

### Exploring EFL Students' Apprehension in Oral Production

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#### Abstract

This paper investigates the students' oral production apprehension at the Sudanese secondary schools with the aim of finding out the factors behind this type of apprehension to help in learning a second language. The study is carried out on some secondary schools in the eastern parts of Khartoum State. The researcher adopted the qualitative approach in analyzing the statement of the research using the Statistic Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) in analyzing the data collected through a questionnaire consisted of two parts for both teachers and learners. The study found out that the majority of the EFL Sudanese learners at secondary schools have cute difficulties in overcoming their fears in dealing with learning second language. The study also found that fear, shyness are central elements in delaying the process of learning a second language. For this reason, the researcher recommended that the Secondary school teachers in the Sudanese schools should talentedly choose the right methods and techniques used in the class to encourage the students who are victims of apprehension of learning.

#### المستخلص:

تناولت الدراسة مخاوف التلاميذ في المرحلة الثانوية من التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية وسعت الدراسة إلى توضيح العوامل المؤدية إلى هذه المخاوف لتساعد التلاميذ على تعلم تلك اللغة الأجنبية. أجرى الباحث الدراسة في عدد من المدارس الثانوية بولاية الخرطوم اتبع فيها المنهج الوصفي مستخدماً التحليل الإحصائي لتحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها باستخدام الاستبيان المقدم لاساتذة المدارس بمدينة شرق النيل. اوجدت الدراسة أن أغلبية التلاميذ في المرحلة الثانوية لديهم مخاوف من استخدام اللغة في محادثاتهم إذ لا يستطيعون التخلص من هذا الخوف. اوجدت الدراسة أن الخوف والخجل هما عاملان رئيسيان في عملية تعليم اللغة واستخدامها استخداماً صحيحاً لهذا يوصي الباحث على معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس بالمرحلة الثانوية اختيار واستخدام الأساليب المختلفة الفعالة لحث ومساعدة هؤلاء التلاميذ لاجتياز هذه العقبات .

#### INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is much more complex process, because it does not only require to know vocabulary and grammar of a language being acquired, but also knowledge about the context and culture and a new way of thinking and acting needs a great consideration. This process also includes certain type of apprehension. Abundant researches have proved language learning apprehension (Ellis 1996 et al). Learning a second language is a long and complex undertaking (Brown, 2007). Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first

language into a new language, new culture, new way of feeling and acting." learning a language is an emotional experience, and the feeling that the process of learning evokes will have a crucial bearing on the success or failure on the learning" (Rardin 1994).

Foreign language (FL) learners often experience problems with spontaneous oral communication. Learning a language is influenced by a vague fear that is indirectly associated with an object, a thing or a person. Language apprehension is a complicated psychological phenomenon related to language learning (Young 1992).

This phenomenon has been studied from different perspectives in relation to the levels of the students, the context of the acquisition and the teaching approaches. (Bailey 1983) and other linguists enumerated many obstacles related to language learning as gender apprehension, the native language skills and the subtle cognitive skills. Students of all levels of academic achievement and intellectual abilities are believed to be affected by apprehension in language learning. Some students display less self-confidence and are more prone to language learning apprehension than others: They tend to become uncomfortable in the presence of peers in the classroom or when faced with academic tasks; they are worried about making mistakes. In classroom communication activities, many students have the desire to express their thoughts orally, provide discussion topics and share their experiences with the class (Tomlinson & Dat, 2004). On the other hand, motivation to language learning is very important element that may assign the way the students learn a language with or without fear. This idea is explained by ( Diller , K , 1981 , pp, 1157-164 ) who stated that integrative motivation may indeed be an important requirement for successful language learning, and the students who possess an integrated type of motivation tend to do better in oral skills than students whose motivation is instrumental. The study investigates the Sudanese students' apprehension in oral production and the factors that lead to such type of apprehension as well as the extents to which such apprehension may affect language learning process namely the oral production in terms of speaking skills. The study contains the overall process of learning process with all its dimensions in the classroom environment

as well as outside classroom contexts. The aim of the study is to classify the origins of anxiety among the students and try to find solutions for such factors.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

