

أعاقلة الطلاقة لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجامعات العراقية

أ.م. د. وفاء مخلص فيصل

جامعة بابل/ كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية /قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

البريد الإلكتروني Email : hum.wafaa.mukhlus@uobabylon.edu.iq

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The Fluency Hindrance of Iraqi EFL University Students

Asst.Prof. Dr.Wafaa Mokhlos Faisal

University of Babylon/ College of Education for Human Sciences / Dept.
of English

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الملخص باللغة العربية

التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية بطلاقة من قبل متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة اجنبية هي قضية شائكة في البلدان الغير ناطقة باللغة الإنجليزية. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تحديد الاسباب وراء اعاقه طلاقة طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية و معرفة العوامل التي تؤثر على طلاقة اللغة الانجليزية و تقديم اقتراحات لتحسين طلاقة طلاب الجامعات العراقية الذين يدرسون اللغة كلغة اجنبية لاكتشاف الأسباب الرئيسية لهذه الإعاقة في أداء طلبة الجامعات العراقية في اقسام اللغة الانجليزية . تناول هذا البحث مشكله محدده في قسمين للغة الانجليزية في جامعة الكوفة وجامعة بابل – كليات التربية للعلوم الانسانية وقد اتخذت الدراسة 62 طالبا كعينة من هذين القسمين واخضاعهم للاستبيان. بعد جمع وتحليل أجوبة العينة، ظهرت عدة نتائج منها: افتقار المعاني والمصطلحات، عدم الكفاءة النحوية وقلة استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية، قلة التحدث، القراءة ، والاستماع الى اللغة الإنجليزية استخدام الطالب للغة الانجليزية في الغالب للدراسة فقط واجتياز الامتحانات مما يتطلب حضور الندوات والاجتماعات والاستماع الى متحدثين اصليين وأخيرا

دمج استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية مع اللغة الام. وبناء" على ذلك يتوجب على القائمون على عملية التعليم في تلك المؤسسات ايجاد حلول لهذه المشاكل لتحسين طلاقة المتعلمين.

Abstract

Speaking English fluently by EFL learners is an issue in those countries that do not speak English. The aims of this study are identifying the reasons behind the hindrance of fluency of Iraqi EFL students, figuring out the factors that influence fluency of English and giving suggestions for improving the fluency of Iraqi EFL university students to figure out the main reasons that cause hindrance in the speech of the students of the departments of English. This research has tackled a specific problem in two departments of English, at the University of Kufa- college of Education and the University of Babylon- College of Education for Human Sciences. The study has surveyed 62 students from those two departments of English , a designated questionnaire has been distrusted among the students. After collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher has found that the main causes of hindrance are: poor vocabulary, grammar inaccuracy, low use of English speaking, reading, and listening issues, They use English mostly just for their study to pass exams so they need attending symposiums, meetings, and listen to native speakers and finally mixing English with their native language. So the authorities in those institutions must work on those problems to improve the students' fluency.

1.Introduction

Learning to speak English is a continuing problem in the world as everyone wants to speak this global language. Learners want to speak English to communicate, read and listen to people, audio clips, and videos. This research has tackled a specific problem in two departments of English, at the University of Kufa- college of Education and the University of Babylon- College of Education for Human Sciences. The problem is the fluency of the students in the departments, so many students are very competent and knowledgeable but they can't speak fluently, they stammer and commit mistakes, they exert a great effort to speak in a flow continuous speech. This research has stated the main causes that hinder the students' fluency. A questionnaire has been designed to diagnose those causes. 62 students from the two departments of English have been selected randomly to participate in the questionnaire. After answering the questions of the questionnaire, the data have been analyzed and concluded.



The Fluency Hindrance of Iraqi EFL University Students

The study had been designed to answer the following questions:

- 1-What is fluency?
- 2-What are the reasons for fluency hindrance?
- 3-How can the fluency of Iraqi EFL students be improved?

by answering the above questions, the research aims at :

- 1-Identifying the reasons behind the hindrance of fluency of Iraqi EFL students.
- 2- Figuring out the factors that influence fluency of English.
- 3- Improving the fluency of Iraqi EFL university students.

The research will be limited to Iraqi EFL students of the departments of English in the College of Education for Human Sciences - the University of Babylon and the College of Education - University of Kufa. The data will be collected from the students of fourth-year students during the academic year 2024-2025 .

