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The Relationship between EFL Learners' First Impression of their Instructors and their Speaking Performance

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Abstract

The paper examines the relationship between EFL learners' first impressions of their instructors and their speaking performance. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining a test and a questionnaire to provide a comprehensive analysis. The participants were 81 EFL learners at Taif University. The results revealed that the correlation coefficient (r) for the scores and all the constructs was small and not significant, indicating that the first impression of the students of their instructors did not affect their performance on the speaking test. We observed that the correlations among the constructs ranged from medium to high positive correlations. The study used a questionnaire to collect data on the factors that influence the first impression of the instructors, such as physical appearance, attitude, and communication style. The results showed that physical appearance and attitude were the most significant factors that affected the first impression of the instructors. The study also found that the participants who had a positive first impression of their instructors tended to perform better in speaking tasks and had higher levels of motivation and engagement.

Keywords: *First Impression, Instructor's Appearance, Instructor's Character, Instructor's Reputation, Speaking Performance*

Introduction

The first impression is the initial opinion or feeling that someone has about something or someone. It is often based on a person's initial experience or interaction with the subject and can be difficult to change. The instructor's first impression is a crucial aspect of the learning experience. It sets the tone for the entire course and can greatly impact how students perceive the instructors and their teaching style. Recent studies have focused on the impact of first impressions on learners' performance. For instance, Maimon et al. (2023) demonstrated that instructors could enhance student outcomes through the utilization of identity safety cues, which indicate to marginalized groups that their identities are respected. The research revealed

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that participants expressed higher anticipated engagement and a sense of belonging when the syllabus included these cues compared to the control syllabus. Additionally, it indicated that the gender of the instructor had negligible effects on participants' outcomes and perceptions. A positive first impression can lead to increased engagement, motivation, and respect from students, while a negative one can lead to disinterest, apathy, and even hostility. Therefore, instructors need to be mindful of their behavior and presentation when meeting their students for the first time.

Although previous studies (e.g., Lane et al., 2021; Vareberg et al., 2023) have provided evidence for the favorable connection between initial impressions and learners' performance, limited research has explored the impact of first impressions on speaking performance. Previous studies of first impressions have not examined the effect of first impressions on speaking skills. Lane et al. (2021) argued that if an instructor appears unapproachable or uninterested, it can be difficult for students to feel comfortable asking questions or engaging in class discussions. On the other hand, if an instructor is warm and welcoming, it can help put students at ease and create an atmosphere of trust and respect. An instructor tries to create a positive impression about him by all possible means. Vareberg et al. (2023) conducted a study in which they discussed how an instructor can create a positive impression about him by using a suitable emoji in online classes and found that emoji choice does impact impressions.

The present study is different in a way that it focuses on one skill, which is speaking. It seeks to investigate whether there exists a correlation between students' initial impressions of their instructor and their performance in a specific skill, namely speaking. We hypothesize that students will engage effectively in speaking activities if they have a positive impression of their instructors. The study tries to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the effect of EFL learners' first impression of their instructor on speaking skills test scores?

RQ2: Which of the factors of the first impression correlates with the other factors?

Review of Literature

First Impression

The issue of the first impression created by learners about their instructor is highly important and of great significance. The majority of studies addressing the initial day of a course have employed surveys to explore student preferences regarding the structure and content type presented, as well as to grasp the longer-term impact of the first day on student impressions of the course. Findings indicated that across various psychology courses, students favored receiving overviews of course requirements, faculty expectations, and guidance on achieving high grades (Eskine & Hammer, 2017). There are some important studies reported in this regard. As an illustration, Begrich et al. (2020) conducted a study exploring the utilization of untrained raters' initial impressions as a novel assessment method, considering them a valuable assessment tool. They employed the thin-slice procedure to gather ratings of instructional quality from thirty classroom observations. These ratings were then compared with longitudinal student data from videos of the instruction to explore the relationship between brief glimpses into the instructional quality and student learning. The results of the study showed that each group gave reliable ratings, as measured by a high degree of agreement between raters. Also, predictive ratings concerning students' learning were observed.

