# Effectiveness of LEP activities in enhancing EFL students' oral communication skills at King Khalid University

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to investigate the effectiveness of Language Enhancement Program (LEP) activities in enhancing the oral communication skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at King Khalid University.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A mixed-method study design was used. Simple random sampling techniques were adopted to recruit the study participants. For the survey, a total of 58 male students were recruited and for interviews, 20 male students were selected. The 58 participants were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The traditional method was adopted to teach the control group, while LEP activities were conducted to teach the experimental group.

**Findings** – A post-test was conducted to examine the oral communication skills of the participants of the experimental group. The scores of both groups were analyzed using a *t*-test value at a significant level of 0.05. The content analysis method was adopted to assess the enhancement of the oral communication of the students enrolled in the LEP. The questionnaires and interview results showed that the LEP program has a central focus on improving students' oral communication skills.

**Research limitations/implications** – It is limited to the EFL students at King Khalid University.

**Practical implications** – LEP is a good program and can be implemented in Saudi Universities.

**Social implications** – Students can interact with one another through the LEP activities that promote their English proficiency as well as their personality characteristics.

**Originality/value** – The paper spells out the role of LEP activities in improving students' oral communication in English and students' opinions about LEP activities in enhancing their English language in different types of communicative contexts. Further, it suggests some pedagogical implications for overcoming the difficulties faced by EFL students in various communicative contexts.

**Keywords** English learning, Oral communication, Language Enhancement Program, King Khalid University

**Paper type** Case study

## Introduction

With the advent of globalization, educational dynamics across the world have substantially changed. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has increased the access of tertiary students

to different countries for accelerating their educational opportunities as well as career progression (Litovchenko and Shmeleva, 2020). The ability to speak of humans involves profound skills and for pursuing career progression, it is essential to mastery over the language. Amid an increasing pace of globalization, learning the English language has become a prerequisite, especially in the region where it is spoken as a second foreign language. Nowadays, it is spoken far and wide. As a medium of teaching and learning, it has been practiced and taught in various educational institutes across the world for disseminating knowledge and for initiating oral communication. The ability to speak English has become one of the requirements to acquire desired or dream jobs, especially in developed states. Most of the business transactions, deals, agreements and judicial decisions are delivered in English.

Therefore, the lecturers or teachers need to adopt effective pedagogical tactics or techniques to infuse English-speaking skills among the students (Marzuki and Kuliahana, 2021). Meena (2020) has emphasized the need to form cooperative learning groups to teach the English language or to improve the communication skills of the students so that the teachers of higher education cannot find any linguistic barrier in interacting with the students. Dabiri and Gilakjani (2019) concluded that the statistical significance of pre-task planning in teaching EFL learners where the pre-task planning aided in diminishing the syntactic and grammatical complexities. In this study, a pre-and post-test was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of pragmatic and targeted tasks that were found to be effective in instilling linguistic skills among the students of EFL (Chen, 2020). In the meantime, teaching students meaningful actions and speaking tasks can unfold students' engagement in language learning and resolve issues such as limited level of vocabulary and poor pronunciation (Chen, 2020).

As reported in the study of Khoram (2019), the impact of task-based language teaching as a novel idea to teach English as an EFL. This experimental study was conducted with 80 students of intermediate learning English as a foreign language. The findings of the pre- and post-test showed that task-based language learning played an important role in ameliorating the oral expression skills of EFL students (Khoram, 2019). Similarly, another quasi-experimental study evaluated the role of task repetition in language teaching and communication skills among Chinese learners of English as a second language. Based on Wilcoxon signed rank tests, the findings of the study revealed that on account of task repetition, there was an improvement in the students' ability to ensure accuracy in grammatical skills as well as in their ability to speak with fluency. The task repetition lessened the phrasal complexities and the number of errors (Sun and Révész, 2021). Estaji and Farahanynia (2019) conducted research aimed to assess the effectiveness of two methods of Dynamic Assessments, i.e. interactionist and interventionist on oral communication skills and anxiety among 34 Iranian EFL students. The results of the study unveiled that the students of both groups had better scores in language learning. Also, the interventionist method had a positive impact in the form of reducing the students' level of anxiety (Estaji and Farahanynia, 2019).

English has various clusters of three to four consonants mostly clustering at the end of the words, whereas this clustering does not exist in the Arabic language (Al-Zahrani and Rajab, 2017). This makes it difficult for Arab EFL learners to speak English. Baker (2015) highlights that, in the present time, communication serves as a successful stimulus, which leads the country towards its success. This is particularly significant for Saudi Arabia given its initiative of Saudi Vision 2030, which was launched by the Deputy Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Al-Zahrani and Rajab, 2017). Though it constitutes various points, the most primary and distinguishable content is the escalation of its education which facilitates it in overcoming the impeding block in international communications of the Kingdom. It has introduced various initiatives where the topmost is the development of

English language teaching (ELT) and overcoming the challenges that still stand as a stumbling block in accomplishing these goals.

