

Article History

Received/Geliş
24/11/2017

Accepted/Kabul
19/12/2017

Available Online/Yayınlanma
10/01/2018

Problems Faced Sudanese EFL Students in Using Oral Communications Tenses

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the problems faced Sudanese EFL students in using oral communications tenses through a case study of the students of El-Imam El-Mahdi University at the Faculty of Arts who majored in English Language and registered in second, third, and fourth level in the academic year 2016/2017. The sample of the study consisted of (97) Students. From among them (51) were males and (46) were females. A descriptive analytical design was employed to find out the problems that face the students when using tenses in oral communication. The study hypothesized that the students of El-Imam El-Mahdi have a problem in using tenses in oral communication. An oral communication test was used to collect the data for this study. The data were analyzed by using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). The findings of the study have shown that students of El-Imam El-Mahdi University have Problems in using tenses in oral communication due to some reasons such as the failure of using correct rules of grammar and using appropriate words. The findings also proved that there are no differences between the participants in the correct use of tenses in communication due to gender variable. The study concluded with some recommendations which offered to EFL learners, teachers of English language, administrations of universities, curriculum designers in order to help in the process of teaching and learning communication correctly and properly by using tenses to establish an environment supports and encourages the students to speak English fluently.

Keywords: *tense, error, oral communication, gender, English as a foreign language.*

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المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة لبحث المشكلات التي تواجه الطلاب السودانيين اللذين يدرسون اللغة الانجليزية باعتبارها لغة أجنبية في استخدام الأفعال استخداماً صحيحاً أثناء المخاطبة، وذلك عبر دراسة حالة أجريت على طلاب جامعة الإمام المهدي بكلية الآداب قسم اللغة الانجليزية. وكانت العينات التي أجريت عليها الدراسة طلاب المستويات الثاني والثالث والرابع للعام الدراسي 2016/2017م وعددهم (97) من الجنسين. منهم (51) من الذكور و (46) من الإناث. اتبعت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لإيجاد المشكلات التي تواجه الطلاب في استخدام الأفعال استخداماً صحيحاً أثناء المخاطبة. وقد كان الافتراض الأساس أن طلاب جامعة الإمام المهدي لديهم مشكلة في استخدام الفعل استخداماً صحيحاً في التواصل المنطوق. قام الباحثون بإجراء اختبار شفهي لجمع المعلومات لهذه الدراسة، تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS). وقد أثبتت نتائج التحليل أن طلاب جامعة الإمام المهدي بقسم اللغة الانجليزية لديهم مشكلة في استخدام الفعل استخداماً صحيحاً في المخاطبة. وتتمثل المشكلات الرئيسية في التواصل في الاستخدام الصحيح لقواعد اللغة واستخدام الكلمات المناسبة. كما أثبتت النتائج أيضاً عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين الذكور والإناث في الاستخدام الصحيح للفعل في التواصل المنطوق. وأخيراً قام الباحثون برفع بعض التوصيات لمتعلمي اللغة الانجليزية باعتبارها لغة أجنبية والمعلمين وإدارات الجامعات ومصممي المناهج بهدف تأسيس بيئة تدعم وتشجع الطلاب للمخاطبة بطلاقة في اللغة الانجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الزمن، الخطأ، التواصل المنطوق، النوع الاجتماعي، اللغة الانجليزية باعتبارها لغة أجنبية.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

There are many problems that face the students who are studying English language as a foreign language, such as writing, reading, listening and speaking and grammar. So, the purpose of this study is to investigate the use of tenses in communication among university students in order to improve the process of learning English language by putting suggestions in the hope of promoting the communication by using tenses correctly.

1.2 Statement of The Problem

Being lecturers of English language at tertiary level, the researchers have observed that students face many problems in using English tenses while communicating. This problem contributes to the drop of standards in English language among Sudanese students. So, this study is an attempt to investigate the role of the correct use of tenses in communication in the process of learning the language, with special reference to English language, concentrating on using tenses effectively in communication.

1.3 Aims of the Study

This study primarily aims to:

1. Investigate the English communication problems facing tertiary level students at El-Imam El-Mahdi University.
2. Investigate what types of errors are made regarding time and tense.
3. Identify the problems of using correct rules of grammar and using appropriate words facing the participants when using tenses in communication.
4. Put forward suggestions and solutions for students, teachers and syllabus designers in order to develop the process of perfect communication in English language at the universities.

