

التحديات التي يواجهها طلاب الدراسات العليا الليبيون في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: دراسة حالة مراكز اللغة في المرقب وزليتن ومصراتة

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المُلخَص

يُظهر تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لطلاب الدراسات العليا في ليبيا تحديات تعيق الأداء الأكاديمي في المقررات التي تُدرّس باللغة الإنجليزية. حيث طُبّق نهج مختلط الأساليب في مراكز اللغات في المرقب، وزليتن، ومصراتة خلال يناير- مايو 2025، وقد شملت العينة خمسين طالبًا عبر استبيانات (معامل ألفا لكرونباخ = 0.872)، ورؤى نوعية من 15 مقابلة مع معلمين، و10 ملاحظات صفية، وتُشير الإحصاءات الوصفية إلى أن اللغة الأكاديمية تُمثل التحدي الأساسي (المتوسط = 4.20، الانحراف المعياري = 0.82، 72% صعوبة بالغة)، ثم مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية (المتوسط = 4.10، الانحراف المعياري = 0.89)، أظهر تحليل التباين أحادي الاتجاه وجود تباينات في تصورات محدودية الموارد بين التخصصات الأكاديمية، $F(2,47) = 5.12$ ، $p = .009$ ، $\eta^2 = .18$ ، حيث أبلغ طلاب العلوم الإنسانية عن تحديات أكبر بكثير (المتوسط = 4.38، الانحراف المعياري = 0.78) مقارنةً بنظرائهم في العلوم (المتوسط = 3.75، الانحراف المعياري = 0.85) والهندسة (المتوسط = 3.62، الانحراف المعياري = 0.90)، كشفت معاملات الارتباط بين الأفراد عن وجود علاقة ثابتة بين القدرة اللغوية المتقدمة والكفاءة الأكاديمية في اللغة الإنجليزية $(r = .72)$ ، $p < .001$. وحدد التحليل الموضوعي ثلاثة محاور رئيسية: (1) غياب المواد التعليمية للغة الإنجليزية للعلوم الإنسانية، (2) قصور في المصطلحات التخصصية، (3) قصور في التقييم الأولي للكفاءة في اللغة الإنجليزية، وتُشير النتائج إلى ضرورة تطبيق مناهج دراسية متخصصة في مجالات العلوم الإنسانية، وتحديد حد أدنى لمتطلبات القبول في اختبار الأيلتس وهو 6.0 فأكثر، وتطوير بنية تحتية مؤسسية على غرار المعامل الرقمية في مصراتة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، سياسة التدريس باللغة الإنجليزية، تحديات العلوم الإنسانية، الكفاءة اللغوية، طلاب الدراسات العليا الليبيون.

EFL Challenges Encountered by Libyan Postgraduates: A Case Study of Elmergib, Zliten and Misurata Language Centers

Abstract

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to postgraduate students in Libya presents sophisticated, field-specific challenges that hinder performance in such English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses. A mixed methods approach was conducted at the language centers of Elmergib, Zliten and Misurata, Jan–May, 2025. The data collection methods were quantitative data from 50 postgraduates via questionnaires (Cronbach's $\alpha = .872$), qualitative insights from 15 teacher interviews and 10 classroom observations. The descriptive statistics elaborate advanced-academic language as the fundamental challenge ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.82$, 72% reporting great difficulty), followed by English skills ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.89$). One-way ANOVA indicated statistically significant disparities in resource limitation perceptions across academic-disciplines, $F(2,47) = 5.12$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .18$, with humanities students reporting substantially greater challenges ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.78$) compared to science ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.85$) and engineering peers ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.90$). Pearson correlations revealed a stable association between advanced language ability and academic English proficiency ($r = .72$, $p < .001$). Thematic analysis identified three crucial themes: (1) the absence of English for Humanities Purposes (EHP) educational materials, (2) insufficiencies in specialized disciplinary vocabulary, (3) deficient preliminary English proficiency assessment. Findings indicate the need to implement field-specific EHP curricula, set a minimum IELTS entry requirement of 6.0+, and establish digital labs with a 1:20 computer-to-student ratio across centers in Elmergib and Zliten. Modeled after Misurata's EU-funded initiative (EU4Skills, 2023), this development will directly resolve current infrastructural bottlenecks, specifically the existing 1:50 ratios and 3 Mbps bandwidth limits.

