

**DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY SAUDI EFL UNIVERSITY LEARNERS IN ORAL COMMUNICATIVE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON ENGLISH ORAL PERFORMANCE (A CASE STUDY OF THE COLLEGE OF SCIENCE AND ARTS- TANUMAH-KING KHALID UNIVERSITY)**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study investigates the difficulties encountered by Saudi EFL university learners in oral communicative classroom activities and their impact on English oral performance communication. The Population of this study targets 20 EFL university instructors in the College of Science and Arts for female students and the College of Science and Arts for male students in Tanumah, King Khalid University in the first semester of the academic year 2019/2020. The population also consists of 35 EFL university third level female students and 35 EFL university third level male students in the two above-mentioned colleges. To collect data, the study depends on the analysis of structured interview conducted on EFL university instructors and on the analysis of the students' oral test in addition to the personal observation of the researchers. The study has come out with the conclusion that, the oral English communicative performance of Saudi EFL university learners is characterized by errors of grammar, pronunciation, intonation, filler words, and inappropriate choice of words, lack of fluency, lack of confidence, hesitation and fear of making errors. However, the study attributes these difficulties to many factors including, for example, interference of the Arabic language of EFL university learners in learning and teaching process, EFL learners' lack of motivation to develop their English oral communication skill, absence of speaking English courses at primary and high secondary school levels, in addition to that the learners lack the necessary vocabulary items and sentence formation skills that enable them to communicate in English. Finally, the paper recommends that EFL university instructors should try other different strategies for developing EFL learners' oral communicative skills. In addition to that, they should build the learners' self-confidence by creating a safe classroom environment, by giving learners more chances to speak in English on different situations and by using fun assignments and interesting topics regarding their age, gender, and context. Moreover, EFL learners should be encouraged to read more and more to get high quantity of vocabulary and be involved in intensive oral practice by encouraging them to have an English conversation club that consists of their own classmates.*

**KEYWORDS:** difficulties; Saudi EFL learners, oral communication, speaking skills, classroom activities.

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## INTRODUCTION

The main aim behind learning English language is to communicate in English effectively. Davies & Pearce, (2000), cited in Leong, L & Seyedeh, M. (2017) think that the major purpose of English language teaching is to give learners the ability to use English language effectively and correctly in communication. Speaking is regarded as one of the major skills which need to be developed in the language classroom. Mouhoub, A. (2016) believes mastering the speaking skill is the keystone in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. Of the four language skills namely: reading, writing, listening and speaking, this latter appears to be of top priority in today's language classrooms due to the significant role it plays in learners' mastery of the target language. Richards & Renandya, ( 2002), cited in Ahmad, A. & Mustafa, A. (2016) point out that achieving proficiency in oral communication is the main dream and motivation which a large percentage of learners bring to language classes. For Warschauer, (2000), in Fareen, J. (2013), communicating in English has become a prerequisite factor in both academy and profession.

Many of the previous and related studies highlight the significance of oral English communication and the strategies for the development of the students' communication skills. For example, Anton, L. (2017) believes that oral communication is very important for students because good communication enables students to assimilate more from the learning process by empowering them to ask relevant questions and discuss doubts. Effective verbal communication nurtures the process of socialization by facilitating new friendships and these in turn aid the learning process. Productive communication is a boost to career development. An ability to convey thoughts in a clear and precise manner would help a student to make a favorable impression at an interview and get the job that he deserves. The importance of speaking has also been pointed by Ur (2000) "*Of all the four skills, speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of the language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing.*"

The significance of speaking is indicated with the integration of the other language skills. For Leong, L & Seyedeh, M.( 2017), speaking helps learners develop their vocabulary and grammar skills and then better their writing skill. Students can express their emotions, ideas; say stories; request; talk, discuss and show the various functions of language. Speaking is of vital importance outside the classroom. Therefore, language speakers have more opportunities to find jobs in different organizations and companies. These statements have been supported by Baker and Westrup (2003), cited in Leong, L & Seyedeh, M. ( 2017) who said that learners who speak English very well can have a greater chance for better education, finding good jobs, and getting a promotion. Indeed, speaking is interrelated with the other skills in a way that practicing one, leads to practice the other. Oral communication skills are fundamental to the development of literacy and essential for thinking and learning. It is the glue that puts all the components of a language together. Through debate, students learn how to think on their feet, hone their listening and reflection skills as well as improving their speaking. This view is also supported by Nunan (1991), cited in Mouhoub, A. A (2016:39) who stated that "*To most people, mastering the art of speaking is the single most important factors of learning a second or foreign language and success is measured by the ability to carry out a conversation in the language*".

For Mouhoub, A. A (2016), the essential goal behind learning a foreign language is to be able to use it appropriately for communicative purposes. The ability to speak and acquire good oral communication becomes very important in nowadays' technological age. However, many language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language. They are not able to communicate fluently and accurately because they do not have enough knowledge in this field. They cannot express their ideas or interact with other people freely. Many of them are very hesitant to communicate because of their inadequate competence in the target language. They are generally facing problems to use foreign language to express their thoughts effectively. They stop talking because they face psychological obstacles or cannot find the suitable words and expressions. The modern world of media and mass communication requires good knowledge of spoken English.

In a nutshell, oral Communication is a challenge for any language learner. Flucher, G. (2003) ,cited in Ahmad, A. S. & Mustafa, A. H.(2016) , argues that second language speaking is complex. He confirms that the learners who want to speak L2 have to master the grammar, vocabulary and the sounds. Harmer (1991) notes that speaking has many different aspects including two major categories which are accuracy involving the correct use of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Brown and Yule (1983) confirm that spoken language production is often regarded as one of the most difficult aspects of language learning. Liu and Jackson (2008) claim that lack of vocabulary was regarded as the main hindrance for spoken communication used by Chinese learners.

Learners face a great deal of difficulty in developing English oral communication. In this regard, Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000), in Rao, P. Srinivas (2018), mention that speaking is the most difficult as well as the most complex of all four skills as it requires expertise in grammatical patterns, vocabulary retrieval and sociocultural competence. Samira Al Hosni (2014), cited in Zakaria, Ali. (2015), assumes that the main speaking difficulties encountered by students are linguistic difficulties, mother tongue use, and inhibition. Students are unable to speak in English because they lack the necessary vocabulary items and grammar structures. They also lack sentence formation skills, which leads them to resort to their mother tongue. In addition to that, students think that the mistakes they make in front of their classmates are very embarrassing. Accordingly, they prefer not to take part in any communicative event.

Improving the students' oral fluency is one of the most challenging issues for languages teachers and students. The overall aim of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the difficulties experienced by Saudi EFL university learners when involving in oral communicative classroom activities and to shed light on the impact of these difficulties on English oral performance. The study is conducted in an effort to improve and develop English oral proficiency of EFL university learners and to suggest practical solutions that can be adopted by both instructors and learners to overcome these challenges.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It has been observed by the researchers that the majority of Saudi EFL university learners encounter some difficulties when involving in oral communicative classroom activities. Many students still adhere to their mother tongue, ignoring at the same time the foreign language use.

They are unable to participate, argue, share, debate or continue in a conversation. Thus, it is the main thrust of this paper to investigate these difficulties and to shed light on their impact on oral communicative performance.

### **Questions of the Study**

The study poses the following questions:

- a) What difficulties do EFL university learners face when involving in oral communicative classroom activities?
- b) What are the main factors behind these difficulties?
- c) To what extent, do these difficulties affect developing of oral communication skill of EFL university learners?
- d) What teaching strategies should EFL university instructors adopt to help their learners overcome these difficulties?

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

The study hypothesizes the following points:

- a) EFL university learners face difficulties when involving in oral communicative classroom activities.
- b) The oral communicative performance of EFL university learners is characterized by ineffective organization of the ideas , inappropriate use of words, grammatical errors and pronunciation errors,
- c) These difficulties have negative impacts on developing and improving EFL university learners' oral communication skill. .
- d) Lack of adequate vocabulary and lack of oral communication skill practice are associated with EFL university learners' problems of developing oral skill.
- e) EFL university learners' problems of developing oral skill can be related to the teaching methods and strategies.
- f) EFL university learners can improve their oral communication skill through extensive reading of English texts, and through more practice of speaking and listening skills in English.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study aims at:

- a) Investigating and identifying the difficulties facing EFL university learners when involving in oral communicative classroom activities.
- b) Shedding light on the impacts of these difficulties on developing and improving EFL university learners' oral communication skill. .
- c) Suggesting practical solutions that can be adopted by both instructors and learners to overcome these difficulties.

