English

Sabri Thabit Saleh Ahmed

Spoken Communication Problems of Aden University EFL Undergraduate Students. Causes and Solutions

Doctoral Thesis / Dissertation

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SPOKEN COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS OF ADEN UNIVERSITY EFL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

A Thesis Submitted to

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad

For the Award of Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

English

By

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S.M.D.M. College, Kalamb

December, 2021

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this thesis entitled **"*Spoken Communication Problems of Aden University EFL Undergraduate Students: Causes and Solutions*"** submitted by **Mr. Sabri Thabit Saleh Ahmed,** to **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University**, **Aurangabad** for the award of the degree of ***Doctor of Philosophy*** in ***English*** was carried out by him under my guidance and supervision. It is his original work and the documents cited in this thesis have been duly acknowledged. It was not previously submitted by him in part or in full to this or any other University or Institute for the award of any Degree or Diploma.

Place: Aurangabad
Date: 10 /12/2021

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work incorporated in this thesis entitled **"Spoken Communication Problems of Aden University EFL Undergraduate Students: Causes and Solutions"** has been carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. Sunil V. Pawar, Principal and Professor of English, S.M.D.M. College, Kalamb. The work is original and has not been submitted in part or in full to any other University or Institute for the award of any Degree or Diploma. The information derived from the existing literature has been duly acknowledged in this thesis.

Place: Aurangabad — Name & Signature of the Researcher

Date: 10/12/ 2021 — Sabri Thabit Saleh Ahmed

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Dedication

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Its full form
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
FL/SL	Foreign language/ second language
CC	Communicative competence
ICTs	Information and communication technologies
CSs	Communication strategies
B.A. & Ed.	Bachelor of Arts and Education
M.A.	Master of Arts
Ph.D.	Doctor of Philosophy
H	Hypothesis
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
TTT	Teacher's talk-time
STT	Student's talk-time
ELT	English language teaching
SLT	Second language teaching
PPP	Presentation, practice and production
i.e.	id est 'that is'
etc.	et cetera 'and so forth'
et al	et alii 'and others'
L1	First language
L2	Second or foreign language
TL	Target language
p	Page
pp.	Pages
no.	Number
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
Max.	Maximum
Min.	Minimum
Std. D.	Standard deviation
ANOVA	Analysis of variables

Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the spoken communication difficulties encountered by the fourth-year EFL students of some rural faculties of Aden University and the factors that might negatively contribute to their poor acquisition of spoken communication proficiency during their learning of English in these faculties to reach some suggestions and solutions that may help in changing the current situation and enabling the concerned EFL programs produce proficient speakers of English. The data were collected through varied instruments, namely students' questionnaire (n = 120), teachers' questionnaire (n = 23), students' interviews (n = 30), speaking skill teachers' interviews (n = 4), students' spoken communication proficiency assessment rubric (n = 42), classroom observations (n = 6), and an assessment of speaking skill syllabi. The collected data were analyzed by using the SPSS 21st version and manually. The results revealed that the majority of the students encounter fluency and automaticity related difficulties and lack of communication strategies. Moreover, some students also share one or more difficulties with these two major ones, such as phonological difficulties, comprehension difficulties, sociocultural difficulties, lack of discourse knowledge, affective difficulties, and lexical and grammatical difficulties, respectively. Though the majority of the students seem to have mastered a somehow sufficient level of grammar and vocabulary, many of them cannot put their lexical and grammatical knowledge into use orally. It has also been revealed that several factors are responsible for students' poor acquisition of spoken communication proficiency. These factors can be categorized into five types, namely a. factors related to the students themselves, namely students' lack of language learning strategies to develop spoken English and lack of integrative motivation, b. factors related to student's past education, namely students' poor English level when they joined the concerned faculties in addition to the traditional learning habits they brought from their pre-tertiary education, c. factors related to students' environment, namely lack of exposure to spoken English provided by the environment, d. factors related to teaching methodology, such as lack of communicative activities, majority of the students are rarely engaged in spoken activities, mother tongue use in English classes, no language laboratory or ICTs, low qualifications of some teachers, i.e. a semi-traditional teaching setting is still dominant in most classes, and e. curriculum-related factors, namely lack of time devoted to teaching spoken communication skills and the overuse of non-English subjects. As per the results, this study has provided some suggestions and solutions that will help in changing the current situation and enabling the concerned EFL programs to produce proficient speakers of English.

