

A COMPARATIVE DETERMINATION OF BARRIERS OF ORAL ENGLISH LEARNING FACED BY PREPARATORY YEAR STUDENTS

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Abstract

It has been reported that Saudi students are unable to achieve desired English language proficiency in general and oral skills in particular. This study is an attempt to investigate Saudi preparatory year students (SPYS) and English language teachers at English language center, Taif University to identify the barriers that hinder oral proficiency. The participants were 142 Saudi EFL learners and 47 English language teachers who responded to a self-developed Likert-scale questionnaire. The results of this empirical study have revealed that SPYS face issues in oral proficiency though they generally have positive attitudes towards speaking skills. They strongly agree that it is an important skill to continue their studies at tertiary level. There are several factors that contribute towards this situation that need immediate attention by the faculty as well the administration. It has been found out that attitudes of SPYS towards English language, frequent use of their 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. are major oral barriers. The results of this study did not reveal any significant oral barriers in relation to the behavior of English language teachers, English textbooks as well as English contact hours. Relevant suggestions have been forwarded that have significant implications not only for SPYS but also for English language teachers and PYD administration.

Keywords: English language proficiency; barriers; oral skills, preparatory year

Introduction

Though English language teaching has a long history in the KSA, during the last few decades there have been very serious efforts to improve

English language teaching/learning process at all levels which is evident from the allocation of huge resources and various initiatives taken especially at university level to ensure better returns (Al-seghayer, 2011). Despite all these efforts, it has been widely reported that English language teaching has not produced the desired results, and Saudi students still lack the desired proficiency in the target language including oral skills even after studying it for many years (Rababah, 2003; Javid, 2010; Al-Seghayer, 2011). Wei & Zhang (2013) have posited that oral language competence means the skill and ability to communicate orally in which the later influences, monitors and decides the degree of competence of the former. The primacy of oral skills is evident if the time factor is considered during the process of communication. It is reported that listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9% during the process of actual communication (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). During classroom teaching, usually oral skills are taken for granted and may not be considered seriously, while more emphasis is placed on reading and writing skills (Hamouda, 2012, Mendelsohn & Rubin, 1995). It has also been reported that during the process of oral communication, ESL/EFL learners face various linguistic barriers that hamper effective communication.

Much research has been conducted to investigate oral skills barriers and has reported that Saudi EFL learners do not possess the required proficiency in all English skills in general and oral skills in particular due to the weak school graduates who join universities, inappropriate curricula, faulty teaching methodologies, non-supportive environment and lack of motivation on learners' part etc. (Pathan, 2013; Tanveer, 2007; Adler & Rodman, 2006; Rababah, 2005; Wahba, 1998; Abu-Ghararah, 1990).

Literature Review

Seidlhofer (2015) has mentioned that English has acquired the prestigious status in the modern world because it has become the international language of communication. The realization of this importance of English is there at all levels in the KSA where it is taught as a foreign language. Al-ma'shy (2011) has revealed that majority of English language teachers "concentrate on improving reading and writing skills and do not take into account the importance of speaking and listening skills" (p. 15). This pedagogical lopsidedness seems like a major cause behind faulty communication ability of Saudi EFL learners. Abu-Ras (2002 cited in Al-ma'shy, 2011) has conducted a study to investigate the communicative ability of Saudi EFL learners and has reported that "after almost sixteen years of its application, the communicative ability of the Saudi students graduating from the secondary schools is still very poor" (p. 17). Similarly

AbuGhararah (1992) has studied oral barriers of Taibah University students and concluded that

“the students majoring in English at the college of education in Madinah Munawwarah, Saudi Arabia, failed to converse in English accurately and fluently. The students tended to make several errors in their daily utterances. Moreover, they were hesitant to speak the target language because they were unable to keep the utterances flowing” (p.1).

Speaking is defined as a productive and active interactive process that involves receiving, constructing and conveying meanings in the form of spoken words (McDonough & Shaw, 1993). Chaney and Burk (1998) have stated that speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (p.13). Al-ma'shy (2011) has highlighted the importance of this active skill as the most frequently used skill in the classroom. He has stated that “teaching speaking skills should be considered an essential part of language courses in schools since it is essential as a means of developing classroom interaction” (p. 23). Review of relevant literature has revealed that oral language is divided into active oral speech and passive oral speech: speaking and listening. It has been posited that listening is the base of achieving proficiency in speaking skills and that both are closely related (Wei & Zhang, 2013). Wen (1999) has emphasised that oral proficiency involves language competence, pragmatic competence and strategic competence. Wei and Zhang (2013) have opined that oral language competence is a complex phenomenon that

“includes knowing the phonics, tone, grammar, words, rules of spoken language, cultural characters of language and using the proper language forms in the certain situation and non-language forms to overcome some difficulties in the language communication strategically (p. 69).