### **Significance of the Study**

The present study will be of considerable interest to language educators and students since it focuses on oral communication skills, which are fundamental to the development of literacy and essential for thinking and learning. Through discussion, students not only communicate information but also explore and come to understand ideas and concepts; identify and solve

problems; organize their experience and knowledge; express and clarify their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Listening and speaking skills are essential for interaction at home, at school, and in the community. On this ground, the study hopes to be of great importance to EFL university instructors and students by shedding light on the challenges encountered by EFL university students in enhancing oral communicative skill. Both EFL university instructors and students can get benefit from the results arrived at in this study by changing their teaching and learning strategies or methodologies and implementing them in classroom, and these may well lead to successful results.

### **Limits of the study**

The study is mainly restricted to investigate and identify the difficulties facing the students of English Language Departments in the Colleges of Science & Arts for male students and female students in Tanumah, King Khalid University, when involving in oral communicative classroom activities, in the academic year 2019/2020 during the first semester. A structured interview and oral test are used as primary tools for collecting data.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Definition of Communication**

There are different definitions for the word "*communication*" provided by a number of scholars and researchers. For example, Chadha (2003:86) argues that communication is derived from the Latin verb "communicate" which means to "*import to share*" and "*to make common*".

Hornby (1995:229) states that the verb "*to communicate*" means to make something known, and to pass or transmit something. Abdellah (2002) claims that communication is an act of sending and receiving of messages. Glenn (1981) defines communication as a process of conveying or transmitting messages such as ideas, information, or feelings so that the receiver understands it.

According to Deverell (1974:8) communication involves exchange of opinions and ideas and associated with human relations and is a matter of skills required for transmitting ideas from a person to another. Brown (2000), as quoted in Abdellah (2002), declares that "*Communication is not merely an event or something that happens; it is functional, purposive and designed to bring about some effect, some change, however, subtle or unobservable, on the environment of hearers and speakers*". The essential elements in any oral communication involve a speaker or sender, the message or speech, and the listener or receiver. From the above definitions, we can say that communication is a part of everyone's life as well as institutional existence and it is very much similar to learning to ride a bike or learning to play an instrument, despite the fact it is generally known that the best mode to learn these skills is by doing them, and not by just studying them or doing exercises and drills (Stryker and Leaver, 1997, p.1).

### **Types of Communication**

There are four types of communication: written communication, visual communication, audio-visual communication and oral communication.



**(a) Written Communication**

Chadha (2003) states that written forms like letters, circular, memorandums, notices, reports, articles, books, essays, magazines, newspapers, e-mails, etc form written communication. It is often believed that a person spends 70 percent of his waking time communicating either by reading, writing, speaking or listening.

Raimes (1983:4) points out that written communication is not an easy task as the learner needs to master the standard forms of grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, good spelling and well organization.

Deverell(1974:74) emphasizes that word order, correct use of tense, agreement, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation, abbreviation, numbers, vocabulary, etc. constitute written communication.

**(b) Visual Communication**

According to Chadha (2003:6) visual communication refers to gestures, facial expressions, tables, charts, diagrams, posters, printed pictures, slides, neon signs, signals, etc.

Barett (1973) mentions that we can receive the feedback of the message visually through the sight waves as gestures, body movement, winks of the eye, and other physical actions.

Brown (2000) asserts that we communicate so much information non-verbally in conversations that often aspects off the conversation are negligible.

**(c) Audio-Visual Communication**

Bam (2006:7) argues that audio-visual communication is a powerful combination of sounds and sight waves.

This type of communication is widely used in mass education; universities usually apply the use of overhead projectors, graphs and charts in lectures, seminars and meetings.

Hassan (1999:55) says that using aids for presentation, demonstration, and reinforcement is important in the learning setting.

**(d) Oral Communication**

Chadha (2003:21) declares that oral communication includes face- to- face conversations, telephonic conversations; radio broadcasts, interviews, group discussion, public speeches, meetings, seminars, etc.

Oral communication is said to be the most demanding type of communication for EFL learners and needs much practice in order to be mastered. Deverell (1974) states that oral communication can be classified into different fields: face-to-face communication, interviewing of all kinds, formal and informal speech, meeting of many kinds, and the use of telephone and similar media for transmission off the voice. According to Douglas (2001:271) there are various types of oral production that students are expected to practice in the classroom setting. These are: imitative, which is carried out for focusing on certain elements of language through generating (human tape-recorder speech). Responsive oral production: includes short meaningful and sufficient replies to teachers and students questions.

Intensive: involves speaking tasks that are designed to practice some phonological or grammatical aspects of the language. Extensive: carried in the form of oral reports or short speeches.

According to Chadha (2003) oral production is divided into formal and informal oral production. Informal oral production takes the form of face- to- face communication in a flexible and an

unorganized manner in a free and frank exchange of ideas whereas formal oral communication is well-organized and demands great and conscious effort.

### **Advantages of Oral Communication**

According to Deverell (1974:108), oral communication has many advantages, he argues that to most of us conversation has a more human and more direct appeal than writing and reading, the direct exchange in speaking and listening gives us opportunity for the interchange of information and views. In face-to-face situation, sensitivity to attitudes and moods of other parties gives the speaker the chance to adapt this approach, physical presence gives incidental advantages such as the opportunity to consolidate words with gestures, to underline statements with facial expressions. In addition to that, information can be repeated in order to make sure the message is being understood. For Chadha (2003:6), oral communication has the following advantages: it saves time, it results in a quick and immediate feedback, it promotes better relations, it is more persuasive and it does not involve big expenditure. Barrett (1973) states that in oral communication the speaker should be clear by using simple and precise language, he/she must show liveliness by using sense-appealing and figurative language, his/her language should be varied by using diversified and fresh language and he/she should be aware of acceptability which refers to the use of standard language in appropriate situations. According to Mohammed (2007:23) speaking is the most important language skill but students of a foreign language will not learn to speak fluently only by listening to speech in the class, although this is very important for providing them with some necessary input and acquainting them with certain forms and the flow of authentic speech as well as for giving them the chance to practice in the receptive side of communication.

### **Characteristics of Effective Oral Communication Skills**

Lane (2010) states that oral communication concerns with the use of words to create and convey meaning in order to enable the speakers to define, classify, and express beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. Jeharsae (2012:22) argues that in order to create effective communication skills, an individual should regularly improve their existing language skills and develop the following characteristics:

- 1) An understanding of the principles of language; knowing how to use the grammar correctly, to pronounce correctly, and to use vocabulary appropriately.
- 2) An understanding of the meaning of words and their proper usage (word choice selection).
- 3) The ability to deliver a message clearly, accurately and directly.
- 4) Having a pleasant voice or good quality, which involves attention to volume, speed and clarity.
- 5) Having good listening skills, such as listening carefully and paying attention to the needs of the speaker.
- 6) Having confidence, a relaxed style, and the ability to adapt the message to fit the needs of the listener.

## Types of Oral Communication

The following are the different types of oral communication:

### (a) **Conversation:**

Hornby (1995:254) argues that conversation is informal talk that involves two or more people. EFL learners have to use conversations as a technique to develop their oral communication.

Ur (2001:4) states that encouraging fluency among EFL learners can be achieved through conversations, he says *"One conventional way of improving EFL learners' fluency is the conversation class, where a group of students sit down together with the teacher- a native speaker if they are lucky- and are required to talk with him/her...so the first thing to do is to bring interesting subjects off conversations to the classroom"*.

### (b) **Formal Speech**

According to Chadha (2003), the most difficult type of oral communication is formal speech hence most people feel uncomfortable when they are asked to speak formally in front of audience; they tend to feel worried and anxious and they cannot easily overcome *"stage fright"*. EFL learners often feel worried and anxious when they are asked to communicate in English lest they would be corrected by their classmates.

Barret (1973:27) says *"In the preparation of speeches, the first, and sometimes most difficult job is finding a topic, the next steps he says are the collection of information followed by the preparation of speech into introduction, main body and conclusion"*.

### (c) **Classroom Interaction**

EFL learners need a good environment in order to interact and practice English. Osman (2003:4) states that the classroom is a unique social environment with its own human activities and its own conventions govern these interaction activities.

Johnson (1998) claims that the nature of classroom communication has different shapes, starting from speech events, participation structures, the nature of the teacher's talk, student-teacher interaction and the effect of cultural factors on classroom communication.

### (d) **Meeting**

EFL learners need to learn and master the skills of participating in a meeting in order to enhance their oral communication skills.

According to Deverell (1974) organization, documentation, conduct and administration of meetings are forms of communication that learners need to apply as a part of their communication classes.

### (e) **Interview**

Deverell (1974:115) claims that students need to know the skills needed for successful interviews as nearly everybody applies interviewing to different matters such as getting and giving information on specific topics.

