

Oral Communication Apprehension as a Barrier to Students' Oral Communication: Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored oral communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students majoring in English. The researcher employed the descriptive analytic approach. The subjects of the study were 30 Sudanese EFL teachers, drawn from three faculties at Gezira University: Faculty of Arts at AlKamleen, Faculty of Education at AL Hasaheesah and Faculty of Education at Hantoub. A quantitative tool was employed for data collection; a questionnaire to identify the level of students' oral communication apprehension (CA), to investigate the causes of CA and to view participants' views of the possible ways to treat CA. Results showed that the students' level of communication apprehension was average and that the causes of their communication apprehension were found to be: excessive use of L1; lack of communicative activities; lack of teacher training; traditional teaching methods; psychological factors; motivational factors, to mention a few. The results also revealed that students' CA could be reduced by various techniques such as training teachers, adopting communicative teaching approach, improving classroom environment, motivating students and considering students' learning style. The study concluded with some recommendations which offered to EFL teachers and educational/language policy makers. Finally, further studies were suggested in relation to the investigation of oral communication apprehension, specifically in lower educational levels and in other universities across the country.

Keywords: EFL teachers, oral communication apprehension, undergraduate students

المستخلص:

تستكشف هذه الورقة مخاوف التواصل الشفهي بين طلاب المرحلة الجامعية السودانيين الذين يتخصصون في اللغة الإنجليزية. لتحقيق الهدف من الدراسة استخدم الباحث المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. تألفت عينة الدراسة من 30 مدرساً سودانياً في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تم اختيارهم من ثلاث كليات في جامعة الجزيرة: كلية الآداب في الكاملين ، كلية التربية في الحصاحيصا وكلية التربية في حنتوب. تم استخدام أداة كمية لجمع البيانات ؛ استبيان لتحديد مستوى خوف الطلاب من التواصل، للتحقيق في أسباب هذا التخوف ولعرض آراء المشاركين حول الطرق الممكنة لعلاج التخوف من التواصل. أظهرت النتائج أن مستوى خوف الطلاب من التواصل كان متوسطاً وأن أسباب تخوفهم من التواصل هي: الاستخدام المفرط للغة الام، عدم وجود أنشطة التواصل ؛ نقص تدريب المعلمين ؛ طرق التدريس التقليدية. عوامل نفسية؛ عوامل تحفيزية ، على سبيل المثال لا الحصر. وكشفت النتائج أيضاً أنه يمكن التقليل من تخوف التواصل لدى الطلاب من خلال أساليب مختلفة مثل تدريب المعلمين ، واعتماد نهج التدريس التواصلي ، وتحسين بيئة الفصل ، وتحفيز الطلاب ، والنظر في أسلوب تعلم الطلاب. اختتمت الدراسة ببعض التوصيات التي قدمت لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وصناع السياسة التعليمية. أخيراً ، تم اقتراح مزيد من الدراسات فيما يتعلق بالتحقيق في مخاوف الاتصال الشفهي ، وخاصة في المستويات التعليمية الدنيا وفي الجامعات الأخرى في جميع أنحاء البلاد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: معلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية، التخوف من التواصل الشفهي، طلاب المرحلة الجامعية.

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, English is the most important language in the world today. It is recognized as an international language and

the official language for the sciences and other professions. However, in many parts of the world, including Sudan, English is a second or a foreign

language. Many EFL/ESL learners encounter some problems while learning it. Communication apprehension is one of these problems which affect students' oral communication in English. Communication apprehension is an individual's fear of communication with another person or group of people (McCroskey, 1982). He adds: "and individuals who are often fearful of communication are commonly referred to as communication apprehensive". The phenomenon has been regarded as one of the most important factors influencing learners' oral communication. In Sudan, many researches have been conducted to investigate oral communication problems with ESL students, mostly secondary school students. However, many students at the tertiary level are still having difficulty communicating in English. This phenomenon needs careful analysis in order to identify viable measures that will address the problem. This study will address the problem of oral communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students majoring in English, at Gezira University. A questionnaire was used to identify the level of CA, to investigate the causes of CA and to view ways to treat CA. Based on the results, some recommendations are to be offered to treat/minimize students' communication apprehension.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study is looking into oral communication apprehension for undergraduate students majoring in English, at Gezira University. Communication apprehension can be a problem whenever individuals are exposed to communication situations such as in meetings, public speaking, interpersonal conversations and group discussions. Richmond and McCroskey (1989:60) believe that the high degree of student communication apprehension seriously hinders the interaction between teachers and learners, which is necessary for productive teaching

