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**The Exploration of Some Lacunae behind Students' Weak  
Oral Performance: Case of Third Year EFL Students at  
BBUC in Ain-Témouchent**

*An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for a  
Master's Degree in Linguistics*

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## **Dedication 1**

*To my dear parents, for their sacrifice, their love, their  
tenderness, their support and their prayers throughout  
my studies;*

*To my brothers and lovely sisters for their support and  
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*To my dear friend Houda HANAFI with whom I  
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*Nassima*



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## ***Abstract***

Students' speaking performance in foreign language classes is affected by various factors. This study has been purposely conducted to find out the most influential factors that stand behind the third- year students' low oral attainment in English. These learners have been selected from the English department at Belhadj Bouchaib University Centre in Ain-Témouchent. The present study also aims at investigating the students' needs in order to improve their oral competencies in English. The research instruments employed were based on a questionnaire administered to the students and teachers of oral expression. Therefore, after collecting the relevant data and analyzing them both quantitatively and qualitatively, the results have shown that the students' weaknesses in speaking effectively the English language is mainly due to several problems, varying from linguistic to psychological, in addition to other flaws. The results obtained also suggest various strategies that both the teachers and students may follow in order to decrease the amount of the frequently encountered lacunae, and encourage the learners to speak the language both inside and outside class.

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## ***Key to Acronyms and Abbreviations***

**BBUC:** Belhadj Bouchaib University Centre

**CA :** Communicative Approach

**CLT:** Communicative Language Teaching

**EFL:** English as a Foreign language

**FL:** Foreign Language

**FLA:** Foreign Language Anxiety

**ICT:** Information and Communication Technologies

**LMD:** Licence, Master, Doctorate

**SLA:** Second Language Anxiety

**TEFL:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language



# **General Introduction**

## General Introduction

One of the main concerns of language learning is the communication process which is performed through speech. Speaking is a productive skill that needs a considerable amount of practice to be developed, and plays an important role in English foreign language (EFL) classes.

Teaching English in a non-English speaking country, like Algeria, is quite difficult since English is completely different from Arabic. For this reason, not all EFL learners- even after spending many years studying English- can communicate accurately and fluently, and when they are offered the opportunity to speak, most of them prefer to remain silent because they find problems in interacting and sharing their ideas and thoughts orally.

Thus, this research work seeks to highlight the most influential factors faced by EFL learners when asked to perform orally, taking third year students of the department of English at Belhadj Bouchaib University Centre as a case in point. The present study aims to help EFL learners overcome the problems they encounter during the oral expression course. Therefore, this research work tries to answer three main questions:

- 1- What are the linguistic obstacles that cause trouble to students when speaking English?
- 2- What are the psychological problems that students encounter when they are asked to perform orally in English?
- 3- Are there any other problems besides the linguistic and psychological problems?

Taking in consideration the above research questions, the following hypotheses are suggested:

- 1- Third year EFL students may face many linguistic problems such as: dearth of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammatical mistakes.
- 2- Anxiety, lack of self-confidence, shyness and fear of making mistakes may be the most influential psychological problems.

3- Besides these problems, there may be other problems such as: the use of the mother tongue, non-motivating atmosphere and overcrowded classes.

The present research work consists of three main chapters; the first chapter represents an overview about the speaking skill including its definition, importance, characteristics and its role in EFL classes. Furthermore, it explores the major obstacles that prevent EFL students from showing a good oral performance. The second chapter deals with all the detailed information about the methodology and the procedures involved in conducting this research work; it is also concerned with the presentation and explanation of the research design and data collection methods. The third chapter which is concerned with the practical part of this study, deals with the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained from the questionnaire that has been addressed to teachers of oral expression and their students.

By the end of this research work, some suggestions and recommendations are proposed for both teachers and students to overcome these lacunae for the purpose of improving the speaking skill inside class.

# **Chapter One**

## **1.1 Introduction**

As language is a means of transferring culture from one nation to another and from one generation to another, many countries insist on teaching students foreign languages. To learn any foreign language, four skills should be mastered: speaking, writing, reading and listening.

This chapter attempts to clarify the obstacles faced by EFL students inside the classroom, and thus, it begins by circumscribing how the speaking skill enhances foreign language learning since it is one of the most important skills which encourages and strengthens oral performance. This chapter is a theoretical framework where a description of foreign language speaking skill, its importance and main characteristics are discussed. The communicative approach and the communicative competence are also highlighted since communication is essential inside the classroom. Finally, the light will be shed on the major obstacles standing behind EFL learners' lacunae.

## **1.2 Definition and Importance of Speaking**

Speaking is said to be at the heart of second language learning and one of the productive skills. Its definition and importance will be discussed in this section.

### **1.2.1 Definition of Speaking**

Language is a tool through which learners can communicate with others to achieve certain goals, or to express their opinions, intentions, hopes and viewpoints. Lindsay and Knight (2006) point out the following,

We speak for many reasons- to be sociable, because we want something, because we want other people to do something, to do something for someone else, to respond to someone else, to express our feelings or opinion about something, to exchange information, to refer to an action or event in the past, present, or future, the responsibility of something happening, and so on (p.58).

The ability to speak is one of the main skills that should be mastered by any foreign language learner since it is necessary for displaying language proficiency. Speaking is a complex skill that deserves great attention because it plays an important role in both foreign language teaching and learning.



To acquire this skill, students need a special ability rather than only mastering a language in terms of grammatical terms or semantic rules. In fact, speaking is considered as the most difficult skill because it requires much effort than the rest of the other skills.

Speaking is also considered as a way by which we deliver a language through our mouth. Nunan (2003) defines it as: “the productive oral skill. It consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning” (p.48).

Chaney (1998) on the other hand, considers speaking as a process. He states in this respect, “speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of context” (p.13). Moreover, speaking is the major way for better understanding and expressing meanings to interact with others, and this is what Cameron (2001, p.40) supports: “Speaking is the active use of language to express meaning so that other people can make sense of them.”

Accordingly, speaking means the learner’s ability to express himself/herself orally, coherently and appropriately in a given context.

### **1.2.2 Importance of Speaking**

Speaking is the most demanding skill compared with other skills such as reading, writing and listening. Ur (2000, p.12) emphasizes this idea by stating, “of all the four skills, speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as ‘speaker’ of the language, as if speaking included all other kind of knowing”. Through speaking correctly, students can improve their writing skill and develop their vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, speaking is very important inside the classroom since learners can express their personal feelings and opinions. Mastering the speaking skill helps the speaker gain and attract the attention of others, and hold it until the completion of his/her message. It also enhances one’s personal life by giving opportunities for travel, promotion, scholarship, etc. Hence, speaking is not important just inside the classroom, but also outside it.

Furthermore, speaking is considered as a tool by which speakers of foreign languages have more opportunities to get jobs, as argued by Baker & Westrup (2003), “a student who can speak English well may have greater chance for further education, of finding employment and gaining promotion” (p. 5).

### **1.3 Characteristics of speaking performance**

The ability to speak English is based on two main factors, accuracy and fluency. Those factors are of paramount importance for measuring the speaking competence in the target language. Baker & Westrup (2003, p13) notice that “Someone who can use English well is both accurate and fluent. Accurate speakers do not make mistakes in grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. Fluent speakers can express themselves appropriately and without hesitation.”

The major features that should characterize EFL learners become qualified in the speaking skill are as follows:

#### *-Fluency*

It is considered as the primary goal any teacher wants to achieve when teaching the speaking skill. Richards et. al (1992, p.204) point out that “fluency is the feature which gives speech the qualities of being natural and normal, including native-like use of pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, rate of speaking, and use of interjections and interruptions”. That is to say, in order to be an effective speaker of a foreign language, one should avoid speaking in unnatural way like hesitating; miss using of stress, rhythm, etc. Fluency in Jones’ terms

does not mean speaking really fast without hesitating. It is being able to express yourself despite the gaps in your knowledge, despite the mistakes you are making, despite not knowing all the vocabulary you might need. It means hesitating in such a way that others keep listening and wait for you to continue, rather than finishing your sentences for you[...]The opposite of fluency is being tongue-tied and embarrassed when speaking English-or not speaking at all. Fluency goes hand in hand with confidence, .and it takes time to develop (Jones, 2007, p.18).

Accordingly, in assessing learners’ fluency, they are not asked to produce speech fastly following the same rhythm as native speakers, but only to follow a

normal speed with clear continuity and logical sequencing of sentences (Hughes, 2002).

- *Accuracy*

It means speaking without making too much mistakes at the level of language structure, so that others can understand well and get the idea. Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005, p.139) argue that: “accuracy is how well one’s speech is produced in relation to the rule system of the target language.”

Moreover, accuracy requires knowledge and mastery of the vocabulary, grammatical structure and the correct way of pronunciation. Lazaraton (2001, p.8) reinforces this idea by saying that: “accuracy in oral speech production refers to good knowledge and use of vocabulary, grammatical structure, and correct pronunciation.” They are manifested as follows:

- a- Grammar: which plays a major role in controlling the use and application of language. It gives the user a structure to build complete and meaningful sentences. According to Nelson (2002, p.1): “Grammar refers to the set of rules that allow us to combine words in our language into larger units.” Therefore, it can be deduced that grammar is needed for the students to form correct sentences and combine them in conversations. They should also be aware of how elements of a sentence (morphemes, phonemes, phrases, clauses, etc.) work together to form a meaningful utterance.
- b- Vocabulary: Being accurate in terms of vocabulary refers to the knowledge of words and the appropriate use of them. Vocabulary is essential in English language teaching, because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot express their own ideas and understand others. Whyte (1986) states that,  
vocabulary is words used in language, they are elements that are combined to make sentences or discourse, the more vocabulary will be needed in order to intake accurate word choice, so it will effectively convey thought and idea” (p.337).

