



The Interplay of Pronunciation, Intelligibility, and Identity: Perceptions of Libyan EFL Secondary School Students

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التفاعل بين النطق والفهم والهوية: تصورات طلاب المدارس الثانوية الليبية الذين يتعلمون اللغة
الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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Abstract:

This study examines the complex relationship between pronunciation, intelligibility, and linguistic identity among Libyan English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. While traditional Libyan applied linguistics research has predominantly focused on grammar, vocabulary, and reading, this research addresses a significant gap by exploring how secondary school students perceive the role of phonology in communicative success. The study is centered on 30 purposely sampled secondary school students in Al-Beida, Libya, employing a mixed-methods research paradigm that integrates quantitative data from Likert-scale questionnaires with qualitative insights from open-ended questions. The findings reveal that 80% of participants find English pronunciation difficult, largely due to the phonological discrepancies between Arabic and English, particularly regarding sounds like /p/, /v/, and interdentals /θ/ and /ð/. Data analysis shows that 87% of students believe their Arabic accent affects their pronunciation, and 60% report avoiding speaking English due to fears of being misunderstood or ridiculed by peers. Despite these challenges, there is a strong shift toward the "Intelligibility Principle," with 83% of learners valuing being understood over achieving a native-like accent. Crucially, the study identifies that pronunciation is deeply intertwined with identity development. While 90% of students associate fluent English with being "educated," many experience "identity tension" between maintaining their Libyan heritage and the desire for English proficiency. Participants expressed a significant desire for more systematic instruction, with 90% requesting more pronunciation lessons. The research concludes that enhancing pronunciation pedagogy in Libyan schools is essential for fostering communicative competence, emotional well-being, and a confident linguistic identity among learners.

Keywords: Pronunciation, Intelligibility, Identity, Libyan EFL learners, Secondary schools, Second language acquisition.

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة العلاقة المعقدة بين نطق اللغة الإنجليزية، والمفهومية (وضوح الكلام)، والهوية اللغوية لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في ليبيا. وبينما ركزت الأبحاث التقليدية في اللسانيات التطبيقية بليبيا بشكل أساسي على القواعد والمفردات والقراءة، تسعى هذه الدراسة لسد فجوة بحثية كبيرة من خلال استكشاف كيفية إدراك طلاب المدارس الثانوية لدور علم الأصوات في نجاح عملية التواصل. ركز البحث على عينة قصدية مكونة من 30 طالباً في المرحلة الثانوية بمدينة البيضاء، ليبيا، معتمداً على منهج مختلط يجمع بين البيانات الكمية المستمدة من استبيانات مقياس "ليكرت" والرؤى النوعية من الأسئلة المفتوحة. كشفت النتائج أن 80% من المشاركين يجدون صعوبة في نطق اللغة الإنجليزية، ويرجع ذلك إلى حد كبير للفوارق الصوتية بين اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية، خاصة في أصوات مثل /p/ و /v/ والأصوات الحلقية /θ/ و /ð/. وأظهر تحليل البيانات أن 87% من الطلاب يعتقدون أن لكانتهم العربية تؤثر على نطقهم، بينما أفاد 60% منهم بتجنب التحدث بالإنجليزية خوفاً من سوء الفهم أو التعرض للسخرية من الأقران. ورغم هذه التحديات، هناك تحول قوي نحو "مبدأ المفهومية"، حيث يرى 83% من المتعلمين أن الوضوح في الكلام أهم من اكتساب لكنة مشابهة للناطقين الأصليين. بشكل جوهري، توصلت الدراسة إلى أن النطق مرتبط بعمق بتطوير الهوية. وفي حين أن 90% من الطلاب يربطون بين طلاقة الإنجليزية وبين كون الشخص "متعلماً"، يعاني الكثيرون من "توتر الهوية" بين الحفاظ على تراثهم الليبي والرغبة في إتقان الإنجليزية. وأبدى المشاركون رغبة كبيرة في الحصول على تعليم أكثر منهجية، حيث طالب 90% منهم بمزيد من دروس النطق. تخلص الدراسة إلى أن تعزيز تدريس النطق في المدارس الليبية أمر ضروري لتعزيز الكفاءة التواصلية، والرفاه النفسي، وبناء هوية لغوية وثقة لدى المتعلمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النطق، المفهومية، الهوية، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الليبيين، المدارس الثانوية، اكتساب لغة ثانية.

