Mastering Phonetics in the EFL Classroom: The Pathway to Effective Oral Communication Skills

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Abstract: *The study's major purpose is to explore the efficacy of phonetic education in enhancing oral communication skills among EFL learners. A questionnaire for teachers was used to collect the data, and there were 30 participants in total. The data was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS. The study suggests that teachers add phonetics classes into EFL sessions and urge students to actively participate in class to improve oral communication skills. The researcher proposes undertaking additional research on the efficacy of various phonetic teaching approaches and how they affect the development of the oral communication skills in EFL learners. After considering the teacher's perspectives, the researcher believes that phonetic - based training significantly improved EFL learners' communication skills.*

Keywords: Communication skills, Phonetics, EFL, Teaching and Learning

1. Introduction

The demand for English communication skills has continuously increased across all sectors of society, and it is now an irresistible force. According to a 1995 US study titled "Fastest Growing Careers, " communication skills would remain in demand throughout the workforce well into the twenty - first century. In today's workplace, effective communication skills are essential for advancement. Aside from language hurdles, language learners face a variety of academic challenges, including tension, worry, and dread. This increases the difficulty of learning the target language in a formal setting. (Jayanth & Soundiraraj, 2016). In this age of globalization, being able to communicate English clearly and effectively is critical. This is a wonderful opportunity for a literature or English education student to help expand and strengthen the community's English - speaking skills. The English education study programme, in particular, ensures that students obtain the best possible support information, one of which is pronunciation and phonetics, in order to accomplish these abilities. (Asiyah1 and Maghfiroh, p.349) Arabs commonly pronounce several English sounds wrong due to their little exposure to English as a foreign language. (Jahara & Abdelrady, 2022, p.194). One of the most crucial courses for improving English language learners' capacity to identify and pronounce sounds like native speakers is Phonetics. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how important is it to teach Phonetics using the best techniques and approaches in order to ensure that EFL Learners can communicate in English fluently. Another point focuses on the ways in which Phonetics is taught and the extent to which it has impacted students' ability to communicate orally in English. Teachers are the targeted applicants because of the importance of this group as educators of English language.

2. Previous Studies

Namaziandost et al., 2018 have conducted a significant study to determine the effect of phonological rule instruction on Iranian pre - intermediate EFL students' English pronunciation. Non - random sampling was used to choose 50 pre - intermediate students enrolled in a private language school in Ahvaz, Iran (convenience sampling). They took the Oxford Quick Placement Test, a homogeneity test, to find out how homogeneous they were. They were then split into two groups at random: control (n = 25) and experimental (n = 25). A validated teacher - made pronunciation test was given to both groups as the pre - test prior to the start of the treatment. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups' performances. Participants in the experimental group performed better than those in the control group, it was discovered. The experimental group generally performed better than the control group. This study suggests that teaching phonological rules can make pronunciation learning more efficient and simple. (Namaziandost et al., 2018). Goswami & Chen2 (2010) study evaluated the impact of instruction in phonetic and phonemic distinctions in sounds on the English pronunciation of English language learners, specifically, Spanish speakers learning English as a second language (ESL). Target sounds in English deemed difficult for Spanish speakers learning ESL were identified. The target sounds were categorized into sounds having allophonic distinctions between the two languages; sounds having phonemic Results indicated that the intervention had a statistically significant impact on the experimental group's pronunciation of the target sounds. Further, subjects' showed improvement in the pronunciation of individual target sounds in the following order: sounds with allophonic distinctions, phonemic differences, and absence in the native language. (Goswami & Chen2, 2010) Acquiring native like pronunciation is not a short - term process. A few effective methods like drilling and minimal pair techniques will help language teachers to gradually give the learners an insight about the English sound system and support in the development of spontaneous speaking. (Priya & Kumar, 2020) Ungarovna (2021) discussed teaching English phonetics with modern methods. By determining the preferred method of explaining and working out the phonetic features of the English language; developing a methodology and plan for explaining and practicing the phonetic features of the English language; and considering modern interactive

