

Exploring Factors Influencing English-Speaking Skills among Saudi EFL Security Guards in Healthcare Institutions

Majid Alharthi¹

¹ Department of Diplomas, Applied College, Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence: Majid Alharthi, Assistant professor in TESOL, Department of Diplomas, Applied College, Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the perceived factors contributing to the English-speaking challenges facing Saudi EFL security guards in health institutions. The data were gathered via questionnaires completed by 258 security guard students (132 males and 126 females) and interviews with 6 English teachers (3 males and 3 females). The findings indicated that course content and materials, as well as teaching methods, contribute to the speaking problems encountered by Saudi EFL security guards in health institutions. Concerns with course content and resources include insufficient content time, inadequate tasks for English language practice, and a lack of relevance to students' language learning needs. Regarding teaching methods, the study demonstrates the influence of institutional power, time constraints, and content-heavy programs that involve teaching methods, such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). This method, which prioritizes memorizing isolated vocabulary rather than fostering communicative language skills in many relevant settings, has contributed to the students' speaking challenges. The study's implications and limitations were discussed.

Keywords: EFL/ESP, speaking challenges, security guards, course content, teaching methods

1. Introduction

Speaking is a crucial skill necessary for acquiring proficiency in the English language. The vast majority, if not all, academic, professional, and business institutions require applicants to possess an adequate level of speaking English proficiency (Alshayban, 2022). In all Saudi universities, for instance, a student must have a score equivalent to a 5 on the IELTS; otherwise, he or she must complete a 32-hour English course. In business, companies expect applicants and students to be able to use the English language for specific purposes and in particular contexts. For instance, the oil company (Aramco) prefers applicants who communicate proficiently in English in business settings. Al-Seghayer (2023) asserts that local (Saudi) and international businesses are keen to recruit English-speaking workers because they frequently collaborate with international commercial organizations and maintain vital global connections. Therefore, these require specific language for particular purposes.

One of the primary goals of teaching English in Saudi Arabia is to improve the speaking skills of Saudis who work directly with non-Saudis and English speakers, particularly in high-level settings such as health institutions (Hoven & Algahtani, 2023). According to the Saudi 2022 Census, which was conducted by the General Authority for Statistics, it is estimated that there are currently 13 million (41.6% of the total population) expatriate workers living in Saudi Arabia. In health institutions, English is the most commonly used medium of instruction when communicating with foreign doctors, nurses, patients, and visitors. Safety is a priority for any health institution in terms of security guarding. Security guarding plays a critical role in saving people's lives. Security guards in hospitals should learn how to manage emergencies, such as by understanding codes. They must learn how to give directions and provide information about their workplace, for example. They interact with people of various nationalities, the majority of whom speak English. As a result, security guards should learn how to speak functionally, as English is the most commonly used language in hospitals. This is why it is critical to investigate whether security guards in Saudi health institutions are able to speak English communicatively.

Due to the high-stakes nature of their job, as well as the obvious need for English in the specialized context of health care, the Saudi security guards must also contend with significant challenges in communicating. This study attempts to understand their experience in terms of not only why speaking English is challenging but also why those challenges continued to play a role in their language learning experience. By hearing from both the students learning English and from their teachers, this study shows how the course curriculum, classroom pedagogy, and the realities of teacher instruction practically structure the outcomes learners were able to achieve. In emphasizing this population, who are often left out of academic discussions, this study is meant not only to highlight problems but also to reveal implications for practical action and productivity that improve the context of English language teaching for those in our health institutions who protect us.

1.1 Research Problem

Saudi students study English for about twelve years, from elementary to high school, and have two courses in English at the university.

Despite the duration of time spent studying English, the students seem unable to use their English communicatively in different real-life situations (Al-Seghayer, 2023). Saudi students graduate from high school without being able to speak the target language functionally (Alghamdi, 2024; Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi, 2022). Also, according to the IELTS data for the year 2022, Saudi Arabia ranks 35th out of 40 countries in terms of academic test takers, but it has the lowest position among all nations in terms of general test takers, based on their overall performance (IELTS, 2022).

