التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية والكفاءة التواصلية. تفترض الدراسة أن السبب الرئيسي لهذه الفجوة المستمرة هو التواجد المحدود للغة الإنجليزية في التفاعلات اليومية خارج المساحات الأكاديمية، مما يقلص بشكل كبير فرص الممارسة الفعلية. وبلاستناد إلى أطر بارزة في اكتساب اللغة الثانية، مثل فرضية المدخلات لكراشن، وفرضية التفاعل للونج، وفرضية المخرجات لسواين، يستكشف البحث كيف يؤدي انخفاض فرص الوصول إلى المدخلات الأصلية والتفاعل في الحياة الواقعية إلى بطء التقدم والتطور غير المتساوي لمهارات التواصل. يسلط التحليل الضوء على أنه في حين يوفر التدريس في الفصول الدراسية دراسة منظمة، فإن الخبرات غير الرسمية واللغة الإنجليزية خارج الأسوار المدرسية — مثل التعامل مع المحتوى الرقمي والأفلام والأغاني والتواصل عبر الإنترنت — ضرورية لتحقيق طلاقة متقدمة ونمو الثروة اللغوية. علاوة على ذلك، تتناول الورقة العوائق النظامية والثقافية في ليبيا، بما في ذلك الفصول الدراسية المزدحمة، والتقييمات القائمة على الاختبارات، وإعداد المعلمين المحدود، والتي غالباً ما تدفع المعلمين نحو التدريس التقليدي القائم على القواعد بدلاً من الأساليب الغنية بالحوار. ومن خلال تركيب أبحاث مقارنة من بيانات أخرى ذات تعرض منخفض، تؤكد هذه الدراسة أن الإتقان ليس مجرد نتاج للقواعد التي يتم تدريسها ولكن للاستخدامات المكتشفة من خلال الاتصال غير الرسمي المتكرر. وتشير النتائج إلى أن سد الفجوة بين التدريس الرسمي والتمكن التواصلية يتطلب تحولاً في التركيز نحو البيئة الاجتماعية اللغوية ودمج التعرض خارج الفصل الدراسي في الاستراتيجية التعليمية الأوسع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعرض للغة الإنجليزية، اكتساب اللغة الثانية، الكفاءة التواصلية، اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية، الإنجليزية خارج الأسوار المدرسية، السياق الليبي.

1. Introduction

Worldwide, English now plays a central role across academic, technological, and diplomatic settings. Because of this shift, instruction in the language has become more prominent within numerous non-native environments, including Libya. Curriculum updates, along with interactive teaching approaches, have been introduced aiming at developing stronger linguistic skills. Nevertheless, spoken ability remains difficult for many students there, even after these educational changes. Research highlights persistent gaps in speaking performance despite ongoing initiatives (Mohsen, 2014).

A considerable amount of recent study on second-language acquisition (SLA) indicates that teaching within classrooms cannot achieve advanced fluency when real-life experience with the language is scarce (Krashen, 1982; Long, 1996). Rare usage of English beyond school walls defines linguistic conditions in Libya, limiting student engagement mostly to written materials and teacher-led exchanges (Belaid & Murray, 2015). With such narrow access comes doubt—rooted in theory—about whether interactive methods truly work where spoken practice remains sparse (Orafi & Borg, 2009).

Though global studies confirm the benefits of learning beyond classrooms (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016), such influence lacks deep analysis across North African EFL settings. In Libya, limited access to real-life practice emerges clearly due to systemic, linguistic, and organizational barriers (Fullan, 1991; Mohsen, 2014). Because of this, attention shifts toward understanding informal encounters with English, framed through theory, focusing specifically on how they shape progress in Libyan EFL learners.

1.1 Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this theoretical study is to critically examine the role of exposure to English outside the classroom in shaping English language proficiency in the Libyan EFL context. It draws on established theories of SLA and comparative research from other low-exposure EFL settings (Krashen, 1982; Tran & Miralpeix, 2024).

1.2 Research Question

How can theories of SLA account for the persistent gap between formal English instruction and communicative competence in the Libyan EFL context, particularly in relation to limited extra-classroom exposure (Krashen, 1982; Long, 1996; Orafi & Borg, 2009)?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to ongoing discussions in applied linguistics by theoretically situating the Libyan EFL context within broader debates on input, exposure, and communicative competence (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016; Tran & Miralpeix, 2024). By linking Krashen's input-based framework with research on extramural English and comparative EFL studies, the paper extends existing scholarship on language learning in low-exposure environments (van Lier, 2004).