A theoretical background will be presented about the meaning of fluency, accuracy and the factors that influence it. Then a brief account of the communication strategies of the second language will be stated. The data of the research will be collected from the students of the two departments . The data will be analyzed to figure out the results by doing statistical analysis by Microsoft excel program.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Fluency

Accuracy can be defined as the ability to speak a language with any kind of hindrance or stammering without any kind of problems. In other words, fluency is speaking a language effectively and clearly (Pineda, 2017). Fluency is only speaking a foreign language but also speaking that language without hesitation or stammering (Lynda ,2017). From another perspective, fluency is not the way to speak effectively, but also the way to understand what is said. It helps the speaker communicate with the society members (Riso, 2013). Fluency means that the number of pauses is not excessive, the pauses should be normal and only between clauses and sentences. Those pauses can be perceived as a part of the rhythm of speech, but if the pause is more than required, this will be regarded as a kind of hindrance in the speakers' speech (Ullakonoja, 2009).

2.2 Fluency of English language learners



Learners of English may commit mistakes in the grammatical rules while speaking, they may feel a bit unsure. They may feel that they have reached a good level to speak English but they do not have enough confidence to speak fluently. This is usual, the learners might achieve a good level of learning English by the traditional ways of learning English, but the learners must exert extra efforts to reach a good level of fluency (Krashen 1981). There are several ways to improve the fluency of the English language such as speaking in the mirror if you couldn't find direct physical contact with a real speaker (Leonard 2015). Another way of improving fluency is joining a specific programme that involves participating in speaking situations with real speakers (Lundquist 2008). When a learner of English speaks with a native speaker of English, that native speaker will lose a lot of time because the learner takes much time to recall his ideas and pick up the suitable words for the situation (Abley 2003). There are several types of research and programmes whose purpose is not only how to write and read in English but also how to speak it fluently (Bygate 1987).

2.3 Accuracy

Most of the English courses try to teach and focus on grammar and vocabulary, but if the learners want to speak fluently, they must join certain courses that focus on grammar and communication to achieve fluency. The teacher in such courses must stress the accuracy of communication to make their learners fluent. There are several ways to make learners accurate such as watching videos, using technological devices, computer programmes, and smartboards. The accuracy of a speaker could be measured according to four syntactic categories: subject-verb agreement, past tense, negation, and clitic object pronouns (Pineda 2017).

Accuracy and fluency cannot be learned separately, they work together to make the speakers perform effectively, fluency means speaking a language without hesitation or stammering and accuracy means avoiding errors, the learner must focus on both of them to be an effectively fluent speaker (Bachman & Palmer 1996).

2.4 Communication strategies in a second language

Speaking a native language does not require a great effort to recall words or grammatical constructions, but speaking a second language requires a bigger effort to recall words and constructions, this process causes a kind of hindrance and hesitation. There are certain strategies to overcome this problem.



1-Approximation: this process means using a more general word than the missed word such as furniture instead of a chair or animal instead of rabbit.

2-Paraphrase: it means the speaker can explain the word with a phrase if he missed those words e.g. I cleaned the room with..... it is a machine that sucks air.

3-Invention: in this way the speaker can invent a word or some words instead of the missing words such as picture place instead of an art gallery.

4-Mims/ gestures: this strategy means using body language to explain the word such as clapping to explain the word "applause" (Ellis 1985).

2.5 Methods for improving your spoken English without a speaking partner

•**Think in English:** one of the reasons that make hindrance in fluency is the thinking in one language to perform or speak another. For Arabic natives who want to learn English, most of them think in Arabic first and then they try to translate their thought to English then say their thoughts, this process takes time and causes hindrance, so the solution is that the learner must train his mind to think in English directly, for example, the learner must think where to go, what eat for breakfast, what to wear for work today and the like, in this way the learner will train his mind to think in English rather than his native language, that way will lead to fluency (Susan & Selinker 2008).

•**Talk to yourself:** sometimes the speaker cannot make direct physical contact with real speakers, what to do? There is a useful way to practice English easily, to talk to yourself. This process will make the speaker listen to his thought aloud and think in English much better and faster, the learner may commit some mistakes, it is ok to have mistakes as those mistakes will help him do better in the future (Cook, 2008).

•**Use a mirror:** another way to improve fluency is to talk to yourself in the mirror, choose a topic and try to make a conversation in the mirror, this way is useful to see yourself speaking and consider your mistakes. This process will let the speaker observe himself concerning the movement for the organs of speech and the body and facial language. It also helps the speaker trust him/herself speaking without any kind of fear or hesitation (Sandra 2013).

•**Focus on Fluency:** The speaker of English as a second language must pay a lot of attention to fluency rather than grammar, when the speaker is thinking about the following grammar all the time, this will make him hesitate and as a result, he will make mistakes. But if the speaker focuses on speaking fluently, he will make some mistakes but still understood (Susan & Douglas, 2002).