## Factors Affecting Oral Communication Difficulties among EFL Learners

Mezrigui (2012) states that EFL learners' low-level of proficiency in oral communication is affected by:

### A. **The Learning Environment**

The environment plays a crucial role in helping the students to acquire the foreign language. Sandstrom (1996:115) argues that *"A large number of systematic and thorough investigations*



*recently have shown how great the importance of environment is to the development of language. The influence of the environment begins remarkably early and its effect lasts a long time".*

According to Mezrigui (2012) one major reason behind the problem of oral communication is that learners are not sufficiently exposed to English either as spoken by native speakers or non-native speakers hence they do not live in an English –speaking environment and they are not given the chance to communicate with native speakers neither they are encouraged to practice English outside the classroom setting; even in the classroom , the amount of practicing English is not enough to the extent that enables learners to be professional English users, as a matter of fact learners have only few English lessons per week, furthermore, when communication skills are presented in the classroom , teachers devote very little time to allow the students to communicate in comparison to the other communicative skills, in addition to that English examinations focus much more on reading and writing skills than on oral and aural skills (Miller,2001,25).

### **B. Psychological Factors**

Psychological factors are determined by the learners' internal thoughts. According to Mezrigui (2012) low-level students often feel frustrated when they are asked to be engaged in a particular learning activity; they have no real interest in learning and no hope of improvement. He also maintains that some students tend to have a passive role in the classroom setting; they participate in the oral activities reluctantly, they feel worried and anxious about communicating in English lest they will be corrected by their peers as communication requires specific qualities such as talking flowingly without hesitation or making long unnecessary pauses which make oral communication difficult to develop unlike the other language skills. Learners' lack of self-confidence could be the outcome of poor school results as when students get low marks in English examinations they feel disappointed and consequently they lose their self-confidence. Lack of EFL learners of the awareness of the importance of English language for their current and future needs may also pose some oral communication problems; students should try as possible as they can to achieve effective learning of the foreign language through formal instruction in the classroom and outside the learning setting. However, most EFL learners learn English as an academic subject and they are unaware of the importance of English for their future needs (Mezrigui, 2012).

### **Problems in English Oral Communication of EFL learners**

The main aim of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate effectively. However, communicating in a language that is not one's own mother-tongue can be difficult; speakers and listeners may share the same interest nevertheless, it is difficult for them to communicate satisfactorily using the foreign language (Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011). Barna (1985), as quoted in Jeharsae (2012), mentions several factors that cause communication difficulties to EFL learners which include false assumptions, language differences and non-verbal misunderstanding. Dabao and Martinez (2007) argue that a message is not well communicated in the target language due to lack of knowledge about lexical items and the purpose of listening to spoken language. According to Khamkhien (2010) English oral communication is considered to be difficult for non-native speakers due to insufficient English knowledge, limited experience with or exposure to English interaction , or lack of communicative competence. Blosch and Starks (1999) claim that the main four problems of EFL oral communication are total lack of understanding between the speaker and

the listener, poor or insufficient vocabulary and use of idioms, distortion or misunderstanding of the message and inappropriate formulation of the message.

Mohammed (2007:222) declares that EFL learners' oral communication difficulties are attributed to the fact that most of the courses taught at universities focus on reading and writing whereas listening and speaking receive less than 6% of the total course weight, moreover, he states that there is always anxiety about the amount of oral practice that less students are getting during lectures. These students are generally reserved and reluctant to use English as many of them feel embarrassed and shy if they make a mistake when speaking in front of the whole class, furthermore, the interaction in classroom is usually dominated by the fluent students only. Sahamat (1999:71) states that oral communication breakdowns are attributed to socio-cultural awareness. He says *"Cultural orientation has been found to be an increasingly important factor in language learning, furthermore, intercultural competence such as norms of interaction, social conventions and values, norms of social appropriateness, proved to be indispensable for the authentic and naturalistic flow of language being spoken or written"*, this suggests that communication errors may occur as a result of the variation of the culture between the source language and the target language.

Jimenez (2015) believes that there are three aspects that affect the students' oral production negatively. First, lack of motivation that could be manifested in anxiety and students' low self-esteem. Second, the learning environment which includes the teacher's methodology and classroom environment in which the absence of an EFL speaking social context does not provide natural content to stimulate communication. Third, mother- tongue interference, as students and teachers tend to translate everything to the first language, they face the problem of thinking in EFL due to the lack of meaningful situations and real life contexts developed in the class.

### **Oral Communication Strategies**

Richards and Schmidt (2002:89) define communication strategies as *"The ways used by the learner who has a limited command of the language , to express a meaning in a second or a foreign language"*, they also maintain that *"In trying to communicate , a learner may have to make up for a lack of grammar or vocabulary, for example, the learner may not be able to say" it's against the law to park here"* and he/she may say\* *"this place cannot park"* which is incorrect. For a handkerchief, a learner could say *"a cloth for my nose"*.

Bygate(1987:115) calls this strategies compensation strategies and he defines them as *"Ways of communicating by improvising temporary substitutes when the speaker lacks normal language"*.

### **Oral Communication Strategies used by EFL Learners:**

The main aim of oral communication is for the speaker to successfully transmit an intended message to the listener. However, in a situation where the message sender and the message receiver have different native languages, it may be very difficult to achieve their communicative goal (Somasai & Intaraprasert, 2011), as a result communicators use oral communication strategies to deal with communication problems and to enhance the effectiveness of the communication even if there is no difficulty or problem involved in oral communication (Bygate, 2002).

Savignon (1983) describes communication strategies as the techniques used to sustain communication; to meet the demands of ongoing communication. The following are some types of oral communication strategies used by EFL learners:

**1. Paralinguistic Features:**

According to Mezrigui (2012) paralinguistic features are also referred to as body language; include facial expressions, movements of particular body parts, namely the head, the eyes and the hands to help communicating meaning. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002:383) paralinguistic features can also include phonological characteristics such as the tone of voice that may reflect the attitude of the speakers. EFL learners tend to use paralinguistic features to sustain communication.

**2. Appeal for Assistance**

EFL learners tend to ask their classmates or teachers for help when they cannot find the words to express appropriate expressions, he/she may ask about a term by saying "*what do you call.....? or what's the word for.....?*".

**3. Topic Avoidance**

Tarone and Yule (1987:51) state that EFL learners may avoid talking about certain topics that require them to use the target language items or structures he or she does not know about.

**4. Message Abandonment**

Tarone and Yule (1987:65) argue that this strategy occurs when the learner begins to talk about something but being unable to continue so he/she stops in mid utterance.

Bygate (1987:116) explains message abandonment as the instance of communication techniques to be included in what he calls "*reduction strategies*" which he defines by saying "*reduction strategies refer to ways in which the speaker can maintain communication by adapting or reducing his/her message when lacking the necessary language*".

**5. Word Coinage**

Word coinage refers to when a learner creates new words that do not belong to the lexis of the target language. Tarone and Yule gave an example of the word "*airball*" which is coined for the word "*balloon*".

**6. Transliteration**

According to Mezrigui (2012) transliteration means saying an utterance of one language using the script or sounds of a different language, EFL learners use this strategy when they are totally lost for words and cannot mime the intended meaning.

**7. Language Transfer**

Richard and Schmidt (2002:294) point out that this strategy refers to the effect of one language on the learning of another, they maintain that there are two types of transfer: positive transfer and negative transfer, they argue that positive transfer occurs when the source language and the target language have the same form which makes learning the target language an easy task. For instance, both English and French include words that have identical form and meaning such as table, train, etc.

Negative transfer, on the other hand refers to the application of the rules of the source language into the target language which leads to errors in the target language as it is totally different from the source language.

### 8. *Literal Translation*

Mezrigui (2012) states that this strategy occurs when the learner translates word for word under the influence of the source language or the target language which may lead to lexical or syntactical errors. For example, instead of saying *"I want to use a computer to finish my work in time"* a learner may say\* *"I want to utilize the computer for achieve my work at time"*.

### 9. *Circumlocution*

This strategy refers to the use of too many words than needed to convey a specific meaning; the learner may tend to say the definition, the function or the description of an object rather than saying the name of the object itself. Richard and Schmidt give an example by saying that instead of saying *"Saw"*, a learner may say *"the tool that has a long blade with teeth used for cutting wood"*.

## Effective Techniques for Developing Learners' Oral Communication

### A. *The learning Environment:*

The learning environment includes the following:

#### 1. Affective Learners:

According to Mezrigui (2012) learners need to be acquainted with the reasons behind their low proficiency level in oral production; the teacher may ask the students to list all the problems that they face during their learning process, doing so will help the students to be aware of the causes of oral communication difficulties and teachers can then examine their own teaching strategies and techniques to overcome such difficulties.

The teacher could also help the students to get rid of their psychological problems as has been previously stated. Learners' low proficiency level in English leads to poor learning results, the teacher should raise the students' hopes about improvement and encourage them to maintain self-confidence.

Scarcella (1990:346) states that one way of helping the students to overcome the oral communication difficulties is by telling them that communication errors and difficulties are normal and can occur even when we use our own native language, he says *"If learners realize that communication difficulties are a natural part of communication and affect everyone using any language, their importance will probably not be blown out of proportion"*.

