Analyzing the English Language Oral Communication Needs for Algerian Employees at Business Workplace

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Abstract:

This study is concerned with the analysis of the oral communication needs for Algerian employees at business workplace. The study adopts the quantitative approach in which the data were collected through a questionnaire which was distributed to (20) employees. The main results showed that most of the employees faced problems in the oral language communication aspects such as pronunciation, oral presentation, and negotiations. On the basis of the results, pedagogical recommendations are suggested for English Foreign language instructors to focus on the relevant business English oral communication skills and needs.

Keywords:

Communication needs, communication skills, business English, English for specific purposes, needs analysis, speaking performance.

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ملخص :

اهتمت هذه الدراسة بتحليل احتياجات التواصل الشفهي للموظفين الجزائريين للعمل التجاري. الهدف الرئيسي من الدراسة الحالية هو تحليل الاحتياجات الشفوية للتواصل الوظيفي للموظفين في شركة "سيفيتال" بمدينة بجاية. اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج الكمي أين جُمعت البيانات من خلال استبيان تم توزيعه على (20) موظفاً. أظهرت النتائج الرئيسية أن معظم الموظفين يواجهون مشاكل في معظم المهارات اللغوية أثناء التواصل مع الأجانب مثل النطق، والعروض التقديمية الشفوية، والاجتماعات، وايصال المهام والواجبات اليومية. على أساس النتائج تم اقتراح توصيات تربوية للأساتذة والطلاب للتركيز أكثر على احتياجات ومهارات الاتصال الشفوي باللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال ذات الصلة.

كلمات دالة:

اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة، اللغة الإنجليزية للأعمال، تحليل الاحتياجات، احتياجات الاتصال، مهارات الاتصال، أداء التحدث.

1. Introduction

The process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Algeria started to witness tremendous changes through the shift from learning a language for the sake of itself to the contextual purposes. Clearly, the traditional approaches to foreign language education are no longer useful and the orientation is moving towards using a language just as a means of communication. In this respect, the modern approaches focus more on the communicative purposes and skills.

Scholars state that English language continues to occupy the place of privilege by being the language of ruling the system of government, education, business, trade, and diplomacy all over the world. In recent years, the importance of equipping employees with good oral communication skills in English language has grown tremendously (Stevens, 2005).

As English is universally used as a means of business communication, its oral skills should be developed along with other language skills. According to Ur (1996), of all the four skills, speaking seems to be intuitively the most important skill especially at business workplace.

Taking into consideration the needs of employees at Cevital Corporation at Bejaia city in Algeria such as being able to communicate effectively through the medium of English language, a training and syllabus that includes occupational oriented tasks is imperative. Richards, (2001) states that, by the 1980s the need-based philosophy emerged in language teaching, particularly in relation to English for Specific Purposes program design. In this respect, Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) state that ESP has emerged in order to meet the specific communicative needs.

A pre-survey has concluded that most of the employees are struggling with the English oral communication skills. At this stage, the current study has generated the following research questions:

• What are the main English oral communication problems encountered by Cevital Corporation employees?

• What are the main English oral communication needs for business employees at the workplace?

2. Literature Review

2.1. English for Specific Business Purposes:

Recently, English for Specific Purposes has become a vital innovative aspect of the overall process of the teaching and learning of English worldwide including Algeria (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). ESP has turned to be the branch where students meet their needs and learn English for their specific areas due to the new situation taking place in the modern life system brought by technology and computation science especially at business workplace.

Plenty of definitions to the term ESP have been elaborated by relevant scholars all over the world. Zhang (2013) states that ESP is a goal oriented and a well- targeted instruction system which puts stress on the combination of English language learning with the specific purposes at professional and business context.

In the same idea, Robinson (1991) declares that English language students study English not because they are interested in English per se but because they need English for communicative purposes. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) maintain that "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reasons for learning".

ESP is an umbrella term to different interests including business English, which can be seen from different perspectives as it involves the definition of a specific language corpus and emphasis on particular kind of communication in a specific context. All over the world, English is used every day in different business activities.

2.2. Needs Analysis:

Needs analysis mainly stands for those activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students (Brown, 1995). Needs analysis is another umbrella term in the field of ESP and henceforth business English which is an ongoing process of gathering information about students' needs and preferences, interpreting the information, and then making decisions that best meet their needs.