Levelt (1989) has suggested that ‘conceptualization, formulation, articulation, and self-monitoring’ are four main processes of speech production. Likewise, Zuraidah (2008, p.1) has revealed that “speaking is a productive skill which requires a lot of back-up factors like knowledge, confidence, self esteem and enthusiasm”. Another major contribution has been from Richards and Schmidt (2002) who have posited that effective speech process involves a combination of four kinds of competencies: 1) grammatical competence including proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, phonology, and semantics; 2) sociolinguistic competence comprising appropriateness, pragmatics, and role relationship; 3) discourse competence

encompassing speech events, cohesion, and coherence; and 4) strategic competence i.e., knowledge of strategic competence to compensate weakness. The proficiency in oral language may be determined by the fact that how competent a person is in “active oral speech and passive oral speech. Active oral speech refers to “speaking” while passive oral speech refers to “listening” The latter is the base of the former and both of them are closely related” (Wei & Zhang, 2013, p. 69). Furthermore, the importance of this component of language learning is evident by the number of definitions found in research (e.g. Jarupan, 2013; Parry, 1996; Bygate, 1991; Duran, 1983).

A growing mass of research has offered valuable insights into the fact that EFL learners lack listening ability that hampers their speaking skills as well. Pathan (2013) has enumerated the following weaknesses including learners’ inability to understand a) only personal or regional pronunciation; b) some words/phrases of a text because of insufficient range of vocabulary; c) fast speech, and d) texts which are either uninteresting or too long. Much research seems to suggest that listening should precede practice in speaking. Pathan (2013) has stated that “learners should be able to recognise a sound before they attain an ability to produce it” (p. 298). He further explained that listening does not lead automatically to oral fluency which is not possible unless listening is followed by suitable and extensive practice to EFL learners at the grammatical and lexical levels. Therefore, it is important that listening-attention is enhanced along with an emphasis on lexical and grammatical knowledge. Various factors that are responsible for creating barriers include anxiety, nervousness, stress and apprehension (Tanveer, 2007). Pathan (2013) conducted a study to find out the barriers that hinder oral communication and reported that these includes failure to

“discriminate between long and short vowels or diphthongs
 aspirate initial /p/, /t/, /k/ of stressed syllables
 pronounce the sounds that are not available in the
 first language put stress on appropriate syllable
 convey message clearly due to inadequate range
 of vocabulary form certain grammatical
 constructions use different word classes
 maintain subject-verb agreement and use some other
 grammatical categories properly” (p. 397).

Much research has emphasised the need to teach oral skills formally. Nunan (2003) has highlighted that teaching oral skills mean teaching EFL learners how to produce English sound patters, to use sentence and word stress properly, to choose suitable lexical items according to the context, audience, social setting and subject matter, to follow logical sequence in organising their thoughts, attain fluency by using the target language quickly

and confidently etc. It has been suggested that English teachers need to pay great attention while planning teaching oral skills exercises and they should “realise that teaching speaking is different from teaching other language skills such as writing and reading (Al-ma’shy, 2011, p. 25). Kayi (2006, p.4) has forwarded the following important recommendations: a) facilitating EFL learners by providing maximum opportunity to practice English language; b) ensuring speaking conducive rich environment by exploiting collaborative work and authentic materials; c) involving each learner especially the shy ones as well to participate actively; d) increasing student talking time; e) providing positive reinforcement on learners’ response; f) encouraging learners to speak more and more by asking eliciting questions; g) providing positive written feedback along with oral feedback; h) ignoring learners’ pronunciation mistakes while they are speaking especially in the beginning; i) avoiding frequent correction that may distract learners; j) encouraging learners to engage in speaking activities not only in class but also outside the classroom; k) providing individual help and attention by circulating around the classroom during speaking activities; l) providing the required lexical items beforehand to facilitate learners; and m) diagnose learners’ problems in expressing themselves in the target language.

While talking about the reasons that create oral barrier, Norrish (1983, pp.21-39) has identified the following important pedagogical factors:

1. Carelessness: It is an important reason which is caused by lack of motivation.

2. First language interference: Learning a language is like developing habit formation; therefore, during the process of learning a second or foreign language, old habits representative of the first language interfere with set of new habits which are developed during learning another language. This interference bears multiple repercussions because of similarities and differences between the mother tongue and the target language.

3. Translation: Literal translation of words and sentences from the first language into the target one causes another major problem.

4. Overgeneralization: overgeneralization of grammar rules negatively effects foreign language learning process.

5. Material-induced errors: Inappropriate selection of teaching materials may cause two kinds of errors including ‘the ignorance of rule restrictions and false concepts’.

6. Errors as part of language creativity: Lack of command of the target language may cause mistakes when learners create new sentences. These kinds of errors are common during the early stages of learning a second/foreign language.

7. Foreign language errors: Learning a foreign language implies that it is learned mainly in the classroom. This insufficient exposure may cause

certain errors to happen. These are usually interlanguage errors. These errors are usually caused by inappropriate teaching materials and lack of exposure to standardised models of the target language in terms of structure and pronunciation.