Having said that, are the security guard students able to use their English communicatively in their fieldwork? Based on the present research's experience, ESP Saudi security guard students seem mostly unable to use their English communicatively. In terms of the ESP Saudi security guard course, students appear unable to use the necessary and appropriate communicative phrases in their fieldwork, which is in health institutions. The researcher of this study examined the students orally in a preliminary investigation. Only a few students were able to express themselves and communicate their English effectively. Therefore, the researcher has been motivated to investigate the factors affecting Saudi security guard students when speaking in English. Subsequently, what are the perceived challenges students face in speaking their English communicatively? Despite the importance of ESP courses for students in Saudi Arabia, no research has been conducted on Saudi security guards. No study has specifically investigated students' and teachers' perceptions of the English-speaking challenges encountered by ESP security guards in Saudi Arabia.

1.2 Institutional Background

The Saudi Health Academy, which operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Health, has developed a curriculum aimed at instructing students on some key terms, expressions, and terminology that can help security guard students communicate effectively in their fieldwork. The main goal of the course is to communicatively utilize the common English expressions in health institutions in Saudi Arabia. The students devote a total of 18 hours to their studies over a span of three weeks. The course consists of nine thematic chapters. Each chapter starts with a textual passage and/or a conversational exchange, followed by a compilation of vocabulary that acts as the primary emphasis of the chapter. In accordance with the provided vocabulary list, students are expected to engage in a sequence of exercises and drills, mostly consisting of multiple-choice, matching, and fill-in-the-blank questions. To achieve success in the course, students are required to complete their final examination successfully.

As stated above, this course is only three weeks long and includes nine units to cover based on the program structure. Therefore, institutional policy demands that instructors exhibit course pacing and a focus on completing the content. The structure emphasizes compliance with the curriculum more than communicative practice, which creates a practical constraint on the methods used. Consequently, the instructional design is expected to privilege fast, non-communicative, teacher-centered ways of instructing students to prepare them for the final exam. The requirement for instructors to teach at the course pace set by the institution is a key systemic factor being analyzed in the current research study.

1.3 Research Objective

The aim of this research was to examine the perceived factors contributing to the English-speaking challenges experienced by Saudi EFL security guards in health institutions.

1.4 Research Question

What are the perceptions of both students and teachers regarding the challenges facing security guard students when speaking English?

2. Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted in ESP contexts to investigate the factors that influence EFL students' communication in English. As far as Saudi Arabia is concerned, several studies have investigated the communicative use of English by Saudi students in ESP contexts. Notable contributions in this area include the works of Khalil & Semono-Eke (2020), Fadel & Elyas (2015), Almathkuri (2022), Muhammad & Abdul Raof (2019), Gaffas (2019), Hashmi, Rajab, and Sindi (2019), Alshayban (2022), Alsamadani (2017), and Al-Malki et al. (2022). While this body of research demonstrates that EFL learners encounter major challenges in speaking, a critical synthesis shows that most literature simply addresses the symptoms, such as a lack of vocabulary, teaching approaches, and the problems within the materials, instead of properly diagnosing the systemic issues pertaining to the educational philosophy behind these problems.

The difficulty encountered by EFL students in speaking English is sometimes attributed to a deficiency of vocabulary (Gaffas, 2019; Alshayban, 2022; Aldohon, 2014). This conclusion, however, can be critiqued for being diagnostically limited. Studies investigating Saudi graduate students (Gaffas, 2019) and bankers (Alshayban, 2022) have shown significant communication challenges resulting from a limited vocabulary range and insufficient understanding of certain terminologies. This evidence suggests that the basic problem is not the acquisition of vocabulary but rather pedagogical strategies that generate 'inert knowledge' (i.e., students possess knowledge but lack the functional ability to employ it in context). Furthermore, this deficiency is commonly attributed to a non-provision of the opportunities necessary for the practice of English outside the classroom (Aldohon, 2014; Kulsum et al., 2025). These results corroborate the claims made by Newton & Nation (2021), Hall (2018), and Nation (2022) that the less EFL students utilize the English vocabulary practically, the less likely they are to be able to communicate effectively in English. Critically, while these studies effectively diagnose the symptom of passive vocabulary knowledge, they do not conduct a comprehensive diagnostic critique of the systemic policy of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which institutionalizes this form of non-functional learning by emphasizing rules and memorized responses.

