

# The Role of Literature in Developing EFL Learners' Communication Skills In El-Obeid Secondary School

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## **Abstract:**

This study examines the role of literature in developing English speaking skills among secondary school students in ElObeid, Sudan. Despite English being a compulsory subject, learners often exhibit poor oral proficiency due to traditional, exam oriented teaching methods. Using a mixed methods design, data were collected from 50 English teachers via questionnaire and 20 teachers through classroom observation. Results indicate strong teacher consensus (80 %) on literature's positive role in enhancing speaking fluency, confidence, and participation. However, significant implementation gaps exist due to insufficient teacher training, limited resources, and curricular constraints. Observations revealed that while students could read texts (85 %), most struggled with analytical discussion (70 % unable) and critical use of literary tools (85 % unable). The study concludes that literature is a potent but underutilized pedagogical resource. Recommendations include curriculum integration, teacher professional development, provision of literary materials, and promotion of communicative, student centered approaches. This research contributes to EFL pedagogy in under resourced contexts and offers actionable insights for curriculum reform in Sudan.

**Keywords:** Literature, Speaking Skills, EFL, Communicative Competence, Teacher Perceptions.

## دور الأدب في تطوير مهارات التواصل لدى دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الثانوية بمدينة الأبيض

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المستخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة دور الأدب في تنمية مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية في مدينة الأبيض بالسودان. وعلى الرغم من أن اللغة الإنجليزية مادة إجبارية، إلا أن المتعلمين غالباً ما يُظهرون ضعفاً في الكفاءة الشفوية نتيجة لأساليب التدريس التقليدية الموجهة نحو الامتحانات. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج المختلط، حيث جُمعت البيانات من خلال استبانة وُزعت على (50) معلماً للغة الإنجليزية، بالإضافة إلى ملاحظة صفية شملت (20) معلماً. وأظهرت النتائج وجود توافق قوي بين المعلمين (80%) حول الدور الإيجابي للأدب في تعزيز الطلاقة في التحدث، والثقة بالنفس، والمشاركة الصفية. ومع ذلك، كشفت النتائج عن وجود فجوات كبيرة في التطبيق العملي تعود إلى نقص تدريب المعلمين، وقلّة الموارد التعليمية، والقيود المفروضة من المناهج الدراسية. كما أوضحت الملاحظات الصفية أن الطلاب قادرين على قراءة النصوص الأدبية (85%)، إلا أن معظمهم يواجه صعوبات في المناقشة التحليلية (70% غير قادرين) وفي الاستخدام النقدي للأدوات الأدبية (85% غير قادرين). وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الأدب يُعد مورداً تربوياً فعالاً لكنه غير مستثمر بالشكل الكافي. وتوصي الدراسة بدمج الأدب في المناهج الدراسية، وتطوير الكفاءات المهنية للمعلمين، وتوفير المواد الأدبية المناسبة، وتعزيز الأساليب التواصلية المتمركزة حول المتعلم. وتُسهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء طرائق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في البيئات محدودة الموارد، كما تقدم رؤى عملية قابلة للتطبيق لإصلاح المناهج التعليمية في السودان. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأدب، مهارات التحدث، اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الكفاءة التواصلية، تصورات المعلمين

### 1. Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Sudan, as in many Global South contexts, has historically prioritized grammatical accuracy and reading comprehension over oral communicative competence. In Sudanese secondary schools, English is a compulsory subject, yet students frequently complete their education with limited ability to speak English confidently or fluently. This discrepancy stems from teachercentered pedagogies, examination pressures, and a lack of authentic communicative practice

in classrooms. ElObeid, the capital of North Kordofan State, reflects these national challenges, with EFL learners demonstrating noticeable weaknesses in oral communication despite years of formal instruction. Concurrently, literature has gained recognition in applied linguistics as a valuable resource for language teaching. Literary texts including short stories, poems, plays, and novels offer authentic language, cultural richness, and emotional engagement, providing meaningful contexts for speaking activities such as discussion, roleplay, and dramatization. Literature aligns with communicative and learner-centered approaches by encouraging interpretation, opinion expression, and oral negotiation of meaning. Moreover, it can reduce affective barriers, making language learning more enjoyable and less anxiety-inducing.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