methods for learners. Teaching phonetics in English lessons at school is an essential component in the development of competent oral speech. The phonetics of the English language should contribute to the formation and development of speech abilities and skills in speech activities. (Ungarovna, 2021) This study looked at how communication strategies education affected the oral performance and strategy use of sixth - grade EFL students in Jordan. The results show that during the course of the therapy, training enhanced both the participants' oral performance and their usage of CS. According to these researchers, EFL teachers should offer communication skills and clearly demonstrate their value in addition to setting up scenarios that motivate students to participate in speaking work. The study suggests that the utilization of communication strategies in language instruction both improves oral performance and increases strategy use. According to earlier reports (e. g., Rodriguez Cervantes & Roux Rodriguez, 2012), EFL teachers typically either abandon the message or switch to the first language in an attempt to avoid communication issues in the classroom, or they are unaware of the value of teaching communication strategies to their students or model inactive use of strategies. (Bataineh et al., 2017) The use of the phonetic technique can improve student learning results in pronunciation. Furthermore, some learning outcomes can be acquired in the cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor abilities, as well as the teaching objective. Improving pronunciation Skills acquired through the Phonetic Method were passionate and engaged in studying pronunciation since students could practice more effectively and under the supervision of the teacher. Their pronunciation issues, particularly when speaking, are resolved. They might avoid anxiety and confusion. Finally, learners received some recommendations for improving their pronunciation using the Phonetic approach. Instead of focusing solely on grammar, they felt more driven to study English. In addition, the teacher was confident in his ability to refresh himself. It is critical to consider a phonetic strategy as an aid for the students learning pronunciation. Furthermore, the teacher should focus on what learners need rather than what the teacher wants, making the scenario more appealing. (Asrul and Husda, 2022)

3. Literature Review

a) Phonetic - based instruction

Phonetics is the science that considers and investigates all aspects of speech, including how speech is produced using our speech organs, the properties of speech sounds in the air as they travel from the speaker's mouth to the listener's ear, and, finally, how we perceive speech and recognize its structural elements as specific linguistic symbols or signs. (Mazon, 2018)

Phonics instruction emphasizes the clear and direct teaching of alphabetic principles and grapheme - phoneme matching rules, as well as their application to word - and text - level reading. Students in PA learn phonological skills like rhyming, recognizing, segmenting, and combining phonemes. Phonemic awareness and phonics teaching share several characteristics. (Ehri et al., 2001). Both of these may have the grapheme - phoneme relationship of 26 English letters. Beyond teaching letter sounds, phonics teaches more

sophisticated spelling rules such as digraphs and diphthongs. (Huo & Wang, 2017, p.3)

Phoneme awareness training teaches children how to manipulate speech sounds in the absence of written letters, whereas word level reading and spelling are important goals of phonics instruction. Phoneme awareness instruction can serve as a precursor to systematic phonics training. (Ehri et al., 2001). The goal of phonetic charging is to anticipate and eliminate potential phonetic challenges such as auditory, pronunciation, and rhythmic - intonation, as well as to develop previously undeveloped phonetic skills. Phonetic charges can have the following content: Reading words, sentences, micro texts, poems, proverbs, and tongue twisters, reading difficult portions of sentences or phrases from beginning to end, listening for mistakes, dialect recognition which is the determining of one's attitude toward someone or something through tone, pronouncing the same phrase with varying tone, repeat after the speaker in pauses, repetition in time with the announcer, auditory word recognition, recitation of poems, and dramatization of discussions. (Ungarovna, 2021)

One of the most important appreciations of phonetics is in the teaching foreign language. It allows teachers to examine the differences between the sounds of sources and target language and explain the difference to learners. It also enables learners to better understand and communicate the language they are learning.

Phonetics is an important foundation to many areas of linguistics such clinical phonetics in this it helps people with their speech and hearing, they need to understand how things work normally. Thus, knowing how speech sounds are produced and how they are perceived they can communicate properly. By knowing what is right, we can recognize what is going wrong and can finally help the person with their speech or hearing disorder. (Mazon, 2018)

b) Micro - Skills of oral communication

Speaking, according to Longman Dictionary, is the utterance of intelligible speech or the appearance of being capable of speech. Speaking is the process of verbally expressing one's thoughts and feelings, reflecting on and shaping one's experience, and sharing information. Speaking is a complex process that involves both thinking and language skills, as well as social skills. The speaker combines words to form sentences and paragraphs and employs a socially appropriate language style. Speaking is development for the relationships between a speaker and her/his hearer. Speaking also entails deciding whether logical linguistic, psychological, and physical rules should be followed in a certain communicative circumstance.