Research Questions

This research project has been governed by the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of SPYS studying at Taif University English language Center, (TUELC) towards barriers of oral English learning?
2. What are the perceptions of English language teachers teaching at TUELC towards barriers of oral English learning?
3. Do any significant differences exist in the perceptions of SPYS with those of English language teachers at TUELC towards barriers of oral English learning?

Hypothesis

This research project has the following null hypothesis:

H₀: There do not exist any statistically significant differences in the perceptions of SPYS with those of English language teachers at TUELC towards barriers of oral English learning?

Research Design

This study had survey design in which 47 English language teachers and 142 SPYS from TUELC have been investigated using quantitative paradigm. Survey research is one of the most common forms of research engaged in by educational researchers. It involves researchers asking a large group of people questions about a particular topic or issue. This asking of questions, related to the issue of interest, is called a survey (Frankel & Wallen, 2000).

Instrumentation

The researcher reviewed relevant research to identify any suitable instrument that might be administered to the participants of this study. Among various instruments, the researcher found the questionnaire used by Al-ma'shy (2011) closest to the context and research objectives of the present study. This questionnaire was adopted and several changes have been made according to the need. This questionnaire had 58 Likert-scale items along with several open ended questions. The researcher deleted several items and modified several others. The final version had 31 items related to various factors of oral

barriers. Standardised procedures were followed to achieve content validity. The final version of the questionnaire was piloted with 20 students from the same context and Cronbach alpha reliability test was run to measure its internal consistency. The test produced internal consistency of this instrument as .776 (See appendix # 4); that is a reasonably high value to collect reliable data. The final version of the questionnaire has been translated into Arabic that was administered to randomly selected participant of this study.

Data Analysis

The following steps of data analysis have been followed by the researcher:

1. The data generated through student/faculty questionnaires were manually coded and entered.
2. Version 15 of SPSS has been used by the researcher to analyse the data generated through the questionnaire.
3. Findings and recommendations have been forwarded based on the results of this study that seem to have significant implications for the SPYS, English language teachers, English syllabus designers etc.

Results and Discussion

This section contains the results of data generated through administering Independent-samples t-test to the questionnaire items. The data have been divided into five themes each represented by a separate table for the sake of convenience to present the results and relevant discussion.

Table (1): Attitudes towards speaking skills

An effective teacher		Group	N	M	SD	T	df	p value	
1	I like speaking English.	EFL learners	142	3.8873	1.1051	5.398	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.8723	1.1537	5.282	75.89	.000	
2	Speaking English is an important skill at university level.	EFL learners	142	4.1268	.86590	- 5.166	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	4.8085	.44907	- 6.969	153.1	.000	
3	Speaking English is very interesting.	EFL learners	142	4.0563	.98048	6.749	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.8936	1.1465	6.238	69.63	.000	
4	Speaking English is tedious.	EFL learners	142	2.0775	1.0319	- 7.093	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.3191	1.0653	- 6.980	76.59	.000	
5	I cannot speak English fluently because it is difficult to speak like natives.	EFL learners	142	3.5634	1.2517	- 1.105	187	.270	p > 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.7872	1.0412	- 1.212	93.55	.228	

The data related to attitudes of SPYS towards English language as perceived by SPYS and English language teachers (ELTs) have been presented in Table 1. The comparative analyses have indicated wide differences in the perceptions of both groups as 4 out of the total 5 items showed significant differences. Both groups have assigned the highest mean value to the item that stated that English speaking skills is an important skill at university level. This indicates that though SPYS bear weaknesses in oral proficiency but they have no confusions regarding its significance in pursuing their studies at university level. The findings are in line with the study of Javid (2011) who investigated Saudi medical undergraduates and the participants have reported that speaking is an important skill for their academic success. The findings also align with the results of Al-ma'shy (2011) who has reported that vast majority of Saudi secondary level EFL learners and faculty members have emphasised that speaking skills is an important skill for their academic success.

The second highest mean has been calculated for item 3 by SPYS "Speaking English is very interesting", but the faculty has assigned it an extremely low value of less than 3 showing the difficulties faced by learners in mastering this skill. Item 5 of the questionnaire has also exhibited unanimity in the responses of both groups. Both have agreed without any significant difference that it is difficult for second/foreign language learners to acquire native-like proficiency especially in speaking skills. This seems to indicate another important factor that English language teachers should emphasise that though it is difficult to achieve native-like competence in pronunciation and intonation, acquiring fluency in the target language is an achievable target. The findings are in line with the findings of -Al Asmari (2014) who has conducted a study regarding the status of English as a lingua franca in the same academic context and reported that different varieties of English are acceptable and there should not be any unnecessary concerns to follow native accent. Another item that exhibited extremely major differences in the perception of both groups was SPYS liking for the target language. The faculty members has assigned extremely low mean value of only 2.82 indicating that one major reasons behind their low oral proficiency might be the Saudi EFL learners' disliking for English language. The response of SPYS is in line with the findings of Al Asmari and Javid (2011) who investigated Saudi EFL learners from the same academic setting and the participants of the study assigned high value to the item that elicited their responses towards their liking for the target language. The findings of Al-ma'shy (2011) have also indicated that Saudi secondary students prefer to speak in the target language partially confirming the findings of this study.