Despite the pedagogical potential of literature, its role in developing communication skills remains under-researched and under-applied in Sudanese secondary schools, particularly in ElObeid. Teachers often underutilize literary texts or use them primarily for reading comprehension, neglecting their potential for oral skill development. This gap between literature's potential and its practical application contributes to the persistent weakness in students' speaking proficiency.

## **3. Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to:

1. Investigate the extent to which literature is used in teaching speaking skills in ElObeid secondary schools.
2. Assess the impact of literary texts on students' speaking skill development.
3. Explore teachers' and students' perceptions regarding literature-based speaking instruction.

#### **4. Questions of the Study**

1. To what extent is literature used in teaching speaking skills at ElObeid secondary schools?
2. What is the impact of using literary texts on the development of students' speaking skills?
3. What are teachers' and students' perceptions toward the use of literature in developing speaking skills?

#### **5. Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to EFL pedagogy by empirically examining literature's role in speaking skill development within a Sudanese context. Findings can inform curriculum designers, teacher trainers, and policymakers seeking to enhance communicative language teaching. It also provides a foundation for further research on literature-integrated language instruction in similar EFL settings.

#### **6. Literature Review**

##### **6.1 Speaking Skills in EFL Contexts**

Speaking is a productive skill enabling realtime interaction and is often considered the most crucial yet challenging of the four language skills. Key components include fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, discourse management, and interactional competence. In many EFL settings, including Sudan, speaking is hindered by limited practice opportunities, high anxiety, teacher-dominated classrooms, and lack of authentic communicative contexts.

##### **6.2 Literature as a Pedagogical Tool**

Literature provides authentic linguistic input, cultural exposure, and opportunities for meaningful communication. Its benefits in language learning include:

- Vocabulary Enhancement: Exposure to rich, contextualized lexicon.

- Grammatical Awareness: Observation of syntax and style in narrative forms.
- Critical Thinking: Analysis of themes, characters, and moral dilemmas.
- Motivational Engagement: Emotional and intellectual involvement through story and character.

### **6.3 Theoretical Frameworks Supporting Literature Use**

- Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Emphasizes meaningful interaction; literature provides authentic contexts for dialogue and discussion.
- Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky): Highlights social interaction and scaffolding; literaturebased collaborative tasks promote oral development.
- Constructivism: Posits active knowledge construction; literature invites interpretation and personal response, fostering oral expression.

### **6.4 Literature and Speaking Skill Development**

Specific literaturebased strategies for speaking include:

- Dramatization and Roleplay: Encourage expressive, spontaneous speech.
- Group Discussion and Debate: Stimulate critical thinking and extended oral interaction.
- Storytelling and Retelling: Enhance narrative coherence and fluency.
- Character Interviews and Predictions: Promote imaginative and interactive speaking.

Empirical studies in African contexts (e.g., Nigeria, Kenya) show that literaturebased activities improve fluency, confidence, and participation.

## **6.5 Challenges in LiteratureBased Instruction**

- Text Complexity: Literary texts may exceed learners' proficiency levels.
- Teacher Preparedness: Many teachers lack training in literature pedagogy.
- Curricular Constraints: Exams and syllabi often prioritize grammar and reading over speaking.
- Resource Limitations: Shortages of appropriate literary materials.

## **7. Research Method**

### **7.1 Research Design**

A mixedmethods sequential explanatory design was employed, combining quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (observation) approaches to provide comprehensive insights.

### **7.2 Population and Sample**

- Population: All EFL teachers in government secondary schools in ElObeid.
- Sample: 50 teachers for questionnaires; 20 teachers for classroom observations (purposively sampled from questionnaire respondents).

