

## Investigating Teachers' Views and Perceptions about Oral Apprehension among EFL Sudanese Undergraduate Students

RODINA MOHAMMED ELMUBARAK ELRAYAH HASHIM

PhD student

Sudan University of Science and Technology

Dr. MAHMOUD ALI AHMED OMER

Supervisor

Professor of English Language and literature

### Abstract

*This study aimed at investigating oral apprehension experienced by EFL Sudanese university students. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method, the researcher collected data by using a questionnaire for (30) Sudanese University teachers. To analyze the data, the researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The findings of the study revealed that EFL Sudanese university students encounter some oral apprehension. In the light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommended that teachers should encourage the students to use the language freely without feeling worried or anxious about making mistakes, students also need to be exposed to English used in real-life situations, moreover, they should be engaged and participate in communication in order to develop their oral communication skills.*

**Key words:** oral apprehension, foreign language learning, oral communication skills.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Certainly, a quite number of educators, classroom practitioners and students alike, foster the feeling that language learning is a set of structural rules and they are more concerned with grammatical competence apart from its use “whether it is feasible, appropriate, or

done in a particular speech community” (Richards & Schmidt 2010: 99). On the contrary, “learning a foreign language is more than a simple task of assembling lexical items in grammatically accurate sentences” (Liddicoat 2017: 1). Without doubt, grammatical competence is a fundamental element to be reckoned and learned, its connection with other important competences should be taken into account, due to the fact that it is only a single aspect of a multifaceted reality in which the communicative competence includes four interrelated areas language knowledge; grammatical competence (formal competence), sociolinguistic competence (sociocultural competence), discourse competence and strategic competence (Martínez-Flor, & Usó-Juan 2006, Richards & Schmidt 2010).

The present study sets out to examine the factors causing oral apprehension taking into consideration a number of parameters including social, psychological and cultural ones.

## **2. Statement of the problem:**

With the advent of communicative language teaching, the main purpose of language teaching has been diverted from mastering language structure to use the language to communicate effectively, this study aims to investigate the causes of EFL Sudanese university students' oral apprehension and devise some strategies that would enable them to develop their communicative competence.

## **3. Objectives of the Study:**

The study is carried out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate EFL Sudanese university students' oral apprehension.
2. To devise some strategies to enable EFL learners to develop their communicative competence.

## **4. Questions of the Study:**

The following research questions formed the basis of the study:

1. What are the causes of oral apprehension that face EFL Sudanese university students?
2. How can teachers help students to overcome oral apprehension?

### **5. Hypotheses of the Study:**

The following hypotheses are postulated:

1. Oral apprehension can be attributed to different factors.
2. Teachers can help students to overcome oral apprehension by raising their awareness about the importance of oral skills for learning in general and the types of communication techniques to be adopted to improve their communication skills.

### **6. Significance of the Study:**

This study is significant for a number of reasons:

- a) It contributes to the existing literature in the field of oral communication.
- b) Teachers will have a better understanding of their students' oral apprehension and examine their own teaching techniques and materials, accordingly.
- c) Learners can identify their problems and be aware of the factors that contribute to their difficulties and can apply the right strategies and techniques of oral communication.
- d) The study shall also form a point of departure for syllabus designers and educators in the field of their specializations.

### **7. Limits of the Study:**

This study is limited to investigating oral apprehension encountered by EFL Sudanese university students during the academic year (2019-2020).

### **8. Methodology of the Study:**

As has been mentioned, the purpose of this research is to investigate oral apprehension among EFL Sudanese university students, to achieve this goal and in an attempt to answer the research questions, data has been collected through using a questionnaire which was administered to (30) professional Sudanese university teachers who have long experience in teaching English and doing research in English. Then the data has been analyzed statistically by using Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS.

### **9. Foreign Language Oral Apprehension:**

Foreign language oral apprehension can be defined as the fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in a second or foreign language (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that FLA frequently shows up in listening and speaking activities, testing situations, and certain beliefs.

