

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**DEVELOPING IRAQI EFL SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

**MOHAMMED HASAN MAHDI H. ALBOBDAIR<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Lecturer, Republic of Iraq, Ministry of Education, Directory of Education in Babylon

E-Mail: [mohammedhassan1969@gmail.com](mailto:mohammedhassan1969@gmail.com)

**Published at 01/07/2021**

**Accepted at 12/06/2021**

**Abstract**

Oral communication is considered as one of the main English language learning skills. Iraqi EFL secondary school students have different difficulties when they try to communicate orally in English. The present study aims at developing and improving EFL secondary school students' oral communication skills which are definitely represented in speaking skills through investigating the serious problems that Iraqi EFL secondary school students encounter when they want to express their ideas orally in English. Moreover, the study proposes that Iraqi EFL secondary school students are very weak in producing good oral communicative patterns. It also proposes that EFL teachers need intensive in-service training and they should focus on teaching oral communication exercises. Furthermore, the current study proposes that modern technology can effectively enhance EFL secondary school students' listening and speaking skills and this will develop and enhance their oral communication skills. The present study adopted the analytical-descriptive method. The researcher used a questionnaire to collect the required data from (80) EFL secondary school teachers in Babylon Province. (SPSS) Program was used to analyse the data of the study. According to the statistical results of the study, the researcher found out that: EFL secondary school students' oral communication skills can be developed and improved through small groups discussions, most oral communication activities inside the classrooms are done by the teachers rather than the students, training EFL teachers is greatly needed for developing the EFL secondary school teachers' teaching techniques that can be applied in secondary schools in Iraq and oral communication skills at secondary schools in Iraq should be taught through effective means of technology rather than traditional techniques of teaching English as a foreign language.

## تطوير مهارات التواصل الشفهية لطلبة المدارس المتوسطة العراقيين في اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية

م.م. محمد حسن مهدي أبو بدير<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> جمهورية العراق، وزارة التربية، المديرية العام للتربية في بابل  
البريد الإلكتروني: muhammedhassan1969@gmail.com

تاريخ القبول: 2021/06/12م

تاريخ النشر: 2021/07/01م

### المستخلص

يعتبر التواصل الشفهي واحد من مهارات التعلم في اللغة الإنجليزية. إن طلبة المدارس الثانوية العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يواجهون مشكلات عندما يحاولون أن يتواصلوا شفهيًا باللغة الإنجليزية. إن الدراسة الحالية تهدف إلى تطوير و تحسين المهارات الشفهية في اللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلبة المدارس الثانوية العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية و التي تتجسد في مهارات التكلم من خلال تقصي المشكلات الحقيقية التي يواجهها طلبة المدارس الثانوية العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عندما يريدون أن يعبروا عن أفكارهم شفهيًا باللغة الإنجليزية.. إن الدراسة تفترض بأن طلبة المدارس الثانوية العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ضعيفون جدا في إنتاج نماذج تواصلية شفهية جيدة. وإن الدراسة تفترض أيضا بأن مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يحتاجون إلى تدريب مكثف خلال الخدمة و يجب عليهم أن يركزوا على تدريس تمرينات في التواصل الشفهي. و الاكثر من ذلك فإن الدراسة الحالية تفترض بأن التكنولوجيا الحديثة تستطيع أن تعزز مهارات التكلم لدى طلبة المدارس الثانوية الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وأن هذا سوف يطور و يعزز مهاراتهم التواصلية الشفهية. إن الدراسة الحالية تبنت الطريقة التحليلية – الوصفية. إن الباحث قد استخدم استبانة لجمع البيانات المطلوبة من (80) مدرسا للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الثانوية في محافظة بابل. إن برنامج الحزم الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية قد استخدم لتحليل بيانات الدراسة. و بحسب النتائج الإحصائية للدراسة فإن الباحث قد توصل إلى إمكانية تطوير و تحسين مهارات التواصل الشفهية لدى طلبة المدارس الثانوية العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من خلال المناقشات في مجموعات صغيرة، و أن أغلب أنشطة التواصل الشفهية في داخل غرفة الصف تنجز من قبل المدرسين و ليس الطلبة، و أن تدريب مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية مطلوب بشكل كبير لغرض تطوير أساليب تدريس مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية و التي بالإمكان تطبيقها في المدارس الثانوية في العراق، و إن مهارات التواصل الشفهي في المدارس الثانوية في العراق يجب أن تدرس من خلال وسائل تكنولوجية فعّالة و ليس من خلال الاساليب التقليدية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