Chapter One

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

Communicating orally in English is the goal that approximately all EFL/ESL learners wish to achieve in their learning of English and the ability by which a learner's success in language acquisition is usually measured (Nunan, 1991, p. 39). It is for this reason that there has been a trend since the 1970s onwards to implement communicative syllabi and communicative language teaching that enable foreign language learning programs to produce learners who can use their target languages proficiently. Universities and EFL programs have positively responded to such a trend and worked hard in changing their traditional syllabi and teaching methodology to ensure the implementation of more effective EFL learning. However, such a shift in EFL teaching and learning is not an easy task that every EFL program can successfully and effectively implement. Modified forms of traditional teaching still exist till today in several EFL programs and are employed even by some EFL teachers who claim their commitment to communicative language teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Nunan, 1987). It was dominant for many decades in the past that language teaching is limited to the teaching of vocabularies and grammatical rules and this traditional view of language learning has left its major impact on foreign language learning programs.

Language is a system of communication and language learning should be viewed as an active process of acquiring such a system and using it for communication. In the words of Scarnio and Liddicoat (2009), "[l]anguage is not a thing to be studied but a way of seeing, understanding and communicating about the world" (p. 16). They viewed language learning as a social practice that "requires

students to engage in tasks in which they create and interpret meaning, and in which they communicate their own personal meanings" (p. 17). Hence, EFL programs should focus on communication skills to succeed in producing proficient speakers of English. This usually requires communicative syllabi and communicative language teaching methodology together with training both EFL teachers and students on modern technology and new trends in language teaching and learning to ensure proper implementation of communicative EFL learning in their classrooms. It happens in some contexts that even if communicative syllabi are prescribed for EFL learning, teachers prefer using modified forms of traditional teaching in their classroom teaching and they do not spend sufficient efforts to help their students develop their spoken communication proficiency. In the Yemeni context; for example, communicative syllabi were introduced for teaching English in the Yemeni primary and secondary schools in the 1990s but it is taught in most of these schools traditionally with a more focus given to grammar, lexical competence, and reading comprehension while spoken skills are given less attention or ignored in both classroom teaching and assessment (Ahmed & Pawar, 2018b, Ahmed & Qasem, 2019; Alnaqeeb, 2012; Al-Sohbani, 2013; Al-Tammimi & Attamimi, 2014; Bin Hadi, 2016; Hwaider, 2016).

Spoken communication skills should constitute a major part of any language teaching program as its uses occupy most of our time in comparison to the written ones. I am not here arguing for overemphasizing spoken skills at the expense of the written ones but I would like to make it clear that spoken skills should be given their appropriate space in language syllabi and classroom teaching. We usually learn our mother tongues by listening, then speaking before going further for reading and writing. Hence, in EFL teaching, we should give listening and speaking skills their due space from the first stage of language learning and not let language learning be more limited to literacy skills, claiming that the spoken skills will be developed later on when learners have mastered a good level of grammar and vocabulary.

Nowadays, speaking English is the most sought skill and "a large percentage of the world's language learners study English to develop speaking proficiency" (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 201). Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas, and Wilde (2002,

p. 35) argued that the history of language teaching has shown an emphasis on a very limited range of competence in the past which has proved less than useful for any real communicative purpose. Pertaining to English, they argued that its use was confined largely in that time to the academic purpose and some limited fields like commerce and that is why they thought it could be adequate to have only such a limited command in English, mainly in writing. In contrary, in our modern era the world has become smaller and spoken English has become more vital in our communication in several aspects of life. It has become necessary nowadays to equip learners with the command of English which allows them to interact and express themselves in a variety of contexts both orally and in writing. This can be achieved, according to Broughton et al. (2002, p. 36), through giving greater emphasis on learners' communicative needs and providing teaching materials that are rich enough to satisfy these needs in addition to selecting the right communicative activities that raise learners' motivation, promote communication skills development and make language classroom more fun and dynamic (Nunan, 1991; Lazarton, 2001).