### **10. Factors Affecting Oral Apprehension among EFL Learners:**

Mezrigui (2012) states that EFL learners' oral apprehension is affected by the following factors:

#### **A. The Learning Environment:**

The environment plays a crucial role in helping the students to acquire the foreign language. Sandstrom (1996:115) argues that " A large number of systematic and thorough investigations recently have shown how great the importance of environment is to the development of language. The influence of the environment begins remarkably early and its effect lasts a long time".

According to Mezrigui (2012) one major reason behind oral apprehension is that learners are not sufficiently exposed to English either as spoken by native speakers or non-native speakers hence they do not live in an English –speaking environment and they are not given the chance to communicate with native speakers neither they are encouraged to practice English outside the classroom setting; even in the classroom , the amount of practicing English is not enough to the extent that it enables learners to be professional English users, as a matter of fact learners have only few English lessons per week, furthermore, when oral communication skills are presented in the classroom , teachers devote very little time to allow the students to communicate in comparison to the other communicative skills, in addition to that English examinations focus much more on reading and writing skills than on oral and aural skills (Miller,2001,25).

#### **B. Psychological Factors:**

Psychological factors are determined by the learners' internal thoughts. According to Mezrigui (2012) low- level students often feel frustrated when they are asked to be engaged in a particular learning

activity; they have no real interest in learning and no hope of improvement.

He also maintains that some students tend to have a passive role in the classroom setting; they participate in the oral activities reluctantly, they feel worried and anxious about communicating in English test they will be corrected by their peers as oral communication requires specific qualities such as talking fluently without hesitation or making long unnecessary pauses which makes oral communication difficult to develop unlike the other language skills.

Learners' lack of self-confidence could be the outcome of poor school results as when students get low marks in English examinations they feel disappointed and consequently they lose their self-confidence.

Lack of EFL learners' awareness of the importance of English language for their current and future needs may also pose some oral apprehension; students should try as possible as they can to achieve effective learning of the foreign language through formal instruction in the classroom and outside the learning setting. However, most EFL learners learn English as an academic subject and they are unaware of the importance of English for their future needs ( Mezrigui ,2012).

The main aim of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate orally effectively. However, communicating in a language that is not one's own mother- tongue can be difficult; speakers and listeners may share the same interest nevertheless, it is difficult for them to communicate satisfactorily using the foreign language (Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011).

Barna (1985) as quoted in Jeharsae (2012) mentions several factors that cause oral apprehension to EFL learners which include false assumptions, language differences and non-verbal misunderstanding.

Dabao and Martinez (2007) argue that a message is not well communicated in the target language due to lack of knowledge about lexical items and the purpose of listening to spoken language.

According to Khamkhien (2010) English oral apprehension for non-native speakers is due to insufficient English knowledge, limited experience with or exposure to English interaction, or lack of communicative competence.

Blosch and Starks (1999) claim that the main four factors of EFL oral apprehension are: total lack of understanding between the speaker and the listener, poor or insufficient vocabulary and use of idioms, distortion or misunderstanding of the message and inappropriate formulation of the message.

Mohamed (2007:222) declares that EFL learners' oral apprehension is attributed to the fact that most of the courses taught at universities focus on reading and writing whereas listening and speaking receive less than 6% of the total course weight, moreover, he states that there is always anxiety about the amount of oral practice that less students are getting during lectures. These students are generally reserved and reluctant to use English as many of them feel embarrassed and shy if they make a mistake when communicating in front of the whole class, furthermore, the interaction in classroom is usually dominated by the fluent students only.

Sahamat (1999:71) states that oral apprehension is attributed to socio-cultural awareness. He says " Cultural orientation has been found to be an increasingly important factor in language learning, furthermore, intercultural competence such as norms of interaction, social conventions and values, norms of social appropriateness, proved to be indispensable for the authentic and naturalistic flow of language being spoken or written", this suggests that communication apprehension may occur as a result of the variation of the culture between the source language and the target language.