•**Listen and repeat:** listening is one of the skills that contribute a great role in learning a language. Listening to some videos on the internet or T.V. channels can be useful in two ways: the first is that it trains your listening ear to hear and practice English words, the second thing is that the speaker will imitate the speech in the same way he hears it, this will train his organs of speech to pronounce the words and structures easily and fluently (Cook 2008).

3.Data description and analysis

3.1 Data description

The sample of the study consists of sixty-one students, thirty-three students from the department of English in the College of Education for Human Sciences- the University of Babylon, and twenty-eight students from the department of English in the College of Education -University of Kufa. The rational for including 4th year students is justified by their advanced level of knowledge and greater academic maturity. The sample asked to answer the questionnaire (provided in the attached file https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ormzURLX3IEGTp4BxnJo1Eu_a8QAk_B62/view) which involves twenty-two questions about the reasons for using English, the causes that hinder the fluency of students, and other factors .

The answers to the questionnaire have been categorized and calculated according to the statistical techniques of the Microsoft Excel program . Each question will be equipped with an illustrative diagram or chart to show the percentages of results.

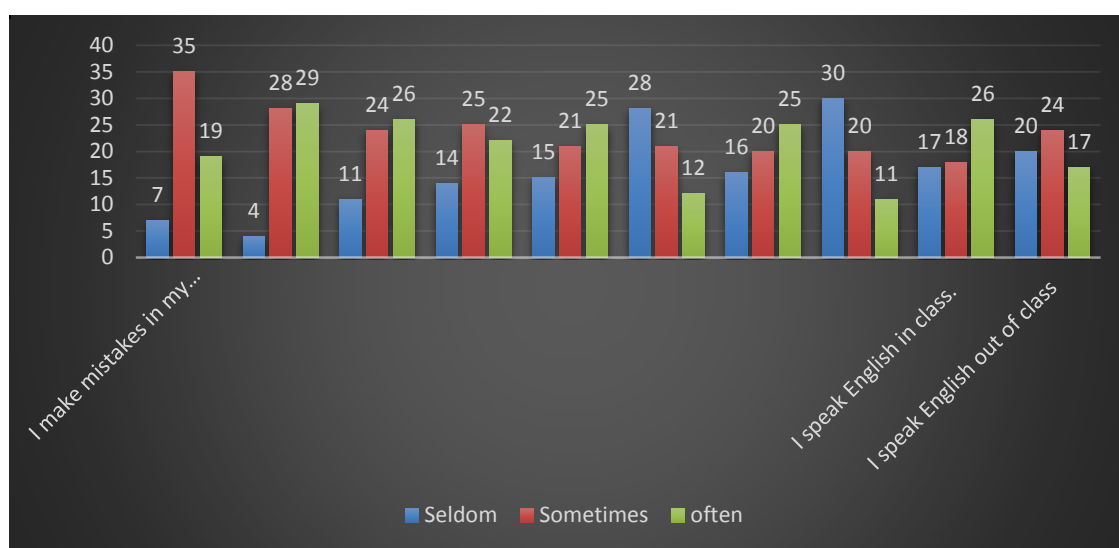
3.2 Data analysis

3.2.1 The analysis of the results of questions one to ten



Question one to ten were about the mistakes that students commit in different situations and occasions as illustrated in(figure 1). From the students' answers we notice that , the most prominent mistakes are in pronunciation as 35(57.37%) students out of sixty-one sometimes commit mistakes in pronunciation , 19 (31%) of them often and 7 (11.47) seldom commit mistakes in pronunciation . The next prominent score comes in the grammar mistakes ,students were divided equally between sometimes 28 (45.90%) and often 29 (47.54%) make grammar mistakes, and 4 (6.55%) for seldom. The scores of the third question is that students often (can't remember some vocabulary when speaking) 26 (42.62%) for often , 24(39.34%) for sometimes and 11(18.03%) for seldom. The fourth prominent score in those ten questions is the fourth question when most students (speak with pauses and hesitation), 25 (40.98%) students sometimes hesitate when they speak and 22 (36.06%) students often hesitate when they speak English and 14 (22.95%) seldom hesitate and speak with pauses . In question five (use substitution words for those that they don't know) 25 (40.98 %) is for often , 21(34.42%) for sometimes and 15(24.59%) for seldom while the results of answers of question six (asking for repetition clarification when communicating with others) involves the following, 28 (45.90%) for seldom , 21 (34.42%) for sometimes and 12(19.67%) for often. The results of question seven (worry about making mistakes when talking in English) reveal that 25(40.98%) for often ,20 (32.78%)for sometimes and 16 (26.22%)for seldom . According to question no. eight(I ammisunderstood by my listeners) the results imply that 30(49.18%)for seldom, 20 (32.78%) for sometimes and 11(18.03%) for often . The answers of the students for the question no. nine are as follows ,26(42.62%) for often , 18(29.50%) for sometimes , and `17(27.86%) for seldom . The results of the tenth question which reads (I speak English out of class) are as follows 24(39.34%) for sometimes , 20 (32.78%) for seldom and 17(27.86%) for often .All the frequencies of the results of the first ten questions are illustrated in (figure 1)

