

## Investigating Oral Apprehension Encountered by EFL Sudanese Undergraduate Students

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### 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 diagnostic test for (50) Sudan University of Science and Technology third year students of English Language, in the Faculty of Languages. To analyze the data the researcher has used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).*

*The findings of the study revealed that EFL Sudanese university students encounter some oral apprehension; Students feel that they are unable to express their ideas in the foreign language due to their fear of making mistakes or shyness. Furthermore, when it comes to doing exercises based on oral skills, they perform very poorly. In light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommended that university textbooks need to include oral activities that satisfy the students communicative needs; in addition, teachers should encourage students to participate and express their ideas in English. Moreover, teachers need to raise the students' awareness about the importance of oral skills in the process of foreign language learning.*

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

## **1. INTRODUCTION:**

The ultimate goal of EFL learning is to be able to communicate effectively by using the foreign language and this is mainly achieved through understanding and speaking. Alhosni (2014) pointed out that oral communication is the active use of language to express meaning since it is the medium through which a new language is encountered, understood, practiced and learnt; this suggests that oral communication is the primary source of language learning hence to learn the language simply means to be able to speak it. According to Chadha (2003:6) oral communication has the following advantages: it saves time, it results in a quick and immediate feedback, it promotes better relations, it is more persuasive and it does not involve big expenditure.

Barrett (1973) states that in oral communication the speaker should be clear by using simple and precise language, he/she must show liveliness by using sense-appealing and figurative language, his/her language should be varied by using diversified and fresh language and he/she should be aware of acceptability which refers to the use of standard language in appropriate situations.

According to Mohammed (2007:23) speaking is the most important language skill but students of a foreign language will not learn to speak fluently only by listening to speech in the class, although this is very important for providing them with some necessary input and acquainting them with certain forms and the flow of authentic speech as well as for giving them the chance to practice in the receptive side of communication.

EFL learners encounter some difficulties when they communicate in English.

In this paper the researcher investigates oral apprehension encountered by Sudanese undergraduate Students.

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

The researcher has noticed that the teaching of English at Sudanese schools dispenses towards augmenting grammar rules and vocabulary at the expense of oral skills as a result Sudanese undergraduate students face numerous serious deficiencies in oral communication, they are also hindered by their natural shyness to communicate in

English among their peers , Furthermore, when it comes to doing exercises based on oral skills, they are observed to be very poor performers, resulting in comparatively poor achievement, too.

So, the researcher finds it important to explore these oral hurdles with the intention of suggesting the appropriate rectifications.

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

This study is carried out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To shed light on oral apprehension that face EFL Sudanese university students.
2. To suggest some suitable solutions to overcome these oral skills problems.

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

The following research questions formed the basis of the study:

1. To what extent do EFL Sudanese university students face difficulties with oral skills?
2. How do EFL Sudanese university students perform when they are asked to do exercises based on oral skills?

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

1. EFL Sudanese university students face some difficulties with oral skills as the teaching of English at Sudanese schools dispenses towards augmenting grammar rules and vocabulary at the expense of oral skills.
2. EFL Sudanese university students perform poorly when they are asked to do exercises based on oral skills and are hindered by their natural shyness to communicate in English among their peers.

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

This study is significant for a number of reasons:

It contributes to the existing literature in the field of teaching oral skills.

Teachers will have a better understanding of their students' oral apprehension and examine their own teaching techniques and materials, accordingly.

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 skills.

### **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 study is to investigate oral apprehension among EFL Sudanese university students, to achieve this goal, and in an attempt to answer the research questions, the data has been collected through using a diagnostic test which was administered to (50) Sudan University third year students. Then the data has been analyzed statistically by using the Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS.

### **9. Oral Communication Skills:**

Lane (2010) states that oral communication concerns with the use of words to create and convey meaning in order to enable the speakers to define, classify, and express beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings.

Jeharsae (2012:22) argues that in order to create effective communication skills, an individual should regularly improve his/her existing language skills and develop the following characteristics:

1. An understanding of the principles of language; knowing how to use the grammar correctly, to pronounce correctly, and to use vocabulary appropriately.
2. An understanding of the meaning of words and their proper usage (word choice selection).
3. The ability to deliver a message clearly, accurately and directly.
4. Having a pleasant voice or good quality, which involves attention to volume, speed and clarity.
5. Having good listening skills, such as listening carefully and paying attention to the needs of the speaker.
6. Having confidence, a relaxed style, and the ability to adapt the message to fit the needs of the listener.