Jimenez (2015) states that there are three aspects that affect the students' oral production negatively. First, lack of motivation that could be manifested in anxiety and students' low self-esteem. Second, 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 natural content to stimulate communication. Third, mother- tongue interference, as students and teachers tend to translate everything to the first language, they face the problem of thinking in EFL due to the lack of meaningful situations and real- life contexts developed in the class.

## **11. Effective Strategies for Developing Learners' Oral skills:**

### **A. The learning Environment:**

The learning environment includes the following:

#### ***1. Affective Learners:***

According to Mezrigui (2012) learners need to be acquainted with the reasons behind their oral production apprehension; the teacher may ask the students to list all the problems that they face during their learning process, doing so will help the students to be aware of the causes of oral apprehension and teachers can then examine their own teaching strategies and techniques to overcome such difficulties.

The teacher could also help the students to get rid of their psychological problems as has been previously stated , learners' low proficiency level in English leads to poor learning results , the teacher should raise the students' hopes about improvement and encourage them to maintain self-confidence.

Scarcella (1990:346) states that one way of helping the students to overcome the oral apprehension is by telling them that communication errors and difficulties are normal and can occur even when we use our own native language , he says "If learners realize that communication difficulties are a natural part of communication and affect everyone using any language , their importance will probably not be blown out of proportion".

The teacher should also encourage the students to talk freely without feeling worried or anxious about making mistakes.

#### ***2. Sensitizing Learners to the Importance of English:***

Parrot (1993:192) argues that "It is sometimes argued that oral communication develops naturally in response to a need to communicate".

The teacher should raise the students awareness about the importance of oral skills in the process of foreign language learning , this can be done directly or indirectly; the teacher may tell the students that English is the most important and widely used language in the world , it is essential in scientific research and scholarship , it is the acknowledged international language of science,

technology, business, and diplomacy and about a quarter of the world's population is fluent or competent in English(Crystal,2004).

Tarone and Yule (1987:49) state that " The use of English as an international language for communication is probably more common than ever before .It must now be regarded to be a regular occurrence that East-West interaction as between Japanese and Mexican businessmen for example, takes place in neither Japanese nor Spanish but English"

### ***3. Creating an English - Speaking Environment:***

EFL learners need to be exposed to English used in real-life situations, they need to be engaged and participate in communication in order to develop their oral communication skills, creating an English –speaking environment is effective for doing so; students should join English clubs where they can feel free to express their views and ideas, they can be asked to watch movies, plays, news, etc. then discuss what they have watched freely.

Scarcella (1990:347) declares that" Learners can also invite native speakers to their classes , so that they may discuss things related to the culture of the source and the target language".

### **B. Classroom Activities to Promote Oral Proficiency:**

Mezrigui (2012) argues that there are number of classroom activities that EFL learners need to develop:

#### ***1. Songs:***

It is often believed that what usually remain in the students' memories from school times are songs; in primary school students learn English alphabet through the alphabet song. Songs are useful ways for teaching language skills, such as pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, etc.

Listening to songs can help the students to develop their oral communication skills; before students listen to a song the teacher may tell them the name of the song and then he/she may ask them to guess what is the song about and whom is the audience it is written for; doing so will help the learners to speak the target language while singing after the singer which will encourage them to learn the song by heart.



Songs can help learners to speak the target language as native speakers do and familiarize them with the culture of the target language and hence develop their oral skills.

### ***2. Role-plays and Simulation:***

Kayi (2006) states that " Simulations are very similar to role-plays, but what makes simulations different from role-plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class (realia) to create more realistic environment".

In role-play and simulations, learners could be given some roles to act which would enable them to communicate in an effective dramatic way which in turn makes learning fun and easy.

### ***3. Memorization and Loud Reading:***

Nicholas (1989:33) argues that memorization and reading aloud are good ways of testing different aspects of spoken English such as pronunciation, intonation, stress and juncture and general fluency".

This suggests that memorization and loud reading are effective ways of developing students' oral skills.

This approach can be used to enhance oral proficiency, learners may be asked to make reports about events, incidents using their own experience in the classroom while using English; the teacher may take the students to a trip then students can discuss the event in the classroom while the teacher guides and monitors.

