## Nature of the Undergraduate English Syllabus Ill-preparation Features towards Communicative Competence Promotion in Sudanese Universities

Yousif Ahmed Hussein Mohammed[1]  -  Mahmoud Ali Mohammed[2]

**ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates the shortcomings that hinder current English syllabus from developing students' communicative competence of English language in Sudanese universities. It investigates the possibility of improving the communicative competence via this currently-used syllabus. The researcher manipulates a quantitative methodology. He uses a questionnaire as a tool for data collection. It consists of seven statements directed to fifty members of university teaching staff to get their responses towards the currently-used syllabus. Finally, he analyzes the collected data statistically via SPSS program and concludes the following results: teaching language as a knowledge rather than as a means of communication, consuming students' and teachers' time and efforts in traditional teaching methods that do not result in usefulness except gaining information about language. Further, the researcher recommends a constructive evolution of this syllabus that builds on the current limited positive advantages. Finally, he asks the syllabus developers to combine the means and the content to teach language communicatively and take this in consideration during the preparation phase.

**KEYWORDS**: English Syllabus - Ill-preparation – Communicative competence – Promotion.

**المستخلص :**

هذه الورقه العلميه تتقصى فى جوانب القصور في منهج اللغه الانجليزيه الحالي فى الجامعات السودانيه والذي يعتقد انه يشوه النتائج النهائيه للعمليات التعليميه0 الورقة تبحث امكانية تطوير مهارة استخدام اللغه الانجليزيه للتخاطب من خلال استخدام المنهج الحالي. استخدم الدارس طريقة البحث الكمي. استخدم الباحث استبيانا موجها للمعلمين للحصول علي رؤاهم فى المنهج الحال وبعد تحليل نتيجة الاستبيان والتي استخدم فيها طريقة التحليل الكمي كانت النائج على النحو التالي:المنهج الحالي ينقصه جانب مهم يتعلق بتدريس اللغه الانجليزيه وهو امكانية استخدام اللغه الانجليزيه كوسيلة للتخاطب والتواصل فى الحياة استنادا على هذا المنهج الحالي. وقد اوصي الباحث بالتطوير البناء لهذا المنهج بابقاء الجوانب الايجابيه المحدوده والبناء عليه. وقد وجه الكاتب دعوة لمطورى المناهج ان يجمعوا بين المحتوى ووسائل التدريس فى اعداد المنهج وعدم حصر الاعداد على المحتوى فقط وان يضعوا ذلك فى الاعتبار عند تصميم المنهج.

**INTRODUCTION**

All syllabuses are heading towards particular outcomes to be achieved after instruction. The processes of setting the objectives and goals, students' needs consideration, specifying the content, grading the content, methodology, application and evaluation phases are targeting certain results. Success of educational processes depends on what the learners are able to do as a result of instruction. In English language teaching and learning in particular, the hopeful outcomes are the learners' competency in using the language inside the classrooms as well as outside the classrooms. Since language is a means of communication, it is expected to be taught likewise and not as a source of information or knowledge gaining.

There are multiple participants in the field of syllabus design. Each participant has a separate role but the participants' roles are complementary and call efforts towards ultimate aims of the educational operations. These goals are now restricted to language constructions rather than its use. Areas of syllabus planning which facilitates the promotion of communicative competence are the scope of this study.

## Statement of the Problem

Ill-preparation of English syllabus negatively affects the Students' communicative competence promotion. This situation enforces the students to refuge to post-graduation extra courses. The weakness of communicative competence can be mirrored in and lecturers' complaints of students' poor performance and the students' incapability of using their knowledge of language in real life contexts. These phenomena are concrete evidences that this current English syllabus does not meet the students' needs. There is a close relationship between the syllabus preparation and the students' competence in using the language.

Language is treated as a source of knowledge or information, rather than as a means of communication. Traditional methods of teaching hinder the promotion of the students' communicative competence at the end of instructional processes. There are additional factors that play negative roles in developing the communicative competence. Of them is the limitation of time allocated for oral skills, overcrowded classes, and exam-oriented education.

