

## Problems of Teaching and Learning Spoken English in Sudan

Mohamed Eltayeb Abdalla - Elhadi Nasr Elhadi Mustafa

<sup>1,2</sup> Sudan University of Science and Technology College of Graduate Studies

### **Abstract :**

This paper investigates the problems and challenges of teaching spoken English in Sudan and its importance in the professional life and academic promotion of teachers. It also tackles the problems of learning spoken English on the part of students. The writer uses a questionnaire addressed to 30 English language teachers from the African Council Basic and Secondary schools in Khartoum North. The data was statistically analyzed by the SPSS program. The findings of this paper indicate that there are major problems that hinder Sudanese students from speaking English. Among these are low income of most learners; lack of the target language environment; under-qualified teachers; inappropriate teaching materials; improper teaching methods; and some psychological factors that hinder students when they speak such as lack of motivation. The study provides some recommendations to tackle these problems and enhance the processes of teaching and learning spoken English in Sudan. These are concerned with developing materials, teachers and learners through steps taken by the educational authorities.

### **المستخلص:**

تتقصى هذه الدراسة مشكلات تدريس اللغة الانجليزية المنطوقة و تعلمها في السودان و أهميتها في الحياة العملية و التطور الأكاديمي لدى الدارسين. تعتمد الدراسة في الأساس على استبانة جمعت من خلالها البيانات المطلوبة من ثلاثين مدرساً يعملون في مدارس المجلس الإفريقي الأساسية و الثانوية بالخرطوم بحري. و قد حلت البيانات باستخدام برنامج (SPSS). و تشير النتائج الى ان هنالك مشكلات اساسية تعيق الطلبة السودانيين عن تحدث اللغة الإنجليزية. تشمل هذه المشاكل تدني دخل الفرد لدى معظم الدارسين و انعدام البيئة الملائمة لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية و عدم كفاءة المدرسين و ضعف المواد التدريسية و عدم ملائمة مناهج التدريس بالإضافة للعوامل النفسية مثل عدم الدافعية و غيرها. تقدم الدراسة بعض التوصيات لمعالجة هذه المشكلات و تطوير عمليتي تدريس و اللغة الإنجليزية المنطوقة و تحدثها في السودان. هذه التوصيات تعنى بتطوير المواد التدريسية و المدرسين و الدارسين من خلال خطوات تتخذها السلطات التعليمية.

### **INTRODUCTION :**

Speech is a great blessing. People use a language as a medium of communication. English language is one of these languages. It is the most widely spoken language in the world. A great number of non-English language speakers as well as native speakers use English as an important medium of international communication all over the world. English is no longer the language used in English speaking countries; rather it is internationally used. No developing country can ignore the role of spoken English in improving its international profile and prominence. Sudan is no exception. Subsequently, the ability to listen critically and to express oneself clearly and effectively contributes to a student's success in school, in college and later in life. However, teaching spoken English in Sudan is confronted by a lot of problems and challenges. This paper discusses some of these problems and challenges.

### **2. Teaching Spoken English in Sudan: A Brief Background**

In Sudan, the process of learning a foreign language, especially English, has been a constant headache to the concerned governmental bodies, teachers, and parents. In spite

of the great efforts, energy, and money used in developing the syllabus and training of teachers, still some learners fail to speak the language because of different reasons. It is

### **3.1 Teaching Spoken English at Schools**

Most of the teachers said that the text book used for teaching English at school is not helpful. It neglected both aspects of the language skills: speaking and listening. The methods of teaching were bad. Most teachers concentrated mainly on grammar as the main aspect of learning English and neglected other classroom activities. In addition to that, the teachers needed more training and workshops.

### **3.2 Teaching Spoken English in Private Educational Institutions**

Teaching spoken English in some Sudanese private educational institutions present an idealized image of how spoken English should be taught. Interesting and useful materials reflecting western culture are used for teaching spoken English. These materials are made to equip the learners with the necessary communicative skills they need to actively interact with them and cope with the requirements of their society. In these courses, students have the opportunity to listen actively since speaking feeds on listening. They are also provided with visual teaching aids like pictures, CDs, data show, etc., so that they can watch what they listen to. In these courses, the learners are put into situations where they find themselves able to speak. Activities like classroom chat, classroom discussion, incomplete dialogues, information gap activity, etc., are used to support the learners' listening and speaking skills. However, despite these good characteristics, teaching spoken English at private educational institutions also face some problems.