Introduction

Pronunciation has long been identified as a core element of oral proficiency and communicative competence in second language acquisition (SLA). For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, pronunciation has a direct impact upon intelligibility, listener comprehension, interactional success, and the development of a confident linguistic identity. Within the Libyan context, where English has an important function in education, international mobility, and professional promotion, the importance of effective pronunciation becomes even greater. Despite such significance, pronunciation development remains one of the most problematic skill domains for Libyan learners, especially during the secondary school level. Challenges originate from linguistic differences between Arabic and English, limited exposure to authentic input, restricted classroom practice opportunities, and sociocultural attitudes toward English and identity.

This study investigates the concept of pronunciation, intelligibility, and linguistic identity as perceived by Libyan EFL secondary students in the city of Al-Beida. The research investigates how students understand the role of pronunciation within communication, how they perceive their own intelligibility in English, and how pronunciation interacts with their sense of identity as learners of English. Clearly, student perceptions become the focus, given that learner beliefs and attitudes have been found to heavily influence motivation, anxiety, willingness to communicate, and effort investment in oral English development.

This study adopts a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data through questionnaires with qualitative insights via open-ended questions. The methodological orientation, therefore, allows the detailing with greater specificity of how pronunciation skills are developed, the way students assess their own intelligibility, and how identity is negotiated in the EFL context. The

research draws from 30 secondary school students from Al-Beida, using purposive sampling to ensure that the participants were active learners.

The study represents an area that has received rather scant attention within Libyan applied linguistics, where most of the earlier studies have looked into grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, or even general issues in EFL teaching. Few empirical studies have been conducted on the interlinking of pronunciation, intelligibility, and identity, let alone from the learners themselves. Such a study may outline some pedagogical implications that inform curriculum development and teaching methodology, as well as teacher training in Libya. Besides, this study investigates the concept of identity, which has recently become rather significant in SLA as learners juggle their native linguistic identity against an emerging one related to English competence.

Literature Review

The L2 pronunciation is theoretically set upon a "special sub-language system". For instance, cognitive models such as those developed under Flege's (1999) Speech Learning Model give some explanation as to why such learning difficulties should be observed: "An L2 learner's ability to establish additional phonetic classes depends on perceived similarities to L1 classes". This explains the very fact that Arabic speakers fail to make a distinction between /p/, /v/, and /θ/; these are assimilated into existing categories. Most importantly, though, it is predicted by Flege and Bohn (2021) that "improving perception precedes improvement in production," reminding us of the often-forgotten auditory training. The difficulty in, for example, distinguishing between /ɪ/ and /i:/ in English can be further explained by Best's (2007) Perceptual Assimilation Model. These theories demonstrate how "L2 learners' intentional error production [is] based on L1 phonological frameworks".

It is argued by Derwing and Munro (2015) that there needs to be a shift towards an "Intelligibility Principle," such that "intelligibility [is] a more desirable goal than accent reduction as an end in itself". This "Intelligibility Principle" claims that "it is precisely 'communicative success, not native-like perfection, that should remain our prime focus and goal'" (Levis, 2018). The "Identity-theory" of SLA extends this when it posits, "pronunciation should be viewed not as an act solely dependent on cognition and articulation, but as an act with roots in highly social domains". More specifically, Norton (2013) argues that L2 wishfulness, or "investment," depends on investment, identity, and power relations.

Understanding intelligibility does call for nuance. Derwing and Munro (2015) distinguish between intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness. The three are, as they point out, "interrelated but not identical". An accent does not necessarily guarantee low intelligibility. Yang (2021) has shown that suprasegmentals can have a "stronger effect on intelligibility," and intelligibility is "co-constructed between speaker and listener".