## 1. Introduction

Oral communication is considered as one of the main language skills in English language learning. Iraqi EFL secondary students encounter many difficulties when they communicate orally with their teachers or with each other as well. In many cases, they resort to the use of Arabic in oral communication. Scientifically, this has a negative effect on EFL learning. The major objective of the current study is to investigate the problems that Iraqi EFL secondary students encounter in oral communication. Furthermore, some EFL teachers participate in these problems because they lack experience in teaching English in English, and they also use Arabic in teaching English, therefore, they play a passive role in developing Iraqi EFL secondary school students' oral communication skills. In addition, the cultural differences, weaknesses in vocabulary, lack of grammatical and socio-linguistic competence are also other factors that affect EFL students in oral communication. The present study investigates certain problems that seriously affect Iraqi EFL secondary school students' oral communication in order to help in paving the way for the coming generations through having developed and effective ways or oral communication to cope with what dominates the world today under what is known as globalization and modern technology in FL learning effectively.

For effective communication in English as a foreign language, learners need to acquire the knowledge of both grammar and vocabulary that are the two essential and important elements of a language. Once the EFL learners learn some basic grammatical structures of English and some vocabulary, they can practice speaking skills under the guidance of their EFL teachers. In this respect, Celce-Murcia (2000) argued that "In some ways speaking can be considered the most difficult skill to acquire because it requires command of speech production sub-skills like vocabulary retrieval, choice of grammatical patterns, and sociocultural competence". As there is a great demand for communication skills in the present job market, EFL learners are now struggling to develop their EFL communication skills. Furthermore, all the organisations are employing the people who have excellent communication skills in English, as they believe that these skills may develop and promote their business. These language skills are really required in almost all the fields like computer software, business, teaching, law, administration, management, marketing, tourism and so on. Because of the great importance of communication skills in various fields, it is the time for the EFL learners to get a mastery over these skills. Khamkhien (2010) said "Speaking skill is the most important skill in a second language. Mostly people, who learn English language, have in their minds that they like to master the goal of developing the proficiency in speaking skill through it is a difficult task".

In fact, there is a great demand for English language in the world market because of the global status of English language that is greatly used in all fields by most of the countries in the different parts of the world. English language learning is promoted everywhere as EFL and ESL. In both aspects, the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are given more importance in the process of teaching and learning. In order to develop EFL learners' communication skills, teachers of English language use different strategies and techniques with the help of technology in classrooms as well as language laboratories.

## **Listening Skill**

Listening skill is used very frequently among all the other skills. Underwood (1989) mentioned that "Listening is an activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear. It involves understanding the speaker's accent and pronunciation, his / her grammar and vocabulary and grasping the meaning. For successful communication, listening skill is essential, so it should be taught to students". Without doubt, learners use listening more than any other language skills. It means learning of a language basically depends on listening as most of the language learners spend much time on listening to a foreign language than producing it themselves. In fact, listening helps the learners in language acquisition and enables them to interact with others in spoken communication. According to Nation and Newton (2009), "Listening is the way of learning a language". Listening is a fundamental oral communication skill and it influences the development of reading and writing skills. Therefore, listening plays a vital role in academic success since learners understand and learn the language through listening.

## **Speaking Skill**

Speaking skill is a productive skill which FL learners should develop to communicate fluently. Iqbal (2012) said "Speaking, therefore, as a language skill is defined as the oral mode or the productive skill which is more complicated and which involves more than just pronouncing words". In the acquisition of a foreign language, speaking skill performs a key role. FL teachers usually focus on speaking skill to make their students communicate well in the foreign language. Speaking skills are required for expressing one's thoughts and opinions as well as impressing other people. Good speakers can persuade other people so that the FL teachers have to realize that they need to focus more on this language skill to prepare the learners for employment, interaction with others and perform well at work places.

## **Reading Skill**

Reading skills is a receptive skill that can make the learners understand and analyse the written texts. This language skill should be developed among the learners at all stages of their language learning. Reading skill is one of the good habits that should be mastered and inculcated in the minds of the learners by the teacher in the classroom. Wallace (2001) considered "Reading as practice, product or process with regard to the field of study". Reading skill reinforces the comprehensive abilities of learners and therefore, they can analyse the text what is intended for. Hence, FL teachers focus on reading skills in classrooms to develop the ability of learners' understanding the text given.

## **Writing Skill**

Writing skill is one of the four language skills in English as it is a productive skill and it enables the learners to communicate their thoughts, ideas, expressions and feelings in the form of writing. It facilitates language communication between the individuals of the society in different aspects of life, such as business, education, science and technology and so on. Therefore, writing skill is considered a very important too of communication. Nunan and Brindly (1989) indicated that "Writing is an extremely complex, cognitive skill for everyone because in this activity the writer has to show control of some variables simultaneously".