Learning needs explains how students will be able to move from the starting point to the ending point. Furthermore, it clarifies well for students and teachers altogether to understand the gap existing during the process of learning and teaching English language. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state clearly that it is too early to base a course design simply on the target objectives, and that the learning situation must also be taken into account. They add that the target

situation alone is not a reliable indicator, and that the conditions of the learning situation, the learners' knowledge, skills, strategies, and motivation for learning are of prime importance.

2.3. Oral Communicative Competence:

The main focus of the modern language teaching and learning approaches is on communication. Within this new trend it seems that the communicative purpose is the prime aim at the expense of the linguist competence. It is worth to mention that the communicative competence have plenty of aspects such as oral communication skills and performance.

Oral communication is a basic skill that language speakers should master with the other language skills. Samovar and Porter (2000) declare that oral communication can be referred to as one way in which people tend to express feeling or to present their ideas, opinions and perceptions. In fact, communicating verbally is structured by language, which is defined as a systematic set of sounds, combined by a set of rules for the sole purpose of communication (Neuliep, 2006).

It is the fact that oral communication is the most widely used skill and it plays a major role in day-to-day life communication. According to Burkat (1998), oral communication, as a part of communication process provides plenty of opportunities among the people to express their views, feelings and thoughts in several ways.

2. 4. Oral Communication Techniques

With a change in EFL learners" needs, two paradigmatic shifts happened in the 1960s, with the attempt to find an adequate answer to the new needs of being able to communicate in EFL, rather than know about it. The first was a move away from producing linguistic competence only, and focusing more on producing communicative competence.
Several decades ago, Chomsky (1964) introduced the concept of linguistic competence as the ideal model for any speaker. In the 1970s, Hymes (1974), proposed a new concept, which was called

Communicative Competence "CC", which corrected and supplemented the first term, since the ability to discern when and how to use language in specific contexts was added to sheer linguistic ability when speaking. By paying attention to the way in which the ability to use language appropriately was acquired. He was placing emphasis on sociolinguistic competence, as a fundamental concept in the development of communicative language teaching and learning when it was applied to EFL classroom.

Later on, Celce-Murcia et al., (2007, p. 42) propose the action competence as part of CC. He states that CC is the ability to comprehend and produce significant speech acts. The figure below shows a graphic representation of different CC models, as presented by Celce-Murcia comprising the development of CC form Chomsky 1950s till the 1990s.

3. Research Methodology

The previous sections relied on the conceptual analysis of the existing literature concerning the issue of the oral communication skills for business context. It made the reasons clear to design the research methodology. So the present discussion is a reflective account of the steps undertaken towards the issue of the paper.

3.1. Research Design:

According to Mouton (1994, 112), research design is: "a set of instructions and guidelines according to which the research problem is addressed". Thyer (1993) also states that the aim of research design is to provide an outline or plan of study to be conducted.

The current research explores the English oral communication needs of the employees at the business context. A quantitative method was adopted to collect data. This type of research is usually conducted to study a problem that has not been clearly defined yet. Thus, the exploratory descriptive research design would be the most suitable one for the current study since it seeks to find out the problems of the English language use at the workplace faced by the employees of the Cevital Corporation in terms of their needs.

3.2. Population, Sample and Setting:

The population of this research are twenty (20) employees at Cevital Corporation at Bejaia city. Due to the limited number of the participants, the whole population was larger five times. The twenty (20) employees were selected randomly in order to answer a questionnaire. To clarify the issue of the sample selection, the eight participants were selected only from the section that is more likely to face foreigners in which English language must come into play. The aim of this questionnaire is to identify the main English oral communication skills. In addition to identify the English oral communication learning needs for business communication, and to suggest which type of syllabus design would be suitable for the participants.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures:

A questionnaire is a research tool used to gather information which is given to participants in a written form in order to collect data for analysis (Denscombe, 2007). The questionnaire used to gather a varied database that will provide reliable and valid conclusions. The following classification of tools is according to the conducted steps applied in the research.

In order to collect quantitative data for the current research, the quantitative research approach is used. The quantitative research approach refers to an emergent methodology of research that advances the systematic integration of data collection procedures. It keeps the reasons of data validity and reliability condition well achieved through numerical data.

4. Data Analyses and Interpretations

This section is considered as the core of the research, because it gathers the beneficial summary of the whole findings. It is concerned with the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. The results allow the researcher to answer and analyze the current research questions.

