EFL for Survival Outside the L1 Environment: An Empirical Study of Arab High School Learners

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Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has been growing throughout the Arab world and hence English has become an obligatory subject in the school curriculum in most Arab countries. However, teaching EFL to Arab learners outside the L1 environment becomes more challenging. In such a setting, Arab EFL learners use mostly spoken English for survival, i.e., English acts as a genuine *lingua franca* outside the classroom and this requires well-qualified teachers as well as a professional educational environment inside the classroom. For survival, the speaking skill becomes inevitable. The study attempts to investigate the factors that might affect Arab high school learners' EFL speaking performance in Poland. The data collected come from two sources: a questionnaire that was distributed to Arab EFL high school learners (N = 30) studying at the Libyan private school and Dar al salaam private school of Iraq in Warsaw and semi-structured interviews with instructors (N = 3). Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been employed. The findings reveal that students encounter problems in EFL speaking skill due to three main factors: teacher-related variables, curricular-variables, and learner-variables.

Keywords: speaking skill, environment, teacher-related variables, curricular-variables, learner-variables

Introduction

"Language is one of the most useful tools we have as humans" (Mosha, 2014, p. 64). People communicate with one another by using a language, be it English, Arabic, Polish, etc. To be a good communicator, one should have a fair command of the language he/she is using. In other words, one should be aware of the four skills needed for mastering any language. However, since the ultimate goal of learning any language is to communicate successfully with others, speaking skill receives the priority in this process.

Learning a new language helps learners realize their future dreams and it opens doors to future careers (Sim & Pop, 2016, p. 264). A great number of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking. They can use speaking for many different purposes. For instance, being involved in a casual conversation, the purpose would be to make social contact with people. Being engaged in a discussion with someone, on the other hand, the purpose would be to express opinions, to persuade others about something, or to explain information. In other situations, one uses speaking to give instructions or to get things done. One may also use speaking for describing things, complaining about others' behavior, making requests, or entertaining people (Shumin, 2002 in Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 201).

According to Emanuel (2011, pp. 1-2), communication is the vehicle that allows humans to recall the past,

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think in the present, and plan for the future. It enables people to manage relationships with others and to interpret and interact with the environment. Therefore, communication skills are needed for personal, academic, and professional success. They fuel one's self-confidence and make one able to communicate clearly, eloquently, and effectively.

Language teaching depends on the idea that the ultimate goal of language acquisition is communicative competence, i.e., it is based on the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to achieve communicative goals (Al-Nawrasy, 2013, p. 243). Mosha (2014, p. 65) supported this idea by stating that the prime aim of teaching is to communicate. Teachers of English should have communicative competence. They should have enough knowledge of the language itself so that they can make right decisions regarding what should be taught to whom and how it should be done.

Therefore, learning to speak a second or foreign language is not an easy task. It is regarded as the most complex and difficult skill to master (Tarone, 2005 in Pawlak, 2011, p. 4). It requires developing not only knowledge about why, how, and when to communicate, but also the complex skills for producing and managing interaction (Burnes & Seidlhofer, 2010 in Pawlak, 2011, p. 4). It requires more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. Learners should be aware of the knowledge of how native speakers use the language in context. For this reason, it seems to be difficult for EFL learners to speak the target language fluently and also appropriately in social interactions. In her study, Shumin (2002) discussed a number of factors that can be considered while planning a speaking course. For example, she referred to the influence of age, listening ability, and sociocultural knowledge (Shumin, 2002 in Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 204).

It is worth noting that teaching English language has been growing throughout the Arab world and most Arab governments begin to involve the teaching of English as an obligatory subject in the school curriculum. In spite of the continuous attempts to solve the problems of English language learning/teaching in the Arab world, Arab students still encounter serious problems in their English speaking (Tahaineh, 2010, pp. 77-78). In fact, speaking has become a demanding skill which is regarded as the backbone of communication (Senel, 2012, p. 49). For Afshar and Asakereh (2016, p. 114), speaking is considered to be one of the basic elements of communication. It has proved to be a required skill for EFL learners. Speaking, as one of the four skills of teaching English, is a complex and dynamic skill. It plays an important role in daily communication. However, students still encounter certain problems in communicative skills due to the fact that there seems to be a tendency to overemphasize English grammar, reading, and vocabulary (Sim & Pop, 2016, p. 264).