In other words, vocabulary refers to the combination of words in order to form coherent sentences with clear sense to express thoughts. Therefore, without mastering vocabulary adequately, students will not be able to communicate effectively and express themselves, and thus, they may use synonyms which do not have the same meaning in the same context.

- c- Pronunciation: According to Redmond and Vrchota (2007, p104), “It is imperative that you use the correct word in the correct instance and with the correct pronunciation. Pronunciation means to say words in ways that are generally accepted or understood.” Therefore, if the pronunciation is not correct, then, the student will not be understood and the accuracy will not be achieved, and consequently, learners should study how words are pronounced, and knowing the phonological aspects of the sentence and its elements.

#### **1.4 The communicative approach**

According to the Oxford dictionary definition, the communicative approach (CA) also called communicative language teaching (CLT), is a method of teaching a foreign language which stresses the importance of learning to communicate information and ideas in the language. That is to say, the communicative approach focuses on teaching language through communication where this latter is not only a goal, but rather a method of teaching.

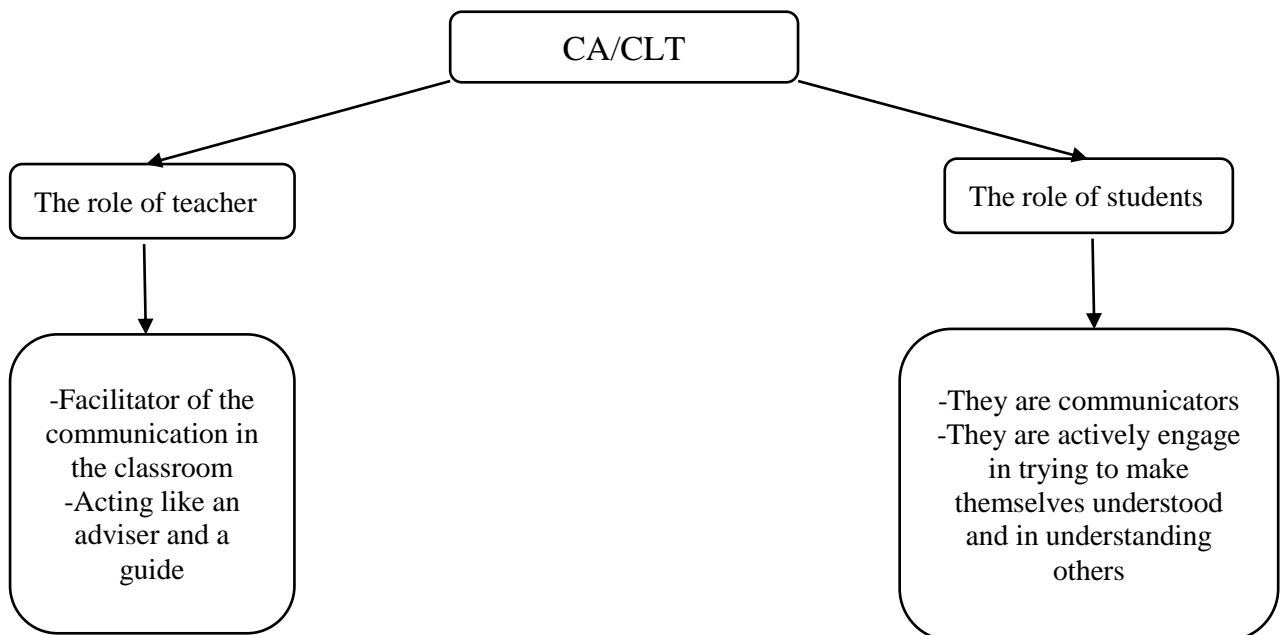
The CA has also been defined by Richards et al (1992) as, “an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence” (p.65). This means that this approach aims at developing learners’ competence to communicate in the target language with more emphasis on real life situations where communication is really needed.

By contrast, Widdowson (1978) suggests the following, “Teachers must focus on communication and meaning rather than accuracy.” (p.19); that is, teachers should encourage their learners to speak and express their ideas without

giving much importance to grammar and spelling mistakes. They should ignore their learners' mistakes and focus only on the meaning of the message.

Through the use of the CA, teachers will find themselves talking less and listening more; their main role is to be a guide or facilitator of their students' learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). That is to say, lessons will be learner-centered<sup>1</sup>; a situation where learners are the agents of speaking while the teacher is responsible of organizing the classroom. This would create a setting for communicative activities where students themselves would communicate.

Accordingly, the CA is considered as a helpful method for FL teachers in teaching the target language since it develops students' oral performance and makes them feel free when communicating in the target language. This will probably decrease their feeling of anxiety and help in promoting confidence and security both inside and outside the classroom milieu.



**Figure 1.1: The Role of Teacher and Students in the Communicative Approach<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Learner-centered means focusing on the learner rather than the teacher.

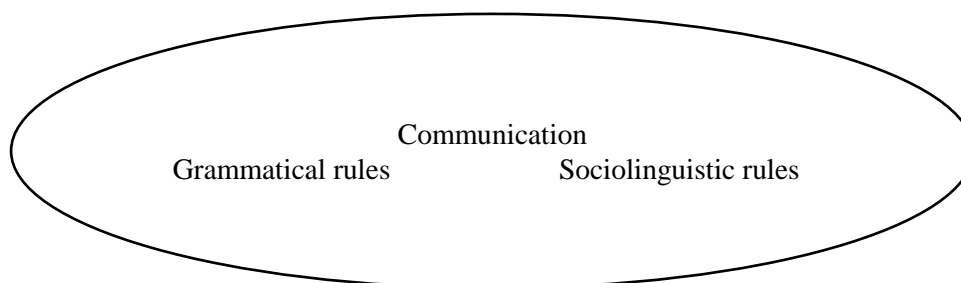
<sup>2</sup> <https://coggle.it/diagram/XLmhLsUWNNUldvT4/t/topic-14-methods-that-focus-foundations-in-english-language>

### 1.5 Communicative Competence

Any foreign language learner has a goal when learning the target language which is to be communicatively competent. Communicative competence has been defined by many scholars (Dell Hymes, 1972; Paulston, 1974; James Cummins, 1979; Savignon, 1983) as the ability that allows a person to communicate in real life situations in order to fulfill the communicative needs. This concept has been first introduced by the prominent linguist Dell Hymes (1972) who mentions,

Communicative competence is what enables the person to perform appropriately in speech events. It includes not only grammatical competence, which allows a person to judge to what degree something is formally possible, but also the competence to judge feasibility, appropriateness, and to what degree something is in fact done.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, communicative competence requires not only knowledge of the linguistic rules such as grammar, syntax, phonology, and vocabulary, but also the ability to use that knowledge in a communicative event, which means that communicative competence involves both grammatical rules and sociolinguistic rules.



**Figure 1.2: Communication features**

### 1.6 The role of speaking in foreign language classrooms

Speaking compared with the other foreign language skills (listening, reading and writing) seems to be the most interesting and important to deal with, especially for foreign language learners. Students need to be encouraged to communicate in English and use it in real communication strategies. Classroom, therefore, is the appropriate place where the use of spoken language is sensitively supported since it enables students to make connections between what they know and what they are

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Riley (1996, p.115).

learning. Speaking a foreign language requires a degree of real time exposure which can be realized through a set of classroom activities. This should be developed in a dynamic interactive learning environment where both teacher and learners collaborate and cooperate with one another to create a safe, comfortable and relaxed atmosphere for a perfect productive talk in classroom.

As a result, in order to develop learners' communicative competence (see section 1.5), teachers should provide their students with a diversity of activities, which must include the different types and styles of expressions. The role of the teacher, then, is to select the suitable activity and method that meets his learners' needs and goals. He should take care about creating interaction between the learners by exchanging information and ideas. He should also pay great attention to the correct grammar (accuracy), proper vocabulary, acceptable fluency and a good pronunciation in order to convey meaning.

### **1.7 Major obstacles standing behind EFL learners' speaking lacunae**

There are many factors that learners encounter when practicing speaking, and they are interrelated to each other. Each of them is explained below.

#### **1.7.1 Linguistic obstacles**

Linguistic knowledge is important when talking about the speaking skill. If any feature of this knowledge is missed or poorly performed, students will face some lacunae which can be due to grammar mistakes, dearth of vocabulary or pronunciation mistakes. These are discussed below.

##### *-Grammar mistakes*

Grammar knowledge is one of the most important aspects of being professional in speaking. EFL students must develop this knowledge to reinforce their oral performance ability without any flaws. Nevertheless, many students prefer to keep quiet rather than making grammatical mistakes because they are afraid of being ridiculed in front of their classmates, and this is what Davies and Pears (2000) correctly state; "Many people do not like speaking in front of large groups of people. This is especially true in a foreign language, because we may

worry about producing utterances with many errors or oddities in them.” (p.82). Thus, grammatical mistakes are among the obstacles preventing EFL learners from participation.

*-Dearth of vocabulary*

In order to be a fluent speaker of English, any EFL learner should possess knowledge of its vocabulary since it is the primary condition in learning the target language. Learners need a suitable selection of words while they are speaking and should manipulate these words and expressions accurately. Therefore, learning any foreign language requires a great knowledge of its vocabulary as stated by Thornbury (2005), “spoken language also has a relatively high proportion of words and expression” (p.22).

However, the problem in all EFL classes is that most students face some lacunae when they want to express their needs or ideas. They have difficulties in finding the appropriate words because of their limited vocabulary. Thus, these difficulties affect the rate of their participation in oral sessions and make them unable to share their ideas in a comfortable manner.

