





Challenges and Attitudes of Iraq's Kurdistan ESL University Students Towards Improving Oral Skills

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Abstract

In many instances, English language poses great challenges to English as a second language learners, obviously due to the variations between English and the learners' second language. The paper looked intensively at the challenges and attitudes of Iraq's Kurdistan English as a Second Language (ESL) University students towards improving their oral skills. The difficulties of oral skills exist in many institutions; students defied the obstacles during speaking; so, the study delved into the issues in this area. The study is quantitative. The data was collected from 63 participants selected from different institutions who utilized the survey questionnaire. The study was carried out in four educational institutions. The study used descriptive statistics and adopted tables and percentages to interpret the results. The results of this study indicated that the depression of students, apprehension, shyness, and lack of motivation made students unable to interplay with other mates in pair groups and perform activities. Teachers could not manage all activities in the classroom on their own. The results showed that lack of practice, chances, and motivation to speak in English classrooms were the most frequent obstacles for students learning to speak. Additionally, the methods and procedures employed in the lecture do not encourage students to utilize English. Thus, this study would assist university students in identifying the issues they encounter when learning to speak English and what they must do to overcome these obstacles.

Keywords: *Attitudes; Challenges, ESL; Oral Skills; University Students*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking refers to the capacity to convey "words, phrases, or sentences" verbally. It is the process of creating meaning by utilizing both verbal and nonverbal symbols in a variety of contexts (Chaney, 1998). Thus, speaking is the deliberate blending of sounds to create language phrases. Speaking is, therefore, relevant to encoding. Speakers must first transform their thoughts into words or symbols in order to communicate with listeners directly. Through the speaker's voice, the thoughts go to the listeners' brains. In order to decipher the message, listeners infer meaning from the language forms that are utilized. To make sense of what they are hearing, they translate words into thoughts. Because of this, it is frequently asserted that language is a tool for exchanging ideas. The capacity to perform tasks successfully is referred to as skill. This "talent" may result through practice or training. In other words, skill is the acquired capacity to carry out a task competently, often one that involves a number of synchronized processes and activities (Richards, 2002).

Many English as a Second Language (ESL) students over time have demonstrated in their spoken language that they have challenges in learning and using the English language to achieve their communicative purposes. It is, therefore, important for teachers to help guide the students to succeed in their spoken language. This is because, beyond speaking, English also serves as an important learning tool.

According to Brown (2000), one of a language teacher's duties is to encourage students to use English not just in the classroom but also in everyday discussions and, as much as possible, communicate with their partners and classmates. This may be achieved through a variety of activities, including leveraging technology, promoting active listening, doing group presentations, and viewing movies that can serve as conversation skill models. One of the most challenging aspects

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of learning a second language may be speaking; many L2 students struggle to articulate their thoughts in spoken English.

Rahayu (2015) expressed that the main problem in speaking /oral communication is the lack of students' mastery of English speaking. There are some programs which support learning English speaking, such as conversation, memories of vocabulary, public speaking, study club, and language tutorial. But, unfortunately, the students have some problems speaking English in their daily communication. This motivates this study to examine the challenges ESL students face in their oral communication. The aim of this study is, therefore, to x-ray the challenges of the ESL students with a view to proffering solutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An examination into how gaming activities affect speaking ability was done by Jeczny and Bapir (2021). Focusing on forms may not have a substantial effect on speaking ability, according to some educationalists who claim that learners lack mastery when they talk, although linguistic elements (form) are well studied. This indicates that linguistic characteristics may be taught implicitly and that the emphasis should be on meaning. Words cannot be mixed in a random order since language is a set of laws. Therefore, linguistic elements that can help learners speak accurately should be explicitly taught. Many nations whose primary language is not English have performed research on teaching and/or acquiring English speaking abilities, how to develop them, and issues causing learners' low speaking ability.

Similar to the current study, Khan and Ali (2010) conducted research on college students' perspectives on speaking skill improvement in Pakistan. The investigation came to the conclusion that rather than being taught as a language, English was treated as a topic. The majority of students concurred that they did not have enough time to practice various speaking drills, that they were unable to speak for fear of being teased by their peers, and that their teachers did not utilize English in the classroom the majority of the time. Some of the pupils gave their excuse that they couldn't talk in front of their professors in English.

