

# What are the aspects affecting the Usage of English Language: Student’s Perspectives in Saudi Arabia

**Jehanzeb\***

\*English Department for ESP, College of Applied Medical Sciences, Shaqra University, Al-Quwaiyiyah, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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## Abstract:

The widespread use of the English language and the globalization of the world have made it mandatory for the English learners’ to be more efficient in oral communication. Speaking is one of the most important skills to be developed and enhanced as means of effective communication. Many language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language. Therefore, college students are required to have high oral English competence. We find that undergraduate students are generally facing problems to use the foreign language and express their thoughts effectively and confidently. They face many psychological obstacles or cannot find the suitable words and expressions. The inaccurate articulation and inadequacy of an English learner is an indication of the problem. Therefore a need was felt to discover the reasons behind this worrying trend. Due to the scarcity of research in Al-Quwaiyiyah, Saudi Arabia, it would be a timely study to redress this issue. The present study aims to explore the speaking problems of a cross-section of undergraduate students foundation level (Prep year), Nursing and Laboratory students in Communicative English in Al-Quwaiyiyah Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Our results demonstrated that most of the students like to communicate in English and be a part of the English-only environment; however they acknowledged some key factors that prevented them from speaking English. Fundamental factors included linguistics, individual, social, psychological and institutional which were largely based upon their beliefs, assumptions, needs and desires. This paper aims at establishing the need to focus on the factors affecting on language learners’ English speaking skill. It may also help teachers and educators to understand the underlying factors that compel students to speak their first languages instead of English. The study identified the main learning difficulties in English speaking as observed by the students. Finally, some suggestions expected to be significant remedies to overcome the problem based on the results of the study.

*Keywords:* social, assessment, self-confidence. Speaking, obstacles

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## I. INTRODUCTION:

### 1.1 An overview of communication

English has been playing a significant role in connecting people of the world. This is the age of communication. People speak to maintain existing social relationships and to make new ones. Language is the strongest tool of conveying the message so the study of language is termed as linguistics. English language made a pervasive progress to become a language of international diplomacy, commerce, education, science and technology[1].reported English as the most useful international language of communication at the time. Oral English competence is associated with career options, social status and reward. English is the language of the aspirations of young students. A

better spoken English skill enhances a youth's employability and opens higher paying job opportunities. Among the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking is the most important skill because Ur *et al.*, 1996 [2] believes that individuals who learn a language are referred to as speakers of that language. This means that using a language is more important than just knowing about it because "there is no point knowing a lot about a language if you don't use it [3]. Speaking is viewed as the most complex and difficult skill to master. According to Kang Shumin, 2002 [4] the learning of English speaking skill is a preference for a lot of English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) learners, it is one of the abilities that is needed to perform a conversation. English speaking is not an easy task because speakers should know many significant components like pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. It requires the ability to use the language properly in social interactions.

The goal of English language teaching and learning is to encourage learners to use English for meaningful and effective communication, not only inside but also outside the classroom. Learners should have enough English speaking ability in order to communicate easily and effectively with other people. Rivers, 1981 [5] studied the use of language outside the classroom situation and understood that speaking is used twice as much as reading and writing combined. According to Brown, 1994 [6] listening and speaking are learners' language tools.

Competence in English has been considered as one the dominant factor of indefinitely greater amount of mobility. Nowadays the globalization of business and industry, the social media and an easy access to all parts of the world, has made it desirable for non-native English speakers to communicate with English speaking peers. English learners of all ages and purposes value the ability to orally communicate in second or foreign language [7].

This study shows the speaking activities and the assessment of the factors that affect teaching speaking skills in the ESL classroom activities. In order to help students to overcome their problems in speaking, it is necessary to figure out the aspects that affect their oral communication.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem: Speaking Performance

There are number of reasons that distract participants' attention to speak a language. They are worried about being criticized and highly conscious about mistakes. Although making mistakes is a natural process of learning a language but it causes potential threat to one's ego. Motivation can influence and be influenced by the components of language learning. According to Merisuo-Storm *et al.*, 2007 [8] ESL learners should be motivated to speak bravely in order to improve their speaking competence because "motivation is probably the most important factor that educators can target in order to improve learning Olson, 1997 [9] and "the expenditure of effort to accomplish results Dubrin, 2008 [10]. Encouragement is one of an essential factor that influence success or failure in learning a language, particularly a second language or

foreign language Gardner, 2010 [11] If learners have an unfriendly attitude towards the language, they will not have any substantial improvement in acquiring the different features of language. Without positive attitudes towards the speaking performance, the aim of speaking would not be obtained.