Table (2): Oral Barriers related to English language

An effective teacher		Group	N	M	SD	T	df	p value	
6	English pronunciation is difficult for me when I speak.	EFL learners	142	3.084	1.285	- 4.406	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.978	.9205	- 5.192	109.6	.000	
7	English grammar is difficult for me when I speak.	EFL learners	142	3.253	1.240	- 4.407	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	4.106	.8138	- 5.402	120.6	.000	
8	Lack of adequate vocabulary makes speaking difficult for me.	EFL learners	142	3.401	1.085	- 4.994	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	4.255	.7652	- 5.927	111.5	.000	
9	The difference between English and Arabic makes English speaking difficult for me.	EFL learners	142	3.000	1.320	- 3.468	187	.001	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.723	.9487	- 4.080	109.2	.000	

Table 2 details the statistical analyses of 4 questionnaire items regarding oral barriers related to the factors that are linked to English language itself. The results showed a clear pattern in the perceptions of both groups of the participants. The first important finding is that all items bear significant differences in the perceptions of both groups whereas the order of their preferences has remained the same towards all four items of this table. The highest mean value has been allocated to the questionnaire item which states that lack of adequate vocabulary is a major factor that creates problems for Saudi EFL learners as represented by the participants of this survey. English grammar has been allocated the second highest mean by SPYS and English faculty members. The results of these two items are in line with the findings of Pathan (2013) who investigated tertiary level Bangladeshi students and found out that inadequate range of vocabulary and their inability to form grammatically correct sentences. Pronunciation difficulties in English language as an oral barrier have been allocated the third highest mean by both groups of this study. The findings are completely in line with the findings of Al-ma'shy (2011) who have reported that Saudi secondary school students have also identified lacks in adequate vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation as three most important factors that cause oral barriers respectively.

As mentioned earlier, the results of independent-samples t-test have shown significant differences in the perceptions of the students with those of the faculty members. Furthermore, high standard deviation values in the descriptive analyses of SPYS perceptions have also suggested vast inter-rater differences in their perceptions. The fourth item of this category was related

to probable oral barriers because of the differences between English and Arabic language and it was assigned comparatively a high mean of 3.72 by the faculty whereas SPYS have allocated a low mean of only 3 to this item. This finding partially confirms the findings of Wei and Zhang (2013) who have stated that Chinese EFL learners strongly agree that their mother tongue is a major hindrance in achieving oral skills. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) have similarly concluded that interference of Arabic language cause serious issues among Arab EFL learners in achieving speaking skills proficiency. AbuSeileek (2007, p.3) has also posited that "Arabic speaking learners of English have difficulty in producing stress patterns. While stress in Arabic is predictable, stress in English is not."

Table (3): Oral barriers related to social/peer pressure

An effective teacher		Group	N	M	SD	T	df	p value	
10	I feel embarrassed when I speak English in the classroom.	EFL learners	142	2.436	1.3017	- 5.548	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.595	1.0354	- 6.218	97.96	.000	
11	I never feel confident when I speak English in the classroom.	EFL learners	142	2.654	1.2606	- 3.936	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.468	1.1200	- 4.178	87.64	.000	
12	I get nervous when I speak English in the classroom.	EFL learners	142	2.823	1.3750	- 1.193	187	.234	p > 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.085	1.0390	- 1.371	103.4	.173	
13	I enjoy when I speak English in the classroom.	EFL learners	142	3.697	1.0979	4.855	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.808	1.0558	4.952	81.42	.000	
14	I prefer not to speak in the classroom because I am afraid of making mistakes.	EFL learners	142	2.964	1.3068	- 2.676	187	.008	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.531	1.1004	- 2.917	92.40	.004	
15	I prefer not to speak English in the classroom because my classmates will laugh at me.	EFL learners	142	2.211	1.2424	- 2.467	187	.015	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.702	.97613	- 2.781	99.25	.006	

The comparative results of the questionnaire items related to oral barriers caused by social and peer pressure are presented in Table 3. A general overview of data analysis indicates that faculty has assigned comparatively higher mean values to nearly all items as compared to their counterparts. Faculty members have assigned the highest value to item 10 'I feel embarrassed when I speak English in the classroom', whereas SPYS have allocated the highest value to item 13 'I enjoy when I speak English in the classroom'. This finding has revealed a dichotomy in the preferences of

both groups regarding speaking English in the classroom; the students have suggested that they enjoy this activity whereas the faculty has reported that Saudi EFL learners feel embarrassed when they speak English in their classrooms. The response of SPYS corresponds to the findings of Al-ma'shy (2011) who has also reported that majority of Saudi secondary school students strongly agreed that they enjoy speaking English and strongly disagreed that they feel embarrassed when they speak English.