Lane et al. (2021) verified that the initial impression students develop during the first session could influence both course satisfaction and performance. Their study, conducted across 23 STEM courses, focused on the first day of class, where they made observations. While all instructors addressed policies and fundamental information, the findings highlighted differences in instructor approaches to content coverage on the initial day of class. The research determined that instructors possess the ability to create enduring impressions and guide students toward a positive trajectory for success. In this respect, Laws et al. (2010) discovered that students' perceptions of the course and instructor formed after the initial class endured throughout the term, significantly influencing course evaluations. It was established that the initial impression created by instructors on the first day of class can have a lasting effect on students. Cabrera et al. (1999) confirmed this type of association and stressed that the more positive the classroom environment the better the student performance. It has also been observed that the teacher's performance in the first class can help create a positive classroom learning environment (Cheng, 1994; Dörnyei & Muir, 2019)

English as a foreign language (EFL) learners often have a first impression of their instructor that can significantly impact their speaking performance (Alrasheedi, 2020). This impression is formed based on the instructor's teaching style, attitude, and overall demeanor. According to Leong and Ahmadi (2017), a positive first impression can lead to increased motivation and improved speaking performance, while a negative one can lead to decreased motivation and poorer performance. A positive first impression of an EFL instructor, they add, can be created by demonstrating enthusiasm for teaching, being organized and prepared for class, and providing clear instructions. An instructor who is passionate about teaching will be more likely to engage students in the learning process and create an environment conducive to learning. Additionally, an organized instructor who is well-prepared for class will be able to provide students with clear instructions and expectations, which will help them feel more comfortable in the classroom.

On the other hand, Foote et al. (2000) conducted a study in which they found that a negative first impression of an EFL instructor can be created by being disorganized or unprepared for class, having a lack of enthusiasm for teaching, or displaying a negative attitude towards students. An instructor who is disorganized or unprepared for class may confuse students and make them feel uncomfortable in the classroom. Similarly, an instructor who lacks enthusiasm or displays a negative attitude toward students may discourage them from participating in class activities or speaking up during discussions.

In a related study, Kato and Matsuda (2024) examined the relationship between instructors' first impressions and EFL learners' willingness to communicate. They found that learners who had a positive first impression of their instructors were more likely to engage in speaking activities and exhibit higher levels of willingness to communicate.

In a study conducted in a Japanese EFL context, Ishino and Shimizu (2023) investigated the relationship between instructors' first impressions and learners' speaking anxiety. They found that learners who had a positive first impression of their instructors experienced lower levels of speaking anxiety and performed better in speaking tasks.

In another study that explored the mediating role of learner motivation, Liu and Chang (2024) found that motivation played a significant role in the relationship between instructors' first impressions and EFL learners' speaking performance. They found that learners who were

motivated to learn English were more likely to form positive impressions of their instructors and perform better in speaking tasks.

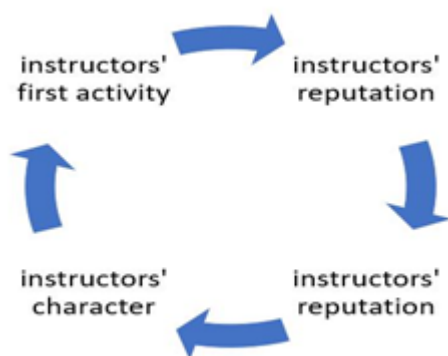
Variables

First impressions are incredibly important, especially when it comes to students. A student's first impression can have a lasting impact on their academic and social life. Many factors can affect a student's first impression, such as physical appearance, attitude, and communication style. Physical appearance is often the first thing people notice about someone and can be a major factor in forming a first impression. Students who dress well and take care of their hygiene tend to make better first impressions than those who do not. This is because people associate neatness and cleanliness with intelligence and success. Additionally, physical features such as height, weight, skin color, or facial features can also influence how people perceive someone initially. Attitude is another factor that affects a student's first impression. Students who come off as confident and friendly tend to make better impressions than those who appear shy or aloof. People are drawn to those who seem open-minded and willing to engage in conversations with others.

The correlation between these variables is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Relationship between the Variables of First Impression and Students' First Impression of the Instructor



The first impression, a student has of their instructor can have a lasting impact on their learning experience. Bucher et al., (2008) explored the effect of the students' first impression of the instructor on their performance. They found that a positive first impression can set the tone for the rest of the course, while a negative one can cause students to become disengaged and disinterested in the material. When students enter a classroom, they are often looking for cues that will help them determine whether they will be successful in the course. According to Lane et al. (2021), if an instructor appears unapproachable or uninterested, it can be difficult for students to feel comfortable asking questions or engaging in class discussions. On the other hand, if an instructor is warm and welcoming, it can help put students at ease and create an atmosphere of trust and respect. This is especially important for students who may be new to college or who have had negative experiences with instructors in the past.