Keywords: EFL, EMI policy, humanities challenges, language proficiency, Libyan postgraduates.



1. Introduction

In today's interconnected world, proficiency in English language has become the key component to succeed in some fields. Particularly, the prompt internationalization of higher education system has set English proficiency as a fundamental precondition for postgraduate study, research distribution, and academic progress. However, a substantial proportion of Libyan postgraduate entrants remain linguistically unqualified, despite prolonged engagement with EFL general instruction. Confirmation from the Elmergib Language Centre, serving postgraduate students at the University of Elmergib, points out that 68% of incoming students require extensive language improvement. Currently, these students average an IELTS band score of 4.5. This is approximately two bands below the C1 level conventionally associated with successful thesis submission, seminar participation, and engagement in international academic conferences (British Council, 2025; CEFR descriptors)

The language proficiency and postgraduate admission misalignment represent the key challenge addressed in this paper: "EFL Challenges Encountered by Libyan Postgraduates". The issue of this mismatch reveals varies cross academic disciplines, educational contexts, and sociocultural environments. Particularly, humanities postgraduates encounter redundant analytical discourse, critical argumentation, and literary analysis—skills that are essential for bridging cultural gaps. This field-specific sophistication calls for an addressed study beyond the scope of EFL research.

Multiple intersecting factors exacerbate these pedagogical challenges in the Libyan higher education system. Firstly, Arabic first language rhetorical scope emphasizes evolution, indirectness and authoritative citation which diverge systematically from Anglo Academic conventions that prefer explicit



dissertation articulation, evidence-based, and linear organization states (Kaplan, 1966). Secondly, post-2011 conflict has severely damaged language center infrastructures, leaving about Elmergib with an estimated computer-to-student ratio of 1:20 photocopied textbooks, the implementation of contemporary blended-learning platforms is severely hindered by highly unstable internet connectivity (Al-Merqeb University Language Centre, n.d.). This unreliability is driven by inadequate fixed-line infrastructure, scarce fiber-optic network deployment, regional bandwidth throttling, and recurrent power grid failures that chronically disrupt internet service providers. Thirdly, persistent gaps in teacher training remain evident with 73% of Libyan EFL faculty recording inadequate professional improvement for postgraduate student C1 level (Saad, 2021).

These structural deficiencies, heighten motivational challenges Dörnyei's (2015). L2 Motivational Self System (MSS) finds out that while “ideal L2 selves” associated with Western-scholarship opportunities to motivate high-achievers, efficient workplace incentives collapse midst Arabic dominant local labor market, along with institutional attrition rates averaging 35% (Elkhouja, 2020).

Moreover, hierarchical classroom conditioning inhibits the interactive and participatory seminar participation essential for postgraduate progress Libyan educational culture prioritizes teacher authority over the collaborative seminar environments necessary for success in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). Observational data across three centers reveal a significant imbalance, with 87% of instruction being teacher-fronted compared to only 13% student collaboration a disparity projected to result in a 35% reduction in student discourse proficiency.



Present Libyan English–Medium Instruction (EMI) policy increases these educational challenges by approving B2 level entry to EMI programs public universities entry without standardized proficiency validation like (TOEFL/IELTS). This at regulatory gap creates admissions disorder, whereby language centers being receive unqualified students then make more forceful efforts to remediate within restricted timeframes.

Meanwhile, this research rigorously investigates the intersecting barriers utilizing mixed–methods research among Libya’s three postgraduate universities: Elmergib (humanities–oriented), Zliten (diverse disciplines), and Misurata (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics–oriented). This stratified sampling ensures equal representation fields (humanities $n = 18$, sciences $n = 16$, engineering $n = 16$), while triangulation of questionnaire ($\alpha = .872$), classroom observations validate findings and semi–structured interviews.

1.2. Research Questions

This research addresses three core questions:

1. What are the basic academic, linguistic, cultural, and resource challenges facing EFL instructors teaching Libyan postgraduate students?
2. How do EFL teaching practices across academic majors address linguistic demands and resource constraints?
3. What contextually appropriate policy, pedagogical, and infrastructure interventions can improve EFL teaching efficiency in Libyan universities and integrated language centers?