It has been observed that the majority of the Sudanese EFL learners are influenced by what is called language learning apprehension. Although they study the grammar rules and the vocabulary of English, but still many of them find it difficult to express their ideas and hence they show some sort of inability while speaking the target language. Such a problem is deeply rooted among the Sudanese EFL Learners in English classes. The problem of the inability to produce the language in oral communication has been the core of many researches. That is why this study tries to find a clear way of treating such a phenomenon. It is a multi – dimensions problem that need integrative, joint and effective work to be solved. The researcher believes that oral production apprehension is a critical problem which is being faced by majority of EFL Sudanese students.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

- 1) To investigate difficulties encountered by EFL Sudanese students in learning English language
- 2) To show the extents to which EFL Sudanese learners have apprehension in oral production
- 3) To identify the factors that lead to the EFL learners' apprehension in oral production

#### **Hypotheses of the Study**

- 3) Most of the common EFL students' problems while oral production and speaking are shyness, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes and of negative evaluation

4) Apprehension exerted a strong influence on the students competence and negatively affect their unwilling to communicate

#### Questions of the Study

1) What are the factors concerning communication stress that cause language apprehension for EFL learners in oral production?

What are the EFL perceptions of language apprehension that exhibited in the learners?

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is conducted to show the effects of apprehension in the course of learning a second language inside and outside classroom. The chapter will investigate the theories and comments as well as the studies about this crucial concept. Apprehension occurs in cases where learners lack mature communications skills although they have mature ideas and thoughts. It refers to a fear of getting into real communication with others. There are many reasons that can play major roles in the act of feeling such a feeling of anxiety or apprehension among the classmates or colleagues. The study in this chapter gives through definitions to the terms apprehension and anxiety in order to clarify the point of the research. This review will widen the researcher's background about the study; its basic concepts, theories and anything that can have a relationship with the topic. Some learners have fear of negative evaluation which is an issue that has attracted little attention in language learning. Meanwhile such an issue should be given priority due to the different psychological behavior of learners. One could say that the core of this study which is the 'Apprehension' has a relationship with language achievement, because language anxiety is a significant factor affecting learners' achievement in their course of learning. The study in this chapter handles

all the factors that have something to do with apprehension and its effects in language learning. The research shows the effects and roles of language teaching method in the domain of learning a second language and removing language apprehension among learners. The chapter also contains the different aspects that relate to language apprehension and the field of learning in general.

#### Apprehension

This term is defined by Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English as "a form of anxiety about the future especially about dealing with something that is unpleasant or difficult". The term apprehension is one of the major factors that determine the level of comprehensible input received. It refers to a fear of getting into real communication with others.

According to Mc Croskey (1987) apprehension "... is a type of anxiety experienced in interpersonal communicative settings where learners have little control of the communicative situation regardless whether in a small group or a large crowd" (p.129). Another definition about the term apprehension is linked to the term communication is defined by Young (1990). He states that a variety of complex psychological construct Causes foreign language anxiety is communication apprehension which is defined as " an individual level of fear of anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons". Also, there is something to be said about communication apprehension by " Richard & McCarthy, 1982). They describe the people who suffer from communication apprehension by saying "people who suffer from communication apprehension are unwilling to communicate with others"

### Communication Apprehension

In order to get a better understanding of language learning anxiety, we must first find out about its sources. Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that the language anxiety is mostly grounded in the skills of speaking and listening. They also stated that language anxiety appears when an individual is evaluated in academic and social context. Therefore, they have identified three related performance anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is also known as communication anxiety or performance anxiety. Since foreign language learning emphasizes the importance of interpersonal interactions, the communication apprehension construct plays an important role in language learning. An individual experiencing communication apprehension finds it difficult to speak in a group or in public, or even to listen to a spoken message. The communication apprehension can also be caused by the necessity to produce language structures in a language which is not yet fully mastered. The inability to express themselves in a desired manner or to understand others can lead to frustration and can make otherwise talkative people silent in foreign language class (Horwitz et al., 1986). Lin and Rancer (2003) found that men reported experiencing higher apprehension about intercultural communication than do women