### **3.3 Teaching Spoken English at the Tertiary Level**

Some teachers state that there are a lot of misconceptions associated with the teaching spoken English at the tertiary level. Teaching spoken English is thought of as an isolated teaching of the segmental and supra-segmental aspects of phonology. Much emphasis is laid on teaching the consonant and vowel sounds of English, especially in the first year. There should be not less than three or four structure-based courses in spoken English. They direct the learner to master the basic structures of English without teaching or creating situations to enable them to use such structures in real life.

## **4.Importance of Spoken English in Sudan**

According to Graves (2008), the thrust is to learn language to communicate, to improve one's economic prospects, to expand one's horizon both literally and figuratively, and to be a global citizen. English has become a world language rather than the language of only the English speaking countries such as the UK and the USA because the number of the people who use English as a foreign means of

communication exceeds much more than the number of the people who speak it as their mother tongue.

Spoken English involves listening and speaking skills. Both listening and speaking are interrelated to each other. As Hasan (2000:138) points out, “listening comprehension provides the right conditions for language acquisition and development of other language skills”. Listening appears to be the basic mechanism through which the rules of language are internalized. These lay the foundation for all the three macro skills-speaking, reading and writing that are to follow.

The need for spoken skills in English has been dramatically increasing due to the strong position of English as a language for international communication. Learners need speaking skills to interact with each other, inside and outside the classroom. In relation to this, Richard and Renandiyas (2002:201) assert that “a large percentage of the world’s language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking. Speaking is also important because there are many cases where learners know their subject well, but fail to communicate it properly. Therefore, the ability to speak English fluently will encourage them to communicate their brilliant ideas smoothly. Many language learners also regard speaking ability as the measure of mastering a language, because the speaking ability gives a quick impression of a person, whether s/he is a competent user of English or not. The ability to speak English has also become very important for students who want to fulfill their higher studies abroad. When you are looking for a job you, make sure that you speak English well. Therefore, we have to improve our English speaking skills.

## 5. Results

Many studies have been conducted to discuss the problems facing the Sudanese learners when speaking English, but still the problem is getting worse. Most of these problems hinder the process of teaching and learning English in general and spoken English in particular. After analyzing the data collected through the questionnaire, the results can be seen clearly through the following analysis table.

Table 2: Questionnaire Analysis

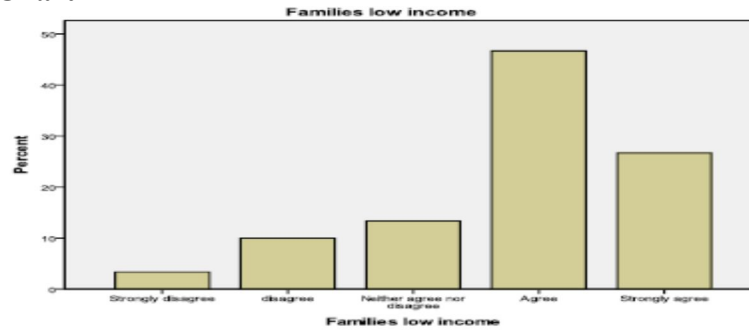
Items	Descriptive statistics	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1 Families low income	frequency	8	14	4	3	1	30
	percentage	26.7%	46.7%	13.3%	10.0%	3.3%	100%
2 Lack of target language environment	frequency	13	14	0	3	0	30
	percentage	43.3%	46.7%	0%	10.0%	0%	100%
3 Under-qualified teachers	frequency	6	16	2	6	0	30
	percentage	20.0%	53.3%	6.7%	20.0%	0%	100%
4 Inappropriate teaching materials	frequency	11	15	1	3	0	30
	percentage	36.7%	50.0%	3.3%	10.0%	0%	100%
5 Improper teaching methods	frequency	7	14	2	6	1	30
	percentage	23.3%	46.7%	6.7%	20.0%	3.3%	100%
6 Psychological factors	frequency	11	9	7	2	1	30
	percentage	36.7%	30.0%	23.3%	6.7%	3.3%	100%
Total	frequency	56	82	16	23	3	180
	percentage	31%	45%	9%	13%	2%	100%

The above table shows the percentage of each option towards a number of factors which are thought to have negative impact on learning spoken English. The results in the table are discussed below. Each item is considered separately.

### 5.1. Low income

Some teachers maintain that Sudan is one of the countries in which people are struggling against the expensive life. This has its negative impact on most aspects of life including education. Parents are struggling for their livelihood. As a result, they don't take care of their children education. Children need to work to support their families. These factors stand against students from attending classes which negatively hinder their proficiency in English in general and spoken English in particular. On the other hand, the researcher found that those who live in good conditions in such areas in Khartoum like Riyadh, Manshiya, Taif and Mamoura and others speak English well, and that they are highly motivated than those who live in rural areas and some poor areas in Khartoum. Also, there is the low salary of the teaching staff which affects the educational process in general. After analyzing the data collected through the questionnaire, this problem ranged third. Those whose mark is strongly agree and agree are 73.4%. It can also be seen through the chart below.