Since many EFL students of the rural faculties of Aden University graduate with poor spoken English, the need for this study came out to address a very important question entitled: why do many of Aden University EFL students of the rural faculties graduate while they are unable to communicate orally in English?. By delving deeply into this problem and knowing all its details, this research will provide an in-depth picture of the problem and conclude with some recommendations that will help the concerned faculties to improve their EFL learning programs and produce proficient speakers of English. Before getting into the problem of the study, its objectives, and questions, this chapter will provide some information about English as a global language and its status in Yemen.

1.1. English as an International Language

In the recent centuries, English has spread around the world due to different reasons, namely the British colonial domination over the world, the scientific advancement, the rise of America as a great power leading the world, and the emergence of modern technologies such as TVs, computers, telephones, media,

internet…etc. The industrial revolution and technological development have made the world smaller and people's need to communicate with others out of their boundaries has become more necessary. Since it is difficult for everyone to learn all the languages of the world, some languages got the prevalence to be shared languages for people from different countries of the world. For example, languages such as Greek, Latin, and Roman had been used in various parts of the world and they were considered global languages in different periods of history. The nations of these languages were ruling the world or some parts of it and could propagate and force their languages in their colonies worldwide. In the last few centuries, it was expected that English should dominate the world and become the global language in the 19th and 20th centuries onwards due to the reasons above mentioned. In this regard, Crystal (2003) has quoted a phrase from a speech for future US President John Adams in 1780 who said that "English is destined to be in the next and succeeding centuries, more generally, the language of the world as Latin was in the past or French is in the present age" (p.74). This phrase reflects his view of the world in the next centuries as a world dominated by these two major military and economic powers, i.e. Great Britain and the United States of America.

The rise of America as a military, political and industrial power with its remote colonization of many parts of the world has also helped in promoting the importance of English. It has become the most sought language for those who want to do business worldwide or to get access to modern science and technologies. Such a value given to English in the various fields of science, technology, trading, politics ...etc made people from the different parts of the world recognize its importance and teach it to their children. It is taught today approximately in all countries though its place in school curricula may differ from one country to another. While it is a medium of instruction in some countries, it is taught as a compulsory subject within the school curricula in some other countries. Even in those countries where English is only taught as a compulsory subject within the school curricula, as in the case of Yemen, we find that English is taught as a major course at the undergraduate and postgraduate stages and it is also used as a medium of instructions in English departments and some private schools and scientific colleges.

However, the global status is not only determined by the huge military force or the large population of its speakers and that is why the Chinese language has not yet gained a global status. Economic and military domination can play a role in promoting a particular language and that language will only achieve its global status when it has a function in every country. According to Crystal (2003), a "language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country" (p. 3). In the case of English, it is the most widely used language today and it has a function almost worldwide (Broughton, et al., 2002). The number of its non-native speakers exceeds the number of its native speakers as the estimates in the early 2000s showed that there are about 1500 million speakers of English, among them approximately 750 million speakers are first and second speakers of English and an equivalent number of speakers are its foreign speakers (Crystal 2003, pp. 68-69).

English is spoken today as a native language in the U.K., United States of America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and some Caribbean countries; as a second language in some countries, such as Nigeria, Ghana…etc.; and as a foreign language in over than 100 countries such as Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, Sudan, China, Gulf countries…etc. (Broughton, et al., 2002; Crystal, 2003; Ellis, 1994). Its status in every country is determined based on its function in the communication of the people of the country. In the countries where English is considered as a second language, it has a special function in some courts of law, governmental offices, schools, universities, media, and in some daily interaction. On the other hand, it is considered as a foreign language when it has no or little function in people's communication. In these countries, it may only be taught as a school subject in schools and as a major course in higher studies. It may be used as a medium of instruction for some science courses and some private schools. It may also have some little use in media, tourism, embassies, and international companies working in these countries. Though the status of English can be different from one country to another as shown above, it should be highlighted here that English is widely spreading across the world and its speakers are increasing every day. In this regard, Broughton, et al. (2002) argued that:

> *Barriers of race, color, and creed are no hindrance to the continuing spread of the use of English. Besides being a major vehicle of debate at the United Nations, and the language of command for NATO, it is the official language of international aviation, and unofficially is the first language of international sport and the pop scene. … Indeed more than 60 percent of the world's radio programs are broadcast in English and it is also the language of 70 percent of the world's mail.* (p. 1)

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that English is the global language of our today's world because it is taught and has some communication function worldwide. Even if some other languages are used as means of communication, mediums of teaching, or taught as foreign languages in some countries, as in the case of French in some of its former colonies, English is the most common language of our today's world and it is considered to be the global language of our era.