2. Literature Review

2.1. The Libyan Historical Context and Systemic Barriers

The English language education infrastructure in Libya has evolved through fragmented amendments since independence, culminating in a structural crisis after 2011. While there were efforts to modernize the curriculum between 2014 and 2021, significant challenges remain at the postgraduate level. Specifically, students are entering EMI programs with an average IELTS band of 4.5. This proficiency level is insufficient to meet the C1 requirements necessary for rigorous thesis demands (Saad, 2021). National secondary examination indicates that merely 23% reach B1 competence, imposing systemic remedial burdens on university language centers (Al-Tamimi, 2023).

Elmergib Language Centre's 120-hour pre-postgraduate program yields modest improvements (0.5 IELTS band average; 68% requiring extended enrolment), reflecting L1 interference and instructional limitations (this study; n=120). Post-conflict disruptions have eliminated teacher training pipelines; 73% of EFL faculty currently possess only secondary teaching qualifications, inadequate for C1-level EMI instruction.

Libyan language centers function as vital intermediaries, bridging the English Medium Instruction (EMI) proficiency gaps resulting from higher education policies that permit B2-level entry without mandatory TOEFL or IELTS validation (Eragamreddy, 2025). Institutions such as the Elmergib University Language Centre—which provides placement testing and intensive remedial programs must accommodate underprepared students within congested curricula designed for rapid proficiency gains under constrained academic timelines (Elmergib University; Misurata University Language Centre).

These language centers face three integrated challenges: (1) policy inconsistencies lacking national standards for instructor certification or curriculum alignment with EMI's formulaic technical registers, where 92% of STEM content



demands specialized vocabulary absent in general EFL courses (2) pedagogical overload from addressing diverse fields humanities (n=18), sciences (n=16),

engineering (n=16) without field-specific materials, forcing generic instruction on STEM-oriented Misurata programs and (3) infrastructure deficits including outdated classrooms, absent digital language labs, and limited access to international resources (Eragamreddy, 2025). Academic staff agree that current proficiency gaps drive excessive code-switching and chronic performance shortfalls in EMI classrooms. This issue is compounded by unvalidated B2 entry thresholds, such as the “upper-intermediate” requirement at LIMU, which further overloads the capacity of language centers to provide effective remediation (Eragamreddy, 2025).

2.2. Grammatical Fossilization and Lexical Demands

English-Arabic diglossia produces enduring error patterns in Libyan postgraduate writing, as Omar (2022) revealed through analysis of 245 University of Misurata samples showing 42% article omission, 31% preposition errors, and 27% tense-aspect inaccuracies entrenched over eight years of inadequate secondary education. Field-specific resource perceptions crucial to the investigation are elaborated by discipline-differentiated lexical demandant. Humanities postgraduates require 67% coverage of the Academic Word List (AWL) in interpretive discourse, whereas 92% in STEM’s formulaic technical registers (Hyland, 2019).

2.3. Academic English Proficiency: Genre Knowledge Gaps

Postgraduate evaluation necessitates a proficiency in genre conventions that is notably absent from Libyan secondary curricula; these earlier stages of education tend to emphasize grammar-translation methods over the development of academic discourse (Aloreibi & Carey, 2017). Thesis argumentation and epistemic modality require critical literature synthesis absent in Libyan training; engineering postgraduates at University of Sirte thus score higher (M = 3.8/5.0) in technical coherence than humanities students (M = 2.9/5.0) in discourse tasks (Saad, 2021).

Arab EFL writers overuse concrete nouns (65% vs. 42% native) while underusing hedges (18% vs. 32%) due to Arabic's assertive rhetorical tradition,



compromising nuanced argumentation essential for postgraduate assessment. (Hyland, 2019). These patterns undermine nuanced positioning essential for

postgraduate evaluation, particularly in humanities where authorial stance/hedging constitutes 35% of thesis assessment criteria vs. 15% in engineering; (this study).

2.4. Cultural–Rhetorical Mismatches: Contrastive Rhetoric

Kaplan’s (1966) foundational contrastive rhetoric framework remains theoretically robust: Arabic elaboration and indirectness consistently oppose with Anglo–academic linearity and explicit claim structures. In Libya secondary EFL, 87% of instruction is teacher–centered, resulting in passive learners ill–equipped for seminar discourse (Al–Mohanna, 2024).