### **7.3 Data Collection Instruments**

1. Teacher Questionnaire: A 30item Likertscale instrument covering perceptions, practices, and attitudes regarding literature and speaking skills. Included demographic sections on qualifications and experience.
2. Classroom Observation Checklist: A structured tool focusing on: use of literary texts, types of speaking activities, student participation, teacher student interaction, and analytical discussion.

### **7.4 Data Collection Procedures**

- Permissions obtained from educational authorities.
- Questionnaires distributed and collected in person.

- Observations conducted during regular lessons to capture authentic practices.
- Ethical principles (confidentiality, voluntary participation) strictly followed.

### 7.5 Data Analysis

- Quantitative: Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) using SPSS.
- Qualitative: Thematic analysis of observation notes, identifying patterns in teaching practices and student engagement.

### 7.6 Validity and Reliability

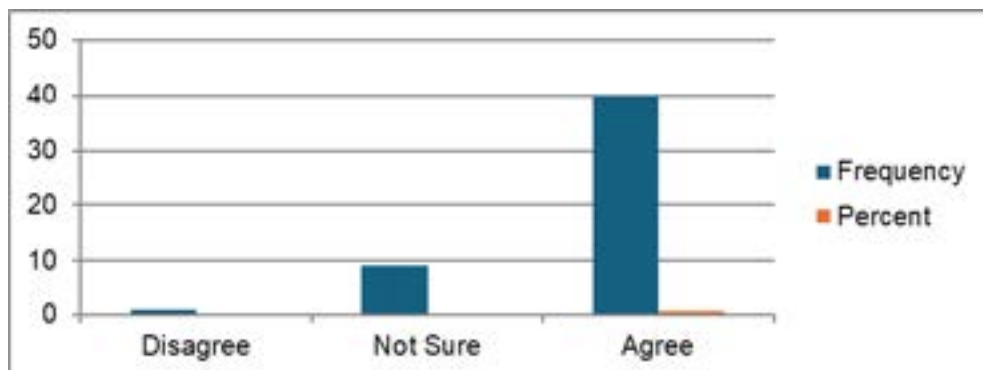
- Instruments reviewed by ELT and research methodology experts.
- Pilot study conducted with 10 teachers (excluded from main sample).
- Cronbach's alpha for questionnaire: 0.84, indicating good internal consistency.

## 8. Data Analysis and Discussion

**Table (8.1):** Literature role is to develop and enhance student's communicative skills.

Options	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	1	% 2.0
Not Sure	9	% 18.0
Agree	40	% 80.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>% 100.0</b>

The results show that 40 teachers (80 %) agree with the statement, 9 teachers (18 %) are not sure, and only 1 teacher (2 %) disagrees. This indicates a strong consensus that literature plays a role in developing speaking skills.

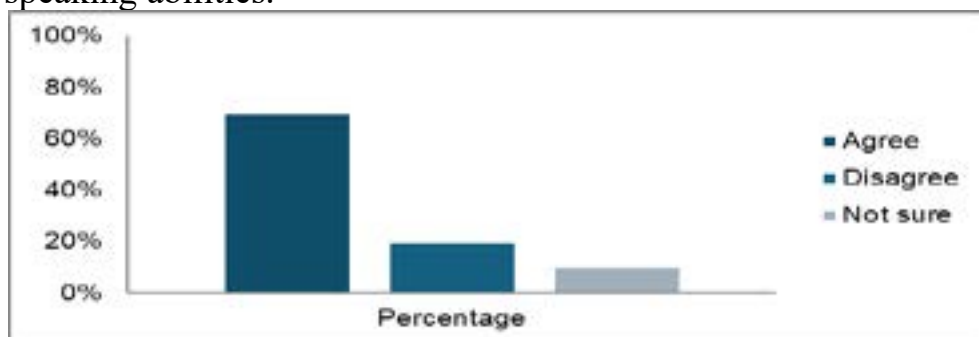


**Figure (8.1): Literature role is to develop and enhance student’s communicative skills.**

**Table (8.2): Students can improve their English language skills through literature**

Options	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	1	% 2.0
Not Sure	11	% 22.0
Agree	38	% 76.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>% 100.0</b>

The findings reveal that 38 teachers (76 %) agree, 11 teachers (22 %) are not sure, and 1 teacher (2 %) disagrees. This result further supports the importance of literature in enhancing students’ speaking abilities.