### **1.3 The role Linguistic:Speaking Performance**

According to Mahripah, 2014 [12], EFL learners' speaking skill is affected by some linguistic components of language like phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics and psychological factors such as motivation and personality. Phonology is a difficult aspect of language learning for EFL learners. As we know, English is not a phonetic language. That is, pronunciations of English words are not similar to their spellings. Words with similar spellings are sometimes pronounced differently because of their surrounding contexts like tenses and phonemes that come after them. This can cause a lot of problems for non-native speakers of English and they sometimes get confused in producing the English words.

EFL learners should have the knowledge of words and sentences. They should comprehend how words are divided into different sounds and how sentences are stressed in specific ways. Grammatical competence can help speakers apply and perceive the structure of English language correctly that leads to their fluency Latha, 2012[13].

### **1.4 The Social Role**

The fear of speaking English is pertinent to some personality constructs like anxiety, inhibition, shyness, low self-esteem and fear of making mistakes. ESL teachers usually come across so many problems in the classroom. Speaking a language sometimes results in anxiety. Sometimes, extreme anxiety may lead to despondence and a sense of failure in learners [14]. According to Woodrow, 2006[15], anxiety has a negative effect on the oral performance of English speakers. Adults are very careful to making errors in whatever they tell. In their opinion, errors show a kind of unawareness which can hinder them to speak English in front of other people. Speaking anxiety may originate from a classroom condition with the different abilities of language learners. They are worried about making mistakes and fearful of criticism. They are ashamed of the other students' attention towards themselves. Littlewood, 2007 expressed that a language classroom can also create inhibitions and apprehension for the students [16].

All human beings make a series of defenses to protect the ego. Due to the fact that committing mistakes is a natural process of learning a language, it certainly causes potential threats to one's ego. These threats disappoint the learners to talk English and prefer to be silent rather than being criticized in front of a large number of people [17]. Risk-taking is pertinent to inhibition and self-respect. EFL learners who have a low self-respect tend to stop taking a risk of committing mistakes in their speaking tasks which resulting in the inhibition to the betterment of their speaking skill [12].

### **1.5 The Listening Role**

Listening is another important skill without which a discussion on acquisition would remain incomplete or uncultivated. It attracted more attention in the advent of the general technological advancement recently realized in the field of ESL. Listening and speaking are closely related. Listening plays an inevitable role in the development of speaking competency. In fact, speaking is closely related to listening. Doff, 1998 says that learners cannot improve their speaking ability unless they develop listening ability [18]. Learners should comprehend what is uttered to them in order to have a successful dialogue. Shumin, 1997 represented that when students talk, the other students answer through the listening process. Speakers have the role of both listeners and speakers [19]. It can be concluded that students are not able to reply if they cannot comprehend what is told. That is to say, speaking is very closely related to listening.

### **1.6 Contemporary Knowledge**

Contemporary knowledge is another factor. Bachman *et al.*, 1996 [20] defined it as the knowledge structures in long-term memory. Having enough knowledge about a certain topic and being familiar with the register enhance one's linguistic self-confidence, while lack of knowledge about a topic and its appropriate register result in one's avoiding communication [21]. That is, a topical knowledge that speaker uses the knowledge related to topical information. It enables students to apply language with respect to the world in which they live and assert that topical knowledge has a great impact on the learners' speaking performance. Participants' knowledge about the topic affects the use of language to a great extent [20].

### **1.7 The influence of mother tongue**

The role of mother tongue in Second Language acquisition has been the subject of much debate and controversy. Mother tongue always interceded target language usage especially when the learners share the same mother tongue they tend to use it more than second language. The problem related to the speaking ability is that when some learners share the same mother-tongue, they try to use it in the speaking class because it is very easy for them [22]. The use of L1 in the English classroom has been and will remain an issue that everyone has an opinion about, either against or for it. Various studies have shown that students first language play an important part in the learning of target language [23]. The systematic use of target language and a minimal use of mother tongue in English language classroom may provide learners with explicit knowledge of the target language systems. However, there is another school of thought that believes that massive exposure to target language is required in order to maximize the learning process for the learner [24].

### **1.8 The Role of class Environment**

Classroom environment plays a significant role in making a student take part in speaking activities “The participants bring with them some attitudes born of conversations shared with family, friends, the media and personal experience of the target language community” these experiences are beneficial to the classroom culture and

context that enrich participation and therefore enhance learning. In effect, Chambers' work validates [25] insight that it is undoubtedly true that learners bring many individual characteristics to the learning process which will affect both the way in which they learn and the outcomes of that process. The size, the atmosphere, the arrangement of seats and many other class-related factors affect the motivation of the students. A conducive, co-operative and supportive environment is useful for learners. Teachers' individual attention to participants and learners would get them involve in communicative activities. On the other hand, mixed ability in class is another factor which hinders the language acquisition process. It is essential to explore the use of new learning tools and materials in the classroom. The idea is to curb prominent variables such as inadequate exposure which is featured among the main perpetrators undermining the development of L2 listening comprehension [26].