and learning. According to Hamilton (2011), students who have a high level of communication apprehension are at disadvantage. The phenomenon of communication apprehension is, therefore, a distinct area of research. Worldwide, research about communication apprehension has been carried out extensively. Factors, reasons, effects and strategies to deal with CA have been given a special concern. Yet, the problem still exists and researchers are still looking for best ways to deal with this important barrier to learning. Sudan is not an exception; there have been a lot of researches on oral performance from different perspectives. However, there is paucity in research regarding communication apprehension of Sudanese students, at any level. There is, therefore, a need to determine the degree of communication apprehension among Sudanese students. The researcher has chosen to research the topic among Sudanese undergraduate students when communicating in English. The researcher has noticed that most of the Sudanese undergraduate students "majoring in English" refrain from giving a speech in English. It is, therefore, necessary to find out about the levels of students' communication apprehension as well as the factors contributing to it.

1.3 Objectives

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the level of communication apprehension (CA) among Sudanese undergraduate students majoring in English.
2. To find out what tertiary staff in Sudan regard as the main reasons behind communication apprehension.
3. To suggest appropriate techniques and strategies to treat communication apprehension.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the level of OCA among Sudanese undergraduate students majoring in English when communicating in English?

2. What are the main reasons behind oral communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students majoring in English, from teachers' perspectives?

3. What can tertiary staff do to treat/minimize OCA in the EFL classroom?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

1. The level of communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is very high.

2. The main reasons behind oral communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students majoring in English could possibly be: traditional teaching methods, lack of communication models, little exposure to communication activities, poor educational environment, psychological, cultural and social factors.

3. Adopting communicative teaching approaches, training teachers, improving classroom environment, reviewing course book materials, forming English clubs, using modern technology, motivation and building self-confidence are all possible ways to treat or minimize oral communication apprehension among students.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study focuses on the causes and treatment of oral communication apprehension among undergraduate students majoring in English. It may, therefore, help university teachers be aware of these causes so that they can cope with the problem in their classrooms. Furthermore, the study will enable teachers to develop approaches and practices for working with apprehensive students. Finally, the study will initiate future researchers to do further studies in this regard.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition and Types of Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension (CA) is defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another

person or persons" (McCroskey, 1982). According to McCrosky (1984), there are five types of CA: trait-like, generalized-context, person-group, situational communication apprehension and pathological communication apprehension. The term "traitlike" is used to describe an invariant characteristic of an individual, such as eye color or height, which cannot be changed. Generalized-context communication apprehension is when people are anxious about communicating in one type of context while they might have no anxiety in other contexts. Person-group communication apprehension represents the reaction of an individual to communicating with a given individual or group of individuals across time. Situational communication apprehension can be viewed as a transitory orientation towards communication with a given person or group of people. It is viewed as a response to the situational constraints generated by the other person or group. Pathological communication apprehension is considered an abnormal cause of CA. It refers to an extremely high level of communication apprehension or low level of communication apprehension.

2.2 Causes of Communication Apprehension in the Classroom

Educationists and researchers in the field of ELT has regarded many factors as causes of CA in the classroom: Horwitz (1988) argues that communication apprehension in the classroom could be due to linguistic related sources such as lack of vocabulary, poor grammar and bad pronunciation. In addition, Schreiner (2011) contends that traditional teaching approach can, negatively, affect students' oral performance. He describes the teacher-centered classroom as a context in which the educator is just a lecturer who presents a lot of information and students are just empty vessels who receive the teacher's directions, without given the opportunity to interact or comment.