## Literature Review:

To start with, (Nunan.1988:27) differentiates between product-oriented and process-oriented syllabuses. Product syllabuses main concern is the knowledge and skills the learners will gain as a result of instruction while the latter is concerned with the learning experiences themselves.

From the beginning, it is noticed that there is an obvious variation in the applied linguists' views. Those who adopt communicative competence trend state their objectives in the previous citation, the other trend adopts teaching language knowledge for the sake of itself, and they assume that this style of teaching and designing of the syllabuses will lead to the same result in a later on phase. Zulikha (2008:44) contradicts with the product syllabus supporters when she claims that "Learning language is not an end itself but a means". With reference to (Fan Fang, 2010:112)," The basic objective of both English language teaching and communicative English language teaching is to promote communicative competence". According to (Nunan.1988:80) "The objectives can guide the selection of content and learning activities and the learners may come to have greater appreciation and acceptance of the learning experience they are undertaking or about to undertake''. He (1988:158) adds that, " Objective is a statement describing what the learner is able to do as a result of instruction". Further, (Nunan.1988:17) indicates that, "The instruction should be focused around the needs of the learners and for this reason, they should exercise their own responsibility in choosing the objectives, the content, the methods and means of assessing their information since they are not merely passive recipients of subject-matter devised by the educational authority,

but they have an experience to be brought or called upon to bear in the learning process and it is this belief that makes the researcher appreciate the learner-centeredness principle to language curricula development.

Focusing on the students' needs, (Nunan.1988:13) presents an outline for needs analysis. He introduces them as: "The techniques and procedures for gathering information to be manipulated in designing syllabuses". This means students are asked why? And how? They learn English because their objective can vary from the teachers'. For this reason gathering information about the students' needs will facilitate the learning and teaching process. Moreover, Nunan in this concern indicates that 'It is possible to distinguish a broad and narrow approach to syllabus design: The narrow view draws a clear distinction between syllabus design and methodology but those who adopt a broader view question this strict separation, arguing that with the advent of communicative language teaching the distinction between the content and task is difficult to sustain". (Nunan.1988:53) additionally points out that: "The learners may not be able to translate what they learn to new situations which they have rehearsed".

Taking this quote in consideration, Nunan (1988:6) states that, "Methodology as distinct from the syllabus which is concerned with what units will be taught, is concerned with how these units will be taught". (Nunan.1988:52) adds that: "The traditional distinction between syllabus design (specifying the 'what?') And methodology (specifying the 'how?') has become blurred with the development of process-oriented, task-based and content-based syllabuses''. And he goes on indicating that, "In TBLT, it is difficult to draw a strict separation between syllabus design and methodology, and the methodology slice is larger than in more traditional approaches which give greater prominence to content". (Nunan.1988:41) argues that: "Planning, implementation and evaluation phases must be an integrated set of processes and the outcomes and processes will be specified when the emphasis is on the context, environment and purposes of teaching the program. The difference is in the means because both product-oriented and process-oriented seek for communicative competence".

Additionally (Nunan.2013:26) comments that, " curriculum designers have focused on the planned, the assessed curriculum, and ignore the implemented curriculum". (Nunan.1988:13) notices that, "The core of the syllabus design is based on linguistic features of language and the main focus is on the knowledge''. Moreover, (Nunan.1988:35) explains that: "It is neither necessary nor possible to provide learners with exposure to all target language constructions and the major task of the syllabus designer is to identify those aspects of the grammatical system from which learners can generate most powerful generalization and that is to teach grammar as a process rather than a product. There is no need for memorization but to raise their consciousness of the grammatical and discourse processes operate and interact in the target language''. In addition to the previous quote (Nunan.2013:34) states that, "Task-based language teaching has been an important addition to the conceptual and empirical repertoire of the second and foreign language teacher in the eighties, having influenced syllabus design, material development and language teaching methodology".