*-Pronunciation mistakes*

Besides learners’ obstacles in vocabulary, there is another serious problem represented in the mispronunciation of words, which leads to problems in the comprehension of an utterance’s meaning. The way of pronunciation is the first thing that students are judged on and assessed. Morley (1991) emphasizes the importance of pronunciation by stating that “intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communication competence” (p.488).

Consequently, any EFL learner who wants to be a competent interlocutor must practice the correct pronunciation forms and be aware of the various rules of sounds such as stress, intonation, and so forth.



### **1.7.2 Psychological barriers**

Students may experience different psychological barriers that prohibit their performance in learning English as a foreign language. Anxiety, lack of self-confidence, shyness and fear of making mistakes are the major psychological obstacles. All these barriers are explained below.

#### *-Anxiety*

Many researchers (Horwitz, 1986; Spielberger, 1972) have discussed the phenomena of foreign language anxiety (FLA) which is considered as a serious problem that affects foreign language learners. Arnold (1999) notes that “anxiety is possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process” (p.8).

The term anxiety has been defined by Spielberger (1972) as, “an unpleasant emotional state or condition which is characterized by subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry” (p.482). Anxiety is the negative emotion that occurs because of a number of reasons, it creates troubles in the learning process, and prevents students from learning a foreign language.

Anxiety when associated with learning a foreign language is called “second/foreign language anxiety”, a state related to the negative emotional reactions of the learners towards foreign language acquisition. Horwitz et al (1986) defines this phenomenon as

“a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p.128).

When students are anxious, they experience different symptoms, which may lead to poor oral performance. Indeed, anxiety increases more when students are asked to perform orally, or try to participate in the classroom. Therefore, they feel stressed and uncomfortable about speaking in front of their classmates, Littlewood

(1981) supports this idea by saying, “it is too easy for a foreign language classroom to create inhibition and anxiety” (p.93).

*-Lack of self-confidence*

Those who have self-confidence are potential to perform speaking in a way that is more fluent because they consider the problem of making mistakes the last matter to think about. Brown (2007) mentions the following:

It could easily be claimed that no successful cognitive or affective activity can be carried out without some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of yourself and self-efficacy belief in your own capacities to successfully perform that activity (p.154).

However, students with low self-confidence are not motivated to speak; they feel inhibited and afraid when they come to share their ideas and opinions with others. Therefore, they rather keep their ideas to themselves and keep silent just because they are not sure about their abilities and capacities. Therefore, lacking self-confidence is an influential factor which prevents learners from participating.

*-Shyness*

The act of being shy is also a barrier that many students suffer from. This makes them hesitate to participate or speak inside class when they are required to do so mainly because they feel uncomfortable to speak in front of their teacher and classmates, or afraid of being laughed at by their friends

According to Baldwin (2011), speaking in front of people is one of the most common phobias that students encounter, and feeling shy makes their mind go blank or even forget what to say. Therefore, shyness undoubtedly affects students' interaction and participation during the oral expression course.

*-Fear of making mistakes*

The feeling of being afraid of making mistakes is another influential factor that most students face. According to Aftat (2008), this fear is related to the issue of negative evaluation and correction. As such, students are afraid about being corrected or commented by their teacher or classmates, and prefer not to say

anything than being confounded in front of their friends. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to convince his students that making mistakes is not a bad thing and that they should learn from these mistakes.

### **1.7.3 Auxiliary obstacles**

Besides the linguistic and psychological obstacles, there are other problems that students are confronted to and that hinder their speaking practice inside the classroom. Among these, are non-motivating atmosphere, the use of the mother tongue and overcrowded classes.

#### *-Non-motivating atmosphere*

Motivation is a significant factor for avoiding inhibition. It is one of the most important keys to success because it allows students to achieve higher and better results and fulfillments. However, the atmosphere inside the classroom can be either a motivating or non-motivating factor for EFL learners. Non-motivating classroom atmosphere hinders students' participation and prevent their oral progress. Therefore, teachers should create a relaxed atmosphere for students to express themselves and help them to break down their fear and shyness. Davies and Pears (2000) state some implications for an effective teaching,

Try to create a relaxed atmosphere in your classes so that most learners are not frightened of speaking in front of the class, and do as many speaking activities as possible in pairs and groups, so that the learners can speak English without the rest of the class listening (p.82).

Thus, EFL teachers must provide a safe and warm atmosphere in order to encourage their students and enhance their speaking skill inside class.

#### *-The use of the mother tongue*

This is another influential factor. In classes, where all learners share the same mother tongue, they may tend to use it frequently because they find it easier to fill in their linguistic gaps. They may also use their mother tongue inside class because they feel demotivated to communicate in the target language, or they are unable to express themselves in a foreign language. As such, they shift to their native tongue to express what they want to say, and this is due to the lack of

vocabulary in the target language. This is what Baker & Westerup (2003) rightly mention, “barriers to learning can occur if students knowingly or unknowingly transfer the cultural rules from their mother tongue to a foreign language.” (p.12). Therefore, the use of the mother tongue can have negative effects that may impair students’ communication and consequently, decreases their speaking capacities.

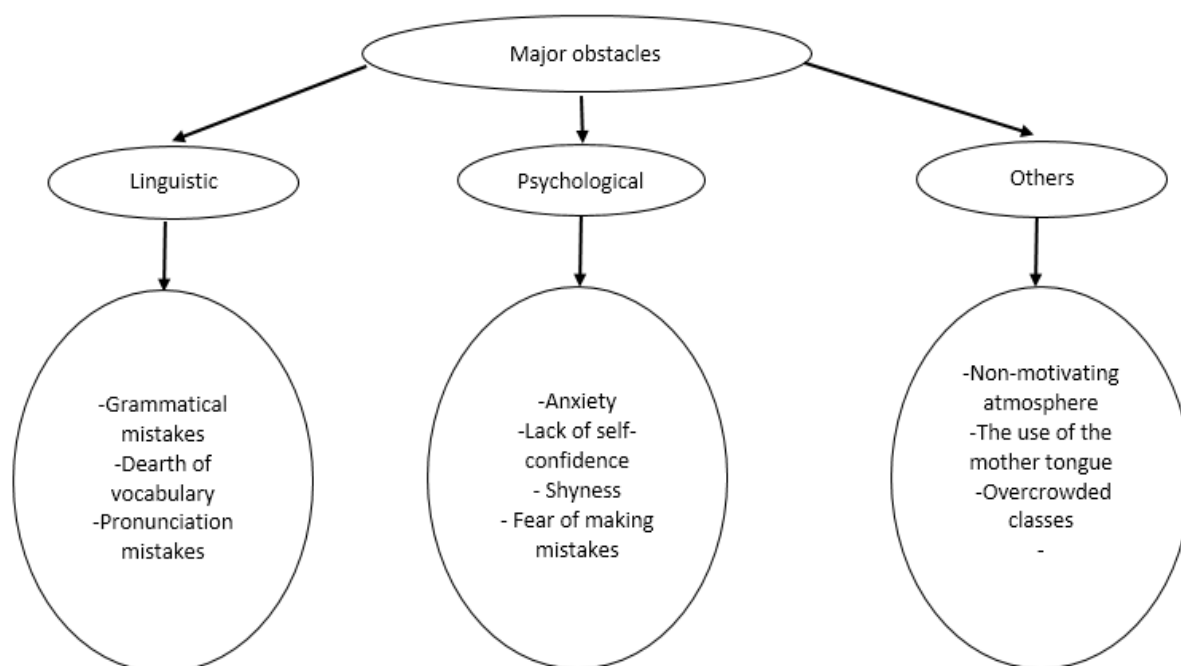
*-Overcrowded Classes*

They are also considered as a hindrance to teaching and learning process because they can affect negatively a class’s success. Therefore, it is difficult to establish a sufficient interaction with all students. The high rate of learners in one class inhibits teachers from teaching effectively and learners from learning efficiently. Murcia Celec (2001) correctly says that “Large classes are often the norm of overseas, limiting both student opportunities to talk and teacher opportunity to provide feedback” (p.110).

Many teachers feel uncomfortable in an overcrowded class and cannot keep proper eye contact with the whole class. They cannot involve all their students in the selected learning activities. If they cannot do so, then the teaching/ learning process will not be in a natural manner. Hayes (1997, p.109) claims that “Large size of class makes me frustrated and tired, and I feel hopeless to manage the class successfully.”

Consequently, due to the large number of students in class, teachers cannot pay attention to every individual student. Thus, such a situation renders some students, especially the ones who are shy and weak, being neglected by their

teachers



**Figure 1.3: The major Obstacles Standing behind Students' Speaking Lacunae**

## 1.8 Conclusion

Through this chapter, we have attempted to shed the light on the speaking skill since it is very significant in enhancing learners' oral performance. Indeed, the oral expression subject is very important because it aims at providing students with the best space to practice and develop their speaking abilities. Nevertheless, many EFL students do not interact and participate inside class because of many problems such as anxiety, shyness, lack of self-confidence and so forth. The next chapter will be devoted to the methodology followed in our research work.

# **Chapter**

# **Two**

## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to present the research design and the procedures followed in the present study. It introduces a complete description of the methodology and the sample chosen for our investigation. Furthermore, it presents the instruments that have been used which consist of two different questionnaires. One questionnaire is designed to all teachers of oral expression, and the other is delivered to students since they represent the main sample population in our study, and through their opinions, we will be able to confirm whether our hypotheses are validated or not.

## **2.2 Research motivations**

The great difference between the native language and a second language affects in the oral communication as it is observed in Algerian FL classrooms, where the majority of learners find difficulties in communicating in the target language. This is exactly what motivates us to do this research work. Our main purpose is to determine the major issues that EFL learners confront on the level of speaking performance, and to provide some recommendations in order to overcome these problems and encourage speaking among students.