Figure (1) Frequencies of results of questions one to ten.

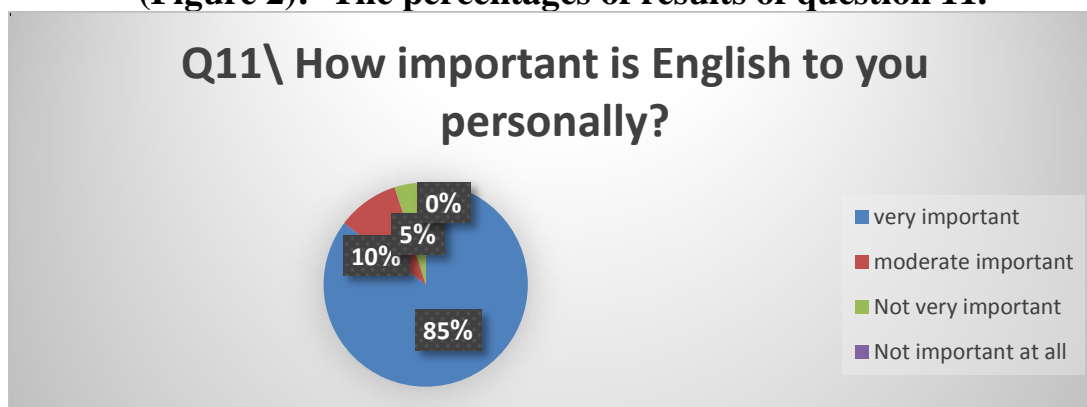


The students of the English departments commit mistakes in pronunciation and in grammar because of many reasons like the difference in phonology between the foreign and the native languages , each language has its certain intonation, rhythm, stress, sound and grammatical system ,and because of the interference between the two languages, lack practice and also because too much information which are given in the two academic semesters for Iraqi university students at English departments make them feel overloading to concentrate and master.

3.2.2 The analysis of the results of questions 11 to 22

- Question number 11 is about the importance of English to the personality of students. From the scores in the questionnaire, it has been found that English is very important for the personality of the students with a percentage of 85%, the other 10% goes to moderate importance for their personality. the other 5% is for not of great importance and 0% for not important at all. See(figure 2) below.

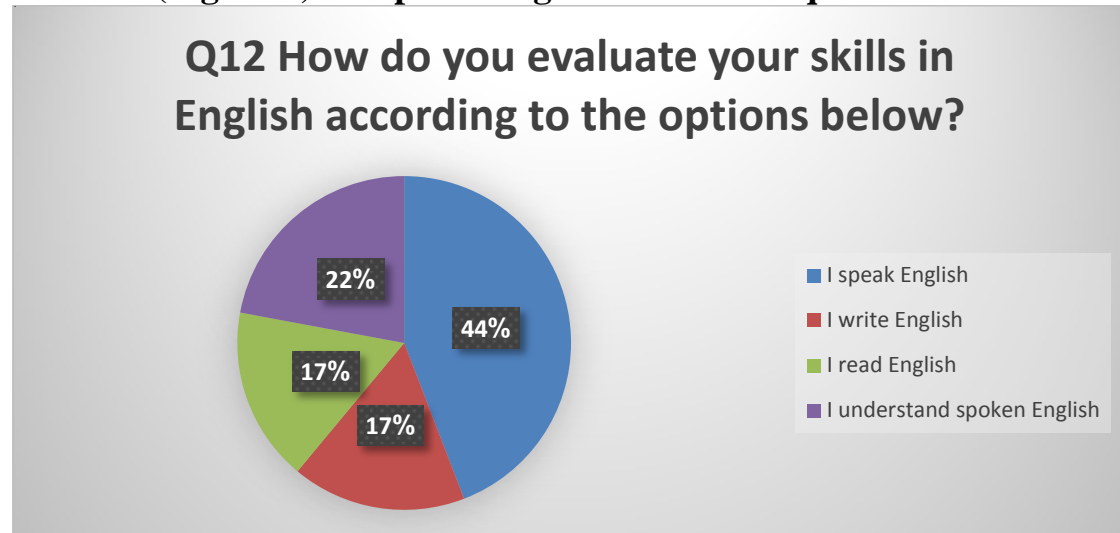
(Figure 2): The percentages of results of question 11.