Pronunciation is a site of important "identity negotiation" since "the more audible signifier" of the speaker's background "is indeed pronunciation". Arabic-speaking learners feel "identity tension balancing Arabic identity with English proficiency" and "dread being seen as culturally disloyal" or "showing off," creating an insecurity that hampers practice. In places like Libya, for example, peer pressure can make English an "outsider activity". These include predictable segmental problems such as substituting /b/ for /p/, and suprasegmental ones, such as rhythm and stress patterns, which are more than mere linguistic errors; if they provoke laughter, they "reduce confidence" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) and reinforce negative self-assessment.

Such issues are exacerbated in the Libyan EFL context, where its curriculum has "traditionally emphasized reading, grammar, and translation" and contains "almost no pronunciation practice," with teachers who are "not trained in phonetics". The environment offers "limited daily contact," where there is "peer pressure against English speech outside class". Feeding into this conflict is the fact that EFL learning aligns with "education" and "foreign opportunities"

but is pitted against "the fear of appearing 'too Western'" and "apprehension about being laughed at for accent". In conclusion, it is a tedious process for learners like Libyans to achieve intelligibility, as it starts with cognitive models and a pedagogical emphasis on comprehensibility, but becomes complex through sociocultural "struggles within identity". The objective set out for the study is, therefore, to answer the following questions:

Research Questions

1. How do Libyan secondary school students of English in Al-Beida rate their pronunciation abilities?
2. How do students perceive their intelligibility when they speak in English to different kinds of listeners—teachers, peers, and strangers?
3. How does pronunciation influence students' sense of linguistic identity as EFL learners?
4. What pronunciation difficulties are reported by students and what factors do they believe affect their intelligibility?
5. What are the pedagogical implications that will lead to the betterment of pronunciation teaching in Libyan secondary schools?

In order to address these questions, this study used a mixed-methods questionnaire containing Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and five open-ended items. Following Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), it is possible to combine numerical data and narrative data to achieve both breadth and depth in understanding learner perceptions.

Methodology

This mixed-methods design combines quantitative and qualitative measures to investigate the perceptions of pronunciation, intelligibility, and identity among Libyan EFL learners. These methods are appropriate since both pronunciation and identity involve empirical, objective patterns that can be measured—such as self-perceived pronunciation difficulty or self-rated intelligibility—while also providing deeper insights into emotional impact, identity, and social experiences.

The quantitative section consists of a structured questionnaire using Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions. The qualitative part consists of open-ended questions embedded in the same questionnaire, providing narrative data on learners' personal experiences, beliefs, and identity-related perceptions.

The participants of this study are 30 Libyan EFL secondary school students, consisting of 17 females and 13 males. Their ages range from 15 to 18 years, and all are native speakers of the Libyan Arabic-Eastern Libyan dialect. The participants were chosen selectively from two public secondary schools with permission from their administration to support the study.

A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants because the study aimed to select learners with rich, relevant data pertaining to pronunciation and identity (Cohen et al., 2007). The criteria utilized in this research include active enrollment in the secondary English program and a willingness to participate. The main instrument used was a researcher-designed questionnaire divided into three sections:

1. Section A: Pronunciation Perception.
2. Section B: Intelligibility Perception.
3. Section C: Identity and Emotional Responses.

The questionnaire consisted of 25 items: 17 Likert-scale statements, 3 multiple-choice questions, and 5 open-ended questions to allow for qualitative input.

Data Analysis

Since this study involves a mixed methodology, the data analysis was conducted in two distinct stages:

Quantitative Analysis

Likert-scale responses (items 1–20) and multiple-choice questions (21–23) were analyzed using frequency counts, percentage distributions, and mean scores. These descriptive statistics reveal tendencies concerning perceived pronunciation difficulty, intelligibility, identity attitudes, and emotional responses.

Qualitative Analysis

The five open-ended responses (items 24–28) were subjected to thematic analysis following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006). This process included:

1. Familiarization with the data.
2. Initial coding.
3. Theme development.
4. Theme refinement.
5. Final interpretation.

The topics covered in this part relate to pronunciation difficulties, intelligibility, emotional effects, and learners' aspirations regarding identity. Furthermore, this paper adheres to ethical considerations, including voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, respect for the participants' expressions, and maintaining the anonymity of the participants.