## **2.3 Case study**

In order to gather information about this research, a case study is applied; this enables us to link the collected data and the conclusion. The researcher can carefully examine a situation data throughout a case study.

A ‘case study’ can be defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident...[and] relies on multiple sources of evidence.” (Yin 1994, p.13). Generally, case studies investigate and explore contemporary phenomenon by selecting a very restricted number of people as the subject of study.

This study has been conducted at the English department of Belhadj Bouchaib university centre in Ain Témouchent. The Institute of Foreign Languages opened in

2012. The aim of this department, is to prepare learners who have the baccalaureate examination to become future teachers of English.

During the three years of LMD system, students are presented to various subjects; each subject has a specific number of credits and coefficients. After three years of studies, students can get the degree of licence, which depends on an average mark of 10/20 .Then, they move to the Master degree which relies on some criteria, and choosing between two present specialties: linguistics and literature. By the end of these two years, students are asked to write a thesis and present it in front of jury members.

However, the department of the English language in Ain Témouchent is not complete and not appropriate for students, since it lacks many important things such as: teaching materials, audio- visual aids, laboratories, absence of many fundamental subjects and internet access. All these factors may influence the teaching/learning process.

#### **2.4 Aim of the study**

The primary purpose of using a case study in this research work is to acquire a perfect understanding about third year EFL university students' thoughts and attitudes concerning the speaking skill. Moreover, it aims to determine the way they speak English and the strategy they employ when speaking. In this respect, the speaking skill becomes the basic theme of many researchers in the domain of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), because students need to speak the target language accurately and fluently. Furthermore, all third year EFL students already studied the English language since the middle school, and they start to study oral expression starting from the first year at university. However, most of them still have some lacunae that hinder them from speaking English correctly and in a good manner when participating or interacting in the oral expression session. Therefore, the aim of this study is to detect the major obstacles that affect the students' speaking skill. This failure of speaking the target language is related to many obstacles which can be linguistic, psychological, or others.



## **2.5 Sample population**

Sampling is a process used by researchers in a statistical analysis in which a predetermined number of observations are taken from a larger population. It is useful to facilitate the data collection because it is impossible to test every single individual in the population. According to Namey & Mitchel (2013): "sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of items from a defined population for inclusion into a study [...] the validity of study findings is related to sampling."

In addition, the sampling is used to save both time and effort while conducting a research. However, the sample should be a representation of the entire population, and to get a representative sample, it should be drawn randomly and encompasses the whole population.

For the present study, and in order to get answers for our questionnaire and test our hypotheses, a sample of 30 EFL students will be taken, 15 students from each group since there are two groups. In addition to all EFL teachers of oral expression. The students were randomly chosen out of the total number of third year students' population of 96 at Belhadj Bouchaib university centre. The reason behind the selection of this sample lies in the fact that third year EFL students have already experienced many lacunae when performing orally. However, they are supposed to graduate this year, so, if they happen to teach in the future, they should know about these lacunae and their impact on the oral performance.

The gathering of data of this research work has taken a long period of time due to the absence of both teachers and students, because the university centre was closed from the first week of March until the second week of May, so it was impossible to conduct a classroom observation as an extra research tool, and we have found a great difficulty to get the answers of all the sample population. Concerning teachers' questionnaire, we were obliged to send it to teachers via email because it was impossible to find them at university.

## **2.6 Research method**

To fulfill our study, we need to rely on different methods. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005) agree that methods are a "range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as basis for inference and interpretation for explanation and prediction" (p.44). That is to say, methods are approaches and procedures used to collect data, and our objective is to analyse and interpret them. In this research work, we will adopt both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Quantitative approach, according to Van der Merwe (1996), is a research approach which aims at testing theories, determining facts, demonstrating relationships between variables and predicting outcomes.

Quantitative approach requires researchers to use a pre-constructed standardized instrument or predetermined response categories into which the participants' varying perspective and experiences are expected to fit. They generally demand randomly selected large representative samples in order to generalize the findings from the sample.

This method allows the researcher to measure the responses of a number of participants to a limited set of questions, thereby facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. The results of close-ended questionnaire helps the researchers to identify general patterns of participants' reactions to treatment or programme, it also allows the researchers to obtain a broad and generalizable set of findings and present them succinctly. But because they require a deductive approach and predetermined sets of standardized responses based on theory, they fail to provide insight into the participants' individual or personal experience, the respondents in this case are not allowed to describe their feelings, thoughts and so on with their own words.

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is concerned with process, context, interpretation, meaning or understanding through inductive reasoning<sup>3</sup>. Patton (2001) defines qualitative research as,

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<sup>3</sup> Inductive Reasoning means using patterns to arrive at a conclusion.

an approach that uses a naturalistic approach which seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as real world settings, where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomena of interest...it is any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification, but instead the kind of research that produces findings derived at from real-world settings where the phenomena of interest unfold naturally. (p.39)

The qualitative research is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations. It describes and understands the phenomenon studied by capturing and communicating participants' experience in their own words. Qualitative method require an in -depth study of people's lives or the issues in their natural settings without restoring standardized and predetermined categories of analysis. Open-ended responses let researchers understand and present the world as it is seen and experienced by the participants without predetermining those stand points. Hence, qualitative findings are far longer, more detailed and variable in content than quantitative findings. Purposeful sampling plays a key role, the main aim of this sampling in qualitative research, is to select and study a small number of people or unique cases whose study produces a wealth of detailed information, and an in-depth understanding of the people, programmes, cases, and situations studied. However, this sampling procedure limits the possibility of generalizing research findings to other settings or situations.

In order to distinguish between the two cited methods, the following table shows the main different points between them:

Table 2.1: Quantitative vs. Qualitative Research (Adapted from Neill, 2007).

Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
The aim is to classify features, count them, and construct statistical models in an attempt to explain what is observed	The aim is a complete, detailed description.
The researcher knows clearly in advance what he/she is looking for	The researcher may only know roughly in advance what he/she is looking for
Data are in the form of numbers and statistics (number-based)	Data are in the form of words (text-based)
Objective- seeks precise measurement and analysis of target concepts	Subjective- individuals' interpretation of events is important
Fixed response options	Unstructured or semi-structured response options
More generalizable	Less generalizable

## 2.7 Research Instruments

Research instruments are tools for gathering data about a particular area of research. They include questionnaires, interviews, observations, and many others. Parahoo (1997, p.52-325) defines a research instrument as “a tool used to collect data”. On the other hand, a research instrument is one of the primary elements that help the researcher get the information needed in the research. In fact, any scientific research needs tools for gathering data to be studied, analyzed and interpreted. However, researchers use instruments that they believe are more appropriate for collecting enough information about this situation.

Thus, choosing the right instrument depends entirely on the subject of the research, the sample population and the data collection method selected, as stated by Monton (2001), “to satisfy the information needs of any study or research project, an appropriate methodology has to be chosen.” (p.133). In our research work, we will deal with the questionnaire which is a common tool used by researchers to provide data. It is the easiest research instrument because it does not require much time or energy to be done. This questionnaire has been conducted in order to collect data about

factors that hinder EFL students from participating in oral expression course and to identify their needs.

Unfortunately, classroom observation as an additional tool has not been used because it was impossible to conduct it, since the country was being through a political issues, that is why students were going out for manifestations and not attending their courses. This could enable us to provide more reliable and valid data to explain our aim behind doing this research work.

### **2.7.1 Questionnaire**

The questionnaire is a method of data that provides both quantitative and qualitative data. It can be used for exploring people's attitudes, perception, views and opinions. It is an instrument that involve a number of questions that need a complete answer or selecting one among certain answers. Brown (2001:06) defines questionnaire as, "any written instrument that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers."

The questionnaire is considered as the most common instrument for gathering information about any topic. Jordan (1999) in this regard states that,

The questionnaire has been established the most common method, through which they can express themselves since it involves the students' awareness of their language use and areas of difficulties as it can be also conducted to teachers of the target language. In other words, it helps us to draw a profile of the learners' needs, lacks, wants, learning styles and strategies. (p.33)

Therefore, questionnaire can be the only common instrument that serves as means of collecting a large amount of data with minimum of time and effort. It provides a general view of the investigated problem which is difficult to be acquired by other means of research, and this is what Anderson (1990, p.207) claims, " Allow the gathering of reliable and valid data, relatively in short time." Furthermore, questionnaire has some advantages that are summarized by Beiske (2003, p.16) in the following points:

- The majority of people are familiar with questionnaires , and know how to complete them;
- The respondents' opinions are not influenced by the researchers' point of view;
- The respondents can fill the questionnaire at their place;
- Questionnaires are easy to analyze.

Moreover, the questionnaire enables the researcher to include different types of questions such as close-ended questions, in which the participants select one of the several answers provided to them. They can be yes/no questions, multiple choice items where the respondents are required to choose one or more answer from a range of choices, or rating scale which is based on the participants' evaluative judgments by selecting one of the several answers organized into a scale. This is generally known as 'Lickert-scale'.

The second type is open-ended questions that require the participants' answers in which they give their own points of view. While the third type is a mixture between the open-ended and close-ended questions, and it is called close-open-ended questions where the respondents are asked to choose an answer and provide justification or explanation about their choice(s). According to Nunan (1992, p.231) "a questionnaire is an instrument for the collection of data, usually in a written form consisting of open and/or closed question and the probes requiring a response from the subject"

## **2.8 Data collection Procedures**

The present research work is based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches of data collection since data will be collected through the use of teachers' questionnaire where questions are open-ended and require qualitative approach. On the other hand, questions that are addressed to students are close-ended questions with multiple choice answer options. The answers obtained should be analyzed using a quantitative approach in order to measure data, and this measuring can only done through numerical data collected.