The teacher should also encourage the students to talk freely without feeling worried or anxious about making mistakes.

#### 2. Sensitizing Learners to the Importance of English:

Parrot (1993:192) argues that *"It is sometimes argued that oral communication develops naturally in response to a need to communicate"*.

The teacher should raise the students awareness about the importance of oral communication in the process of foreign language learning, this can be done directly or indirectly; the teacher may tell the students that English is the most important and widely used language in the world, it is essential in scientific research and scholarship, it is the acknowledged international language of science, technology, business, and diplomacy and about a quarter of the world's population is fluent or competent in English (Crystal,2004).

Tarone and Yule (1987:49) state that *"The use of English as an international language for communication is probably more common than ever before. It must now be regarded to be a regular occurrence that East-West interaction as between Japanese and Mexican businessmen for example, takes place in neither Japanese nor Spanish but English"*.

3. Creating an English Speaking Environment:

EFL learners need to be exposed to English used in real-life situations, they need to be engaged and participate in communication in order to develop their oral communication skills, creating an English speaking environment is effective for doing so; students should join English clubs where they can feel free to express their views and ideas, they can be asked to watch movies, plays, news, etc then discuss what they have watched freely.

Scarcella (1990:347) declares that *"Learners can also invite native speakers to their classes, so that they may discuss things related to the culture of the source and the target language"*.

**B. Classroom Activities to Promote Oral Communication Proficiency**

Mezrigui (2012) argues that there are number of classroom activities that EFL learners need to develop:

1. Songs:

It is often believed that what usually remains in the students' memories from school times are songs; in primary school students learn English alphabet through the alphabet song. Songs are useful ways for teaching language skills, such as pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, etc.

Listening to songs can help the students to develop their oral communication skills; before students listen to a song the teacher may tell them the name of the song and then he/she may ask them to guess what is the song about and whom is the audience it is written for; doing so will help the learners to speak the target language while singing after the singer which will encourage them to learn the song by heart.

Songs can also help them to speak the target language as native speakers do and familiarize them with the culture of the target language.

2. Role-plays and Simulation:

Kayi (2006) states that *"Simulations are very similar to role-plays, but what makes simulations different from role-plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class (realia) to create more realistic environment"*.

In role-play and simulations, learners could be given some roles to act which would enable them to communicate in an effective dramatic way which in turn makes learning fun and easy.

3. Memorization and Loud Reading:

Nicholas (1989:33) argues that memorization and reading aloud are good ways of testing different aspects of spoken English such as pronunciation, intonation, stress and juncture and general fluency.

This suggests that memorization and loud reading are effective ways of developing students' oral communication skills.

**C. Approaches to Teaching Oral Communication**

The following are effective approaches for teaching oral communication:

1. Language-Experience Approach:

This approach can be used to enhance oral proficiency, learners may be asked to make reports about events, incidents using their own experience in the classroom while using English; the teacher may take the students to a trip then students can discuss the event in the classroom while the teacher guides and monitors.



## 2. Extensive Reading Approach:

Kayi (2006) states *"Before coming to class , students could be asked to read a newspaper or a magazine and in the class , they report to their friends what they find the most interesting news"*. In this way, students feel excited and motivated to speak about what they had read in the target language.

## 3. Free-Speaking Approach:

Kayi (2006) describes this approach by saying *"It is very enjoyable, whole class, free-speaking activity for which students sit in a circle"*. The teacher may start to tell the students a story and make some pauses to allow the students to complete the story.

## Previous Studies

This part sheds light on some previous studies that have investigated oral communication difficulties among EFL learners. For example, Ahmad (2018) made a study under the title *"Oral Communication Apprehension among English Senior Majors at Al-Quads Open University in Palestine"* with the aim to investigate the degree of oral communication apprehension among English language students in Palestine. He used the descriptive approach and collected the data through the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension Measurement (PRCAM) which was distributed to a sample of (64) English language seniors at Al-Quads Open University in Palestine. The findings of the study revealed that the degree of oral communication apprehension was moderate and there was no significant difference in the performance of the students due to gender (male or female).

Al-Lawti (1995) made a study under the title *"A Diagnostic Study of the Difficulties Encountered by Omani Secondary School Students in Their Oral Production of English"* the results of the study showed that the linguistic domains (vocabulary , grammar , pronunciation , and discourse) are the most difficult for the students to use appropriately; teachers claimed that these problems are due to the fact that the curriculum does not provide enough opportunity for learning and practicing new vocabulary and speaking tasks besides the large number of the students in communication classes.

Cheekeonget. al. (2014) conducted a study entitled *"Oral Communication Problems of Yemeni High School EFL Students in Malaysia"*, the data was collected through a questionnaire and interviews, the results of the study revealed that the oral communication problems of Yemeni high school students could be categorized into three factors, firstly teachers neglect communication skills and pay more attention to grammar and they do not encourage the students to communicate in English in the classroom setting. Secondly, the curriculum is not designed to promote and enhance oral communication. Thirdly, most of the students were not confident enough to use English as a medium of communication in and outside the classroom.

Majid et. al.(2008) did a study on Iranian EFL students entitled *"Testing Oral Language Proficiency of University EFL Students"*. They chose a sample of eighty students from the University of Masjed Soleyman in Iran according to their availability and their successful passing of conversation, the results of the study showed that the performance of the students in



comprehension, vocabulary and structure was better than their performance in oral communication skills as most of the students felt hesitant and their oral production was discontinued.

In term of Saudi EFL context, there are some studies carried out in the field of oral communication problems .For example, Rao, P. Srinivas (2018) focuses on developing speaking skills among the learners in EFL/ESL classroom environment. He emphasizes the role of a teacher in enhancing learners' speaking skills by applying various methods, techniques and approaches in English language classrooms since communication skills play a vital role in getting employment opportunities in any sector. The need of teaching speaking skills in English classrooms has been identified and stressed. More importance has to be given to speaking skills in order to make the learners communicate effectively at all places. Moreover, the focus has been on the assessment of speaking skills in a systematic way. As communication skills are playing a key role in the modern society, the responsibility is more on the teachers to train the learners in those skills. Speaking or oral communication is important in personal and professional life. Therefore, English teachers have to give importance to speaking skills in classrooms and encourage the learners to communicate in English not only in the classrooms but also in social life as far as ELT is concerned. Finally, some suggestions and recommendations are given to improve the learners' speaking skills to prepare them for any challenges they face in their career.

Abu-ghararah, B (2014) aims at analysing the effectiveness of speaking practice exercises, as it is one of the most crucial and learning-oriented aspects in the language education field. The English as a foreign language (EFL) Saudi Sector was selected for this study, and all of the respondents were willing to provide their viewpoints in response to the questionnaires provided to them. The entire study was based on considering and acting upon the importance of speaking activities inside and outside the classroom. Results have shown that there are issues and needs associated with speaking activities: speaking tasks and speaking materials.

In their study, Younes, Z. & Albalawi, F (2016) investigate the factors leading to speaking difficulties from both the EFL Saudi learners and their teachers' perspectives through answering these questions: 1-What are the factors that affect Saudi students' speaking performance from their own perspectives? 2-What are the factors that affect Saudi students' speaking performance from their teachers' perspectives? 3- What are the difficulties that Saudi students' encounter when they learn how to speak English from their own perspectives? 4-What are the difficulties that Saudi students' encounter when they learn how to speak English from their teachers' perspectives? The subjects of the study were three hundred and fifty female EFL students and 20 teachers of English. Three instruments were used to answer the research questions: two questionnaires and a classroom observation sheet. The findings of the research proved that EFL students' speaking performance is affected by many factors such as conceptual knowledge, listening ability, motivation to speak, teachers' feedback during speaking activities, confidence, anxiety, and mother tongue. The findings also revealed that students face many speaking difficulties when they try to speak like fear of mistakes, fear of criticism, the disability to think of anything to say, speak very little, and their mother tongue . Data from class observations show that students' speaking performance is mainly affected by four factors: insufficient input, time for preparation, poor instructions and the unsatisfactory amount of practicing speaking.

Alzahrani, G. (2019) intended to explore the reasons behind the weakness of speaking among the English Department's students at Najran University. Also to explore the impact of gender on the perception of the study sample. For the purpose of this study, two research questions were provided and discussed. The participants of this study were 59 students at English Department of colleges of Science and Arts (Sharurah) of Najran University for the academic year 2017-2018. Among the participants, there were 29 female students and 30 male students. This study is a quantitative study. The data for this study was collected through a questionnaire. The findings of this study revealed that the teaching and learning environment weakness, and then the weakness of the students themselves were the main themes discovered by the sample. They also revealed that gender difference did not play a significant impact on the opinions toward the reasons behind the weakness of speaking English among English Department's students at Najran University.