Speaking is the most crucial ability to learn and enhance as a sign of good engagement, according to Morozova (2013). Furthermore, she contends that ESL language learners have to learn how to improve their communicative competency in speaking. Speaking is the most crucial ability while learning a second language or foreign language, according to Khamkhien (2010). He claims that "the speaking skill is a vital aspect of the language learning and teaching process," to put it another way. Nomass (2013) makes the assumption that students attempting to acquire ESL information require additional linguistic assistance. ESL students need more practice speaking, thus they should be exposed to various activities that can teach them how to do so quickly and efficiently.

English is a challenging language for non-native speakers to speak. Because practice is essential for speaking English, students who may struggle with confidence, motivation, or embarrassment in class should make an effort to speak every day when interacting with teachers and fellow students. There were some factors that affected speaking, such as ESL learners not being able to talk about themselves; the large number of students in the class has an impact on the student's participation because some of the students do not have the chance to speak; some learners are afraid, worried, and shy of making mistakes in front of their classmates; and some learners prefer to communicate with their teachers instead of their classmates (Al Hosni, 2014).

These studies have examined issues related to problems associated with using and learning the English language for communication and, in this regard, related to the present study. The point of diversion, however, with this present study is in the area of study and spread of the participants across fields. This study is broader in its approach/methodology as the analysis of its result is

carried out qualitatively and accompanied by a qualitative explanation/interpretation of results.

RESEARCH METHOD

For the purpose of conducting this study, the researchers adopted the descriptive method. The descriptive method is a questionnaire which is used to search for some problems under investigation. In this study, the questionnaire used employed closed-ended questions. The questionnaire had six choices for their responses: (Sometimes, Often, Always, Never, Rarely, and Somehow). The data was analyzed using simple percentages, pie charts, histograms and frequency tables.

Participants

This quantitative study was piloted among 63 participants in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), exploring the authentic data selected from different universities. For instance, with 63 responses, 8(12.7%) were from Duhok University, 17(27%) were from Koya University, 13 (20.7%) at Salahaddin University, and 25(39.7%) at Soran University. The results are explicitly stated in the discussion section. The samples were selected from among the universities across KRI. This is done because of proximity and ease of data collection. The sample population was limited due to the difficulty in retrieving all questionnaires administered owing to the attitude of respondents towards participating in the research. Overall, the sample gives a fair representation of the challenges experienced by ESL students.

Data Analysis

The information was qualitatively examined. The questionnaire results were descriptively examined. Additionally, it was utilized to locate the frequencies, which are crucial for interpreting the data. The frequencies and percentages of the student respondents were determined using descriptive statistics. To examine the data, frequencies and percentages were calculated. These metrics were used to discuss the difficulties that students have while learning to talk, the requirements of the students in speaking classes, and the ways in which the instructor may support the students in speaking more clearly.

In this study, the Likert Scale numbers at descriptive statistics are deemed as follows: (Sometimes, Often, Always, Never, Rarely, Somehow), then Frequency, and after that, Percentage (%)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The items of the questionnaire were analyzed, and the results are shown in the table below.

Table 1. Frequency of Universities' Names

	Frequency	Percentage
Duhok University	8	12.7
Koya University	17	27
Salahaddin University	13	20.7
Soran University	25	39.7
Total	63	100.0

According to the information gathered from 63 responses, the majority of students were male, as 41 (65.1%) were male. The questionnaire was piloted for 63 students, and the majority of responses were male. Only 16 (25.4%) were female. There was a paucity of responses: 6 (9.5%) preferred not to answer, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency of Gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	41	65.1
Female	16	25.4
Prefer not to say	6	9.5
Total	63	100.0

As the study explored this area, 20 (31.7%) of participants were regarded as between 20 and 25 years old, while 32 (50.8%) were highly rated between 26 and 30 years old, and 9 (14.3%) were between 31 and 35 years old. In addition, a small number of responses, 2 (3.2%), were over 36 or more. The results are analyzed in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency of Age Group

	Frequency	Percentage
20-25	20	31.7
26-30	32	50.8
31-35	9	14.3
36 or more	2	3.2
Total	63	100.0

Out of 63 participants, 6 (9.5%) had diplomas, and the minority of them did not have vocational qualifications. Solely 2 (3.2%) had vocational, and half of them 45 (71.4%) had Masters. Regarding this table, 4 (6.3%) had a Ph.D. The result is assessed in-depth in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of Education Level

	Frequency	Percentage
Diploma	6	9.5
Vocational	2	3.2
Bachelor's	45	71.4
Master's	6	9.5
Ph.D.	4	6.3
Total	63	100.0

Regarding the gleaned data, over 63 responses, nearly 20 (31.17%), their fields were English Language and Literature. Yet, in relation to the sheer number of participants, 30 (47.6%) of their fields were English Language Teaching based on gathering real data. Few students (6 (9.5%)) studied linguistics. The last one, 7 (11.1%), studied English translation. Table 5 displays the results.

