

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Effective speaking skill is one of the most important language skills required not only for academic purposes but also for coping with the current global challenges in everyday life. However, in learning English as a foreign language (EFL), students face difficulties in acquiring the skills. They are reluctant to speak the English language in their classrooms (Savaşçı, 2014). Various factors have been identified as responsible for the students' difficulties in acquiring the desired proficiency in speaking English. These include the lack of ideal environment where students can speak in English as in natural settings (Chang & Goswami, 2011). Other factors include over reliance on their mother tongue, inadequate time allocated for English lesson, negative attitudes of students toward speaking English, lack of motivation, and inadequate reading materials (Tokoz-Goktepe, 2014).

For many years, the predicaments highlighted above have been a great challenge for EFL teachers, parents and the Libyan government, as they have been always complaining about the students' poor speaking ability in a Libyan EFL setting. Considering the importance of students' proficiency in speaking, particularly that of English language, it is necessary to help the students to improve their speaking abilities. Researchers in language acquisition provide valuable information about how second/foreign languages are learned and the factors that influence their learning process (Palmer, 2009). Cook (2000) states that the acquisition of language is not the same among learners. Thus, he identifies three main factors that influence this process namely age, personality, and motivation. Motivation is the most significant factor among the three factors mentioned (Cook, 2000) which will be the main focus of this study. Cook maintained this position because language acquisition centers on the fulcrum of interest and the drive that pushes the learner to acquire more and more.

The learner must have a target that encourages him/her to acquire the language; this target is the motivator. It is argued that Libyan EFL learners are less motivated to learning English which may discourage them to have targets to acquire the language (Mohammed, 2014; Alhmali, 2007; Abidin, Mohammadi & Alzwari, 2012; Al-Zahrani, 2008). For example, Mohammed (2014) reported that though English teaching in Libya has been gaining momentum in the recent years, after the stagnation and other difficult experiences in the previous years, there is a need for teachers' professional development with recent theoretical and methodological developments in order to enhance teaching delivery and improved students' performance. Lecturers in the EFL classroom in Libya only prepare students for examination following Lecture-Based Learning (LBL) approach. This, in turn, makes the educational purpose in Libya a matter of test-driven, rather than a cognitive one.

Abidin et al. (2012) reported that Libyan EFL learners have a negative attitude towards learning English. The students may not likely be motivated when they have negative attitude towards leaning the language. Among the reasons for students' lack of motivation and negative atitudes towards learning English could be because students consider the teaching approaches adopted by their lecturers as rigid and tedious. For example, n the Libyan context, university lecturers face many challenges while teaching English which include lack of awareness of new approaches to teaching (Suwaed, 2014). They followed a standardized syllabus administered by the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE), and usually do switch their teaching approach to other available approaches that can take the teaching process to a different path and different outcome. Lecturers' inability to introduce alternative approaches could be apparently due to sheer lack of initiative, or that they themselves were taught by the use of the traditional method and grew with that. So it appeared to them as though it was the only alternative.

According to Ryan and Deci (2008), there are three factors which can motivate learners toward their instructional contexts namely autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the degree of choices that learners have about the tasks and when to perform them. Competence refers to learners being able to grasp onto the material and effectively deal and take control of their learning. Finally,

relatedness refers to learners' feeling of attachment to their classroom and task-related lessons (ibid).

Teachers can promote these factors of motivation (i.e. autonomy, competence, and relatedness) by employing several teaching strategies such as Problem-Based Learning approach (PBL) (Li, 2013). PBL approach was first introduced in McMaster University in Canada in the Faculty of Health Sciences in 1960 with the aim to bridge the gap between what was learned in school and relevance for future professional practice (Barrows, 1996). PBL is characterised by the use of real-life and ill-structured scenarios, those that are complex and generally have multiple responses as starting materials instead of the teacher simply assigning readings, providing lectures or walking students through a solution (Barrows, 1996). In PBL approach, students identify problems associated with the scenario and use these problems to drive their learning process. Their inquiry and exploration lead to the learning of key concepts, principles, content knowledge, and strategies necessary to solve the challenges presented by the problem.