The quantitative and qualitative approaches are different in the sense that quantitative approach gives researchers numbers to analyze, while qualitative approach

provides thoughts and opinions of participants to them. Bricki & Green (2007) state in this regard that,

Qualitative research is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its method generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis, unlike quantitative research which is concerned with the analysis of data in terms of numbers and things that can be measured as time-members-age..etc. (p. 2)

As already mentioned, and in order to achieve the goals of our research work, we will collect data through the use of two different questionnaires. The first one will be addressed to third year EFL students in order to gather data from a great number of students, and the second one is given to teachers to gather more data about the lacunae encountered in oral expression classrooms.

### **2.8.1 Questionnaire to students**

The first questionnaire, in this research work which is addressed to the students, consists of nine questions for third year EFL students in order to achieve the purpose of the work and reach the necessary conclusions. This questionnaire is mainly intended to shed light on the factors that hinder students from participating in class.

The questionnaire consist of five multiple choice questions in which students are asked to select the appropriate answer from a number of options; three close-ended questions requiring the students to answer by either yes or no, and the last one which is open-ended question, requires the students' own comment. The first question's aim is to investigate students' opinions about the importance of speaking. The second question is designed in order to know which of the four skills students are most interested in and want to develop.

The aim behind the third question is to get an idea about students' level in the speaking skill. The following question is addressed to them for the purpose of knowing how frequently students participate in the oral expression course. The next question is designed to investigate students who use their mother tongue inside the class, and the reason behind their reliance on it. The sixth question aims to know whether students feel afraid about participating in front of their classmates or not, and in order to determine the causes behind this fear, two questions are given to them, one question

includes the grammatical problems and the other one includes some psychological flaws. The last one is an open-ended question, which aims to gather information about the ways and strategies the students use to improve their speaking capacities and here, the respondents are free to comment using their own thoughts.

### **2.8.2 Questionnaire to teachers**

In addition to third year EFL students, the present research work involves all the teachers of oral expression at the English department. They were given eight questions in order to collect different views as well as to gather much data that may respond the inquiries of this research work, and thus to achieve our goals and have a broad overview about the students' oral performance flaws. These teachers have been chosen purposely because they are aware about their students' difficulties in speaking, and they have already dealt with the learners' communicative activities.

The first and the second questions aim at knowing the number of hours devoted to the oral expression course, and whether they are sufficient or not. The third question is designed to investigate the teachers' opinions about their students' level concerning the speaking performance. The fourth question aims to know whether teachers face any difficulties in teaching the oral expression subject. The following question is about Teachers in the sixth question are requested to highlight the obstacles that prevent their students from participating during the course. The next question emphasizes on knowing the most challenging speaking problems where teachers are required to select answer(s) from the given choices or add other choice(s). The aim behind the last question is to gather information about teachers' own strategies to reduce their students' lacunae.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has dealt with the methodology followed in this research work. It has highlighted the main methods and tools used, in addition to the methodological approaches, which consist of both a quantitative and qualitative. The next chapter will involve the presentation of the results, the analysis and interpretation of the data collected, followed by a series of suggestions and recommendations to the current



issue. The sample population and its choice has also been explained. The third chapter will completely be devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the central results.

# **Chapter Three**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The present chapter is devoted to the practical part of this research work. It focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained from the tool used, i.e. the questionnaire that was administered to both teachers and students at the English department of Belhadj Bouchaib university centre. The collected data will be analyzed and organized systematically in tables and graphs for discussion purposes. This chapter also sheds light on the main results and draws conclusions from them. It describes the statistical procedure adopted to test our hypotheses, in addition to the qualitative analysis of the participants' responses.

### **3.2 Analysis of the results: Quantitative vs. qualitative analysis**

In order to provide more explanations, the researcher may use tables or diagrams to summarize and recapitulate the main points listed within the text. The aim of qualitative analysis is the reconstruction or collections of data in accurate and comprehensible way, where the outcomes that are acquired from this process are of an explanatory nature (Byram, 2002).

Through the use of the quantitative analysis, the researchers rely on the use of descriptive statistics which involve frequencies, percentage, tabulations and graphic representations. Frequencies and percentage can be provided within a text or presented on tables, or through graphic representations which involve the use of bar graphs or pie charts.

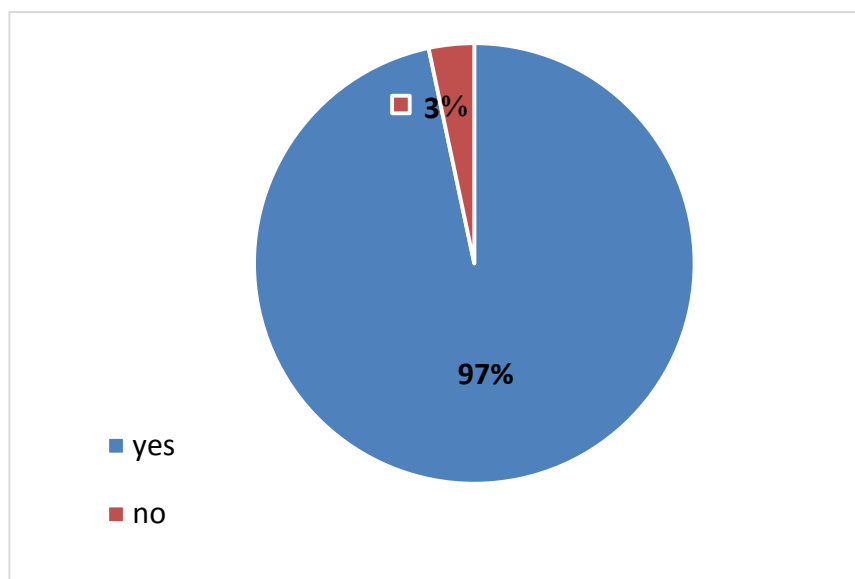
#### **3.2.1 Analysis of the students' questionnaire results**

The questionnaire was administered to third year EFL students for the purpose of gathering the maximum relevant data about their oral capacities, and the most influential problems that prevent them from showing a good oral performance.

**Item 1:** Do you agree with the fact that in order to learn a language you have to speak it?

**Table 3.1:** Students' opinion about the importance of speaking

options	participants	%
Yes	29	97%
No	01	3%
<b>Total</b>	30	100%



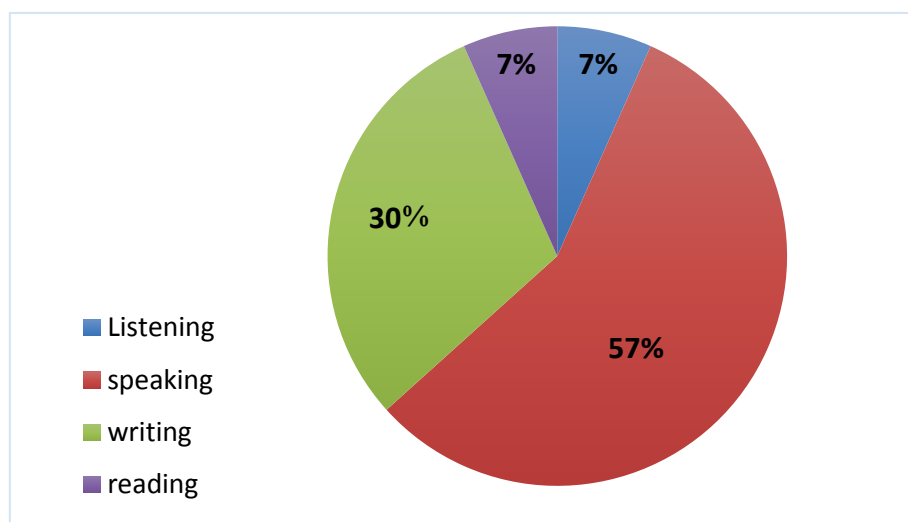
**Pie chart 3.1:** Students' opinion about the importance of speaking

According to the table and the pie chart above, almost all the participants agreed with the fact that the speaking skill is important in learning a language, they represent (97% )of the whole sample. Only one participant did not agree with this idea.

**Item 2:** which of the following skills do you prefer to enhance?

**Table 3.2:** Skills that students prefer to enhance

Options	Participants	%
Listening	02	7%
Speaking	17	57%
Writing	09	30%
Reading	02	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>



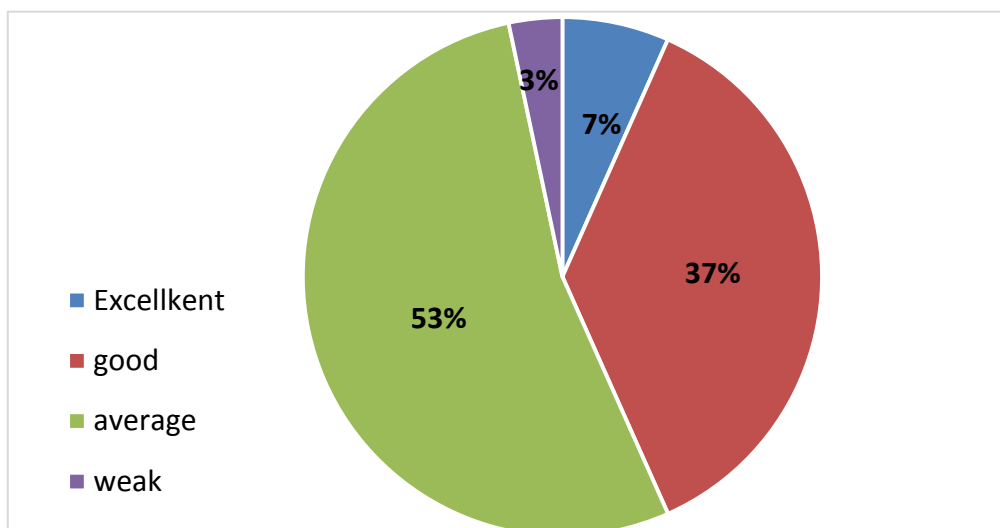
**Pie chart 3.2:** Skills that students want to enhance

The results above show the majority respondents representing (57%) of the whole sample are interested in enhancing the speaking skill. This indicates that more than the half of the percentage is about the speaking skill, which reveals that speaking is the most preferable skill for the students to be developed. Writing comes in the second position where only nine students with a percentage of (30%) showed that this skill is important to be developed. Reading and listening come later with the same percentage of (7%).