Second highest mean has been calculated for item 14 suggesting that learners' fear of making mistakes is a major cause of their speaking prohibitions confirming the findings of Javid (2014a) who found out that Saudi EFL learners are quite conscious of making mistakes in front of other students. The findings are partially in line with Javid, Thubaiti & Uthman (2013) who have reported that Saudi English-major university undergraduates have agreed that they encourage themselves to speak English even though when they are afraid of making mistakes. The difference may be due to the fact that the participants of their study were English-major students who seem to have higher motivation level. Findings of Al-ma'shy (2011) has also revealed that English teachers assigned medium preference to fact that fear of making mistakes is one of the important factors that create oral barriers.

The next highest mean was unanimously allocated to the items that meant to elicit their responses towards lack of confidence and nervousness when they speak English in their classes. Both these items have been reported with higher means by the faculty members indicating the problems caused by these factors in using the target language as a mean of communication in the academic setting of classroom. The findings reported by Javid (2014a) support the responses of SPYS while contradict the perceptions of the faculty of this study. The last item of this section was related to their fear of speaking English in classroom as they may lose their face because of their classmates' mocking behavior. Surprisingly however, this item has been allotted extremely low mean suggesting the irrelevance of this factor as a probable oral barrier. The same attitude has been reported by the participants of Javid (2014a) as well.

Table (4): Oral barriers related to EFL teachers

An effective teacher		Group	N	M	SD	T	df	p value	
18	I am afraid that my English teacher will laugh if I make a mistake.	EFL learners	142	2.302	1.2027	2.457	187	.015	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	1.808	1.1728	2.489	80.41	.015	
19	My English teacher uses same kinds of speaking activities.	EFL learners	142	3.239	1.0446	3.001	187	.003	p > 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.702	1.1212	2.896	74.22	.005	
20	I hate speaking English because of my English language teachers.	EFL learners	142	2.443	1.3396	2.002	187	.047	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.021	.94384	2.376	111.6	.019	
21	My English teacher usually speaks in Arabic in the classroom.	EFL learners	142	2.690	1.3847	.041	187	.967	p > 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.680	1.1814	.045	91.18	.964	
22	My English teacher does not encourage us to speak English in the classroom.	EFL learners	142	2.302	1.3261	-.076	187	.940	p > 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.319	1.1441	-.081	90.19	.935	
23	My English teacher does not give us many oral English quizzes.	EFL learners	142	2.570	1.2849	-.019	187	.984	p > 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.574	1.0579	-.021	94.52	.983	
27	I prefer to ask my teacher about the correct pronunciation of English words.	EFL learners	142	3.795	1.1456	-.068	187	.946	p > 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.808	.99211	-.073	89.85	.942	

Table 4 displays the results of the questionnaire items which are related to the role of EFL teachers in causing oral barriers. The results of this table have demonstrated a change in trend as only three out of total 7 items bear significant difference. Furthermore, both groups have unanimously assigned the highest mean values to items 27, 19 and 21 respectively. The highest mean has been calculated for the item that was related to learners' preference to ask their teachers about the correct pronunciation of new English words. No significant difference has been found in the perception of both cohort groups. "My English teacher uses same kinds of speaking activities" has been allotted the second highest mean from both the groups. SPYS assigned reasonably high mean of 3.23 as compared to quite a low mean of only 2.7 by the faculty. The result confirms the findings of Javid (2014b) who has reported that Saudi university undergraduates prefer those teachers who exploit multiple pedagogical techniques to help their students understand the concepts. Both groups saw eye to eye to each other in assigning the third highest mean to item 21 which was related to the use of

Arabic by the faculty members. The findings are partially in line with the results of Javid (2010) who has stated that Saudi English-major university undergraduates from the same academic context have revealed that English language teachers do not always use the target language in classes and usually they resort to Arabic language. This finding of Saudi EFL learners' preference towards English language teachers who use the target language also aligns with the findings of Javid (2014b). Confirming the growing mass of research in this regard, Rababáh (2002) has investigated causes of communication problems among Arab EFL learners and concluded that this weakness is caused by “the inadequacy of school and English department curricula and teaching methodology, the lack of the target language environment, and the learners' lack of motivation” (p.184). Another important finding is that both groups have assigned quite low values to item 18 indicating pedagogically serious behaviour of English teachers. Generally speaking, the results seem to indicate that nearly all items of teacher related issues to oral barriers have been assigned comparatively low values.