(Nunan.2013:16) adds that," learners seek immediate or not too far or remote goals. Thus, he concludes that the learner-centered and not subject-centered is more suitable". (Nunan.2013:18) points out, 'Learner-centered strength comes from the advent of communicative language teaching which is considered a cluster of approaches rather than a single methodology which stems out of the dissatisfaction of structuralism and the situational methods of the sixties". (Nunan.2013:20) criticizes the use of drills and controlled practice and appreciate the activities that: ''Require learners to do in class what they will have to do outside and in addition, he states that the methodological practices in the past were based on false assumptions and they are described as not informative".

From the fore-mentioned views, it is quite clear that the concept of communicative language teaching is necessary or essential. (Nunan.2013:23) clarifies that, " Exercises of the course followed should be responsive to the needs of the students that emanated from his stage of language development , his personal interests and aspirations and thus any barrier between the learner and the community is bridged and any sense of undesirable alienation is reduced, rather than being arbitrary academic exercises".

 Adding to that (Nunan.1988:24) states, ''More recently communicative competence gains currency. It refers to the knowledge of the rules of use and appropriateness and it includes linguistic competence. He adds that, "the problem is that nobody, even the native speakers and linguists, knows all the rules of a language and he introduces the children model who uses the language without knowing the rules for they use it as a tool rather than as

knowledge. (Nunan) adds that "In task-based syllabus content the instructional processes are selected with reference to communicative tasks which learners will need to engage in outside the classroom and also with reference to insights into those social and psycholinguistic processes which facilitate language acquisition. Its main emphasis is on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language , authentic texts into learning situation , the focus is not only on language but on the learning process itself, learners' own personal experiences in classroom learning and link this with language activation outside classroom''. (Nunan.1988:29) suggests that, "The solution is that to abandon structural grading and the pedagogic focus in class or to focus on what learners are expected with language learning tasks rather than on language itself". Within this alternative, he continues, "it is the tasks rather than language which are graded. And he claims that learning does not occur in this additive fashion". (Nunan..2013:24) claims that," It is not what the students know about language but what they do with the language." Considering this quote (Nunan.2013:18) states that, "A basic principle underlying all communicative approaches is that learners must not only learn to make grammatically correct, propositional statements about the experiential world, but must also develop the ability to use language to get things done". Finally, (Nunan: 1988, 3) assures that, 'There has been a comparative neglect of systematic curriculum development. Language specialists have tended to focus on only part of the total picture--- some specializing in syllabus design, others in methodology and yet others in assessment and evaluation".

**Methodology**

The investigator adopts quantitative method in his study. The researcher uses a questionnaire as tool for data collection. The questionnaire is entailed by the nature of the study to gain the university teaching staff's' responses to the statements of the questionnaire. It is conducted on fifty respondents. The collected data is analyzed statistically by SPSS program to test the supposition of the study.

**Data Analysis**

Statement No (1): First year English syllabuses content is information based with much emphasis on subject – matter. Table No (1) The Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of statement No (1

| Valid | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 27 | 54.0 |
| agree | 11 | 22.0 |
| Neutral | 10 | 20.0 |
| disagree | 2 | 4.0 |
| strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 50 | 100% |
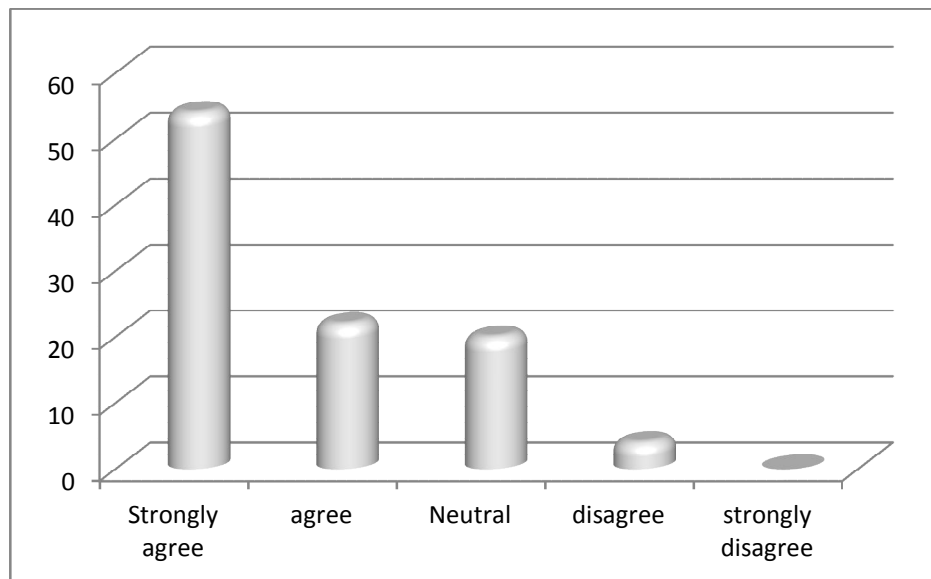