**Item 3:** Following this grading scale, how would you evaluate your speaking skill?

**Table 3.3:** Students' evaluation on their speaking ability

Options	Participants	%
Excellent	2	7%
Good	11	37%
Average	16	53%
Weak	1	3%
<b>total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>



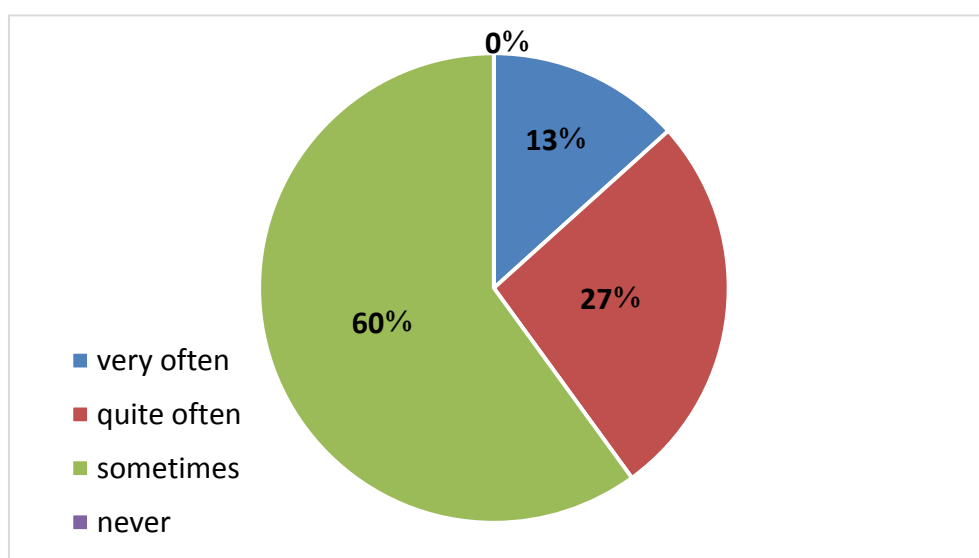
**Pie chart 3.3:** Students' evaluation on their speaking ability

Students, in this question, were asked to evaluate their level in speaking. The results above reveal that (53%) of the sample population have an average level, whereas (37%) of this sample said that they are good in speaking. A rate of (7%) of the sample represents the students who are excellent in that skill and only one student said that he is weak in speaking.

**Item 4:** How often do you participate in the oral expression course?

**Table 3.4:** Frequency of students' participation in the oral expression course

Options	Participants	%
Very often	4	13%
Quite often	8	27%
Sometimes	18	60%
Never	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>



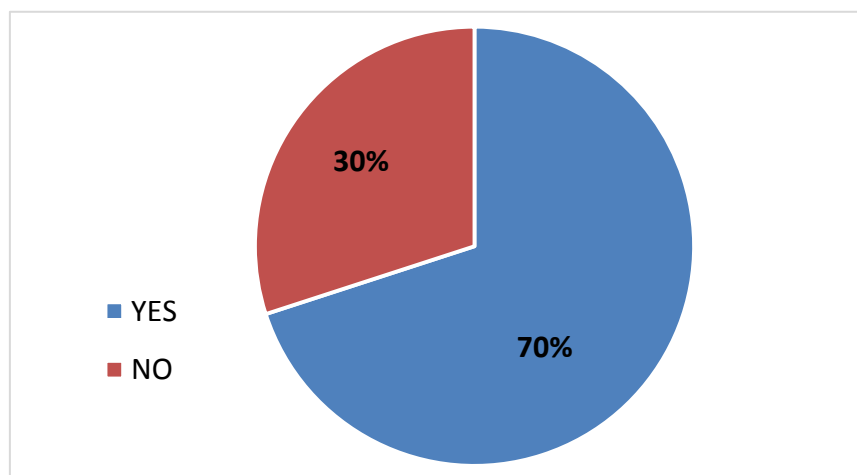
**Pie chart 3.4:** Frequency of students' participation in oral expression

From the table and the pie chart above, we can see that most of the students with a percentage of (60%) of the sample answered by 'sometimes'. On the other hand, (27%) from the total percentage said that they participate quite often, while only four students provided an answer with 'very often', i.e., these four students always participate during the course. However, no one of the participants said that he/she does not participate in class.

**Item 5:** Do you use your mother tongue inside the classroom? If yes, why?

**Table 3.5:** The students' use of the mother tongue inside class

Options	Participants	%
Yes	21	70%
No	9	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Pie chart 3.5:** Students' use of the mother tongue inside class

In order to know whether students use their mother tongue (Arabic language) or not, the question above was posed. The results show that the majority of them rating (70%) of the whole sample use their mother tongue inside the classroom, and (30%) responded with “No” .i.e. they do not use their mother tongue during the course.

Students were requested to provide the reasons behind their mother tongue's use inside the classroom. These reasons are listed in the table below:



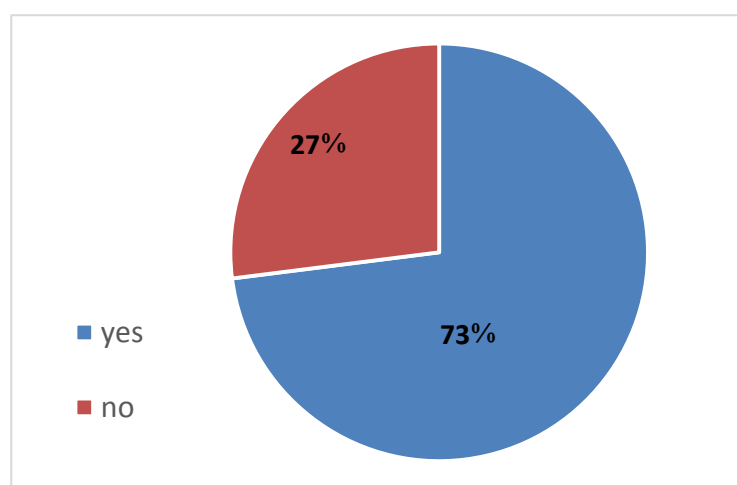
**Table 3.6:** Students' justification of their mother tongue use

<i>No justification</i>	<b>4</b>
<i>Justification</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The mother tongue is easier for them than the English language.</li> <li>-They feel comfortable when using their mother tongue.</li> <li>-They can understand each other better.</li> <li>-They do not have enough vocabulary.</li> <li>-They are scared about making mistakes and being criticized.</li> <li>-They feel shy and not motivated to speak in English.</li> </ul>

**Item 6:** Are you scared of speaking in front of an audience?

**Table 3.7:** Students' fear of participating in front of an audience

<b>Options</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>yes</b>	22	73%
<b>No</b>	08	27%
<b>total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Pie chart 3.6:** Students' fear of participating in front of an audience

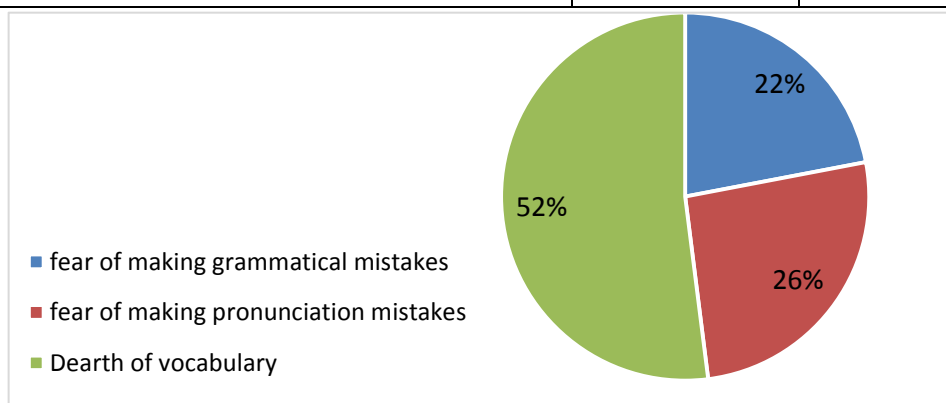
This question aims at determining whether students are scared about participating and speaking in front of their classmates or not. The obtained results showed that the majority of respondents have a fear of participation inside class, they represent (73%) of the whole sample. The rest of participants who represent (27%) of the whole sample, gave a negative response, .i.e. they are not scared and they consider themselves able to participate. The fact of being fear about participation inside class may be due to many problems, which can be either psychological or linguistic. Therefore, we proposed some questions in order to know more about the most influential problems.

**Item 7:** If your answer is positive, is it because of:

- a- Fear of making grammatical mistakes      b- fear of making pronunciation mistakes  
c- Lack of vocabulary

**Table 3.8 :** Linguistic obstacles

Options	Participants	%
Fear of making grammatical mistakes	5	22%
Fear of making pronunciation mistakes	6	26%
Dearth of vocabulary	12	52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Pie chart 3.7 :** Linguistic obstacles

This question attempts to highlight the major linguistic problems that impede the students' participation during the course. From the results obtained above, it is shown that the lack of vocabulary is the most influential problem for most students, (52%).i.e., more than half of the percentage provided this response. On the other hand, (26%) of the sample responded that what hinders them from participating is being afraid of making pronunciation mistakes. The rest of the participants who represent (22%) of the sample asserted that they are afraid of making grammatical mistakes.