Furthermore, the study offers a contextualized critique of the assumptions underlying communicative language teaching in settings where sociolinguistic conditions restrict opportunities for language use beyond the classroom (Fullan, 1991; Orafi & Borg, 2009). In doing so, it provides a theoretically informed perspective that may be relevant to researchers examining similar EFL contexts in the Arab world and other linguistically constrained environments (Benson, 2011).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Views on Language Exposure

Exposure holds a key place in how second languages are learned. According to Krashen (1982), linguistic growth happens when learners encounter language they can understand but that stretches just past what they already know. This perspective places comprehension ahead of formal teaching. In contexts where real-life contact with the target language is scarce, both the amount and clarity of input shape skill advancement significantly (Long, 1996). Other views, such as Long's (1996) focus on conversation and Swain's (2005) argument for producing speech, add weight to active engagement, which is an element often missing where exposure is minimal (Pica, 2005; Swain, 2005).

2.2 Learning English Beyond the Classroom

A growing number of cross-national studies point to benefits when students encounter English outside formal lessons, especially for building word knowledge, understanding spoken language, and speaking smoothly (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Evidence gathered across Europe and Asia suggests such gains emerge more clearly where learners interact with English via films, online spaces, or casual conversation, rather than relying only on school-based teaching (Benson, 2011; Warschauer, 1997).

A study conducted by Tran and Miralpeix (2024) reinforces earlier observations about learning beyond classrooms. Through analysis of adolescent EFL students, it became evident that consistent contact with English in daily life contributes to progress. Activities like viewing digital content, engaging with songs, or communicating online showed measurable links to improved ability. Although school-based results did not always reflect such advancement clearly, indirect experiences still influenced skill growth. Despite inconsistencies in academic metrics, exposure outside instruction remains a relevant factor in language acquisition.

2.3 Teaching Communication in Limited Exposure Settings

Even though communicative language teaching expects meaningful use of the target language by learners, applying it where exposure is limited presents distinct difficulties. Studies into what Libyan EFL teachers plan versus what happens in their classrooms show a gap, as curriculum aims often do not match real classroom behavior (Mohsen, 2014; Orafi & Borg, 2009). One sees, through studies into Libyan educators' views and actions, alignment with communicative ideals in theory but rigid adherence to structure during lessons (Tran & Miralpeix, 2024).

Notably, underlying conditions such as scarce time, crowded rooms, test-driven evaluation, and uneven student skill affect how daily teaching unfolds (Al-Buseifi, 2003; Fullan, 1991). Instead of dialogue-rich methods, grammar precision along with syllabus coverage tends to dominate instruction. Such choices emerge even when recognition exists that communication ability matters deeply (Ahmad, 2001; Orafi, 2008). This gap between aim and application links to structural conditions alongside cultural norms (Fullan, 1991; Orafi & Borg, 2009). Uncertainty about how communication-based methods work in real classrooms arises when educators take little part in shaping curricula. Within Libya, insufficient preparation before employment combined with scarce ongoing support intensifies the challenge, pushing instructors toward conventional teaching styles (Al-Buseifi, 2003; Orafi, 2008).

Outside the classroom, limited chances to speak English shape how instructors approach interactive tasks (Mohsen, 2014; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Without regular contact elsewhere, student dialogue inside lessons may feel forced or hard to maintain. Under such conditions, teaching choices follow practical realities more than any dismissal of interaction-based methods (Orafi & Borg, 2009).

2.4 Attitudes and Exposure in Libyan EFL Settings

From primary school to university, Libya includes English as a required course; still, its role outside classrooms stays minimal (Belaid & Murray, 2015). Because of this, student interaction with the language mostly happens during lessons. Challenges in gaining skill persist among undergraduates, who connect such issues partially to narrow contact and rare real-life use of English (Belaid & Murray, 2015).

With attention turned to global patterns, including work by Tran and Miralpeix (2024), Libya's situation reveals limits tied to minimal language exposure. Where interaction beyond classroom walls remains rare, progress in real-world communication tends to stall, even when teaching plans aim higher. This analysis identifies a distinct void in theory: although studies on second language acquisition repeatedly stress exposure, settings like Libyan EFL classrooms do not offer the sociolinguistic environment needed to sustain it (Krashen, 1982; van Lier, 2004). Resolving this disconnect continues to demand attention within applied linguistics, particularly where input is limited.