Alasmari (2015), cited in Alzahrani, G. (2019) investigated the barriers that hinder the oral proficiency of Saudi preparatory year students and English language teachers at English language center, Taif University. The study sampled 142 students from Taif University. Results showed that attitudes of students towards English language, frequent use of students' mother tongue not only outside the campus but also inside the classroom with their peers and teachers, their inability to command proper pronunciation, appropriate grammatical structures, necessary vocabulary items, their hesitance to use the target language in front of their class fellows because of their fear of making mistakes etc. were major oral barriers. The results of this study did not reveal any significant oral barriers in relation to the behavior of English language instructors, English textbooks, and neither English contact hours.

The present study places itself as an extension of and in line with some of the previously reviewed studies conducted in the domain of oral communication problems of EFL students. The big difference between the previously -reviewed studies and the present study is that the present study attempts to investigate the difficulties experienced by Saudi EFL university learners when involving in oral communicative classroom activities and to shed light on the impact of these difficulties on English oral performance.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Method of Study**

The study adopts the analytical descriptive approach.

### **Population of Study**

Population of this study targets 20 EFL university instructors in the College of Science and Arts for female students and College of Science and Arts for male students in Tanumah, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia in the first semester of the academic year 2019/2020.

The population also consists of 35 third - level EFL university female students and 35 third - level FL university male students in the two above-mentioned colleges.

### **Sample of Study:**

The sampling of the study is randomly chosen as follows:

- (a) Seventeen EFL university instructors.
- (b) Twenty-five male students
- (c) Twenty-five female students

### **Tools of Data Collection**

For data collection, the study employs two tools as follows:

#### **a) *The structured interview:***

This interview is conducted on the English language teaching staff. The interview seeks to reveal EFL university instructors' points of view about some issues that are related to English oral communication skill in terms of difficulties the EFL university learners encounter when involving in oral communicative classroom situations or activities. The interviewees are also asked to identify the major causes of these difficulties, the teaching strategies that EFL university instructors should adopt to help their students overcome these difficulties, and to propose solutions to help EFL university learners improve their oral communication ability.

#### **b) *The oral test:***

The test is conducted on both male students and female students in the two above-mentioned colleges. The rationale behind this test is to reveal some aspects of the students' oral communication performance. The students are requested to speak about a certain topic determined by the researchers. The task is done during a regular university lecture. Any participant is given a five minute period to accomplish the oral test. All the oral tests are recorded immediately. Then, the recorded tests are analysed in terms of the following aspects:

- i. Grammatical Errors
- ii. Inappropriate use of vocabulary
- iii. Pronunciation Errors
- iv. Lack of Fluency
- v. Filler words

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

In this part, the oral test and structured interview will be analyzed and described as follows:

#### **Analysis & Description of the Students' Oral Test**

In this section, errors committed by both male and female students in the oral tests are identified and categorized into five aspects including grammatical errors, wrong choice of vocabulary, pronunciation errors, filler words and lack of fluency as the following table shows:

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages of errors committed by both EFL male and female students in the English oral test:

Aspects	Male Students		Female Students	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Inappropriate use of vocabulary	69	28.6%	76	28.9 %
Pronunciation errors	61	25.3%	64	24.3%
Grammatical errors	57	23.7%	63	23.9%
Filler words	54	22.4%	60	22.8%
<b>Total</b>	241	100%	263	100%

The above table gives a statistical description of frequencies and percentages of errors committed by EFL male and female students in English oral test. These errors are ranked according to number starting with the highest to the lowest frequencies.

### 1) Inappropriate use of vocabulary:

As shown in Table 1. above, this category is the commonest errors committed by both male students and female students in the oral test with 69 (28.6%) for male students and 76 (28.9%) for female students. These errors show that the students find it difficult to use words appropriately. The overuse of lower-level vocabulary reflects participants' failure to acquire more advanced-level vocabulary. These errors can be related to the participants' limited range of vocabulary, to the students' lack of sufficient lexical competence that enables them to form semantically well-formed sentences, inappropriate methods and strategies of teaching English vocabulary and to the interference of Arabic Language.

### 2) Pronunciation Errors:

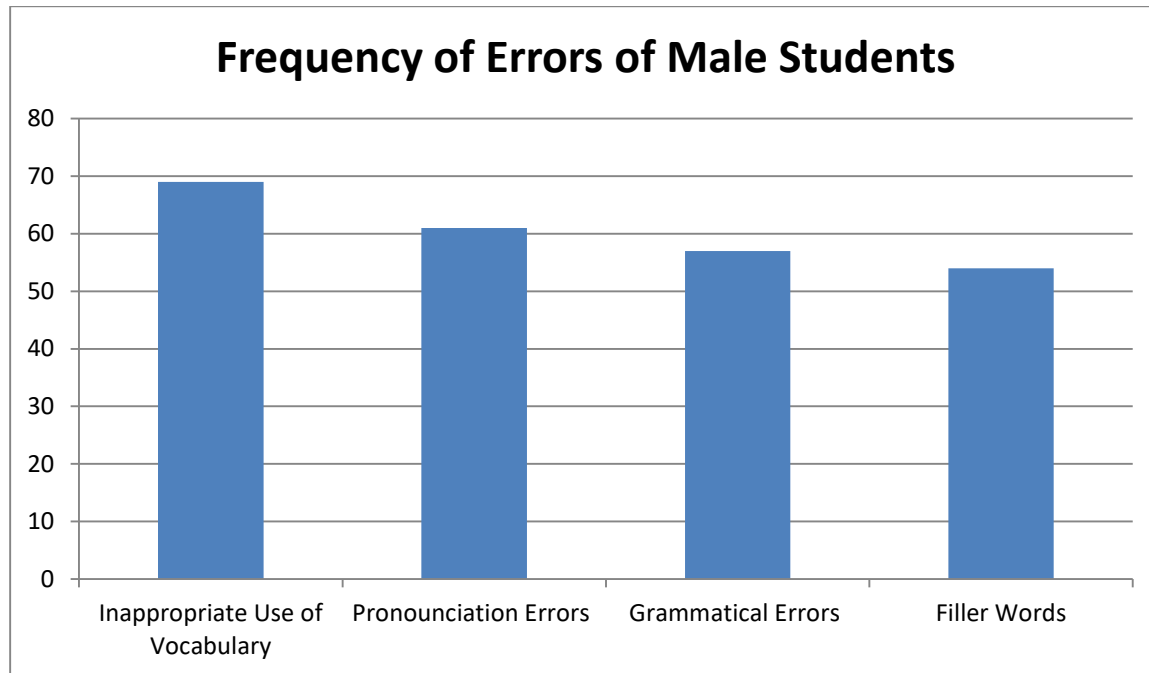
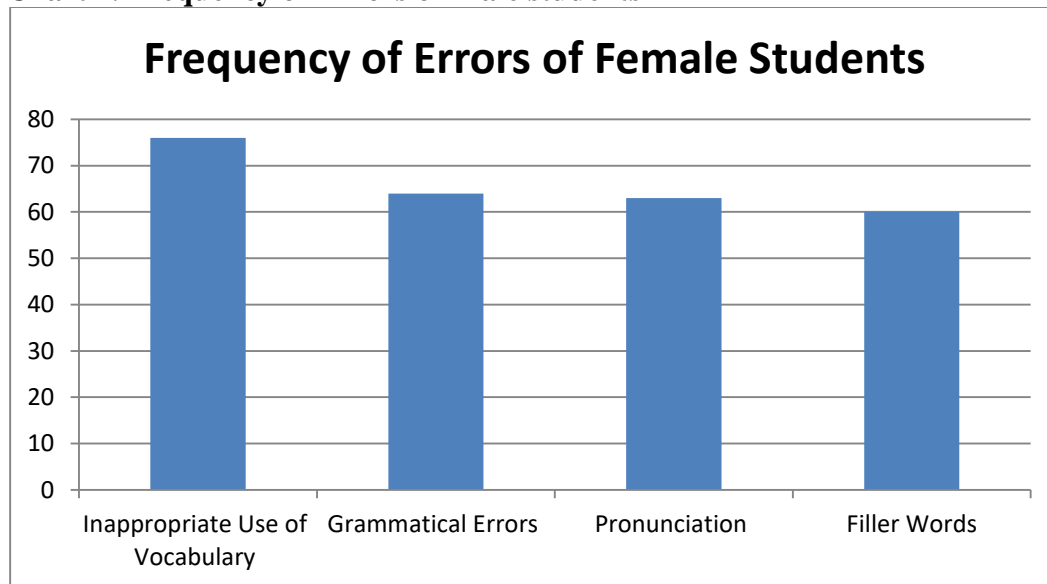
A close look at Table 1. will indicate that this category of pronunciation errors scores the second highest rank in errors count with 61, (25.3 %) for male students and 64, (24.3%) for female students. Errors of pronunciation could be attributed to insufficient practice of English sounds and to the ineffective techniques of teaching English pronunciation. Another probable cause of such errors could be related to mother tongue interference.