Table 5. Frequency of Field of Study

	Frequency	Percentage
English Language and Literature	20	31.7
English Language Teaching	30	47.6
Linguistics	6	9.5
English Translation	7	11.1
Total	63	100.0

The results show the majority of participants (63) studied in governmental institutions. The real reason is that these institutions, which advanced the survey, had no one working in either private or public aid. So, the high response was governmental. This is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. University Types

	Frequency	Percentage
Governmental	63	100
Private	0	0
Aided	0	0
Total	63	100.0

Overall, 63 participants' language proficiency of 11 (17.5%) is intermediate, and 15 (23.8%) is upper intermediate. However, 18 (28.6%) are advanced, 13 (20.6%) are elementary, and no response has been reported for beginner proficiency. 6 (9.5%) is Proficiency. As for the results, which are demonstrated in Table 7,

Table 7. Frequency of Language Proficiency

	Frequency	Percentage
B1 (Intermediate)	11	17.5
B2 (Upper intermediate)	15	23.8
C1 (Advanced)	18	28.6
A2 (Elementary)	13	20.6
A1 (Beginner)	0	0
C2 (Proficiency)	6	9.5
Total	63	100.0

The finding shows 6 (9.5%) use an electronic dictionary, 5 (7.5%) utilize a tablet computer, 17 (27%) use a smartphone, 10 (15.9%) use an audio player, 12 (19%) use a desktop computer, 5 (7.5%) use an electronic book reader, 6 (9.5%) use a smartwatch, 11 (17.5%) use a laptop, and 3 (4.8%) use heterogeneous. The results are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8. Frequency of Devices Used to Support Foreign Language Learning

	Frequency	Percentage
Electronic Dictionary	6	9.5
Tablet Computer (e.g. iPad)	5	7.9
Smartphone	17	27
Audio Player (e.g. MP3, or CD player)	10	15.9
Desktop computer	12	19
Electronic book Reader (e.g. Kindle)	5	7.9
Smart Watch (e.g. iWatch)	6	9.5
Laptop	11	17.5
Others	3	4.8
Total	63	100.0

In the second part of the questionnaire, which contained the main items outside demographic issues, the participants responded thus:

Table 9. It is stated in the course requirements that oral participation is counted in the course grade.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	27	42.9
Often	10	15.9
Always	12	9
Never	3	3.8
Rarely	7	11.1
Somehow	4	6.3
Total	63	100.0

In response to "It is stated in the course requirements that oral participation is counted in the course grade." According to coding, 27(42.9%) were *sometimes*, and also 10 (15.9%) were *often*, and almost 12(9%) were *always*. 3(3.8%) were *never*. The paucity of the response was *rarely* 7(11.1%). Among 63 responses, only 4(6.3%) showed *somehow*. The results are represented in Table 9.

Table 10. Students actively discuss course material or do exercises in small groups during class time.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	18	28.6
Often	16	25.4
Always	10	15.9
Never	7	11.1
Rarely	10	15.9
Somehow	2	3.2
Total	63	100.0

The participants' views about this item "Students actively discuss course material or do exercises in small groups during class time." 18(28.6%) sometimes, 16(25.4%) was also *often*, and 10(15.9%) was *always*. *Never* was 7 (11.1%). Furthermore, 10 (15.9%) were *rarely*, and only 2 (3.2%) were *somehow*. The outcomes are demonstrated in Table 10.

Table 11. Students communicate using English with other students outside of class to complete graded projects

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	16	25.4
Often	16	25.4
Always	15	23.8
Never	3	4.8
Rarely	8	12.7
Somehow	5	7.9
Total	63	100.0

Regarding this item, "Students communicate using English with other students outside of class to complete graded projects." 16(25.4%) was *sometimes*, and 16(25.4%) was *often*. 15 (23.8%) were *always*. Furthermore, only 3 (4.8%) of the responses were never in the other option, 8(12.7%) were stated as *rarely*, 5(7.9%) were *somehow*. The result is given below in Table 11.