4.1. General Oral Communication Levels

The first question of the survey targets to discover the overall level of the participants at the Cevital Corporation as far as English language is concerned. The researchers believe that the aim of the current question would uncover the situation of the English language in the setting of the research. Consequently, the answers were clearly rated through frequencies and percentages in the figure 1.

**Fig1. Workers Levels in General Oral Communication**
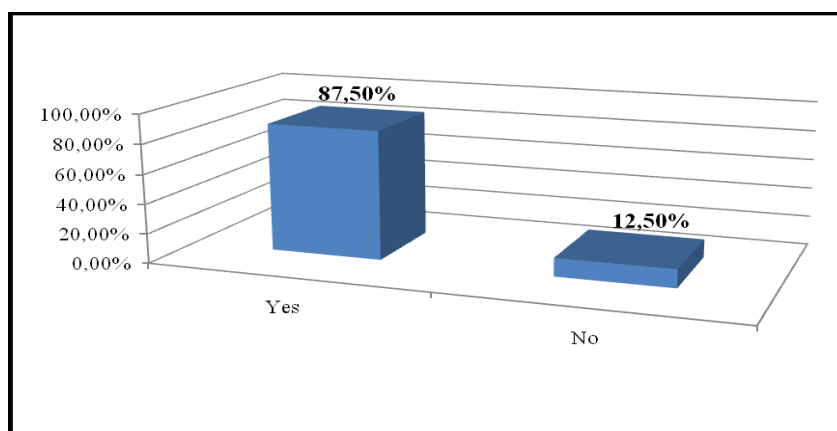
The majority of the participants mentioned that they have a proficient level of English especially in the oral communication skills while communicating orally. The exact number of participants who answered this question is fourteen and equal to (87.5%) out of the total number of the participants while only few of them (12.5%) answered that they do not have a proficient level of English to communicate orally.

The results obtained from this question do not deny the fact that the group of participants could communicate fluently in English language since the issue is about English for specific purposes. The positive answers are much related to their proficiency in general English as the subsequent responses claim. Furthermore, the positive answers of the participants could be related to the training they receive in school and university since English language is an imperative subject matter in the curriculum and syllabus.

4.2. Employees Conversational Skills:

The second question treats the conversational skills that are much relevant to the employees. The question relies on the following scale strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree which was used to rate well their answers. Consequently, the answers were clearly rated through frequencies and percentages in the figure 2.

Fig2. Conversational Skills
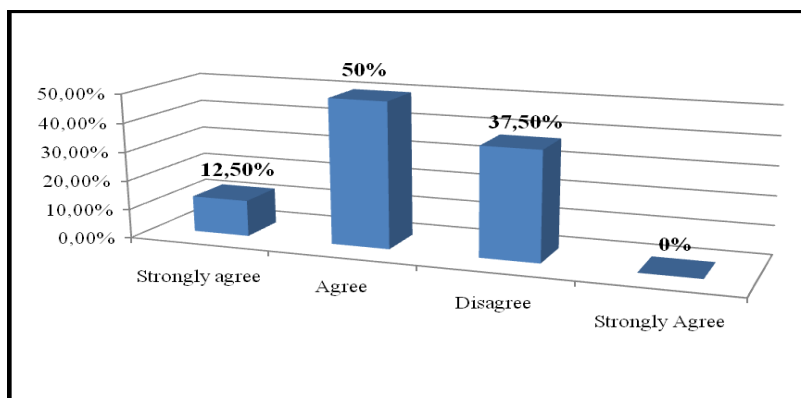
The closed question yielded that the action of talking about everyday tasks and duties corresponds to agree scale which got the highest percentage by (50%) and 10 participants followed by disagree scale by (37.5%). The scale strongly agree was ranked in the third position and got (12.5%) who answered while the rate of the strongly disagree scale was weaker. The ratio for strongly disagree was (0%). To communicate powerful data, it seems good idea to group together the scale strongly agree and agree scale to indicate positive attitudes towards participants conversational skills and the scales strongly disagree and disagree together to indicate participants negative attitudes towards their conversational skills at the workplace.

To bring this into effects, (62.5%) represents the participants' positive attitudes while (37.5%) represents the participants' negative attitudes. A short comparison with the data obtained in the previous question, it seems that the groups of participants' are in total agreement with the importance of English language in a business setting.

