
An Investigation into the Communication Difficulties that English Cultural Centre Students (ECC students) Encounter

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Abstract:

This study aimed at assessing English Cultural Centre students' oral communicative competence in an EFL environment. The study attempted to assess, investigate and determine the level of oral communicative competence attained by English Cultural Centre students who are majoring English language. The study, moreover, aimed at exploring new ideas and views to develop the students' oral communicative competence in classroom and outside the institute environment. For this purpose a test was used as a tool were designed to collect data and details from the sample of the research, a questionnaire for the students. The data were analyzed and computed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, (SPSS). The study concluded to some findings of which learners pay much attention to accuracy and grammar rather than pragmatic competence and fluency using the target language. The study also found that students need much practice of their English in the real world because the communicative activities in class don't fulfill their need. Another finding is that, the evaluation of the learners depends mainly on the written exams, so teachers pay attention only to literacy skills. The study found that most of the students have little opportunity to practice their English in the real world which leads to serious problems when they encounter real life situational conversations. On the basis of the results, the study finishes with some recommendations for teaching and learning oral communicative competence in the EFL context.

Keywords: CC(communicative competence), ECC (English Cultural Centre), EFL, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), FLL (Foreign Language Learning)

INTRODUCTION

Many students are facing a lot of difficulties in developing their communicative competence when learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Indeed, there are three aspects that affect negatively on the students' oral production. Firstly, the lack of motivation that could be manifested in anxiety, and low self-esteem. Secondly, the learning environment which includes the teacher's methodology, and classroom environment in which the absence of an EFL speaking social context does not provide a natural context to stimulate communication. Thirdly, mother tongue interference that is in trying to develop EFL with non-native speakers learners where students (and teachers) tend to translate everything to their first language; as a result this practice reduces the possibility of thinking in EFL, this leads to lack of meaningful situations and real life contexts developed in class.

It is important to identify the problems of the Sudanese students encounter in the process of learning English. The main obstacle for Sudanese as EFL in learning English, as it was, mentioned previously, that there is no environment makes the students familiar with the original language. In other words there is no practice of English outside the class. So they do not feel the immediate need to learn English and the educational system should bring about such needs.

Furthermore, there are a lot of people who look for ways to start. In lots of English classes, little attention is paid to the real efforts learners make in mastering a foreign language. Many of the students do not know, neglect, or pay enough attention to how to deal with the task of learning a foreign language even after years of studying; only a few students who have used a set of strategies, have been able to succeed and, hence learn the language. It is neglected area in our language classes. Teacher should be concerned with helping students to learn how to learn the ways of effective learning of English as a foreign language and achieve autonomy in their education. Another challenging factor is students' beliefs about the nature of learning

English as a subject consisting of a list of words, and a set of grammatical rules which are to be memorialized and separable skills. To be acquired rather than a set of integrated skills and sub skills (Oxford, 2001).

The mistake is in the educational system itself as the teacher's target is to prepare their students to the examination and not to make them skilled in the use of the language they are learning.

Moreover, students try to get the required grade and they have no internal motivation to learn English for other purposes, and they move to higher grades with different grades and levels of English knowledge and even inadequate knowledge. "A large number of teachers help students to pass the examinations in order to preserve their reputation as good teachers"

However, the purpose of this research goes beyond proving that these three aspects affect on the communicative skills of Sudanese as EFL learners. In fact, its purpose is to provide valuable information about the cause of this problem for improving fluency among Sudanese as EFL learners.

Statement of the Study Problem

Learning English as a foreign language is not an easy task. It needs much effort, in particular with regard to oral communicative competency because it can be acquired over a long time with a lot of practice. Moreover, comprehending with native speakers needs special attention as a lot of Sudanese EFL learners are not accustomed to their accent. This is because only a few native English teachers teach at Sudanese universities. Sudanese universities do not have the financial ability to hire teachers from English speaking countries unlike other countries in the Middle East or other parts of the world. In China for example, the government hires teachers from the English-speaking countries to develop students' oral communicative competence. Parents also send their children to some English-speaking countries, in particular the UK or the US for the same purpose. The same situation is taking place in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. In Sudan, the situation is totally different; learners may find it hard when listen or talk to native speakers or communicating in real life situations. There are some private efforts of some Sudanese EFL learners who get access to the internet to comprehend with native speakers through various social contacts or some of them may have chances to travel to English

speaking countries from time to time to practice their English in real conversations. Sudanese university learners are expected to acquire adequate communicative competence in English as a foreign language. Despite the efforts made within the area of teaching English to university students majoring in it, the outcome as reflected by students' skills and competencies in English is still below expectations.