3. Discussion

Looking at how English is learned in Libya shows that contact with the language beyond school plays a key role in building communication skills. Following Krashen's theory, progress comes when learners regularly hear or read English they mostly understand but find just a little challenging (Krashen, 1982). Yet, in this setting, such experience happens almost exclusively during lessons, which reduces chances for real conversation and shifts focus toward repetition and grammar drills instead (Ahmad, 2001; Mohsen, 2014).

Beliefs held by educators, when seen alongside actions inside classrooms, reveal a disconnect between what curriculum plans expect and what actually happens. Although some teachers in Libya say they favor methods that promote communication, factors like overcrowded rooms, scarce teaching hours, and tests that dominate evaluation pull instruction back toward rules and word lists (Al-Buseifi, 2003; Fullan, 1991; Orafi & Borg, 2009). This space separating goals from real-world delivery highlights structural barriers faced when bringing communicative language teaching into settings where exposure is minimal; these findings are echoed across second-language acquisition studies stressing the need for genuine interaction opportunities (Swain, 2005; van Lier, 2004).

Studies across nations confirm that contact with language beyond classroom walls supports growth. Not only do media, digital exchanges, and casual conversations matter, but evidence shows they shape skill levels significantly. Recent work links such experiences to stronger performance in real-world usage (Tran & Miralpeix, 2024). In like manner, gains in word

knowledge, understanding speech, and self-directed learning appear tied to outside practice (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Where instruction lacks depth, these external inputs often determine progress, a trend seen far beyond Libya. Limited access defines many EFL settings; success then depends on opportunities found elsewhere.

Still, Libya's setting shows how teaching methods connect closely with student outlooks through surrounding language patterns. When real-life speaking chances beyond school remain scarce, traditional teaching styles persist alongside learner passivity (Belaid & Murray, 2015; Orafi, 2008). From this arises a clear point: changing instruction alone achieves little unless immersion fits within broader social conditions shaping language learning.

Overall, insights show how second-language acquisition models—especially those focused on input, engagement during exchanges, and spoken production—offer a clear structure when analyzing difficulties faced by students in Libya. Still, such frameworks gain real meaning once paired with surrounding conditions like systemic limitations, educational policies, and cultural influences shaping learning environments. By combining these perspectives, a clearer picture emerges about mismatches among intended syllabi, actual teaching methods, and what learners ultimately achieve; further, this blend supports later findings pointing toward experiences beyond formal lessons as essential elements in progress.

4. Conclusion

This research explored how contact with English beyond school walls influences skill growth among learners in Libya's foreign language setting. Through lenses offered by Krashen (1982), Swain (2005), and Long (1996), one sees that lessons inside classrooms fall short when aiming at strong speaking ability, especially where daily life gives little chance to practice. While teaching matters, real progress leans heavily on moments outside scheduled learning hours. Without regular encounters with the language elsewhere, mastery remains distant. These frameworks together suggest a gap between what schools provide and what fluency demands. Exposure, then, becomes less optional and more necessary. In such contexts, reliance solely on academic spaces limits outcomes. What happens after class may weigh heavier than expected; opportunities to listen, speak, or engage informally carry unseen value. From digital media to online videos, each moment adds texture to the learning process. Proficiency grows not just from rules taught but from uses discovered. Where usage fades, so does momentum. When speech lacks natural settings, even good instruction stumbles. Without presence beyond the coursebook, full command stays out of reach.

Research shows Libyan students encounter deep-rooted systemic and cultural barriers: scarce materials, overcrowded classrooms, and test-driven syllabi, alongside little contact with English beyond lessons (Belaid & Murray, 2015; Mohsen, 2014; Orafi & Borg, 2009). Despite embracing interactive methods, results consistently fall short of goals due to these entrenched conditions. Instruction frequently emphasizes accuracy over real communication, influenced heavily by rigid school frameworks (Al-Buseifi, 2003; Fullan, 1991; Orafi, 2008). Actual classroom behavior reflects the environment more than theory when support remains thin.

Evidence drawn from diverse EFL environments highlights how learning extends beyond classroom walls through media consumption, digital exchanges, or casual conversation (Benson, 2011; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016; Tran & Miralpeix, 2024). This work adds to the knowledge of English learning in limited-contact settings, connecting SLA theories to Libya's schools. Access outside class stands out as a critical factor next to shortcomings in standard teaching methods. These findings show why educational decisions must consider real-world language use far beyond structured lessons.

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