



SUDAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
COLLEGE OF LANGUAGES
INVESTIGATING TEACHERS' VIEWS AND PERCEPTIONS
ABOUT ORAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AMONG
EFL SUDANESE POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate oral communication apprehension encountered by EFL Sudanese post -graduate 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 communication apprehension. In the light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that teachers should be trained to recognize the presence of communication apprehension and provide extra reinforcement for communication. In addition, teachers should motivate their learners , reduce anxiety , stimulate students' self-esteem , maintain good learning environment which includes the teacher's methodology and classroom environment and social context in order to stimulate oral communication skills. Furthermore, EFL learners should be

aware about the importance of oral communication for their current and future needs.

Key words: Foreign language learning, oral communication , oral communication apprehension.

المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة لتقصي مخاوف الاتصال الشفوي لدى طلاب الدراسات العليا السودانيين في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية , استخدمت الباحثة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي و جمعت البيانات بواسطة الاستبانة التي وزعت علي (30) معلماً للغة الإنجليزية بالجامعات السودانية, استخدمت الباحثة برنامج الحزم الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعيه لتحليل البيانات. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن الطلاب يواجهون بعض المخاوف في الاتصال الشفوي . بناء على تلك النتائج فإن الباحثة توصي بأنه ينبغي تدريب المعلمين على التعرف على وجود مخاوف التواصل وتقديم تعزيز إضافي للتواصل. بالإضافة الى ذلك , ينبغي على المعلمين تحفيز المتعلمين وتقليل القلق وتحفيز الثقة بالنفس لدى الطلاب, وتوفير بيئة تعليمية جيدة تشمل على منهجية التدريس وبيئة الفصل الدراسي والسياق الاجتماعي من اجل تحفيز مهارات الاتصال الشفوي. علاوة لى ذلك, يجب على معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة اجنبية أن يكونوا على دراية بأهمية الاتصال الشفوي لإحتياجاتهم الحالية والمستقبلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : تعلم اللغة الأجنبية, التواصل الشفوي, مخاوف التواصل الشفوي

1.Introduction

It is widely recognized that graduates entering the world of work require more than academic knowledge of their chosen discipline as they need a diverse range of non-technical competence and, in particular, they must be effective communicators (Mitchell et. al., 2010). The relationship between oral communication and job success has motivated many colleges and universities to introduce courses to enhance their students' oral communication skills. Charlesworth (2008) stated that graduates in various fields should be competent in communication skills in order to succeed in their workplace tasks effectively

Mitchell et. al., (2010) declared that there is increasing recognition that students' failure to develop appropriate oral communication skills may not be due to the quality of relevant education and training programmes but the

individual may experience a range of fears concerning oral and/or written communication tasks or situations which may inhibit the development of the requisite skills(p.76).

EFL students find oral difficulties in oral communication due to the fact that the language is primarily taught in a foreign language context where students have limited access to it outside the classroom setting.

2. Statement of the problem

The researcher has noticed that EFL post –graduate students encounter some difficulties in conveying ideas clearly and accurately orally, they experience fear of making mistakes in oral communication as a result of correction and the negative evaluation ,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 comprehension skills such as public speaking, meetings, group talking and oral presentations , they are observed to be very poor performers, resulting in comparatively poor achievement, too.

Oral communication has been reported to be challenging by various researchers such as (Soomro et. al., 2019; Kakepoto, 2012 .Mustapha et. al. 2010) they found that EFL students preferred group discussions as they were less apprehension-provoking than engaging in dialogues and speeches. So, the researcher finds it important to explore these oral communication hurdles with the intention of suggesting the appropriate rectifications.

3.Objectives of the Study

The study is carried out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To highlight the causes of oral communication apprehension that face EFL Sudanese post-graduate students .
- 2.To suggest some suitable solutions to overcome oral communication apprehension among EFL Sudanese post-graduate students.

4. Questions of the Study

The following research questions formed the basis of the study:

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

5. Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses are postulated:

1. Oral communication 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:

It contributes to the existing literature in the field of oral communication apprehension.

Teachers could have a better understanding of their students oral communication 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 communication skills.

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 communication apprehension encountered by EFL Sudanese post-graduate students during the academic year (2022-2023).

8. Methodology of the Study

As has been mentioned, the purpose of this research is to investigate oral apprehension among EFL Sudanese post-graduate 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. Oral Communication

According to Lane(2010) that oral communication is mainly concerned with the use of words to create and convey meaning in order to enable the speakers to define, classify, express beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings(p.54).