### 3) Grammatical Errors:

This category of errors constitutes 57, (23.7 %) for male students and 63, (23.9%) for female students. These errors are attributed to the learners' low proficiency in English grammar and to the ignorance of grammatical rules. Another probable cause of such errors could be related to inappropriate methods and strategies of teaching English grammar.

### 4) Errors of Filler words:

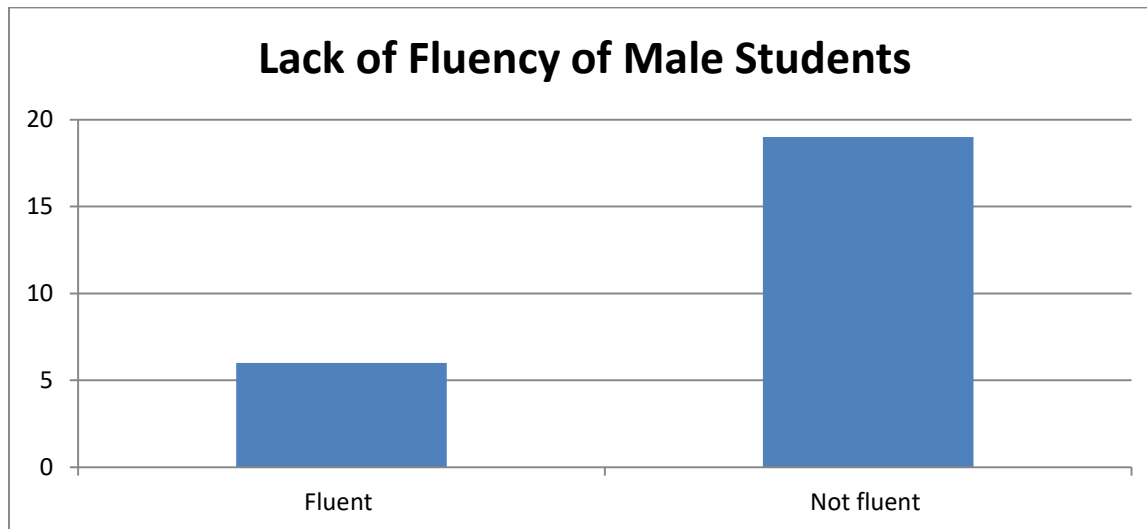
This category of errors ranks number four. There are 54, (22.4 %) made by male students and 60, (22.8%) made by female students. These errors are related to the students' lack of sufficient lexical competence and to the lack of topical knowledge in English. However, all these four aspects of errors are explained clearly in Chart 1. and Chart 2. below :

**Chart 1. Frequency of Errors of Male students****Chart 2. Frequency of Errors of Female students****5) Lack of Fluency:**

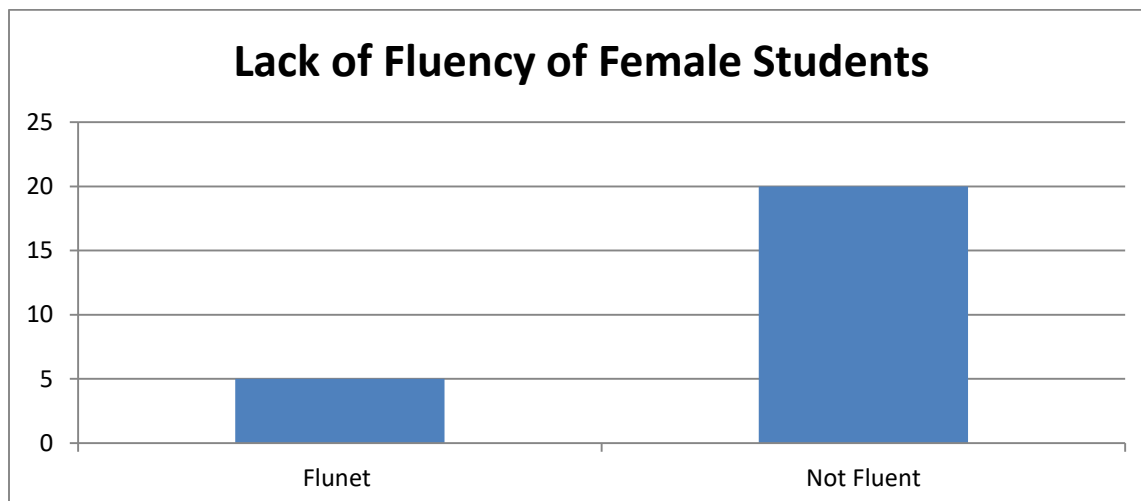
Aspect		Male Students		Female Students	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Fluency	Fluent	06	24 %	05	20 %
	Not Fluent	19	76 %	20	80 %
Total		25	% 100	25	% 100

**Table 2. Frequencies and Percentages of Lack of Fluency**

This table shows that 76% of male students and 80% of female students are not fluent. Lack of fluency of both male students and female students could be attributed to many factors such as EFL learners' lack of motivation to develop their English oral communication skill, absence of English speaking courses at primary and high secondary school levels, EFL learners' lack of the necessary vocabulary items and sentence formation skills that enable them to communicate in English, EFL learners' lack of self-confidence in addition to ineffective techniques of teaching English vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Lack of fluency is explained clearly in Chart 3. and Chart 4. below.



**Chart 3. Lack of Fluency of Male Students**



**Chart 4. Lack of Fluency of Female Students**

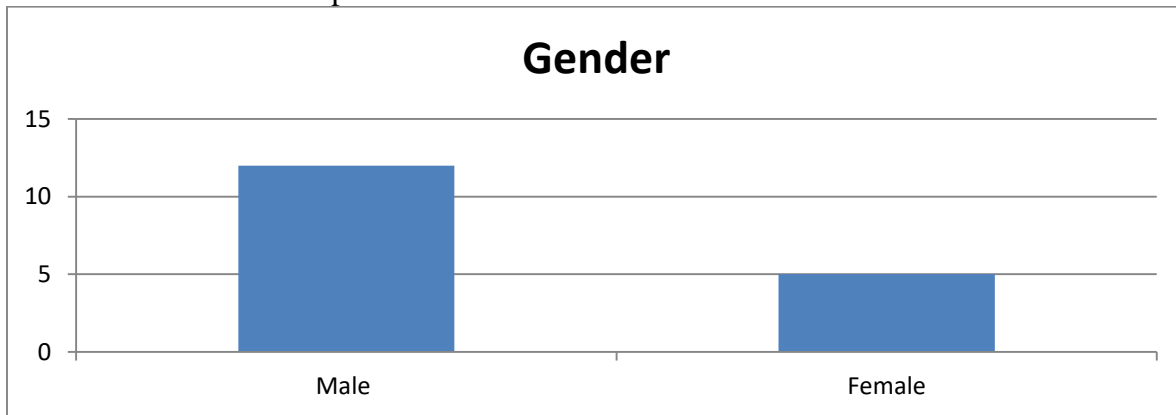
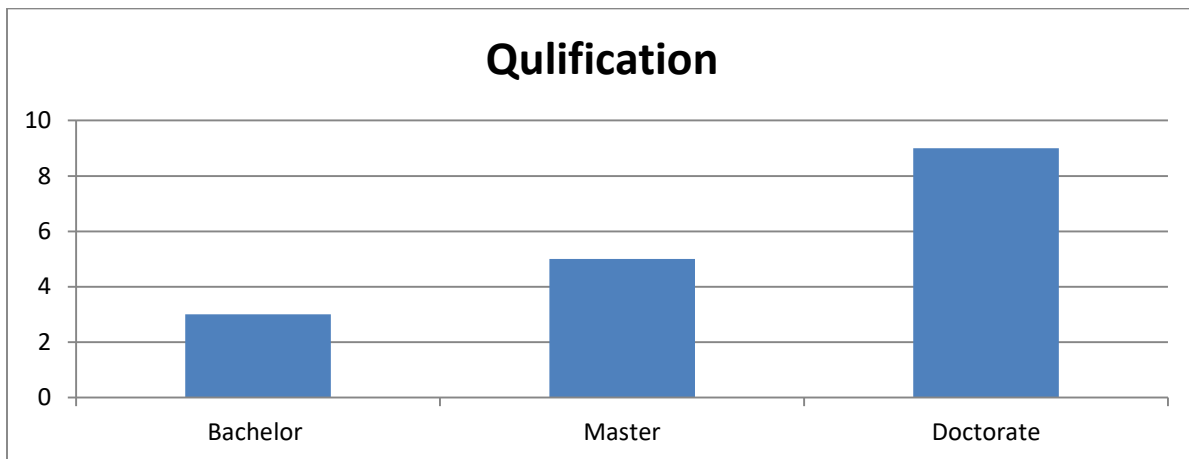