Besides, the Saudi Ministry of Education has been working to reform the educational curriculum at the national level. Additionally, new courses such as art, music, critical thinking, as well as critical thinking, have been introduced where the medium of answer and instruction is English from the primary level to the secondary level (AlMadina News, 2022). Since it requires a substantive number of English teachers at every level of education, training teachers on a large scale is necessary. As reported by Alqahtani (2022), the total number of English teachers is about 33,000 employed at secondary and intermediate educational institutes. The inclusion of new courses with the medium of answer and instruction in English raises the need to increase the quality and efficiency and adopt state-of-the-art techniques and methods for providing education (Alqahtani and Albidewi, 2022). Notably, the enhancement of English communication skills and the development of language in the region will assist the country in its achievement of Vision 2030; Mitchell and Alfuraih (2018). This necessitates an understanding of the plausible barriers that impede the development of oral skills among students, particularly, for EFL students.

Therefore, the study aims to understand the phenomena and specific mechanisms that serve as a stimulus for improving the learning outcomes of the students. This research is also driven by previous research which reveals that the English language competency among the Saudi population is below the optimum level when assessed for the students at the intermediate and secondary stages (Alrabai, 2016).

The current study focuses on the EFL students enrolled at King Khalid University (KKU) and evaluates their oral communication skills through activities introduced by the Language Enhancement Program (LEP). The oral communication in this study includes the ability to verbally transmit information and ideas from one individual or group to another. The novel contribution of this study is to analyze the impact of the activities provided by LEP on EFL students at KKU. The findings of the study would help to understand the effectiveness of LEPs. This study will help to understand more about the LEP and how can we improve it. Moreover, it will provide insights into the views of students on the program and the pedagogical implications for the difficulties faced by EFL students when they communicate.

## Literature review
### Speaking enhancement activities
The objectives of enhancing speaking skills and public speaking are challenging in the process of Second Language acquisition as public speaking provokes anxiety among the majority of individuals. In a traditional setting of an EFL classroom, it is hard to inculcate speaking skills among students due to limited space, time constraints and the lack of familiarity with the advanced technology and available digital tools (Chen, 2022). This can be explained by the statement of Aljumah (2011) in his work, "Teachers babble all the time, whereas students mumble and swallow their words, or say nothing. Therefore, almost all such teachers and lecturers complain about the unwillingness of their students to talk and communicate" (p. 85). As a result, a large number of EFL learners get frustrated, as they do not receive any response or feedback about the questions and problems, they put forward to be solved. On the other hand, some students who do not wish to communicate and learn have not considered all these challenges. The regular use of LEP activities can be very effective for teachers and student–student interactions, as students are provided with an environment that is productive and helps them to enhance their oral communication skills. Given the

ongoing transformation in Saudi Arabia, Alqahtani and Albidewi (2022) emphasized that sustainability is the central focus of these reforms. Alqahtani and Albidewi (2022) conducted a study to assess the extent of sustainability in the English Language Program (ELP) by analyzing the results of 431 candidates enrolled in this program. The findings of the study reported the significance and sustainability of the ELP program to ameliorate the students' ability to have effective communication in English as a foreign and academic language. The study recommended increasing the incentives for encouraging more enrollments in EL programs to inculcate expertise in English among the native speakers of students in Saudi Arabia (Alqahtani and Albidewi, 2022). Moreover, Alanazi (2022) designed a curriculum program named World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) to help teachers who were instructors of English to teach English at the proficiency levels to students of higher education in Saudi Arabia. The study has documented effective results of adopting the proposed instructional design to be implemented by teachers. The instructional design comprised more emphasis on reading, speaking and writing in English. That had delivered two-fold outcomes by improving the instructional design of teachers and ameliorating the proficiency levels of students to understand, speak and write in English.

On the other hand, Assulaimani (2019) conducted a review study regarding teaching the English language as a foreign language (TEFL) in Saudi Arabia. The study encapsulated recommendations in light of the review and recommended integrating curriculum and skillsets related to information technology to increase the penetration of the English language. Gaffas (2019) explored the perceptions of the undergraduate students enrolled in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and General Purposes (EGP) courses in improving their language and understanding taking English as an academic language. The findings reported that students faced difficulty in recognizing difficult terms which was the factor responsible for their lower grades. Also, they had a lack of understanding of technical jargon while highlighting inadequacies in the curriculum and instructions (Gaffas, 2019). Alrashidi (2022) evaluated the types and frequency of the strategies for learning adopted by the students of the university and their effects on the level of proficiency and the association with a year of language learning. The study recruited a total of 256 students in Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study showed that metacognitive strategies were the most effective strategies employed by the students. Cognitive, compensation and metacognitive strategies were mostly adopted by female students as compared to male students. However, the results of the study did not find any statistically significant impact based on the years of learning. In addition, Alahmadi and Muslim Alraddadi (2020) assessed the effectiveness of using virtual classrooms upon teaching a second language. In this study, a total of 90 students enrolled in the Preparatory Year Program (PYP) held at the Saudi Language Centre (SLC). The study found that the level of proficiency of the students was low and at the A2 language level following the standards set by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). However, the study reported a favorable outcome of using virtual classes to teach secondary language. Along with this, the students' attitudes were also positive toward using online mediums.