Table 12. Students give oral presentations in front of the class

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	8	12.7
Often	10	15.9
Always	10	15.9
Never	16	25.4
Rarely	11	17.5
Somehow	8	12.7
Total	63	100.0

The option addressed in this section of the questionnaire was "Students give oral presentations in front of the class". 8 (12.7%) was sometimes, 10 (15.9%) was often, and 10(15.9%) was always. As a result, 16 (25.4%) were never. 11 (17.5%) were rare, 8 (12.7%) were somehow. The findings are indicated in Table 12.

Table 13. Students facilitate or lead whole-class discussions or activities using English with ease

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	7	11.1
Often	17	27
Always	5	7.9
Never	7	11.1
Rarely	11	17.5
Somehow	16	25.4
Total	63	100.0

The fifth item reports that "Students facilitate or lead whole-class discussions or activities using English with ease." 7 (11.1%) was sometimes, 17 (27%) was often, and then, 5 (7.9%) was always. *Never* was 7 (11.1%). Furthermore, 11 (17.5%) were *rare*, while 16 (25.4%) were *somehow*. This is shown in Table 13.

Table 14. Whether students ask questions confidently about course content before, during, and after class.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	9	14.3
Often	11	17.5
Always	11	17.5
Never	6	9.5
Rarely	12	19
Somehow	14	22.2
Total	63	100.0

The participants were asked to draw attention to "Whether students ask questions confidently about course content before, during, and after class." Regarding the gleaned data, 9 (14.3%) was sometimes, now and then, 11 (17.5%) was often, 11 (17.5%) was always, and 6 (9.5%) was never. Also, 12 (19%) was rarely, then, 14 (22.2%) was somehow. The results are revealed in Table 14.

Table 15. ESL students have a mastery of oral communication.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	12	19
Often	14	22.2
Always	6	9.5
Never	9	14.3
Rarely	9	14.3
Somehow	13	20.6
Total	63	100.0

The item claims that "ESL students have a mastery of oral communication." Of 63 responses, 12 (19%) were sometimes. 14 (22.2%) of the responses were often. And 6 (9.5%) was also always, whereas 9 (14.3%) was never, 9 (14.3%) was rarely, and 13 (20.6%) was somehow. The results are contemplated in Table 15.

Table 16. ESL students have difficulty working with other students in small groups during class for fear of errors in English usage.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	13	20.6
Often	10	15.9
Always	11	17.5
Never	6	9.5
Rarely	15	23.8
Somehow	8	12.7
Total	63	100.0

Regarding this questionnaire item, "ESL students have difficulty working with other students in small groups during class for fear of errors in English usage." 13 (20.6%) was sometimes, 10 (15.9%) was often. While 11 (17.5%) were always, 6 (9.5%) were never, 15 (23.8%) were rarely, and 8 (12.7%) were in some way. The results are found in Table 16.

Table 17. ESL students have difficulty relating to other students on out-of-class projects.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	9	14.3
Often	21	33.3
Always	9	14.3
Never	5	7.9
Rarely	8	12.7
Somehow	11	17.5
Total	63	100.0

The participants' concerns on this question, "ESL students have difficulty relating to other students on out-of-class projects." At this point, 9 (14.3%) was sometimes, while 21 (33.3%) was often. Furthermore, 9 (14.3%) was always a small number of participants, but never 5 (7.5%). And, while 8 (12.7%) were infrequent, 11 (17.5%) were in some way. The results are illustrated in Table 17.

Table 18. ESL students struggle with giving oral presentations in front of the class.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	17	27
Often	10	15.9
Always	5	7.9
Never	8	12.7
Rarely	13	20.6
Somehow	10	15.9
Total	63	100.0

The option reaffirmed in this section of the questionnaire was, "ESL students struggle with giving oral presentations in front of the class." 17 (27%) was sometimes, and 10 (15.9%) was often. Hence, 5 (7.9%) was always, 8 (12.7%) was never, whereas 13(20.6) was rarely, and after that, 10 (15.9%) was somehow. The results are displayed in Table 18.

Table 19. ESL students have difficulty participating in large group discussions or in debates.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	13	20.6
Often	8	12.7
Always	14	22.2
Never	7	11.1
Rarely	9	14.3
Somehow	12	19
Total	63	100.0

This item shows that. "ESL students have difficulty participating in large group discussions or in debates." The data computed showed that 13 (20.6%) was sometimes, whereas 8 (12.7%) was often, and 14 (22.2%) was always. Likewise, 7 (11.1%) was never, 9 (14.3%) was rare, and otherwise, 12 (19%) was sometimes. The result is reflected in Table 19.

