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**The Effect of Using Reflective Listening on
Developing EFL Adults' Oral Fluency**

A thesis

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Abstract

The study aimed to examine the effect of using reflective listening on developing EFL adults' oral fluency. The study begins with a review of literature and previous studies dealing with reflective listening and oral fluency. The researcher prepared a list of oral fluency components as a guide for the design of the instruments. The researcher also designed a pre/post oral fluency test and a rubric. The researcher designed the proposed program. Then, she nominated a random group of course trainees who passed level 5 in the Cambridge placement test and who intended to study a conversation course (n= 30) to participate in the study and get involved in its activities. Their ages ranged from (20 to 30) years old. The participants were submitted to a pre and posttest. Then, the scores were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The results showed that reflective listening was highly effective in developing EFL adults' oral fluency.

Keywords: *Reflective listening, oral fluency*

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Chapter One

Background and Problem

Chapter One

Background and Problem

Introduction

English has become an essential language in many non-English speaking countries. Being an international language, many people use English to communicate and to express their ideas. That is why learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) always seek to master the English language, to speak it fluently and to understand others using it. In addition, many job opportunities, nowadays, require English language fluency. Scholarships are released in English, and most of them necessitate achieving a high level of fluency and accuracy. Many interesting movies, series, and TV programs are published in English.

Emphasizing the importance of English fluency, Pinon, and Haydon (2010) conducted research in some developing countries to see how important the English language is in these countries. The research revealed that English helped people get involved in international business, which led to economic and individual growth. Moreover, English was a necessary requirement for any job opportunity, even in non-native countries. In addition, those students who wanted to travel abroad needed English to be able to get this opportunity and to communicate and deal with native speakers.

Despite the importance of the English language, many English learners face many challenges while learning it. Liu (2009) stated that learners in non-English-speaking countries encountered many difficulties. First, the English language materials provided to the learners were not connected with their real-life experiences as traditional teaching focused on memorization and recalling information. Thus, the learners were not motivated, or even interested in what

they learn. Second, the only chance for the learners to practice English takes place inside their classrooms that most of the time do not provide them with this opportunity to use the target language. Hanane (2016) states that EFL learners' mother tongue influences their speech production as they tend to think in Arabic. Students are familiar with their first language as they use it every day. On the other hand, they have little exposure to the English language and its lexical, phonological and grammatical constructions. This causes learners to struggle to try to cope with the real experiences through which the English language is authentically practiced. Thus, developing the learners' learning environment is a prerequisite for a successful learning process.

There is a huge gap between what the learners learn in their classrooms and what they already hear while watching English movies or dealing with native English speakers. Although there is a growing need among EFL learners to use the English language orally, they are unable to achieve this goal. In Egypt and in many other Arab countries, learners have little exposure to the English language outside the classroom. Some teachers even use their mother tongue in their classes to facilitate the target language for their students. In turn, learners find it easier and less embarrassing to use their mother tongue to express their ideas and thoughts. This accordingly, hinders their oral fluency.

“Fluency refers to speaking at a good pace without pausing or hesitating” (Handley & Wang, 2018, p.5). Acosta (2017) states that hesitations and pauses hinder communication and interaction as they cause the listener to misunderstand the message. “Fluency means speaking with ease and without thinking about possible errors” (Baker & Westrup, 2003, P. 90). Baker and Westrup (2003) add that when people speak their first language, they tend to speak it fluently and confidently. Their focus is to communicate their intended message. According to Rizvi (2005), fluency makes a distinctive speech. Fluency is characterized by the natural flow of words and the lack of unwanted

pauses and repetitions. Fluent speakers are able to use appropriate words and expressions to formulate meaningful utterances and structures. Therefore, if speakers tend to use poor vocabulary that does not match the context, their speech cannot be described as being fluent (Rizvi, 2005). As non-native English speakers, EFL learners need to enhance their listening and speaking abilities in order to be able to communicate. Moreover, teachers need to find new creative ways to develop EFL adults' oral fluency.