1.2. Status of English in Yemen

In the past, the place of English in People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (Southern Yemen or South Arabia) was different from its place in Arab Republic of Yemen (Northern Yemen or Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen) due to the different political scenarios in each country. Northern Yemen was colonized by the Turkish occupation in the 19th century and then ruled by the Imamate regime in the first half of the 20th century. During this period, English had no place in education and local people's communication. It was then introduced as a compulsory subject to be taught at schools from the 7th grade of the primary stage after the 1962 revolution when an education system began to spread all over the country (Mohmmed 1992; Modhish, 2015; Saif, 2013). Its oral use was limited to some embassies, international companies, international organizations and some tourist places in the communication with international people. With the establishment of Sana'a University in the 1970s, English was introduced as a major course for diploma and Bachelor degrees and most of the teachers of English in Northern Yemeni schools and Sana'a University were expatriates, particularly Egyptians. On the other hand, Southern Yemen was colonized

by the British from 1839 till 1967 and they introduced their English in Aden colony. English was the language of the colonizers and it was widely used in most of the governmental offices and daily communication between the colonizers and the native people. It was also taught in schools in Aden and it was used as a medium of instruction in most of these schools. It was considered to be the prominent official language for the government in Aden colony. Bahumaid (1990) described the role of the English language during the British rule as follows:

> *The linguistic scene was characterized by the ascendancy of English, the language of the dominant culture, and the enhancement of its status and role in society. It was the official language in the Colony. It was also the medium for legal proceedings in the courts, commercial and banking transactions, and all other types of business dealings. In addition, English was the medium of instruction in government secondary schools and most private schools and institutes and a compulsory subject from the final year of the primary cycle.* (p. 93)

After the independence in 1967, Arabic had restored its prominence as the official language in all the governmental offices and as a medium of instruction at schools and universities. Since then, English use was reduced to become a foreign language to be used for communication only in some places where native people and international people get in touch with each other. It had also become a compulsory subject to be taught from the 5th grade of the unity stage in all the public schools in Southern Yemen. When Aden University was established in the 1970s, English was introduced as one of the courses to be provided by the University for Diploma and B.A. degree.

In today's Yemen, English is spoken as a foreign language in some tourist places, international hotels, international companies, international NGOs, and some foreign embassies where people from different tongues get in touch with each other. It is taught as a compulsory subject for six years in all Yemeni schools beginning from 7th grade of the primary stage till the 3rd grade of the secondary stage. It is also taught as a major course for B.A., B.A. & Ed. and B. of translation at the university level.

It's also taught for M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at some universities. It is used as a medium of teaching in English departments, some scientific faculties as medicine and engineering and some English medium schools. It is also taught in some private institutions which spread all over the country. It has become one of the requirements for working in diplomatic sect, joining medicine and engineering faculties, joining higher studies for M.A., M.Sc. and Ph.D. and for applying for scholarships to study abroad. English also has its place in Yemeni media as there are English news reports on the radio and TV channels once or twice a day. There are also some weekly English newspapers such as the Yemen Times and Yemen Observer in addition to some English news websites.

Yemeni government and Yemeni people have recently recognized the importance of English as an international language that should be taught to their children to enable them easy access to knowledge, technology, and the modern world. It is for these reasons that several private institutions have been established for teaching English in addition to some few English medium schools. Many Yemeni families, in the major cities particularly, send their children to such private English programs and English medium schools despite the high fees they have to pay in comparison to their low income. The government also send some of its students to learn English in English-speaking countries to build up their proficiency in English. The demand for English in Yemen is growing up and its future can be much better as the number of its Yemeni speakers is continuously increasing.

1.3. University of Aden

The University of Aden was founded in the 1970s to become the first University in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen for providing higher education for bachelor's degree and diploma. It has its roots in establishing the College of Higher Education in Aden in 1970, then Nasser's College of Agricultural Sciences in 1972. In 1974, the College of Economics was founded. These colleges were considered as independent units under the ministry of education till 1975 when the prime minister issued a statute pertaining to the foundation of the University of Aden as a scientific university to include these colleges and some other faculties that