Developing speaking skills in a foreign language starts at school and both the teachers and the learners play an indispensable role in this concern. It is an interactive process in which the teachers do their best to help learners have a good command of English by providing them with appropriate materials, training, and guidance. On the other hand, learners might have different variables that might influence their achieving an advanced level in using the language orally.

Since no similar empirical study has so far been conducted with the aim of investigating the factors that might affect Arab high school EFL students' speaking performance in Poland, this makes the current study verily significant to be investigated.

Statement of the Problem

It has been quite obvious that the significance of spoken language has become more prominent over the written language. It is because the ability to speak a language reflects one's own personality, self-knowledge,

and the ability of reasoning things logically. However, it is not always easy for learners who use English as a second or foreign language to be able to speak like native speakers. This is due to some factors related to the learners themselves that play important roles in affecting their speaking performance.

Like other non-natives, Arab students encounter certain problems in developing their speaking skill. This can be attributed to the absence of the appropriate environment for developing this skill. Also, the lack of important tools as labs and lack of practice make students unable to improve their speaking skill. The teacher-related variables and the learner-variables along with the curricula-variables all can contribute to aggravating the speaking problem.

The students often tend to find it difficult to speak fluently inside the classroom let alone outside the classroom. Therefore, the researcher thought that this is a significant issue that requires investigation. The statement of the problem tells the reader that the current paper will diagnose the most prominent problems which students encounter while speaking English language and the factors that might affect their speaking performance.

Aim and Principle Research Question

The prime aim of the present study is to explore the factors that might contribute to speaking English problems among Arab high school EFL students in Poland. This general aim leads to formulating the following study question: What are the factors that might have a negative impact on Arab EFL high school Students' speaking performance in Poland?

Literature Review

There have been many studies that attempted to explore the factors that might affect students' speaking performance. Starting with the Middle East, Rababah (2002, p. 3) highlighted that Arab learners of English still encounter problems in both speaking and writing. These problems are resulted from not being exposed to the target language, for instance, when students encounter native English speakers who come to country as tourists. Another reason lies in the fact that English is not used in daily situations. Instead, Arabic is the language used everywhere. Rababah (2002, pp. 5-13) shed light on speaking problems encountered by Arab EFL students in different Arab countries. For example, in Egypt, learners of English face certain problems related to pronunciation. Some of them are concerned with stress and some others with intonation. In Yemen and Saudi Arabia, learners of English have low proficiency level in English since they start learning English in the seventh grade. What makes it worse is that in most universities in Arab world countries, English departments accept high school graduates without taking into account their proficiency level. In Jordan, learners of English have difficulties in communication and they are not able to communicate freely in the target language. This can be attributed to the unsuitable methods of language teaching and the learning environment. Furthermore, it is worth noting that English in Jordan is only used as an academic subject. In other words, students are not involved in real-life situation outside the classroom, they use Arabic most of the time and they use English only when they come across a situation where they are forced to use English as a medium of communication. In addition, it was also found that teachers of English use Arabic to translate difficult words and to explain English literature. Moreover, listening materials are not used by most of the school teachers. It is due to the fact that the number of cassette recorders is limited compared to the large number of teachers. As a result, teachers tend to read dialogues loudly to their students and this certainly does not provide learners with the necessary

native speaker model. It also demotivates them and makes them feel bored. Lack of the target language exposure can be another reason behind students' weakness in communication. According to the study, 94% of the teaching staff in the English department is native speakers of Arabic. This indicates that students might not have enough exposure to the target language as it is spoken by its native speakers.

Suleiman (1983, as cited in Rababah, 2002, p. 11) claimed that the problems that might impede the Arab students' progress may be attributed to their inadequate mastery of the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. He added that mother tongue interference is a part and parcel of the problems the students encounter while learning English.