There are several components for oral fluency. According to Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005), oral fluency is characterized by “automatic, smooth, and rapid language use” (p. 327). For Pineda (2017), other components of oral fluency include speed and length of speech. Adding some other components of oral fluency, Pineda mentions that a fluent speaker can create comprehensible and coherent sentences that are semantically and grammatically correct. Benwell (2009) describes pronunciation as an essential component of oral fluency.

Oral fluency is crucial to language learners. According to Talouki (2015), oral fluency enables learners to carry on business or casual conversations. Madhok (2018) contends that oral fluency increases self-confidence and self-esteem, which are both essential for successful communication. Madhok adds that a speaker who lacks self-confidence is regularly hesitant and uncertain about how to react while having a discussion which may cause the listener to get irritated and unwilling to interact. Moreover, oral fluency enables speakers to have a phone call or a face to face interaction (Madhok, 2018).

Due to the importance of oral fluency, the researcher investigates a different alternative to develop EFL adults' oral fluency by utilizing reflective listening. This may enable the learners to listen with understanding and to relate

the new information to their prior knowledge in an attempt to develop their oral fluency.

According to Johns (2013), reflection is an intentional purposeful process. Reflective learners keep reflecting on different experiences and mirroring them until they have a clear vision of their own learning and their whole life. For Johns, reflection requires the person to be aware of the whole situation and to view it from different perspectives in order to be able to resolve any contradictions and to act congruently with future situations. Johns adds that reflection leads to courage, empowerment, discussion, and confidence.

Similarly, Brazier (2009) defines reflective listening as what people do when they feel interested in what the speaker is saying. Interested listeners normally listen attentively and give feedback. Applying reflective listening, listeners sometimes simply listen carefully and give signs that they have heard the speaker's talk. They send non-verbal responses such as "uhuh" or "mmm". However, Brazier (2009) states that reflective listening is a more active process. The important part in reflective listening is for the listener to listen and reflect. A person needs to pay more attention to what the speaker is saying in order to be able to use his/her own words and expressions to convey the meaning and reflect on the message.

Fetzer (2008) argues that reflective listening includes three different mental processes. It includes hearing, thinking and reflecting. A person uses his/her hearing sense to listen. At the same time, s/he thinks of what is being said. Finally, the listener gives reflective responses. Also, Cormier, Nurius, and Osborn (2017) state that listening goes through three steps. First, the person receives a message. Then, s/he thinks about it or deals with it. Finally, the listener sends a message to the speaker. They also add that in reflective

listening, listeners need to listen to themselves and their inner voice to have a deeper understanding of their attitudes and perspectives.

Holli, Calabrese, and Maillet (2003) mention that listeners use reflective listening to check their understanding of the speakers' meaning. They do not assume that they have complete knowledge of what is being said. They only try to guess the meaning. Therefore, the learners have the chance to talk and express their understanding without feeling afraid of making mistakes which hinders their oral fluency most of the time.

Context of the Problem

Oral Fluency is not given sufficient attention in our Egyptian schools in spite of its importance to the language users as one of the main purposes of any language learning. Learners want to be able to use the target language to communicate their ideas, feelings, and intentions with others. If the learners keep studying the language without observing any progress in their ability to communicate orally, they will certainly be frustrated and unwilling to learn. Therefore, there is a growing need to develop EFL adults' oral fluency.

Despite the importance of oral fluency, a close look at the Egyptian EFL learners' oral fluency reveals that they lack the abilities that can qualify them to use the English language appropriately and effectively in oral contexts. This problem may be attributed to their inability to listen to the other speakers effectively. Therefore, a different strategy for developing EFL adults' oral fluency needs to be developed.

As an English instructor, the researcher observed the modest level of EFL adults' oral fluency. Those learners tend to speak slowly with hesitation and low self-confidence. They make a lot of pronunciation mistakes. Moreover, they are out of words most of the time, which in turn affects their oral fluency negatively. They cannot express themselves appropriately. Oral interaction is