Instructor's Reputation

The idea that there is an inevitable relationship between instructors' reputation and students' performance is not new. Perry et al. (1979) discussed this issue and found that instructors have a profound impact on the lives of their students. Their reputation, both in and out of the classroom, can shape the way students view themselves and their academic potential. Peers and students alike respect a good instructor who can inspire their learners to reach their full potential. Doo et al. (2020) confirm that the positive reputation of an instructor has a positive impact on learners' achievement. A positive reputation for an instructor can be built through a variety of methods. First, they should strive to create a safe and supportive learning environment for all students (Cole, 2014). This includes providing clear expectations for behavior and performance, as well as offering constructive feedback when needed. Additionally, instructors should be open to different perspectives and ideas from their students, while also providing guidance when needed. This will help build trust between the instructor and student, which is essential for successful learning (Nilson, 2016). Gilbertson et al. (2022) emphasized that instructors should also strive to be knowledgeable in their subject matter and stay up to date on current trends in education. This will help keep students engaged in the material and motivated to learn more. Furthermore, instructors should strive to build relationships with their students outside of the classroom setting. This could include attending school events or participating in extracurricular activities with them. Doing so will show that they care about each student's success both inside and outside of the classroom setting (Chang & Hall, 2022).

Instructor's Appearance

The impact of the instructor's appearance on the students' performance is a topic that has been debated for a long time (Carpenter 2013; Dean, 2000; Gold et al., 2012; Gonyea et al., 2018; Melville & Maddalozzo, 1988). It can have a significant effect on the learning experience of students. Dean (2000) and Gonyea (2018) confirmed that the physical appearance of a teacher can impact students' perceptions of their expertise, authority, and the overall classroom atmosphere. It is crucial for educators to recognize the significance of their appearance on student perceptions and to proactively strive for a positive impression. Also, Peterson et al. (2019) stressed that an instructor's physical appearance can affect how seriously students take them. If an instructor looks unprofessional or sloppy, it can give off the impression that they are not knowledgeable or organized. This can lead to students not taking them seriously and not paying attention in class. On the other hand, if an instructor looks professional and puts them together, it can give off the impression that they are knowledgeable and organized. This will make students more likely to respect them and pay attention in class. Similarly, Pi et al. (2022) found that an instructor's physical appearance could affect how comfortable students feel in the classroom. If an instructor looks intimidating or unapproachable, it can make students feel uncomfortable speaking up or asking questions in class. On the other hand, when an instructor appears amicable and accessible, it increases the likelihood of students engaging in class discussions and feeling comfortable asking questions as necessary. Likewise, Radd (2014) discussed this factor and found that an instructor's physical appearance can affect how confident students feel about themselves and their abilities. If an instructor looks intimidating or unapproachable, it can make students feel like they are not good enough or capable of

succeeding in the course material. On the other hand, if an instructor looks friendly and approachable, it can make students feel more confident about themselves and their abilities.

Instructor's Character

The character of an instructor has a profound effect on the learning experience of their students. According to Suwija et al. (2022), a good instructor can create an environment that encourages learning, while a bad instructor can have the opposite effect. Instructors need to be aware of their character and how it affects their students. Also, Reeve et al. (2013) conducted a study and found that instructors who are patient, understanding, and supportive create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. They can provide guidance and support to their students without being overly critical or judgmental. They also understand that everyone learns at a different pace and are willing to adjust their teaching style accordingly. This type of instructor will often foster a sense of trust between themselves and their students, which can lead to better engagement in the classroom. On the other hand, instructors who are impatient, unsupportive, or overly critical can have a negative impact on student learning. These types of instructors may be quick to criticize mistakes or lack of understanding without providing constructive feedback or guidance. This can lead to feelings of frustration and discouragement among students, which can impede their progress in the classroom. Additionally, these types of instructors may not be as approachable as those with more positive characters, making it difficult for students to ask questions or seek help when needed. Kwok et al. (2022) emphasized that for instructors to be successful in the classroom, they must be aware of how their character affects student learning.

Instructor's First Activity

The initial activity conducted by an instructor in a classroom can profoundly influence the learning process. This is because it sets the tone for the rest of the class and can influence how students interact with each other and with the instructor. Foster and Hermann (2011) conducted a study in which they found that a good first activity can help create an environment of trust, respect, and collaboration that will foster learning throughout the course. On the other hand, a poorly planned or executed first activity can lead to confusion, frustration, and even apathy among students (Foster & Hermann, 2011). Also, Sugita and Takeuchi (2014) discussed the importance of the instructor's first activity and found that instructors should consider how their first activity will affect student motivation levels. If it is too difficult or complex for students to understand quickly, it may lead to frustration and disengagement from the course material. On the other hand, if it is too simple or straightforward, it may not challenge students enough to keep them interested in learning more. Finding a balance between these two extremes is key to creating an effective first activity that will engage students while also introducing them to important concepts in a meaningful way. Regardless of what type of activity is chosen, it should be engaging enough to capture student interest while also providing them with meaningful information about the course material (Dennen & Arslan, 2022).