### **1.9 The Role of Teachers**

Teacher plays a pivotal role in the educational system. The learner's success greatly depends upon the teacher; the better the behavior of the teacher, the better is the process of learning and hence the learner's success. One of the most important elements of progress is education and the basic unit of education is the institution that provides the environment of learning to the students. Similarly, in an educational institute the responsible authority is the vital factor that provides the suitable learning environment.

Identified the context of the classroom as a very special context. The way a teacher teaches contributes a lot to the classroom context. The instructional material can in no way replace a teacher. The interpersonal behaviour of a teacher towards the learners effects the learner's motivation towards second language learning. Teachers should turn their fears into challenges and challenges into success by introducing many interesting and engaging activities in the classroom. Teaching and learning can be more meaningful if they integrate many elements in their approaches. Teacher's interpersonal behavior with the students plays a significant role as a factor in learning atmosphere where English is taught in a classroom situation as a foreign language.

## **II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:**

In this study it is investigated that English plays a negligible social role in the daily lives of the students. Arabic is the predominant language of the society Al-Quwaiyiah. Saudi Arabia. All the participants communicate and share their common Language that is Arabic, outside the class. Although these participants has been studying English as a compulsory subjects at primary, secondary and higher secondary schools in Al-Quwaiyiah. Yet their level of competence in English at this stage is still below average. They have not been as successful in oral communication as they are expected. Arabic use has been observed as a medium of instruction and communication among students and teachers. Fundamental factors included linguistics, individual, social, psychological and institutional which was largely based upon their beliefs, assumptions, needs and desires. Little exposure and less emphasize to English on the part of teachers and students have added to the situation. Lack of ESL environment in the classroom has been an additional problem.

(ESL) in the classrooms has long been a subject of debate, especially in European and Asian countries [27]. In many instances, students find EMI helpful in improving their English proficiency, however they find it hard to understand English lectures in the classrooms.

## **2.1 Objectives of the Study:**

The general objective of the study was to assess factors that affect teaching of speaking skills in English language classroom. The following are the specific objectives of the study:

1. To identify students' views on the factors that affect attitudes towards speaking English?
2. To identify and analyze the most common problems faced by them while speaking English?
3. To identify and analyze factors that participants believe are affiliated with these problems?
4. To explore possible solutions and enhance participants' communication skills?

## **III. RESEARCH METHOD:**

### **3.1 Participants**

The research population in this study consists of 148 out of 150 ESL learners. These participants belong to three different departments, foundation level (Prep year), Nursing and Laboratory students surveyed in Al-Quwaiyiah, Riyadh Saudi Arabia. The selection of the subjects was purposive in that they comprised male ESL learners who represented the different acquisition levels mentioned. These participants have been studying English at various private institutions as well as main stream secondary schools where English is claimed to be the second language after Arabic.

### **3.2 Research instrument**

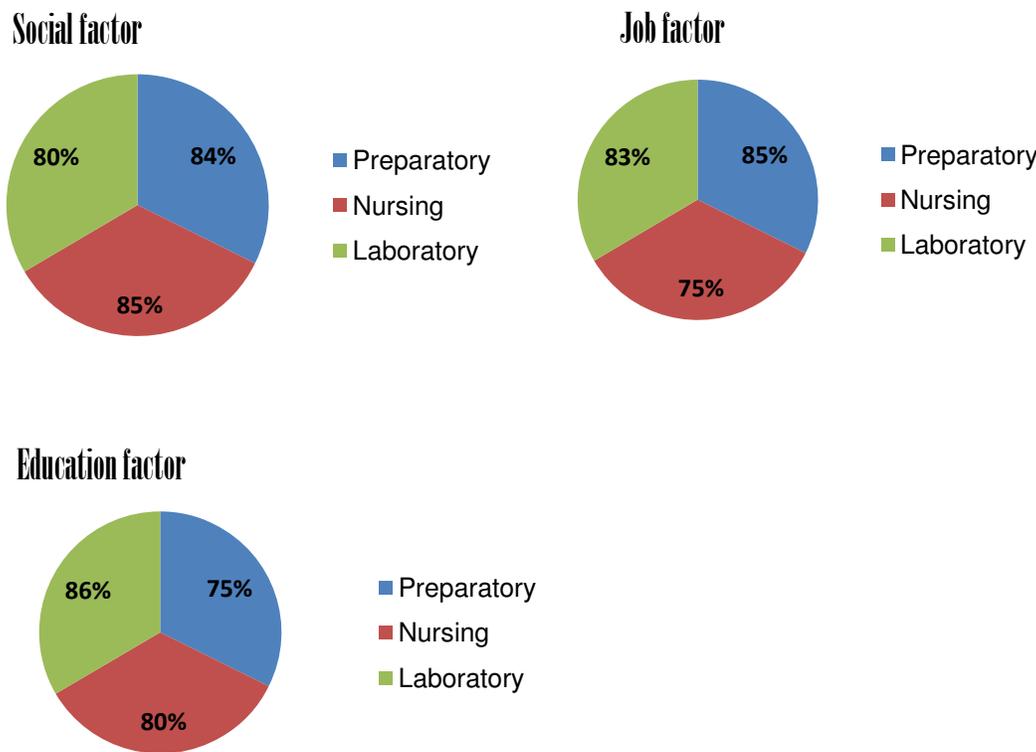
The study employed quantitative research approaches. "to heighten the dependability and trustworthiness of the data and their interpretation" [28].