Teachers should educate students the following procedures in order to make speaking proper and understandable: Speak clearly and expressively about their views.2011 (Bin Tahir) Speaking is a highly complex and dynamic talent that requires the simultaneous activation of numerous processes - cognitive, bodily, and socio - cultural - and the activation of a speaker's knowledge and skills in real - time. As a result, it is critical that speaking be explicitly taught in language schools — "doing" speaking through a sequence of activities is not the

same as learning the knowledge, abilities, and techniques of speaking. (2019, Burns)

Speaking skill gives the grade of knowing a language. It fulfils the basic need for using a language. Generally, in schools, teachers concentrate on writing skills when concerned to English language. If at all there is a chance to teach speaking skills in the classroom to the students, who learn English as their second language, they concentrate on grammar, forms and vocabulary. (Priya & Kumar, 2020)

Speaking necessitates mastery of a variety of small skills known as micro - skills. These micro - skills can be used to evaluate speech production quality. Brown (2001) defines oral communication micro - skills as the following tasks. Mastery of a variety of small skills known as micro - skills is required for speaking. These micro - skills can be used to evaluate speech production quality. Furthermore, English teachers must be aware of the following micro - skills in order to effectively plan their lessons. Language chunks of multiple lengths are rated, oral production of differences in English phonemes and allophonic variants, the use of patterns, stress in words and unstressed positions, rhythmic structure, and intonation. to use a large number of lexical units to achieve pragmatic goals, to create abbreviated forms of words and phrases, to speak fluently at various levels of speaking, to monitor oral production using strategic devices such as pauses, fillers, and self - corrections to improve message clarity using grammatical word classes (nouns, adjectives, and so on), systems (such as tense and pluralization), word order, patterns, and rules, to use proper phrases and sentences when speaking, to use several grammatical forms to communicate a given idea. In order to use coherent devices in one's speech, one must first learn how to use them, to fulfill communicative functions in a suitable manner for the occasion, appropriate registers, pragmatic rules, and other sociolinguistic elements must be developed in order to engage with others using connections and links between events to connect situations like the main idea, supporting idea, new information, supplied information, generalization, and exemplification, combining expressions, gestures, body language, and other nonverbal indicators with spoken language to convey the meaning of a speech. Developing and using speaking tactics such strengthening key words, rephrasing, offering context for comprehending word meanings, appealing for help, accurately measuring how well your listener understands the dialogue, generalization, and exemplification. (Masuram & Sripada, 2020)

c)   Principals of teaching communication skills
According to Anuradha et al (2014), the following are the principles of teaching speaking skills: to encourage students to speak up right away. If not, be patient with students who simply repeat what they say as soon as possible and without having to wait until she teaches them a set of words, phrases, or sentences; if a student responds to a question with a single word, accept it for the time being; allow students to actively participate in the conversation using whatever English knowledge they have; and allow learners to make errors and mistakes at the beginning. Interruptions and corrections impede fluency and discourage learners from completing any task or topic without difficulty; propose structures/words and have students use them in a variety of situations; drill as much

as possible; and encourage students to use the back - chaining or tail - forwarding approach to combine more than 10 sentences to construct lengthy sentences, organize role play and pair work as much as possible, and supervise the learners to correct the active learners and activate the passive ones, be well prepared in terms of lesson planning, activities, and tasks ahead of time, and allow learners to make mistakes and errors in the early stages. In addition, keep in mind that interruptions and corrections stifle learning and discourage students. (Hussain, 2017)

d)   Teaching - Speaking cycle
Taking some of the previous ideas and expanding them to plan a comprehensive and sequential series of communicative activities based on the teaching - speaking cycle (Goh and Burns, 2012, p.153). The model's goal is to highlight a few key elements that teachers can use to help their students, such as developing fluency in meaning expression, using grammar flexibly to produce a diverse range of utterances that express meaning precisely, and so on. Using appropriate vocabulary and accurate language forms relevant to their speaking needs, understand and apply social and linguistic communication rules in a variety of contexts, manage and self - regulate their own speaking development, increase understanding of genre and genre structures, and increase metacognitive awareness of EFL speaking (Burns, 2019)