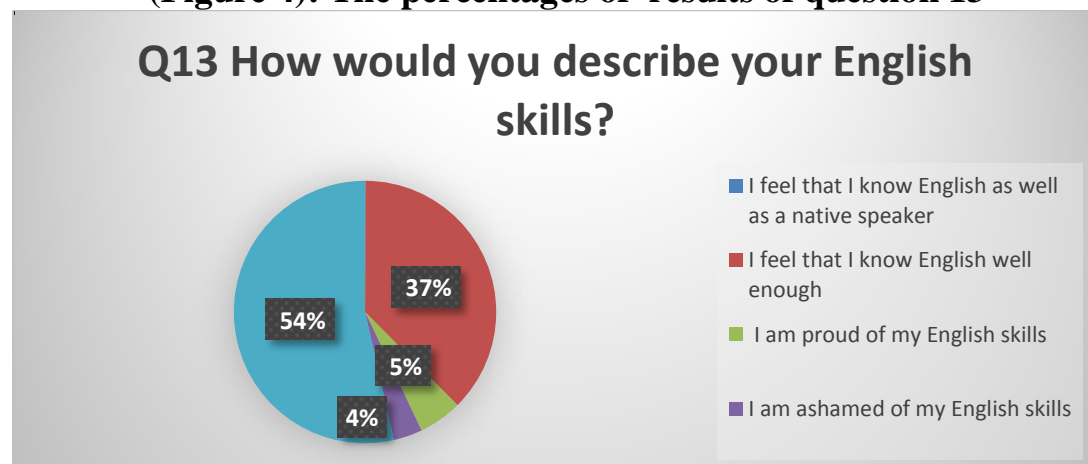
Question number 12 concerned the evaluation of the students' four skills, 44% of the students admit that their English speaking is the best skill, the next skill is understanding the spoken English which scores 22%, writing English well comes in the third rank to be 17%. The skill reading comes at the same rank to be 17% also, as shown in(figure 3).

(Figure 3) The percentages of results of question 12



Concerning the evaluation of the student's English skills in question 13, the answers show that 54% of students approve that they need to learn more about English, 37 % acknowledged that they know enough about English, 5% are proud of their English as they can use and communicate easily, 4% are ashamed of their level of English skills and need more work to improve it, finally, none of the participants proves that they have English as a native language. All the percentages above are shown in the figure below.

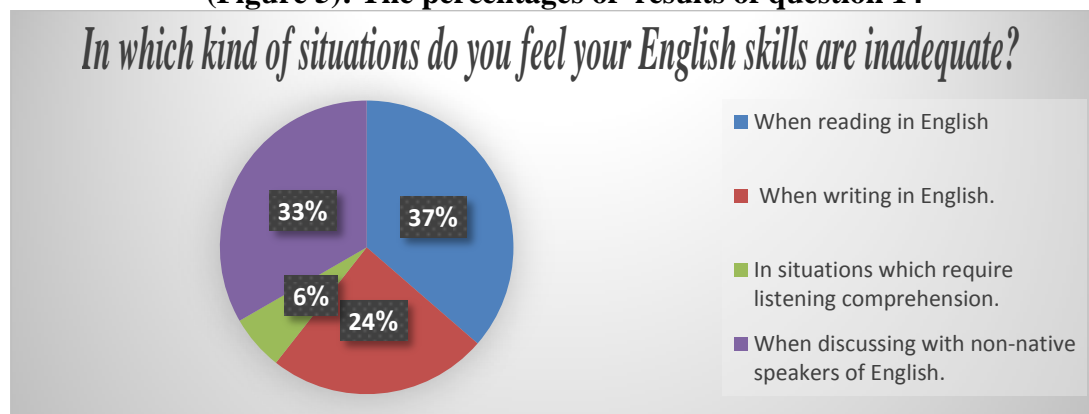
(Figure 4): The percentages of results of question 13



In question 14 students are asked to specify which skill they perform inadequately than others, 37% of the students said that they perform