*Students' opinions (attitudes)*
Chen (2022) conducted an experimental study to assess the effectiveness of technology-enhanced learning in overcoming the fear of public speaking. The researcher recruited 33 students and divided them into three groups based on three types of learning, i.e. mobile-assisted, lecture-based and virtual reality (VR), which continued for four weeks. The findings revealed that there was a statistically significant reduction in public speaking fear among the students who were taught by VR; however, no significant difference was observed in terms of the oral performance of the three groups (Chen, 2022). Wongsa and Son (2022) documented

the perceptions of Thai Secondary students in the EFL department. The vitality of Facebook and drama-based activities was examined. A mixed-method study design was employed and 40 students as survey participants from 12 Grade and 2 Thai EFL teachers from high school were recruited for this study. The results of the study concurred that Facebook together with drama-based activities enhanced English language lessons effectively in EFL classrooms and they had a positive impact on the speaking skills of the students and increased their motivation and positive attitude (Wongsa and Son, 2022). Zhang et al. (2020) researched assessment and fundamental curricular changes in the Chinese EFL and their role in advancing English listening and speaking (ELS) competencies. The study envisioned to study predictors (de/motivation) and mediators (engagement, anxiety) of ELS attainment and intention to continue. A total of 591 EFL students were investigated. The findings of the study suggested that changes in EFL in the domain of teachers' skills, test orientation and meaningful pedagogical patterns are the two most important indicators for better engagement and motivation of students (Zhang et al., 2020). A qualitative case study was performed by Bahruddin et al. (2021) and documented that giving EFL instruction in Arabic was a beneficial factor, helping students in gaining mastery over vocabulary, structures, context and communication. Conspicuously, the Arabicization of linguistic terms was found as an important strategy (Bahruddin et al., 2021). Yudar et al. (2020) recommended using television and promoting movie culture as learning activities to increase the speaking abilities of students so that they could be trained for correct intonation and pronunciation. In addition, Anikina (2022) asserted that the thematic principle for controlling speaking skills practices has become obsolete in modern interpersonal communication; thus, recommended to articulate an expanded comprehensive control system for facilitating unrestricted learning and free and psychological stimulation of communication.

### A description of LEP

An LEP typically refers to a structured educational or training initiative designed to improve a person's language skills. These programs are often implemented to enhance language proficiency, communication skills and overall language capabilities in individuals who are non-native speakers of English or seeking to refine their language skills in a specific context. KKU initiated LEP to improve students' English proficiency in listening, reading, speaking and writing. Teng and Stewart (2011) that LEP programs also provide academic and career counseling, guidelines about the study and life skills, workshops and training in public speaking and debates and learning facilitation. The Faculty of Languages and Translation supervises this LEP at KKU in Saudi Arabia.

Many skilled and efficient colleagues spend a significant amount of their time facilitating English language learning activities for students with limited proficiency in English at KKU, particularly those who are weak in oral communication. The LEP center at KKU can accommodate more than 70 students. It has 30 desktops and 28 laptops to provide EFL students with online facilities to learn the English language. The walls of the classroom are covered with various pictures ranging from sports to prepositions. These pictures and images are particularly framed or designed for beginner students who might want to express something in English but need a visual reference. Commonly, EFL learners in Saudi Arabia are quite weak in the skills that are related to the grammar of the language and thus, require assistance (Alghammas, 2020). LEP at KKU is designed to cater to this inefficiency of students enhance their oral communication skills and provide them with relevant resources.

Implementation of LEP activities in the EFL classroom at KKU can be stated as an effective step to enhance the oral communication of the learners. This is particularly because the interaction between the students and teachers in the classroom at KKU is often unsolicited for an EFL class. The LEP is not meant only for the students of the Faculty of Languages and

Translation. It is for any KKU student who is interested in improving and practicing English skills.

### Conceptual framework

Second learning acquisition has brought rote learning to its end and triggered the need for more focus on developing communication skills, backed by an adequate understanding of grammatical and structural phenomena of the second language. In this instance, various theories were proposed to streamline learning on factual and pragmatic grounds to enable students and individuals to serve in multicultural and multi-linguistic classrooms, workplaces and societies. Hence, to have a full understanding of theoretical structures and address systematic learning, different learning theories are described in the following sections:

### Grammar-translation method (GTM)

This methodology is adopted in foreign language learning and has been derived from the classical methods, inherited from Latin and Greek styles of teaching. It entails learning word-to-word translation of the text, learning the meaning of words and memorizing the grammatical structures. It was deemed helpful for grasping literary works and classical texts by converting them into the native language. However, it lacked any effective mechanism for increasing the learners' understanding of intonation and correct pronunciation. Also, communicative aspects were not taken into consideration in this theoretical model (Elmayantie, 2015). The main principles of GTM included teaching a second language in the mother tongue; vocabulary learning in the form of listed and separated words; explanation of difficult grammatical structures; practicing intricate classical texts; and little attention to pronunciation and fluency but more focus on accuracy.