According to Wu (2006), pure PBL is an excellent example of active learning that motivates students vigorously in problem formulation, information seeking and actual problem-solving. However, for the purpose of this study, due to the nature of the language teaching that took place in the Libyan ESL context, the study adopted the Hybrid Problem-Based Learning (HPBL) Model.

1.2 PBL vs. HPBL

Hybrid problem based learning model is especially useful for those schools that wish to benefit from the advantages of PBL methodology but do not want a complete reform to switch to an entirely PBL-based curriculum Cario et al. (2011). Many schools or teachers who do not want to abandon the traditional teacher-based approach largely choose the HPBL because they want to share the advantages of both approaches HPBL entails fusing or embedding the PBL approach into the curriculum of the traditional teacher-based approach. Quite well numerous studies as cited earlier accentuate the benefits of PBL approach over the traditional approach. But employing

the PBL approach completely will also sometimes present a scenario that requires the teacher or lecturer as the case may be, to assume his/her traditional role to expound on, or clarify key concepts and issues of learning significance that emerged from either the solution proposed for the ill-structured problem itself, or the students' presentations. Hence a HPBL comes with a solution handy, in that a teacher holds a mini lecture on issues and concepts of learning importance which emerged from the students proposed solutions to the ill-structured problem presented. The mini lecture lessons conducted by teachers normally enhance or boost and crystalize students' understandings of hidden dimensions associated with solutions proffered which are important .

However, it should be noted that students in hybrid problem based learning (hereinafter referred to as HPBL) model the problem issues with basic knowledge or understanding given by the teacher in a mini-lecture (see Sections 2.5 and 2.6). The HPBL model involves incorporating the traditional lecture method in the PBL curriculum. Therefore unlike the PBL model which centres on students' independent collaborative learning with teachers' less intervention, the HPBL model requires the teachers to play a significant role in the teaching and learning process.

Throughout related literature, very limited studies were found, which implemented the HPBL model in education context particularly in EFL classrooms. Most of the studies found in literature implemented the HPBL model in medical technological contexts (e.g. Alajmi, 2014; Servant, 2013; Wu & Fournier, 2000). For instance, Alajmi (2014) examined the feasibility of using HPBL model that combines PBL and didactic teaching to a multicultural Middle Eastern Dental Hygiene program in Kuwait. Findings revealed that HPBL model was successful as an educational approach for the dental hygiene program (College of Health Sciences, Kuwait).

Moreover, Wu (2006) examined the feasibility of HPBL model in teaching one computer-programming course in China. Findings revealed that the HPBL model provided a good transition for students to the university environment. Moreover, it provided a framework to assist the students in problem abstraction, problem analysis, and problem-solving and it helped students in developing critical thinking skills, verbal and written communication skills and ability to work in groups.

The effectiveness of PBL approach in motivating students toward learning is well documented by many researchers (Huang & Wang, 2012; Murphy & Alexander, 2000). For instance, Huang and Wang (2012) experimented PBL in an English interpretation class for a period of one academic semester in Taiwan to examine its feasibility in actual utilization. Four variables were investigated qualitatively; students' attitude, students' satisfaction, students' motivation, and students' self-achievement. Findings indicated that students' attitudes toward PBL was positive, which in turn influenced their motivation levels.

From the discussions so far, scholars have reported some of the reasons why Libyan EFL learners are not motivated toward learning English, especially speaking and why their language achievement is below expectation. However, no studies to date have taken research actions to tackle these problems. This warrants further research since motivation affects Libyan EFL learners' educational outcomes. Therefore, this research intends to fill the existing gap by implementing the HPBL model in the context of EFL classroom in Libya. This is an attempt to examine ways in which the HPBL motivates Libyan EFL learners toward speaking English; the ways the HPBL enhances their speaking achievements in speaking course, and the situation in which lecturers affect the Libyan EFL learners' motivation and speaking achievement under the HPBL context.