4. 3. Employees Participations in Conversations

The third question is about the rate of participation that the employees take in business conversations. In order to bring the participants' answers and opinions, the same scale as the second question used.

Fig3. Rate of Participation in Conversation
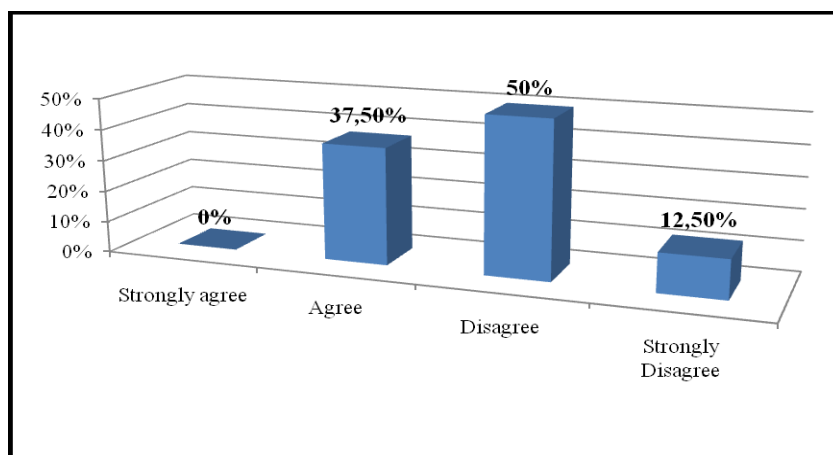
It is clear from figure 3 that the highest percentage was for disagree scale by half of the participants (50%) followed by Agree scale which got (37.5%). In addition, to (12.5%) opted for the strongly disagree while the last scale strongly agree got no participant. The ratio for Strongly Agree was (0%).

A brief comparison with the findings of the two previous questions my show a kind of shift of the participants' opinions from positive to negative orientation. In fact this question came to foster the research problem. The researchers' assumptions are well shown in this question since the main concern of the current research is about business English at workplace but not general English for communication.
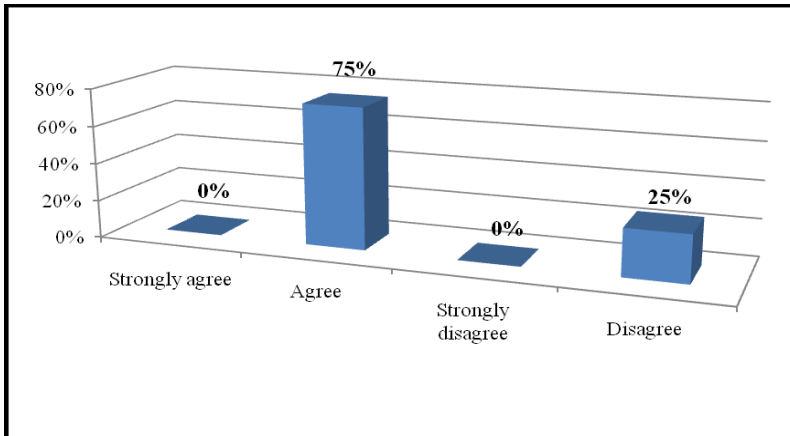
4. 4. Communication Skills with Clients

The fourth question is about the rate of the communication skills with the clients that the employees take at the workplace.

It is observed from the figure 4 that the scale agree got the first rank with the highest occurrence with the majority of the participants

equals to 15 and (75%) followed by disagree scale with 5 participants and (25%) while the ratio for strongly agree and strongly disagree was (0%). It looks clearer from the answers that the participants have moderate views towards the issue of their communication practices since they do not insist on their answers.

## Fig4. Communication Skills with Clients

In the same way, it seems that the majority of the participants hold positive opinions towards the use of English language for their communication with the clients.

4. 5. Communication Skills in Meetings and Negotiations

In order to bring the participants' answers and opinions into light, the same scale as the previous questions used. The figure 5 represents the data gathered.