### Direct method (DM)

It is interchangeably known as the Natural Method for instructing foreign languages. In this method, using the mother tongue or native language is not allowed. This method was more popular in the 1900s and gained much traction in France and Germany. For teaching vocabulary, pantomiming, realia and other visuals were used. An inductive approach was adopted for learning grammar. Special focus was given to question-answer sessions and teacher–student communication for communication skills. DM method succeeded in GTM in instilling communication competencies among individuals (Usman *et al.*, 2018). However, to address its limitations such as no attention to systematic written work and reading and limited vocabulary, the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) was proposed (Zulfa, 2020).

### Audio-lingual method (ALM)

The ALM has been derived from behaviorist theory, implying that specific commands can be obtained through a trained system of reinforcement where accuracy will engender positive feedback. Unlike the Direct Method, this model did not pay heed to teaching vocabulary but augmented the focus on drilling exercises for grammar skills such as repetition of the correct model of the sentences in the absence of specific grammatical instructions with consistent practice until their usage spontaneously. Reliance on static drills and less focus on students' genuine output were some of the limitations of this method, emanating the reformulation of the audio-visual method (AVM).

### Audio-visual method (AVM)

This theory involves learning language with the help of visual and audible elements to increase learners' practice of communication in a particular language. Various studies have

found that statistically significant was the impact of televised learning where watching videos and movies helped students increase their linguistic competencies and speaking skills in certain linguistic fields. Also, the role of presentation with the use of visuals and audio has been effective in enabling students to make simultaneous responses in foreign languages (Kurniawan, 2016).

*Constructivism learning theory (CLT)*
The constructive learning method is deeply connected with education and learning which emphasizes cognitive learning and practice as well as the replacement of existing information with emerging ones. The methods stress that learning must not hinge on teachers' role in imparting knowledge but students must be encouraged to further knowledge creation and construct knowledge. It focuses on a student-centric approach, problem-solving, discovery processes, social interaction and new knowledge creation. Under this theory, learners must act as active constructors of knowledge, compile knowledge from concrete experiences, collaborative activities and reflection and interpretation and their role must be centered as consumers of ideas whereas teachers as facilitators of ideas (Alzahrani and Woollard, 2013). Based on these constructs, the present study attempts to examine the effectiveness of LEP through the lens of CLT (Figure 1).

*Previous studies*
Targeted ESL programs are required to be implemented as a scheme of study for EFL learners to achieve targeted learning (Casaletto, 2019). One most popular academic settings is flipped classrooms where result-orientation and learner-centric approaches are focused as a blended learning method. A study was conducted at Hong Kong University to assess the role of gamified learning which characterized story-making and storytelling digital drawing with active learning approaches. The results of the study concluded that gamified or digital learning was a catalyst for a positive learning trajectory for the students. Employing technology in the Korean flipped classroom validated the assessment and customized feedback for all and engendered less anxiety and stress levels in the EFL classrooms. Resultantly, the gamified learning model for EFL proved as an effective strategy for cognitive, motivational and behavioral engagement for students (Ho, 2020). The relationship between academic achievement, self-efficacy and self-esteem was examined in a study by Noorollahi (2021). The study was conducted in Iran with 229 graduates in ELT. The researcher encapsulated the findings through Rosenberg's self-esteem questionnaire and Schwarzer, and Jerusalem's self-efficacy questionnaire and reported a significant statistical association between self-esteem, self-efficacy and academic achievement (Noorollahi, 2021). Generally, acquiring English as a second language and gaining expertise in its grammatical structures are daunting tasks in Asian nations (Hashim *et al.*, 2019). Hence, the role of online
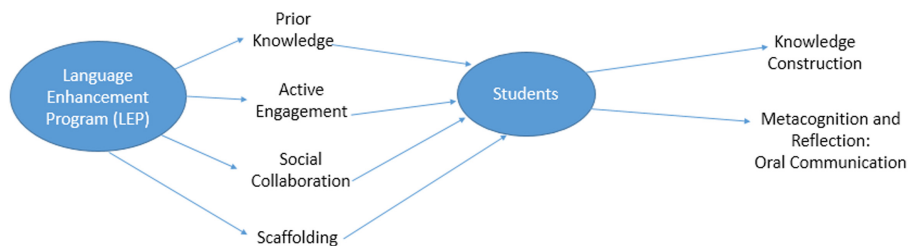