1.3 Rationale for Using the HPBL model

This research was conducted in a Libyan public university that is located in west part of Libya. It was carried out in the English Foundation Program where students are prepared by exposing them to the skills of writing, speaking, listening and reading to make them ready for English degree program. The instructional technique employed in this context is Lecture-Based Learning (LBL) approach that presents concepts and rules in lecture format; which employed assignment and end of semester examinations. The researcher examined the context of this research and observed the following:

- The teaching technique employed in this context is competitive and test driven in that Libyan EFL students are encouraged to learn only materials that will come in examinations.
- Learning for its own sake or sharing one's knowledge with others in the class has no place in English language classroom in the English department at the public university of this research.
- The majority of the students in the classrooms are passive recipients of information and they rarely take initiative steps toward participation.
- The majority of EFL students face several problems in speaking such as reluctance, fear of committing oral mistakes, poor speaking ability, and lack of peers or social circles with whom they can express their speaking potentials.
- Students are not motivated to speak English

According to these observations, the researcher decided to change the direction of the EFL classroom particularly in a speaking course with both methods of delivery and assessment strategy to support the current course. The researcher argues that this could be done by employing the HPBL model rather than the pure PBL because of the difficulties associated with implementing the pure PBL approach as pointed out in the literature (see Section 2.6). The difficulties are stated as the following:

- This will be the first time implementing such a new teaching technique in the context of Libyan EFL classroom.
- Lack of adequate time in the process, because employing full PBL approach requires longer time in preparing the lecturers and training them on how to implement the methods of full PBL in the context, particularly the methods of delivery and assessments.
- Libyan EFL students who had just joined the English Foundation Program (EFP) in the university under consideration schooled for 13 years based on lecture-based learning approach and they had never been exposed to such other approaches during their schooling time.

1.4 Statement of Problem

Teaching English as a foreign language in Libya has experienced different conditions that affected the status of the language in the Libyan educational system. One of these major conditions was the decision No. 195/1986 that was announced in April 1986 by the Minister of Education in Libya stopping the teaching of all foreign languages in Libya including English. This decision in particular severely affected the status of English as a foreign language among Libyan students at almost all educational levels (Mohamed, 2014). At the beginning of the nineties, English was reintroduced in the country gradually. However, other problems emerged in the instructional process such as the teaching technique employed in EFL classroom context that focuses on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary, and translation of texts and conducting written exercise (Al-Hussein, 2014). Most of these classes are taught in the native language (Libyan Arabic) with little active use of English language in the speaking sense.

Motivation is always being reported as the most significant factor that affects the learning of English in a country. In Libyan EFL context, learners are not motivated toward learning English due to the poor teaching techniques employed by teachers in the classrooms (Mohamed, 2014; Alhmali, 2007; Abidin et al., 2012; Elmadwi & Shepherd, 2014; Suwaed, 2014). Learning mostly focused on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary, translation of texts and doing written exercise without giving attention to the tasks that can motivate learners toward learning English. Libyan EFL learners also have a negative attitude toward learning English (Abidin et al., 2012) which may be due to the instructional and traditional techniques employed by English language lecturers in the country. It is reported that in the Libyan context, many teachers of English lack professional training and awareness of new teaching strategies (Suwaed, 2014). This may affect the students' motivation toward learning English because the teaching methods adopted may be monotonous, rigid and tedious to them.