To collect data, we used a questionnaire with four questions. The first one was close ended with four choices of answers. Its aim was to deal with a quantitative measurement of the responses by enumerating or rather comparing and contrasting the frequency of each of the four options provided. The relevant data was selected, coded, tallied and converted into percentages. The purpose was to determine students' perceptions of what they considered as the most influencing factor and attitude towards ESL acquisition.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

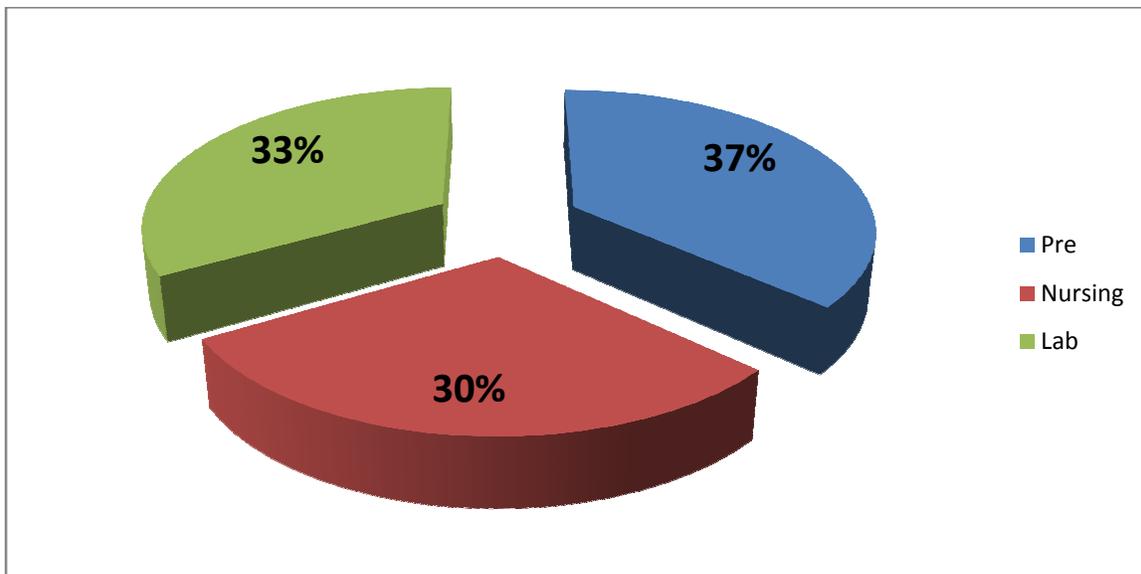
The quantitative data was analyzed by comparing frequencies of responses contained in the data so as to learn the variation in the students' choices of factors. These

are displayed in tables for easy understanding of the counts and their representative percentages regarding the comparative levels and acquisition skills examined. For the qualitative section, a simple coding system was adopted to represent clusters of responses that match in opinion, based on reflective terms learners have articulated in the open-ended segment of the questionnaire. In addition, samples of learners’ direct quotations are used verbatim to demonstrate evidence of the qualitative information where necessary.