From the above table No.(1 ) and figure No ( 1) It is clear that there are (27) persons in the study's sample with percentage (54%) strongly agreed with " First year English syllabuses content is information based with much emphasis on subject – matter.. ". There are (11) persons with percentage (22%) agreed with that, and (10) persons with percentage (20%) were not sure that, and (2) persons with percentage (4%) disagreed. And (0) persons with (0%) are strongly disagreed.

**Statement No (2):** The currently use English syllabuses   lack relevance to the outside world. Table No (2) The Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of statement No (2)

| Valid | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 13 | 26.0 |
| agree | 2 | 4.0 |
| Neutral | 22 | 44.0 |
| disagree | 4 | 8.0 |
| strongly disagree | 9 | 18.0 |
| Total | 50 | 100% |
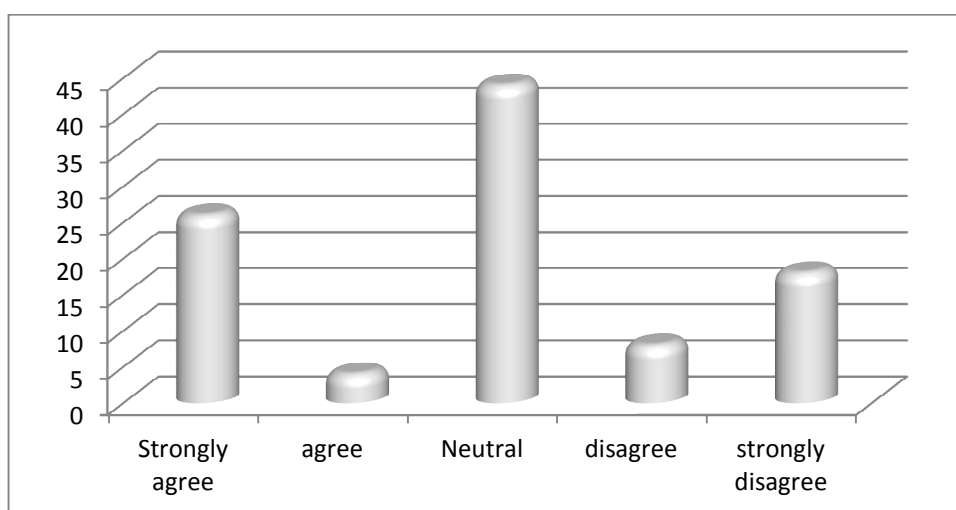


From the above table No.( 2) and figure No (2 ) It is clear that there are (13) persons in the study's sample with percentage (26%) strongly agreed with " The currently use English syllabuses lack relevant to the outside world". There are (2) persons with percentage (4%) agreed with that, and (22) persons with percentage (44%) were not sure that, and (4) persons with percentage (8%) disagreed. And (9) persons with (18%) are strongly disagreed. Statement No (3): The adopted undergraduate first year English syllabuses are more teacher centered than learner centered. Table No (3) The Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of statement No (3)