1.4 Questions of The Study

The problem of the study can be summarized in form of the following questions:

1. What is the degree of El-Imam El-Mahdi University students' achievement in using tenses in communication?
2. Are there any differences that have statistical indications in the participants' correct use of tenses in communication due to gender variable?

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1.5 Hypotheses

The study tests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis (1)

The degree of El-Imam El-Mahdi University students' achievement in using tenses in communication is low.

Hypothesis (2)

There are differences that have statistical indications in the participants' correct use of tenses in communication due to gender variable in favour of male participants.

1.6 Significance of The Study

Finding of the following study might:

1. Help the Sudanese tertiary level students to develop their communication skills.
2. Shed a light on the current status of teaching and learning English grammar and communication at tertiary level in the Sudan by revealing the sides of strength and weakness.
3. suggest some solutions to the difficulties facing tertiary level students in using English tenses in oral communication.
4. Help teachers of English language and syllabus designers to design curricula that taking the techniques of using tenses correctly in communication into consideration.
5. Serve as a useful indicator for further researches in the area of using tenses in communication.

1.7 Scope of The Study

There are four limits in this study which are subject, sample, place and time. So, the present study was restricted to the following:

- i. Subject limit: Problems of using tenses in oral communication facing EFL Sudanese students.
- ii. Sample limit: Male and Female EFL Sudanese tertiary level students studying English language as a major subject.
- iii. Place limit: El- Imam El-Mahdi University at the White Nile State in the Sudan.
- iv. Time limit: The academic year 2016/2017.

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1.8 Method of The Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the Problems of using tenses in oral communication facing Sudanese EFL students. To achieve this aim, the study adopts the following methodology:

1.8.1 Description of The Samples

The participants of the study were (97) male and female students from the second, third and fourth level in El-imam El-Mahdi University at the White Nile State.

1.8.2 Research Design

The study uses the descriptive analytical method to find out the Problems of using tenses in oral communication facing EFL Sudanese students.

1.8.3 Data Collection Instrument

The instrument which was used for collecting data for this study is an oral communication test designed by the researchers in (2017).

1.8.4 Procedures

In the procedures, the researchers selected the topic {*talk about the Sudanese culture in the past, present, and future*} by selecting a group of boys and a group of girls randomly; then limit the time for each group. While they are talking, the researchers observe their communication, jot down the notice, and put the marks of each one at the end of his / her talk.

1.8.5 Means of Data Analysis

The data was analyzed statistically by using means, frequency, standard deviation (SD) and percentages. The statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for processing the data. Descriptive statistics are used to present the result of the study.

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2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 English Language Tense

Kent (2006) states that " tense is a form of verb that shows times of action or state of being ; whereas Ramabhadracharyulu (2009:59) views that "tense in English is the correspondence between the form of the verb and the concept of time ". According to Graver (1986:50), the term "tense" is used to refer to a verb form, not to chronological time". English verbs are used to express the aspect (simple, continuous or perfect) of an action or event. Cakir (2011:124).

2.2 Learners' Problems In Using Tenses

Cowan (2008:350) states that " use of verb forms is one of the two or three most difficult areas for English language learners to master'. As a result, EFL learners sometimes make mistakes in the proper use of verb forms as they attempt to express the time of an event in the target language.(Cited in Rahman and Ali 2015: 132).

Ellis (2008:418) distinguishes two types of challenge: (1) the difficulty learners have in understanding and expanding a grammatical feature and (2) the difficulty learners have in internalizing a grammatical feature so that they are able to use it fluently and automatically in communication.

2.3 Error Analysis

Brown (1987) says that "according to cognitive approach the making of errors is an inevitable and necessary part of language learning. The language of a language learner contains errors. The errors are made by non-native learner in learning a Second Language".

Richards in Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1985:96) defines error analysis as "the study and analysis of the errors made by second and foreign language learners".

Brown (1987) cites that "learners do make errors and these errors can be observed, analyzed and classified to reveal something of system operating within the learner lead to a surge of study of learner's errors called error analysis".

Corder (1979:260) states that, "Errors are the features of the learner's utterances which are different from those of any native speakers and the learners do not recognize their errors so that they cannot correct their errors themselves".

