Investigating Oral Communication Challenges among Sudanese EFL University Students

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Abstract

Since oral communication is an important part of the aim of learning languages, this study intends to investigate the challenges that face EFL university students when communicate orally in English, and the causes of these challenges. The research data is obtained by using interview. The data is analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The research findings have shown that the main problems that face EFL university students in oral communication are the problems of pronunciation, weakness of speaking skills, difficulty in communication, and lack of fluency, lack of practice speaking English, the shyness of students to speak in English, absences of native English teachers in Sudan and the influence of mother tongue. Some methods of teaching English are not suitable for developing oral skills of the students; there are no enough oral activities in the lectures. In addition, the results have shown that the strategies that EFL university students have to adopt to overcome these problems and develop their oral communication skills are: more practice speaking English, more reading and listening to English texts. Other strategies include: teaching by native English teachers, changing the methods of teaching at university (adopting communicative method of teaching).

Keywords: Investigation, , EFL, Interaction, Competence.

دراسة تحديات المخاطبة الشفاهية التي تواجه الطلاب الجامعين الدارسين للغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في السودان

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مستخلص

بما أن المخاطبة هي جزء أساسي لتعلم اللغات، فقد هدف هذا البحث إلى التعرف على نقاط الضعف و المشاكل التي تواجه الطلاب في مجال المخاطبة باللغة الانجليزية، وأسباب هذه المشاكل. جمعت معلومات هذا البحث بواسطة المقابلة. وقد تم تحليل البيانات إحصائيا باستخدام برنامج (SPSS). الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية أوضحت نتائج الدراسة بان مشاكل المخاطبة الأساسية التي تواجه الطلاب السودانيين الدارسين للغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية هي: مشاكل النطف، ضعف مهارات المخاطبة وصعوبتها. بالإضافة لضعف الطلاقة عندما يتحدثون باللغة الانجليزية لخوفهم من الوقوع في الأخطاء، قلة الأساتذة المتحدثين بالانجليزية كلغة الأم في مؤسسات التعليم السودانية، الدور السالب للغة الأم في تعلم اللغة الانجليزية، بعض طرق التدريس اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات السودانية لا تساعد في تطوير مهارة المخاطبة بالانجليزية للطلاب، إضافة إلى أن معظم مناهج اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات السودانية لا تحتوي على تمارين كافية للتحدث باللغة الانجليزية. كشفت النتائج أيضا أن معظم الذين شملتهم الدراسة يعتقدون أن الحلول و الاستراتيجيات اللازمة التي ينبغي أن يتبناها الطلاب للتغلب علي هذه المشاكل و تطوير مهارة المخاطبة باللغة الانجليزية هي: مزيدا من التحدث بالانجليزية و الاستماع إليها و قراءة نصوصها. أيضا التدريس بواسطة أساتذة لغتهم الأم هي الانجليزية، تغيير طرق تدريس اللغة الانجليزية في المرحلة الجامعية إلى النهج التواصلي في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية.

1. Introduction

Speaking is considered an important factor as one of the four language skills. People in general concentrate upon this skill rather than the others, because it represents someone's knowledge about the language he knows. The major goal of all English language teaching process should give the learners the ability to use English effectively, accurately in communication. EFL learners can pass and get the written knowledge about language, but the problem is how they can produce the language they have been studying in classroom through oral communication activities.

Sine English is a foreign language in Sudan most students are not familiar with it to communicate orally. They use English more frequent only inside the class and less frequent outside class,

and they still do not have enough encouragement to practice English outside the class in order to be fluent to communicate orally in English language.

1.1. Aims of the Study

1. To find out problematic areas hider EFL learners in oral communication in English.
2. To study the causes of these problems and their effects on EFL learners' oral communication.
3. To enable EFL learners speak accurately and proficiently.
4. To provide suggestions to overcome the problems of oral communication.

1.2. Scope of the Study

The significance of this study for EFL university students appears in helping them to overcome their oral communication problems. Also it is important to the Sudanese Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, because this research may assist modify the polices of English language learning at the universities. Moreover, the department of English language and linguistics at Kassala University and other Sudanese universities can benefit from this research paper as sheds lights on the problems that face the Sudanese EFL learners in oral communication.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Sudanese EFL university students have problems of oral communication, weakness of speaking skills, difficulty in pronunciation, and lack of fluency. Wang. S (2014) says that "speaking fluency refers to the ability to produce the spoken language without pausing or hesitation". Accordingly, the researcher attempts to discuss oral communication problems encountered by English language students at University of Kassala. Linguistically, socially and strategically. This is because students do not have enough linguistic competence of language system as well as social competence to interact with each other in English language.