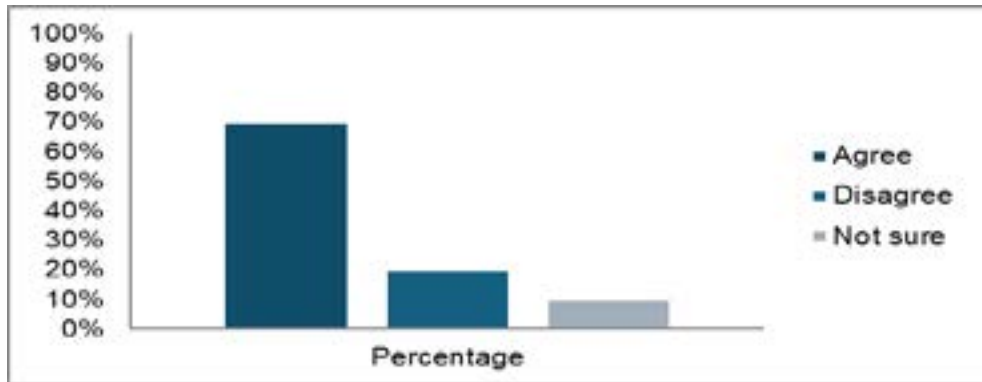


**Figure (8.2) Students can improve their English language skills through literature**

**Table (8.3): Teaching literature fortified enriching student's with vocabulary.**

Options	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	5	% 10.0
Not Sure	14	% 28.0
Agree	31	% 62.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>% 100.0</b>

The data indicate that 31 teachers (62 %) agree, 14 teachers (28 %) are not sure, and 5 teachers (10 %) disagree. Although the majority agree, the relatively high percentage of uncertainty suggests the need for teacher training in literature-based speaking

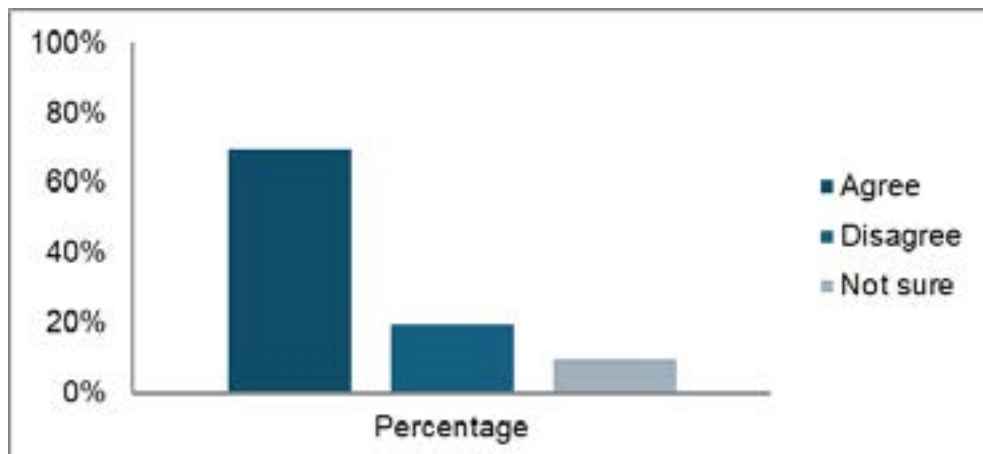


**Figure (8.3) Teaching literature fortified enriching student's with vocabulary.**

**Table (8.4): Teachers utilize literary approach for teaching literature to develop communicative skills.**

Options	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	5	% 10.0
Not Sure	14	% 28.0
Agree	31	% 62.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>% 100.0</b>

Similarly, 31 teachers (62 %) agree, 14 teachers (28 %) are not sure, and 5 teachers (10 %) disagree. This suggests that literature contributes positively to speaking skills, though its implementation may vary across classrooms.