Another recent study conducted by Diaab (2016, pp. 338-343) attempted to investigate the Libyan EFL learners' speaking problems. It showed that Libyan EFL learners face some difficulties in oral communication due to linguistic and psychological barriers. Despite having built good linguistic knowledge, they fail to employ that knowledge in real communicative situations. The reason behind this can be attributed to the outcome of inadequate teaching approaches employed by teachers. The results also revealed that students are not exposed enough to the target language and they frequently use Arabic inside and outside the classroom. Other reasons are the lack of speaking activities and the overemphasis on accuracy rather than fluency by the teachers. In other words, it is notable that there is an overemphasis on teaching grammar and vocabulary. Like the findings of the current study, the data obtained from the questionnaire revealed that students are not given enough opportunities to speak English and they are not engaged in speaking activities. Whereas the data obtained from the interviews showed that most of the teachers use Arabic in the English classroom, lessons were introduced and explained in Arabic and the classroom interaction was teacher-centered. In other words, teacher speaks more than the students do and students are not given enough opportunities to participate and practice speaking due to the lack of vocabulary. Students cannot express themselves precisely because they are interrupted by teachers in order to correct their mistakes and this makes them feel hesitant to speak. Besides, students feel anxious while speaking. They feel apprehensive when they tend to perform in front of teachers and their classmates.

Hassan (2014, p. 31) carried out a study that aimed to examine the problems of English pronunciation that Sudanese students encounter while speaking. It attempts to find the problematic sounds and the causes of these problems. The results of the study showed that Sudanese students had problems with the pronunciation of English vowels that have more than one way of pronunciation and also the consonant sound contrasts, e.g., /z/ and /ð/, /s/ and /θ/, /b/ and /p/, /ʃ/ and /tʃ/. The study concluded that factors including interference, sound system differences, and inconsistency of English sound and spelling have a negative effect on Sudanese students' pronunciation.

Hammad and Ghali (2015, p. 52) conducted a study that attempted to identify Gaza EFL pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety level and its reasons. The results disclosed that Gaza pre-service teachers' speaking anxiety level was high and the reasons behind this can be attributed to the following factors: teachers' inappropriate procedures. It was found that there was a lack of encouraging atmosphere inside the classroom. Teachers do not evaluate students' oral skills. Teachers used to interrupt students while speaking for the purpose of correcting them, the thing that might confuse them while speaking. Students are not provided with enough opportunities to use their oral skills. Another factor is related to the learners such as students' inability to use only-English in English classes, students' fear of negative evaluation due to their low perception of

linguistic abilities, and students' sensitivity to teacher's correcting comments due to their lack of linguistic competence.

A study conducted by Elmahdi and Khan (2015, p. 85) attempted to examine the pronunciation problems faced by Saudi EFL learners at secondary schools. The findings revealed that the main problem lies in the fact that the sound systems of Arabic and English are different in many aspects.

One more significant recent study carried out by Afshar and Asakereh (2016, p. 122) aimed at examining the speaking skills problems encountered by Iranian EFL freshmen and seniors from their own and their English instructors' perspectives. The findings revealed that the speaking skills problem commonly shared by the participants was not having the opportunity to practise English outside the classroom. Another problem lies in having inefficient speaking classes. It seems that EFL instructors are not thoroughly aware of the significant effect of oral instruction on speaking skills. The third problem is concerned with the lack of team-teaching in teaching speaking. Students believe that it would be more beneficial if they were taught by more than one instructor so that they can be provided with different speech models. The fourth one is the lack of efficient and sufficient facilities in language laboratories. The last but one is the inadequate speaking courses in the BA program. And finally it is the inefficient educational system of the country. However, psychological factors, such as being afraid of making mistakes, were not considered the main causes affecting the students' progress in developing their speaking skills.