In the process of language learning, the main aim of the learner is to acquire and



develop the four language skills: listening, speaking, speaking, reading and writing. Scientifically, listening and reading skills are receptive language skills whereas speaking and writing skills are productive language skills. These skills must be given great emphasis in the classroom by EL teachers because the soul of language learning is represented in the four language skills. Moreover, the main aim of the four language skills is to develop the EL learners' learning abilities in producing oral discourses (ibid).

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Secondary school students have different problems in developing their oral communication skills in English. The problems are the lack of their creativity in communicating orally in English because of the lack of self-confidence, and they are not encouraged to express their ideas and answers to questions orally. Additionally, EFL teachers do not focus on providing adequate speaking tasks and guiding the students to actively practice English orally.

### **1.2 Aims of the Study**

The present study aims at investigating the problems that Iraqi EFL secondary school students encounter in oral communication. It attempts to achieve the following aims: First, to develop and improve secondary school students' oral communication skills. Second, to find out the effects of EFL teacher-training in oral communication help on developing and improving the student's level in oral communication effectively. Third, to know how modern technology can enhance the quality of EFL oral communication.

### **1.3 Questions of the Study**

The present study tries answer the following questions:

1. Can secondary students in Babylon Province orally communicate in different situations in English.?
2. To what extent can EFL teacher-training in oral communication help in developing and improving EFL secondary school students' oral communication skills?
3. To what extent is modern technology used to develop and enhance the quality of EFL secondary students' oral communication skills?

### **1.4 Hypotheses of the Study**

The current study tests the following hypotheses:

1. Iraqi EFL secondary students are weak in producing good oral communication.
2. EFL teacher-training in oral communication can help in developing secondary school students' oral communication skills in English.
3. Modern technology develop and enhance the quality of secondary school students' oral communication skills in English.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The present study is important to all Iraqi EFL secondary school students because it focuses on one of the main problems of oral communication skills in English language learning so as to achieve new ways of oral communication that cope with the current progress in the world as far as modern technology is concerned. The researcher tries his best to find out new ways to help Iraqi EFL secondary school students in the area of oral communication. Furthermore, the researcher hopes the results will encourage the active participation of the secondary school students in oral communication in English. Additionally, the current study attempts to help the Iraqi educators to review the

English language textbooks in Iraq in a new way that secondary school students' oral communication skills be can developed and improved.

### **1.6 Methodology of the Study**

The Descriptive-Analytical Method will be used in the current study. The researcher will design a questionnaire that will be distributed randomly among (80) teachers of English language in (20) secondary schools in three different cities in Babylon Province. The aim of the questionnaire is to collect the required data concerns the problems that EFL secondary school students encounter in oral communication. The data will be scientifically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

### **1.7 Limits of the Study**

The present study is confined to investigate the problems that Iraqi EFL secondary school students encounter in oral communication. This study is limited to secondary school students in Babylon Province, academic year 2019-2020.

## **2. Literature Review**

Communication is the exchange of ideas, information, etc., between two or more persons. In an act of communication there is usually at least one speaker or sender, a message which is transmitted, and a person or persons for whom this message is intended (the receiver). Communication is scientifically studied from many disciplinary perspectives, is often viewed as a discipline in its own right, and is central to sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and information theory.

Communication skills are very important skills for a student's academic success and future vocations predictions. In the present time's challenging environment, students must not only possess academic experiences and expertise, but also the requisite skills to reinforce their learning and employability prospects in the future.

Communication is a dynamic process as it involves an interaction between two or more people, i.e. the sender and the receiver. The main purpose of communication is to transmit ideas, thoughts and beliefs to another person. The major elements of communication are verbal communication or oral communication and non-verbal communication. Oral communication is the process of expressing thoughts, ideas and belief through the medium of speech and this process plays a vital role in the life of students.

In fact, good communication enables FL students to assimilate more from the learning process by encouraging them to ask relevant questions and discuss various ideas. Effective oral communication encourages the process of socialization by facilitating new friendships and these in turn support the learning process. Productive communication is an improvement of occupation development. An ability to convey ideas in a clear and precise way would help FL students to make clear and effective impressions at interviews and get the jobs that they deserve. Communication skills inculcate professionalism in speaking styles, ways of self-expression and attitudes towards other people, and these traits would hold FL students in good advantage in their professional lives.

Oral communication is an art that can be learnt through reading, presentation skills and practice. An oral communicator should have intellectual curiosity. Reading is a means to the development of good communication skills. A well-educated mind would be able to communicate better as content is the soul of the communication process. He

should also possess an attitude of discussion and deliberation as this would encourage and develop intellectual capabilities and therefore contribute to effective communication.

Effective writing skills and good verbal communication skills go hand-in-hand although they may seem different skills. A FL student with good writing skills would alone be in a position to organize and present his ideas, thoughts and beliefs in a right structured way.