2. Literature Review

In this part the study gives background and history reviews

of the oral communication in two sections. Section one is the theatrical framework, which investigates the communicative language approach and its application to ELT, the definitions of communication in general, process of communication. Section two contains the previous studies.

2.1. Section one: Theoretical Frame Work

This section discusses the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach and its application to ELT, and the definitions of the term communication generally, communication process.

2.1.1. Communicative Approach

The origins of the communicative approach are to be found in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The communicative approach is the product of some linguists and educators; who had grown dissatisfied with the previous two methods used for foreign language teaching; the audio-lingual method and Grammar-translation method. These great linguists and educators who contributed to the rise of this worldwide used approach are Hymes, Chomsky, Wilkins, and Alexander. However, all these linguists and educators felt that students during those years were not learning the language in the right way. They claimed that they did not learn 'whole language' and realistic language. Students did not know how to communicate outside classroom in real life situation, using the appropriate social language. So far they were relying on the structures of language instead of relying on functions and notions of language. This made them unable to communicate in the culture of the language studied. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign language, emphasizes interaction as both means and the ultimate goals of learning a language. According to these views communicative language teaching which emphasize students' interaction is better to be adopted as to improve EFL university students' oral communication skills.

2.1.2. Implications for Methodology

As well as rethinking the nature of a syllabus, the new communication approach to teaching prompted a rethinking of classroom teaching methodology. It was argued that learners learn a language through the process of communication in it, and that communication is meaningful to the learner provides a better opportunity for learning than through a grammar-based approach. The overarching principles of communicative language teaching approach at this time can be summarized as follows:

1. Make real communication the focus of language learning.
2. Provide opportunities for learners to experiment and try out what they know.
3. Be tolerant of the learners' errors as they indicate that learner is building up his or her communicative competence.
4. Provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency.
5. Link the different skills such as speaking, reading, and listening together, since they usually occur so in the real world.
6. Let students induce or discover grammar rules.
7. In applying these principles in the classroom, the following new classroom techniques and activities were needed. Jack. (2006).

2.1.3. Communication

The term communication has been defined at various levels. Communication is a dynamic interactive process that involves the effective transmission of facts, ideas, thought, feelings, and values. We actively and consciously engage in communication in order to develop the information and understanding required for effective group functioning. It is dynamic because it involves a variety of forces and activities interacting over period of time. The word 'process' suggests that communication exists as flow through a sequence or series of steps. The term 'process' also indicates a

condition of flux and change. The relationships of people engaged in communication continuously grow and develop. Hornby (1995:228).

Communication is a foundation activity in our daily life and there are different methods or channels by which we can communicate our massages, such as face-to-face meetings or emails. According to Lynch (1996:9), "communication involves enabling someone else to understand what we want to tell thim, what is often referred to as our message." That means, in a communication situation, three factors are involved: a speaker or a message sender, a message and a listener or message receiver".

EFL university student have to exert ultimate efforts to master skills of communication in English language, through adopting certain techniques like: role plying, making conversations with others, participating in classroom activities and presentations. This represents their target language use.

2.1.4. Process of Communication

A communication process gets start as soon as we decide to convey a fact, an idea, an emotion, or an opinion to other. The communication process has many components: the person who starts the communication is called the sender or the source. The matter he communicates is called the message. This message is encoded in a suitable set of symbols and transmitted to other person/persons called 'Receiver' through appropriate medium or channel. The receiver receives the message, decodes it i.e. understands or interprets it and gives a suitable response called' feedback Chadha (2003:1).

Bloomer et al (2005:15), point out six major components of verbal communication. The following model summarizes the process of communication and is known as Jacobson's model of linguistic communication.

<div align="center">

Context

Message
</div>

Addresser--addressee

<div align="center">
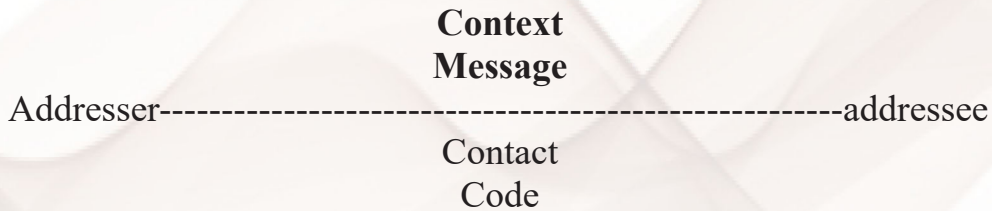
Contact

Code
</div>

In this model, which sometimes known as a 'code model', a message giver (addresser) transmits a message to a receiver (addressee). The message is put into words (the code). There must be a point of contact linking the addresser and the addressee. There will be a psychological link between them as well as a physical contact whether that by face to face to or at a distance. The importance of context is in determining the form of the message that has already been noted above.