Developing the communicative competence of the learners is one of the major goals in the process of English teaching. There are even views "the essence of English teaching is communication", (Wang, 1996). And that "communicative competence is the essential and ultimate goal of English teaching", (Wang, 1996). However, it seems that it is easier said than done, since an investigation of the English majors at Sudanese universities has shown difficulties whenever engage in real communication. The situation is probably not optimistic among the majority of them.

In the ESL situation, English is learned within the context of an English- speaking society as the case in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Therefore, ESL learners are exposed to English in and out of the classrooms. Thus, they have opportunities to practice their English and observe how the language used in real situations by interacting with communicative competent English speakers. These opportunities can lead to the development of pragmatic competence in ESL learners because the learners acquire their knowledge of the English language as it is used in actual situations.

On the other hand, the EFL learners' opportunities for English practice are limited solely to classroom activities as the case of the Sudanese learners majoring in English, because they are learning the language in a social environment where it is not commonly used for communication. Therefore, Sudanese EFL learners lack both the chance to practice and observe multiple instances of genuine English communication and a lot of them may not develop the pragmatic communication knowledge needed if they are to develop communicative competence. Hence, it is of utmost importance that teachers of English as a foreign language use pedagogical practices that can provide and foster pragmatic skill development in the EFL situation.

Research Questions

This study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. For what aims oral communicative competence should be given importance in teaching English as a foreign language to Sudanese learners?
2. How do teachers assess students' oral communicative competence in foreign language classes for Sudanese learner?
3. To what extent are Sudanese learners majoring in English aware of communicative and speaking skills?
4. Does having an EFL teacher helping the Sudanese students or it limits to their awareness with the language?

Hypotheses

Based on the above questions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1. It is a must to focus on communication in teaching English as a foreign language as learners have little opportunity to practice their English outside classroom environment.
2. Sudanese EFL learners lack oral communicative competence of the language.
3. The communicative activities in classrooms do not fulfill the learners' need of using the language in real life situations.
4. Assessing learners' oral communicative competence differs from level to level and place to another.

Research Methodology

The researcher used a descriptive and analytical tool which is students' questionnaire for investigating ECC students' oral communicative competence. This method used to collect information and analyze the data for the purpose of the study and to test the hypotheses. The method helped a lot in finding a fruitful answers and getting a positive results for the research questions.

Research Sample

The sample of the students' questionnaire, investigated for the purpose of conducting this study consists of 30 students from English Cultural Centre. All students are majoring the English in different levels. The males are 15 and 15 are females. The researcher distributed the questionnaire at English Cultural Centre with assistance of some colleagues.

The Definitions of Language

Language is a particular system of human communication that consists of sounds, for example, the Arabic language, and the English language. Sometimes a language is spoken by most people in a particular country, for example, Japanese in Japan, but sometimes a language is spoken by only part of the population of a country, for example, Tamil in India, French in Canada.

Languages are usually not spoken in exactly the same way from one part of country to the other. Differences in the way a language is spoken by different people are described in term of regional and social variation. (Richards& Schmidt, 2010, p.311)

The Definition of communication

Communication is transfer of information from one person to "another, whether or not it to elicit confidence. But the information transferred must be understandable to the receiver"- (G.G.Brown).

"Communication is the intercourse by words, letter or messages"- (Fred G. Mayer).

"A communication takes place when one individual, a sender, displays, transmits or otherwise directs a set of symbols to another individual, a receiver, with the aim of changing something, either something the receiver is doing (or not doing) or changing his or her world view. This set of symbols is typically described as a message."- (William Rice-Johnson)

We can now proceed to define communication from what we have seen above. To define means to give the precise and exact meaning of a word. The exact meaning of the word communicate is 'to share' or 'to participate' dictionaries say that communication is the transmission of a message or information by speaking or writing. Another dictionary declares that communication is giving or exchanging information, signals or messages by talk or writing. Yet another definition says that communication is social intercourse. Communication is all this and even more.