According to research, variables such as second language learners' age and gender, the extent of second language use, the length of residence in the second language environment, learners' aptitude, first language background, and the presence or absence of phonetic training in the second language all influence second language learners' pronunciation (Piske, 2008). Students can learn in a variety of ways, including through movement, sound, and sight. Teachers should Keep their lessons applicable. The majority of students, even adults, find theory and technical explanations to be difficult to understand and easily forgotten. Instead, simple, concrete demonstrations followed by lots of practice yield better results. Lessons need to fit our students' level of understanding for communicative practice whenever possible. It is necessary for students to practice pronouncing words correctly in spoken language. In class, teachers can reinforce students practice by implementing exercises that mimic genuine communication. Encourage students to become autonomous and self - directed learners. Teachers and students won't be together all the time. Eventually, they'll have to figure out how to pronounce things correctly on their own. If teachers can help students become proficient at listening, mimicking, and self - checking their pronunciation, it will be a huge help for their future learning. Yoshida (2016). The aforementioned methods will undoubtedly aid EFL students in communicating clearly and effectively. Furthermore, it was stated that learners can better reconcile formal and informal communicative circumstances and use what they have learned outside of the language classroom by mastering communication methods. Improving oral performance in foreign language classrooms and other settings may also be facilitated by increasing teachers' awareness of the value of communication tactics. (Bataineh et al., 2017)

4. The Methodology of the study

1) Statement of the problem

The researcher noticed that EFL learners struggle to be fluent when communicating orally in English. The study suggests emphasizing on sound mastery by teaching English Phonetics. Thus, this study is an attempt to find out the extent to which phonetics instruction contributes to EFL learners' communication in English.

2) Questions of the study

* To what extent does teaching phonetics enhance EFL learners' oral communication skills?
* To what extent do Sudanese teachers use the appropriate method of teaching to facilitate oral communication in EFL classroom?
* Does the syllabus of the department of English in the University requirement unit at Sudan University of science and technology include phonetics?

3) Hypotheses of the study

* Teaching phonetics enhance EFL learners' oral communication.
* Sudanese university English teachers use the appropriate method to teach communicative skills.
* The syllabus at the department of English in the University Requirements Unit includes phonetics components.

4) Significance of the study

The researcher hopes to assist EFL instructors and students by highlighting how crucial it is to teach phonetics in order to improve EFL learners' oral communication skills.

5) Limitations of the study

Although there are other aspects that contribute to the good communication, this study emphasizes the importance of phonetics teaching as one of the key factors in improving English language oral communication. As a result, the researcher suggests more studies to bridge the gap.

6) Population of the study

English Teachers at Sudan University of science and technology –Faculty of Languages –English department.

7) The Method of the study:

The researcher uses the descriptive analytic method and a questionnaire for the teachers as a tool.

A questionnaire:

The questionnaire is designed for university teachers at Sudan University of Science and Technology –College of Languages   University requirements unit & English department teachers.

The validity of the questionnaire

The questionnaire is judged to be valid because it is distributed to ten university teachers four of them are PhD holders in English and education. The committee has approved the face, content, structure validity of the questionnaire. They participate on the final form of the questionnaire by their advices and comments.

The reliability of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed to thirty university teachers and they understand it and respond accurately which emphasis the reliability of the questionnaire.

The population

All the teachers at the University Requirements unit - English department - College of languages - Sudan University of Science & Technology who teach English for specific purposes courses

The sample of the study

The sample is thirty teachers from Sudan University of science and technology –college of languages – University requirements Unit – English department.