Furthermore, behaviorists believe that the type of reinforcement can influence negatively or positively students' oral performance; McCrosky (1984:25-30) argued that if a child is sometimes rewarded and other times punished for the same communication behavior, or if his behavior is even sometimes ignored, the child will become confused. This confusion will, in turn, lead to a learned helplessness and negative expectations which are components of CA. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the teacher to reinforce positive or negative behavior. Moreover, MacIntyre and Gardner (1988:251-273) believe that the language of instruction, which is a second one for students, may cause communication apprehension resulting in minimal performance. They contend that a language student may have more thoughts and ideas but because of an immature second language vocabulary, he/she will not be able to express them. The inability either to express oneself, or to comprehend another person leads to frustration and apprehension. The absence of role models in a second language class would also have a detrimental effect on communication in a second language. Macdonald and Burroughs (1991:15) say that teachers are the authority and that they direct the flow of student activity; the students look at the teachers for directions and will willingly carry out their instructions. The role which the teacher adopts is one of the biggest drawbacks or one of the biggest head starts experienced by learners (Macdonald & Burroughs, 1991: 19).

Further CA causes in the classroom are lack of confidence, lack of motivation and lack of aptitude. According to Nunan (1999), students who lack confidence about themselves and their English suffer from communication apprehension. This shows that building students' confidence is an important part of teacher's focus of attention. As for motivation, Nunan (1999), argued that motivation can affect students' reluctance to speak in English. In this sense, motivation is a key consideration

in determining the preparedness of learners to communicate. Nunan (1999), attributes the causes of the students' lack of motivation to: uninspired teaching, boredom, lack of relevant teaching materials and lack of knowledge about the goals of the instructional program. In addition, Richard and Renandya (2008:205), argued that lack of aptitude is an important psychological factor that causes communication apprehension. They add: "it is the student's ability in learning a language". Many SLA researchers believe that children learn their first language so well because they have the cognitive and linguistic endowment to learn it entirely implicitly. Lack of this cognitive and linguistic endowment entails failure to perform oral communication.

Three final factors in this section are fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation and competitiveness. According to Aftat, (2008), fear of making mistakes is linked to the issue of correction and negative evaluation; students are afraid of being laughed at by other students or being criticized by the teacher. As a result, students commonly stop participating in the speaking activity (Hieu, 2011). Therefore, it is important for teachers to convince their students that making mistakes is not a wrong or bad thing because students can learn from their mistakes. Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) is another source of students' communication apprehension (Horwitz, 2013). Price (1991, p.105) conducted interviews with highly apprehensive students and found that several students preferred to sit silently in the class due to the fear "of being laughed at by others or being criticized by their teachers. It means they might avoid participating in oral tasks which would improve their speaking. FNE may be particularly harmful for those who lack confidence and have low self-esteem since they may barely try to speak or respond in the class due to the fear of peers' derision. Finally, competitiveness has frequently been reported as a factor contributing to students CA (Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

However, competitiveness cannot be generalized to all contexts as a source of CA; in some contexts competitiveness might motivate students to increase their efforts and overcome their weaknesses. According to Oxford (1992), CA stemming from competitiveness might depend upon students' learning styles and the demands of the environment. As far as the Sudanese context is concerned, competitiveness could be CA-provoking for students due to a number of reasons. For example, apart from the formal exam's competition, there are hardly any competitive activities during English classes. In addition, the classroom environment and lack of motivation could affect students' competitiveness.

2.3 Managing OCA in the Classroom

Juhana (2012), argues that the causes of OCA in the classroom could be attributed to: anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation and fear of making mistakes. Based on these causes, the following were offered as intervention strategies:

Firstly, Koichi Sato (2003) suggests that teachers should be more careful about anxiety in the classroom and should find techniques that allow students to participate more in oral activities. In addition to this, providing students with positive reinforcement, motivating students and creating an easy environment in class are important techniques to lower students' anxiety, increase their confidence, and encourage their willingness to communicate (Chan, 2004). Furthermore, Tsui (1996) explains that teachers should accept a variety of answers from reluctant students.

Secondly, Pesce (2011), contends that teachers should create a friendly and open classroom environment. By doing this, shy students are hoped to feel fine of making mistakes in their learning. This way, students will not worry about their imperfect pronunciation and grammar. As a result, they dare to speak in their speaking class. In addition, Chinmoy (2007) suggests that

teachers should convince students to look upon shyness as a thing to overcome and do not fear failure or success. Hence students will be more confident in their speaking.