Jeharsae(2012:P.54) stated that in order to create effective communication skills an individual should regularly improve their existing language skills and develop the following characteristics:

1. An understanding of the principles of language; knowing how to use the grammar correctly, pronounce correctly, and use vocabulary appropriately.
2. An understanding of the meaning of words and their proper usage (word choice selection).
3. The ability to deliver the message clearly, accurately and directly.
4. Having a pleasant voice or good quality, this 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. Communication Apprehension

McCroskey (1977:P.32) defined communication apprehension as an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. According to Spielberg (1983) communication apprehension means the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system(P.65).

EFL learners who are apprehensive about participating in actual communication situations are less able to communicate effectively. On the contrary, EFL learners with high levels of communication apprehension are afraid to speak and communicate, and therefore naturally avoid doing so (Scovel, 1991) .

11.The Importance of Oral Communication Skills

Oral communication is one of the most important skills that EFL learners need to develop and enhance in order to communicate effectively.

According to Ur (1996:P.54) oral communication is the most important of all the language skills because individuals who learn a language are referred to as the speakers of that language.

Efrizal (2012:P.32) pointed out that oral communication is of great significance for people's interaction as they communicate wherever and whenever since it is the method of expressing ideas orally.

Oral communication is of vital significance as it involves the integration of the other language skills since it helps students to develop their vocabulary, grammar, reading, pronunciation and writing.

Mastering oral communication skills help students to express their ideas and feelings hence oral communication plays a crucial part outside the learning setting as it helps learners to communicate effectively which in turn helps them to get better education , finding better jobs and getting

promotion(Baker and Wretsup ,2003) .Kouicem(2010) supported this idea by saying that " A student who can communicate well in English may have greater chance for further education of finding employment and gaining proportion".

Despite its importance in EFL classes, oral communication has long been somewhat neglected in schools and universities since much attention is given to grammar, reading and vocabulary, what's more is that universities do not test their students' oral communication skills objectively (Clifford, 1987), besides that learners do not have enough opportunities to practice communication in or outside classroom setting and teachers do not consider oral communication skills important part of their text books and exams.

12. Causes of Oral Communication Apprehension

McCroskey (1977:P:32) stated that oral communication apprehension is an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. Each individual has a unique level of apprehension concerning real or anticipated communication which results in a number of individual differences such as effectiveness of, amount of, and desire for, communication (Richmond & McCroskey, 1998).

When confronted with communication activities, individuals who demonstrate high levels of anxiety towards oral communication report fear, tension, or physical symptoms (such as increased heart rate and sweating) (Beatty & Dobos, 1997).

Researchers acknowledge that an individual's environment affects oral communication apprehension, but they consider that the genetic dimension (nature) is also significant. Beatty et. al. (1998) considered the relationship may be 80/20 in favour of genetics whereas some social learning theorists give more weight to the environment and would put the relationship at 40/60 or 50/50 (Beatty & Dobos, 1997).

Carey & DiLalla (1994) asserted this view and suggested that the question is no longer whether nature or nurture shapes human development but rather how these complex influences act together to form specific outcomes.

Katz (2017) reported the reasons for students in experiencing communication apprehension in public speaking. These include worries to make mistake, to look stupid by others, or be judged unattractive.

According to Cooper et al. (1995), there is no enough and accurate information about the causes of communication apprehension, some researchers have tried to seek possible explanation. They stated the following explanations:

(1) Physical inception elements such as social ability, physical appearance, body shape, and coordination and motor abilities which may contribute to the development of communication apprehension.

(2) It is essential to develop social interaction skills within the young learners to prevent them from experiencing communication apprehension later.

(3) Providing model is also required; there is a bigger possibility that a child will formulate communication apprehension on daily basis, which emerges from parents who also suffer from communication apprehension.

(4) The theory of reinforcement is used to expose apprehension. When a child obtains profound reinforcement, the child will receive communicating rewarding and vice versa. Quietness, shyness, and reticence are general personality traits which frequently precipitate communication apprehension.

Friedman (1980) stated that shyness or reticence occurs when the process of verbalizing limits the ability and desire to participate in discussions. The level of shyness, or range of situations that it affects, differs greatly from individual to individual. According to McCroskey (1980) and Bond (1984), there are seven reasons that could lead to a quiet student , they are:

(1) Low intellectual skills.

(2) Speech skill deficiencies.

(3) Voluntary social introversion.

- (4) Social alienation.
- (5) Communication anxiety.
- (6) Low social self-esteem.
- (7) Ethnical/cultural divergence in communication norms.

Another generally accepted explanation for the cause of communication apprehension is the Negative Cognitive Appraisal Model (Glaser, 1981). The model assumes that the quiet child was criticized for his or her early language performance. The impact is that the child learned to anticipate negative reactions and avoid them by keeping quiet. Even if teachers, parents, or other children simply stop reacting negatively to such a child's talk, the child will perform poorly and avoid oral communication situations (Bond, 1984).