Table 1: Gender

Gender	Number	Percent
Male	19	63
Female	11	37
Total	30	100

Table 2: Experience

Year	Frequency	Percent
1 - 5	10	33.3
10 - 5	12	40
15 - 10	06	20
More than 15	02	6.7
Total	30	100

Table 3: Qualifications

Degree	Number	Percent
Bachelor	01	3.3
Higher diploma	04	13.3
Master	25	83.3
Philosophy Degree	00	0
Over philosophy Degree study	00	0
Total	30	100

In this part, the researcher uses SPSS statistical computer program to analyze the teacher's questionnaire and the questionnaire.

Table 4: Frequency Table

Sex		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Male	19	63.3
	Female	11	36.7
	Total	30	100.0
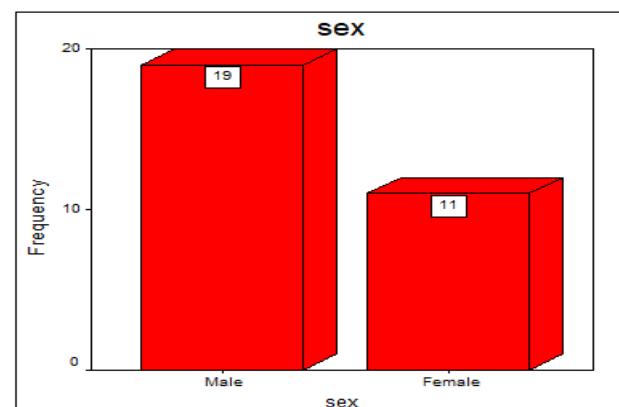
Figure 1

Table 5
I use pair and group work to teach speaking skill

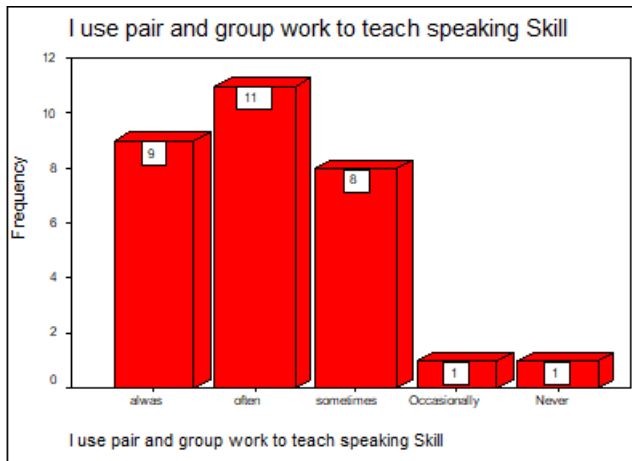|		Frequency	Percentage
	Always	9	30.0
	Often	11	36.7
Valid	Sometimes	8	26.7
	Occasionally	1	3.3
	Never	1	3.3
	Total	30	100.0

Figure 2

Based on the data presented in table ((4)), it is clear that most of the sample often use pair and group work to teach speaking skills. the frequency is (11), they constitute 36.7%.
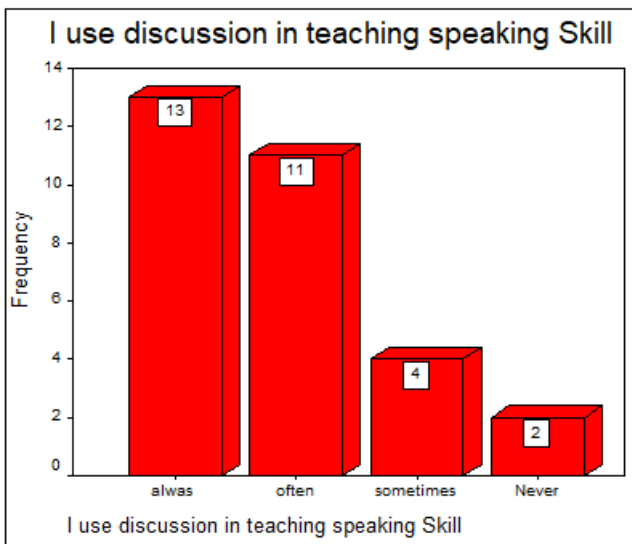