Thirdly, Ye Htwe (2007) argues that maximizing students' exposure to English is a good way to build students' confidence. In line with this, Kubo and Michael (2009) adds that to build students' confidence to speak English, teachers can provide regular opportunities to practice proper pronunciation and intonation, and to converse freely. By doing this, students will experience a greater sense of ability to speak English. Therefore, teachers should create a comfortable atmosphere in which learners are encouraged to talk in English and are praised for talking.

Fourth, Aftat (2008) suggests teachers should provide constant encouragement and support as well as ask questions that reveal the basis of students' problems. Encouragement also gives students feeling of secure and welcome in their learning. Other suggestions to increase students' motivation are shared by Liu and Huang (2010). They argue that teachers can do activities like promoting students' awareness of the importance of English, enhancing students' interest in English, and developing their self-confidence.

Fifth, Zua, Li (2008) gives several suggestions to overcome students' fear of making mistakes. First, she suggests that emotional bonds between students and teachers should be built. Second, the teacher should improve the students' concentration when learning English. Third, the teacher should create a harmonious atmosphere that can reduce students' nervousness. Juhana (2012), suggests that certain strategies could be implemented to alleviate OCA in the classroom. These strategies include: seating order, open dialogue with learners, attitudes towards errors, constructional feedback, pair/group work and background music.

Sixth, many studies on individual learning style preference have concluded that individuals possess specific preferences and abilities for processing instructional messages. If these learning style preferences are considered, students' academic achievement is enhanced (Gorham, 1986; McCarthy, 1994).

Additionally, Little Wood (1985) contends that adopting proper communicative teaching approaches are believed to be effective intervention strategies to treat CA in the classroom.

2.4 Previous Research on OCA

Results of the studies regarding OCA among learners worldwide are many. A few examples of these studies can be discussed as follows:

First, Liu (2006) conducted a study on anxiety in Chinese undergraduate non-English majors at three different proficiency levels. The study revealed that the more proficient students tended to be less anxious.

Second, Na (2007), surveyed and analyzed 115 students from a high school in Shandong Province, China, to explore high school students' OCA in Chinese EFL classrooms. The results indicated that students had high CA.

Third, Flanders (1960), in his study "classroom interaction in EFL classes" focused on what teachers say inside the classroom and the consequences on students' achievement and involvement. Flanders' study reveals that teachers' talking time hinders students' oral communication.

Fourth, Abdellah. A (2011). "Sudanese EFL learners' Oral Communication Problems". University of Gezira

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Participants

The total number of tertiary staff participating in this study is 30 EFL teachers of Gezira University. They are all Sudanese and they have been teaching for

several years; they have an average of 6 -20 years of teaching experience. All of them are Arabic speakers (mother tongue) and they were chosen on the basis of their convenience and accessibility and they were selected randomly from the entire population.

3.2 Research Design

A questionnaire consisted of three parts was used to collect data for this study. The contents of the first part include background information about the respondents such as gender, university, position and years of experience. In part two (a), participants were instructed to identify the level of oral communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students majoring in English; by ticking the option that best describes their opinion. Part two (b) has 16 statements. The statements explore tertiary staff perceptions about the factors that cause students' communication apprehension. Participants were requested to indicate their agreement or disagreement to each statement on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Part three of the questionnaire has three open-ended questions about the causes, effects and treatment of communication apprehension. In this paper, only the level of students' CA, the causes and ways to reduce CA are considered.

3.3 Procedures

Teachers were asked to:

- Indicate their opinions about the level of communication apprehension of undergraduate students at Gezira University; by circling one of the options: low CA, average CA, high CA, and all CA.
- To identify the causes of communication apprehension.
- To view possible ways to treat/reduce communication apprehension among students.

4. Data Analysis and Research Findings

4.1 Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS. A descriptive analysis was performed to compute the means and standard deviations for the items. These analyses were intended to identify the level of students' CA, to investigate the causes of CA and to suggest possible ways to treat CA.