Several studies were conducted to find out if there is any correlation between first impressions and learners' performance. Wang and Frang (2020) investigated the connection between students' initial opinions of their teachers and their English-speaking abilities. They discovered that speaking scores were much higher for pupils who first had a favorable view of

their teachers than for those who initially had a negative one. In addition, Hsu (2010) investigated the effect of instructors' nonverbal conduct on students' English-speaking performance in a different study. They discovered that teachers who displayed good nonverbal cues, including smiling and maintaining eye contact, were more likely to make a good impact on pupils, which in turn improved speaking abilities. Also, King (2016) discussed how instructor feedback impacted student speaking performance. They discovered that students who got good feedback from their teachers had a better opinion of their teachers, which in turn improved their speaking abilities. In a similar vein, Anh et al. (2022) looked at the connection between students' initial impressions of their teachers and their drive to study English. They discovered that students who had a favorable first impression of their teachers were more motivated to study English, which in turn improved their speaking abilities. Alrasheedi (2020) confirmed that there is a relationship between teaching methods and students' speaking abilities. They discovered that instructors who employed a student-centered teaching strategy—one that prioritizes contact and teamwork—were more likely to help students generate favorable first impressions, which in turn improved speaking performance. These studies collectively demonstrate that students' initial impressions of their professors might significantly affect how well they speak English.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-method research methodology to explore the impact of first impressions on students' perspectives. In this mixed-method design, two data collection tools were used: a questionnaire and a speaking test.

Participants

The participants were 81 undergraduate students at Taif University. All of them were male students. Their mean age was 23 years, and they all speak Arabic as a first language and study English as a foreign language. The students gave consent for their data to be used for research purposes. The study received approval from the university's Human Research Ethics Committee.

The Questionnaire

The study utilized a questionnaire as one of the tools of data collection. The authors of this study developed the questionnaire based on the factors introduced in the literature review. See Table 1 below. The questionnaire consisted of five major parts.

Table 1

Components of the Questionnaire and Number of Items

Part	Description	Number of items
Part 1	Instruction	5
Part 2	Instructor's reputation	5
Part 3	Instructor's character	7
Part 4	Instructor's appearance	3
Part 5	Instructor's first activity	5

All parts were answered using a 5-point Likert scale. The participants could select the most appropriate answers to describe their attitudes toward their instructors and instruction.

Speaking Test

The speaking test centered around the theme of "your daily routine," requiring students to engage in a discourse on this topic for roughly 5 minutes. This type of examination is designed not only to evaluate the students' language proficiency but also their ability to organize and present information coherently and fluently. To successfully address this topic, students would need to delve into the details of their typical daily activities and provide a comprehensive overview of their routines. Moreover, students should aim to present their daily routine in a logical sequence, ensuring that each activity naturally flows into the next. Transitions between different parts of the routine should be smooth, and the language used should be appropriate for the level of proficiency being assessed. This might involve employing appropriate vocabulary, tenses, and sentence structures.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

The survey underwent meticulous planning to ensure the instrument's validity and reliability. It was distributed to a panel of three Applied Linguistics professors, who provided their approval along with suggested changes and adjustments. After incorporating these revisions, the final version of the survey was circulated. The assessment of its Cronbach's alpha coefficient yielded a reliable result (0.94).

Procedures

Since this study adopted the mixed method research design, the data collection process was conducted in two phases. The first phase included the use of a designed survey that was distributed through Google Forms in the classrooms. The second phase included administering the speaking test. All the participants were asked to talk about "Their daily routine". The participants' instructors, who were experts in the field, evaluated the speaking test. To ensure consistency and objectivity in the evaluation process, the instructors followed a predetermined rating scale proposed by the department. This rating scale was carefully designed to assess the participants' performance in the speaking test effectively. This approach allows for a structured and standardized evaluation process, ensuring that all participants are assessed based on the same criteria. It consisted of five distinct categories, each of which was assigned a value of three points. The total points were 15 points: Task fulfillment (3 points); Range (3 points); Organization (3 points); Pronunciation (3 points); Accuracy (3 points); Total (15 points).