13. Previous Related Studies

Ernesto (2019) conducted "Factors Contributing To Oral Communication Apprehension Among Selected Senior High School Students". This study examined how oral communication apprehension (OCA) is evident among selected EFL students in English classrooms. It identified underlying factors, both internal and external, which contribute to the existence of oral speech anxiety. Using a mixed methods approach with three methods of analysis: a) written interview through an open-ended questionnaire; b) McCroskey's PROCRA; and c) Duncan ANOVA to determine the significant differences. Findings showed that most of the SHS students were moderately apprehensive to use English when communicating during oral presentations, meetings, group discussions, and public speaking. Through factor analysis, the contributing factors were identified and labeled as personal expectations, and rejection, verbal fluency, regional and cultural reference, previous unpleasant experience, training and exposures, self-evaluation, socio-economic status, word pronunciation and content, personal competencies, audience, teacher evaluation and peer influence. The results also revealed that there were significant differences among nine identified factors when they were grouped according to their OCA level. However, there were no

differences in the other factors - audience, verbal fluency and pronunciation, socio-economic status, and word enunciation and content.

Saeki, et.al(2020) studied "An Acoustic Study of Communication Apprehension during English Oral Presentations by Japanese University Students".

This study investigated the influence of communication apprehension and anxiety in second-language (L2) learning on oral performance of Japanese university students in terms of F0 (fundamental frequency) analysis. The participants were English-major students (3 males and 6 females) who presented at an oral communication festival for university students. The F0 analysis consisted of a mean F0 and F0 range. The participants' utterances were digitized and analysed with *Praat*. Participants also completed two structured closed-ended questionnaires: a Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) and a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). One subscale of PRCA is Speech Anxiety (SA) that measures apprehension in public speaking. Acoustic analysis of F0 was conducted of the utterances provided by the students and their F0 data during rehearsal and the actual performance settings. The results revealed a significant difference in mean F0 between the rehearsal and actual performance. Mean F0 was significantly correlated with SA. These results suggested that students tend to show higher speech anxiety during the actual performance setting that is also reflected by a higher speaking.

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).

14. Data Analysis and Discussion

The questionnaire was mainly designed to investigate some of the causes of the oral apprehension that EFL learners face EFL Sudanese post-graduate students and to elicit some of the solutions to overcome oral communication apprehension. 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 Hypothesis: Oral communication apprehension can be attributed to different factors.

No.	Statements	mean	SD	Chi square	p-value
1	The amount of students' practice and the students' mental status are among the factors that contribute to difficulties in oral communication	2.4	.50	28	0.010
2	EFL learners have only few English lessons per week, in addition, 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, moreover, English examinations focus much more on reading and writing skills than on oral and aural skills	2.5	3.8	15	0.006
3	Students' failure to develop appropriate oral communication skills may not be due to the quality of relevant education and training programmes but the learner may experience a range of fears concerning oral communication tasks or situations which may inhibit the development of the requisite skills	2.8	1.7	12	0.000

4	Oral communication has long been somewhat neglected in schools and universities ;universities do not test their students' oral communication skills objectively	3.6	.50	22	0.000
5	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 enables learners to be professional English users	2.6	.50	22	0.036
6	EFL 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	3.4	-.50	28	0.010
7	Lack of EFL learners’ awareness of the importance of English language for their current and future needs may also pose some oral communication apprehension; most EFL learners learn English as an academic subject and they are unaware of the importance of English for their future needs	2.4	.50	28	0.010
8	False assumptions, language differences and non-verbal misunderstanding may lead to oral communication apprehension	3.6	.80	29	0.023

	among EFL learners				
9	English oral apprehension for non-native speakers is due to insufficient English knowledge, limited experience , lack of exposure to English interaction and lack of communicative competence	3.3	.70	23	0.006
10	EFL learners are 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, besides, the interaction in classroom is usually dominated by the fluent students only	3.4	2.5	33	0000
11	Cultural orientation has been found to be an increasingly important factor in oral communication apprehension, in addition, 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 communication elements	2.9	4.8	34	0.000
12	Lack of motivation , anxiety , students' low self-esteem , the learning environment which includes the teacher's methodology and classroom environment, speaking social context do not provide natural content to stimulate oral communication skills	2.9	.70	32	0.023
13	EFL learners use mother-tongue in their speaking classes when they	3.6	.80	22	0.023

	are asked to talk about a topic that they do not have enough knowledge about and teachers tend to translate everything into the first language, as a result EFL learners face the problem of thinking in EFL due to the lack of meaningful situations and real- life contexts developed in the class				
14	EFL students face problems in decoding messages in the target language believe that the main reason behind their inability is their weakness in vocabulary and inability to form well-structured sentences	3.3	.70	23	0.006
15	Shyness, and reticence are general personality traits which frequently lead to oral communication apprehension	3.3	.70	23	0.006

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 (15) 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 post-graduate students face some oral communication apprehension because of the above factors, so the first hypothesis of the study is verified.