4.2 Results and Findings

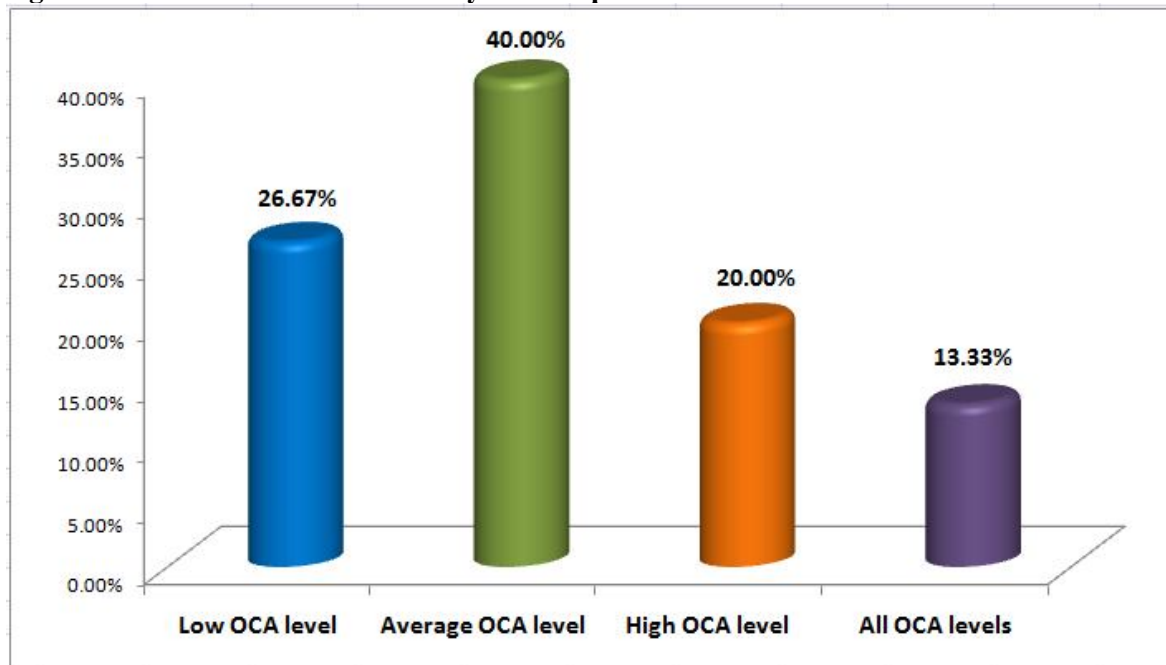
The findings have been organized in three parts which correspond to the study's research questions.

Research Question (1) aims to investigate tertiary staff views about the level of communication apprehension. Table 4.2.1 and figure 4.2.1 display the frequency distribution for the respondents' opinions about the level of oral communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students majoring in English.

Table 4.2.1: Frequency and percentage distribution for tertiary staff's opinions about OCA levels

OCA Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Low level of OCA	8	26.66%
Average level of OCA	12	40%
High level of OCA	6	20%
All level of OCA	4	13.33%

Figure 4.2.1: Distribution for tertiary staff's opinions about OCA levels



It is clear from table 4.2.1 and figure 4.2.1 that 40% Of the respondents believed that Sudanese undergraduate students experience average level of communication apprehension where as 13.33% of the respondents believed that all levels of

communication apprehension exist among undergraduate students. Low OCA was indicated by 26.67% and high OCA was indicated by 20% of the respondents. It can be concluded that the majority of Sudanese tertiary staff (at

Gezira University) believe that undergraduate students majoring in English have an average level of communication apprehension. These findings, therefore, do not confirm hypothesis 1.

Research Question (2) aims to identify the reasons behind oral communication

apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students majoring in English. Table 4.2.2 and table 4.2.3 below present the tertiary staff's responses to the questionnaire items.