In Libya, lecturers simply followed the standardized syllabus administered by the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE). They have not been switching their teaching approach to other available approaches such as PBL or HPBL (as opposed to Pure PBL), in order to motivate the students toward learning English. The lack of

motivation may affect the students' academic achievement in a negative way. From the researchers experiences, many Libyan EFL learners score low grades in their speaking courses as a result of which they tend to change their courses of study to their mother language (Arabic Language) most likely in order to avoid these challenges. For example, according to the unpublished statistical study conducted by the English department at the university under consideration in Libya, which is the context of the current study, 32 % of the students dropped their English courses and shifted their attention to other degree programmes such as business, accounting, and law during their first-year enrollment.

Although some scholars (Abidin et al., 2012; Al-Zahrani, 2008; Suwaed, 2014) as mentioned previously explored possible factors responsible for the Libyan EFL students' lack of motivation in speaking English and made some suggestions, none of these studies had taken actual action to tackle this problem (i.e. lack of motivation toward speaking English among Libyan EFL learners) by implementing new teaching techniques to address the problems. Previous studies on both the general approach of PBL and HPBL show their effectiveness in increasing students' motivation toward learning. Therefore, this research attempts to implement the HPBL-model in the context of EFL classroom in Libya to examine how the HPBL model can motivate Libyan EFL learners toward speaking English. HPBL is a type of PBL which blends any other types of teaching approaches with the PBL approach (see Section 2.6 for details). This study is unique in the sense that the PBL model in Libya has been usually implemented only in medical science courses and its benefits have been amply sustained in the medical field but not in other disciplines (Ambarek, 2010). Therefore, this research adopts the HPBL framework under the PBL approach in English speaking course in a Libyan public university.

1.5 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the use of HPBL in EFL English speaking course in a Libyan university. The following are the specific objectives of the study:

- To examine how the HPBL model is implemented in the EFL speaking course.

- To investigate how the HPBL model motivates Libyan EFL learners to speak English in the speaking course.
- To assess the extent of motivation of Libyan EFL students to speak English in the speaking course using HPBL model.
- To examine how the HPBL model develops Libyan EFL learners' achievement in the speaking course.

1.6 Research Questions

In order to address the above research objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How is the HPBL model implemented in the Libyan EFL speaking course?
2. How does the HPBL model motivate Libyan EFL learners toward speaking English in a speaking course?
3. To what extent does the HPBL model motivate Libyan EFL learners to speaking English?
4. How does the HPBL model develop Libyan EFL learners' achievements in an English speaking course?

1.7 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The theoretical postulation that underpins this study is the Constructivist Learning theory. The theory, which encompasses other theories of cognitive constructivism and social constructivism, presupposes that knowledge and learning are based on linking new information and experience to already acquired information/experience and on the basis of interacting with others in the learning process. The use of HPBL in a speaking classroom is also supported by the cognitive constructivism founded by Piaget and social constructivism theory founded by Vygotsky. The cognitive constructivism theory focuses on learners as cognitive beings while the social constructivist theory views learners as social beings. The integration of these two theories forms the foundation of the constructivist learning theory which informs the use HPBL approach. The implication of the theory on teaching is that

instructional design should be changed in the teaching environment itself so as to create an enabling environment which fulfils all the necessary conditions. In this trajectory, teachers are to facilitate students' learning by guiding them to construct their own interpretations of the world rather than by putting knowledge into their minds (Martins, Jean-Sigur & Schmidt, 2005).

In the process of learning, students are encouraged to work collaboratively among themselves (Alzahrani & Woollard 2013), and in the course of interacting with peers; they argue, reason, question, probe and debate with one another. These near social interactions and tutors' facilitation serve as a catalyst that contributes to the development of their reasoning, critical thinking and ultimately their speaking skills (Savery & Duffy, 2001; Wee, 2004).

The amalgam of the Schmidt, Moust and Patel's (1989) Seven Jump Steps thrusting on the platform of constructivist learning theory and its branches of cognitive and social constructivism to explain the advantages of the HPBL model in a speaking course depicts the conceptual model under examination in this study.