| Valid | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 23 | 46.0 |
| agree | 23 | 46.0 |
| Neutral | 1 | 2.0 |
| disagree | 2 | 4.0 |
| strongly disagree | 1 | 2.0 |
| Total | 50 | 100% |
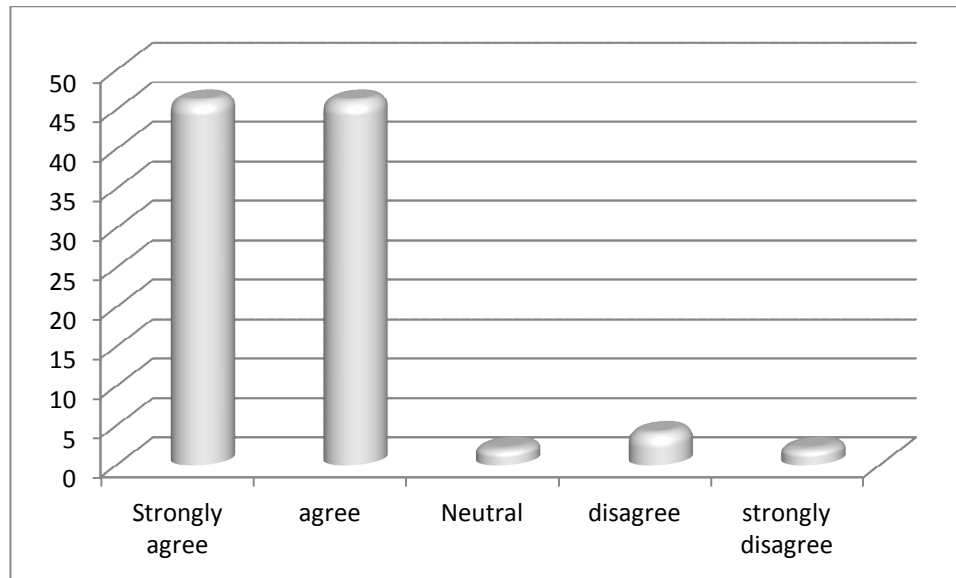
From the above table No.(3 ) and figure No (3 ) It is clear that there are (23) persons in the study's sample with percentage (46%) strongly agreed with " The adopted undergraduate first year English syllabuses are more teacher centered than learner centered. . ". There are (23) persons with percentage (46%) agreed with that, and (1) persons with percentage (2%) were not sure that, and (2) persons with percentage (4%) disagreed. And (1) person with (2%) are strongly disagree. Statement No (4): The first English year structural syllabuses nature is of limited value in communicative competence promotion. Table No (4) The Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of statement No (4)

| Valid | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 5 | 10.0 |
| agree | 1 | 2.0 |
| Neutral | 5 | 10.0 |
| disagree | 18 | 36.0 |
| strongly disagree | 21 | 42.0 |
| Total | 50 | 100% |
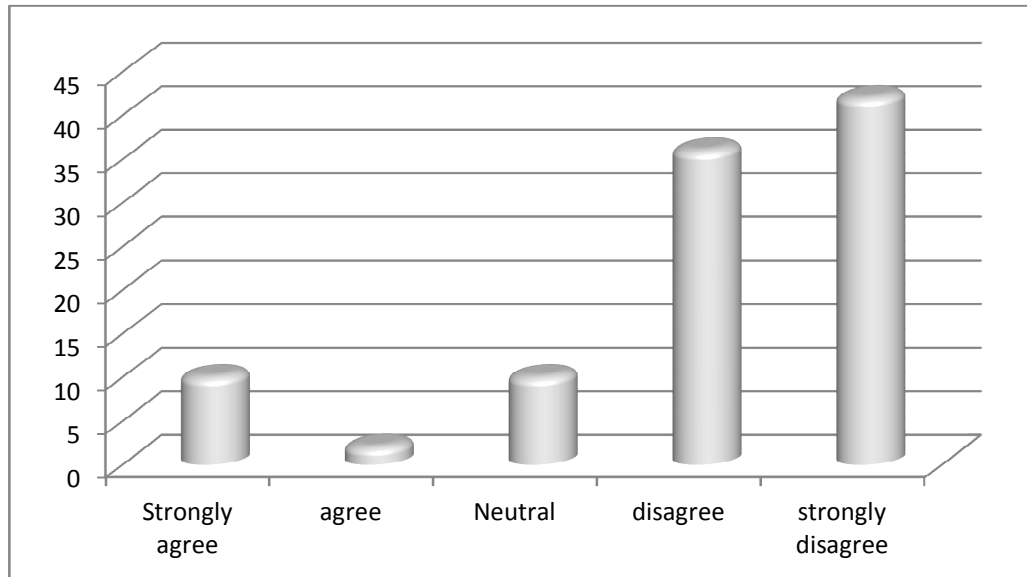
From the above table No.(4 ) and figure No (4 ) It is clear that there are (5) persons in the study's sample with percentage (10%) strongly agreed with " The first English year structural syllabuses nature is of limited value in communicative competence promotion. . ". There are (1) persons with percentage (2%) agreed with that, and (5) persons with percentage (10%) were not sure that, and (18) persons with percentage (36%) disagreed. And (21) persons with (42%) are strongly disagreed. Statement No (5): Under graduate first year English syllabuses contain a few oral and written skills. Table No (5) The Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of statement No (5)