## **10. Types of Oral Communication:**

The following are the different types of oral communication:

### **A. Conversation:**

Hornby (1995:254) argues that conversation is informal talk that involves two or more people. EFL learners have to use conversations as a technique to develop their oral skills.

Ur (2001:4) states that encouraging oral skills among EFL learners can be achieved through conversations , he says" One conventional way of improving EFL learners' oral skills is the conversation class, where a group of students sit down together with the teacher- a native speaker if they are lucky- and are required to talk with him/her ,so the first thing to do is to bring interesting subjects off conversations to the classroom".

### **B. Formal Speech:**

According to Chadha (2003), the most difficult type of oral communication is formal speech hence most people feel uncomfortable when they are asked to speak formally in front of audience ; they tend to feel worried and anxious and they cannot easily overcome "stage fright".

EFL learners often feel worried and anxious when they are asked to communicate in English lest they would be corrected by their classmates.

### **C. Classroom Interaction:**

EFL learners need a good environment in order to interact and practice English. Osman (2003:4) states that the classroom is a unique social environment with its own human activities and its own conventions that govern these interaction activities.

Johnson (1998) claims that the nature of classroom communication has different shapes , starting from speech events , participation structures, the nature of the teacher's talk , student-teacher interaction and the effect of cultural factors on classroom communication.

#### **D. Meeting:**

EFL learners need to learn and master the skills of participating in a meeting in order to enhance their oral skills.

According to Deverell (1974) organization, documentation, conduct and administration of meetings are forms of communication that learners need to apply as a part of their communication classes.

#### **E. Interview:**

Deverell (1974:115) claims that students need to know the skills needed for successful interviews as nearly everybody applies interviewing to different matters such as getting and giving information on specific topics.

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

Tuan and Mai (2015) stated that there are some factors that affect oral skills which teachers may encounter when teaching communication in EFL classrooms; they are inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low or uneven participation, mother tongue- use and poor listening practice.

#### **Inhibition:**

Inhibition occurs when students feel that they are unable to express their ideas in the foreign language due to their fear of making mistakes or shyness. Kouicem (2010) declared that "Learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom , worried about making mistakes , fearful of criticism or loosing face , or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts" (p.37).

#### **Lack of Topical Knowledge:**

Students usually tend to remain silent when teachers ask them to communicate in the foreign language hence they feel that they have very little or nothing to say, this may be attributed to the fact that these students are not motivated and confident enough to express themselves or they lack linguistic proficiency that would enable them to discuss a certain topic.

Bygate (1987) pointed out that "The teacher may have chosen a topic which is uncongenial to him , the learner , or about which he

knows very little , and as a result, he has nothing to express, whether in the native language or in the foreign language" (P.34).

This problem is the result of lack of practicing the target language as learners may have their own ideas but they are unable to use vocabulary and grammatical structures appropriately.

Baker and Wertrup (2003) as quoted in Ahmadi (2017) claimed that it is very difficult for learners to answer when teachers ask them to tell things in a foreign language because they have little opinions about what to say, which vocabulary to apply, or how to use grammar accurately.

### **Low or Uneven Participation:**

According to Kouicem (2010) the participation in foreign language depends on the learner's personality which should be known by the teacher.

Low or uneven participation is often due to the teachers' ignorance of motivational techniques, moreover, speaking classes are usually dominated by active students while others talk very little or never speak.

### **Mother-tongue Use:**

When learners possess the same mother- tongue, they use it when they are asked to discuss a topic as it is easier for them to express their ideas using their mother tongue.

According to Hammer (1991) there are some reasons why learners use mother-tongue in their communication classes. The first reason is that when teachers ask their students to talk about a topic that they do not have enough knowledge about, they will try to use their own language; the second reason is the application of mother-tongue is very natural for learners to use. If teachers do not urge their students to talk in English, students will automatically use their first language to explain something to their classmates.

### **Poor Listening Practice:**

Boussida (2010) maintained that students who face problems in decoding messages in the target language believe that the main reason behind this inability is their weakness in vocabulary and inability to form well-structured sentences.