Mosha (2014, pp. 65-75) conducted a study that aimed to investigate the factors affecting students' performance in English language in Zanzibar—an island in the Indian Ocean—Rural and Urban Secondary Schools. Similar to the current study, the author looked into the problem from three different angles: teacher factors, curriculum factors, and learner factors. To start with teacher factors, the results showed that teachers were not competent in teaching despite the fact that they were trained. Some of the teachers were not able to speak English fluently throughout their teaching. The lack of effective teaching methods and low motivation of the teachers do contribute to impacting the performance of the students. Teachers have difficulties in using the suggested teaching and learning materials shown in the syllabus and they are not interested in using them. Turning to the curriculum factors, Mosha (2014, pp. 65-75) observed that English lessons were not taught effectively for many reasons, for example, teachers are overloaded with other responsibilities, teachers might have frequent and unexpected meetings and teachers' lateness. The study also revealed that there was lack of teaching facilities, for example, the shortage of textbooks that would enable the students to learn the basics of the language and contribute to their high performance. The absence of school debates between classes and schools or English clubs may impact negatively on the students' speaking performance and their self-confidence. As for the learner factors, Mosha (2014, pp. 65-75) concluded that motivation plays an important role for explaining failure or success of a learner.

Sursattayawong (2006, pp. 12-33) carried out a study that aimed to investigate the speaking problems of the nurses at Rajavithi Hospital in Thailand. The results showed that the problems were due to the inability to speak with correct grammar, inappropriate use of words, intonation, stress and mispronunciation, poor listening, cultural differences, and the lack of self-confidence. The author of the study suggested that the nurses ought to be trained by native speakers in order to be familiar with accents and vocabulary required at work.

A study conducted by Mai (2015, pp. 14-18) aimed at investigating the speaking problems of the students at Le ThanhHien High School and the factors that might affect their speaking performance. The results of the study revealed that the factors affecting the student's speaking performance can be summarized as follows: (1)

Students speak very little or nothing in speaking classes; (2) they cannot think of anything to say; (3) they often use Vietnamese instead of English when they work in pairs; (4) they have no motivation to express themselves; (5) they have low or uneven participation; (6) they are fearful of criticism or losing face; (7) they used to translate information into Vietnamese before they speak; (8) they have some problems in listening; (9) the teachers' negative feedback throughout speaking activities; and finally (10) the lack of confidence and time for preparation.

The above factors have been underscored by many other authors. For instance, Ur (1996, as cited in Mai, 2015, p. 10) pointed out that students encounter certain problems when they come to speak such as self-confidence, lack of knowledge, low or uneven participation, and mother-tongue use. A study conducted by Park and Lee (2005, as cited in Mai, 2015, p. 11) attempted to investigate the impact of Korean learners' anxiety and self-confidence on their speaking performance. The findings showed that learners' anxiety level and self-confidence had a negative impact on their oral performance.

Another study carried out by Bozorgian (2012, as cited in Mai, 2015, p. 11) aimed to examine the relationship of listening skill with other language skills. The results revealed that there is a close correlation between listening and other language skills. In other words, the higher the listening score is, the better the speaking score will be.

Lukitasari (2008, as cited in Mai, 2015, p. 11) also conducted a study that is concerned with the students' strategies used to overcome speaking problems in Indonesia. The findings indicated that students encounter some speaking problems including inhibition, having nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother-tongue interference. Moreover, students were not competent at the three elements of speaking, namely vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

Furthermore, Senel (2012, p. 55) conducted a study that attempted to explore the oral communication anxiety and the problems of Turkish EFL learners. Similar to the findings of the current study, Senel's study revealed the following: (1) students are interrupted by the teachers while speaking; (2) most of the teachers are non-native speakers, consequently, they do not force students to use the target language; (3) most of the students criticized the methods and techniques used by their teachers. They think that such methods are old-fashioned and not up-to-date and this requires the use of their native language for communication rather than the target language; (4) the number of the English courses is limited and their content is insufficient; (5) students do not have any opportunity to use the target language outside the classroom; and (6) most of the exams are written and this affects negatively their oral communication.

Al-Nawrasy (2013, p. 243) carried out a study that aimed to investigate the effect of the native and non-native English language teachers on students' achievement in speaking skills. It is concluded that native English-speaking teachers are better than the non-native English-speaking teachers in teaching speaking. The study confirmed that the native English-speaking teachers are the best and ideal teachers to teach English, particularly in speaking. Due to their command in English language as a mother tongue, they will be able to use it effectively with greater spontaneity (Harmer, 1991 in Al-Nawrasy, 2013, p. 244). On the other hand, non-native English speaking teachers usually possess a poorer competence which disallows spontaneity. Besides, they naturally experience problems related to pronunciation, colloquial expressions, and certain kinds of vocabulary.