Data Analysis

The research questions were tested by two different analyses. The first one involved applying a descriptive statistical technique to analyze and present the data, using the frequency, mean, and standard deviation (SD) of the items. Also, Pearson Correlation analysis was performed. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0 was used to do analyses in this study. Pearson's correlation coefficients (r) between speaking test scores and the categories of the survey were performed. The Pearson correlation coefficient, also known as Pearson's r , is a statistical measure that quantifies the strength and direction of the linear relationship

between variables. It ranges from -1 to +1, with positive values indicating a positive linear relationship, negative values indicating a negative linear relationship, and a value of 0 indicating no linear relationship. The correlation coefficient is interpreted in this study following the scale as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Interpreting the Size of a Correlation Coefficient (Mukaka, 2012)

Correlation	Interpretation
.90 to 1.00 (-.90 to -1.00)	Very high positive (negative) correlation
.70 to .89 (-.70 to -.89)	High positive (negative) correlation
.50 to .69 (-.50 to -.69)	Moderate positive (negative) correlation
.30 to .49 (-.30 to -.49)	Low positive (negative) correlation
.00 to .29 (.00 to -.29)	negligible correlation

Results and Discussion

RQ1: What is the Effect of EFL Learners' First Impression of their Instructor on Speaking Skills Scores?

Table 3

Pearson Correlations (r) between the Scores and the Constructs

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Intervals (2-tailed) ^a	
			Lower	Upper
scores - about instruction	.188	.094	-.032	.390
scores - about the instructor's reputation	.151	.179	-.070	.357
scores - about the instructor's character	.133	.238	-.088	.341
scores - about the instructor's appearance	.187	.095	-.033	.389
scores - about the instructor's first activity	.131	.243	-.090	.340

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), a. Estimation is based on Fisher's r-to-z transformation.*

The results of Pearson correlations (r) between the scores and the constructs of the questionnaire are shown in Table 3. First, the correlation coefficient (r) for the scores and the construct "about the instruction" showed that the correlation coefficient was small and not significant ($r=0.18$, $p=0.094$). This value suggested no relationship between scores and participants' beliefs about the instruction. The correlation coefficient (r) for the scores and the construct "About the instructor's reputation" showed that the correlation coefficient was small and not significant ($r=0.15$, $p=0.17$). The results also suggested no significant positive relationship between scores and the participants' beliefs about the instructor's reputation. Similarly, the results indicated no significant positive relationship between scores and the participants' beliefs about the instructor's character. The correlation coefficient (r) for the scores and the construct "About the instructor's character" ($r=0.13$, $p=0.23$). The results also showed that the correlation r was 0.18 ($p=0.09$) between the scores and the participants' beliefs about the instructor's appearance. Regarding the instructor's first activity, the results showed that the correlation r was 0.13 ($p=0.243$) between the scores and the participants' beliefs about the instructor's first activity. The correlation analyses revealed a negligible correlation between the participants' beliefs about the instructor and the instruction and speaking test scores.

The findings of this study contradict the findings obtained from the previous studies. For example, Wang and Frang (2020) examined the relationship between students' first impression of their teachers and their English-speaking abilities. They found that speaking scores were much higher for pupils who had a positive impression of their teachers than for those who initially had a negative one. A similar finding was reported by Wijaya (2017) who found that students who had a positive first impression of their teachers were more motivated to study English, which in turn improved their speaking abilities. There are several possible explanations for this finding. First, the difference between the findings of these studies and the current one can be attributed to the nature of the test. In the current study, the students were asked to talk as part of their course evaluation. Therefore, they had to do their best irrespective of their impression of their instructors. Regarding this point, it is suggested to do future research comparing the effect of students' first impression of their instructors in two conditions: mandatory test and optional test.

RQ2. Which of the factors of the first impression correlates positively with the other factors?

The correlation among the constructs of a questionnaire plays a crucial role in understanding the interrelationships and associations between different variables. In this study, we investigate the correlation among the five constructs of the questionnaire, aiming to explore the underlying relationships and patterns that exist between the variables. The correlation among the constructs of the questionnaire was performed as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Correlation between the Constructs of the Questionnaire

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Intervals Lower	Confidence Intervals (2-tailed) ^a Upper
The instruction - the instructor's reputation	.887	.000	.830	.926
The instruction - the instructor's character	.672	.000	.531	.776
The instruction - the instructor's appearance	.806	.000	.713	.871
The instruction - the instructor's first activity	.842	.000	.764	.896
The instructor's reputation - the instructor's character	.574	.000	.406	.704
The instructor's reputation - the instructor's appearance	.574	.000	.406	.704
The instructor's reputation - the instructor's first activity	.732	.000	.611	.819
The instructor's character - the instructor's appearance	.882	.000	.821	.922
The instructor's character - the instructor's first activity	.918	.000	.875	.947
The instructor's appearance - the instructor's first activity	.926	.000	.888	.952

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). a. Estimation is based on Fisher's r-to-z transformation.*

The results are shown in Figures 2-6. To create these figures, we divided the marks by the total mark and multiplied them by 100 to place them into interpretable categories. The mark is considered low if it ranges between forty to sixty percent, average if it ranges between sixty and seventy percent, and high if the mark is eighty percent and above.