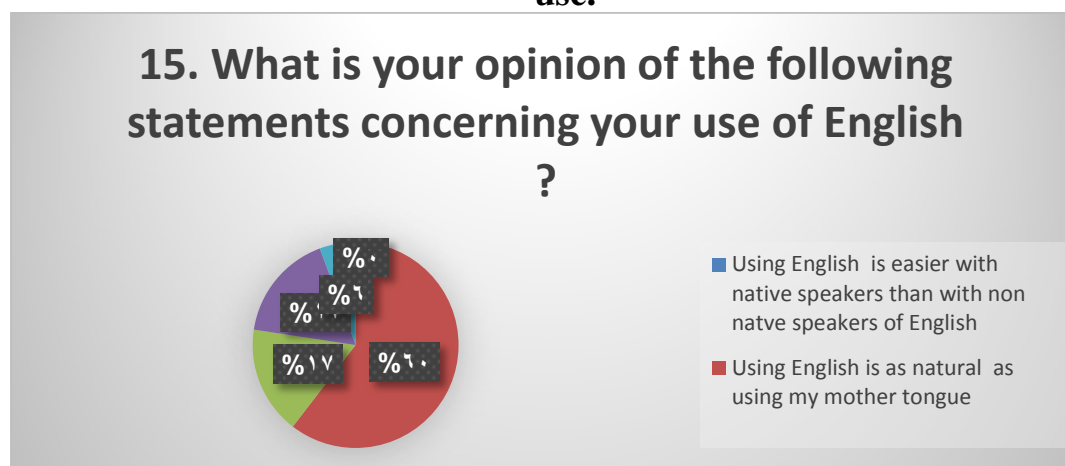
inadequately in reading, whereas 33% of them perform inadequately in the discussion with non-native speakers of English. 24% of the students showed that their writing skill is inadequate then other skills, finally, only 6% of the student showed that they perform better in a situation that required comprehension. See figure (5).

(Figure 5): The percentages of results of question 14



In question 15, the students were asked to record their first reaction about the way they use their English, most of them with 60% showed that their use of English is natural as native, but this does not mean that their language is native-like, but this means that they feel comfortable when they use their English, this is why it is natural. 17% of the students use English when they have the opportunity to do this, also another 17% of the students use English when it is necessary. The least percentage with 6% is for those students who use English to be fluent, finally, non of the student who participated in the questionnaire stated that using English is easier with native speakers because none of them has any contact with native speakers. See Figure (6) below

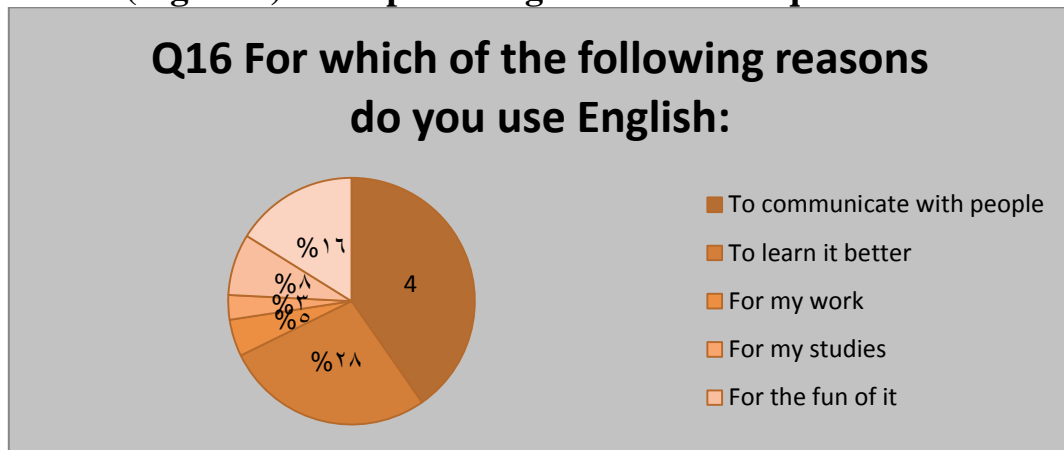
(Figure 6) :Students' opinions about statements concerning English use.





Question 16 is about the reason behind using English by students, the most prominent use of English is to communicate with other people with a percentage of 40 %, the next dominant use of English with 28 % is that the students use English to learn English better, the third rank of the usage of English is for collecting or searching for information with a percentage of 16 %. The other uses are only minor with percentages of 3%, 5%, and 3% for the uses of fun, works, and studies respectively. See figure (7)

(Figure 7) : The percentages of results of question 16



When asked about mixing English with the native language, students state that the majority of them with 89% prove that they mix English with Arabic. The rest of them include 11% percent mix writing only. See the figure below .