Study Hypothesis Two:

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.

No.	Statements	mean	SD	Chi square	p-value
1	The best treatment for oral communication apprehension should be a combination of behavioural and pedagogical interventions in a supportive and positive environment	2.4	1.9	12	0.00
2	Anxiety in the classroom can be moderated by manipulating the context (interpersonal, group, classroom, and public speaking), by motivating students, and by making the tasks more friendly , and teaching techniques should help students handle apprehension feelings	2.5	2.6	17	0.00
3	Teachers should teach each skill independently; they should tell the students that listening skill plays an important role in enhancing communication skills	2.4	2.4	13	0.00
4	EFL students should have interest in the topic so they could have the impetus to prepare for whatever oral activities they will do hence they encounter problems with the terms and ideas relevant to the topic, which lead to lack of personal attachment and relevant knowledge about the major topic	3	.80	25	0.03
5	EFL students must undergo training and skills development to sharpen their oral communication skills because they experience difficulties in communicating in English including frequent stammering and stuttering while speaking, and sudden pausing	2.9	1.6	20	0.00

	when see difficult English words				
6	English language proficiency should include confidence, knowledge on guidelines, eloquence and fluency on the use of the language	2.4	1.9	12	0.00
7	It is essential to develop social interaction skills within young learners to prevent them from experiencing communication apprehension later	2.5	1.4	17	0.00
8	Responsiveness training could help individuals learn how to speak confidently regardless of the non-verbal cues they may perceive or receive from the audience	2.7	2.6	15	0.00
9	EFL learners with slow language development or deficient speech skills should receive help as early as possible so that they do not lose positive reinforcement as a result of deficient skills	2.8	.80	20	0.001
10	Teachers should be trained to recognize the presence of communication apprehension and provide extra reinforcement for young learners' communication, particularly in the early school years	2.5	.70	21	0.008

From the above table, it is obvious that the calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in the (10) statements is 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, so the second hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

15. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the findings of the questionnaire which conveys the views of teachers about the problem of the study, EFL Sudanese post-graduate students face serious problems in oral communication due to many causes such as the following:

- They have only few English lessons per week, in addition, 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, moreover, English examinations focus much more on reading and writing skills than on oral and aural skills.
- The amount of students' practice and the students' mental status are some of the factors that contribute to difficulties in oral communication hence EFL students need to have a great effort to enable to communicate in English.
- Students' failure to develop appropriate oral communication skills is not due to the quality of relevant education and training programmes but the learner may experience a range of fears concerning oral communication tasks or situations which may inhibit the development of the requisite skills.
- Oral communication has long been somewhat neglected in schools and universities since much attention is given to grammar, reading and vocabulary, in addition, universities do not test their students' oral communication skills objectively.
- 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 enables learners to be professional English users.
- Lack of EFL learners' awareness of the importance of English language for their current and future needs pose some oral communication 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.

- EFL learners are 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.
- Lack of motivation , anxiety , students' low self-esteem , the learning environment which includes the teacher's methodology and classroom environment, speaking social context do not provide natural content to stimulate oral communication skills .
- EFL learners use mother-tongue in their speaking classes when they are asked to talk about a topic that they do not have enough knowledge about and teachers tend to translate everything into the first language, as a result EFL learners face the problem of thinking in EFL due to the lack of meaningful situations and real- life contexts developed in the class.
- Shyness, and reticence are general personality traits which frequently lead to oral communication apprehension.

According to the responses of the teachers to the questionnaire, the following are some suggestions to overcome oral communication apprehension among EFL Sudanese post-graduate students:

- EFL students must undergo training and skills development to sharpen their oral communication skills as they experience difficulties in communicating in English including frequent stammering and stuttering while speaking, and sudden pausing when see difficult English words.
- English language proficiency should include confidence, knowledge on guidelines, eloquence and fluency on the use of the language.
- EFL learners with slow language development or deficient speech skills should receive help as early as possible so that they do not lose positive reinforcement as a result of deficient skills.

- Students should try to interact with English skills activities in the classroom to be active learners.
- It is essential to develop social interaction skills within young learners to prevent them from experiencing communication apprehension later.
- Teachers should be trained to recognize the presence of communication apprehension and provide extra reinforcement for young learners' communication, particularly in the early school years.
- Teachers should use materials that suit the level of the students, needs, interest and background knowledge in order to enhance their students' oral communication skills.

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