Fig5. Communication Skills in Meeting and Negotiations
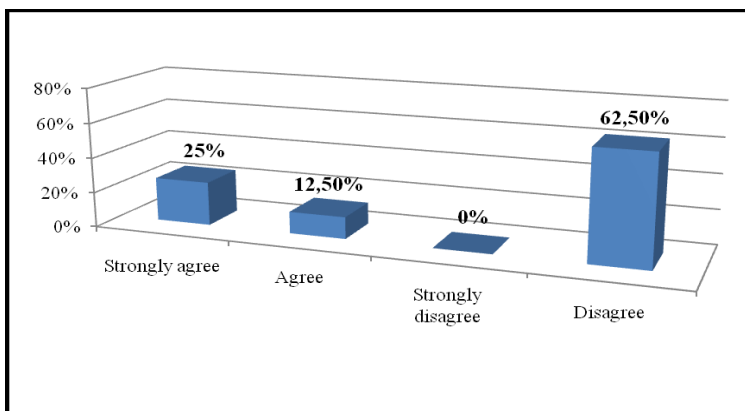
It is evident from the figure 5 that the action of conducting business meeting and negotiations at the workplace receive the attention of the majority of the participants. In brief examination of the graph indicates that the highest percentage was in favor of disagree scale representing the majority of the answers with 62.5%) followed by strongly agree scale by (25%) taking the second rank in order.

In addition, the agree scale occupies the third position with (12.5%) and no option for the strongly disagree scale. The ratio for strongly disagree scale was (0%). A close examination to the scores obtained from the current question may uncover a central concern to the group of the participants in the sense that English language is strictly used for communication while the action of meetings and negotiations seem as peripheral to English language integration.

The small space given to English language in meetings and negotiations is clearly seen through the second portion of the participants who opted for strongly agree as well as an interesting portion for the agree scale. This question indicates the multiple obstacles that participants face while using English language for business purposes. So much more attention has to be paid to business based contents syllabuses in order to equip the participants with the relevant needs and skills.

4. 6. Future Communication Needs Prospects

The sixth question is concerned with the more likely communication skills and needs that the participants need to master at the workplace. In detail, it is about the oral presentation skills,

discussion skills, negotiations skills, telephone call skills, and conversational skills that all constitute the relevant future prospects for the participants. In order to bring the participants' opinions into light the graphic 6 represent the frequencies of the collected data.

The figure 6 shows that the future prospects communication needs and skills at the workplace receive the attention of all the participants. In brief examination of the graph indicates that the answers are devoted for the emphasis on the oral communication skills and meeting respectively with (87.5%). Discussion skills ranked in the second position with (75.5%) then negotiation skills, conversational skills and pronunciation skills took the third order with (62.5%) respectively while telephone skills came in the last position with (50.5%).

**Fig6. Communication Needs Prospects**
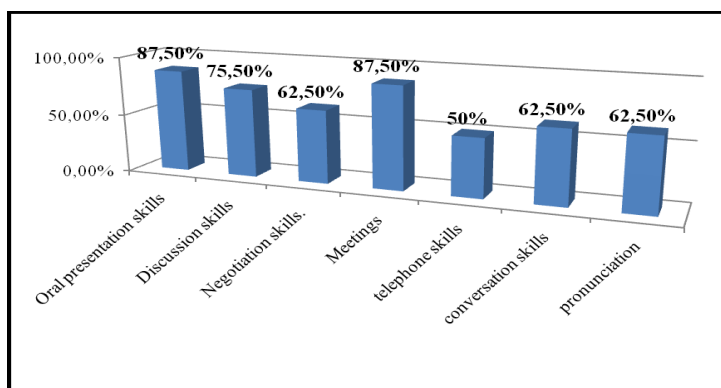
It looks clearly that this question sorted out a crucial concerns with the question of English for business context in Algeria. This situation could be seen through the distribution of the participants' answers over the available options in the question in the sense that they all got the interest of the participants with close rate of their answers. In fact, it opens the door for exploring the obstacles that hinder the participants to practice appropriately their English communicative concerns at the business workplace. The scores of this question represent the likely answers to the research questions.

4. 7. Importance of English oral Needs at Workplace

The seventh question deals with the most relevant communication skills and needs that the participants really ask for

their English language at the business workplace. In detail, it is concerned with the oral communication needs at the workplace.