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2.4 Types of Errors

Besides the errors can be observed and analyzed, errors also can be divided or classified into some categories. According to Richards (1985:95), errors can be classified to vocabulary (lexical errors), pronunciation, (phonological error). Grammar (syntactic errors), misunderstanding of speaker's intention or meaning (interpretive error), productive of wrong communicative effect e.g. through the faulty use of speech act one of the rules of speaking (pragmatic error).

2.5 Grammatical Errors

A more useable approach was that discussed by Ozbek (1995), that although grammar "is the first prerequisite for effective writing", students are unable to make use of the grammar they know in composition courses. This arises because they are taught grammar in isolation, and do not have the opportunity to apply it in actual discourse.

2.6 Definition of Communication

Communication is the interaction among the people, which involves sound, gestures, and writing involving meaning. According to Chadha (2003), communication is derived from a Latin word 'communicare' which means 'to impart' 'to share' and 'to make common'. It may be defined as an exchange of facts, ideas, opinions or emotions between two or more people (Cited in Adel Alkarim (1999:9).

Pathan (2013:3) states that " The word communication is derived from the Latin terms 'cum munis' [to make common] and 'communicare' [to share]. Hence, communication is defined as the exchange of information, thoughts, ideas, feeling and the like".

Finally, Rahman (2010:2) states that "Communication is a dynamic interactive process that involves the effective transmission of facts, ideas, thoughts, feelings and values".

From the above definitions, one can conclude that communication is the sending and receiving of the message between the speaker and listener.

2.7 Oral Communication

Yamani et al (2013:255) defined Oral communication as "an interactive process in which an individual alternately takes the roles of speaker and listener".

Chadha (2003) points out, oral communication includes face-to-face conversation, telephonic conversation; radio broadcasts, interviews, group discussion, public speeches, meetings, seminars, etc. Use of different forms of oral

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communication is most common and proficiency in oral communication can be a great asset to any individual. But for most of the learners of EFL it was said that the most difficult skill of their TL for them is oral communication". (Cited in Adel Alkarim (1999:9).

According to Deverell (1974), the main fields of oral communication are: face-to-face communication, interviewing of all kinds, formal and informal speech, meetings of many kinds, and the use of the telephone and similar media for transmission of the voice.

2.8 Importance of Oral Communication

Effective oral performance skills help students to improve their own academic performance and improve their own personal effectiveness. Deepa (2012) states that "Oral communication fulfills a number of general and discipline-specific academic functions. It is vital to learn to speak, since it provides students a set of skills they can use all through their lives".

Allen (2002) states that "With strong assessment programs, administrators and faculty can demonstrate that communication skills are fundamental academic skills and are critical to students' success in college and beyond". (Cited in Raga 2013:13)

2.9 Problems of Oral Communication

Wei and Zhang (2013:69) say that oral language competence is a complex phenomenon that "includes knowing the phonics, tone, grammar, words, rules of spoken language, cultural characters of language and using the proper language forms in the certain situation and non-language forms to overcome some difficulties in the language communication strategically . (Cited in Al Asmari (2015).

In a study conducted by Shteivi and Hamuda (2016:19), the findings revealed that there were some problems get in the way when speaking English by some graduates in the faculty of Education, English majors such as lack of the time allotted for teaching this skill, Lack adequate exposure to English inside and outside the classroom, lack of some grammatical and pronunciation components, lack of retrieving the suitable vocabulary during oral communication, lack of word collocation and lack of not being use English out-side the classes, Students are not exposed to native speakers.

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Abdellah (2002: 99) conducted a study in which its findings have revealed that the main problems that face Sudanese EFL learners in oral communication are problems of pronunciation, weakness of speaking skills, difficulty in communication and lack of fluency.

Ella and Dapudong (2014,:211) maintain that "The problem in English communication proficiency could be attributed to the students' limited opportunities to practice the language they are acquiring. While on the other hand, it could be due to the flaw of institutional curricular programs".

2.10 Improving the Process of Using Tenses in Communication

Skolverket, 2000:1). States that "The school in its teaching of English should aim to ensure that pupils develop their ability to use English to communicate in speech and writing". " Hedstrom, (2001:76) as cited by Andersson (2008:3) maintains that "To use the correct time and tense of the verb is of great importance in communication. Firstly, one has to use the right tense of the verb to convey the correct information and secondly, one has to use the language correctly otherwise both the writer as well as the message run the risk of not being taken seriously by the receiver".