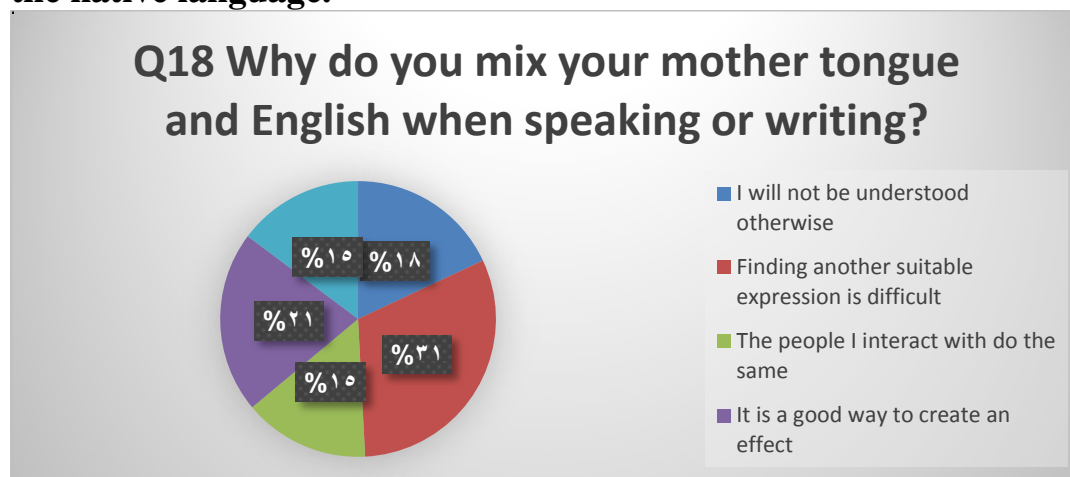
(Figure 8): The degree of mixing English with native language.



Question 18 was about the type of mixing English with Arabic, whether in writing or speaking. Question 18 is about the reason behind mixing the native language with English, according to the answer of the students, 31% of them think that it is difficult to find another suitable expression in English, 21% of them think that mixing is a good way to create an effect. 18 % of the students think that if they do not mix English and their native

language, they would not be understood. The final two reasons with an equal percentage of 15 % are that the student did not feel that they are mixing the two languages and the other group do that mixing because their addressees also do the same.

(Figure 9) : The percentages of the reasons for mixing English with the native language.



The next question that is 19 is about the nature of the student as a speaker of English as a second language. Seven options are stated but the majority goes to only two options. The first option with 42% needs to search for proper words a while they speak English. The next percentage with 24 % proves that students use interjections like hmm, yea while they are speaking English. The other five options are similar minor percentages, 9% for (speak slower) and (feel like outsider) , 7 % for (gesticulate more with my hands) ,6 % for (am more talkative) .and 3% for feel less capable) . See figure(10)

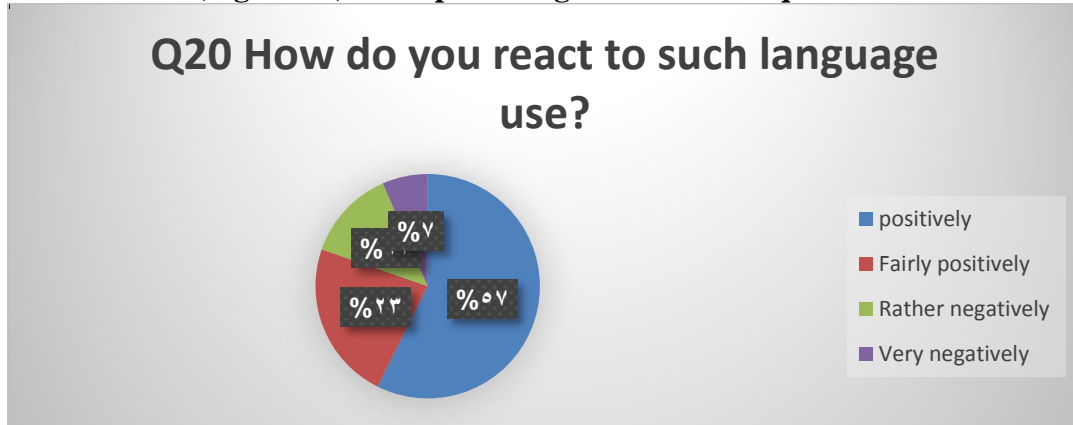
(Figure 10) :The percentages of results of question 19





Question 20 is about the evaluation of English use from the point of view of the students, 57% of the students react positively, 23% of the students react fairly positively, only 13 % of the students react rather negatively, and finally, 7% only react very negatively. See the figure below