Table (5): Oral barriers related to miscellaneous factors

An effective teacher		Group	N	M	SD	T	df	p value	
16	The English textbook does not have enough speaking exercises.	EFL learners	142	2.739	1.2754	.903	187	.368	p > 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.553	1.0593	.991	93.69	.324	
17	English contact hours are not sufficient to have enough practice of speaking skills.	EFL learners	142	2.112	1.1115	- 2.92	187	.004	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.680	1.2701	- 2.73	70.79	.008	
24	I prefer to speak Arabic in the classroom.	EFL learners	142	3.366	1.3341	- .769	187	.443	p > 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.531	1.1004	- .847	94.35	.399	
25	I prefer to speak Arabic outside the classroom.	EFL learners	142	3.894	1.0699	- 4.00	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	4.553	.61885	- 5.17	137.9	.000	
26	I prefer to use a dictionary to find out the correct pronunciation of English words.	EFL learners	142	3.598	1.2149	4.67	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.659	1.1282	4.85	84.04	.000	
27	I prefer to ask my teacher about the correct pronunciation of English words.	EFL learners	142	3.795	1.1456	- .068	187	.946	p > 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.808	.99211	- .073	89.85	.942	
28	I prefer to listen to English speakers on TV to improve my speaking skills.	EFL learners	142	3.985	1.2490	3.26	187	.001	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.319	1.1054	3.46	87.96	.001	
29	I prefer to interact with native speakers to improve my speaking skills.	EFL learners	142	4.154	1.0738	6.54	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	2.978	1.0527	6.60	80.04	.000	

30	I prefer to watch English movies to improve my speaking skills.	EFL learners	142	4.169	1.1359	3.79	187	.000	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.446	1.1191	3.82	79.69	.000	
31	I prefer to listen to English speakers on the internet to improve my speaking skills.	EFL learners	142	3.929	1.2584	2.37	187	.019	p < 0.05
		Faculty	47	3.446	1.0385	2.61	94.30	.010	

This last table contains the data analyses related to miscellaneous factors that adversely affect oral proficiency of Saudi EFL learners. The overall results have demonstrated interesting findings exhibiting wide differences in the perceptions of both groups towards 7 out of total 10 items in this category. Furthermore, the highest ranking items for both groups are also different. The faculty has assigned the highest mean to the item that stated that Saudi EFL learners use Arabic outside the classroom and the third highest to the item that sought their responses towards using Arabic inside the classroom by Saudi EFL learners. These two items suggest using Arabic language inside and outside the classroom as a major barrier in their oral proficiency confirming much research conducted to investigate oral barriers among EFL learners (Al-ma'shy, 2011; Awang & Begawan, 2007; Lan, 1994; AboGhararah, 1992;). The second highest ranking item reported that Saudi learners prefer to ask their teachers about the correct pronunciation of English words. Interestingly, none of the above items has been among the preferred items by SPYS. SPYS have reported that their most preferred way of improving speaking skills is watching English movies confirming the findings of previous research conducted in the same academic context (Al Asmari & Javid, 2011; Javid 2011) revealing that Saudi EFL learners want to achieve high proficiency in English language to help them appreciate English movies and talk shows. The next highest value was allocated to the technique of interacting with native speakers to improve their oral performance partially confirming the findings of Javid (2014a) who reported that Saudi EFL learners like to interact with native speakers. This item was assigned extremely high mean of 4.16 by SPYS whereas the same has been allocated only 2.97 by the faculty. Apparently the point of view of the faculty members seems convincing because Saudi students do not have enough opportunities to interact with native speakers frequently. This may be due to overgeneralization or some confusion they face in interpreting these two items.

The third highest mean was recorded for their preference of listening to English speakers on TV to improve their oral proficiency. The findings of Javid (2011) reinforce these points as his study also revealed that watching English movies and TV shows are among the most favourite learning styles of Saudi medical undergraduates. The least preferred items of this category

have been regarding the absence of enough contact hours to practice speaking skills and availability of enough speaking activities in textbooks. This implies that both groups are satisfied with the existing textbooks and English contact hours. The results of these two items do not confirm the findings presented by previous research in the same context. For example, Al-ma'shy (2011) and Matsuya (2003) have reported that the participants of their studies strongly disagreed that the present textbooks have enough number of speaking exercises and that they help the learners to improve their speaking skills. This finding also contracts with Javid, Farooq and Gulzar (2012) who have reported that Saudi EFL learners as well as English faculty members recommended to have more contact hours to maximise English language proficiency. The findings of Fallaj (1998) has also suggested that insufficient English contact hours is a major hindrance in achieving English language proficiency among Saudi school children.

Implications and conclusions

The results of this empirical study reveal that SPYS face issues in oral proficiency though they generally have positive attitudes towards speaking skills and they strongly agree that it is an important skill to continue their studies at tertiary level. The present study findings uncover several factors that contribute towards this situation that need immediate attention by the faculty as well the administration to improve the situation. It has been found out that Saudi EFL learners' attitudes towards English language also contribute towards this problem. It has been revealed that the participants of this study indicated that it is difficult to command oral proficiency because it is difficult to speak like native. Another major factor is Saudi EFL learners' use of their mother tongue not only outside the campus, but also inside the classroom with their peers and teachers. Much research has strongly suggested that it is not possible to achieve oral proficiency without extensive practice, and this habit of speaking Arabic seems a big hindrance in achieving the goal of oral proficiency. The findings have also offered valuable insights into the fact that Saudi EFL learners' inability to command proper pronunciation, appropriate grammatical structures and necessary vocabulary items also significantly contributes towards their weak oral proficiency. Another important finding of the current study is the role of differences between English and Arabic languages in creating problems for Saudi EFL learners to achieve proficiency in English language in general and oral proficiency in particular. Language proficiency is a skill which requires appropriate and constant practice inside as well as outside the academic setting. It has also been transpired that Saudi preparatory year students represented by the participants of this study tend to avoid using the target language in front of their class fellows because of their