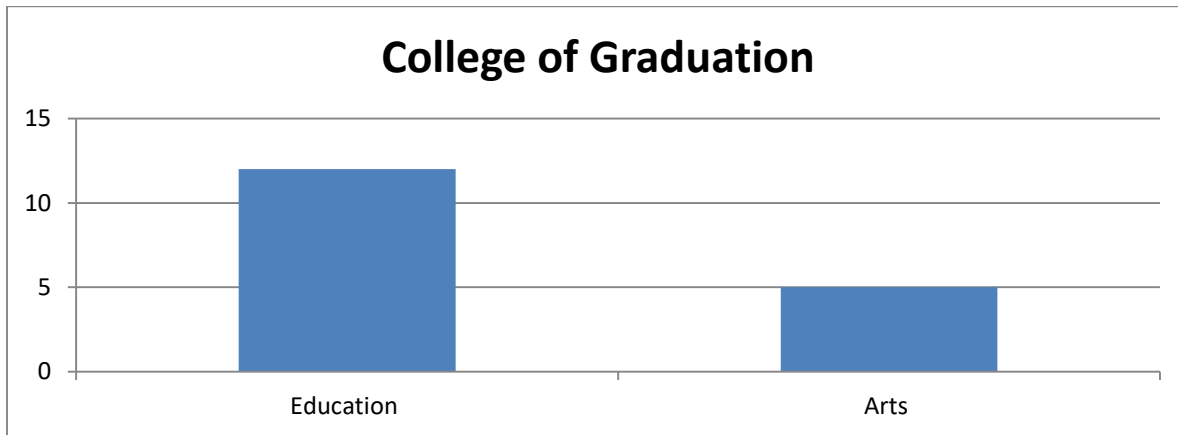
**Summary of the Findings of the Instructors' Interview:**

As it has been mentioned before, the structured interview is conducted on the EFL university teaching staff. The interview consists of two sections as follows:

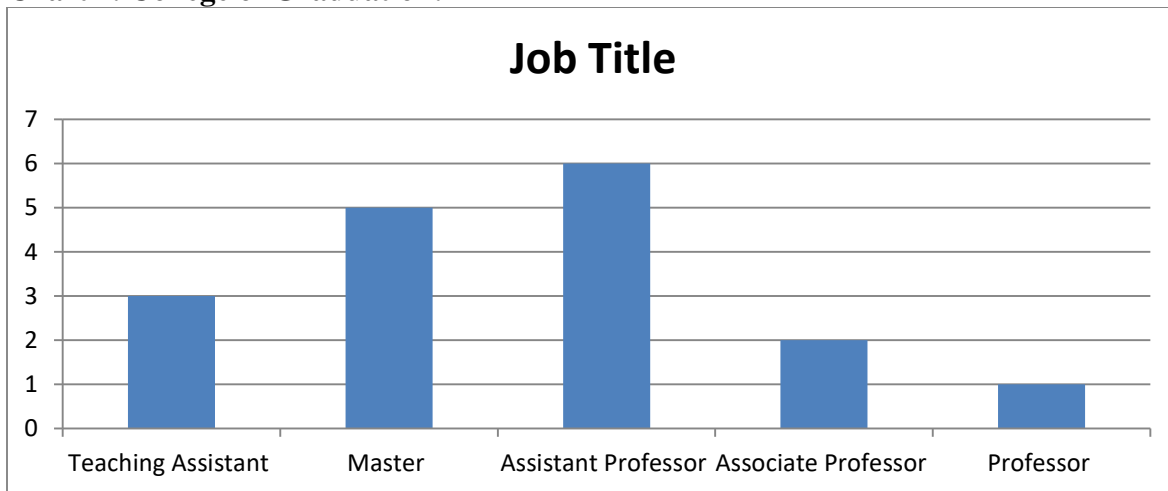
**1. Section One: General Information**

This section shows general information about the respondents in terms of gender, qualification, colleges of graduation, designation and years of experience. The following charts show the characteristics of the sample:

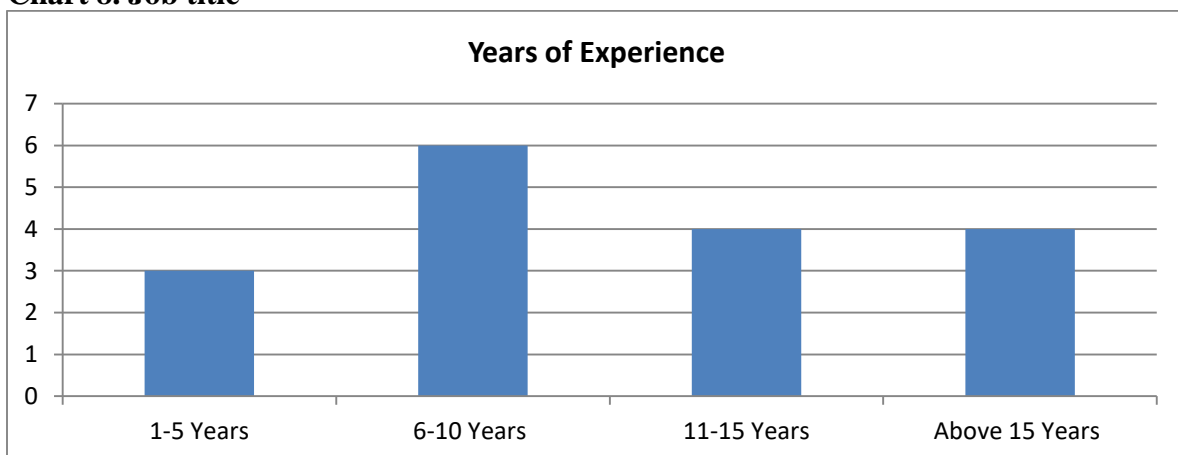
**Chart 5. Gender****Chart 6. Qualification**



**Chart 7. College of Graduation:**



**Chart 8. Job title**



**Chart 9. Years of experience**

**Section Two:**

In this section of the interview, EFL university instructors are kindly requested to answer certain questions briefly. Here is a summary of instructors' responses to the interviews questions. Each question will be considered separately.

**Question (1)** *Do you believe that Saudi EFL university learners face difficulties when involving in oral communicative classroom situations or activities?*

98 % of EFL university instructors believe that Saudi EFL university learners in the College of Science and Arts in Tanumah face difficulties when involving in oral communicative classroom situations or activities.

**Question (2)** *Based on your experience, what difficulties do you think Saudi EFL university learners experience when involving in oral communicative classroom situations or activities?*

In answering this question, EFL university instructors point out that Saudi EFL university learners in the Colleges of Science and Arts in Tanumah, in general, experience a number of recurrent difficulties when involving in oral communicative classroom situations or activities. They mention that the oral communicative performance, in general, is characterized by certain features. The instructors mention that most students do not understand what is said to them, which leads to weak responses. They find it difficult to build sentences when they try to express their ideas. That is, they struggle to find the appropriate vocabulary items when trying to speak in English. Moreover, they do not have the confidence to communicate in English. In addition to that, they show hesitation, shyness and nervousness of public speaking. Furthermore, they think in Arabic. These difficulties can be summarized as follows:

- a. The students' oral communicative performance is characterized by errors of grammar, pronunciation, intonation, filler words, and inappropriate choice of words, lack of fluency, lack of confidence and fear of making errors.
- b. The students have inadequate knowledge of vocabulary
- c. Their ideas are not organized in a logical order.
- d. They show hesitation when they forget a word.
- e. Lack of topical knowledge in English is one of the important factors that hinder their speaking proficiency
- f. They find it difficult to build sentences when they try to express their ideas.