| Valid | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 29 | 58.0 |
| agree | 16 | 32.0 |
| Neutral | 4 | 8.0 |
| disagree | 1 | 2.0 |
| strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 50 | 100% |
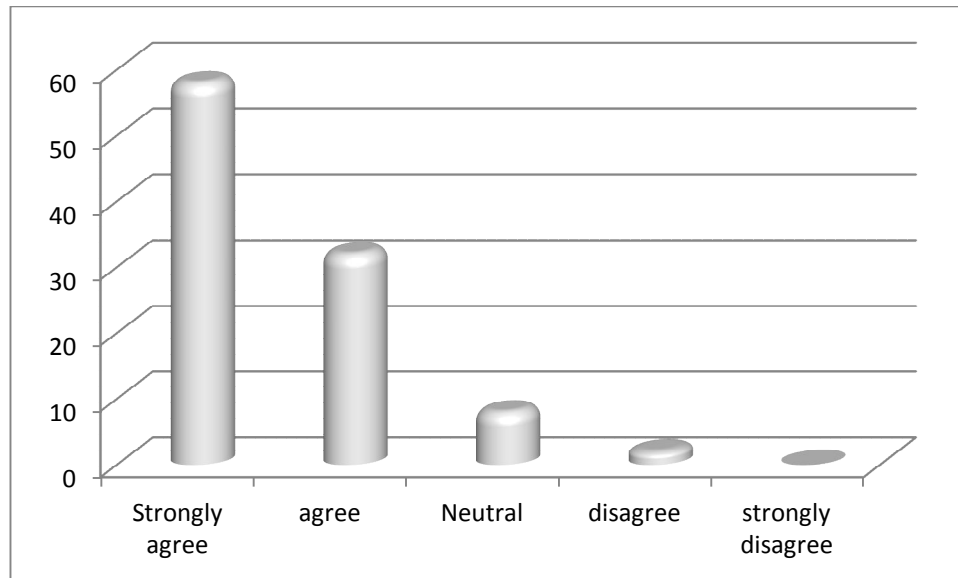
From the above table No.(5 ) and figure No (5 ) It is clear that there are (29) persons in the study's sample with percentage (58%) strongly agreed with " Under graduate first year English syllabuses contain a few oral and written skills. ". There are (16) persons with percentage (32%) agreed with that, and (4) persons with percentage (8%) were not sure that, and (1) persons with percentage (2%) disagreed. And (0) persons with (0%) are strongly disagreed. Statement No (6): The manipulated English syllabuses content only focus on grammatical rules, vocabulary and languages systems. Table No (6) The Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of statement No (6)