### Anxiety

The term "Anxiety" is a concept which affects people universally, regardless of their ages, gender or races. It is a term that deals with the individual's psychology and it has many definitions as these cited below: Psychologists describe anxiety as " ... a state of apprehension a vague fear that is

only indirectly associated with an object'. (Tanveer, 2007). In this sense it is described as a kind of fear that has a link with something ; a state, object or whatever. Another definition is stated by Young (1991) who defined it in this way: "it is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon and can be defined as a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system. Both of the above definitions considered this term as a complex phenomenon that is shown in the tension and fear which might affect the learners in dealing with second language. The act of having such feelings of fear and anxiety is to some extents a normal and likely to happen in any multicultural classroom especially with native speakers teachers. This is due to the fact that some students are used to be introvert and have little participation in classrooms and hence they are afraid of being laughed at and / or being evaluated negatively. Language anxiety plays a fundamental role in the learning process affecting the learners' cognitive and behavioral appearance. Anxious students are more concerned about their responses to tasks and performance in tasks they receive in language classroom. It is stated that "Language learning is a cognitive activity that relies on encoding, storage, and retrieval processes, and anxiety can interfere with each of these by creating a divided attention scenario for anxious students. Anxious students are focused on both the task at hand and their reactions to it (p.96)". Anxiety as an affective state is defined as an " ... uncomfortable emotional state in which one perceive danger, feels powerless, and experiences tensions in the face an expected danger (Blau, 1955).



### Factors Affecting Second Language Learning

In Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, Jack Richards, et al. (1985, p. 252) states that second language acquisition is, "the process by which people develop proficiency in a second or foreign language." Rod Ellis (1986, p. 4) explains that SLA is "a complex process, involving many interrelated factors. It is the product of many factors pertaining to the learner on the one hand and the learning situation on the other." In addition, Victoria Fromkin et. al (2002, p. 593) says that SLA is "the acquisition of another language or language after first language acquisition that is under way or completed." To conclude, second language acquisition (best known as SLA) is subconscious study through which a person acquires L2 or additional languages. The above definition to second language pave the road to the factors that affect the learning / acquisition process of the second language which may be second , third or fourth language. In the section below the study presents a number of factors to show how such factors affect this process of learning and to show how apprehension is an influencing factors as represented in the fear from leaning a foreign language.

#### Impact of Apprehension on Learners

Horwitz et al. define communication apprehension as "a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people". They argue that a learner who has difficulty in listening to or learning a spoken message or has difficulty in speaking in public or in a group is experiencing communication apprehension. Fear of negative evaluation is defined as an "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others

would evaluate one negatively" (Watson & Friend, 1969 as cited in Foss & Reitzel, 1988), and it is indicated that it may be experienced in any social, evaluative situation such as speaking in a FL. Test Anxiety is defined as the type of performance anxiety resulting from fear of failure (Horwitz et al., 1986). It is indicated that any situation in which the student feels s/he is being tested can result in anxiety and lead to low performance on language tests. The three types have their negative effects on the learner and this is due to several external and internal factors that may be attributed to age, sex or the environment. Anxiety in FL teachers needs further investigation. It is said that language learning is never complete even for language teachers who are supposed to be high-level speakers of their target language. Most non-native language teachers are likely to have uncomfortable moments speaking in the target language. In order to reduce anxiety while teaching, Gardner and Leak (1994) suggested that training programs that increase awareness of anxiety and equip individuals with strategies to cope with anxiety could be implemented. They asserted that communication between colleagues is vital because teachers would see that they are not alone and that other teachers may also be experiencing teaching anxiety.

#### METHODOLOGY

##### Population

This research was conducted in Khartoum state, East Nile Locality. The population of this study were the students of Eastern Nile Secondary School for girls/boys. Students in this school as in other schools study general subjects such as: Biology, Physics, History, Geography, etc. All the students in this school share the same circumstances such as:

The academic year, the academic system, the number of subjects, the number of classes, etc. From this society, the researcher selected some students as a sample. Specifically some students of the first year secondary were chosen to participate in conducting this study. They were selected randomly. All the students study English language without concentrating on specific skills or in a balanced way. Moreover, they had a British English background in addition to their native Arabic language with regard to a few number of learners who may have some local or tribal languages.