Figure 3

Table 6:
I use discussion in teaching speaking skill

		Frequency	Percentage
	Always	13	43.3
	Often	11	36.7
Valid	Sometimes	4	13.3
	Never	2	6.7
	Total	30	100.0

Based on the data presented in table ((5)), it is clear that most of the sample always use discussion in teaching Speaking skills. The frequency is (13), they constitute 43.3%.
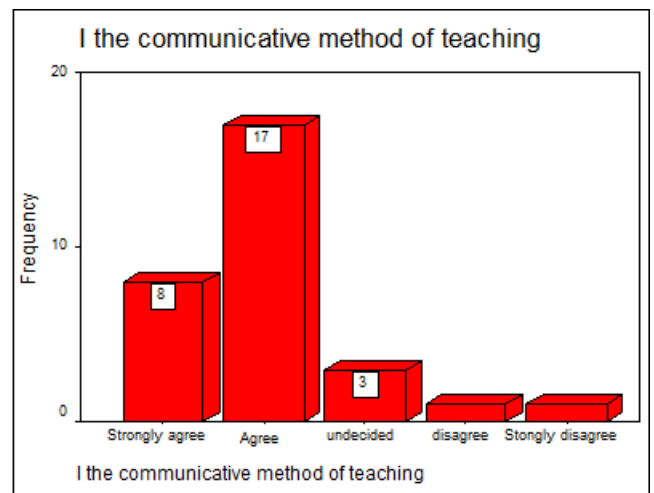

Figure 8

Table 7
I the communicative method of teaching

		Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly Agree	8	26.7
	Agree	17	56.7
Valid	Undecided	3	10.0
	Disagree	1	3.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	3.3
	Total	30	100.0

Based on the data presented in table ((7)), it is clear that most of the sample agree that they often use the communicative method of teaching in their classes. The frequency is (17), they constitute 56.7 %
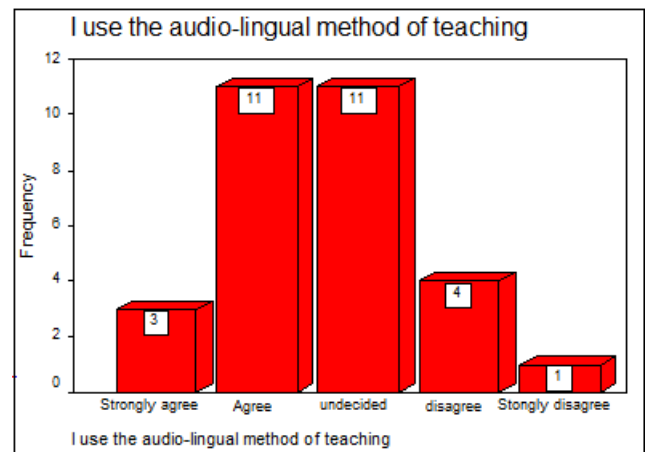

Figure 4

Table 8
I use audio- lingual method of teaching

		Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly Agree	3	10.0
	Agree	11	36.7
Valid	Undecided	11	36.7
	Disagree	4	13.3
	Strongly Disagree	1	3.3
	Total	30	100.0

Based on the data presented in table ((8)), it is clear that some of the teachers agree that they are using the audiolingual

method and some of them could not decide. The frequency is (11) for each, they constitute 36.7 %
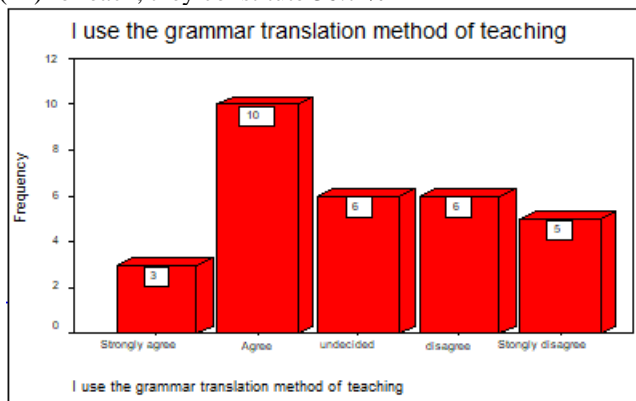