Last but not least, a study conducted by GAN (2012, pp. 43-53) aimed to identify the problems with oral English skills of ESL (English as a Second Language) students at a tertiary teacher training institution in Hong

Kong. The results revealed that students do not have adequate vocabulary. They lack grammatical accuracy. They have some problems in pronunciation and intonation. And they are not provided with enough opportunities to speak English in class.

Methodology

Participants

The participants who took part in this study were 30 Arab high school EFL students enrolled at both Arabic private schools in Warsaw, namely Libyan private school and Dar al salaam private school of Iraq. The participants' age ranges from 15-19 years old.

Data-Collection Instruments

A questionnaire and interviews were used as the research instruments for collecting the data. The questionnaire has been adopted from Senel (2012) and Diaab (2016) since it matches the participants' age and covers the three factors of the study, namely teacher factors, curriculum factors, and learner factors. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items aiming at identifying the three factors under investigation. Interviews with three instructors were also conducted with reference to the research question.

Data-Collection Procedures

To maximize the validity of the data, to make the findings of the study more generalizable, and to have a more in-depth analysis of the participants, speaking skills problems, the data collection procedure was triangulated. That is to say, 30 Arab EFL students were asked to fill in the questionnaire and three Arab EFL instructors were interviewed semi-structurally.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed both statistically and descriptively. In other words, the data of the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively by applying SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions). The frequency count was used to identify the factors that might affect Arab high school EFL students' speaking performance in Poland. Therefore, descriptive statistics were presented and interpreted. Besides, the analysis of the interviews was accomplished qualitatively.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the results of a quantitative analysis. It deals with the three factors of the study that might affect Arab high school EFL students' speaking performance in Poland. The first table (Table 1) focuses on the teacher factors. The second table (Table 2) is concerned with the curriculum factors and the third table (Table 3) is related to the learner factors.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Quantitative Findings on the Teacher Factors

No	Item statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Teachers would translate vocabulary into Arabic	-	-	23.3	10.0	66.7
2	Teachers would explain lessons in Arabic	3.3	6.7	16.7	40.0	33.3
3	Teachers would speak more than I do	6.7	3.3	3.3	20.0	66.7
4	Teachers would not make speaking activities	30.0	10.0	16.7	3.3	40.0
5	Teachers would not encourage me to speak	36.7	16.7	6.7	6.7	33.3

(table 1 continued)

No	Item statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
6	Teachers would not give me opportunities to practice speaking	53.3	3.3	3.3	10.0	30.0
7	We would do more reading and writing than speaking	26.7	6.7	33.3	20.0	13.3
8	We would use Arabic more than English in the classroom	10.0	16.7	10.0	13.3	50.0
9	I would not speak English with my classmates	13.3	-	10.0	23.3	53.3
10	We are frequently interrupted by our teachers, so this discourages us for using the target language (English)	43.3	10.0	6.7	3.3	36.7
11	Our teachers do not force us to express our ideas in the target language (English)	23.3	6.7	-	30.0	40.0
12	Most of our teachers are non-native speakers, so this does not force us to speak in the target language (English)	6.7	3.3	3.3	13.3	73.3
13	Teaching methods and techniques used by our teachers do not encourage us to use the target language (English)	33.3	6.7	13.3	10.0	36.7

Notes. SD: Strongly disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly agree.