## **12. Previous related works:**

The following are some important studies that have investigated oral apprehension among EFL learners:

Ahmad (2018) made a study under the title" Oral Apprehension among English Senior Majors at Al-Quads Open University in Palestine" with the aim to investigate the degree of oral apprehension among English language students in Palestine. He used the descriptive approach and collected the data through the Personal Report of Apprehension Measurement (PRCAM) which was distributed to a sample of (64) English language seniors at Al-Quads Open University in Palestine. The findings of the study revealed that the degree of oral apprehension was moderate and there was no

significant difference in the performance of the students due to gender (male or female).

Al-Lawti (1995) made a study under the title "A Diagnostic Study of the Difficulties Encountered by Omani Secondary School Students in Their Oral Production of English" the results of the study showed that the linguistic domains ( vocabulary , grammar , pronunciation , and discourse) are the most difficult for the students to use appropriately ; teachers claimed that this problems are due to the fact that the curriculum does not provide enough opportunity for learning and practicing new vocabulary and speaking tasks besides the large number of the students in oral communication classes.

Cheekeong (2014) conducted a study entitled "Oral Apprehension of Yemeni High School EFL Students in Malaysia", the data was collected through a questionnaire and interviews, the results of the study revealed that the oral apprehension of Yemeni high school students could be categorized into three factors, firstly teachers neglect communication skills and pay more attention to grammar and they do not encourage the students to communicate in English in the classroom setting.

Secondly, the curriculum is not designed to promote and enhance oral communication. Thirdly, most of the students were not confident enough to use English as a medium of communication in and outside the classroom.

### **13. Data Analysis and Discussion:**

The questionnaire was mainly designed to investigate some of the causes of the oral apprehension that EFL learners face and to elicit some strategies that would enable them to develop their communicative competence. The questionnaire was given to 30 respondents who represent the teachers' community at Sudanese Universities.

**Table (1) the mean and standard deviation and chi-square values for the study Hypotheses:**

1. Oral apprehension can be attributed to different factors.
2. Teachers can help students to overcome oral apprehension by raising their awareness about the importance of oral communication for learning in general and the types of communication techniques to be adopted to improve their communication skills.

No.	Statement	mean	SD	Chi square	p-value
1	One major reason behind oral apprehension is that learners are not sufficiently exposed to English either as spoken by native speakers or non-native speakers and they are not given the chance to communicate with native speakers ; even in the classroom , the amount of practicing English is not enough to the extent that enables learners to be professional English users	3.6	.80	29	0.023
2	When oral skills are presented in the classroom, teachers devote very little time to allow the students to communicate in comparison to the other skills.	2.4	0.5	28	0.010
3	Students tend to have a passive role in the classroom setting; they participate in the oral activities reluctantly, they feel worried and anxious about communicating in English lest they will be corrected by their peers.	3.3	0.7	23	0.006
4	Lack of EFL learners of the awareness of the importance of English language for their current and future needs may also pose some oral apprehension.	2.5	3.8	15	0.046
5	Oral apprehension can occur due to insufficient English knowledge, limited experience with or exposure to English interaction, or lack of communicative competence.	3.4	2.5	22	0.000
6	Oral apprehension can be attributed to EFL learners' socio-cultural awareness, shyness, social anxiety and lack of motivation.	2.8	1.7	12	0.000
7	The teacher should raise the students' hopes about improvement and encourage them to maintain self-confidence.	2.4	1.9	12	0.000
8	The teacher should encourage the students to use the language freely without feeling worried or anxious about making mistakes.	2.5	2.6	17	0.000
9	EFL learners need to be exposed to English used in real-life situations, they need to be engaged and participate in communication in order to develop their oral communication skills.	2.9	1.6	20	0.023
10	Memorization and loud reading are effective ways of developing students' oral communication skills.	2.7	1.4	20	0.003
11	Role-play and simulations can help students to use the target language as native speakers do and familiarize them with the culture of the target language.	2.8	0.8	15	0.001
12	Teachers should use suitable materials and tasks that suit the level and the needs of the students in order to improve their communication skills.	2.5	0.7	17	0.010

It is clear from the above table that the calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in

the (12) statements are greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents. According to the above findings, we can say that EFL Sudanese university students face some oral apprehension so the hypotheses of the study are verified.