Communication is giving, receiving or exchanging ideas, information, signals or messages through appropriate media, enable individuals or groups to persuade, to seek informal, to give information or to express emotions.

The Definition of learning

“A change in human disposition or capability that persists over a period of time and is not simply ascribable to processes of growth.”

— *From The Conditions of Learning by Robert Gagne*

“Learning is the relatively permanent change in a person's knowledge or behavior due to experience. This definition has three components: 1) the duration of the change is long-term rather than short-term; 2) the locus of the change is the content and structure of knowledge in memory or the behavior of the learner; 3) the cause of the change is the learner's experience in the environment rather than fatigue, motivation, drugs, physical condition or physiologic intervention.”

—*From Learning in Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Richard E. Mayer*

“We define learning as the transformative process of taking in information that—when internalized and mixed with what we have experienced—changes what we know and builds on what we do. It's based on input, process, and reflection. It is what changes us.”

—*From The New Social Learning by Tony Bingham and Marcia Conner*

“A process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential of improved performance and future learning.”

- *From How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching by Susan Ambrose, et al.*

“The process of gaining knowledge and expertise.”

From The Adult Learner by Malcolm Knowles.

Language and Communication

All living creatures have their own way to communicate. They have some means of conveying their message to others of their own group, communication is of utmost importance for them to survive. They use several means, some use physical movement or facial expressions, others use vocal noises.

Human beings can exploit many varieties of techniques of communication. Man, uses oral message, he also uses his body for gestures of different kinds. He can convey information by facial expression like eye contact or moving his eyelashes. The word language is used to cover all forms of communication, and that animal language as a common term. Man, shares other creatures in using signals, but he is special in using vocal language with a complexity range for beyond

anything known to exist among other forms of life. Still human language is special because it consists of many characteristics that we cannot find in any other creatures' means of communication. (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill&Pincas, 2003, p. 25)

The Importance of Communication

McPheat (2010) has brilliant ideas about the importance of communication: "In a survey by Katz Business School at the University of Pittsburgh, organization rated communication skills as the most important factor used in selecting their management staff. The study found that oral and written communication skills were important in predicting job success, as was the ability to communicate well with others in the workplace" (p.10).

English as a Second or Foreign Language

It is a basic term with several somewhat different definitions. In a loose sense, English is the second language of any or who learns it after learning their first language in infancy in the home. Using the term this way, no distinction is made between second language, third language, etc. However, English as a second language is often contrasted with English as a foreign language. Some who learn English in a formal classroom setting, with limited or no opportunities for use outside classroom, in a country in which English does not play an important role in internal communication (China, Japan, and Korea, for example), is said to be learning English as a foreign language. Someone who learns English in a setting in which the language is necessary for every body's life (for example, an immigrant learning English in the US) or in a country in which English plays an important role in education, business, and government (for example, in Singapore, the Philippines, India and Nigeria) is learning English as second language. But in countries like, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, or Libya English doesn't play a vital role in the people's life so they learn English as a foreign language. (Richard& Schmidt, 2010, pp. 196, 197)

Teaching English as a foreign language

Very often TEFL jobs are advertised as ESOL (English for speakers of other languages). Teaching English as a foreign language, English as a second language and English for speakers of other languages are the same kind of word depending on which country you are in and who your

students are. There is a slight difference between learning a language to survive in the English-speaking country you now live in and learning English while you are in a non-English speaking country. Maxom, 2009, p. 10) The basis for the distinction between foreign and second language learning in geographical context in which a language is spoken. An ESL situation is one where English is widely used in commerce, administration, and education. It is a foreign language (EFL) in a country where English plays no such role. When English is taught to non-native speakers in an English-speaking country, ESL usually refers to people who are long-stay or permanent residents, whereas EFL is taught to those who return after a period of time to their own country. (Johnson& Johnson, 1999, pp. 133, 134)

"EFL is the teaching of English to people whose first language is not English. EFL is an abbreviation for 'English as a Foreign Language'. (COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary.

Beliefs about Teaching

Teaching is a very personal activity, and it is not surprising that individual teachers bring to teaching very different beliefs or thoughts, or assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching. This can be seen by comparing two English teachers in one teaching environment, conduct their classes in a secondary school or even teaching students at university majoring in English in an EFL country. Teacher A follows special technique that enables his students to do well and exert efforts academically, while Teacher B is not experienced enough and so his class does not as well as academically as the students in Teacher A's class, although they both work hard and are enthusiastic. (Jack& Charles, 1996, p. 53)

How Can You Improve Your Communication Skills?