According to the responses given by the participants of the study as shown in the above table, teacher factors are found to be the main factors in hindering the students from speaking English successfully. A great number of the participants (86.7%) reported that most of the talk in the class is done by the teacher. More importantly, 86.6% of the participants agreed that most of the teachers are non-native speakers of English. This revealed that students will not be obliged to speak in English and they will be using Arabic as a medium of communication inside the class. The teachers will also tend to translate some vocabularies into Arabic or even explain lessons in Arabic. These are reported by 73.3% and 76.7% respectively. It is also worth mentioning that 76.6% of the participants agreed that having non-native speaking teachers and not being exposed enough to the target language would make them prefer to communicate with one another in Arabic. With regard to speaking activities and the opportunities given to the students to practise speaking, it is found that students are neither engaged in speaking activities nor given enough opportunities to practise English without being interrupted or criticized. These are reported by 43.3% and 40% respectively. Additionally, 46.7% of the participants reported that the teaching methods and techniques used by their teachers do not enhance their speaking skills.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Quantitative Findings on the Curriculum Factors

No	Item statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
14	Number of the English courses is only a few	6.7	-	20.0	3.3	70.0
15	The less the number of the Arabic courses in the program is, the more we can use the target language (English)	-	6.7	23.3	10.0	60.0
16	Most of our exams are written, so we do not give priority to oral language	3.3	-	26.7	16.7	53.3
17	"Speaking course" is not a part of the curriculum, so this affects us in a negative way to use oral communication	13.3	3.3	-	10.0	73.3
18	In most of the courses we are generally passive, so we do not need to use the target language (English)	23.3	6.7	13.3	10.0	46.7

Notes. SD: Strongly disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly agree.

The Table 2 showed that about 83.3% of the participants reported that "speaking course" is not a part of the curriculum. In other words, it is not a separate course, but rather it is included as a separate section or module of the curriculum. It seemed that the curriculum concentrates more on the theoretical aspects of English such as grammar, reading, and writing than speaking and listening activities. They added that focusing on the

theoretical aspects of English would affect them negatively to use oral communication. Moreover, 73.3% of the participants agreed that the number of English courses is few and 70% of them were aware of the fact that the fewer subjects are taught in Arabic is, the greater are the opportunities for the students to use English language. In addition, 70% of the respondents viewed that since most of their exams are written, they do not give priority to oral language.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Quantitative Findings on the Learner Factors

No	Item statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
19	I am unable to pronounce words correctly	13.3	10.0	13.3	10.0	53.3
20	I am afraid of making mistakes	23.3	13.3	13.3	-	50.0
21	My mistakes embarrass me and make me feel incompetent	23.3	13.3	13.3	16.7	33.3
22	I worry from the negative feedback I get from my teacher in the English class	26.7	13.3	20.0	20.0	20.0
23	I am worried about what opinions others might have when I speak English	46.7	6.7	13.3	-	33.3
24	I feel anxious every time I speak	20.0	30.0	26.7	10.0	13.3
25	While speaking English, I get nervous; I forget things I really know	20.0	20.0	3.3	3.3	53.3

Notes. SD: Strongly disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly agree.

Pawlak (2011, p. 15) pointed out that learners should be equipped with the necessary systemic knowledge in terms of grammar, lexis, pronunciation, pragmatic routines, and paralinguistic means. They also should be aware of the distinctive features of the spoken language that can by employed to convey intended meanings in a range of situations.

However, according to the results, 63.3% of the participants reported that they have some difficulties with pronunciation. It goes without saying that English words can be sometimes difficult to pronounce. This can be attributed to the difficulty of the language itself, the intervention of the mother tongue, or maybe a problem born with the learner himself. Moreover, when a learner comes to speak English, he/she should put in his or her mind the fact that he/she should consider not only the pronunciation of single words, but also the connection between the words in the sentence. However, the learners who have pronunciation problems do not have to worry too much. Their problem can be overcome. For example, a learner can take a pronunciation course by a well-qualified teacher. Otherwise, there will be no point to take it unless the teacher is a good speaker/pronouncer. Another way is to keep practising one's listening. The more one listens, the more one's pronunciation will be developed naturally and get closer to native pronunciation.

The findings also showed that 50% of the participants seem to be afraid of their mistakes and be embarrassed by them. Actually, if a learner feels shy or afraid of being laughed at by others while speaking, surely, he/she will be affected negatively unless he/she overcomes this problem. A learner should bring into his notice that he/she is a language speaker. It means that walls should be broken. He/She should be brave and confident enough to speak even if the speech he is going to deliver contains mistakes, no matter with grammatical mistakes or the problems of pronunciation. These can be overcome with the passage of time. The most important thing is to be courageous. Otherwise a learner will never be able to be developed as a language speaker.