2.2. Section Two: Previous studies

Many researchers are interested in the field of English language and its learning. They wrote many researches on English language generally, and in the area of oral communication problems and skills in particular. More specifically, many of these researches have focused on EFL/ESL learners and their oral communication problems.

2.2.1. Mohammed (2007:222), in his PhD. Thesis on 'Interaction in Large Sudanese University Classes' found that the majority of English language teachers supported the statement that large university classes are not conductive for maintaining interaction and communication in class. This is due to the fact that in the majority of these classes the seats are arranged in such a way that they are static and do not allow students to have a natural way for holding conversation since they are not facing each other. He also demonstrated that teachers as well as students think that present English language syllabuses in the Sudanese universities do not contain materials that encourage oral interaction or communication. He also fount that most of the course taught at the universities

visited by the researcher has more than 90% of their courses in reading and writing, whereas listening and speaking receives less than 6% of the total courses weight. He also found that the majority of the universities do not have English language clubs to enable the students to practice speaking English out of class. Accordingly, to this deprives most students from practicing speaking in English and from developing natural interactions in relaxed contexts.

The researcher thinks that the seating system in Sudanese universities is really not encouraging the interaction among the students. It seems difficult to communicate with a person you are not facing him. It is well-known that paralinguistic features like facial expressions, body language, node of the head, etc also play important role in the process of communication. But the Sudanese university seats' system is not helping to practice these paralinguistic features in communication. Also he believed that course in different university put a little focus on speaking and listening skills. Some subjects of this study strongly stressed this point. The practice of the target language is very important to develop its skills, including oral communication skills. EFL university students lack English environment, so they need to create their own environment for practicing English, beside the classroom.

2.2.2. Suleiman (1999:98) in an M.A thesis on 'English language teaching and classroom practices in Sudanese secondary schools' found that teachers' main aim behind teaching English is for educational purposes and not for communicative purposes. Moreover, they do not emphasize the functions of the language. Also students are not given enough time to practice and produce language, because teacher's talking time during the lesson is more than students' talking time. Students are not taught how to improve their language skills. Classroom activities are not modified and elaborated so as to give learners opportunities to make more practice. Students' native language is also much used in teaching foreign language in one way or another.

2.2.3. Johnson (1987) claimed that second/foreign language learning must include opportunities for the learners to engage in meaningful social interaction with the native speakers of the language to discover the linguistic and social cultural rules which are necessary for second language comprehension and production

Methodology of the Study

3.1. Introduction

This chapter shows the methodology of the study. It contains the population, the sample of the study, the instrument of data collection, the method which the researcher uses for the analysis of data and the procedures that the researcher follows to interview students. The two scales of instrument reliability and validity are devised to see the extent to which responses are properly achieved.

3.2. Methods:

3.2.1. Population

The population of the study is EFL university students. Their ages range as between 19 to 24 years. They study many courses through five years, focusing on reading and writing English which rarely having oral communication activities. Emphasis was put on theoretical work on phonetics and phonology as guide to pronunciation.

3.2.2. Subjects

A number of 35 male and female students are chosen randomly from the target population to participate in data collection. The participants are chosen from fifth level students at the Kassala university department of English language and linguistics.

3.2.3. Instruments

The instrument of data collection: namely an interview. A mobile phone is used for recording the interviews to be analyzed later on. The students' interview includes 7 items manly interested in communication problems inside and outside lecture room. It draws attention to the importance of native English speakers and the contents of text books for oral activities. This is treated in terms

of the time available for students participation.

3.2.4. Procedures

As indicated previously, this research adopted only one method (interview), for collecting its data from fifth level students of English language linguistics department. The researcher also includes the interview of the teachers. The interview was conducted in Lyons lecture room on the nineteenth of May 2020. When starting the interview some of the students are not ready to speak and try to hide from being asked questions. The total number of students was about 54. The researcher randomly chooses and interviews 35 0f students from fifth level. Every participant takes 5 minutes to answer the questions. The researcher interviewed the participant's personally and face to face using mobile phone recorder.