#### Subjects

The group chosen to perform this study consisted of 40 members. The students of

the third year secondary school whose ages range between 14 to 16 years. They belonged to one grade, too. They were both males and females with different geographical backgrounds. The subjects of this study are also some teachers from some higher secondary schools chosen randomly to give their opinions about their students

#### Instruments

In this research, the researcher adopted a questionnaire for students and another for teachers to show the effects of apprehension in the process of learning a second language. These questionnaires were designed to collect data about the students' and teachers' attitudes towards learning a second language in terms of language production and apprehension.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Tables and Charts

Here the researcher presents the tables and charts as follows:

*Table (4.1) shows results of questionnaire of the first statement*

**I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
no	9	22.5	22.5	22.5
Valid yes	31	77.5	77.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table (4.1) shows that 77.5% answered positively and 22.5% negatively responded. As shown in the chart below:

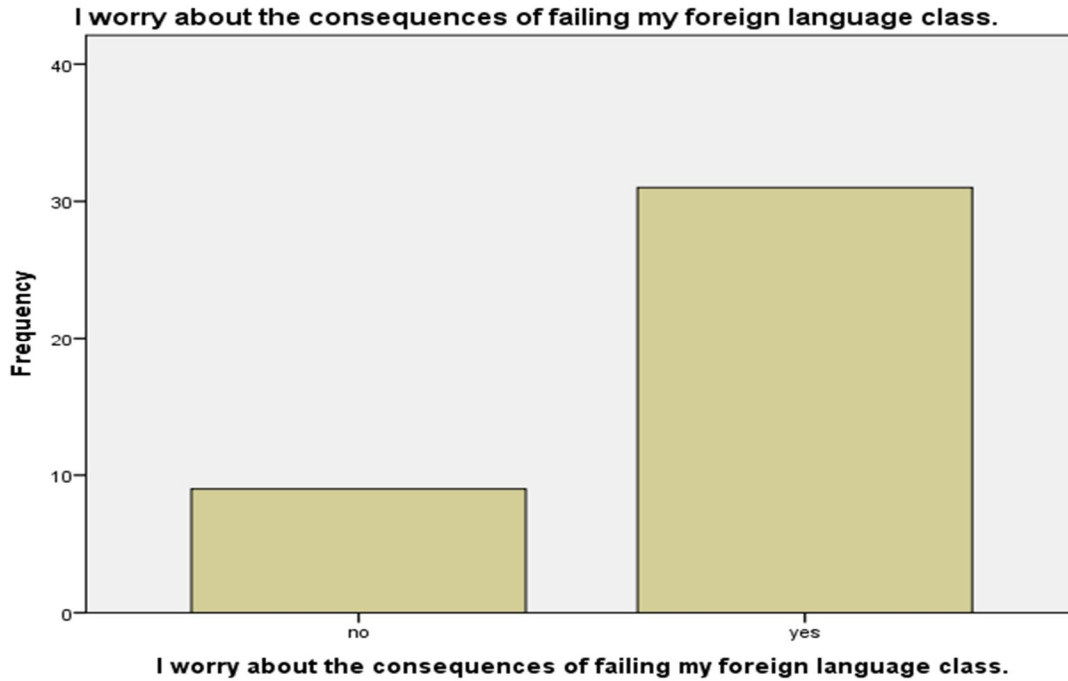


Table (4.2) shows results of questionnaire of the second statement

I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid no	17	42.5	42.5	42.5
sometimes	13	32.5	32.5	75.0
yes	10	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table (4.2) shows that 25.0% answered positively and 42.5% negatively responded and those who said sometimes are represented by 32.5%.