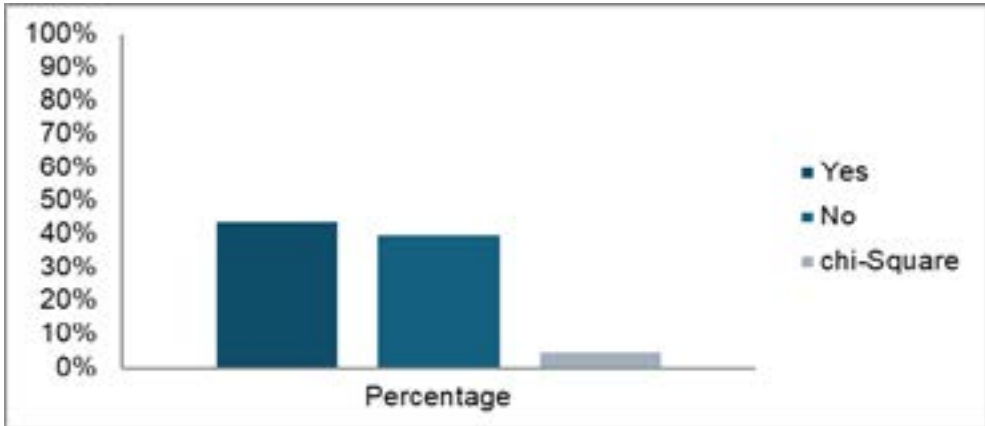
**Figure (8.4) Teachers utilize literary approach for teaching literature to develop communicative skills.**

#### Regarding the Observation Checklist

**Table (8.5): Students Have Previous Experience in Literature**

Option	Frequency	Percentage	$\chi^2$
Yes	5	% 25	5.0
No	15	% 75	
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>% 100</b>	

It is evident from Table (2.1) that the majority of students, 15 (75 %), lack prior experience in literature, while only 5 (25 %) possess such experience. This finding highlights a serious gap in students' literary background and underscores the need for systematic exposure to literature as a means of developing communication skills.

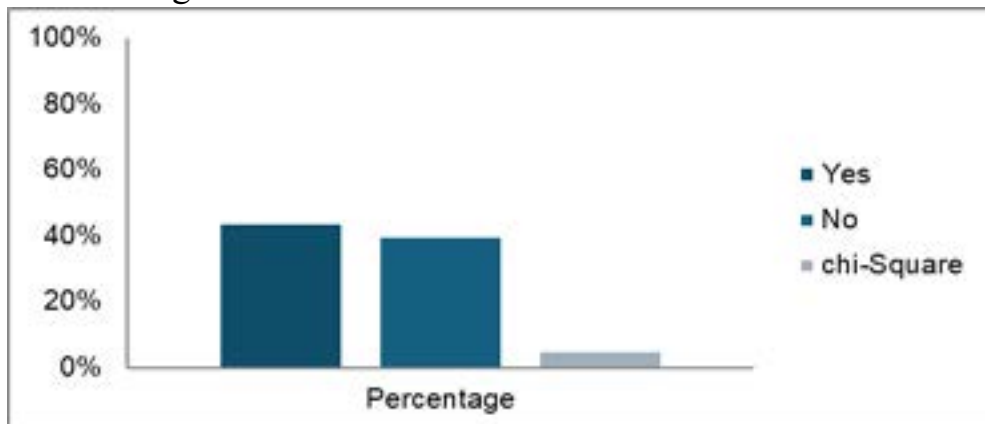


**Figure (8.6): Students Have Previous Experience in Literature**

**Table (2.2): Students Are Able to Read Literary Texts**

Option	Frequency	Percentage	$\chi^2$
Yes	17	% 85	9.8
No	3	% 15	
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>% 100</b>	

Table (2.2) shows that a large proportion of students, 17 (85 %), are able to read literary texts, whereas only 3 (15 %) face difficulties. This indicates that reading ability is not a major obstacle and can be effectively utilized to enhance communicative competence through literature.