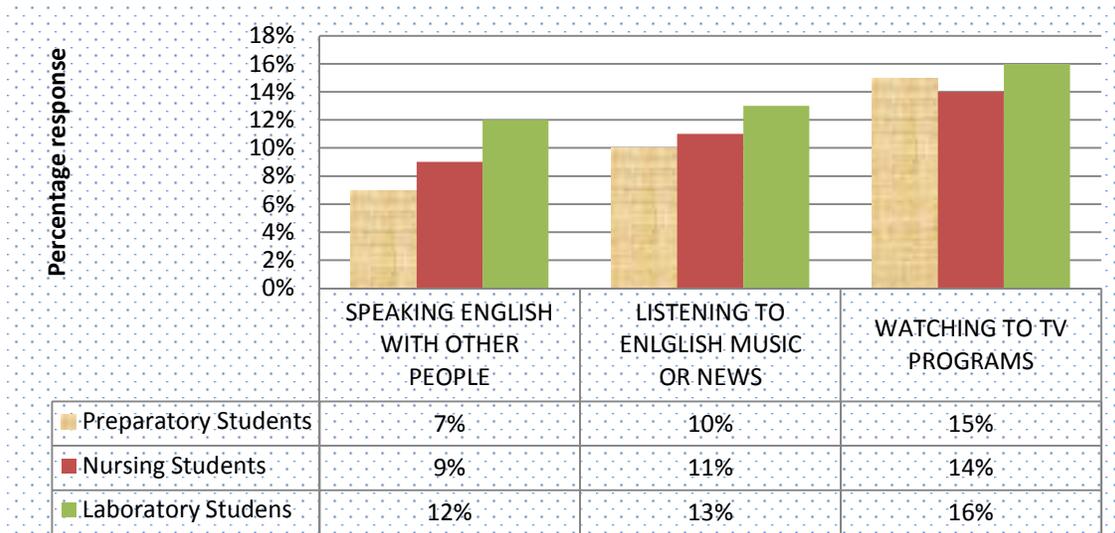
**Fig 1: Factors affecting speaking English**

**Figure1.**the figure above shows that the highest number of preparatory students an aggregate of 85% of all the three factors they perceive getting jobs is a core factor to ESL acquisition; 83% nursing students and 75% lab students were in favor of getting job. While 86% of Laboratory students 80 % nursing and 75% preparatory students agreed on higher education. The social usage of English is the lowest number of all the three factors. The highest percentage is 85%. They are aware of the advantages of being able to speak English well. These findings have been supported by Baker *et al.*, 2003[29]. Who said that learners who speak English very well can have a greater chance for better education, finding good jobs, and getting promotion.



**Fig 2: English speaking opportunity in previous classes**

**Figure 2** reveals the fact that in school, Arabic was dominant language of instruction. The students did not have a regular opportunity to expose to the target language English in their classes. It shows number of prep students an aggregate of 37% believed they had little exposure to ESL acquisition; 30% nursing students and 33% lab students believed they had little exposure to ESL acquisition during their previous schooling. That is the why, the lack of a target language environment in classroom results in a lack of involvement in real-life situations. It has been observed that speaking fluency appears to develop with increased exposure to second language input. [30].



**Fig 3: English learning activities**

**Figure3:**It shows number of students and aggregate of 7% preparatory, 9% nursing students and 12% laboratory students speak English with other people. In this way 13 % of Laboratory students, 11 % nursing and 10% preparatory student listen to English news. Furthermore 16% of Laboratory students 14 % nursing and 15% preparatory student are involved in watching TV programs.

It's an absolute fact that the highest exposure the target language can help students to perceive and conceive tasks and develop skills that would enhance learners' potential and level of competency. Listening plays an inevitable role in the development of speaking competency. The results of a study conducted by Bozorgian, 2012[31] also indicate a close correlation between listening skill and oral proficiency. He states that the higher the listening score, the better is the speaking score.

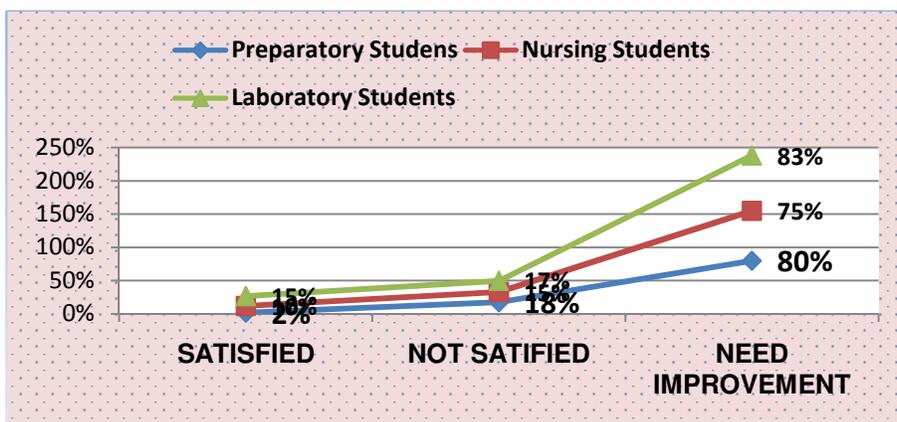


Fig 4: English speaking skill Self-assessment

Fig 4: This figure shows the number of 80%, preparatory students an aggregate of 75% nursing students and 83% lab students are in opinion that their oral skills need improvement. While 18% of Laboratory students 15% of nursing and 17% preparatory students were not satisfied with their present situation. In this way a limited number of students of all the three streams were happy with present position. The interviewers believe more speaking or oral communication practice is a good motivator toward acquisition. They are apprehensive when communicating in English despite many years of studying English in school.