Also the feeling of getting nervous while speaking reported by 56.6% of the participants made them unable to remember what to say. Fear of negative feedback by teachers is experienced by 40% of the

participants. Besides, about 33.3% of the participants had some concerns about others' opinions on their speaking performance. Definitely, if a learner feels nervous or is afraid of making a mistake while speaking, then his or her problem will be the lack of self-confidence. Being confident is a part and parcel of being a fluent/competent speaker. However, there are some things that can increase the learners' confidence. First, they should not feel anxious about grammatical mistakes. They have to do their best to communicate and at the long run they will be successful even if they do make a small grammar mistake. Another way is to have a positive attitude towards learning. A learner has to think of himself or herself as a speaker of English language and he/she should focus on celebrating what he/she knows, not being frustrated about what he/she does not know. In this way, their confidence will be built gradually. Another important point is that a learner should try to practise speaking English as much as possible in low-pressure situations. For example, a learner has to speak to himself. This will sound ridiculous at first, but it really helps. Then he/she has to speak with his teachers and classmates in English. By following these steps, the learner will feel more comfortable while speaking in English and he/she will be more ready for handling high-pressure situations like conferences, presentations, or interviews.

After discussing the analysis of the data of this study quantitatively, the following presents the main findings of this study qualitatively. Three instructors were interviewed. They all focused on the problems that are related to the learners themselves. For instance, the first instructor stated that "…based on my five years of experience, I could note that the most anxious students are those with low proficiency level. On the contrary, students with high proficiency level are able to speak English confidently and effectively". The same idea has been underscored by the second instructor who stated that "… I think that students with low proficiency level are often passive during speaking. They usually stop for thinking about what to say, and sometimes they ask me about the translation of some Arabic words in English. Sometimes, they stop their speech and ask 'am I correct?' 'Is my pronunciation correct?' 'Whereas the third instructor points out that'… I believe that most students are sensitive to my feedbacks. They feel embarrassed when I correct their mistakes".

According to the above three point of views, it seems that students lack linguistic competence and they are fearful of their teachers' negative feedback. In fact, teachers should convince their students that committing errors and mistakes is necessary for learning any language and it is an integral part of language learning.

Conclusion

This study investigated the factors that might contribute to the speaking skill problems among Arab high school EFL students in Poland. The data came from a questionnaire distributed to Arab high school EFL students (N = 30). Three instructors were also interviewed for the purpose of validating the data collected from the questionnaire. The findings revealed that students encounter problems in speaking skill due to three main variables, namely, teacher-related variables, curricula-variables, and learner-variables.

First, the teachers speak more than the students do. They do not provide students with enough opportunities to practise English or engage them in speaking activities so that they cannot develop their speaking skill. Moreover, because teachers are non-native English speakers, they use Arabic to explain lessons and translate vocabularies and this makes the students less exposed to the target language.

Second, it is found that the curriculum does not provide students with enough speaking activities. Since most of the subjects are taught in Arabic and most of the exams are written, students do not give priority to oral language.

And finally, the findings showed that students are shy and embarrassed to use English inside and outside the classroom. This can be attributed to the fact that students lack self-confidence to perform in front of others. They may have no enough vocabulary or correct grammar to speak in public. Another reason can be related to their difficulties with English pronunciation.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that Arab high school EFL teachers should rethink of their style of teaching English. They should pay more attention to the elements of the communicative competence that require engaging the students in the process of learning that should be interactive between both the teacher and the student. Besides, teachers should create a comfortable learning atmosphere which could lessen students' anxiety and where students can be able to express themselves with no fear. Moreover, students should be offered a curriculum that contains more practical aspects of the language. It should consist of more speaking activities that could enhance their oral language. Last but not least, Arab high school EFL students should be provided with more opportunities to use English by means of engaging them in speaking activities to develop their speaking skill and to enhance their self-confidence.

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