**Item 8:** or you do not participate because of:

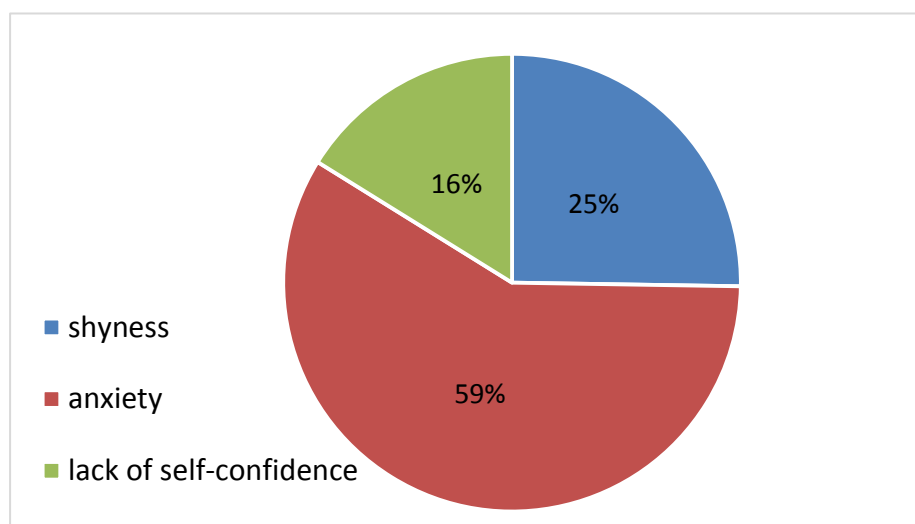
a- Shyness

b- Anxiety

c- Lack of self-confidence

**Table3.9:** Psychological obstacles

Options	Participants	%
Shyness	6	25%
Anxiety	14	59%
Lack of self-confidence	4	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Pie chart 3.8** Psychological obstacles

In this question, students were provided with a set of possibilities relating to some psychological problems from which they are asked to choose the appropriate factor that describes their case. The results reveal that most of the students are afraid to participate because of anxiety, they represent more than the half of percentage (59%). Six respondents who represent (25%) said that they are afraid due to shyness. Whereas four students indicated that they are afraid because they lack self-confidence and they represent (16%) of the whole sample. These results do not only demonstrate the responses of students who are afraid about participation, but also the responses of some students who said that they are not afraid about participation. This means that not only students who are afraid about participation suffer from these problems, but also the ones who are not.

**Item 9:** How could you ameliorate your oral capacities?

This question aimed to explore the possible strategies that students use in order to ameliorate their speaking capacities. The respondents provided some common responses, which include watching movies and videos, listening to English songs, reading books and speaking English with classmates and friends. Some of them added other strategies such as joining groups of English speakers on messenger, using online conversations, doing oral activities such as oral presentation, trying to speak alone and recording their speaking in order to be aware of the pronunciation mistakes, and using dictionaries to ameliorate their pronunciation and enrich their vocabulary.

### **3.2.2 Interpretation of the teachers' questionnaire results**

The second questionnaire, in this study, was administered to the English teachers of the oral expression course at Belhadj Bouchaib university centre in Ain Témouchent. The respondents really showed their collaboration through the complete answers and through adding comments and suggestions when it was necessary; this has really facilitated the analysis of our results.

**Item 1:** How many hours per week are devoted to the oral expression course?

The teachers to whom this questionnaire is administered teach different grades. This question was given to them for the purpose of gathering information about the number of hours devoted to the oral expression course per week. The responses reveal that the number of hours vary from one hour and a half (one session) to three hours (two sessions) per week, it depends on the grade, i.e., whether it is the first, second, or third year grade.

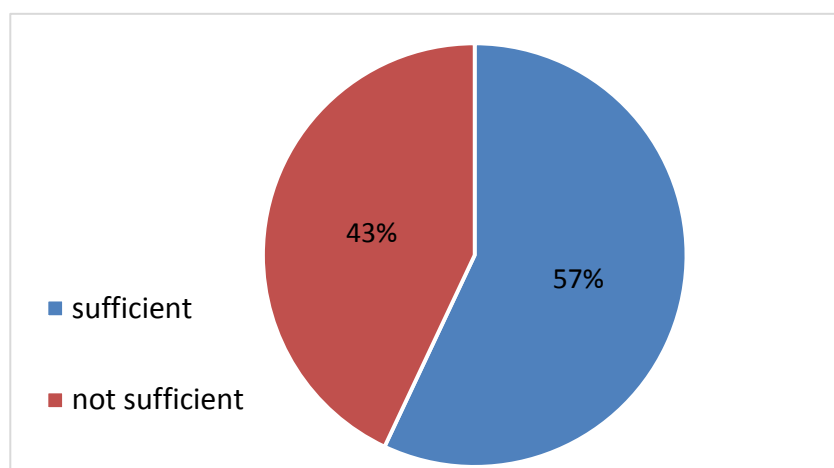
**Item 2:** What do you think about the allotted time? Is it:

a- Sufficient

b- Not sufficient

**Table 3.10:** Teachers' opinion about the allotted time

Options	Participants	%
Sufficient	4	57%
Not sufficient	3	43%



**Pie chart 3.9:** Teachers' opinion about the allotted time

Teachers in this question are asked to evaluate the time allocated to the oral expression course. Four teachers stated that the number of hours devoted to the course is sufficient. Whereas three other teachers asserted that the allotted time is not enough

at all, for they believe that it is impossible to give every student the chance to speak because of the time's shortage. The results indicate that time can be considered as another influential factor that hinders students' participation and prevents teachers from fulfilling the programmed tasks.

**Item 3:** How do you evaluate your students' oral performance level? Why?

In this question, we have tried to know how EFL teachers evaluate their students' speaking level. The results show that three respondents rating (45%) considered that their students have an average level. Whereas, two other teachers rating (29%) said that their students' level is weak. The rest of teacher respondents did not give any answer.

Teachers were asked to provide the reasons behind their evaluation, and thus, the following table clearly demonstrates some reasons.

**Table 3.11:** teachers' justification

answers	participants	Justification
-weak	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Because of their lack of vocabulary and their lack of self-confidence.</li> <li>-Because most of them are not in their right place.</li> <li>-They make no effort to improve.</li> </ul>
-Average	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-They are not motivated to speak.</li> <li>-They may have problems that decrease their level and stop them ameliorating it.</li> </ul>

**Item 4:** Do you find difficulties when teaching the oral expression subject?

**Table 3.12:** Teachers' difficulties when teaching the oral expression subject

options	numbers	Teachers' justification
Yes	5	-overcrowded classes -Students are mostly passive -Lack of sophisticated material -Classroom bad conditions -Time allowance -ICT issues
No	2	

**Item 5:** From your own viewpoint, which obstacles prevent your students from participating in the oral expression subject?

The majority of the teachers agreed that the psychological obstacles are the most influential ones. They claimed that the lack of self-confidence, fear of mistakes, anxiety and shyness influence their students' speaking and hinder them from participating. Three teachers added that they consider the lack of vocabulary to be the major obstacle behind these difficulties. Another teacher added other reasons; he suggested that lazy and bad teachers, in addition to boring and old techniques are frustrating sometimes. Fear of being mocked at and not having experience of facing the audience are other obstacles that have been mentioned by another respondent.

**Item 6:** As a teacher of oral expression, which of these areas should be highly considered from your part? Why?

The purpose behind asking this question was to explore the most important area that teachers emphasize on. From the results obtained, there are two teachers who said that grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are important to be considered. Three other teachers asserted that they emphasize on grammar. One participants' answer was vocabulary and grammar, and the last one responded that vocabulary is the most important area.

Teachers were asked to provide the reasons behind their choices. They are listed in the table below:

**Table 3.13:** Teachers' justification

Options	Numbers	Teachers' justification
Grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation	2	-They are complementary -Because communication encompasses all of them
Grammar	3	-At least, they can structure well said sentence -They need to use correct English -It may lead very often to misunderstanding
Vocabulary and pronunciation	1	-Meaning
Vocabulary	1	-This is the area which motivates the students to talk i.e. if the student masters the English vocabulary, he will certainly talk without caring of grammar and pronunciation.



**Item 7:** What do you think are the most challenging speaking problems?

This question was designed in order to determine the most challenging speaking problems. All the teachers have given one common answer. They asserted that lack of self-confidence is the most challenging problem. Some of them added other answers. One of the respondents said that anxiety is also considered to be the most challenging one. Another teacher admitted that all of the options given are considered the same, in addition to the lack of motivation. One teacher added other problems including poor vocabulary and mispronunciation of words.

**Item 8:** Which remedies do you suggest to avoid, or at least reduce these lacunae?

This question was designed to obtain ideas about the potential remedies for low achievements of speaking skills. The teachers suggest different strategies to help their students overcome their speaking difficulties. The following are the main propositions:

- Reduce students' numbers per group to 25.
- Engage students in real communication situations and contexts.
- Motivating students, establishing a good classroom atmosphere.
- Doing self-study tasks in oral skill.
- Encourage students to speak and use English inside and outside university.
- Encourage group work.
- Students have to rely on themselves (be autonomous);
- Encourage students to interact with native-speakers via social media.
- Smaller groups to install a kind of intimacy between the teacher and their students.
- The teachers should be an artist; he must use all the techniques that motivate students such as using ICTs<sup>4</sup> to make the lecture attractive and effective.
- Read motivational books, watch motivational videos.