fear of making mistakes: A situation that may make them a laughing stock from their class mates. The results of this study did not reveal any significant oral barriers in relation to the behaviour of English language teachers and on the whole it has been suggested that they have positive attitudes that is rather instrumental in keeping the motivational level of the students intact. The only observation in this regard has been the use of same kind of speaking skills exercises by the faculty members that may cause monotony in their teaching. Likewise, it has also been reported that English textbooks as well as English contact hours for speaking classes are appropriate and suitable. It has been learned that Saudi preparatory year students have high tendency of asking their teachers regarding the pronunciation of new vocabulary items instead of consulting dictionaries. Last but not the least, the results have clearly suggested that Saudi preparatory year students have high preference for watching English movies, talk shows as well as other online resources to practice and enhance their oral language proficiency.

Based on the findings of this empirical survey, the following suggestions are forwarded which bear significant pedagogical implications for preparatory year students, English language teachers and the administrators of preparatory year programme as well. Considering the fact that SPYS lack oral proficiency, it seems inevitable that English language teachers should take additional measures to provide their students with the chances to improve oral proficiency. It is recommended that to encourage the students in exerting their optimum efforts to improve their speaking skills, the faculty members should make them realise that achieving native-like accent should not be the only goal. It should be conveyed to them that though it is difficult to achieve native-like competence in pronunciation and intonation; rather, acquiring fluency in the target language is an achievable target that should be followed. Considering the fact that oral proficiency cannot be achieved without intensive practice of the target language in various contexts, Saudi EFL learners should be convinced to use the target language not only in the academic setting but also they should be motivated to practice it as much as possible outside the classroom. It is recommended that joining online special interest groups related oral practice may be instrumental to maximise the chances to practice English more frequently. It is also recommended that teachers should exploit positive attitudes of SPYS towards speaking English and try their level best to keep their motivation high. It also seems important that English classes be allocated sufficient sessions to practice oral skills. It is also important that English language teachers should ensure variety and innovation in speaking skills activities to avoid monotony and boredom. Use of appropriate teaching aids such as language laboratories, audio-visual aids, computers and power point presentations should be judiciously used to keep the interest level high. It is

also important that English language teachers are encouraged to actively participate in professional development activities to keep themselves abreast with new trends and innovative practices in ELT. Furthermore, it may also contribute significantly if SPYS are encouraged to exchange audio-visual materials they use at home with their peers so that maximum benefit is ensured. Finally, it is also important that better teacher-students and students' mutual relationship is ensured to maximise the possibilities of increased interaction in the target language

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Appendices

Appendix # 1

QUESTIONNAIRE (Students)

I- PERSONAL

Name:

University ID:

College:

Marks in English 101:

II- Circle the most appropriate choice.

The researchers want to find out oral barriers that hinder EFL learners’ speaking proficiency. Read the statements carefully and circle the most appropriate answer according to the following scale:

1 = strongly disagree
4 = agree

2 = disagree *3 = neutral*
5 = strongly agree

	Questionnaire items	Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I like speaking English.	5	4	3	2	1
2	Speaking English is an important skill at university level.	5	4	3	2	1
3	Speaking English is very interesting.	5	4	3	2	1
4	Speaking English is tedious.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I cannot speak English fluently because it is difficult to speak like natives.	5	4	3	2	1
6	English pronunciation is difficult for me when I speak.	5	4	3	2	1
7	English grammar is difficult for me when I speak.	5	4	3	2	1
8	Lack of adequate vocabulary makes speaking difficult for me.	5	4	3	2	1
9	The difference between English and Arabic makes English speaking difficult for me.	5	4	3	2	1
10	I feel embarrassed when I speak English in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
11	I never feel confident when I speak English in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
12	I get nervous when I speak English in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
13	I enjoy when I speak English in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
14	I prefer not to speak in the classroom because I am afraid of making mistakes.	5	4	3	2	1
15	I prefer not to speak English in	5	4	3	2	1

	the classroom because my classmates will laugh at me.					
16	The English textbook does not have enough speaking exercises.	5	4	3	2	1
17	English contact hours are not sufficient to have enough practice of speaking skills.	5	4	3	2	1
18	I am afraid that my English teacher will laugh if I make a mistake.	5	4	3	2	1
19	My English teacher uses same kinds of speaking activities.	5	4	3	2	1
20	I hate speaking English because of my English language teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
21	My English teacher usually speaks in Arabic in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
22	My English teacher does not encourage us to speak English in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
23	My English teacher does not give us many oral English quizzes.	5	4	3	2	1
24	I prefer to speak Arabic in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
25	I prefer to speak Arabic outside the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
26	I prefer to use a dictionary to find out the correct pronunciation of English words.	5	4	3	2	1
27	I prefer to ask my teacher about the correct pronunciation of English words.	5	4	3	2	1
28	I prefer to listen to English speakers on TV to improve my speaking skills.	5	4	3	2	1
29	I prefer to interact with native speakers to improve my speaking skills.	5	4	3	2	1
30	I prefer to watch English movies to improve my speaking skills.	5	4	3	2	1
31	I prefer to listen to English speakers on the internet to improve my speaking skills.	5	4	3	2	1

Thank you very much for your cooperation

Appendix # 2

QUESTIONNAIRE (Faculty)

I- PERSONAL

Name:

Teaching Experience: year/s

Nationality:

Qualification:

II- Circle the most appropriate choice.