The primary source of this problem is the teacher as teachers teach each skill independently; they do not tell the students that listening skill plays an important role in enhancing speaking skills.

In addition to the above factors, Rababa'h (2005) declared that there are other factors that can cause oral apprehension for EFL learners, some of them are related to the learners themselves, the teaching strategies, the curriculum and the teaching and learning environment.

### **13. Previous related works:**

Mohammed (2017) made a study under the title " Investigating Oral Apprehension Encountered by EFL learners in Sudanese Secondary schools", the study adopted analytical descriptive method, the data has been collected through two tools; a diagnostic test for (40) secondary school students and a questionnaire for (40) secondary school teachers. The results of the study revealed that EFL Sudanese secondary school students face some difficulties when they are asked to perform exercises based on oral skills, the syllabus does not include enough oral skills exercises.

Majid et al. (2008) did a study on Iranian EFL students entitled" Testing Oral Language Proficiency of University EFL Students". They chose a sample of eighty students from the University of Masjed Soleyman in Iran according to their availability and their successful passing of conversation, the results of the study showed that the performance of the students in comprehension, vocabulary and structure was better than their performance in oral communication skills as most of the students felt hesitant and their oral production was discontinued.

Abdellah (2002) made a study under the title " Sudanese EFL Learner's Oral Communication Problems" with the aim to investigate the problems that face Sudanese EFL learners when they communicate orally in English and the causes of such problems. The data has been collected through two tools: the interview and class observation. The study findings have shown that the main problems that face Sudanese EFL learners in oral communication are problems of pronunciation, weakness of speaking skills, difficulty in communication and lack of fluency, these problems were attributed to different factors such as shyness of the students to speak in English,



influence of mother-tongue interference, lack of practice speaking in English , the negative effect of the Arabic environment , the shortage of native English language teachers in Sudan and poor teaching methods and strategies.

**14. Data Analysis and Discussion:**

In this study a diagnostic test was given to (50) Sudan University third year student to collect the data, the main purpose of this test was to investigate the oral apprehension that encounter EFL learners in both formal and informal settings.

**Hypotheses of the study:**

1. EFL Sudanese university students face some difficulties with oral skills as the teaching of English at Sudanese schools dispenses towards augmenting grammar rules and vocabulary at the expense of oral skills.
2. EFL Sudanese university students perform poorly when they are asked to do exercises based on oral skills and are hindered by their natural shyness to communicate in English among their peers and their background knowledge.

**Rate the given scenarios according to their relevance to the study and clarity of construction.**

**Table (1) shows the frequency distribution of the social variables associated with the situations in all scenarios:**

	Social status between interlocutors		Social distance		Degree of imposition	
	high	Low	high	Low	high	Low
Scenario ( 1 )	17	33	18	32	20	30
Scenario ( 2 )	22	28	25	25	15	35
Scenario ( 3 )	12	38	12	38	15	35
Scenario ( 4 )	23	27	24	26	34	16
Scenario ( 5 )	14	36	20	30	31	19
Scenario ( 6 )	11	39	15	35	14	36
Scenario ( 7 )	15	35	15	35	15	25
Scenario ( 8 )	32	18	34	16	23	27
Scenario ( 9 )	32	18	31	19	17	23
Scenario (10 )	11	39	14	36	26	24
Scenario (11 )	14	26	15	25	12	38
Scenario (12 )	25	25	25	25	23	27
Scenario (13 )	25	25	24	26	15	35
Scenario (14 )	33	17	33	17	11	39
Scenario (15 )	23	27	25	25	17	33

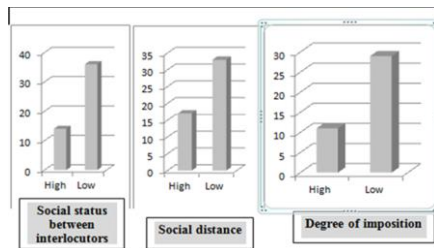
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<b>Scenario (16)</b>	17	23	17	23	22	28
<b>Scenario (17)</b>	26	24	26	24	12	38
<b>Scenario (18)</b>	12	38	20	30	23	27
<b>Scenario (19)</b>	23	27	23	27	14	36
<b>Scenario (20)</b>	15	35	15	35	11	39

From the above table it's clear that the number of low scores in Social status between interlocutors is greater than the high scores , and also at the Social distance and Degree of imposition this mean oral apprehension exists among the subjects of the study as can be seen in the test analysis.