2.11 The Best Method for Teaching Communication Correctly by Using Tenses

The primary goal in language teaching is to enable students to communicate using the target language. Many of these same methodologists emphasize the acquisition of linguistics structures and vocabulary. Adherents of the communicative approach acknowledge that structures and vocabulary are important. However, they feel that the preparation for communication will be inadequate if only these are taught. Ahmed (2008:67) states that "students may know the rules of language usage and will be unable to use the language. When we communicate we use the language to accomplish some functions, such as arguing, persuading, or promising. Moreover we carry out these functions within social context".

The listener gives the speaker feedback as to whether or not he/she understands what the speaker has told. In this way the speaker can revise what he/she has said and tried to communicate his intended meaning again, if necessary. Therefore the researchers views that communicative approach is the best method for teaching students in order to use tenses correctly while they communicate with each other

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3. Methodology of The Study

3.1 Research Design

Descriptive analytical design was employed to find out the problems of using tenses in communication among EFL Sudanese tertiary level students in the white Nile state from El-Imam El-Mahdi University.

3.2 Samples of The Study

Sample for this study was drawn from Students of El-imam El-mahdi University, Faculty of arts, English language Department, second, third and fourth levels. The sample of the study consisted of (97) Students. From among them (51) were males and (46) were females.

Table (3.1): Distribution of Samples Based on Level and Gender

Level	Gender	Number	Total
Second level	Male	23	44
	Female	21	
Third level	Male	18	34
	Female	16	
Fourth level	Male	10	19
	Female	9	
Total	Male	51	97
	Female	46	

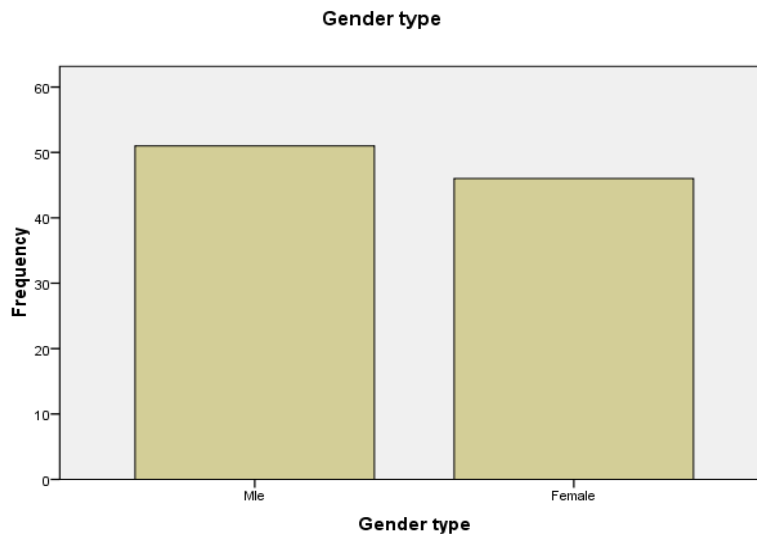


Figure (3.1): Distribution of Samples Based on Gender

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3.3 Data Collection Instruments

To study the relation between using tenses and oral communication an oral communication test was constructed by the researchers (2017) as an instruments for data collection.

The oral performance test has been prepared by the researchers to the students of second, third, and fourth level at the Faculty of Arts in El-Imam El Mahdi University so as to measure the students' performance in using tenses while they communicate.

The oral communication test included Presentations. This activity was conducted by the Researchers, so as to measure the students' Performance in oral communication with great focus or on using tenses. The major question was (*Talk briefly about the Sudanese culture in the present, past and future*) within 10 to 15 minutes. The degrees of the test were 10 and the estimations are (excellent, very good, pass, failed)

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures included the conducting and collecting of the oral communication test. The participants were tested individually. This Test was performed in front of the instructor and colleagues. Each participant was given 10 to 15 minutes to deliver his/her Presentation. The researchers evaluated the participants performance according to the following criteria: using tenses correctly, using correct rules of grammar and using appropriate words.

The researchers transferred the required data to Microsoft excel spreadsheet. Then the participants name were coded into numbers to hide their identities. The degrees which represented in the oral communication test were organized and represented.

3.5 Analysis of The Written Test

The data acquired from the learners scores on the oral communication test were analyzed by using SPSS (version 19) and statistics was calculated from the study instrument to examine the relations between the study variables.