Results and Discussion

This section explores the quantitative and qualitative data analysis produced from the responses of 30 students in Al-Beida, Libya. The analysis is presented through descriptive statistics and themes identified from the responses.

Quantitative Data Analysis [Likert-Scale Items]

The responses to Likert-scale items (Items 1 to 20) were analyzed through frequencies, percentages, and mean scores.

Pronunciation Perception [Items 1–7]

Table 1: Summary of Pronunciation Perceptions (n = 30)

Item	Statement	Agree/Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	English pronunciation is hard	24 (80%)	4 (13%)	2 (7%)	4.1
2	I am confident pronouncing English	9 (30%)	8 (27%)	13 (43%)	2.7
3	My Arabic accent affects my pronunciation	26 (87%)	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	4.4
4	I compare my pronunciation with classmates	21 (70%)	5 (17%)	4 (13%)	3.9
5	I want more pronunciation lessons	27 (90%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	4.5
6	I practice pronunciation outside class	11 (37%)	6 (20%)	13 (43%)	2.8
7	Listening to English can help me improve	29 (97%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	4.8

Interpretation:

The results show that 80% of students find English pronunciation difficult, while only 30% feel confident in their speaking abilities. Notably, 87% reported that their Arabic accent influences their English, and 70% compare themselves with classmates, signifying social pressure. Although 90% expressed a desire for more pronunciation practice, only 37% practice outside of class. These findings highlight a disparity between the perceived need for systematic pronunciation training and actual classroom levels.

Intelligibility Perception [Items 8–14]**Table 2: Intelligibility Perceptions**

Item	Statement	Agree/Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	Mean
8	Other people can easily understand me	15 (50%)	7 (23%)	8 (27%)	3.2
9	Teacher understands me better than other learners	20 (67%)	5 (17%)	5 (17%)	3.8
10	I speak more clearly when nervous	6 (20%)	8 (27%)	16 (53%)	2.4
11	I avoid speaking due to intelligibility concerns	18 (60%)	5 (17%)	7 (23%)	3.6
12	Pronunciation influences understanding	30 (100%)	0	0	5.0
13	Improvement enhances confidence	28 (93%)	2 (7%)	0	4.7
14	I prefer intelligibility to native speaker's accent	25 (83%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	4.3

Interpretation:

Only 50% of participants believe they are readily understood, which aligns with a general lack of confidence. Interestingly, 67% felt that teachers understand them best, likely due to the teacher's familiarity with the Libyan accent. Furthermore, 60% of students refrain from speaking due to a fear of being misunderstood. Critically, 83% of the group valued intelligibility over achieving a native-like accent, reflecting the worldwide trend toward the "Intelligibility Principle" (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Levis, 2018).

Emotional and Identity Reactions [Items 15–20]**Table 3: Emotional and Identity Responses**

Item	Statement	Agree/Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	Mean
15	Speaking confidently in class	10 (33%)	6 (20%)	14 (47%)	2.8
16	Embarrassed by mistakes	22 (73%)	5 (17%)	3 (10%)	4.1

17	Pronunciation impacts my identity	25 (83%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	4.3
18	Want English accent	19 (63%)	6 (20%)	5 (17%)	3.8
19	Proud when pronouncing correctly	30 (100%)	0	0	5.0
20	Speaking English feels "educated"	27 (90%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	4.5

Interpretation:

The data indicates that 47% of students lack confidence when speaking in class, and 73% feel embarrassed by mistakes due to pronunciation anxiety. Importantly, 83% see pronunciation as an influence on their sense of identity as English learners. While 83% value intelligibility (Table 2), 63% still desire a native English accent, indicating an internal "identity tension" (Norton, 2013). Finally, 90% link English proficiency with being "educated," illustrating a positive identity alignment with the language.