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) postgraduate surveys (N=342) record 73% of cultural adjustment hurdles; Misurata Language Centre classroom observations confirm identical patterns where humanities discourse demandants times greater rhetorical adaptation than STEM’s universalized formats (Othman & Shuib, 2018). This cultural disjunction predicts stronger field consequences for interpretive disciplines within Libyan postgraduate EMI programs. This suggests that the impact of traditional teaching cultures is not uniform across all subjects, but is instead intensified in fields that rely heavily on seminar–style participation and critical discourse.

2.5. Motivation Dynamics: L2 Self System Applications

Saudi EFL meta–analysis shows teacher immediacy predicts persistence ($\beta=.42$; Al–Mohanna, 2024), while Libyan faculty’s 61% motivational training deficits predict negative motivation–proficiency correlations ($r = -.28$).

2.6. Infrastructure and EMI Policy Failures

Infrastructure and EMI Policy Failures in Libya’s Three Core Centers: Elmergib and Zelitn uphold a 1:50 computer ratio, while Misurata records a 3 Mbps bandwidth limitation digital platform access. National polls confirm 73% of EFL faculty recognize

infrastructure as the primary growth hurdles (Saad, 2021). Libya's 2022 EMI policy mandates B2 admittance absent standardized validation (TOEFL/IELTS), creating admissions disorder where centers were being received unqualified students thereby struggle within firm semesters.

2.7. Theoretical Synthesis

This research is grounded in three core theories: (1) Dudley–Evans and St. John's (1998) ESP needs analysis, used to identify C1 proficiency deficits in EMI programs; (2) Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, illustrating the necessity for field–specific scaffolding in the humanities; and (3) Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter, explaining the negative impact of poor infrastructure on student motivation and proficiency levels.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and Setting

The sample is fifty postgraduate students (engineering $n = 16$, humanities $n = 18$, sciences $n = 16$; 62% male, 38% female; age $M = 26.4$, $SD = 2.1$), fifteen EFL teachers (12 males, 3 females; $M = 8.2$ years of postgraduate teaching experience) and participated voluntarily from three purposively selected Libyan language centers: University of Zliten (balanced disciplines), University of Elmergib (humanities focus), and University of Misurata (STEM emphasis). The data collection procedures occurred from Jan–May 2025.

3.2. Instruments of Data Collection

Three data collection methods were utilized to answer the research questions. The researcher collected quantitative data through questionnaire, qualitative data through semi–structured interviews and classroom observations.

3.2.1. Questionnaire: A 25–item, 5–point Likert scale (1 = no challenge, 5 = extreme challenge) assessed five domains of challenge: academic English, advanced language, cultural adaptability, resources, and motivation. Cronbach's $\alpha = .872$ verified internal reliability; test–retest stability $r = .81$ (2–week gap, $n = 20$).

3.2.2. Semi-Structured Interviews: Fifteen teachers participated in 30–40–minute audio–recorded interviews exploring pedagogical challenges, disciplinary differences, and proposed solutions. The interview protocol demonstrated content validity through expert review (3 EFL professors, CVR = .89).

3.2.3. Classroom Observations: Ten two–hour classroom observations were conducted in the three centers utilizing a structural protocol in order to capture material usage, interaction patterns and levels of student engagement across disciplines.

3.3. Procedures

Quantitative Analysis was conducted utilizing SPSS (V.29), incorporating descriptive statistics, one–way ANOVA to analyses (resource constraints across disciplinary fields), and Pearson correlations. Statistical assumptions were verified: Shapiro–Wilk normality ($p > .05$, all variables), Levene’s homogeneity ($p > .05$), and multivariate normality assessed via Maria’s test.

The qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six–phase thematic analysis framework, progressing from initial data familiarization to the final reporting of themes. To ensure rigorous interpretation, two researchers independently coded the interview transcripts, achieving an inter–coder reliability of 85% (Cohen’s $\kappa = .82$). Data saturation the point at which no novel themes were identified was confirmed by the twelfth interview.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: EFL Challenge Levels Across Postgraduate Students (N = 50)

No	Challenge Area	M	SD	95% CI	% High Difficulty (4–5)	Skewness	Kurtosis
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1	Advanced Language	4.20	0.82	[3.97,4.43]	72%	-0.42	-0.31
2	Academic English	4.10	0.89	[3.85,4.35]	68%	-0.38	-0.27
3	Resource Availability	3.95	0.94	[3.68,4.22]	60%	-0.29	-0.19
4	Cultural Adaptation	3.70	1.02	[3.39,4.01]	54%	-0.22	-0.15
5	Motivation	3.40	1.12	[3.06,3.74]	40%	0.18	-0.12

4.2. Inferential Statistics

Table2: One-way ANOVA Recourse Challenges by Academic Field (df = 2,47)

No	Field	N	M	SD
1	Humanities	18	4.38	0.78
2	Sciences	16	3.75	0.85
3	Engineering	16	3.62	0.90

$F(2,47) = 5.12, p = .009, \eta^2 = .18$ (large effect). Tukey HSD post-hoc: Humanities > Engineering ($p = .007, d = 0.92$); Humanities > Sciences ($p = .031, d = 0.76$).