(Figure 11): The percentages of results of question 20



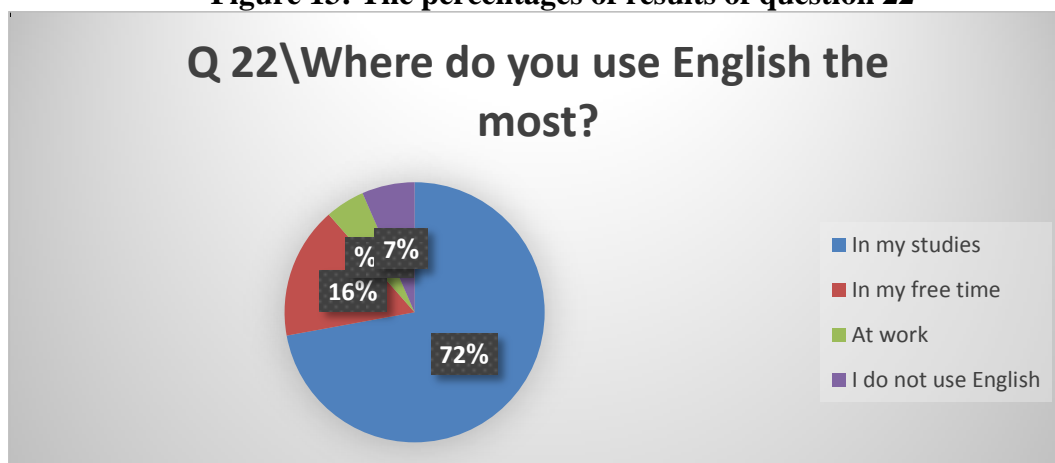
Question 21 is about using English in the students' free time, 58 % of the students state that they sometimes use English in their free time, 21% of the students always use English in their free time. 13% of them often use English in their free time. Finally, only 8% of them seldom use English in their free time. See figure (12) below.

Figure 12 : The percentages of results of question 21



Finally, question 22 is about the situation or purpose students use English most, 72% of students use English in their studies, 16% of them use English in their free time, 7% of students do not use English at all in the below four situations, finally, only 5% of the students use English at work. This is the end of the data analysis of the research questionnaire. In the next section, the most prominent result will be stated as shown in figure(13).

Figure 13: The percentages of results of question 22



4. Discussion of results with some suggestions for improving the fluency of EFL university students

According to the data analysis explained earlier, the following results can be concluded:

- 1-Most of the students have problems and hindrances in their pronunciation and grammar.
- 2-Most of the students have a poor vocabulary, they also speak with pauses, these problems cause hindrance in their speech.
- 3-The majority of students feel that they need to learn English more.
- 4-Concerning the four skills students have many hindrances in speaking, reading, and writing.
- 5-Students think that they speak naturally but with some problems.
- 6-The most common reason for using English by students is to communicate with others and to learn better English.
- 7-Nearly 90% of the students mix English with their native languages ,this mixing happens when the students feel that they cannot remember certain vocabularies and they feel that they would not be understood if they do not mix the two languages.so they need more practice to use the foreign language in life situations and in social media
- 8-More than 70% of the students have a positive reaction towards the use of English.
- 9- Although the students think that English is very important to their personality (85%) so they should improve their fluency and listening but just (22%) of them are understand well to the spoken language so they need to improve their listening skills and pronunciation by concentrating on knowing the sound system of English language, listen to debates , TV. Programs, interviews,.....ect .
- 10-Students need more practice to learn English and use the foreign language successfully without hesitation.
- 11-They have inadequate efficiency when they read and discuss issues with their colleagues and others .
- 12- Just 6 % of the students use English to be fluent so they should take care of this matter .



The Fluency Hindrance of Iraqi EFL University Students

13-89% of the students mix between English and their mother tongue when speaking .

14- Students need English language to communicate with others so need to be fluent .

15- They search about suitable words and expressions to be used to speak that need efforts ,read and practice .

16- They use English mostly just for their study to pass exams so they need attending symposiums, meetings, and listen to native speakers .

5. Conclusions

Depending on the above results, it can be concluded that most of the students want to learn and speak English fluently but certain problems might hinder their speech and fluency. Poor vocabulary, hesitation, lack of practice and shyness are the main problems of a hindrance. Most of the students have problems with soft skills including speaking. One of the good results is that the majority of the students have a strong motif to learn and speak English and they use English in studying, so academic institutions must make use of this motif to improve the students' fluency. It is also recognized that students mix English with their native Arabic, this mixing is a result of hindrance in their fluency, this temporary solution will make things worse. So certain precautions must be accomplished to overcome these difficulties and improve the students' fluency.

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