**Figure 1.**
Conceptual framework of the study

**Source(s):** Author

language games in improving ESL learners' grammar was examined by Hashim *et al.* (2019). A quasi-experimental study was conducted with 30 secondary school students. In this study, three gamified learning applications were assessed: Socrative, PowerPoint Challenge Game and Kahoot! The post-test unveiled a significant increase in language (Hashim *et al.*, 2019). Hardin (2023) examined Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) which was implemented as an adult language program. The program was a targeted learning scheme that enabled individuals for English in certain fields or occupations. The study concluded that such programs are rarely witnessed in the meantime, despite their huge significance and potential to improve communication and linguistic skills and expertise for professionals and students, working or practicing some certain area of discipline (Hardin, 2023). Keeping the significance of the targeted linguistic programs for both the individuals and professionals (i.e. students), it can be conspicuously stated that targeted EFL programs are necessary for inculcating and upgrading bilingual or multilingual skills among the Arabic-speaking native populations. Based on the review of the studies above, it is apparent that no study has been conducted to examine the effectiveness of the LEP program, initiated by KKU in Saudi Arabia. Hence, to address this gap, the present study aimed to examine the effectiveness and role of this program in facilitating English learning.

*Research objectives and questions*
The main rationale of LEP activities is to promote the learning process in a friendly and responsive environment, in which students can communicate about whichever topic they want. Students are encouraged to read English newspapers, play games and watch English documentaries, movies and other informational reports. Furthermore, students are encouraged to engage in roundtable conferences with their peers on various topics, under the apprenticeship of teachers. This helps them to get familiar with their mistakes and lacking and learn from them. Such activities also allow students to solve various academic problems they come across.

The present research aims to investigate the impacts of LEP activities provided to the EFL students at KKU. In this way, this research study will collect the opinions of EFL students studying at the KKUs' LEP center. To achieve these objectives, two research questions were imposed, which are:

*RQ1.* Can LEP activities improve students' oral communication in English?

*RQ2.* What are the students' opinions about LEP activities in enhancing their English in different types of communicative contexts?

The study aims to describe how LEP activities can be used to enhance the oral communication skills of the English language in students at KKU. From this perspective, it will put special emphasis on the use of various activities offered by LEP at KKU for the advancement of the oral skills of the students. Commonly, EFL learners or students in Saudi Arabia are quite weak in the skills that are related to the grammar of the language and thus, require assistance. Nevertheless, these learners are usually very poor in oral communication. In this regard, the most common complaints raised by EFL instructors at KKU are related to the limited exposure and practice of the target language.

Therefore, the lack of available resources can be stated as the prime reason why the LEP activities are strongly needed for the EFL students at KKU to enhance their oral communication. In other words, with the help of LEP activities, EFL students at KKU can be made proficient in oral communication. This is particularly because enhancing the communicative skills of learners through encouraging and stimulating students to interact in the target language is considered cooperative, as well as effective and possible learning

principles that can be adopted in the EFL classroom at KKU for establishing a supportive environment.

## Methodology

### Study design

The design of the study combines a mixed method study to have an in-depth understanding of the impact of LEP activities at KKU on the oral communication of EFL students. As per Creswell and Creswell (2017), the mixed method approach is helpful in independently amassing and evaluating the data and interpreting the results of a complex phenomenon while utilizing wide-ranging research variables and instruments. In this way, the present research has utilized two major instruments used in quantitative and qualitative research methods, which are a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. As a quantitative method, the study adopted a quasi-experimental design wherein the means of two groups were compared to assess the significance of LEP. The experimental group ($n = 29$) was provided EFL learning by LEP while the control group ($n = 29$) was taught conventionally.

### Study sample

A total of 80 male students at KKU were given the questionnaire for the survey. Out of which only 58 surveys returned completed. Thus, the total sample size for the survey was 58 students of KKU. In total, 20 male students were recruited for interviews. Simple random sampling was used by the researcher for the distribution of the questionnaire as well as the selection of the students for the interview. Simple random sampling helps researchers assure the likelihood of equal probability of the student's participation (Cohen *et al.*, 2008).

### Study instrument

The researcher designed the survey and interview questionnaires by extensively reviewing the published studies. For facial validity, the researcher acquired the services of two educational experts (from the Department of ESL with expertise in linguistics) and amended the questionnaires based on the suggestions for modification. Further, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the stability coefficient of the adopted survey questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha values of the questionnaire came out to be higher than 0.7 which is considered fit for the study (Table 1).

| Items | Description | Cronbach's alpha values |
|---|---|---|
| A1 | LEP focuses on oral communication | 0.896 |
| A2 | LEP offers activities concerning improving the listening and speaking power of EFL students | 0.809 |
| A3 | LEP includes English background within and surrounding area of the class | 0.949 |
| A4 | LEP allows EFL students to be engaged in oral communication | 0.922 |
| A5 | Teachers participate in students' debate, conversation and group discussion | 0.880 |
| A6 | LEP encourages students to use the English language outside the university, particularly publicly | 0.960 |
| A7 | EFL students using their native are welcomed in the LEP center | 0.883 |
| **Source(s):** Author | | |