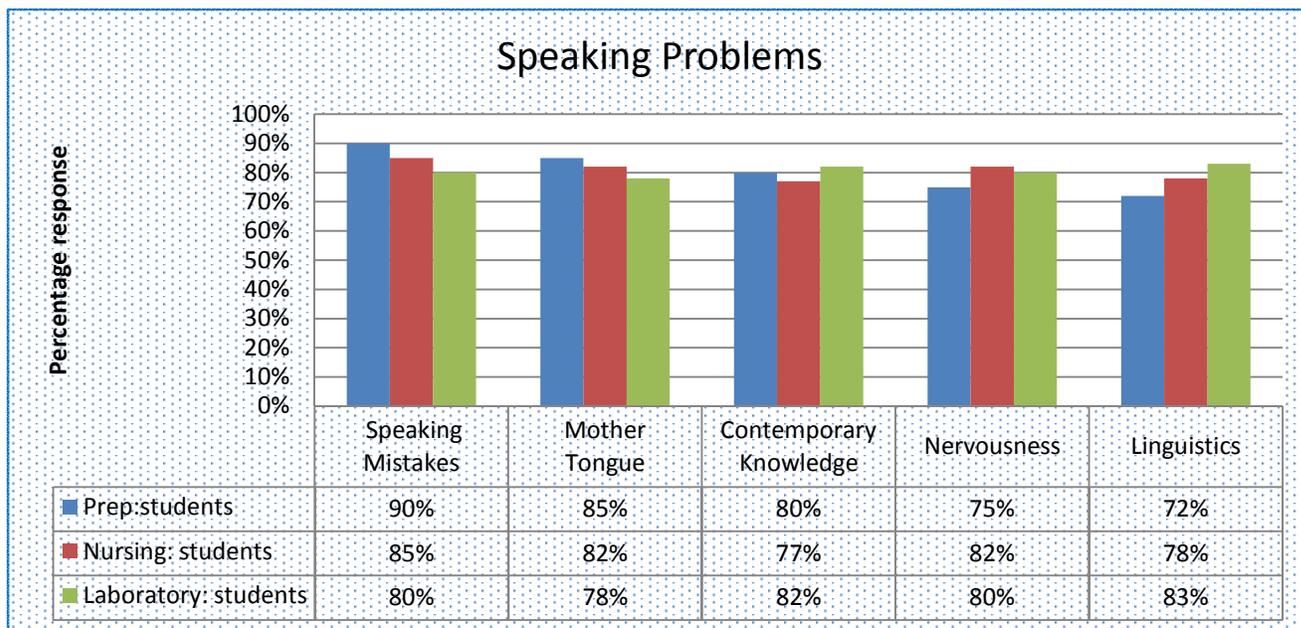


Fig 5: Students English speaking problems

**Fig 5:** This figure shows the number of 90%, preparatory students and aggregate of 85% nursing students and 80% lab students are in opinion that they make a lot of mistakes while speaking English. While 85% preparatory students 82% nursing and 78 % of Laboratory students believe there is interference of mother tongue when speaking a foreign language. In this way 80% of preparatory students 72% nursing and 82 % of Laboratory students had no clue of contemporary knowledge. Further 75% preparatory students 82% nursing and 80 % of Laboratory students feel shyness and nervousness while speaking English. Linguistics also creates hurdles a lot of students 75% preparatory, 82% nursing and 80 % of Laboratory students have problems with using proper vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar while target language English.

As it is obvious there are so many problems faced by the learners while speaking English. Teachers can come across in helping students to speak in the classroom. These are inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low participation, and mother-tongue use. According to the results of this survey, as presented in Figure 5, learners face a multitude of challenges in English speaking classrooms. Most of them identified several common areas of difficulty in speaking. They were most concerned with their low English language proficiency. Lack of vocabulary (90%) Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students identified as a big source of stress for the learners. Urrutia *et al.*, 2010[32] demonstrated that learners' oral performance was influenced by their lack of vocabulary. The present study also found that grammatical errors (90%) Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students identified as a big source of students are scared that they would make noticeable grammatical errors. Surprisingly, a large number of (90%) Preparatory students, (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students worried about their pronunciation too. It is contrary to the view of Thornbury, 2005 [33] that pronunciation is the lowest level of knowledge that learners. (90%) Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students believed that their shyness had affected their involvement in oral discussions. According to McCroskey *et al.*, 1992 [34], shyness is a behavior that could be the result of any one or a combination of factors like social introversion, unfamiliarity with academic discourse, lacking confidence in subject matter and/or communication apprehension.