As shown in the chart:

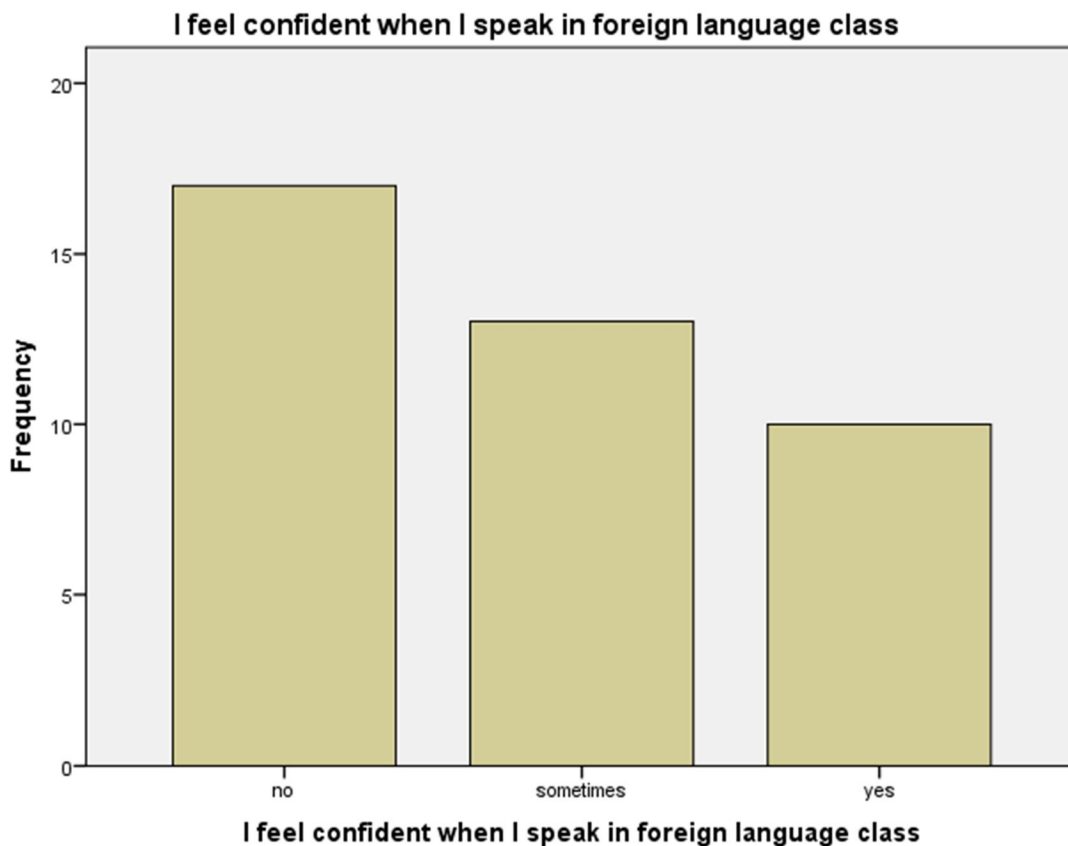


Table (4.3) shows *results of questionnaire of the third statement*

**I feel ashamed of myself in front of my classmates when making mistakes.**

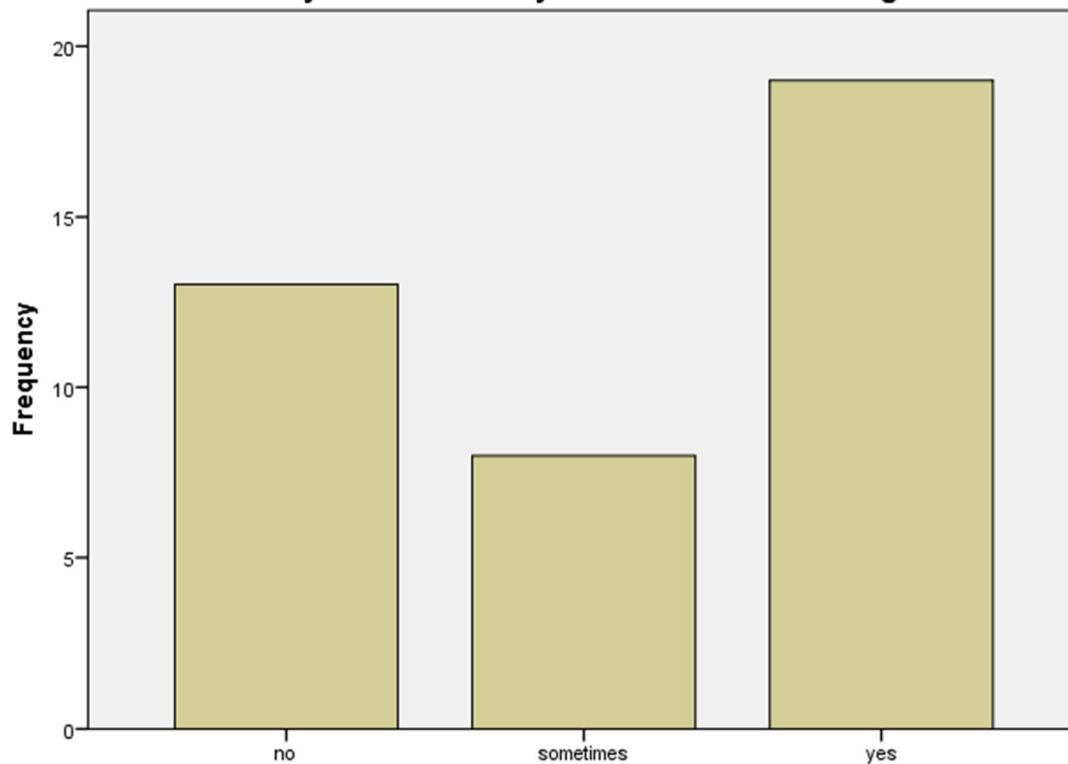
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid no	13	32.5	32.5	32.5
sometimes	8	20.0	20.0	52.5
yes	19	47.5	47.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table (4.3) shows that 47.5% answered positively and 32.5% negatively responded and those who said sometimes are represented by 20.0%.