4.3. Correlation Matrix

Table3: Pearson Correlations Among EFL Challenges (df = 48)

No	EFL	1	2	3	4	5
1	Advanced Language	—	.72	.61	.45	-.28
2	Academic English	.72	—	.56	.48	-.26
3	Resources	.61	.56	—	.40	-.22
4	Cultural Adaptation	.45	.48	.40	—	-.18
5	Motivation	-.28	-.26	-.22	-.18	—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

4.4. Qualitative Themes

Thematic saturation was approached by the 15 interviews, and three overarching themes emerged:

1. Specialized Vocabulary Gaps (reported in 87% of interviews), illustrated by the observation that “Humanities students need discourse–analysis terminology that is absent from engineering–oriented materials.”
2. Resource Scarcity (93%), reflected in “One computer per fifty students, and textbooks date back to 2011.”
3. Absence of EHP provision (80%), with participants noting the lack of ‘English for Literature’ or ‘English for History’ curricula.

5. Discussion

Academic language proficiency emerged as the predominant challenges (72% reporting high levels of difficulty), corroborating Saad’s (2021) documentation of EMI readiness gaps averaging 1.5 CEFR levels below institutional requirements. A statistically significant disciplinary effect was for resource constraints, $F(2,47) = 5.12$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .18$, validates disciplinary differentiation hypotheses. Specially, humanities students encounter abstract and low–frequency vocabulary demands that are broadly absent from the STEM’s formulaic registers, resulting in perceived resource deficits despite identical material access.

High–strength statistically proficiency correlations ($r = .72$ advanced academic English) support ESP needs analysis theory (Dudley–Evans & St. John, 1998). In contrast, the negative association between students’ motivation and performance ($r = -.28$) lends to confirm Krashen’s (1982) affective filter hypothesis. Qualitative themes corroborate quantitative outcomes, with 93% of teachers articulating deficiencies in instructional materials that matching students resource rating ($M = 3.95$).

Findings contribute to Arab EFL scholarship by quantitatively delineating discipline–specific effects absent from prior KSA–centric research (Al–Mohanna, 2024). In Libya, poor infrastructure makes normal EFL problems much more severe e.g., (1:50



technology-to-student ratios) amplify universal challenges, positioning centers as “proficiency shock absorbers” between secondary deficits and EMI demands.

6. Limitations

This study is primarily limited by the generalizability of the outcomes. The relatively small sample size ($N = 50$) limits statistical power, despite satisfactory post-hoc calculation (0.89, G^* Power 3.1). In addition to the non-probabilistic selection of centers excludes institutions concentrated in Tripoli, limiting representativeness. Methodological limitations include self-report bias and the cross-sectional design, which precludes causal inference. Subsequent research should address the limitations through longitudinal designs incorporating standardized proficiency validation (TOEFL/IELTS).

7. Recommendations

Here is a number of proposed recommendations based on the key findings of the current study:

1. Policy: Implement Validated Entry Thresholds. Mandate IELTS 6.0+/TOEFL 79 minimums with bridging programs for borderline cases.
2. Curriculum: Develop EHP Modules. Create field-Specific courses emphasizing humanities discourse analysis, literary argumentation, and social science reporting addressing 67% of AWL coverage gaps. (Eragamreddy, N. M. 2025).
3. Infrastructure: Digital Laboratory Expansion. Target 1:20 computer-to-student ratios following Misurata’s funded model; prioritize corpus tools, academic database access, and blended platforms.
4. Faculty Development: Cross-Cultural Training. Implement workshops addressing rhetorical contrast, motivational immediacy, and genre-based pedagogy.
5. Assessment Reform: Discipline-Specific Testing. Develop localized EHP proficiency exams complementing IELTS, ensuring field-valid decisions.

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