Table 1.
Cronbach's alpha values

*Data collection*
To analyze data, as well as data collection, two types of instruments were used, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, as mentioned previously. Both instruments were utilized to investigate the impact of LEP activities offered at KKU on students' oral productive communication. This also helped to uncover the perception of students about LEP activities. The researcher performed a quasi-experimental study and divided the sample size into two groups equally in the experimental ($n = 29$) and control group ($n = 29$). The total number of fully completed questionnaires was 58. For the qualitative portion of this research, the researcher randomly selected 20 male students from the students who completed the questionnaire to participate in semi-structured interviews.

*Data analysis*
The primary objective of the statistical analysis was to measure the effectiveness of the LEP, specifically in enhancing the students' oral communication skills. Two key statistical methods were applied in this study. First, Cronbach's alpha was performed. It is used to assess the internal consistency or reliability of a set of measurement items. Second, a one-sample *t*-test is used. It is a statistical technique used to compare the means of a sample to a known population mean or a specified reference value. The statistical analysis was performed by using statistical software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 23.

**Results**
The demographic details of the participants are demonstrated in Table 2. Based on the results, it was found that the majority of the EFL students (62.25%) were aged between 19 and 21 years, followed by the students aged between 22 and 24 years (38.75%). It also exhibits that the majority of the LEP program students (37.5%) were enrolled in the 1st year of university, followed by second-year students (30.0%) and third-year students (25.0%). Table 3 illustrates the outcomes of the pre-test of both the groups, control and experimental.

Table 4 demonstrates an insignificant value of 0.582 which is higher than the value of 0.05. These results implied that no statistical differences were found in both groups through the pre-test where students were taught traditionally without LEP activities. Whereas, Table 4 illustrates that by contrasting the findings of the pre-test, the mean scores in the post-test of the experimental groups are greater.

The results of the one-sample *T*-tests show that LEP was an effective method to inculcate communication skills and raise the proficiency level of the students of EFL. Regarding the central focus of the EFL on oral communication, the *T*-test value shows the highest score (47.683) in comparison with the score of the control group (*t*-value = 14.856). Moreover, concerning the engagement among the students, the *t*-value of the experimental group was

| Items | | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 19–21 years | 36 | 62.25 |
| | 22–24 years | 22 | 38.75 |
| Education level | First year | 21 | 37.5 |
| | Second year | 18 | 30.0 |
| | Third year | 15 | 25.0 |
| | Fourth year | 4 | 7.5 |
| Total | | 58 | 100 |
| **Source(s):** Author | | | |

Table 2.
Demographic details of
participants

also higher (*t*-value = 18.430) in comparison with the control group (*t*-value = 15.627). On the other hand, the semi-structured interview conducted by twenty EFL students and five EFL teachers engaged in the LEP institution revealed almost the same results as the questionnaire did. All respondents showed their happiness and satisfaction towards the institution and suggested that more such activities should be introduced by the institution. In the same way, EFL teachers complained about the inappropriate environment of English learning throughout the country and appreciated the LEP as a beneficial step taken by KKU.

*Personal attributes*
Some of the responses received from students in the semi-structured interviews stated that the usage of ice-breaking activities increases their confidence and helps them overcome their reluctance. As one student stated, "*By breaking the ice, it is very important to neglect embarrassment and hesitation*" (Student 1). During the interview, students also highlighted that LEP activities have been beneficial for them as they helped them deal with their fear of speaking. In this regard, one student stated "*The LEP helped me to overcome my fears regards speaking with others in English since it is not my first language*" (Student 2). One of the teachers stated that LEP activities have not been beneficial for EFL learners but also for the teachers. Such as one teacher revealed, "*The diversity observed in the class has allowed the teacher to reduce communication apprehension as it assists in revealing new things about the student improving their confidence as well as excitement.*"

Many of the interviewees, both teachers and students, have highlighted that LEP activities provided them with a platform, which offers them exposure and helps them speak without fear. Similarly, one student revealed, "*The program has been a great help to me as I am a very shy person, but these activities have given my confidence a boost.*" In the same context, another student added, "*The thing I find helpful in these activities is that the people we are*

| Description | Participants | Statistical value (*t*) | Level of sig |
|---|---|---|---|
| Experimental | 29 | 0.582 | Insignificant |
| Control | 29 | | |
| **Source(s):** Author | | | |