As shown in the chart below:



I feel ashamed of myself in front of my classmates when making mistakes.



I feel ashamed of myself in front of my classmates when making mistakes.

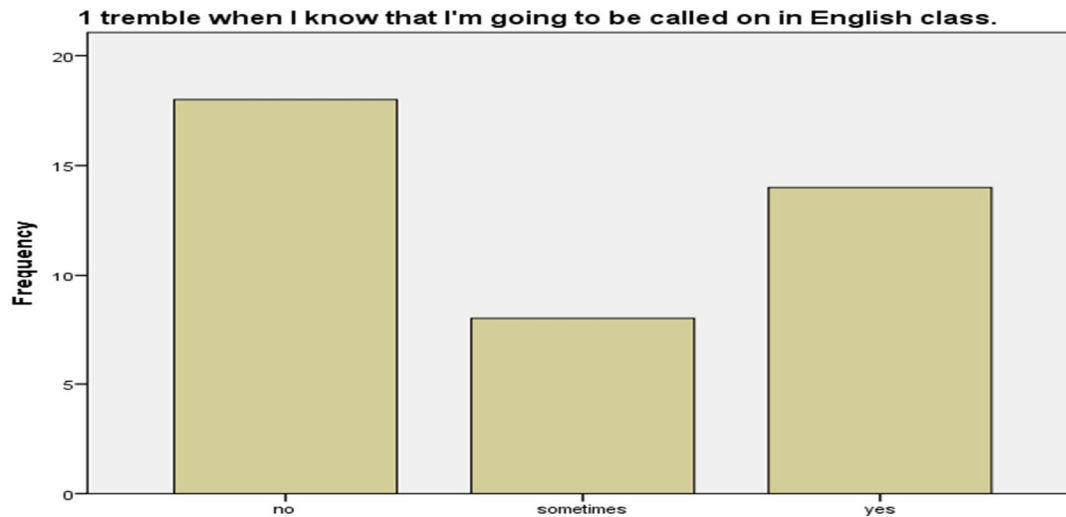
Table (4.4) shows *results of questionnaire of the fourth statement*

I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid no	18	45.0	45.0	45.0
sometimes	8	20.0	20.0	65.0
yes	14	35.0	35.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table (4.4) shows that 35.0% answered positively and 45.0% negatively responded and those who said sometimes are represented by 20.0%.

As it is clear in the chart:



1 tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.

Table (4.5) shows *results of questionnaire of the fifth statement*

**I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid no	12	30.0	30.0	30.0
sometimes	8	20.0	20.0	50.0
yes	20	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table (4.5) shows that 50.0% answered positively and 30.0% negatively responded and those who said sometimes are represented by 20.0%.