#### **14. Conclusion and Recommendations:**

According to the findings of the questionnaire which conveys the views of teachers about the problem of the study, EFL Sudanese university students face some oral apprehension due to many causes such as insufficient English knowledge, lack of socio-cultural awareness, psychological factors, limited experience or exposure to English interaction and lack of communicative competence.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following points:

- Teachers should raise the students' hopes about improvement and encourage them to maintain self-confidence
- Teacher should encourage the students to use the language freely without feeling worried or anxious about making mistakes
- EFL learners need to be exposed to English used in real-life situations, they need to be engaged and participate in oral skills in order to develop their oral communication skills.
- Role-play and simulations can help students to use the target language as native speakers do and familiarize them with the culture of the target language.
- Teachers should use suitable materials and tasks that suit the level and the needs of the students in order to improve their communication skills.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

1. Ahmed, M.(2018). Oral Apprehension among English Senior Majors at Al-Quads Open University in Palestine. *International Journal of Research in English Education*.
2. Al-Lawati, M.(1995). A Diagnostic Study of the Difficulties Encountered by Omani Secondary School Students in Their Oral Production of English. Unpublished M.A. Thesis. College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University.
3. Cheekeong, Y.(2014). Oral Problems of Yemeni High School EFL Students in Malaysia. *Journal of Applied Sciences*. Volume 14(24):3620-3626.
4. Crystal, D.(2004). *English as a Global Language*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
5. Douglas, H.(2000). *Principles of Language and Teaching*. Fourth edition. San Francisco State University.
6. Jeharsae, F.(2012). *English Oral Communication Problems and Strategies Used by Thai Employees in an International Workplace to Communicate with Native and Non-native English Speaking Customers*. Bangkok: Graduate School, Saiwaroon Chumpavan.
7. Jimenez, G.(2015). Three Communication Difficulties of EFL Students. *Revista De Lenguas Mooernas*, N 221-233.
8. Kayi, H.(2006). Teaching Speaking: Activities to Promote Speaking in Second Language, *The International TESL Journal*, XII(11).
9. Khamkhen, A.(2010). Thai Learners Pronunciation Competence: Lesson Learned from Word Stress Assignment. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, I(6),757-764.
10. Mezrigui, Y.(2012). *Communication Difficulties in Learners of English as a Foreign Language: Whys and Ways out*. Linguistics. University of Rennes.
11. Miller, L. (2001). Speaking Lesson: How to Make a Course Book more Interesting. *Modern English Teacher*,10(2),25-28.
12. Mohammed, M.(2007). *Maintaining English Language Interaction in Large Sudanese University Classes through Communicative Language Teaching*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis. University of Khartoum.
13. Nicholas, L.(1989). *Reading Aloud: Why, When and How*. *English Teaching Forum*,27(1),33-35.
14. Parrot, M.(1993). *Tasks for Language Teacher: A Resource Book for Training and Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
15. Richard, J.C.& Schmidt, H.(2002). *Longman Dictionary of Language and Applied Linguistics (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

16. Sahamat, N. (1999). Fluency and Accuracy in Spoken Language: Implications for Classroom Practice in Bilingual Context. University of Malaysia, Malaysia.
17. Sandstrom, C.(1996) The Psychology of Childhood and Adolescence.(Albert Read, Trans.).Middlesex: Penguin Book Ltd.
18. Scarcella, R.(1990). Communication Difficulties in Second- language Production, Development and Instruction: New York: New Burry House.
19. Somsai, S.& Intaraprasert, C.(2011). Strategies for Coping with Face-to-face Oral Communication Problems Employed by Thai University Students. GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies,11,83-96.
20. Tarone, E.,&Yule, G.(1987).Communication Strategies in East- West Interactions. In L.E. Smith (Ed.). Discourse Across Cultures: Strategies in World English. New York: Prentice Hall.