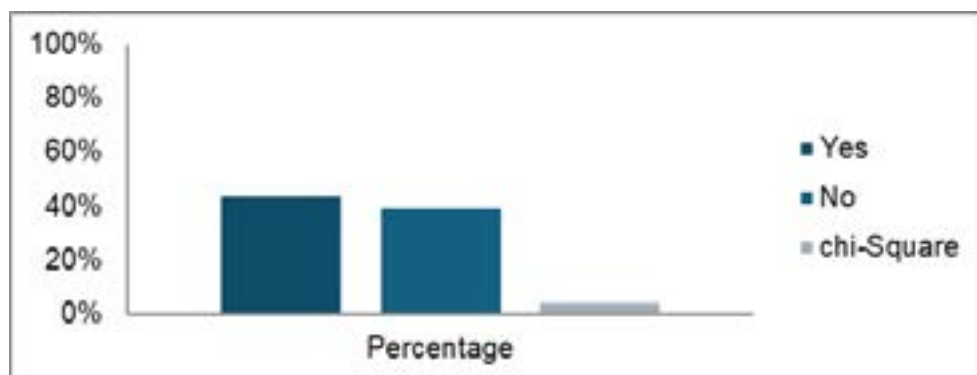


**Figure (8.6): Students Are Able to Read Literary Texts**

**Table (2.3): Students Can Follow the Sequence of Events in the Story**

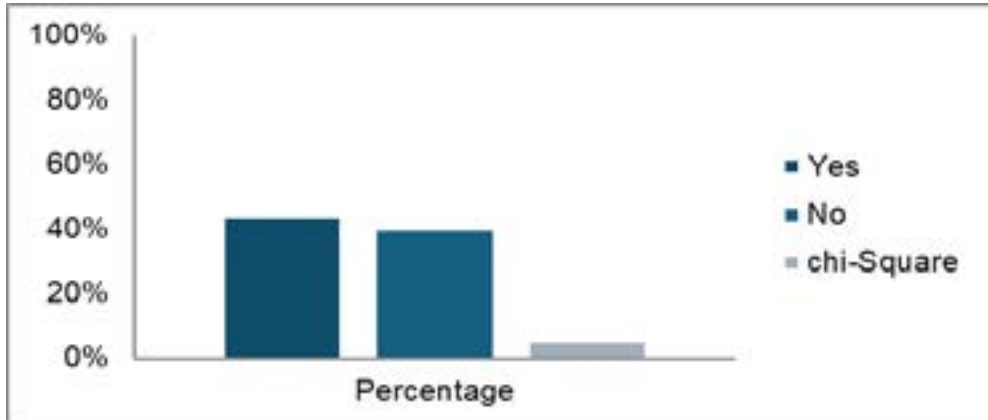
Option	Frequency	Percentage	$\chi^2$
Yes	18	% 90	12.8
No	2	% 10	
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>% 100</b>	

The results reveal that 18 (90 %) of the students can follow the sequence of events in a story. This reflects good comprehension skills, which are essential for meaningful discussion and oral communication in literature classes.

**Figure (8.7): Students Can Follow the Sequence of Events in the Story****Table (8.8): Students Participate in Answering Questions Given by the Lecturer**

Option	Frequency	Percentage	$\chi^2$
Yes	18	% 90	12.8
No	2	% 10	
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>% 100</b>	

Table (8.8) indicates a high level of classroom participation, with 18 (90 %) students actively answering questions. This positive engagement suggests that literature lessons provide opportunities for interaction and verbal expression.