Figure 5

Table 9
I use the grammar translation method of teaching

		Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly Agree	3	10.0
	Agree	10	33.3
Valid	Undecided	6	20.0
	Disagree	6	20.0
	Strongly Disagree	5	16.7
	Total	30	100.0

Based on the data presented in table ((9)) it is clear that most of the sample agree that they use the grammar translation method of teaching. The frequency is (10), they constitute 33.3%.
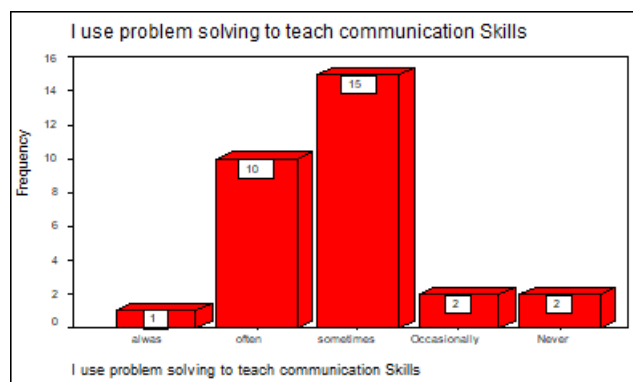

Figure 6

Table 10
I use problem solving to teach communication skills

		Frequency	Percentage
	Always	1	3.3
	Often	10	33.3
Valid	Sometimes	15	50.0
	Occasionally	2	6.7
	Never	2	6.7
	Total	30	100.0

Based on the data presented in table ((10)) it is clear that most of the sample sometimes use problem solving to teach communication skills. The frequency is (15), they constitute 50.0%.
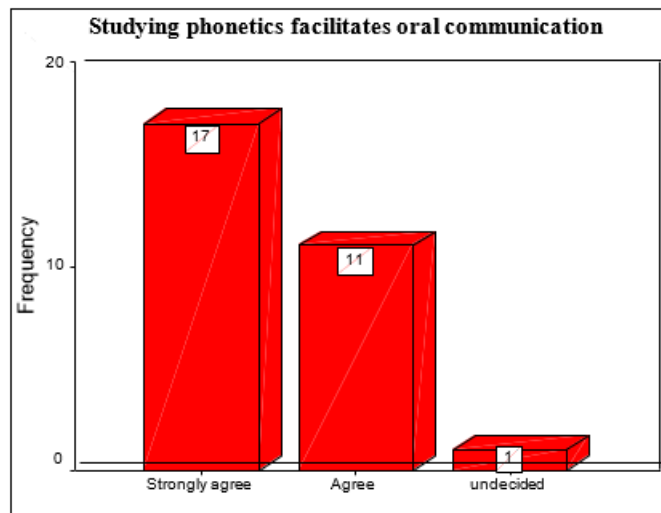

Figure 7

Table 11: Studying phonetics facilitate oral communication

		Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly Agree	16	53.3
Valid	Agree	12	40.0
	Undecided	2	6.7
	Total	30	100.0
Missing	System	1	3.3
Total		30	100.0

Based on the data presented in table 11 it is clear that most of the sample strongly agree that studying Phonetics facilitates communicative skills. The frequency is (17), they constitute 56.7%.
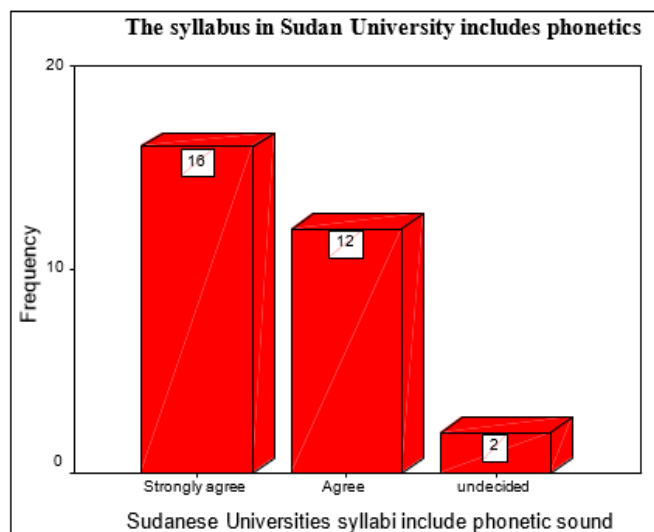