To improve your communication skills, you need to be self-confident and open-minded. You also need to ask questions that better suit the topic under discussion. Listening effectively and attentively is highly recommended to improve the quality of communication. You should read well and interpret body language or eye contact; you should understand what is being said behind word under any circumstances. This helps a lot to enhance communication skills between you and the other part. Good communicators are self-confident people who do believe in their abilities and respect views and opinions of others. They

are assertive people who can express themselves without getting angry or shouting out or being upset. Moreover, they encourage others to express their feelings and views. (Rawson, 2007, p. 21)

Pragmatic Competence and its Significance in L2 Communication

Pragmatic Competence as defined by Chomsky (reported in Kasper (1997: 17) refers to the L2 learners' knowledge of conditions and manner of the appropriate use of language in conformity with various purposes. It shows learners' ability to use the language effectively and accurately in real life situations depending on the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and structure they have learned at schools and colleges. Pragmatic competence is the learners' ability to comprehend well and convey their messages and meanings in an accurate and appropriate cultural circumstances in which communication occurs accordingly. (Gaily, 2014, p. 41)

Gaily adds to this concern: "The primary function of pragmatic competence as indicated by many studies is to enable learners communicate more effectively and relate the proper linguistic action to the appropriate language sociocultural context. Accordingly, the vital role that pragmatic competence in L2 communication stems from the fact that language has been viewed in the first place as communicative process, therefore, the development of communicative competence is the ultimate goal for teaching. Good communication in L2 requires not only mastering of basic linguistic features such as phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics but also the ability to use appropriate expression in the appropriate context" (p. 41)

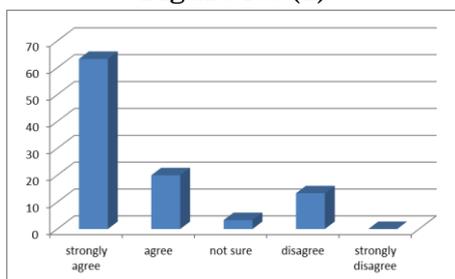
Sample of the Analysis

Question No (1): "Learning oral communicative competence is challenging in EFL classes".

The frequency distribution for the respondent's answer of Question No. (1):

Valid	Frequency	Percent%
Strongly disagree	19	63.3
Agree	6	20.0
Not sure	1	3.3
Disagree	4	13.3
Strongly disagree	0	0.0
Total	30	100.0

Figure No (1)



It is clear from the above table No.(1) and figure No.(1) that there are (19) persons in the study’s sample with percentage (63.3%) strongly agree to: “Learning oral communicative competence is challenging in EFL classes”. There are (6) persons with percentage (20.0%) agreed to that idea and (1) person with percentage (3.3%) was not sure of that and (4) persons with percentage (13.3%) disagreed to the idea. And with percentage (0.0%) no one strongly disagreed to the idea.

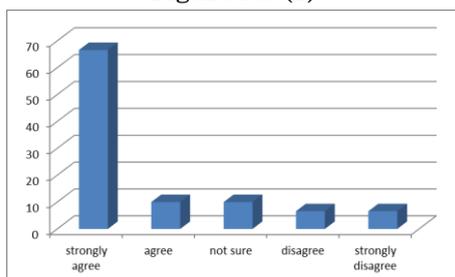
Question No (2): “The students feel shy to express themselves in English outside the classroom environment”.

Table No (2)

The frequency distribution for the respondents’ answers of question No. (2):

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	20	66.6
Agree	3	10.0
Not sure	3	10.0
Disagree	2	6.6
Strongly disagree	2	6.6
Total	30	100.0

Figure No (2)



It is clear from the above table No.(2) and figure No.(2) that there are (20) persons in the study's sample with percentage (66.6%) strongly agreed to "The student feel shay to express themselves in English outside the classroom environment ". While (3) persons with percentage (10%) agreed to that idea.(3) persons with percentage (10%) were not sure of that, and (2) persons with percentage (6.6%) disagreed. Only (2) persons with percentage (6.6%) were strongly disagreed.