Given that teachers are in contact with students, it is not surprising that ineffective methods of teaching are widely cited as a major

contributing factor to the speaking difficulties that EFL students face (Fadel & Elyas, 2015; Almathkuri, 2022; Hashmi et al., 2019; Alsamadani, 2017; Al-Hassani & Al-Saalmi, 2022; Manulang & Susilowaty, 2022; and Alfares, 2024). Research conducted on Saudi undergraduates in various ESP contexts reveals issues stemming from pedagogical approaches (Alfares, 2024; Almathkuri, 2022; Alsamadani, 2017; Alhassani & Al-Saalmi, 2022; Hashmi et al., 2019) that rely on traditional methods, such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which typically results in the literal translation of vocabulary and their meanings, emphasizing rote learning and memorization rather than contextual application.

A fundamental problem is that several studies found that Saudi students are being taught in a traditional way, with the instructor having more control over the classroom and the learning process not being focused on the students. (Alfares, 2024; Almathkuri, 2022; Alsamadani, 2017; Al-Hassani & Al-Saalmi, 2022; Hashmi et al., 2019). This method disproportionately emphasizes the instruction of vocabulary, grammar, and structure as distinct, discrete, and independent components. More critically, such behavior demonstrates valuing the structure and mechanics of the language (accuracy) over the meaningful use of language (fluency), a prevalent tendency among several EFL instructors (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This teacher-centered approach fails to enable second language learners to become autonomous and express their ideas and opinions in different significant contexts (Nation, 2022; Thornbury, 2002). Conversely, the necessity for a learning-centered approach is clear, one in which the learner is the central part of the learning process and teachers facilitate the learning by providing students with tasks that promote communication (Cooze, 2017; Hall, 2018). This learner need for change has been substantiated by EFL Saudi learners' perceptions that their teachers depend on traditional lecturing rather than engaging students in varied interactive activities such as group work, peer activities, or problem-solving tasks (Almathkuri, 2022; Hashmi et al., 2019). This demonstrates a motivational element for the participating students to engage in interactive and communicative circumstances to improve their English language skills.

The ongoing inclination towards the traditional teacher-centered grammar translation method, which structurally prioritizes the structures of language over the practical use of them (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), is a significant pedagogical failure routinely reflected in research data that show that productive skills are ignored. This error is often further critically exacerbated by practical considerations such as class sizes, which will impede the development of speaking fluency by preventing teachers from implementing alternative strategies to the essential cycles of practice and feedback (Almathkuri, 2022; & Al-Saalmi, 2022). These data reflect the established structure of teacher education and the policies that dictate teaching methods and practices, resulting in a persistent trend of language instruction that is entirely opposed to the communicative goals of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Ultimately, addressing the speaking deficiency demands not just a superficial adjustment in terms of syllabus but a genuine holistic restructuring of the system of teacher education and institutional policies to order and support genuinely student-centered communicative teaching methods.

However, do the teachers help the students to use their English language communication skills in a practical sense? Studies undertaken by Almathkuri (2022), Alsamadani (2017), and Alhassani & Al-Saalmi (2022) may assist in answering this question. These studies indicated that the teachers mostly favor the receptive skills at the expense of the productive skills. In addition to this, studies conducted by Alrashed & Abdel Latif (2025) and Almathkuri (2022) found that there was a lack of any effective use of the productive skills. Simply put, few opportunities exist for the students to practice speaking adequately to be ready for their future duties in the medical field, for example, communicating with patients and other stakeholders. In several cases, this deficiency stems from the systemic flaw of insufficient practice, which is again a consequence of a congested curriculum and an excessive number of classes within the allocated time. This situation raises serious evaluative concerns about the fundamental structure and prioritization of the course content itself.

The literature also widely addresses the deficiencies related to course content and materials. Research findings suggest that much of the present curriculum in ESP courses is outdated and does not reflect the actual needs of students nor the demand of the market (Almathkuri, 2022; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2017). The disconnection between classroom instruction and the demands of the real world immediately undermines the fundamental purposes for ESP instructions. Furthermore, the essential listening skills required for comprehension have largely been neglected because current resources lack authentic listening activities that promote understanding (Almathkuri, 2022; Aldohon, 2014; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2017). Additionally, the topics covered are not tailored to the local context (Hashmi et al., 2019), and irrelevant curriculum would expectedly discourage students from engaging in learning the target language (Richards, 2017). Another major concern is the limited number of course hours, which restricts students' opportunities to practice their English productively and limits the time available for teachers to provide constructive feedback (Almathkuri, 2022; Al-Hassani & Al-Saalmi, 2022).