**Chart 1**

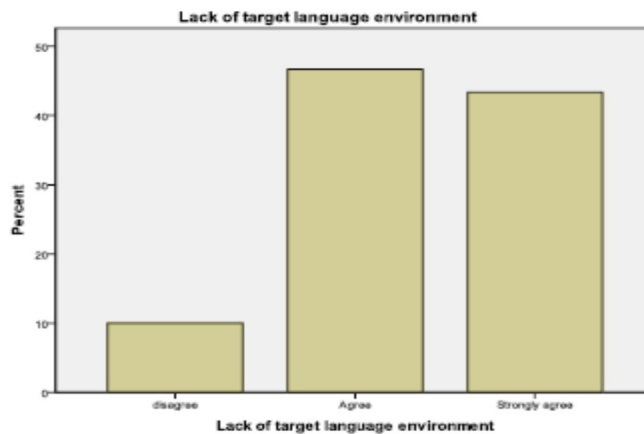


The highest two bars show that most of the respondents agree and strongly agree that the low income of the families is one of the reasons having negative impact on learning spoken English.

**5.2. Lack of the Target Language Environment**

English language is taught as a foreign language in Sudan. Therefore, learners lack the target language environment. Rababah (2005) points out that lack of the target language environment is one of the problems facing the learners of English. There is little opportunity to learn English through the natural environment since there are few native speakers. This point is mentioned by most teachers in Sudan. After analyzing the data collected through the questionnaire, this problem ranked first. Those who mark strongly agree and agree are 90% and that can be seen clearly through the following chart.

**Chart 2**



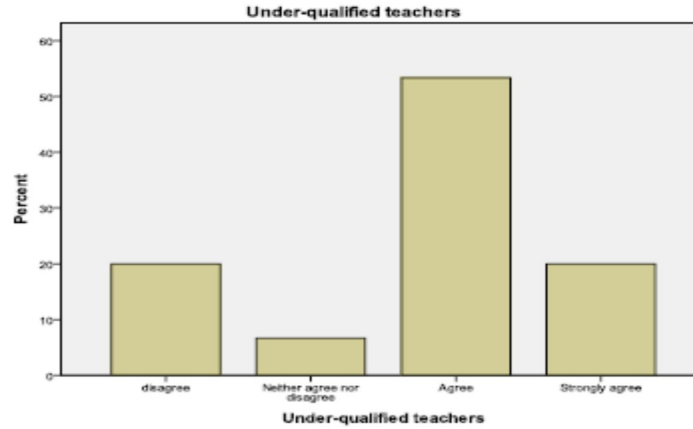
The highest two bars show that most of the respondents agree and strongly agree that the lack of target language environment a factor behind the difficulty of learning spoken English.

**5.3. Under-qualified Teachers**

According to some teachers' opinion, teachers neglect the listening and speaking skills. They have to reflect to their students the importance of listening and speaking.

Therefore, they should make different classroom activities in order to help students reduce their shyness and anxiety and let them have self-confidence toward speaking. According to the questionnaire, this problem ranked fourth. The total percentages of strongly agree and agree is 73.3% and that can be seen clearly through the chart below.

**Chart 3**

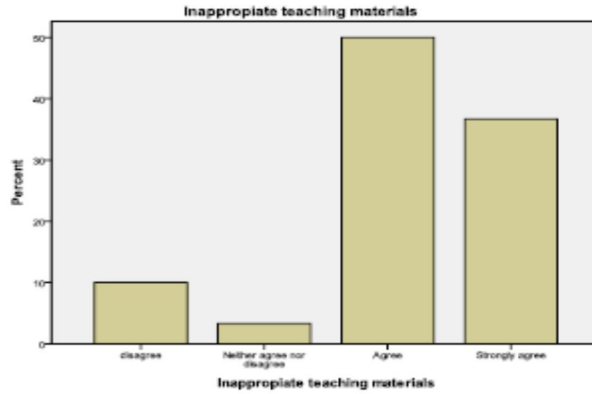


The highest two bars indicate that most of the teachers agree and strongly agree that the unsatisfactory qualification of teachers is one of the reasons that have negatively affect learning spoken English.