Figure 2

The Relationship between the Speaking Test Scores and the Instruction

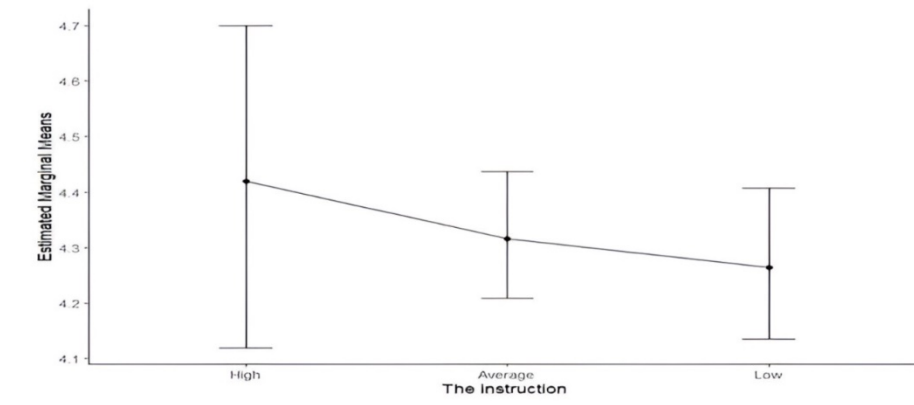


Figure 3

The Relationship between Speaking Test Scores and Instructor's Reputation

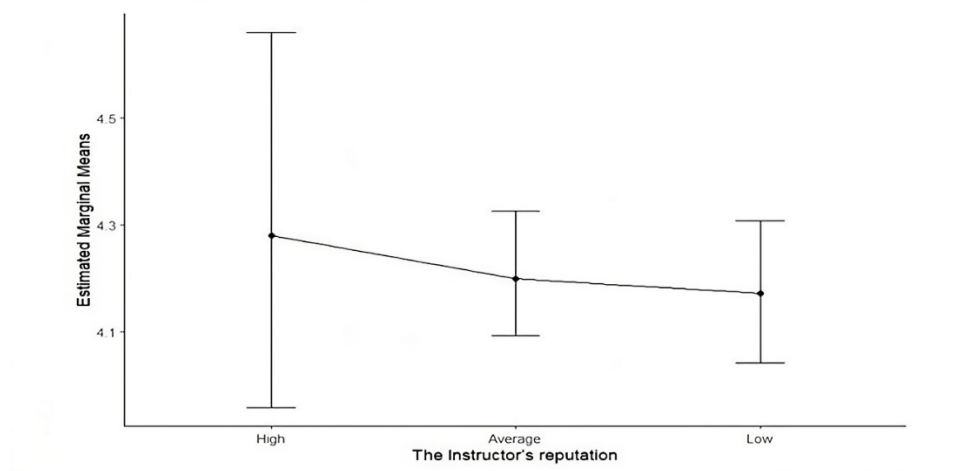


Figure 4

The Relationship between Speaking Test Scores and Instructor's Character

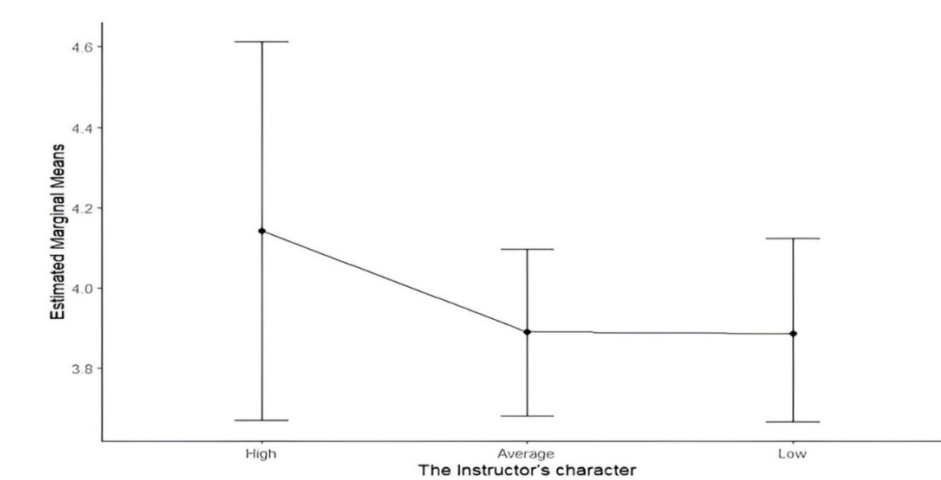


Figure 5

The Relationship between Speaking Test Scores and the Instructor's Appearance

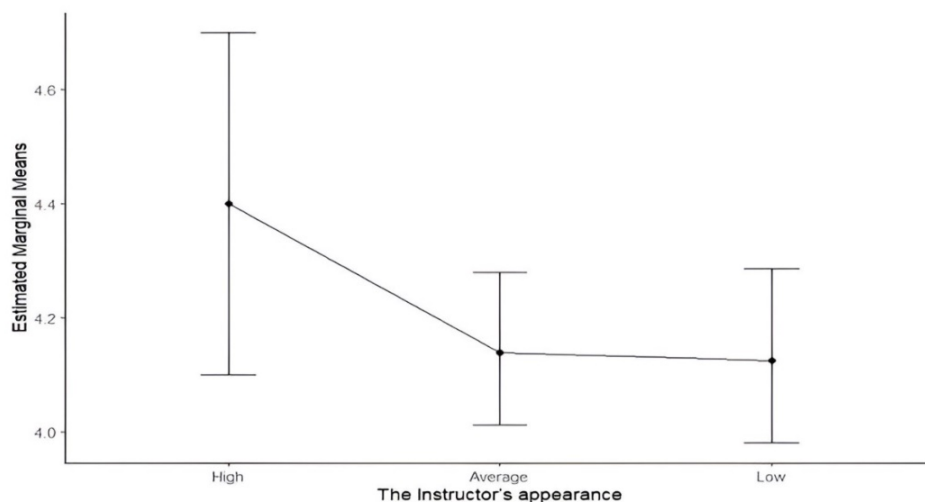
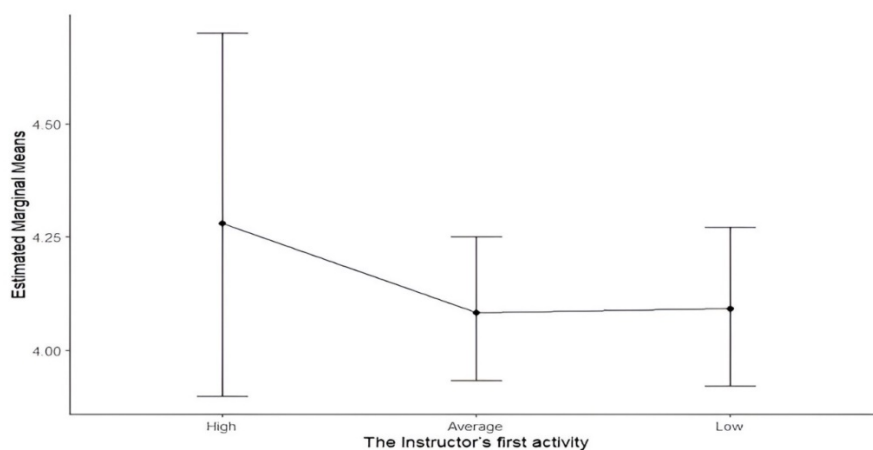


Figure 6

The Relationship between Speaking Test Scores and the Instructor's First Activity



The results of the Pearson correlations presented in Table 4 revealed significant insights into the relationships between different constructs within the questionnaire. These correlations provide valuable information about how the various elements being measured are interconnected, shedding light on potential patterns and associations. In particular, the strength and direction of the correlations offer a deeper understanding of the factors influencing participants' perceptions.

One of the notable findings is the strong positive correlation observed between the instructor's reputation construct and the instruction construct ($r=0.88$, $p=0.00$). This high correlation suggests that participants tend to associate an instructor's reputation with the effectiveness of their instruction. This implies that instructors who are perceived positively in terms of their reputation are more likely to be viewed as providing quality instruction. Such a finding underscores the importance of a positive reputation in academia and how it can impact students' perceptions of instruction.