*Table (4.9) shows the results of the first part of the questionnaire*

No	The Item		Yes	sometimes	No
1	I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	F	31	0	9
		P	77.50%	0.00%	22.50%
2	I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class	F	10	13	17
		P	25.00%	32.50%	42.50%
3	I feel ashamed of myself in front of my classmates when making mistakes.	F	19	0	13
		P	77.50%	0.00%	22.50%
4	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.	F	17	8	18
		P	42.50%	20.00%	45.00%
5	I am calm and relaxed while	F	20	8	12

	participating in group discussions.	P	50.00%	20.00%	30.00%
6	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	F	20	7	13
		P	50.00%	17.50%	32.50%
7	I feel relaxed during the English classes	F	20	11	9
		P	50.00%	27.50%	22.50%
8	I find studying English more interesting than other subjects	F	17	3	20
		P	77.50%	0.00%	22.50%
TOTAL			154	58	111

Table (4.9) shows that 77.5% gives positive response in the first item and 22.5% gives negative response. While in the second item, those who feel confidence are estimated to be 25.5% and about 75% feel less confident including the choice (sometimes). In the third item, 77.5% feel ashamed, 22.5% gives positive response. In the 4th item 42.5% gives positive response, 20.0% sometimes and 45.5 % never tremble when speak in English. The 5th item shows balance in that 50.00% are relaxed and others not. The 6th item has the same result like the 5th and the 7th item. The last item shows 77.5% gives positive response and 22.5% gives negative response in terms of finding English an interesting subject.

#### CONCLUSION

It could be clear from the analysis of the first part of the questionnaire that over 77% of the students worry about failing in the English class and or afraid of the negative consequences of such a failure in studying English. Also there are students estimated with more than 55% who feel confident when they speak in foreign language class. However, half of this percentage or it could be said that 32% of the students sometimes feel as such and only 25% feel confident when they speak English. However 47% of the students feel ashamed of themselves in front of their classmates when making

mistakes and only 32% never feel as such in front of their classmates when they speak English. Some students tremble when they know that they are going to be called on in English class. This is estimated according to the responses to the questionnaire by 35% and other 25% sometimes tremble when they are called to answer or speak in front of the class. On the other hand, 50% of the students feel calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions. In addition to some of them approximately 20% sometimes feel relaxed while participating in classroom discussion. The last item of the first part of the questionnaire shows that 50% of the students find studying English more interesting than other subjects. This means that fifty percent of the students are interesting in learning English and the others find some obstacles in doing so. In the second part of the questionnaire, 53% of the students often feel like not going to their language class and only 47% are in one way or another attend their English classes. On the other hand, 70% of the students range between (sometimes and No) have fear of speaking up in conversations. Only around 30% of the students have the courage to speak up in conversation with other people.



In the case of being nervous, 55% of the students agree that they would be nervous when speaking the foreign language with native speakers, 45% of the total number of them are not nervous.

### Main Findings

Based on the analysis and the discussion conducted in the previous chapter, the research found that:

-The majority of the EFL Sudanese learners at secondary schools have cute difficulties in overcoming their fears in dealing with learning second language.

-Fear, shyness are central elements in delaying the process of learning a second language.

-The apprehension of being negatively evaluated cause some students avoid attending English classes and hence affect the language mastery by those students.

-The environment plays a great role in the process of language learning due to the influence of Sudanese Arabic language among a large number of the students who prefer speaking their own language rather than practicing oral communication

-Secondary schools' students have negative attitudes towards the target language. This negative attitude affects in one way or another the learning process.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, there are some recommendations posed by the researcher in this concern. These are as follows:

-Since it is not possible to escape evaluations in language learning, students too have to be smart in dealing with fear such as adopting strategies and making preparation for English classes.

-Sudanese second language teachers play a very important role in determining the communication apprehension level of the students, hence, they should try to do their best to help them overcome their fears

### Suggestion for Further Studies

- The main limitation of our study is that our participants were only from one region of the country, the capital city, therefore, it is expected that certain scales, institutes or universities such as English as an international language might show different values if other parts of the country were surveyed. Another future study might include the less confident teachers who participate in the student's language learning apprehension.

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