Table 4.2.2: OCA causes from tertiary staff perspectives

No	Statements	Average responses	Average (%)
1	The excessive use of L1 by the teacher leads to students' apprehension when communicating in English	4.43	88.67%
2	The non-existence of native English teachers can negatively affect students' communication skills.	3.70	74.00%
3	Lack of communicative activities in the student English textbooks can negatively affect students' communication skills.	4.33	86.67%
4	The Sudanese tertiary level staff are, mostly, not trained enough to improve the oral skills of their learners.	3.67	73.33%
5	The teaching methodologies adopted in Sudanese tertiary level are too traditional to support oral communication skills.	3.83	76.67%
6	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is attributed to psychological factors, e.g emotions such as anger, nervousness, confusion, restlessness.	3.97	79.33%
7	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is due to motivational factors, e.g are students motivated towards learning and speaking the language?/do they really want to learn and speak the language?	3.87	77.33%
8	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is owing to beliefs and perceptions about learning and speaking English, e.g. the students think that English is a bloody damn language/ too difficult.	3.27	65.33%
9	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is owing to code-related factors (e.g. poor grammar, vocabulary, and bad sound production or pronunciation.	4.07	81.33%
10	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is due to social and cultural factors, e.g students' social status and cultural background	3.83	76.67%
11	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is attributed to environmental factors e.g classroom environment.	3.90	78.00%
12	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is caused by genetic factors e.g some students are quiet by their nature or because their parents are quiet.	3.00	60.00%

13	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is due to students' Low intellectual skills e.g. knowledge and understanding, critical thinking, problem solving and creative skills.	3.67	73.33%
14	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is attributed to gender-related factors e.g treating girls differently from boys.	2.97	59.33%
15	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is caused by classroom formalities and teacher's behavior e.g what's an acceptable behavior from the part of students/whether the teacher is lenient or strict.	4.13	82.67%
16	Communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students is due to fear of making mistakes e.g the teacher may shout at him/her or colleagues may laugh	4.43	88.67%

To discuss the statistical results in the above table, the researcher summarized the responses of the study sample by using the arithmetic mean of the responses for each statement and then calculating the relative mean by dividing the value of the arithmetic mean of each statement by the number 5 according to the criterion used

for the five responses, where the highest response value is 5 when the respondent responds strongly agree. The second step is to judge the strength of the response to a phrase, and here the relative mean is used in the last column of the table. To issue a judgment, these percentages are subject to the following criteria:

Table 4.2.3: Judging the degree of respondents' agreement

No	Values of the arithmetic mean	Percentage of arithmetic mean values	Judging the degree of agreement
1	1.00 — 1.80	20% — 36%	Degree of agreement is very low
2	1.80 — 2.60	36% — 52%	Degree of agreement is low
3	2.60 — 3.40	52% — 68%	Degree of agreement is average
4	3.40 — 4.20	68% — 84%	Degree of agreement is high
5	4.20 — 5.00	84% — 100%	Degree of agreement is very high

It is clear from table 4.2.2 and table 4.2.3 that all statements received high degree of agreement except for items 8, 12 and 14 which received average degree of agreement. It could, generally, be concluded that tertiary staff, at Gezira University, perceive the causes of CA among students as due to: the excessive use of L1 by the teacher, lack of native English speaking teachers, lack of communicative activities in the student English text books,

lack of teacher training, traditional teaching methods, psychological, social and motivational factors, students' negative beliefs about learning the language, linguistic factors, genetic and environmental factors, low intellectual skills, gender-related factors, classroom formalities and teachers' behavior, and fear of making mistakes. The findings of this study, mostly confirm hypothesis

2. Research Question (3) is an open-ended question and aims to identify tertiary staff views on the best strategies/techniques to help treat/minimize communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate English major students. It is worth mentioning that not all the respondents attempted the question. However, those who answered the question, offered the following comments as best ways to treat or alleviate oral communication apprehension in the EF classrooms.

Participant 1: “ Using authentic activities that provide real life communication situations.”

Participant 2: “ There are many ways to treat oral communication apprehension. For example, teachers should change their teaching styles every now and then. In addition, students should be motivated to far extent and more emphasis should be put on communication activities by creating a suitable environment for practicing and developing language skills. Furthermore, class size should be limited to a small number. Finally, course materials should be reviewed on regular basis and continuous evaluation should be carried out to give chance for remedial work.”

Participant 3: “ Communication apprehension can be reduced by encouraging students to communicate in English inside and outside the class.”