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4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Introduction

In this section, the presentation of results of students' oral test was presented sustained with tables and figures followed by the discussion of results.

4.2 Representation of Question and Hypothesis (1)

Question (1): What is the degree of the achievement of the students of El-Imam El-Mahdi University in using tenses in communication?

Hypothesis (1): The degree of the achievement of the students of El-Imam El-Mahdi University in using tenses in communication is low.

To answer this question and test its hypothesis, the researchers applied a one sample T- test for a medium of a single community. The table below represents this procedure.

Table (4:1) Results of The Oral Communication Test

Dimension	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test value	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Deduction
oral communication achievement	97	58.5385	5.42873	69	-15.537-	64	.000	Low achievement

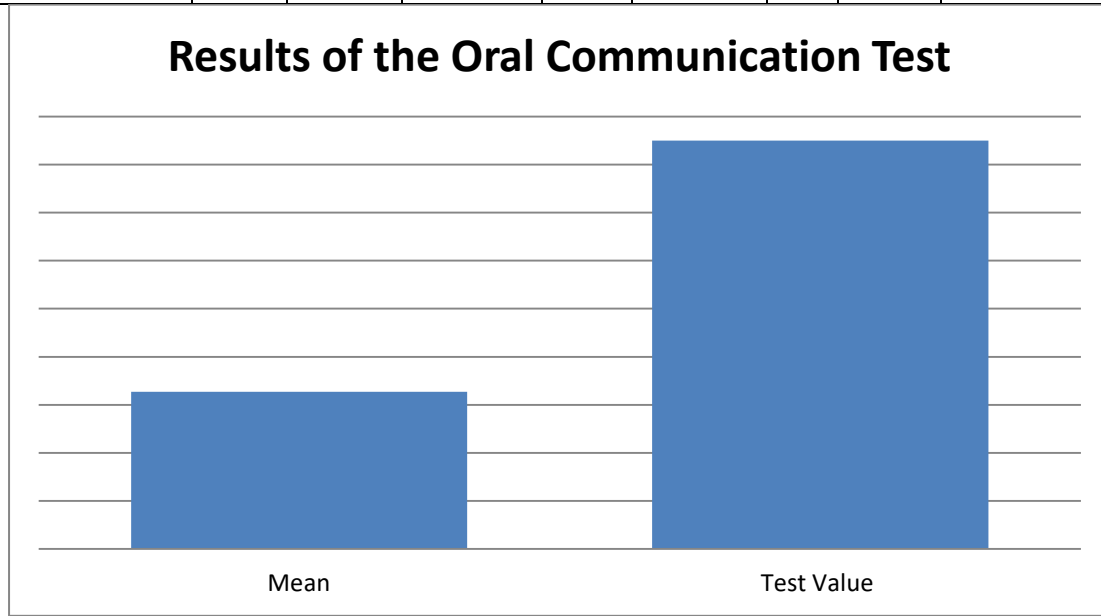


Figure (4:1) Results of the oral communication test

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Table and figure (4.1) shows that T value is (-15.537-) at a significant level (.000) which is less than (.05). The arithmetic mean (58.5385) is less than the test value which is (69). This indicates that the degree of the achievement of the students of El-Imam El-Mahdi University in using tenses in communication is low. Which means that they face difficulties in the correct use of English tenses in communication. Thus, hypothesis (1) is accepted.

4.3 Presentation of Question and Hypothesis (2)

Question (2): Are there any differences that have statistical indications in the participants' correct use of tenses in communication due to gender variable??

Hypothesis (2): There are differences that have statistical indications in the participants' correct use of tenses in communication due to gender variable in favour of male participants.

In order to explore the differences between males and females participants in the achievement in oral communication test due to gender variable, the researchers have calculated the mean and standard deviation of each group separately, then applying a T-test for the difference between the mean of two independent groups.