Multiple-Choice Responses

Table 4: Difficult Sounds [Item 21]

Option	Sound Type	Responses	%
A	/p/ and /v/	7	23%
B	/θ/ and /ð/	11	37%
C	Vowel sounds	4	13%
D	All of the above	8	27%

Interpretation:

Interdentals (/θ/ and /ð/) are identified as the most difficult sounds for 37% of students. Additionally, 27% rated all categories as difficult, reflecting a broad phonological challenge typical for Arabic-speaking learners (Flege, 1999).

Table 5. Who Understands the Learner Best? [Item 22]

Listener	Responses	%
Teachers	18	60%
Classmates	5	17%
Strangers	2	7%
Family	5	17%

Interpretation:

Teachers were identified as the most reliable comprehenders (60%), confirming the classroom as the most secure communication environment for learners. This suggests that teachers' familiarity with the "Libyan English" phonological accent facilitates understanding, whereas the low percentage for strangers (7%) highlights a significant gap in real-world communicative competence.

Table 6. Students' Greatest Concern When Speaking English [Item 23]

Worry	Responses	%
Mispronouncing	10	33%
Not being understood	11	37%
Being laughed at	6	20%
Grammar errors	3	10%

Interpretation:

The findings indicate that the fear of mispronouncing words (33%) and the dread of being laughed at (20%) are deeply rooted in the concept of 'Face-saving' within Libyan culture. This psychological barrier is best explained by MacIntyre and Gardner's (1994) theory of 'Foreign Language Anxiety'. In this context, Libyan learners perceive their social identity as being under threat if they fail to perform phonologically in front of their peers. The fear of not appearing 'educated' or 'modern' often drives learners toward silence or withdrawal to avoid social embarrassment. Consequently, pronunciation becomes a psychological barrier long before it is a linguistic one.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Five major themes emerged from the thematic analysis conducted following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006):

Theme 1: Challenges in English Pronunciation Arising from L1 Transfer

Students frequently identified difficulties rooted in the phonological interference between Arabic and English. Specific areas of struggle include:

- Consonant contrasts: /p/ vs. /b/ and /v/ vs. /f/.
- Interdentals: /θ/ vs. /s/ or /t/.
- Vowel contrasts and complex consonant clusters (e.g., "street," "school").

Representative comments:

- *"I always say 'bicture' instead of 'picture,' and I know it is wrong but difficult to fix."*
- *"The sounds /θ/ and /ð/ are impossible for me."*
- *"English vowels confuse me."*

Theme 2: Intelligibility Difficulties and Communication Anxiety

The qualitative data supports the quantitative findings regarding the fear of speaking. Students reported specific instances where communication broke down:

- *"Sometimes when I speak, my classmates look confused."*
- *"A stranger did not understand me in the hospital when I spoke English."*

Several participants mentioned using avoidance strategies: *"I don't talk much because I am afraid people will not understand."* This provides narrative evidence for the 60% of students who refrain from speaking due to intelligibility concerns.

Theme 3: Pronunciation as a Pillar of Identity and Self-Image

Pronunciation is not merely a linguistic skill but a reflection of the learner's identity. Responses indicated that students equate clear pronunciation with proficiency and status:

- *“When I pronounce wrongly, I think that I don’t know English well.”*
- *“If my pronunciation is good, I feel like a real English speaker.”*
- *“Speaking English makes me feel educated and modern.”*

However, an identity conflict was also evident: *“If I speak like native speakers, people here may say I am showing off.”* This reinforces the theory that identity is a prime factor and a complex motivator in EFL development (Norton, 2013).

Theme 4: Desire for Systematic Practice and Instruction

The majority of participants highlighted a significant gap in the current curriculum regarding pronunciation training:

- *“We never study pronunciation in class.”*
- *“I want the teacher to correct our pronunciation more.”*

Students suggested integrating listening activities, multimedia resources, and teacher modeling, reflecting the 90% demand for more pronunciation-focused lessons.