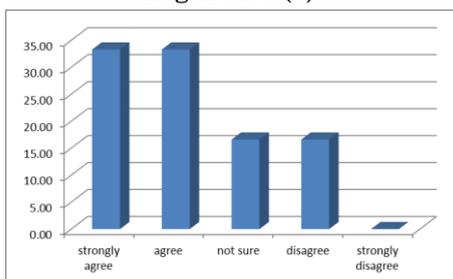
“The interference of the mother tongue affects negatively on the development of learning English language”.

Table No (3)

The frequency distribution for the respondents’ answers of question No (3):

Valid	Frequency	Percent%
Strongly agree	10	33.3
Agree	10	33.3
Not sure	5	16.6
Disagree	5	16.6
Strongly disagree	0	0.0
Total	30	100.0

Figure No (3)



It is clear from the above table No (3) and figure No (3) that there are (10) persons in the study’s sample with percentage (33.3%) strongly agreed to “The interference of the mother tongue affect negatively on the development of learning English language”.

There are (10) persons also with the same percentage (33.3%) agreed, and (5) persons with percentage (16.6%) were not sure, also (5) persons were disagreed with percentage (16.6%) and no one strongly disagree.

Discussion of the results

The results are discussed according to the sequences of data analyzed by the instruments used in the research. The discussion is necessary to develop and promote the students' oral communicative competence in an EFL environment.

The most significant results obtained by the students' questionnaire and the teachers' interview analysis indicate that most of the students who responded to the questionnaire view oral communicative competence as challenging in EFL classes. Very few of them see that it is not challenging, maybe those students had a good opportunity to interact with native speakers of English or with people who know English or they have lived or visited one of the English speaking countries or having good knowledge of the language through some special factors.

Most of the students strongly agreed that they feel shy to express themselves in English outside the Classroom, if the educational system is not prepare them to speak outside the classroom conveniently it become pointless for them.

Most of them either agreed or strongly agreed to the point that the interference of the mother tongue affects negatively on the development of learning English language. That view of the students is essential in developing the learners' communication ability through encouraging them to use only use English from the very beginning of their learning.

Most of the students either agreed or strongly agreed to the point that Speaking with native speakers is much easier than speaking with EFL learners, this shows the difficulties students facing in their learning English through non-native speaker teachers.

Most of them either agreed or strongly agreed to the point that Having a native speakers teachers is affective more than non-native speakers, this reveal that native speakers are more affective in the classes than non-native speakers and they are less likely to be not understood.

Most of the students strongly agreed that teacher's accent encourage and help them to clearly understand.

Summary

Acquiring oral communicative competence is difficult, challenging and frustrating for most EFL learners in particular the English Cultural

Centre's students. Moreover, it can be very stressful for them because of many factors they may encounter during their study, so they always exert efforts to find some ways to develop that important part of learning the language outside the class environment. How well students communicate with others has a major impact on their future career because they need English in their jobs and other field of life. The main purpose of this research is to assess, investigate and explore students' oral communicative competence in an EFL environment at English Cultural Centre, besides how to overcome difficulties that might face students in that concern. To achieve this, the researcher used questionnaire. The questionnaire was applied on a group of different level students at the English Cultural Centre. The first chapter is an introduction for the research. Chapter two gave an idea about the literature review and previous studies related to the thesis. Chapter three deals with all the procedures about the research in conducting the study; it included the instruments of data collection and the procedures followed in collecting the data. Chapter four concerns with the data analysis of the questionnaire and the interview, analyzed statistically through using statistical products solution services techniques, (SPSS). It also includes discussion of the results.

Findings

From this study, the researcher came up with the following findings:

1- Native speakers are more affective in the classes than the others. Students need to know how the real communications goes to build their own knowledge on that.

2-The lack of practicing outside the class hinders the students from developing fast and it makes them use to interfere the mother tongue in the class, boundaries have to be set in the class.

3-Students should use English outside the classes to overcome the problem of shyness when it comes to use English out the class.

4-The aims of studying English in beyond passing the examination or be active in the class, they have to be prepared for real life situation and jobs qualifications.

5-The skilled teacher helps to transfer the information fully and clearly.

6-The teacher's accent encourage students to study and practice English specially if the teacher from EFL environment.

7-grammatical rules helps the students so speak correctly, but the over concentration on it can affect negatively by missing the oral side.

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