Although these studies are effective in diagnosing the symptom called curricular misalignment, they stop the analysis at the classroom level. Researchers do not generally probe deeply enough into the systemic origins of the underlying inertia (Richards, 2017). For example, there is an absence of research on the institutional conditions, such as the role of policy mechanisms or a basic lack of employer involvement in the curriculum development and validation processes, which maintain the tenuous position of out-of-date content (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2017). The result of this picture is that the current literature lacks the analytical force to be operational in relation to the fundamental requirement for high-level policy reform.

Other findings recommend tasks and materials for the communicative aspects of the course content, such as reading or listening to authentic products, using English through films and games (Fadel & Elyas, 2015; Manulang & Susilowaty, 2022), watching videos, delivering presentations, role-playing, and class discussions. These proposed solutions, which are frequently endorsed by the students themselves, collectively evaluate the existing system as inadequate. The results of these studies indicate that their participating students seem to be aware of their needs. Such awareness is reflected in the suggested solutions perceived by both students and teachers that

generally enhance communicative tasks. For example, Muhammad & Abdul Raof (2019) found that more than 70% of the participating students perceived that listening to lectures, taking notes while listening, watching videos, delivering presentations, and describing the content of tables and graphs were the most important tasks they wanted to have in their course. According to Alshahrani & Saud (2024), Cooze (2017), and Lennon (2021), speaking activities must be communicative, providing an effective platform for EFL students to participate in simulated real-life conversations, enabling students to use their English communicatively in various interactive contexts.

Al-Malki et al. (2022) found that the Saudi tourism profession places a high emphasis on speaking abilities due to the predominant nature of verbal communication with visitors. One of the most essential speaking skills pertained to the capacity to respond to queries about attractions, provide detailed information about those attractions, identify oneself, and supply the necessary details pertaining to the attractions. These students' suggestions imply that they want to have active roles and practice their English speaking fictionally in different real-life situations, which aligns closely with Alasal's (2025) findings—Saudi EFL learners significantly enhance their communicative competence when engaged in task-based, real-world speaking tasks that emphasize fluency, accuracy, and interaction.

The literature reviewed has addressed several factors that affect Saudi EFL learners' oral communication, such as restricted vocabulary use, ineffective teaching methods, outdated course material, and lack of communicative activities. While previous studies have addressed these challenges in general ESP contexts, no study has been carried out to investigate the perspectives of Saudi security guard students and their teachers about the problems the students encounter while communicating in English during their field job. The current research aims to address the existing information gap by using a mixed-methods approach (a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies) to comprehensively capture the whole of the narrative (Creswell, 2014).

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The study sample included 258 security guard students (132 males and 126 females). All the students are graduates and have the same educational background. Also, the sample consisted of six teachers (three males and three females). They have PhDs in teaching English and educational linguistics.

3.2 Instruments of the Study

Two instruments were employed in this study, i.e., a student questionnaire and one-on-one teacher interviews. They were used to obtain the perspectives of students and teachers on the challenges experienced by the Saudi security guards while communicating in English. The questionnaire consists of 10 closed-item questions and one open-ended question. The researcher developed the questionnaire through exploration of the literature research and piloting. The researcher developed the 10-item questionnaire in Arabic (the L1 of the participants), incorporating a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 4, with 0 meaning "strongly disagree" and 4 meaning "strongly agree." Concerning the teacher interviews, six teachers were interviewed to elicit their perceptions of the challenges encountered by their students when communicating their English.

3.3 Procedure

After assuring the students of the confidentiality of their answers and that codes would be used instead of their names in the study, the questionnaire was sent to all the students to answer online via Google Forms. The items were presented in Arabic to avoid students' confusion. A total of 258 students completed the questionnaire. Their responses to the open-ended question were translated into English.

Regarding the teacher interviews, all six teachers were sent emails to ask for their approval on participation and what place and time suited them. All of them agreed to be interviewed over the phone. The interviews were conducted in English.

3.4 Questionnaire Validity

To ensure both semantic and linguistic equivalence, the questionnaire was first translated from English into Arabic. The Arabic version was then back-translated into English by an independent bilingual expert who had not seen the original English version. Next, the original English, translated Arabic, and back-translated English questionnaires were reviewed by two bilingual TESOL professors to check for content clarity, topical relevance, and translation quality. Some items were modified as per their suggestions to establish the content validity. Also, piloting the questionnaire helped the present researcher obtain feedback from the students to draw conclusions about the validity of the questionnaire. A pilot test of the questionnaire was employed to make sure that there were no ambiguous, uncertain, or wordy items in the questionnaire (Creswell, 2014). Some elements were changed to be more explicit as a result of student feedback.