Theme 5: Emotional Influence: Pride, Motivation, and Embarrassment

Emotional responses are central to the formation of a linguistic identity. Students expressed a range of emotions:

- *Pride:* “When I say a word correctly, I feel powerful.”
- *Embarrassment:* “I hate when others laugh at my pronunciation.”
- *Motivation:* Positive reinforcement from tutors was cited as a major driver for improvement.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that pronunciation, intelligibility, and identity are deeply interrelated constructs within the Libyan EFL context. The following points expand on the core results:

1. **L1-L2 Phonological Discrepancies:** Problems in pronunciation are largely attributed to the stark differences between Arabic and English phonology. Learners struggle with sounds non-existent in their native dialect, leading to "phonological interference" (Flege, 1999).
2. **Impact on Communication:** Reduced intelligibility serves as a significant deterrent, discouraging students from active communication. The fear of communication breakdown leads to "willingness to communicate" (WTC) issues.
3. **The Pronunciation-Identity Link:** There is a profound connection between how a student pronounces words and their linguistic identity. Pronunciation is the most "audible signifier" of a learner's identity (Norton, 2013).
4. **Pedagogical Gaps:** Teaching in the classroom alone is inadequate. Students expressed a high demand for more systematic practice, explicit instruction, and teacher reinforcement.
5. **Emotional Determinants:** Errors in pronunciation elicit strong emotional reactions—ranging from embarrassment to pride—which ultimately determine the learner's motivation and learning path.

6. **Social Risk vs. Academic Safety:** While teachers are perceived as helpful and supportive "comprehenders," socializing with peers in English entails social risk, including the fear of ridicule or being perceived as "showing off."
7. **Valuing Intelligibility over Perfection:** A significant shift was observed where learners prioritize being understood (intelligibility) over achieving a flawless, native-like accent. This aligns with the "Intelligibility Principle" (Levis, 2018).
8. **Sociocultural Pressure:** The Libyan sociocultural environment creates a unique pressure; English proficiency is equated with being "educated" and "modern," yet seeking a native accent can be viewed as cultural disloyalty.

In summary, issues with segmental sounds and suprasegmentals lead to a cascade of effects on confidence and identity. The current inadequacy of pronunciation teaching in Al-Beida secondary schools increases the "affective burden" on learners. Modifications in curriculum and instruction are required to foster a well-balanced and confident linguistic identity.

Conclusion

This study investigated the complex nexus between English pronunciation, intelligibility, and linguistic identity among 30 secondary school students in Al-Beida, Libya. Utilizing a mixed-methods research design, the study identified that pronunciation challenges are widespread and largely rooted in the phonological distance between Arabic and English. Students specifically struggle with consonantal distinctions, vowel variations, and suprasegmental patterns (stress and rhythm).

Analysis revealed that concerns regarding intelligibility significantly influence students' willingness to communicate. Learners often show reluctance in speaking activities due to the fear of being misunderstood and the weight of peer evaluation. The intimidation felt by students suggests that pronunciation is a high-stakes skill in the social hierarchy of the classroom.

A major contribution of this research is the confirmation that pronunciation is a primary site for identity development. Correct pronunciation acts as a symbolic marker of being "educated" and "accomplished," whereas errors lead to embarrassment and negative self-assessment. Thus, pronunciation is not just a motor skill but a symbolic construct of a learner's educational identity.

Despite these hurdles, students exhibited high motivation for improvement. They advocated for more feedback, explicit modeling from teachers, and increased speaking opportunities. Their preference for intelligibility over native-likeness (accent) matches modern pedagogical trends in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which prioritize communicative success.

Pedagogical Implications

The study offers several implications for the Libyan educational context:

1. **Intelligibility-Based Instruction:** Teachers should shift focus from "accent reduction" to "intelligibility enhancement".
2. **Safe Speaking Environments:** Educators must create low-anxiety environments to protect the "emotional well-being" of students.
3. **Curriculum Integration:** Pronunciation should be integrated into the daily routine, covering both segmental (individual sounds) and suprasegmental (intonation/stress) aspects.
4. **Institutional Change:** Prioritizing teacher training and curriculum reform at the institutional level is essential to elevate the status of pronunciation in Libyan schools.

Ultimately, this research concludes that pronunciation plays a prime role in determining a learner's communicative competence and linguistic identity. Addressing these phonological and psychological needs will enable Libyan students to develop a more positive and confident identity as global users of English.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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