### **3.3 General analysis and interpretation of the results**

The present study has been conducted to highlight the main difficulties that EFL students encounter when they are asked to perform in the oral expression course, and to find out the main factors that hinder them from showing a better speaking performance. In this section, we attempt to discuss the main findings that have been obtained throughout the research tool used over this study which consists of a questionnaire administered to both EFL students and teachers of oral expression.

The aim behind students' questionnaire was to figure out the problems that third year EFL students face while speaking. The data and the obtained results show that the majority of students really face many serious problems which prevent them from doing a good oral performance.

From the students' answers, it has been noticed that almost all of them asserted the significant role of the speaking skill by considering it as the main important element to be developed. However, these students are affected by many factors which may prevent them from developing this skill (speaking). These factors vary from linguistic to psychological problems. When talking about the psychological problems, we can notice from the results that most of students face anxiety as the most influential problem that impedes their participation during the course.

Moving to the linguistic problems, the results revealed that the lack of vocabulary is considered as the most remarkable problem that the majority students are confronting, and again, this problem hinders them from interacting with their teacher and classmates inside class. Moreover, there are other problems beside the psychological and the linguistics problems, which include the students' reliance on their mother tongue inside the classroom, and this is due to their shortage vocabulary. Learners have also revealed that they feel themselves demotivated to speak English in front of others; overcrowded classes are also another obstacle which render students feel shy and anxious to participate in front of a great number of students.

The aim behind the second questionnaire administered to the oral expression teachers, was to have an idea about the teachers' opinion towards the most common issues that students face while dealing with the speaking skill, and to test whether the problems discussed before really exist among their students.

According to the elicited results, it has been noticed that the time allocated for the oral expression subject is insufficient for practicing speaking because of the large number of students, a fact which prevents the teachers from giving the chance to every student to speak, and achieving their programmed objectives as well. This means that the large number of students in class is another factor that influences the teaching/learning process.

When teachers were asked about their students' oral performance level, they asserted that their level varies from weak to average, which means that they are not good at the level of speaking; this is due to various factors. Another question was posed to teachers in order to know the difficulties they encounter in teaching the oral expression course. They admitted that they face several problems mainly: lack of sophisticated material, classroom bad conditions, ICT issues; they also added that students are mostly passive, in addition to overcrowded classes and time allowance which have already been discussed before.

Moreover, and from what has been discussed earlier concerning the difficulties faced by the students during the course, it can be deduced that all teachers emphasize on the lack of self-confidence as the most challenging speaking problem among their students; they added that the lack of vocabulary also hold back the students and prevent them from participating. Despite all of that, teachers often try to do their best to solve these problems as much as possible; they use some strategies which have been mentioned above (see section 3.2.2) to reduce the students' lacunae.

### **3.4 Suggestions and recommendations**

To complete this research work which highlights the major obstacles that prevent the students' participation, we will try to present some suggestions and recommendations that hopefully will be useful and helpful for the EFL students and teachers of oral expression. This may help them overcome the frequent lacunae that appear at the level of the speaking skill for better performance. Therefore, we propose the following suggestions and recommendations for both teachers and EFL students:

**❖ For students:**

- Students should know that anxiety is a natural feeling of any human being, and everyone can experience speaking anxiety;
- Students should not be afraid of making mistakes because mistakes are part of the learning process;
- Students need develop their own speaking through listening to native speakers and taking notes;
- They should practice the speaking skill outside the classroom to enhance their level in speaking;
- Students should be engaged within the explanation of the teacher;
- They can share their opinions or thoughts with their colleagues in order to practice speaking;
- They should do some tasks at home that can help them ameliorate their pronunciation, master further grammatical structures and enrich their vocabulary;
- Students should not be shy, they should ask the teacher for clarifications such as the repetition of the difficult points;
- Students should create an oral competitive atmosphere in classroom;
- Students should practice some activities at least thirty minutes every day.

**❖ For teachers:**

- Teachers should create a relaxed atmosphere in classroom in order to encourage students' participation and interaction;
- Teachers should be aware how to behave with psychological barriers (anxiety, shyness, lack of self-confidence, etc.)
- Teachers should design simple and fun activities to keep students motivated and interested.
- They should give support to students when asking and answering questions, and encourage them to make research about topics from their

own choice, and then discuss them in class. Thus, the teacher can elicit the topics that stimulate his learners' interest;

- They should build a friendly relationship with their students to motivate them participating;
- Teachers should enhance learners' self-confidence, using various activities and group work with the aid of appropriate authentic materials to improve all students' skills;
- Teachers should build up a student-centered environment rather than teacher-centered environment through the use of the communicative approach (CLT);
- Indicate positive feedback when commenting on a student's response;
- Teachers are advisable to diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language;
- Teachers should teach learners concrete situations, so that they can show them that the language taught in the classroom is similar to what they will cope with in the future.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The third chapter has been concerned with the practical part of this research work. It has dealt with the analysis, as well as the interpretation of the data collected. These data have been gathered through the use of a questionnaire administered to both students and oral expression teachers. According to the findings, it has been noticed that the third year EFL students concretely encounter many problems that prevent them from improving their speaking skills and participating in class, which means that the obtained results have confirmed and validated our hypothesis. At the end, the chapter has presented some suggestions and recommendations for both teachers and students to prevent or at least reduce the major flaws that frequently occur in the oral expression course.

# **General Conclusion**

## **General Conclusion**

The present study has investigated the major factors that hinder and influence third year LMD students' oral performance. Its main purpose was to determine the frequent problems that students face while performing orally, and to propose some alternative recommendations that can be used by both teachers and their students to achieve a successful teaching/learning process, and eliminate or at least reduce these problems.

This research work has been divided into three chapters; the first chapter has provided an overview about the speaking skill and discussed its importance in learning English as a foreign language in comparison with the other skills (writing, reading, listening). Then, the major obstacles that EFL students face have been discussed in details. The second chapter has explained the methodology adopted and the procedures followed in this research work; it has presented the case study and the sample population, as well as the main methods and research instruments used for data collection and analysis. Through this chapter, we have also explained the constraints that we have encountered when doing our fieldwork and gathering our data.

The third chapter has been concerned with the practical part of this study; it has dealt with the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the collected data through the use of a questionnaire that was addressed to both third year EFL students and teachers of the oral expression subject.

Based on the results obtained from the questionnaire, and after analyzing the data gathered from the students' questionnaire, it has been deduced that students really face many problems that impede their participation and interaction during the oral expression course. They have admitted that they really encounter linguistic problems relating to dearth of the necessary vocabulary, grammatical and pronunciation mistakes, as well as some psychological problems such as lack of self-confidence, anxiety, shyness and fear of making mistakes. Other problems include the use of mother tongue, non-motivating atmosphere and overcrowded classes.

Moreover, the results from the teachers' questionnaire have also revealed that most of the teachers under investigation are aware about these problems, and have suggested some solutions to help their learners avoid or at least reduce them.

All in all, it is significant to assert that the findings of this study have confirmed our hypotheses concerning the speaking and communication flaws and answered our research questions. Another important finding is that the teachers of the oral expression subject take all these lacunae into consideration in their teaching process; a fact which urges them to try to minimize their students' oral flaws, and help them develop and promote their oral performance inside and outside class. Finally, this research work has ended up with some suggestions and recommendations for avoiding or at least reducing these lacunae.

Another piece of research would be beneficial if it explores these lacunae among students of other grades (graduate and undergraduate students), and from other universities, in order to find out whether the same problems are faced by EFL students, or there might be others, and try to raise the awareness of all the partner parties involved in higher education, to try to find solutions to this serious problem.



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# **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### Teachers' questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine the most frequent difficulties that EFL students face inside the classroom. For this reason, you are kindly requested to answer the questions below.

1- How many hours per week are devoted to the oral expression course?

.....

2- What do you think about the allotted time? Is it:

a- Sufficient?

b- Not sufficient?

3- How do you assess your students' oral performance level? Why?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4- Do you find difficulties in teaching oral expression subject?

a- Yes

b- No

- If yes, what kind of difficulties do you encounter?

.....  
.....  
.....

5- From your own viewpoint, which obstacles prevent your students from participating in the oral expression subject?

.....  
.....  
.....

6- As a teacher of oral expression, which of these areas should be highly considered from your part? Why?

- a- Grammar
- b- Vocabulary
- c- Pronunciation

.....  
.....  
.....

7- What do you think are the most challenging speaking problems?

- a- Shyness
- b- Lack of self-confidence
- c- Anxiety
- d- Others

.....  
.....

8- Which remedies do you suggest to avoid or at least reduce these lacunae?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

*Thank you for your cooperation.*

## APPENDIX B

### Students' questionnaire

The aim behind this questionnaire is to analyze the most frequent language difficulties that EFL students confront inside class, and therefore, you are kindly asked to answer the questions below.

1- Do you agree with the fact that in order to learn a language you have to speak it?

- a- Yes   
b- No

2- Which of the following skills do you prefer to enhance?

- a- Listening   
b- Speaking   
c- Writing   
d- Reading

3- Following this grading scale, how would you evaluate your speaking skills?

- a- Excellent   
b- Good   
c- Average   
d- Weak

4- How often do you participate in the oral expression courses?

- a- Very often   
b- Quite often   
c- Sometimes   
d- Never

5- Do you use your mother tongue inside the classroom? If yes, why?

- a- Yes   
b- No

.....  
.....  
.....



6- Are you scared of speaking in front of a class?

- a- Yes
- b- No

7- If your response is positive, is it due to:

- a- Fear of making grammatical mistakes
- b- Fear of making pronunciation mistakes
- c- Lack of vocabulary

8- Or you do not participate because of:

- a- Shyness
- b- Anxiety
- c- Lack of self-confidence

9- How could you ameliorate your oral capacities?

.....

.....

.....

.....

*Thank you for your collaboration.*