Table (4.2): Independent Samples Test of The Achievement in Oral Communication Test Due to Gender Variable

gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Result
male	51	58.5172	5.17287	-.028-	63	.978	No differences
female	46	58.5556	5.69935				

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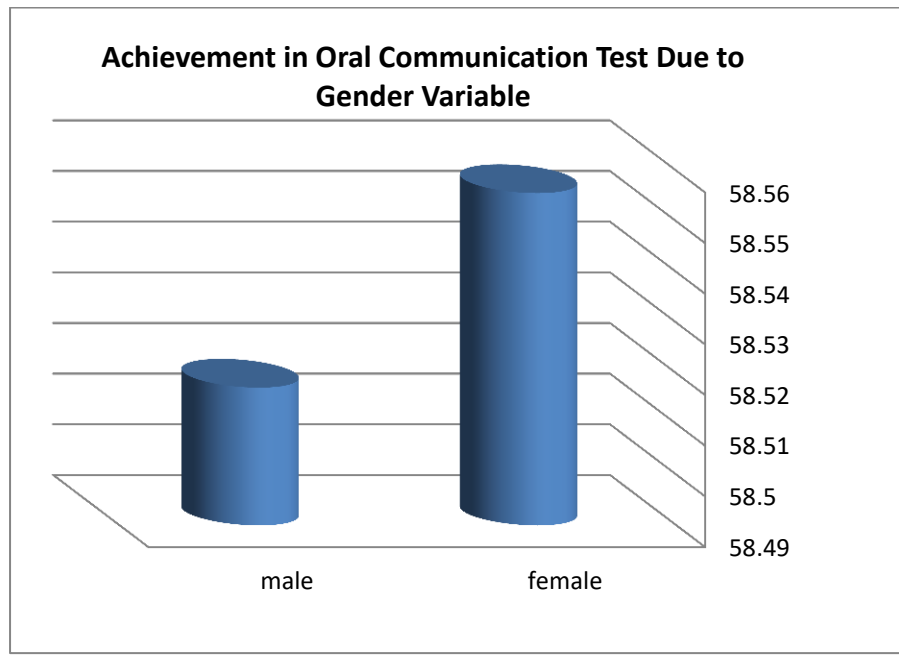


Figure (4.2): Independent Samples Test of The Achievement in Oral Communication Test Due to Gender Variable

Table and figure (4.2) show that the significant level is (.978) which is greater than (.05). This indicates that the differences have no statistical indication and the interpretation is that there are no differences in the achievement in oral communication test between female and male participants due to gender variable. So, hypothesis (2) is rejected.

5. Conclusion, Findings and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study has taken practical and theoretical approach to identify the importance of using tenses correctly in communication in order to facilitate the process of understanding when an action happens and also helps the students to communicate correctly with native speakers and among themselves inside and outside the lecture - rooms.

The study was conducted for the following purposes: to find out the Sudanese EFL students' weakness in the use of tenses in oral communication in English Language. To discover the reasons behind the problems. To provide solutions, suggestions in order help Sudanese EFL learners to overcome the problems which face them in using tenses when engaged in oral communication in English Language. The study used the oral communication test as an instrument to collect the data. The sample is Sudanese EFL students and the second, third and

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fourth tertiary level specialized in English language at the Faculty of Arts in El-Imam El-Madi University.

5.3. Findings

A number of findings were obtained. They can be summarized as follow:

(1) It was found that the degree of the achievement of the students of El-Imam El-Mahdi University in using tenses in communication is low. Which means that they face difficulties in the correct use of English tenses in communication due to some reasons such as the failure in using correct rules of grammar and in using appropriate words.

(2) It was also found that there are no differences in the achievement in oral communication test between female and male participants due to gender variable. That means both male and female students fail to use English tenses correctly in communication .

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be made:

(1) Syllabus designers should provide grammar text books with explicitly explanation to all tenses and their examples within short stories, and any tense must be underlined.

(2) There should be more exercises for written and spoken tenses so as to enable the Students to practice using the tenses correctly in spoken language.

(3) Native speakers should be invited to the class rooms to help the students mastering communication skills.

(4) More Practice of speaking and communication in English language, and more reading and listening of English texts should be focused on.

(5) Teachers should think critically in order to find creative approach in teaching grammar so that the students will take much participation during the learning process.

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(6) Teachers of English language should concentrate on teaching the language and not about the language. That means to teach what people say when they actually communicate.

(7) Grammar should be taught implicitly not explicitly, which means to teach grammar in use not usage.

(8) Improving the methods of language teaching at the university level by adopting the communicative method of language teaching

(9) Students should be active inside and outside the lecture room. The researchers recommend the students to get benefit of their free time; particularly while they are in groups or team work. They should practice using tenses correctly while they communicate with each other.

(10) Oral activities should be increased in English language syllabuses so as to enhance the oral communication abilities among Sudanese students.

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