Moving on, the correlations involving the instructor's character construct are also noteworthy. The moderate positive correlation between the instructor's character and

instruction ($r=0.67$, $p=0.00$) suggests that participants perceive a connection between an instructor's character traits and their instructional abilities. Similarly, the moderate positive correlation between the instructor's character and the instructor's reputation ($r=0.57$, $p=0.00$) suggests that participants might link an instructor's character with their reputation. This highlights the role of personal attributes in shaping perceptions beyond just instructional competence. The instructor's appearance construct also demonstrates meaningful correlations. The high positive correlation between the instructor's appearance and both instruction ($r=0.80$, $p=0.00$) and the instructor's character ($r=0.88$, $p=0.00$) indicates that appearance is associated with both instructional quality and character perception. Moreover, the moderate positive correlation between an instructor's appearance and the instructor's reputation ($r=0.57$, $p=0.00$) suggests that appearance might contribute to an instructor's overall reputation as well. Interestingly, the instructor's first activity construct displays high positive correlations with instruction, reputation, character, and appearance (ranging from $r=0.84$ to $r=0.92$, $p=0.00$). This finding implies that participants perceive a strong connection between an instructor's initial activity and various aspects of their teaching persona, reinforcing the idea that initial impressions play a significant role in shaping subsequent perceptions.

Discussion

The study investigates whether there is a correlation between students' first impressions of their instructors and their speaking test scores, and aims to provide a comprehensive analysis by combining a test and a questionnaire. The paper is significant because it addresses a crucial aspect of the learning experience, which is the first impression that students have of their instructors. The authors argue that a positive first impression can lead to increased motivation and improved speaking performance, while a negative one can lead to decreased motivation and poorer performance. They also suggest that instructors can create a positive first impression by demonstrating enthusiasm for teaching, being organized and prepared for class, and providing clear instructions.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining a test and a questionnaire to provide a comprehensive analysis. The participants of the study were 81 EFL learners at Taif University. The questionnaire included items that assessed the constructs of the first impression, the instructor's appearance, the instructor's character, the instructor's reputation, and speaking performance. The authors used Pearson's correlation coefficient r to measure the relationship between speaking test scores and the constructs of the questionnaire.

The results of the study revealed that the correlation coefficient (r) for the scores and all the constructs was small and not significant. This indicated that the first impression of the students about their instructors did not affect their performance on the speaking test. The authors noted that the results also revealed that the correlations among the constructs ranged from medium to high positive correlations. The study's findings are consistent with previous research that has shown that a positive first impression can have a lasting impact on students' academic and social life. The paper's findings also highlight the importance of instructors' nonverbal cues in shaping students' first impressions. Nonverbal cues such as physical appearance, attitude, and communication style can significantly influence how students perceive their instructors. For example, a study by Ishino and Shimizu (2023) found that learners who had a positive first impression of their instructors experienced lower levels of


speaking anxiety and performed better in speaking tasks. The study's limitations include the small sample size and the fact that the study was conducted in a single university. Future studies could investigate the relationship between first impressions and speaking performance in a larger and more diverse sample size. Additionally, future studies could explore the mediating role of learner motivation in the relationship between first impressions and speaking performance, as suggested by Liu and Chang (2024). The findings suggest that a positive first impression can have a lasting impact on students' academic and social life, and highlight the importance of instructors' nonverbal cues in shaping students' first impressions. The study's limitations notwithstanding, the study contributes to the existing literature on the topic and provides practical implications for instructors who seek to create a positive first impression and enhance their students' speaking performance.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the results, there was a negligible correlation between the EFL learners' first impression of their instructor and their speaking skill test scores. The correlation coefficients were all small and not significant, suggesting that there was no relationship between the participants' first impression of their instructor on their speaking skill test scores. This finding does not support the findings of the previous studies in which the participants' first impression of their instructors had a significant impact on their speaking performance. Additionally, the results of this study showed that there are positive correlations between the constructs of the questionnaire. Specifically, the instructor's reputation, character, appearance, and first activity constructs all correlated positively with the instruction construct. These correlations were all considered high or moderate, suggesting that there is a strong relationship between these factors. The findings of this study have implications for both instructors and students. For instructors, it suggests that they should focus on building a positive reputation, character, and appearance, as well as engaging in activities that will help them connect with their students. For students, it implies that they are likelier to find satisfaction in instruction when they perceive the instructor as having a strong reputation, a favorable appearance, and engaging in effective initial activities.

It should be noted that this study was limited in several ways. First, it was conducted at a single university, so the findings may not be generalizable to other institutions. Second, the study did not measure other factors that may influence student satisfaction with instruction, such as the instructor's teaching style or the difficulty of the course material. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study suggest that the constructs of instructor reputation, character, appearance, and first activity are crucial factors in student satisfaction with instruction. Future research should examine these constructs in more details and should also investigate the potential causal relationships between these constructs and student satisfaction. Furthermore, further research is needed to replicate these findings with a larger sample size and to explore other possible explanations for the lack of correlation between the EFL learners' first impression of their instructor and their speaking skill test scores.

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Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

No, there are no conflicting interests.

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