3.3. Validity

The questions of interview are revised by 4 teachers from the department of English and linguistics at Kassala University before interviewing the students and teachers. The researcher really benefits from their critical assessments that result in some modifications in the contents of the instrument.

3.4. Reliability

The instrument is considered to be reliable when it is applied to the same subject repeatedly and gives the same results each time. Reliability is usually calculated statically in some way of measurement. It provides the instrument **4. Results and Discussions**

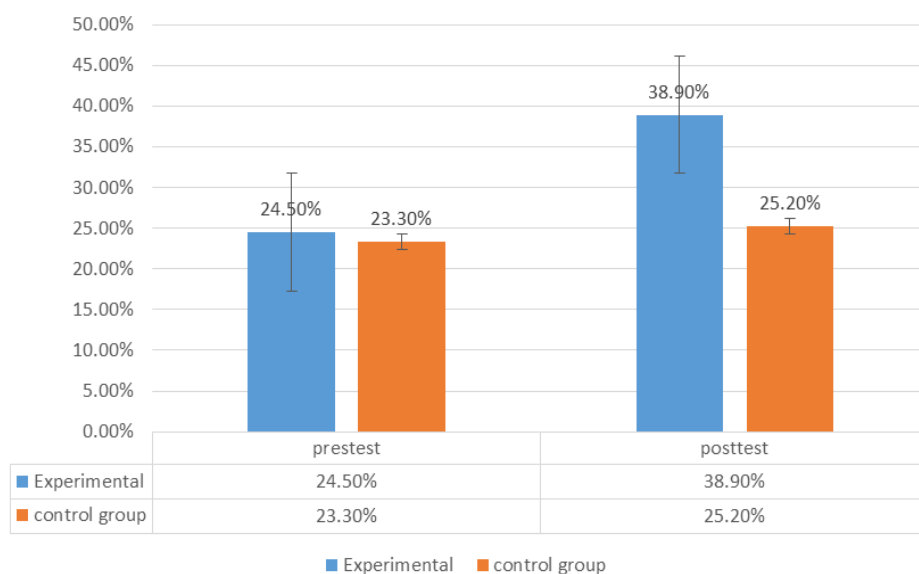**Table (4.1) Oral Communication Problems as Mentioned by Students**

Options	Frequency	Percent
Weakness of speaking skills	7	20.0%
Lack of fluency	9	25.7%
Problems of pronunciation	10	28.5%
Difficulty in communication	4	11.4%
No response	5	14.2%
Total	35	100%
Mean	7	20%

This table shows that the mean deviation of oral communication as mentioned by students is (20%), because (28.6%) of students mentioned the main problems that face EFL university students' oral communication are problems of pronunciation, (25.7%) of students referred to the lack of fluency as main problem of ELF university students' oral communication, while (20.0%) said that the main problem is the weakness of speaking skills, other (11.4%) viewed that the difficulty in communication is one of the oral communication problems, and (14.2) of students gave no responses.

This problem is due to the shortage of native English teachers at the Sudanese universities, lack of practice, and the absence of phonetic laboratories. This view supports the search hypotheses (1) and answers question (1) stated in chapter one.

Table (4.2) the view of students about the causes of oral communication problems:

Options	Frequency	Percent
lack of practice	9	25.7%
The influence of the mother tongue	6	17.1%
The shyness of students to speak	8	22.8%
Lack of linguistic laboratories	3	8.5%
No enough oral activities	2	5.7%
Total	35	100.0%
Mean	7	20%

	prestest	posttest
■ Experimental	24.50%	38.90%
■ control group	23.30%	25.20%

The table above shows that (20%) of students as the mean deviation mentioned their views about the causes of oral communication problems, because (25.7%) of interviewees mentioned that the main causes of EFL university students' oral communica-

tion problems are lack of practice (17.1%) of students viewed that the shyness of students to speak is main causes of the problems, (20.0%) of students referred to the influence of the mother tongue as the main problems of EFL University students oral communication, (22.8%) of students said that the lack of linguistic laboratories is main problems of EFL University students oral communication, while (14.2%) students answered that no enough oral activities is main problem of EFL university students oral communication.

According to these data the main cause of EFL university students' oral communication is the lack of practice, this result achieved the hypotheses (2) and answered question (2) stated in chapter one.

Table (4.3) shows whether the students speak English inside and outside the lecture-room:

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	10	28.5%
No	12	34.2
Sometimes	8	22.8%
No response	5	14.2%
Total	35	100.0%
Mean	8.75	25%

In the table above (25%) of students as the mean deviation shows whether the students speak English inside and outside the lecture-room, because (34.3) of students mentioned that they didn't speak English out of the lecture-room (28.6) of students mentioned that they speak English out of their lecture-room (22.8) of students said sometimes they speak English out of their lecture-room, and (14.2) Students gave no response.