4. Results and Discussion

To answer the research question, what are the perceptions of both students and teachers regarding the challenges facing security guard students when speaking English? The questionnaire items have been categorized thematically. These include the course content and teaching methods.

4.1 Course Content

As Table 1 (see Appendix A) shows, about 60% of the student participants express a dissenting viewpoint on the adequacy of the content time, the effectiveness of the activities and tasks in facilitating English practice, and the relevance of the material to their specific course demands. These perspectives are supported by the participating students' responses to the open question in the questionnaire. Only 42 students provided responses to the open-ended question pertaining to the difficulties they have while communicating in English. Two

issues emerged from it, namely a scarcity of content time and insufficient practical use of English skills. One student mentioned, “We need extra hours to study English for three months rather than three weeks.” Another student said, “We don’t practice our English for communication. We just read the words and answered the multiple-choice questions.” The opinions expressed by the interviewed teachers support the perceptions of the students who took part in the study, as revealed through both closed-ended and open-ended questions. According to one teacher, “the course is insufficient for the trainees’ language skills, especially their communication skills, which need more training hours to improve.” Another teacher critiques the course design, stating that “the content is not suitable because it is not relevant to students’ future careers.” Another teacher added, “Students study the names of diseases, and those are irrelevant to their future because they are security guards rather than physical nurses.” Another teacher mentioned that “the course is just to teach them some words in a list with their equivalent meanings in Arabic. It has nothing to do with improving their speaking skills.” This quote provides direct evaluative evidence of the GTM’s negative philosophical influence on course content.

The results indicated that both the participating students and their teachers concur that the content has some issues that need to be considered. Approximately 60% of the participant students and all the interviewed teachers expressed agreement with regard to the insufficiency of content time, the inadequacy of activities and tasks in facilitating English language practice, and the lack of relevance of the course content to the language learning needs of the students. The findings of the present study are in line with Almathkuri (2022) and Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi (2022), who stated that teachers do not have enough time to give feedback and students have few chances to communicate their English in the class. The current research supports this perspective, since it is corroborated by a majority of the participating students and all the interviewed teachers, who concurred that there is insufficient time allocated for practice.

Regarding the activities and tasks of the content, the findings of the present study align with the findings of Hashmi et al. (2019), which indicate that the coursebook contents and material are outdated and unsuitable for ESP learners. Additionally, the findings of Almathkuri (2022) and Gaffas (2019) support this notion, as they discovered that the textbook is short and lacks linguistic and professional relevance for students. According to Richards (2017), students are less likely to actively participate in learning the target language if the curriculum is unrelated to their interests. All interviewed teachers stressed that students were disengaged in this study because they learned the names of diseases that were irrelevant to their interests and needs. The clear lack of student involvement is a major issue since it detracts from the course’s primary goal, which is to help students go beyond the rote memorization of vocabulary words.

The observed functional failure arises from the nature of the curriculum. More specifically, the outcomes in vocabulary represent an important link between the content of the course and the methods involved in instruction. The orientation toward memorizing vocabulary in isolation comes simply from the two sources of curriculum organization and approach toward instruction (GTM), revealing that problems in vocabulary are of a pedagogical as well as a material nature.

4.2 Teaching Methods

The identified functional failure of vocabulary learning leads directly into an investigation into the methodologies of teaching, considering that they are found to be an obvious contributing factor to the students’ speaking problems. Table 1 (see Appendix A) provides the foundational empirical evidence for this analysis, illustrating a critical gap: 160 (62%) of the students agreed that they can understand English texts easily (Item 5). However, knowing the meaning of words and understanding the texts easily were not enough to help students to ensure functional use, as 168 (65%) of the students expressed disagreement with their ability to use the target words communicatively in different meaningful contexts (Item 6). This stark disparity is consistent with the influence of the instructional methodology. The high percentage of students (214, or 83%) who agreed that they learn the English words in isolated terms (Item 7) suggests that the dominant approach prioritizes rote memorization over communicative competency.