**Table 3.**
Pretest scores of the control and experimental groups

| Items | Groups | *T* | df | Sig. (2-Tailed) | Mean difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | Control | 14.856 | 58 | 0.000 | 3.034 |
| | Experimental | 47.683 | 58 | 0.000 | 4.138 |
| A2 | Control | 16.409 | 58 | 0.000 | 3.190 |
| | Experimental | 60.406 | 58 | 0.000 | 4.345 |
| A3 | Control | 15.361 | 58 | 0.000 | 2.879 |
| | Experimental | 28.008 | 58 | 0.000 | 3.776 |
| A4 | Control | 15.117 | 58 | 0.000 | 2.897 |
| | Experimental | 31.002 | 58 | 0.000 | 4.138 |
| A5 | Control | 16.380 | 58 | 0.000 | 2.897 |
| | Experimental | 24.752 | 58 | 0.000 | 3.672 |
| A6 | Control | 16.321 | 58 | 0.000 | 3.017 |
| | Experimental | 21.499 | 58 | 0.000 | 3.517 |
| A7 | Control | 15.627 | 58 | 0.000 | 2.862 |
| | Experimental | 18.430 | 58 | 0.000 | 2.690 |
| **Source(s):** Author | | | | | |

**Table 4.**
Scores of post-tests

*speaking in front of don't know me and I believe that is the thing which helped me confidently speak.*"

*Collaborative learning*

LEP activities have served to bridge the communication gap between teachers and students. Also, these activities have assisted in forming a conducive and healthy environment where students show a willingness to learn. The student's statement below sums this up, "*Interacting with teachers informally helped me to enjoy the learning process*" (Student 3). These activities have created an environment where learners feel belong. This is evident from one of the student's statements, "*Being part of something which holds people like me has been an interesting experience for me, the best part is we enjoy practicing and making mistakes.*"

Contrary to it, one of the students reported, "*I feel the environment is discouraging as we have to speak English when we don't want to.*" Most of the interview participants have reported regarding the program's benefits such as "*the program gives me the ability to sense the idea I want to convey. Though I still need more practice, it has given me a feeling of acceptance and confidence.*" One teacher stated, "*Through these activities, I am provided with an opportunity to engage with every student in my class to participate in the discussion, which ultimately makes every child comfortable as he is not alone. And that the idea they are introducing is being heard.*"

*Comfortable environment*

The non-judgmental aspect involved in these activities has promoted the EFL student's development of oral communication skills.

> The LEP helped me improve my language because no one is there to say you are right or wrong no marks are being given or taken it's a place that helps you without taking a thing from you. When you have teachers that want to be there to help you, I got motivated to not make a mistake and try to get the best out of my.

A statement from one of the teachers also highlighted that LEP activities have encouraged students to speak comfortably. Such as "*the open classroom experience has allowed the student to comfortably speak right, while at the same time feel equally comfortable to speak wrong, based on the non-judgment aspect of the involved activities.*" Another teacher further adds "*the presence of non-judgment aspect is because a student is being evaluated based on his ideas and thoughts, which are valued and not laughed at.*" Student 4 stated, "*As a Saudi student living in Saudi Arabia, the opportunity of developing speaking skill specifically is very weak. So, the only choice to develop it in KKU is by just being in LEP. It's a very useful place. You can speak, listen, read, and write besides learning other skills.*" A statement by another student also adds to the program's significance such as "*I have got the language there better than any other place I have got it in. Now, I can listen and speak very skillfully. I advise every student to JUST be there*" (Student 5).

**Discussion**

The findings have revealed that LEP has a positive impact on students' English performance, especially in public speaking, group discussion and interpersonal conversation contexts. The findings of the study are comparable to the results of Meena (2020) who concluded that the learning strategies which include cooperative and participatory strategies led to a significant positive impact on the communication skills of the students. However, the findings of the present study are different from the study by Qizi (2022) which attempted a quasi-experimental study while adopting task-oriented learning strategies to improve the speaking skills of the students in Saudi Arabia. The study reported that performing task-oriented

strategies led to a significant improvement in communication skills as compared to traditional methods.

Similarly, Elkhabery *et al.* (2023) adopted another learning strategy, SCAMPER to develop English-speaking expertise among the students of third year with English as a major subject at Beni-Suef University. The posttest results of the study revealed a significant statistical difference between the control and experimental groups which validated the effectiveness of the SCAMPER strategy to improve the English oral communication skills of the students. Furthermore, Messikh *et al.* (2022) have reported that including translation tasks helped students to increase their vocabulary.

The semi-structured interviews spelled out the impact of this type of cooperative learning on EFL students' oral/speech performance. The table mentioned above depicts that a large ratio of people is in accord with the positive influence of LEP in teaching the English Language. Similarly, the study by Şimon (2014) has also endorsed the results that a cooperative environment promotes the students to engage which improves their language competency as well as their confidence level. The study also highlighted the role of teachers indicating that the course facilitator acts as the catalyst for enhancing the students' cooperation and communication.

Suryasa *et al.* (2017) have supported the present study findings and stated that LEP activities are particularly helpful for students who are not native speakers, while also sustaining a high motivation level among students. The present study also indicates that LEP activities are quite helpful for students who are not native speakers. The significance of the KKU language program has also been indicated by Al-Shehri (2017), which states that it provides students with language development opportunities.