This research employed the HPBL model where the researcher integrated the HPBL model into the existing curriculum of teaching English speaking course based on Schmidt, Moust and Patel's (1989) model of PBL "Seven Jump Steps". These are the steps through which the PBL process is implemented in a HPBL classroom started from the presentation of ill-structured problems to students and ends with the proposing of viable solutions to the problems (see Section 3.5.5). The study is guided by two theoretical postulations, constructivist theory and Gardner and Lambert's (1972) model (see chapter two for the details) in order to accomplish the objectives of the study. The first objective is to motivate the students toward speaking English and the second is to improve their achievement in the speaking course. Figure 1.1 explains the conceptual framework which shows the HPBL environment and the students' motivation and expected speaking achievement.

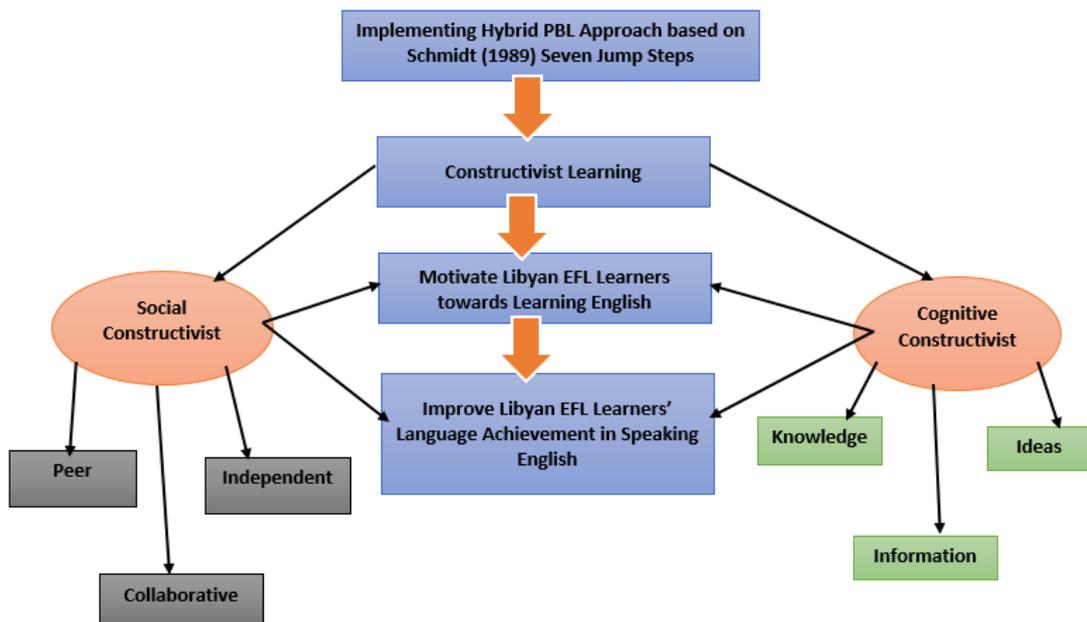


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework of the Research

In the above conceptual framework, the researcher implemented the HPBL model in the context of teaching speaking course in the English Foundation Program at the university of this study, which currently follows the lecture-based learning approach. The HPBL model is believed to motivate Libyan EFL learners towards learning English since one of the major values of HPBL is seen in its aim to motivate students to participate in the learning process so that they are able to improve their problem-solving skills, integrate basic concepts, and foster self-directed learning and higher-order thinking skills (Murphy & Alexander, 2000). Using the HPBL model which has the flexibility in mixing the existing teaching methods with the PBL, the students have the opportunity to grasp the basic language forms through the lecture based teaching and practise what they have learned through PBL lessons

Once motivation is boosted among the students, it is argued that their academic achievements will be improved as well. This is in line with many researchers who argued that motivation is responsible for language achievement. Without adequate motivation, learners even with brilliant talent will not be able to fulfil this process of language acquisition even if they have good curriculum and teachers as well (Dornyei, 2008).