Participant 4: “ Firstly and importantly, effective teaching approaches should be adopted such as the communicative approach as they foster students’ communication skills, using the target language. Secondly, teachers should be trained appropriately on using these approaches and classrooms should be fully equipped with communicative aids. Thirdly, hiring native English speakers in the teaching process is also an advantage for improving the oral communication of students.”

Participant 5: “ Encouraging students to listen to English programs and watching English movies. In addition, forming English clubs can also be a good way to practice the language.”

Participant 6: “ The problem could be treated through practice and training. Students should be exposed to communicative activities like debate, discussion, English club and interviews. This way they will gain self-confidence.”

Participant 7: “ Using modern technology to make out for language exposure.”

Participant 8: “ Using pair and group work will help accommodate the shy students.”

Participant 9: “Using eclectic approach and choosing what works well with our students.”

Participant 10: “ Motivating students according to their interests and providing them with the activities that suit their individual differences.”

Participant 11: “ First, training courses for teachers are important. Second, The classroom environment should be a better place for learning; should be appealing to learners.”

Participant 12: “There are many strategies which are very effective in dealing with students apprehension. For example, the implicit correction of students’ speaking errors is a key factor for making students feel relaxed and secured because teachers are not going to, explicitly, correct his/her speaking errors in front of classmates. Also, creating friendly classroom atmosphere will play a vital role in motivating students to, productively and actively, participate in speaking sessions. Moreover, teachers should inform and persuade students every now and then that making speaking errors is a natural and healthy factor, because learners learn from their mistakes.”

Based on these comments, it could be said that the findings of the study confirm hypothesis 3

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Recommendations

This paper has presented some findings regarding oral communication apprehension among Sudanese undergraduate students majoring in English, specifically at Gezira University. The results showed that the majority of tertiary staff at Gezira University viewed students' communication apprehension as average. However, low and high level of communication apprehension also exist (Table 4.2.1 and Figure 4.2.1). The findings also revealed that tertiary staff at Gezira University attribute students' communication apprehension to a number of causes (see section 4.2). Based on the findings, the following are offered as recommendations.

Teachers should:

- 1/ develop an understanding of the CA construct.
- 2/ design comprehensive and flexible class programs responsive to the communication needs of all students
- 3/ develop class programs that foster, promote, encourage and utilize co-operation.
- 4/ create an atmosphere of mutual trust among students and teachers.
- 5/ recognize, encourage and celebrate the communication efforts of all students.
- 6/ converse with students on topics that are of interest to them.
- 7/ be attentive listeners, affirming and acknowledging what students are saying.
- 8/ teach students the skill of active listening.
- 9/ provide numerous opportunities for student leadership.
- 10/ update themselves with the latest research in the fields of CA, teaching behavior, co-operative learning, social skills teaching and peer relationships.

It is, also, recommended that educational and language policy-makers, in Sudan, should implement a mechanism for teacher-training to equip EFL teachers with the necessary skills to address factors influencing foreign language learning in

general, and oral communication, in particular. Similarly, workshops and conferences should be held to inform teachers about the phenomenon of communication apprehension and the effective means to reduce it.

5.2 Conclusion

In summary, the role of the teacher is vital in reducing or evoking communication apprehension. According to Young (1991), the majority of CA sources are related to instructional and methodological practices. However, creating an anxiety-free classroom for students is often considerably harder in practice than in theory. It appears to be relatively difficult for successful language learning and teaching to be without any anxiety, as some anxiety could be inherent in the foreign language process. Nevertheless, it is recommended that teachers should be as sensitive as possible to students' apprehension.

6. The Present Study versus Previous Studies

The findings of the present study confirm the findings of previous studies, in relation to the causes of CA and the possible ways to treat/reduce CA. However, the present study differs from previous studies in the degree of participants' level of apprehension; participants in previous studies showed high level of communication apprehension whereas participants in this study showed average level of CA. Moreover, the researchers in the previous studies used more than a tool to conduct their studies whereas only one tool (questionnaires) was used in this study.

7. Directions for Further Study

This study is considered a pioneer study in the situation of identifying students' communication apprehension at tertiary level, specifically at Gezira University. It would, therefore, be useful to carry out similar studies at different universities in the country as well as at basic and secondary levels. This would further deepen the understanding of the topic.

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