**5.4. Inappropriate Teaching Materials**

Most of the teachers state that the materials used for teaching and learning listening and speaking skills at schools and some private educational institutions are also one of the basic problems of teaching and learning spoken English. The text books used in schools and some institutions are a total failure since they neglect both listening and speaking. Afaf Abdallah one of the experienced teachers in Sudan states that some text books are above the student’s level. This is because the students’ proficiency level continues to be low and the teachers are not trained well enough to adapt the materials to the appropriate level and try to make real conversation from the text book. After conducting the questionnaire, this problem ranked second. 86.7% mark strongly agree and agree. Therefore, it is considered as one of the greatest problems that hinder students to speak English fluently. This can be seen through the chart below.

**Chart 4**

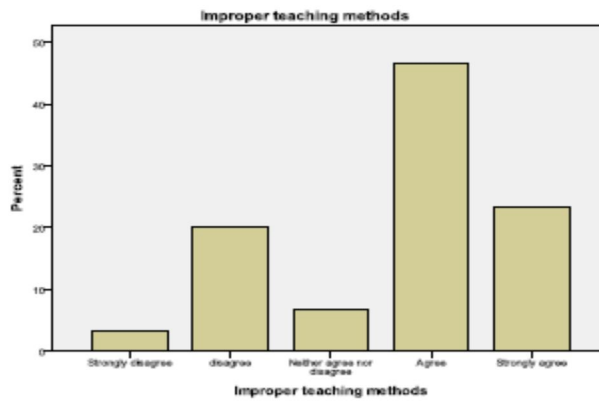


The highest two bars show that the majority of the respondents agree and strongly agree that the teaching materials used to teach spoken English are inappropriate.

**5.5. Improper Teaching Methods**

Most teachers explain that teaching spoken English is still based on teaching grammar, reading comprehension and writing. Students are not taught the aural and oral skills for real use; rather they are taught it to gain knowledge about language. The traditional methods of teaching the segmental aspects of phonology like choral drill, minimal pairs, etc., are still used. The pronunciation of words is taught in isolation, not in context. This kind of teaching is not helpful for real communication. Rababah (2005) points out that one of the problems of our education is teaching methodology which still depends on lecturing. The teachers' talking time is more than the students' talking time. Teachers don't give the students enough time to practice communication. This problem ranked fifth. Those who mark strongly agree and agree are 70% and that can be seen clearly through the chart below.

**Chart 5**



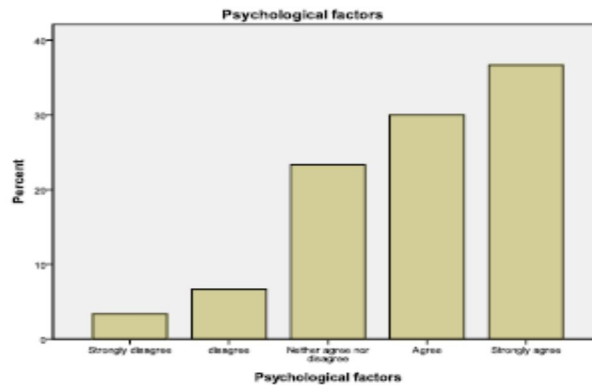
The highest two bars indicate that most of the teachers agree and strongly agree that the improper teaching methods have negative impact on learning spoken English.

**6. Psychological Factors That Hinder Students when Speaking**



According to the results of the questionnaire, there are some psychological factors that hinder students when speaking English. These factors are mentioned below. They can be seen clearly through the following chart.

**Chart 6**



The highest two bars show that most of the respondents agree and strongly agree that the psychological factors negatively affect learning spoken English.

### **6.1. Lack of Motivation**

Babu (2010) argues that lack of motivation in learning causes students' hesitation to speak English in the classroom. He says that the background of this situation is that students are not motivated by the teachers towards the communication in English. In line with what Babu says, Siegel (2004) believes that motivation is a product of good teaching. In other words, students' motivation is really influenced by the teachers' teaching performance. Therefore, it is important that teachers should try to improve their teaching performance so as to give the students motivation toward learning and speaking English in particular.

### **6.2. Lack of Aptitude**

Lack of Aptitude is influenced by a number of factors. Age is one of the most commonly factor of success or failure in L2. This shows that the aging process itself may affect or limit adult learners' ability to pronounce the target language fluently. Adult learners do not seem to have the same innate language – specific endowment or propensity as children for acquiring fluency and naturalness in spoken language.

### **6.3. Lack of Self-confidence**

According to Dornyei (2011), it is commonly understood that students' lack of confidence usually happens when students realize that their conversation partners have not understood them or when they do not understand other speakers. This shows that building students' confidence is an important part of teacher's focus of attention. It means that the teacher should also learn from both theories and practical experience on how to build the students' confidence. Students may lack self-confidence as a result of lack of their low ability or shyness.