Figure 8

Table 12: The syllabus in Sudan University includes pHONETICSphonetics

		Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly Agree	16	53.3
Valid	Agree	12	40.0
	Undecided	2	6.7
	Total	30	100.0

Based on the data presented in table ((12)), it is clear that most of the sample strongly agree that the syllabus at Sudan

University includes Phonetics). The frequency is (16), they constitute 53.3%.

5. Discussion of the Results

Through the examination of the questionnaire, the researcher aims to answer the following first question: To what extent does teaching phonetics enhance EFL learners' oral communication abilities? According to Table 11's statistics, most respondents (i. e., 56.7% of the sample) strongly agree that learning phonetics helps with communicative abilities; this finding supports the premise that teaching phonetics enhances oral communication among EFL learners. . .

The study's second question focuses on the instructors' competency and their application of the best instructional strategies to improve oral communication in EFL classes. Numerous statements were created for the questionnaire examining this issue in order to address this question, and it is evident from the results shown in table ((4)) that the majority of the sample frequently uses pair and group work to develop speaking skills. They make up 36.7% of the frequency (11). This implies that EFL students are free to connect and converse with one another. Due to the fact that the majority of the sample always uses conversation to teach speaking skills, the data in Table 5 further supports the same conclusion regarding oral communication. With a frequency of 17, they make up 56.7%. It is evident from Table ((10)) that the majority of the sample sometimes employs problem solving to impart communication abilities. They make up 50.0% of the frequency (15). Thus, the researcher can conclude that Sudanese teachers employ acceptable oral communication instruction strategies in EFL classes based on the results of the claims under review.

In order to directly address the third study question, which asked whether phonetics is included in the Sudan University curriculum, the researcher looked at the data in Table 12 and found that the majority of candidates strongly agreed that it is.

6. Findings

After analyzing and discussing the results the researcher has reached to the following findings:
1) Teaching phonetics helps EFL learners improve their oral communication abilities, the researcher determined based on data collected from the questionnaire and the findings discussion.
2) In the EFL classroom, the majority of teachers employ effective teaching strategies, interactive patterns, and exercises that improve oral communication.
3) Sudan University's syllabus encourages students to employ phonetic components to learn how to pronounce words correctly so they can communicate clearly and fluently.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In order to improve EFL learners' oral communication, the researcher sought to shed light on the significance of teaching phonetics. The researcher suggests that teaching phonetics enhances EFL learners' oral communication skills According to Munna & Kalam (2021), an active learning environment fosters inclusion and enhances staff and student academic achievement. From the personal reflection and classroom observations, it is discovered that in order to control the behavior of individuals or groups, several techniques may need to be employed, including conversations, paired or group work, role - playing, rewards, punishment, questioning, observations, switching tasks, audio/visuals, etc (Munna & Kalam, 2021)

Based on information gathered from the questionnaire and the discussion of the findings, the researcher concluded that teaching phonetics aids EFL students in improving their oral communication skills. Most EFL teachers use interactive patterns, oral communication activities, and successful teaching tactics in their classes. According to Sudan University's syllabus, students should use phonetic elements to learn how to pronounce words correctly in order to speak coherently and clearly. Further research is required to ascertain the effects of additional linguistic components on the major and subskill performance of English language learners in Reading, Writing, and Listening, as well as other facets of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The fact that the study only looked at a small sample of Sudanese EFL instructors at Sudan University of Science and Technology is one of its drawbacks; larger samples may be available from other universities. Because of the nature of the course, students are allowed to speak English inside and outside of the classroom. Phonetics is a teaching strategy that helps EFL students become more adept communicators by having them practice the sounds. Accurate thought expression, adequate comprehension, and any language - based communication function all depend on the development of phonetic abilities. The development of phonetic abilities is an essential precondition for all language - based communication functions, precise thought expression, and adequate spoken language understanding.

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