While 83% (see appendix A) of the students agreed that they learn the English words in isolated terms, 65% of the students concurred with the statement that they have challenges in effectively utilizing these words across diverse and relevant situations. Consistently, all the interviewed teachers indicated that students learn vocabulary passively. For example, one teacher indicated that “Most of the curriculum is objective exercises for the trainees to memorize these vocabulary sets. There are gaps where content should be designated to provide the trainees with background information on the main themes of security in health institutions so that the trainees can correctly relate acquired vocabulary sets to work contexts.” Another teacher said, “Although the focus is on learning vocabulary, students can’t use it functionally.” This finding indicates that students learn English words passively. In other words, they are passively engaged in memorizing the native language equivalents of the target words rather than actively involved in using their English words communicatively in different meaningful contexts. The findings of the present study are in accordance with those of Almathkuri (2022), Alsamadani (2017), Alhassaani & Al-Saalmi (2022), Hashmi et al. (2019), and Kulsum et al. (2025), who point out that their participants were taught in a passive way and were not provided opportunities to create their own sentences and use them in various situations of daily conversation. Nation (2022) argues that mastering English vocabulary necessitates learners using the target words functionally in different communicative contexts, rather than just recognizing and memorizing their meanings. If, therefore, the students cannot employ the target words for different communicative purposes, how can they expect to achieve their anticipated goals of learning the English language?

A total of 212 (82%) of the students agreed that their goal of learning English is to communicate with others. Consistently, 193 (75%) of the students disagreed that their goal of learning English is to pass the exams. The observed coherence between these two items shows that students have the desire to learn English for communicative purposes. Contrary to the participating students’ perceived goals, all the teachers agreed that students only focus on passing the final exam. One teacher said, “Most of the students just want to pass the exam to

get the job. However, very few students come to me and say, we want to learn how to communicate our English.” It seems that there is a gap between students’ and teachers’ perceptions regarding students’ goal of learning English. While students indicated that their goal is to communicate in English, their teachers believed that their students just wanted to learn English to pass the exam. Hall (2018) indicates that a gap between goals of learning and teaching practices will hinder students from achieving their goals of learning the target language. In the current study, it implies that the students consider the importance of learning English for communicative purposes. However, it seems that due to the time constraints, they just want to pass the exam. This possible explanation is supported by all the interviewed teachers. One teacher said, “We want to improve their speaking skills, but we have only three weeks. We have to finish nine units that have lots of exercises. And students mostly focus on the exam.” This evidence supports a serious conflict: the institution's goal is clearly communicative (as stated in Section 1.2), but the system's design—specifically the tight time limit—goes against that goal and forces teachers to put assessment ahead of fluency. The consequence is that teachers may want to use communicative teaching, but their way of teaching is heavily influenced by the educational system. This means that the course is mostly set by assessment requirements and final exams, which requires a quick, teacher-centered approach that only covers content.

Most of the students (80%, or 207 out of 258) did not agree that their teachers play audio tracks focusing on the words they have learned. The finding demonstrates that exposure to listening was ignored. Consistently, all the interviewed teachers affirmed that the course content doesn't have audio tracks. Two teachers stated that they sometimes play some audio and video clips. One teacher said she uses YouTube to show her students how to pronounce some words. Another teacher indicated that he uses some cartoons on YouTube to show them how to give directions in English. The present study's findings are consistent with the research conducted by Alshayban (2022) and Almathkuri (2022), which similarly revealed that their participants did not have exposure to authentic listening experiences aimed at fostering communication. Listening serves as the input for the subsequent production (Newton & Nation, 2021). Therefore, students should be exposed to listening to the language so that they can speak the target language communicatively.

5. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study revealed that the course content and materials and the way they have been taught don't meet the students' expectations. Therefore, students should be engaged in tasks relevant to their needs and experiences so that they can be encouraged to communicate their English and maximize their practice. Also, there were limited chances for students to practice their speaking inside the classroom. Hence, it is advisable that curriculum designers and teachers give students enough time to practice speaking. Additionally, the present study's findings revealed that the students are taught using GTM, which emphasizes rote memorization of vocabulary in isolation. Therefore, students should have active roles in their learning process and be provided with opportunities to actively engage in English communication, utilizing the acquired words in various functional contexts. Furthermore, the findings of the present study also indicated that the perspectives of both students and teachers are disregarded. How can curriculum designers design courses without taking students' and teachers' voices into consideration? In this study, the revised version of the course could incorporate a variety of communicative activities aimed at offering students supplementary opportunities to be involved in actual conversations on genuine subjects with real audiences (Cooze, 2017; Lennon, 2021). Ultimately, the comprehensive curriculum may prioritize practical application of English in real-life situations above the isolated study of linguistic components.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study has three main limitations. Firstly, the scope of this research is confined to a single city. The study's external generalizability is restricted by the location-based limitation, which also significantly reduces the sample size. Another limitation is that it is related to the study instruments. The data collection process included the administration of student questionnaires and teacher interviews. The inclusion of observational data in this study would have contributed valuable insights into the pedagogical methods and learning processes used within the classroom setting, surpassing the reliance only on the subjective perspectives of instructors and students.