**Table (2) shows the means of the social variables**

Variable	High	Low	Total
Social status between interlocutors	14	36	50
Social distance	17	33	50
Degree of imposition	21	29	50
<b>Total average</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>50</b>



The above table and figures represent a summary of all the related data to the sociable variables which demonstrates clearly that low levels of sociable variables are greater than the higher ones.

Scenario	mean	SD	Chi square	p-value
1	2.8	3.4	25	0.00
2	2.5	1.5	19	0.00
3	2.4	0.9	31	0.00
4	2.9	1.6	25	0.03
5	2.6	0.7	36	0.00
6	2.8	0.6	22	0.00
7	2.5	1.4	17	0.00
8	2.0	0.6	24	0.00
9	3.2	3.5	33	0.001
10	3.1	4	22	0.00
11	2.7	4.1	22	0.00
12	2.6	0.5	19	0.00

13	2.5	0.9	31	0.00
14	2.9	1.6	22	0.00
15	2.7	1.5	23	0.008
16	2.8	2.1	27	0.00
17	2.7	1.5	29	0.00
18	2.6	0.5	34	0.00
19	2.4	1.6	27	0.00
20	2.9	2.7	23	0.00

It is obvious from the above table that he calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondent's answers in the (20) **Scenarios** is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents.

**Table (4) : the mean and percentage of the kind of answers in part (2)**

Kind of answer	The mean	The percentage %
Confident students answers	45	37.5%
Hesitant students answers	34	28.3%
Shy students answers	23	19.2%
Apprehended students answers	18	15%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

It's clear from the above table that most students have confident answers, the mean of those was (45) students with percentage (37.5%).The mean of the students who select the hesitant answers were (34), with percentage (28.3%). The mean of the students who select the shy answers was (23), with percentage (19.2%). The mean of the students who selected the apprehended answers was (18), with percentage (15%).

**Table (5): the mean and percentage of the kind of answers in part (3):**

: Kind of answer	The mean	The percentage %
Confident answers	47	39.2%
Hesitant answers	32	26.7%
Shy answers	26	21.6%
Apprehended answers	15	12.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

It's clear from the above table that most students have confident answers, the mean of those was (47) students with percentage (39.2%). The mean of the students who selected the hesitant answers were (32), with percentage (26.7%). The mean of the students who select the shy answers were (26), with percentage (21.6%). The mean of the students who selected the apprehended answers was (15), with percentage (12.5%).

**Table ( 6 ) one sample T-TEST for the three parts of the test**

part	N	mean	SD	t-value	DF	p-value
1	10	3.6	0.2	12.6	9	0.00
2	10	2.7	1.81	7.4	9	0.00
3	10	3.4	2.44	8.12	9	0.00
<b>For all</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6.33</b>	<b>4.03</b>	<b>15.50</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0.00</b>

The calculated value of T – TEST for the significance of the differences for the respondent's answers in the three parts is greater than the tabulated value of T – TEST at the degree of freedom (9 ) and the significant value level (0.05%) which indicates that, there is statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents .

On the basis of these findings we can conclude that the two hypotheses of this study are verified.

### **15. Conclusion and Recommendations:**

The results of the study revealed that the highest percentage of the students faces the following problems:

- Students feel that they are unable to express their ideas in the foreign language due to their fear of making mistakes or shyness.
- Students usually tend to remain silent when teachers ask them to communicate in the foreign language hence they feel that they have very little or nothing to say, this may be attributed to the fact that these students are not motivated and confident enough to express themselves or they lack linguistic proficiency that would enable them to discuss a certain topic.

- It is very difficult for learners to answer when teachers ask them to tell things in a foreign language because they have little opinions about what to say, which vocabulary to apply, or how to use grammar accurately.
- Students who face problems in decoding messages in the target language believe that the main reason behind this inability is their weakness in vocabulary and inability to form well-structured sentences.

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

- University textbooks need to include oral activities that satisfy the students' communicative needs.
- Teachers should encourage students to participate and express their ideas in English rather than to insist on accuracy.
- Teachers should motivate and train the students to communicate in English in the classroom setting rather than using their mother-tongue.
- Teachers should raise the students' attention to the importance of oral communication in language development.

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