When they want to say something in the classroom they are sometimes inhibited. They are worried about making mistakes and fearful of criticism. They are ashamed of the other students' attention towards themselves. Littlewood *et al.*, 2007 [16] expressed that a language classroom can also create inhibitions and apprehension for the students. Fear of making mistakes in front of classmates and teachers is another cause that deterred the students from speaking in class. Most of the subjects (90%) cared about others' opinion.

Topical knowledge is another factor that test speaker's ability. Bachman *et al.*, 1996 [20] defined it as the knowledge structures in long-term memory. That is, topical knowledge is the speakers' knowledge of related topical information. It enables students to apply language with respect to the world in which they live. Assert that topical knowledge has a great impact on the learners' speaking performance.

The topic of discussion plays a vital role in making (90%) of Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) laboratory learners willing or unwilling to speak. To the focal learners, topic familiarity, topic interest, and topic preparation are very essential to make them speak. When the topics used and discussed in the class are of no interest to the students, they become more reluctant to speak. Having enough knowledge about a

certain topic and being familiar with the register enhance one’s linguistic self-confidence, while lack of knowledge about a topic and its appropriate register result in one’s avoiding communication. MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998 [21].this study also shows that (90%) Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students of learners tend to use their mother tongue in English speaking classes. This is because, they generally start thinking about the topic in their mother tongue, decide what they want to say in their mother tongue and then translate it into English, which often results in making mistakes.