**Question (3)** *What do you think the main factors behind the difficulties that Saudi EFL university learners experience when involving in oral communicative classroom situations or activities?*

The answers of this question reveal that the interviewees mentioned many factors behind these difficulties such as the interference of mother tongue of Saudi EFL university learners in learning and teaching process. Another factor lurking behind these difficulties EFL learners face is that they are not motivated to develop their English oral communication skill. Moreover; they were not prepared well in primary and secondary schools. They have very limited knowledge of English language at school levels, that is to say, they had weak foundation at primary and high secondary school levels. In addition to that; they lack the necessary vocabulary items and sentence formation skills that enable them to communicate in English. Furthermore, the courses of English language

programs pay little attention to develop oral communicative skill. That is to say, classes do not regularly focus on developing speaking skill; there are insufficient oral communication activities in the English language textbooks. Generally, these factors can be summed up as follows:

- a. The learners of English Language Department have not been subjected to a placement test or interview prior to their enrollment in English language programme
- b. Lack of exposure to the native-like English environment.
- c. Lack of oral practice inside and outside the classroom.
- d. Insufficient use of dictionaries by EFL learners.
- e. English textbooks of primary and high secondary school levels pay little attention to the practice of speaking skill.
- f. EFL learners' lack of the adequate stock of vocabulary.
- g. EFL learners' lack of self-confidence.
- h. Some learners feel afraid to be laughed at by others when they make pronunciation errors

**Question (4)** *To what extent, do these difficulties impact the Saudi EFL university learners' English oral performance?*

In answering this question, most participants believe that these difficulties affect the students' performance in oral communication to great extent. Moreover, these difficulties affect the students' performance in oral communication inside and outside the classrooms. However, the impact of these difficulties can be summarised as follows:

- a. These difficulties have huge impact on EFL learners' speaking performance.
- b. Their English oral performance is characterized by long pauses, hesitation and sometimes they do not say a word and these will no doubt affect their evaluation and eventually their grades.
- c. These difficulties impact the EFL learners' oral performance to the extent that they will not understand what is said to them and to the extent that they will not be understood by others.
- d. These difficulties affect the learning outcomes and the students' speaking performance quality.
- e. The EFL learners will get fewer opportunities to communicate in English with others.

**Question (5)** *What would you like to suggest for improving Saudi EFL university learners' ability in English oral performance?*

In order to improve Saudi EFL university students' ability in English oral performance, the interviewees suggest that teachers need to be trained on how to integrate speaking skill into other skills. They also need to be enlightened on the different teaching strategies that may reduce their use of mother tongue in classes. Moreover, involving students in extracurricular activities can provide them with more chances to use the language outside the class. In addition to that, the communicative medium in the university should be strictly English. Furthermore, students should be involved in intensive oral practice by encouraging them to have an English conversation club that consists of their own classmates. They can share and talk about anything in English during that time. In this club, they can learn together. Students can correct each other without feeling embarrassed, the closer the students are as a group.. the less intimidated they would feel .The following are some of suggestions for improving Saudi EFL university learners' ability in English oral performance:

- a. Motivating students while and after speaking
- b. EFL university instructors should look for meaning only; they should not disturb the learners while speaking to correct grammatical or pronunciation errors.
- c. EFL university learners should practice oral communication inside and outside the classroom.
- d. EFL university instructors should build the learners' self-confidence by creating a safe classroom environment, by giving more chance to speak in English on different situations and by using fun assignments and interesting topics regarding their age, gender and context.
- e. Encouraging EFL learners not to use Arabic language when involving in oral communicative classroom situations or activities.
- f. Encouraging EFL learners to read more and more to get high quantity of vocabulary.
- g. Classroom climate is very important to encourage timid students to speak up.
- h. EFL university instructor plays a vital role in making sure that weaker students do not feel inferior.

**Question (6)** *Please feel free to add any other observations you have about Saudi EFL university students' ability in English oral performance?*

In answering this question, the interviewees give the following responses:

- a. Students need practical classes devoted for speaking.
- b. There are some problems in oral performance that I have encountered with my students; firstly, the students complain that they cannot remember anything to say and they do not have any motivation to express themselves. Secondly, they are worried about making mistakes.
- c. Their ability in oral communication is very poor because most of them do not know the basics of building English language sentences.
- d. The level of oral communication in English is very poor; there should be some researches to improve English oral communication.
- e. There is a variation in the students' speaking ability. I noticed that some of them are very good in oral communication especially those who visit English speaking countries. They are improved significantly.
- f. They have very limited use of English in everyday purposes. Their electronic gadgets, social media do not give them enough space for learning English.

## **RESULTS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Results**

With reference to the above-mentioned analysis and discussion of the students' oral tests and EFL university instructors' interview, the present study has come out with the result that there are many difficulties encountered by Saudi EFL university students when involving in oral communicative situations or activities as follows:

- a. The students' English oral communicative performance is characterized by errors of grammar, pronunciation, intonation, filler words, and inappropriate choice of words, overuse of lower-level vocabulary, lack of fluency, lack of confidence, hesitation and fear of making errors.
- b. The students have inadequate knowledge of vocabulary
- c. Their ideas are not organized in a logical order.
- d. Lack of topical knowledge in English.

e. They find it difficult to build sentences when they try to express their ideas.

Moreover, the present study attributes the difficulties encountered by Saudi EFL university students when involving in oral communicative situations or activities to the following factors:

1. Interference of Arabic language of EFL university learners in learning and teaching process.
2. EFL learners lack motivation to develop their English oral communication skill.
3. They were not prepared well in primary and secondary schools. They have very limited knowledge of English language at school levels. Absence of speaking English courses at primary & high secondary school levels, in other words, English textbooks of primary & high secondary school levels pay little attention to the practice of speaking skill.
4. They lack the necessary vocabulary items and sentence formation skills that enable them to communicate in English.
5. The courses of English Language programme pay little attention to develop oral communicative skill ; English language textbooks contain very little oral communication activities
6. The learners of English Language Department have not been subjected to a placement test or interview prior to their enrollment in English language programme in the college .
7. Lack of exposure to the native-like English environment.
8. Lack of oral practice inside and outside the classroom.
9. Insufficient use of dictionaries by EFL learners.
10. EFL learners' lack of the adequate stock of vocabulary.
11. EFL learners' of lack self-confidence.
12. Ineffective techniques of teaching English vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar.
13. Insufficient practice of English sounds.
14. Learners' low proficiency in English grammar and ignorance of grammatical rules.
15. Learners' lack of sufficient lexical competence and lack of topical knowledge in English.

## CONCLUSION

The main aim of this paper has been to investigate and identify difficulties of oral communication experienced by EFL university learners of Colleges of Science & Arts, Tanumah at King Khalid University during the first semester of the academic year 2019/2020. The study focuses on five areas of difficulties including errors of pronunciation, grammar, wrong choice of words, filler words and lack of fluency. The findings of the oral test clearly reveal that the frequency of errors of inappropriate choice of words involving 69 (28.6%) errors made by male students and 76 (28.9%) for female students .Moreover, pronunciation errors score the second highest rank in errors count with 61 (25.3%) for male students and 64 (24.3%) for female students . Also, the grammatical errors constitute 57 (23.7%) of the errors made by male students and 63 (23.9%) by female students. Concerning the errors of filler words, there are 54 (22.4%) made by male students and 59 (22.3%) made by female students. The oral test also shows that 76% of male students and 80% of female students are not fluent in oral English communication. However, the findings obtained from the EFL university instructors' interview attribute the difficulties encountered by Saudi EFL university students when involving in oral communicative situations or activities to many factors including, for example, interference of Arabic language of EFL university learners in learning and teaching process, EFL learners' lack of motivation to develop their English oral



communication skill, absence of speaking English courses at primary and high secondary school levels, in addition to that the learners lack the necessary vocabulary items and sentence formation skills that enable them to communicate in English. Generally, the result of this study is similar, in many ways, to the findings of some previous studies such as Mohammed, M. (2007), Abugararah, B (2014), Zakaria, Ali. (2015), Keong, Y.et al (2015), Younes, Z. & Albalawi, F (2016), Ahmad, A. S., & Mustafa, A. H. (2016), Padang, Meylina (2017), Rao, P. Srinivas (2018), Alzahrani, G. (2019).

Finally, the paper recommends that EFL learners should be encouraged to read more and more to get high quantity of vocabulary and to be involved in intensive oral practice by encouraging them to have an English conversation club that consists of their own classmates. Moreover, FL university instructors should build the learners' self-confidence by creating a safe classroom environment, by giving learners more chance to speak in English on different situations and by using fun assignments and interesting topics regarding their age, gender and context.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of the students' oral tests and EFL university instructors' interview, the present study recommends the following points:

- a. Involving students in extracurricular activities can provide them with more chances to use the language outside the class.
- b. The communicative medium in the university should be strictly English.
- c. Learners should be involved in intensive oral practice by encouraging them to have an English conversation club that consists of their own classmates. They can share and talk about anything in English during that time. In this club, they can learn together. Students can correct each other without feeling embarrassed.
- d. EFL university learners should practice oral communication inside and outside the classroom.
- e. Encouraging EFL learners not to use Arabic language when involving in oral communicative classroom situations or activities.
- f. Encouraging EFL learners to read more and more to get high quantity of vocabulary
- g. EFL university instructors should build the learners' self-confidence by creating a safe classroom environment, by giving more chance to speak in English on different situations and by using fun assignments and interesting topics regarding their age, gender and context.
- h. EFL university instructors should try other different strategies for developing the EFL learners' oral communicative skill.
- i. A non- threatening, cooperative and friendly classroom climate is very important to encourage timid students to speak up.
- j. EFL university instructor plays a vital role in making sure that weaker students do not feel inferior.
- k. The learners of English Language Department should be subjected to a placement test or interview prior to their enrollment in English language programme in the college.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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