| Valid | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 21 | 42.0 |
| agree | 19 | 38.0 |
| Neutral | 2 | 4.0 |
| disagree | 4 | 8.0 |
| strongly disagree | 4 | 8.0 |
| Total | 50 | 100% |
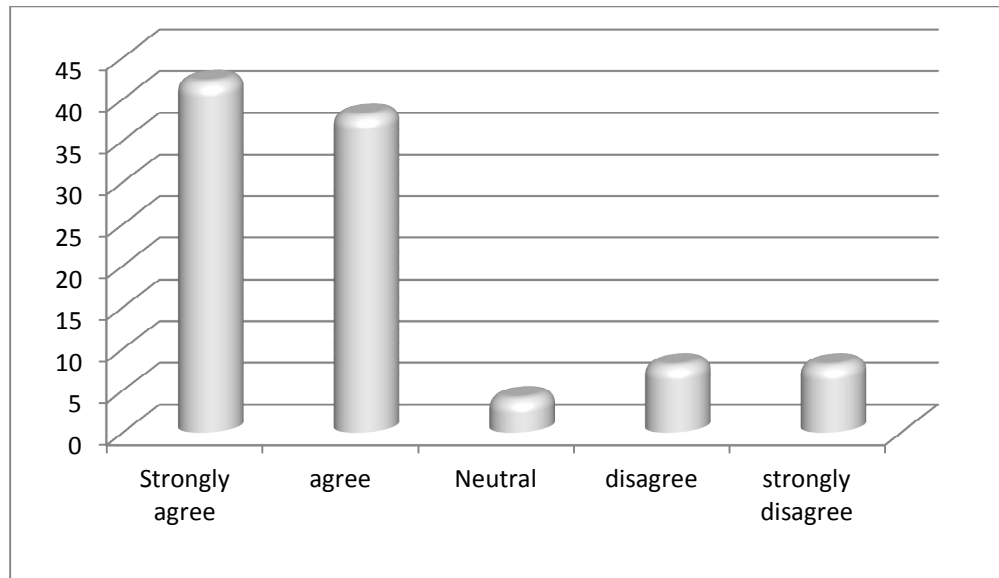
From the above table No.(6 ) and figure No ( 6) It is clear that there are (21) persons in the study's sample with percentage (42%) strongly agreed with " The manipulated English syllabuses content only focus on grammatical rules, vocabulary and languages systems". There are (19) persons with percentage (38%) agreed with that, and (2) persons with percentage (4%) were not sure that, and (4) persons with percentage (8%) disagreed. And (4) persons with (8%) are strongly disagreed. Statement No (7): The currently use English syllabuses do not equally focus on the four macro skills of English. Table No (7) The Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of statement No (7)

| Valid | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 23 | 46.0 |
| agree | 24 | 48.0 |
| Neutral | 1 | 2.0 |
| disagree | 2 | 4.0 |
| strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 50 | 100% |
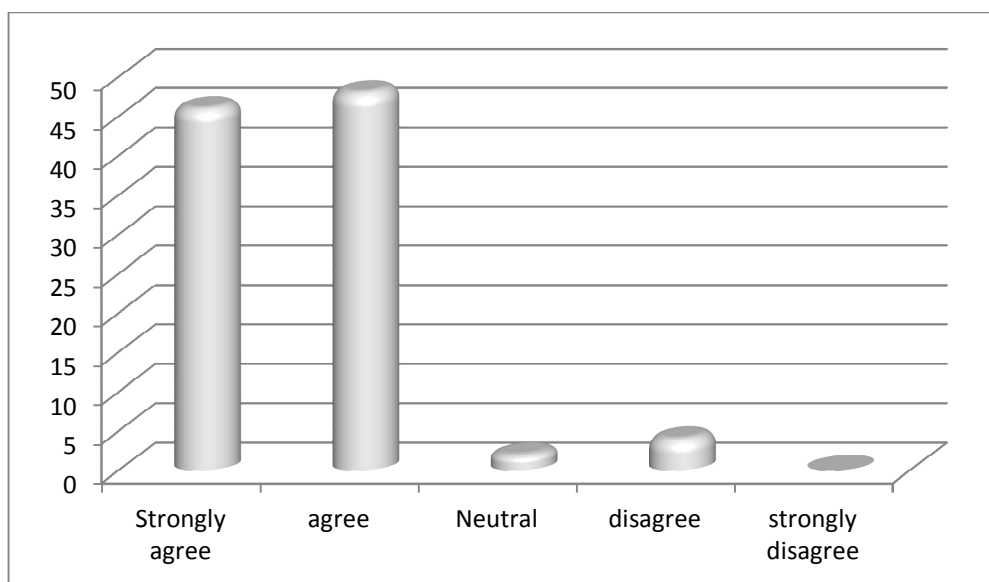
From the above table No.( 7) and figure No (7 ) It is clear that there are (23) persons in the study's sample with percentage (46%) strongly agreed with " The currently use English syllabuses do not equally focus on the four macro skills of English". There are (24) persons with percentage (48%) agreed with that, and (1) persons with percentage (2%) were not sure that, and (2) persons with percentage (4%) disagreed. And (0) persons with (0%) are strongly disagreed. Table No. (8) Chi-Square Test Results for Respondents' Answers of the Questions of the main Hypothesis: various short coming aspects hinder communicative competence promotion related to the under graduate currently used English syllabuses.