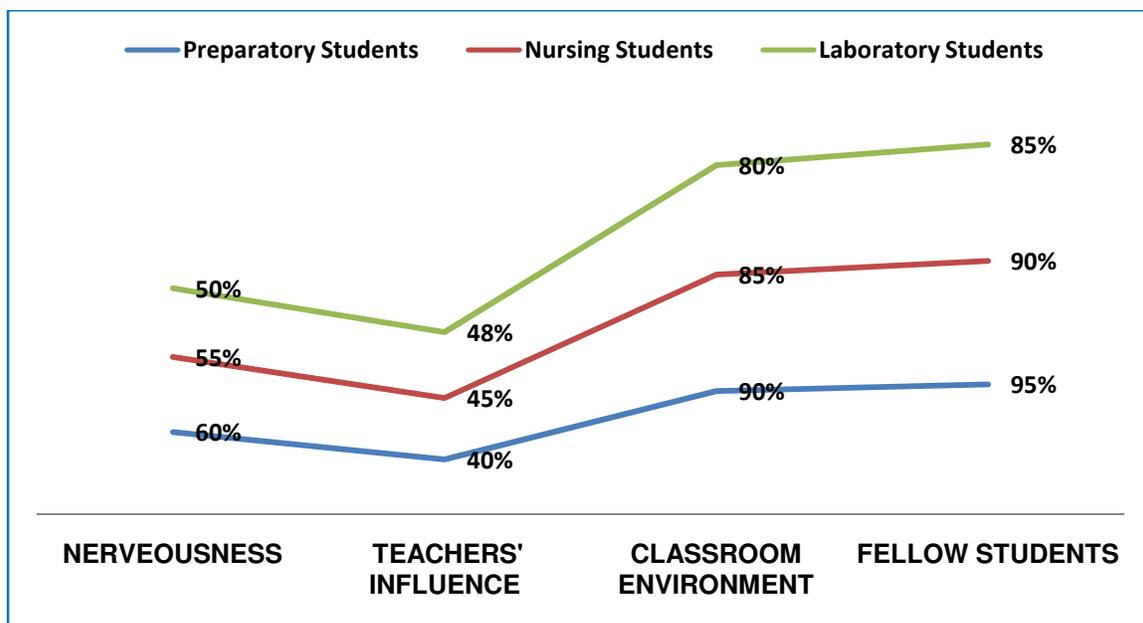


Fig 6: Social factors influencing speaking performance

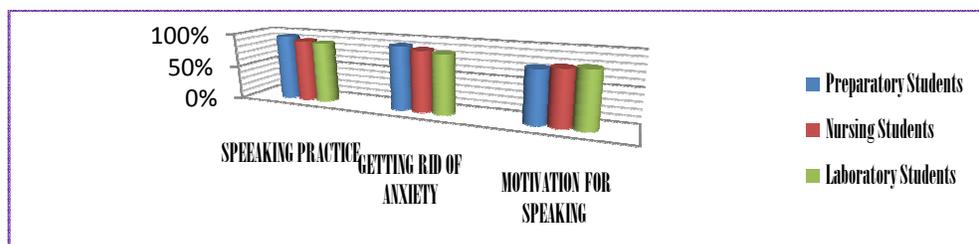
**Fig 6:**The role of teachers is the next important factor that affects the subjects’ speaking performance in the class. A good number of (90%) Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students of the students feel that the positive traits of teachers and their methods of teaching are important motivating factors to stimulate their verbal engagements in the classroom. Every action of the teacher influences the students either directly or indirectly. It has been revealed in this study that many teachers speak Arabic in English speaking classes. Using L1 means sacrificing valuable opportunities for well-motivated English language used in the class. They indirectly and unconsciously convey the message to the students that it is non-essential to speak only English in the class. Allowing learners to use mother-tongue in the classroom result is meager development of their English speaking skill. There are also cases of teachers who pronounce English words incorrectly and commit unpardonable grammatical errors while speaking with the students. Students generally take the wrong expressions for correct ones and this phenomenon goes a long way in affecting their speaking. Teachers need to know that their teaching style and competency have a great influence on the increase and decrease of their students’ motivation to speak English. The teachers should act as role models and try to lessen the pressure and anxiety that learners feel, through their customized teaching strategies.

This figure shows the results of the third research question of this study. When the students were asked to choose the factors affecting their speaking performance among the factors listed in the questionnaire, nearly all of them (90%) Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students viewed anxiety and nervousness as the

most influential factor. Speaking in front of others is the most anxiety provoking language activity. Thus, the study reinforced the findings of the earlier studies by Park *et al.*, 2005 [35] who observed in their study that a large number of learners' anxiety level was negatively related to their oral performance. Even Tanveer *et al.*, 2007 also suggests in his study that the students' feeling of stress, anxiety or nervousness may impede their language learning and performance abilities[36].

The desired goal of most students is to be as good as their peers. Sometimes this acts as a driving force for them but falling behind them can also create anxiety. This is the case with a reasonable number (90%) of Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students are affected by the fellow students or peer groups.

All the factors were considered highly impactful except for the classroom factor which was ranked rather low. Classroom environment poses little effect on students' performance. Nearly, (90%) Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students of the students observed that the atmosphere of the class, its size, number of students in the class and the arrangement of seats in the class did not have a significant role in their speaking performance. The last research question was to find out the students' suggestions of overcoming their difficulties in speaking skills.



**Fig 7: Students' suggestions for improvement**

**Figure 7:** This figure represents (90%) Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students of the students' views that it is very important to practice speaking English inside and outside the class. Many of them (90%) Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students also lay emphasis on getting rid of their anxiety. Around (90%) Preparatory students (85%) nursing students and (88%) Laboratory students feel, proper motivation arouses their interest to learn and encourages them to participate more in the class activities and oral practices. It is true that without will and desire to learn, it is difficult to achieve effective and fruitful learning.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS:

As mentioned earlier, the research population in this study was elementary and intermediate levels ESL learners surveyed in Al-Quwaiyah , Riyadh Saudi Arabia. The purpose of the study to perceive the overall factors that confronted by the participants when interact to ESL environment in the classroom. Focus on improving the English language proficiency of the teachers could help in improving the situation as students may have very little to learn from their teachers if they themselves are not truly accomplished. Moreover, teachers need to be enlightened on the various teaching strategies that may reduce their use of mother tongue in their classes.

Yet the teachers cannot solve the student's problems instead of them. Of course, the way the teacher approaches teaching, the help of the peers, classroom organization matter a lot but the students themselves control the learning process and are responsible for their progress. It is up to them to make the best of all the opportunities to improve their oral skills. We found an array of perceptions behind the use of local languages in the English only classrooms. We summarize that the best model for Saudi Arabia student is to make selective use of L1 in the L2 classrooms. According to our results, most of the students like to communicate in English and be a part of the English-only environment; however they acknowledged some key factors that prevented them from speaking English in the classrooms. Fundamental factors they spoke about were personal, linguistic and social. There were also various psychological and institutional hindrances and all these factors were largely based upon their beliefs, assumptions, needs and desires. They mentioned several social barriers including shyness while speaking in English language. This study may provide insights to the policymakers to work on issues related to communications and medium of instructions in Saudi Arabia. It may also help teachers and educators to understand the underlying factors that compel students to speak their first languages instead of English. These teachers may focus on basic communication skills in English to their students who would be learning other subjects in their own languages in Saudi Arabia. Our study also provides insights for the reformers and educators about how to give richer understanding while diluting the barriers among the students, with culturally and contextually more sustainable environment in the classroom.

#### **COMPETING INTEREST DECLARATION**

It is declared that there is no competing interest involved with this study

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