1.8 Limitations of the Research

The current research had certain limitations that need to be taken into account. First, this study is not meant to generalize the findings because this research was conducted on only 30 first-year Libyan students in EFL context (i.e. speaking course at EFP) and in one public university. Its sole aim is exploration rather than generalisation. Second, from a methodological perspective, it should be noted that although the researcher was a lecturer in the English department of the public university under consideration, she has taken measures to avoid bias in data collections and reflections. Third, one of the methods that this research employed is the video recordings of students' oral presentation (OP) at the presentation sessions (i.e. the four PBL sessions). These videos were collected to assess students speaking performance in their speaking course under the HPBL environment based on particular speaking criteria (see Appendix 2). Having the four samples in different intervals will be fair enough to compare the speaking improvement (if any) among Libyan EFL learners. However, it would be more credible if these samples were collected over one academic year to enhance the research trustworthiness.

Another limitation of this study is that, it did not consider other factors such as gender, age, and tribe, which may affect the implementation of PBL approach in any context (Schmidt & Moust, 1995). These factors were not explored in this research because they are not under the scope of the investigation. Further research should investigate and explore the factors.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in the field of ESL/EFL learning, as it would add general understanding of HPBL in a speaking course. The study would extend the HPBL model from medical schools where it originated, to the EFL speaking classroom. The findings would provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the HPBL in developing students' speaking performance.

In speaking classroom, the study may benefit both teachers and students. For the teachers, they would have a more student-centred approach that would help them to motivate their students to speak English. As for the students, the study may also

help them because while they are engaged in the HPBL model, they acquire not only speaking skills but other skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and life-long learning skills.

The result of the study might also assist policy makers, especially in Libya to provide a good environment and required materials and resources for the implementation of HPBL in schools. The study will give practitioners guide on how to implement HPBL model in the language classrooms. Finally, the study may be useful in guiding future studies on the use of the HPBL in the speaking classroom.

1.10 Definition of Key Terms

This section presents the conceptual and the operational definitions of key terms in the study as follows.

1.10.1 Hybrid PBL (HPBL)

In this study, HPBL means a framework involving a blend of small lecture by the tutor and the PBL processes in which student participants propose possible and suitable solutions to an authentic scenario. Matthew (1989) summarises that activities such as lectures, seminars, laboratory demonstration, and exercises are considered essential and can be integrated into any PBL curriculum. It includes mini-lectures from tutors, after which the students brainstorm the causes and solution to the ill-structured problems; conduct self-directed learning, and finally make oral presentations of the solutions. A model of PBL proposed by Moust and Schmidt (1989) was adopted in this study and administered to the students in four lessons (see Section 2.3 and Appendix 4 for the details). The process was mixed with the traditional method in alternating weeks.

1.10.2 Motivation to Speak English

Motivation is defined in this study as the students' desire to speak English with the aim of communicating with others to accomplish and achieve their learning goals,

which are to propose possible and suitable solutions to authentic scenarios. It also includes the efforts they put and their attitude towards speaking English during the PBL process. The students' motivation to speak English in the HPBL model was measured using a questionnaire adopted from Wang (2008) as described in Appendix 3.

1.10.3 Language Achievement in English Speaking Class

In this study, language achievement in speaking class is defined as the students' ability to speak English language during the implementation of PBL lessons using the HPBL model and the oral presentations and while making oral presentations of the solutions to the ill-structured problems at the end of the HPBL process. It also includes their ability to present the solutions of the problems fluently, with confidence, using accurate grammar, adequate and appropriate vocabulary, correct structure and sufficient pronunciation and intonation.

1.11 Summary

The chapter discusses the background of the study, the rationale for adopting the HPBL and statement of the research problem of the study. It also presents the objectives of the study and the research questions that guide the study. The chapter highlights the conceptual framework, which shows the relationship between the independent (the HPBL context) and dependent variables (motivation and language achievement) of the study. Finally, the chapter states the limitation of the study, the significance of the study and definition of key terms