### Relationships between competencies among EFL students and oral communication apprehension

To understand the relationship between the competencies among EFL students at KKU and oral communication apprehension, it would be very beneficial to comprehend the interest and motivational level of EFL students and teachers at KKU (Elyas and Picard, 2010). From this perspective, the reviewed literature, survey and semi-structured interviews have shed light on the importance of learners' interests and motivational levels in building their oral communication skills (Speziale *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, it would not be wrong to state that the confidence and motivational level of EFL students at KKU are considered to be effective sources to make them competent in speaking English publicly and in small groups as well (Hall, 2013).

Mahdi (2014) believes that the learning power of the students depends on their willingness. He thinks that students who are more enthusiastic and eager to learn can grasp things quickly as compared to those who are apathetic. He believes that some students are naturally enthusiastic about learning while others expect and need their teachers to challenge, inspire and stimulate them. An effective learning environment is maintained only through the teacher's ability (Satsangi and Sarla, 2018).

In light of the conceptual framework of the study, the LEP is an effective mechanism that not only provides an opportunity for pragmatic second language learning but also facilitates knowledge creation based on existing knowledge, students possess. The results of the study indicate the enhancement of the learning environment. This environment provides an opportunity for the EFL students to eradicate their ineffective habit of not practicing oral communication as this further amplifies anxiety and fear (Elmahdi and Khan, 2015). Dajani and Omari (2013) have also stated that the motivation and engagement of EFL students that, it as more of a psychological barrier than a linguistic barrier. Alasmari *et al.* (2016) have also stated the removal of the psychological barrier by emphasizing the role of the EFL teachers. It

supplements that the increase in the classroom activities such as LEP helps in overcoming their fear and develops cooperation, through which the pronunciation barriers and linguistics mistakes can be reduced.

*Various techniques and strategies for EFL class*
Various techniques and strategies offered by LEP for the proficiency of EFL students at KKU in oral communication have positive impacts on the learning of English. This is particularly because there is little or no appropriate environment in which EFL students can enhance their language skills. Breiseth *et al.* (2011) explain that the more EFL students take part in oral communication, the more they will be competent (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Considering this perspective, LEP has created such an environment that is very appropriate to meet the needs of EFL students (August and Shanahan, 2017). The activities offered by LEP are also considered beneficial because it is believed that language is always learned or acquired by environment and culture rather than the pedagogy methodology (Lopez, 2011). In this way, LEP has acquired the process of ELT in the form of environmental and cultural forms rather than the traditional pedagogy (Manavathu and Zhou, 2012).

*Using the latest technology*
While teaching EFL, KKU should ensure that it is innovative and professional to use the latest technologies, i.e. multimedia, iPod, etc. as they enhance the listening power of EFL students. LEP uses various multimedia means/aids that help the EFL students to be connected with the current world along with the improvement of their target language skills (Martin, 2014). However, it would be right to state that the Internet has made learning the English language very easy (Percy, 2012) which has benefited students of KKU. In this way, e-learning is recognized as an advanced teaching style of LEP strategies. The task of listening to native speakers is fulfilled by incorporating the use of the latest technologies in the EFL curriculum at the LEP center (Moussu, 2013, pp. 55–68). Students at KKU had complaints about limited resources available to them, using the latest technologies will cater to those complaints of students and solve their problems.

**Conclusion**
The study aimed to investigate the impact of LEP activities on EFL students at KKU and their opinions toward them. The above discussion explored the role of LEP activities in improving students' oral communication in English and students' opinions about LEP activities in enhancing their English in different types of communicative contexts through a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Findings depicted that oral and written communication in English language learning is very important for all students. Students cannot succeed well in the language learning process if they do not gain confidence and mastery over speaking and writing English. This study suggests some pedagogical implications for overcoming the difficulties faced by EFL students in various communicative contexts.

*Implications*
The results of the study implied that there is a need for massive realignment in the process of second learning acquisition. The study has presented an overview of different language learning theories and has extended the significance of targeted language learning programs. In addition, it has unveiled the significance of LEP in knowledge creation, reflection and metacognition for students and has investigated the role of the student as a center of learning

rather than teacher-centric learning which promotes passive learning with no outcomes for facilitating communication skills.

## Recommendations

The study highly recommends that English language teachers use these types of activities to develop their students' oral skills in meaningful contexts. If all these strategies are implemented, there can be a big change in the learning of such students. Along with it, the study also recommends the teacher introduce such teaching practices where students overcome the issue of underestimating themselves while instilling belief in their abilities. These activities accelerate the student's motivation level as well as their confidence in speaking English without any hesitation. Furthermore, the study also suggests EFL teachers initiate the activity of delivering oral presentations which helps the EFL students to overcome their anxiety and assists in provoking classroom activities that make the classroom environment more informal and less stressful.

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