**Figure (8.8): Students Participate in Answering Questions Given by the Lecturer**

## 9. Findings

The findings indicate that a strong majority of English language teachers acknowledge the importance of literature in developing speaking skills. Specifically, **80 % of the respondents** agreed that literature plays a vital role in enhancing speaking ability, while only **2 % disagreed**, demonstrating overwhelming support for literature-based instruction.

In relation to the impact of literature on students' speaking performance, **76 % of the teachers** agreed that literary texts contribute positively to improving speaking skills, compared to only **2 % who disagreed**. This confirms that literature is perceived as an effective instructional tool in speaking development.

The results further reveal that literature enhances students' participation in speaking activities. This is supported by the finding that **74 % of the respondents** agreed that literature encourages active oral participation, whereas only **4 % disagreed**.

Regarding speaking fluency, **70 % of the teachers** agreed that literature helps improve students' fluency, while **6 % disagreed**, indicating that literary texts promote natural and continuous speech through meaningful language exposure.

In terms of confidence, the findings show that **72 % of the respondents** agreed that literature increases students' confidence in speaking, with only **2 % disagreement**, highlighting literature's role in reducing anxiety and encouraging self-expression.

The results also demonstrate that literature stimulates classroom discussion and interaction, as evidenced by **70 % agreement** among teachers, while **2 % disagreed**.

However, the findings reveal certain challenges in implementation. Some questionnaire items recorded moderate agreement levels, with agreement percentages ranging between **52 % and 60 %**, while uncertainty levels reached up to **46 %** in some cases. This indicates hesitation among teachers regarding specific aspects of applying literature in speaking instruction.

## **10. Conclusion**

This study investigated the role of literature in developing speaking skills among EFL learners in secondary schools in El Obeid, Sudan. The findings clearly demonstrate that literature holds significant pedagogical value in enhancing learners' oral communication, particularly in terms of fluency, confidence, vocabulary use, and classroom participation. Questionnaire results revealed strong teacher consensus regarding the positive impact of literary texts on speaking development, while classroom observations provided concrete evidence of students' ability to read and comprehend texts, albeit with limited analytical and interactive oral engagement. Despite this recognized potential, the study revealed a substantial gap between teachers' positive perceptions and actual classroom practices. Literature is often used in a traditional, text-bound manner, focusing mainly on reading comprehension rather than as a springboard for communicative speaking activities. Factors such as insufficient teacher training, exam-oriented curricula, lack of appropriate literary resources, large class sizes, and students' limited literary background significantly hinder effective

implementation. Nevertheless, in classrooms where literature was employed interactively through discussion, role play, dramatization, and storytelling, students demonstrated greater willingness to speak, improved use of language, and higher levels of engagement. These findings affirm that literature can function as a powerful tool for developing speaking skills when supported by appropriate pedagogy and institutional backing. Consequently, the study concludes that literature is not inherently ineffective in Sudanese EFL contexts; rather, it remains an underutilized resource whose success depends on systematic curricular integration, teacher preparedness, and supportive learning environments. Literature represents a vital bridge between linguistic knowledge and communicative practice. When effectively integrated into EFL instruction, it has the capacity to transform classrooms into dynamic spaces for interaction, creativity, and meaningful language use. For Sudanese secondary school learners to achieve communicative competence in English, literature must be repositioned from a peripheral reading tool to a central component of speaking-oriented pedagogy, supported by coherent policy, informed teaching practices, and sustained institutional commitment. The study recommended that, Literature-based speaking activities should be explicitly integrated into national EFL and English language curricula at the secondary school level should explicitly incorporate literature-based speaking activities to ensure systematic and consistent classroom application. Besides Regular training programs and professional development workshops should be organized to equip English language teachers with practical strategies for using literature to develop speaking skills. Moreover Schools should provide appropriate and varied literary materials, such as short stories, plays, and poems, that suit students' linguistic levels and cultural backgrounds. Finally Further research is recommended to investigate the role of literature in developing other language skills and to examine its effectiveness at different educational stages.

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