Finally, although the students were asked an open-ended question in the questionnaire to talk about their challenges when speaking English, it would be better to interview them to elicit more comprehensive perspectives or viewpoints pertaining to the data presented in the questionnaire (Creswell, 2014). These limitations should be kept in mind while interpreting all of the data presented in this study.

7. Conclusion

The current research investigates the issues Saudi EFL security guards employed at healthcare institutions encounter while speaking in English, utilizing data collected through student questionnaires and teacher interviews. The study revealed two main concerns about the perceived challenges students experienced in studying and using spoken English: the course content and teaching methods.

With respect to the course content, students expressed that there was not enough time afforded to the course material, much of the content was not relevant to their professional context, and the way they were learning did not include ample opportunities to practice meaningful speaking. When asked how much of their study included actual speaking, students continuously referenced study materials that involved mostly rote learning by memorizing lists of isolated vocabulary and did not involve much in the way of communication. Teacher interviews confirmed students' apprehensions, as teachers argued the existing curriculum does not address real-life communication skills, especially those related to health care contexts.

Teaching methods also served as a key impediment to communicative competence. In this context, the teachers' use of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which focuses on memorizing vocabulary and being ready for tests, prevented students from having many

chances to practice speaking in a meaningful way. In addition, the lack of authentic listening resources and communicative activities stunted the development of the functional language of the students. There was also a gap between the value placed by students on learning English for communication purposes and the views of the teachers, who thought the students were keen to just pass the exams. Crucially, the collective findings on content irrelevance and disregarded stakeholder voices analytically fill the systemic gap in the literature, demonstrating that the root cause of instructional failure lies in a broken policy mechanism characterized by institutional inertia and a lack of effective employer consultation.

In follow-up research, this study can be augmented with observational or interview data with students to yield more of an insight into classroom interaction. Also, replicating this research in other cities or contexts would enhance its generalizability. Also, while this research showed the functional failures of the present system, it is highly recommended that future research examine the policy and institutional aspects that have made it such that failed methodologies exist alongside obsolete content. This would pave the way for high-level structural reform. It needs to be noted that the stated aim of the curriculum is for the students to communicatively use English phrases, which is a much different proposition from the functional failure demonstrated by this research, highly indicative of the systemic breakdown in pedagogical effectiveness. Overall, this study illustrates an imperative need to rethink pedagogy and adjust the practice of ESP delivery to the actual communicative context that Saudi security guards encounter in health care settings.

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Data sharing statement

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Appendix A

Table 1. Students' perspective of the factors that contribute to their challenges while communicating in English

	Statement	Agree & Strongly Agree	Disagree & Strongly Disagree
1	The time allotted for the course content is enough.	102 (40%)	156 (60%)
2	I have enough time to practice my English in the class.	93 (36%)	165 (64%)
3	The tasks and activities help me to improve my speaking skills in English.	95 (37%)	163 (63%)
4	The texts in the course are relevant to my needs.	106 (41%)	152 (59%)
5	I can understand English texts easily.	160 (62%)	98 (38%)
6	I can use the words I have learned in meaningful contexts.	90 (35%)	168 (65%)
7	I learn the vocabulary in isolated terms.	214 (83%)	44 (17%)
8	My goal of learning the English course is to communicate with others.	44 (17%)	214 (83%)
9	My goal of learning the English course is just to pass the exam.	65 (25%)	193 (75%)
10	My teacher explains the lessons in Arabic.	125 (48%)	133 (52%)
11	My teacher encourages me to speak English in the class.	75 (29%)	183 (71%)
12	My teacher plays audio tracks in the class.	114 (44%)	144 (56%)