The researcher wants to find out oral barriers that hinder EFL learners’ speaking proficiency. Read the statements carefully and circle the most appropriate answer according to the following scale:

5 = strongly agree
2 = disagree

4 = agree
1 = strongly disagree

3 = neutral

	Questionnaire Items	Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	My students like speaking English.	5	4	3	2	1
2	Speaking English is an important skill at university level.	5	4	3	2	1
3	My students think that speaking English is very interesting.	5	4	3	2	1
4	My students think that speaking English is tedious.	5	4	3	2	1
5	My students think that they cannot speak English fluently because it is difficult to speak like natives.	5	4	3	2	1
6	Pronunciation is difficult for my students when they speak.	5	4	3	2	1
7	English grammar is difficult for my students when they speak.	5	4	3	2	1
8	Lack of adequate vocabulary makes speaking difficult for my students.	5	4	3	2	1
9	The difference between English and Arabic makes English speaking difficult for my students.	5	4	3	2	1
10	My students feel embarrassed when they speak in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
11	My students never feel confident when they speak English in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
12	My students get nervous when they speak English in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
13	My students enjoy when they speak English in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1

14	My students prefer not to speak English in the classroom because they are afraid of making mistakes.	5	4	3	2	1
15	My students prefer not to speak English in the classroom because their classmates laugh at them.	5	4	3	2	1
16	The English textbook does not have enough speaking exercises.	5	4	3	2	1
17	English contact hours are not sufficient to have enough practice of speaking skills.	5	4	3	2	1
18	My students are afraid that their English teachers will laugh if they make a mistake.	5	4	3	2	1
19	English teachers use same kinds of speaking activities.	5	4	3	2	1
20	My students hate speaking English because of their English language teachers.	5	4	3	2	1
21	English teachers usually speak in Arabic in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
22	English teachers do not encourage them to speak English in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
23	English teachers do not give them many oral English quizzes.	5	4	3	2	1
24	My students prefer to speak Arabic in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
25	My students prefer to speak Arabic outside the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
26	My students prefer to use a dictionary to find out the correct pronunciation of English words.	5	4	3	2	1
27	My students prefer to ask their teacher about the correct pronunciation of English words.	5	4	3	2	1
28	My students prefer to listen to English speakers on TV to improve their speaking skills.	5	4	3	2	1
29	My students prefer to interact with native speakers to improve their speaking skills.	5	4	3	2	1
30	My students prefer to watch English movies to improve their speaking skills.	5	4	3	2	1
31	My students prefer to listen to English speakers on the internet to improve their speaking skills.	5	4	3	2	1

Thank you very much for your cooperation

Appendix 4

Reliability: Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	20	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	20	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.774	31

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
VAR00001	95.0000	170.105	.218	.771
VAR00002	94.7000	170.642	.184	.772
VAR00003	94.8000	162.274	.475	.760
VAR00004	96.4000	180.884	-.224	.786
VAR00005	95.1500	160.450	.482	.758
VAR00006	95.1000	161.568	.406	.762
VAR00007	94.7000	161.274	.456	.760
VAR00008	95.0000	174.105	.072	.776
VAR00009	95.7000	167.905	.209	.772
VAR00010	96.1000	164.621	.296	.767
VAR00011	95.6000	152.042	.721	.745
VAR00012	95.8000	156.168	.553	.753
VAR00013	95.0500	173.313	.078	.776
VAR00014	95.3500	166.029	.289	.768
VAR00015	96.2000	145.853	.881	.734
VAR00016	95.9000	171.463	.087	.779
VAR00017	96.1000	166.621	.226	.771
VAR00018	96.4000	170.358	.252	.770
VAR00019	95.3500	176.766	-.055	.783
VAR00020	96.1000	160.411	.462	.759
VAR00021	96.1500	169.397	.216	.771
VAR00022	95.9500	169.313	.135	.777
VAR00023	96.1000	164.516	.288	.768
VAR00024	95.4000	161.411	.383	.763
VAR00025	94.7500	172.408	.112	.775
VAR00026	94.8000	171.221	.116	.776
VAR00027	94.8000	172.168	.069	.779
VAR00028	94.5000	166.158	.261	.769
VAR00029	94.3500	168.029	.248	.770
VAR00030	94.4000	166.358	.282	.768
VAR00031	94.8000	165.011	.259	.770