### **6.4. Shyness**

With regard to the cause of shyness, Bowen (2005) and Robby (2010) argue that some shy learners are caused by their nature that they are very quiet. In this case, the



students are not very confident and tend to be shy because most of them find it very difficult when speaking English in front of their friends and teacher. They are also afraid of being laughed at by their peers.

### 6.5. Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of tension, apprehension and nervousness associated with the process of learning a foreign language. It is considered as one of the most psychological factors that affect students who learn a foreign language, especially when they speak. Regarding the causes of anxiety, Horwitz and Cope (1986), based on the findings of their study, found out three main causes of students' anxiety. These are communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. As suggested by Harmer (2007), to reduce this anxiety feeling, teachers need to pay attention to each student's strengths and weaknesses so that they can create a learning method which accommodates all students in the classroom.

### 7. Summary of the Results:

To sum up, the order of the results can be seen clearly through the table below according to their percentages with regards to the participants:

**Table 3: The problems results in order according to participants choice strongly agree and agree**

No	Problems in order according to results	Percentage
1	Lack of the target language environment	90%
2	In appropriate teaching materials	86.7%
3	Families low income	73.4%
4	Under qualified teachers	73.3%
5	Improper teaching methods	70%
6	Psychological factors	66.7%

According to the above table, the most influential factor behind the problem of learning spoken English is the lack of the target language environment. The psychological factors are the least influential. The other factors range between the two extremes.

### 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

It can be clearly seen from the charts and tables above that there are six major problems affecting the oral performance of the Sudanese Students' spoken English. Teaching this skill in Sudan is confronted with a multiplicity of problems such as outdated courses and neglect of listening and speaking activities in the content of the course books. There is a need to solve the problem of the lack of the target language environment by introducing modern courses in order to practice listening and speaking by using the technology materials like data show, smart boards, etc. Also, one of the major problems is that students are not given opportunities to make real conversation whether inside classroom or outside the classroom. Teachers need to use various activities inside the class rooms. The teachers' talking time should be far less than the students' talking time. Students, as a result just study the course for the sake of passing

the exams. Thus, they pass in the subject without acquiring the skill. Therefore, it is quite safe to say that the teaching of spoken English is still the weak link in the language teaching process. It can be added that students have psychological factors such as fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, aptitude and lack of self-confidence which hinder them from practicing speaking inside the classroom.

These problems will never be solved in the future unless strict action is taken by the government for changing the syllabus, improving the teachers' condition and families' condition as well as making training and workshops for the teachers. To turn to the possible solutions to overcome the psychological factors that hinder students from speaking, the students believed that motivating them to be more confident is the main part of the teacher's job. In this sense, motivating students to speak in English, to some extent, encourages them to speak actively. All these suggest the importance of creating a supporting atmosphere of learning in the classroom

noticed that most of the Sudanese students fail to make real conversations. Students studying English must be taught in the right environment. In general, the right environment increases the students' attitude and motivation toward speaking English, and helps to bridge the gap between the artificial world of the classroom, with its controlled language practice, and the real world outside (Gower, 1995). It is noticed that English learners are very intelligent. Most of them are highly motivated when they begin. The majority are very successful in school, in their jobs, in their business, and in their relationships. So why do many learners fail to speak English easily and fluently? What are the problems? Why do good learners fail in this area?

There might be three answers to this question:

1. Bad Teaching Methods.

2. Bad Teaching Materials. 3. Psychological Factors. Psychological factors emerge as a result of the classroom environment. The bad method of teaching helps to increase these factors. The grammar and text book used in schools here in Sudan are not helpful. They might be total failure. Very few people may learn to speak English easily if they use those books.

**3. Methods**

This section deals with teaching spoken English in particular. Due to the scarcity of resources dealing with teaching and learning of spoken English in Sudan, we have based our data collection on our teaching experience, survey of teaching and learning spoken English in Sudan and on a questionnaire administered to 30 teachers from The African Council Private Education Basic and Secondary schools in Khartoum North. The participants were 23 male teachers and 7 female teachers. They were all from Alzahra basic school, Ibnalhaitham Secondary School and Ali Ibn Abitalib secondary school. Their answers to the questionnaire showed that there were some major problems that hinder students to communicate. The results can be seen clearly through the following paragraphs. Table 1 shows the items of the questionnaire.

**Table 1: Questionnaire items**

No	The problems of teaching and learning spoken English in Sudan as a result of .....	1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree
1	Families Low income					
2	Lack of the target language environment					
3	Under-qualified teachers					
4	Inappropriate Teaching Materials					
5	Improper Teaching Methods					
6	Psychological Factors					