Table 20. ESL students are unsuccessful at leading class discussions.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	14	22.2
Often	9	14.3
Always	11	17.5
Never	10	15.9
Rarely	11	17.5
Somehow	8	12.7
Total	63	100.0

Regarding this statement, "ESL students are unsuccessful at leading class discussions." 14 (22.2%) was sometimes, 9 (14.3%) was frequently, and 11 (17.5%) was always, 10 (15.9%) was never. 11 (17.5%) were infrequent. However, 8 (12.7%) were somehow. The results are shown in Table 20.

Table 21. ESL students struggle with out-of-class assignments, which require interaction with native speakers.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	15	23.8
Often	11	17.5

	Frequency	Percentage
Always	6	9.5
Never	4	6.3
Rarely	12	19
Somehow	15	23.8
Total	63	100.0

The thirteenth item is that "ESL students struggle with out-of-class assignments which require interaction with native speakers." 15 (23.8%) was sometimes, and also 11 (17.5%) was often. Furthermore, 6 (9.5%) was always, while the other one, 4 (6.3%) was never, 12 (19%) was rare, and 15 (23.8%) was somehow. The results are as in Table 21.

Table 22. I pay more attention to the content (e.g., ideas, organization) than the language (e.g., spelling, grammar, vocabulary) when I speak.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	13	20.6
Often	9	14.3
Always	12	19
Never	9	14.3
Rarely	10	15.9
Somehow	10	15.9
Total	63	100.0

The option represented that "I pay more attention to the content (e.g., ideas, organization) than the language (e.g., spelling, grammar, vocabulary) when I speak." 13 (20.6%) was sometimes, and 9 (14.3%) was often. However, 12 (19%) was always, whereas 9 (14.3%) was never, 10 (15.9%) was rare, and 10 (15.9%) was somehow. The results are explained in Table 22.

Table 23. I engage in oral conversation with other students to get feedback on how I can improve my oral communication.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	9	14.3
Often	23	26.5
Always	12	19
Never	6	9.5
Rarely	3	4.8
Somehow	10	15.9
Total	63	100.0

The item reports that "I engage in oral conversation with other students to get feedback on how I can improve my oral communication." 9 (14.3%) was sometimes, and 23 (26.5%) was often, now and then, 12 (19%) was always, and 6 (9.5%) was never, a small rate. 3 (4.8%) were uncommon, while 10 (15.9%) were in some way. The results are shown in Table 23.

Table 24. Most of the students in the preparatory year are shy while practising speaking skills in front of their mates.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	18	28.6
Often	12	19
Always	8	12.7

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	4	6.3
Rarely	9	14.3
Somehow	12	19
Total	63	100.0

The participants' attitudes towards this question, "Most of the students in the preparatory year are shy while practising speaking skills in front of their mates." With regards to gleaned data, 18 (28.6%) was sometimes, and 12 (19%) was often, while 8 (12.7%) was always. However, 4(6.3%) was never, and 9 (14.3%) was rare, and 12 (19%) was somehow. The results are as in Table 24.

Table 25. Students are afraid of oral communication because they do not have a full understanding of the structure of the second language.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	14	22.2
Often	12	19
Always	9	14.3
Never	13	20.6
Rarely	6	9.5
Somehow	9	14.3
Total	63	100.0

The participants were asked to state whether "Students are afraid of oral communication because they do not have a full understanding of the structure of the second language." 14 (22.2%) was sometimes, and 12 (19%) was often, 9 (14.3%) was always, furthermore, 13 (20.6%) was never, 6 (9.5%) was rare, 9 (14.3%) was somehow. The results are given in Table 26.

Table 27. Students struggle with mother tongue interference in their oral communication.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	18	28.6
Often	11	17.5
Always	9	14.3
Never	6	9.5
Rarely	10	15.9
Somehow	9	14.3
Total	63	100.0

This item presents that "Students struggle with mother tongue interference in their oral communication." 18 (28.6%) was sometimes, and 11 (17.5%) was often, 9 (14.3) was always, furthermore, 9 (14.3%) was always, and also 6 (9.5%) was never, 10 (15.9%) was rare, and 9 (14.3%) was somehow. The results are analyzed in Table 27.

Table 28. I learned the English sounds/phonemes in order to improve my oral communication.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	7	11.1
Often	11	17.5
Always	16	25.4
Never	7	11.1
Rarely	9	14.3

	Frequency	Percentage
Somehow	13	20.6
Total	63	100.0

In response to this item, "I learn the English sounds/phonemes in order to improve my oral communication." 7 (11.1%) was sometimes, and 11 (17.5%) was often. In addition, 16 (25.4%) was always. Most importantly, 7 (11.1%) was never, 9 (14.3%) was rare, and 13 (20.6%) was somehow. The results are seen in Table 28.