| Nom. | Statement | mean | SD | Chi square | p-value |
|------|-----------|------|----|-----------|---------|
| 1 | First year English syllabuses content is information based with much emphasis on subject – matter. | 3.4 | 1.9 | 13 | 0.00 |
| 2 | The currently use English syllabuses lack relevant to the outside world | 3.5 | 2.6 | 18 | 0.00 |
| 3 | The adopted undergraduate first year English syllabuses are more teacher centered than learner centered. | 3.4 | 2.4 | 13 | |
| 4 | The first English year structural syllabuses nature is of limited value in communicative competence promotion. | 3 | 0.8 | 25 | 0.03 |
| 5 | Under graduate first year English syllabuses contain a few oral and written skills. | 3.9 | 1.6 | 20 | 0.00 |

| 6 | The manipulated English syllabuses content only focus on grammatical rules, vocabulary and languages systems. | 3.4 | 1.9 | 13 | 0.00 |
| 7 | The currently use English syllabuses do not equally focus on the four macro skills of English | 3.5 | 2.6 | 18 | 0.00 |

**Source: The researcher from applied study, SPSS 24**

The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in question No (1) was (13) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which was (8.57). this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents.

**First year English syllabuses content is information based with much emphasis on subject-matter.** The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in question No (2) was (18) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which was (8.57). this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents, which support the respondent who agreed with the statement "**The currently use English syllabuses lack relevance to the outside world.** The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in question (3) was (13) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which was (8.57). this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the

respondents, which support the respondent who agreed with the statement " **The adopted undergraduate first year English syllabuses are more teacher centered than learner centered.** The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in question No (4) was (25) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which was (8.57). this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents, which support the respondent who agreed with the statement "**The first English year structural syllabuses nature is of limited value in communicative competence promotion.** The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in question No (5) was (20) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which was (8.57). this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents, which support the respondent who agreed with the statement (**Under graduate first year English syllabuses contain a few oral and written skills.**

The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in question No (6) was (13) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which was (8.57). this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents, which support the respondent who agreed with the statement "**The manipulated English syllabuses content only focus on grammatical rules, vocabulary and languages systems.** The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in question No (7) was (18) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which was (8.57). this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents, which support the respondent who agreed with the statement "**The currently use English syllabuses do not equally focus on the four macro skills of English**.

**Conclusion**

In the light of the analysis results, this study finds that there are various shortcoming aspects which hinder communicative competence promotion in the undergraduate currently-used English syllabuses**.** Majority of the participants agree about the questionnaire statements. The findings of study enhance the communicative teaching and the integrated syllabus design rather that the structural design which can develop the students' ability of communicative competence. The results show the agreement of most participants upon the lack of well preparation of the currently-used English syllabus. Based the findings of this study, the researcher would like to recommend the following:

1. The necessity of teaching English language communicatively.

2. Abandonment of grammar translation method dominance in teaching style is helpful to the students to overreach the problem of inability of language use.

3. There is a top urgent need to promote the currently-used English syllabus with a syllabus that emphasizing language as a means of communication rather than a source of knowledge only.

**Suggestion for Further Studies**

Syllabus design related to the communicative competence in English language teaching, learning and syllabus preparation is behind the ability of this current study to cover syllabus ill-preparation and its consequences since it is a fertile area of investigation in Sudan particularly. So, the researcher suggests that the forthcoming investigations may build on this effort towards an informed planning of English syllabus that facilitates the encountered obstacles.

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