According to these results, EFL university students use no enough English language out their lecture-room to make them to be able to communicate orally in English language. As to be able communicate accurately and fluently EFL university students need to use English language more frequents outside their lecture room and to listen to native English language texts.   This result achieve hypotheses (1) as stated in chapter one.

Table (4.4) Students' answers to whether they had ever been taught by a native English teacher:

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes once	20	57.1%
No	8	22.9%
No response	7	20.0%
Total		100.0%
	35	
Mean		33.3%
	11.6	

The table above shows that (33.3%) of students answered to whether they had ever been taught by a native English teacher, as the result of (57.1%) of interviewees mentioned that they have been taught by native English teachers during the five years of study at the university, (22.9) of students mentioned that they have never been taught by native English teacher, and others (20.0) of students have no response.

According to these results EFL university students are encourage to listen and speak to native speakers in any available mediums like social media TV channels and highly appreciated they need to be taught by native English teachers, this can help them learn English from situation similar to native one. The results achieved hypotheses (4) and question (4) stated in chapter one.

Table (4.5) Students' answers to whether their textbooks contain oral communication activities:

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	8	22.9%
No	16	45.7%
Sometimes	7	20.0%
No response	4	11.4%
Total	35	100.0%
Mean	8.85	25%

This table shows that (25%) of students answered to whether their textbooks contain oral communication activities, because (45.7%) of students said that there were no oral activities in Sudanese English language textbooks, (22.9%) of students said that sometimes they can find oral activities in the textbooks, of (20.0%) students pointed out that Sudanese English language textbooks contain oral activities, while (11.4%) of students gave no response.

These results support the research hypotheses (1), which say that the Sudanese textbooks contain few oral communication activities. Oral communication is the most important type of communication; even in the language acquisition the child firstly acquires the language orally by listening to his/her parents then he/she tries to speak. From this view we understand that the oral communication is the base of any language, so EFL University need to adopt the oral communication in English so as to be fluent in speaking English.

Table (4.6) Students' answers to the question of whether their teachers give them opportunities for oral participation I the lectures:

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes they give\ yes I participate	10	28.6%
Yes they give and I sometimes participate	7	20.0%
Yes they sometimes give and I participate	6	17.1%
They rarely give	5	14.3%
No they don't give	4	11.4%
No response	3	8.6%
Total	35	100.0%
Mean	5.83	16.6%

As shown in the table above (16.6%) of students mentioned of whether their teachers give them opportunities for oral participation during the lectures, although, (28.6%) of students mentioned that the teachers give them chances for oral participation in the lectures, and they participate, the rate is still low, (20.0%) of students mentioned that they sometimes participate in oral activities, (14.3%) of students said that rarely they have oral activities, while ((11.5%) of students answered that they have no oral activities. According to these results EFL university students need more oral activities and participation in the lectures, because, in the countries like Sudan, it seems that the main chance to practice speaking English is in the lecture rooms. The results support the hypotheses (1) stated in chapter one.

Findings

(1) It was found that the main problems that face EFL University students in oral communication are problems of pronunciation,

weakness of speaking skills, difficulty in communication and lack of fluency.

(2) It was also found that the main causes of EFL University students' oral communication problems are: lack of practice speaking English, the negative effect of the mother tongue, the shyness of learners to speak in English language, the shortage of native English language teacher and the Sudanese textbooks content very little numbers of oral activities.

(3) The main strategies that EFL University students have to adopt to overcome these problems and to develop their oral communication skills are: more practice of speaking English language, more listening to English native texts, the Sudanese methods of English in all levels must content communicative activities.

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Appendix
Students' interview

This Interview is for students of fifth level, "University of Kassala Faculty of Education Department of English Language and Linguistics"

Dear student you are kindly asked to answer the following questions, your points of view are highly appreciated to this research. The answers you give will be treated confidentially for the purposes of this research only.

Interview Questions:

1. What are the problems that face EFL university students, while communicating orally in English?

2. What are the causes of learners' oral communication problems?

3. Do you practice speaking English inside and outside the lecture-room?I'm

4. Do you think that the existence of the native English teachers is important for improving learners' oral communication?

5. Do the textbooks that currently used contain enough oral communication activities?

6. Do the lecturers give you enough activities for oral communication (interaction) in the lectures?

7. Do you have any kind of oral communication group outside the class?