Table 29. I generally try to listen to native speakers and imitate their speech habits/patterns

	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	10	16.1
Often	11	17.7
Always	15	24.2
Never	6	8.1
Rarely	8	12.9
Somehow	13	21
Total	63	100.0

The participant's perception of the statement, "I generally try to listen to native speakers and imitate their speech habits/patterns", shows that 10 (16.1%) were sometimes, and 11 (17.7%) were often. Interestingly, 15 (24.2%) was always. Consequently, 6 (8.1%) were never, 8 (12.9%) were rare, and 13 (21%) were somehow. The results are presented in Table 29.

Discussion

The research's goal was to examine the challenges of ESL students' oral skills and to further increase students' oral competency by first assessing three key models for teaching English speaking and then by offering a four-step instructional approach that included four stages: preparation, speaking listening comprehension, and extension activities. Students must have the information, language, and coping mechanisms to lessen their anxiety and terror before speaking. When speaking, students should have enough room and time to encourage fluency while paying close attention to clarifying their meanings. For students to improve their speaking accuracy, chances must be provided for them to determine the proper use of language after speaking. Also, extended practice is effective in enhancing students' language use because task repetition helps students become more fluent and accurate speakers of English. The vast majority of responses are "sometimes" because they have not encountered many barriers to speaking; the barriers were fewer, and a few responses were reported as "never."

According to [Azadi et al. \(2015\)](#), one of the most important discussions about speaking is to convey messages to others, and it is essential to have the capacity to communicate effectively in this regard. Interaction in the classroom is essential for enhancing speaking skills. They took into account the learners' gender and the impact of teaching speaking tactics on the development of speaking competence. This corroborates the findings of this study that interaction is vital to improving speaking skills for ESL learners. From the result of this study, 26.5% sometimes engage in oral conversation with other students in order to get feedback for improvement. What this entails is that it is not frequently done; thus, the learners are still limited in their oral skills.

Another problem militating against the improvement of the learners' oral ability is the lack of opportunity to practice, especially in class via oral presentations. From the findings, 25% never give oral presentations, while 17.5% rarely do so in class. The oral presentation is central to developing oral skills. This is the view expressed by [Nomass \(2013\)](#) that students who desire to

acquire ESL information require additional linguistic assistance – they need more practice speaking. Therefore, they should be exposed to various activities that can teach them how to do so quickly and efficiently.

The case of mother tongue interference is also a factor which affects the performance of students in oral skills as demonstrated in the finding. 28.6% of the participants admitted the fact that they sometimes (28.6%) experience interference, while a further 17.5% and 14.3% often and always experience the problem of interference.

Yet another factor which hinders students' ability to improve is that the learners are limited in the area of exposure to self-learning. Only 24.2% of the finding learn English sounds in order to improve their English speaking skills. For any meaningful progress to be achieved, students must go a step further from what is learned in class to expose themselves to the sounds of English.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study is to examine the challenges of ESL students towards speaking proficiency. The study has succeeded in identifying a number of issues affecting students' oral skills, as shown in the findings and discussion sections. Teachers and students may find value in the study's findings. It can provide justification for teachers to engage children in oral contact in order to develop their speaking abilities. Teachers can instruct and develop proficient English speakers using the study's findings as a model. The findings of this study can also help learners get familiar with applying techniques necessary for their success in enhancing their oral abilities. Additionally, through interacting with others, students might gain from their talents. This will enhance their ability to participate in discussions, which will enhance their speaking skills. This study contributes to the understanding of the nature of the challenges of ESL learners in order to improve the curriculum content to help the students.

Teachers should help reduce students' anxiety in oral abilities by designing the content of their teaching to allow the students to speak English in class. In another way, encourage students to utilize and practice their English, and teachers should foster a friendly and supportive environment in the classroom. Furthermore, ESL teachers should put emphasis on communication among students, which might be made feasible through group and pair work in order to minimize bad speaking, boost confidence, and reduce shyness and embarrassment in ESL sessions.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

In the course of data collection for the study, there was a basic issue of not being able to retrieve all the questionnaire administered. If all questionnaires had been retrieved and analysed, the result of the study may have been slightly different.

For future research, a comparative study may have to be carried out between Iraq and Nigerian learners/students to determine the problems with their oral skills.

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