Fig7. Oral Communication Needs at Workplace
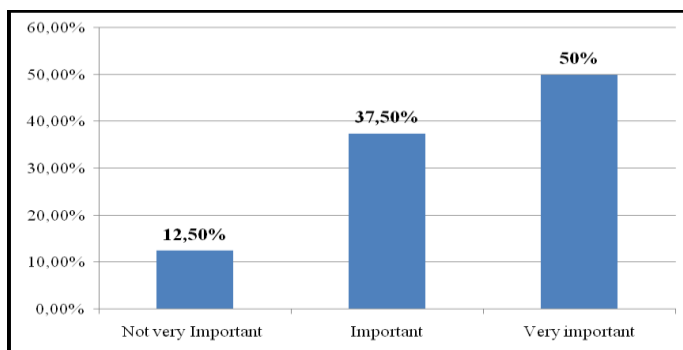
The participants were divided into three sub groups. A close examination may indicate that the scale very important receive the half of the responses (50%) then followed by the scale important with (37.5%) while the scale not very important occupied the last position with (12.5%) as the least percentage.

In order to better understand the meaning of the scores of the current questions, it is good idea to group the scales very important and important together and not very important scale to distinguish between the positive and negative opinions. Working with such new division indicates that positive attitudes stands for the majority of the participants with (87.5%) while the negative attitudes represents the minority only with (12.5%).

In fact, the unanimity achieved in this question show how the groups of the participants pay attention to the oral communication skills rather than other language skills. Participants prove well about their consciousness in using English for speaking more than for writing and match well their needs with the given context which counts more on speaking needs and skills.

4. 8. Strategies for Effective Oral Communication

The last question is about the strategies to achieve effective oral communication. It targets the action of speaking clearly and achieves conditions of appropriate body language. This question opens horizons for the researchers to bring this research into its end through

the participants' opinions about the strategies for effective oral communication.

Fig8. Strategies for Effective Oral Communication
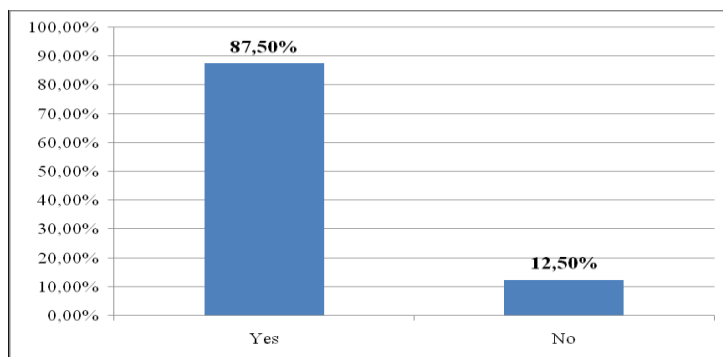
The majority of the participants prefer to look for the relevant strategy that help them to master the speaking skill clearly with a percentage of (87.5%) only few participants answered that they did not pay attention for such strategy with the percentage of (12.5%). A close examination to the scores of the participants here reveals that the employees are envy to improve their communicative oral communication.

5. Discussion of the Findings:

After the analysis of the data collected through a questionnaire addressed to eight (20) employees at The Cevital Corporation at Bejaia city, the study has arrived to some concluding remarks in relation to the research problem, and research questions.

Therefore, as English became the most wide used language of technology and business, it created a new generation of learners who knew specifically why they were learning this language (Hutchinson and Waters 1987) which means the emergence of a new category of people who are objective oriented to their needs. Thus, the participants' answers showed that English language is much needed at the target business workplace.

The group of participants claim that they use all the four skills while communicating at work, and although (50%) of the employees have upper-intermediate level and (50%) of them have an advanced

level of English, they find problems most in speaking skill, more specifically in pronunciation and oral presentations.

Furthermore, mastering the speaking skill will help the participants gain more opportunities to achieve effectiveness in communication in business context. Mastering well business English would facilitate their job task. So, they need to learn more specific words about their field, as Hedge (2000) argues that speaking is an important skill since it is essential part in any communication.

Moreover, the majority of participants uses English oral communication at work, and considers professional English oral communication skills important for them since workplace oral communication is an important field for the participants, moreover; according to (Priya, 2009, p. 2). Communication is the life blood of business.

6. Conclusion

The communication tasks of the participants in the business context are much demanding the use of English language than ever before. The survey uncovered that the participants are participating in formal and informal business communication setting. So English language especially the oral communication skills came into play whenever they perform their tasks.

The participants really considers the importance of English language nowadays especially in business context. They insist more on the oral communication skills since English language is used more orally.

This study suggests a number of pedagogical implications which are as follow:

• Provide an ongoing professional development to support all staff to better master the English oral communication skills.

• Teachers should also vary their teaching techniques according to students' styles and pay more attention to English for business purposes.

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