### **2.1 Language: The Functional Side**

Language is a part of human culture. It is part of human behaviour. Language is an acquired habit of systematic vocal activity representing meanings coming from human experiences, i.e., it is an acquired vocal system for communicating meaning. In other words, language is said to be an oral controlled system used for communication by a certain society. This refers to the following points:

1. Language operates in a regular and systematic order.
2. Language is essentially oral and that the oral symbols represent meaning as they are related to real life situations and experiences.
3. Language is a controlled system.
4. Language has a social role, and that without it the society would probably not exist.
5. Language is the most essential means of human communication. It is the primary subject of the study of linguistics. It is the most frequently used and the most greatly developed form of human communication (Abdul Hameed, 1998).

### **2.2 Language as an Act of Communication**

Language as an act of communication is essentially the transmission of information (a message) from a source to a receiver (both are human and the message is transmitted either vocally through the air or graphically by marks on a surface usually a paper).

In fact there are other forms of communication (not necessarily human) such as the instinctive voices which animals of a certain species use to communicate with each other. This is communication, but not language, because language is fundamentally a human phenomenon (Wilkins, 1972)

There are other systems or methods of communication connected with human beings which linguists do not consider as language. They are simply other possibilities of human communication. For instance, some societies have a system of communication by touch or with their mouths or other parts of their faces or any other senses (only the visual and vocal / auditory senses are frequently used). The use of the senses of taste, smell and touch are restricted as far as human communication is concerned (Lyons, 1981).

"The science that deals with the scientific study of the properties of signaling systems whether natural or artificial is known as 'semiotics' in recent years, the scientific study of semiotics has come to be applied to the analysis of patterned human communication in all its sensory modes, i.e., hearing, sight, taste, touch and smell and in all contexts (e.g. music, films, dance, politics, etc. as well as language). The extension of the subject of the analysis of animal systems of communication is known as 'Zoo Semiotics'. Moreover, semiotics investigates the structures of all possible sign systems and the roles these systems perform in the way we create and perceive meanings in socio-cultural behaviour" (Lyons, 1977).

"Examples of other human systems and facial expressions of communication other

than language are 'body language', (e.g., gestures), 'sign language', (e.g., railway signals and traffic lights). Others are the languages of ants, birds and bees" (ibid).

"Esperanto is a language based on pre-existing natural languages which was invented in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for the purpose of international communication" (ibid).

### **2.3 Language as an Oral Activity**

The visual system is well-established in human beings. Furthermore, all the facial expressions and bodily gestures, hand signals, winks, raised eyebrows and so on communicate a great deal of information (Abdul Hameed, 1998).

Despite its importance, the visual system of communication in human beings does not have by any means the same structure, as the vocal-there is nothing really like grammar, for instance. Hence, linguists do not call it language. They restrict the term 'language' to a vocal system of human communication. Scientifically, language is basically oral. The message is transmitted vocally through the air from the speaker to the listener or listeners. The spoken language is alive, while the writing system of language is a fossil. The spoken system of language always changes by introducing new terms to it while the writing system of language is something artificial (ibid).

### **2.4 Language as a Controlled Act of Communication**

Language should be controlled by the brain to give sense. Our speech must be controlled. We must think before we speak and our language should be based on rules that control or govern our speech telling us what is right and what is wrong. In addition, we cannot breathe, snore or sneeze at our will, but we can control our language. We can speak or not at our will or we can use certain words any time we like. Allen (1975). claimed that "There is a difference between information and communication. For instance, audible vocal noises such as a sneeze or a snore do not communicate a message in the same sense as when we speak words or sentences. A sneeze, for example, may inform us that there is a person who has a cold. On the contrary, words are tied down to our bodily state. Therefore, uncontrolled vocal noises lacking any clear internal structure or conventional meaning are not part of language. Language is a system of systems. It has both a phonological system and a grammatical system, each with its proper units and rules of acceptable combinations and order. Language systematic because it can be described in terms of a limited number of units that can combine only in a limited number of ways".

### **2.5 Oral Communication in EFL / ESL Settings**

In the present advanced world, EFL learners should study and master good speaking skills (oral communication skills), as they are the most important language skills. In fact, one of the most essential factors of communication is conversation. It enables FL learners to share thoughts, ideas and opinions, and receive them from other people in turn. Conversation seems to be very simple, but effective conversations involve a give-and-take exchange that consists of components such as eye contact, body language, responding, paraphrasing and summarizing. Among all the four language skills, speaking seems intuitively the most important one and it is a crucial section of a foreign language or a second language teaching and learning. Chaney (1998) argued that "Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts". Despite the importance of speaking skills for many years, teaching of speaking skills in schools and colleges has been



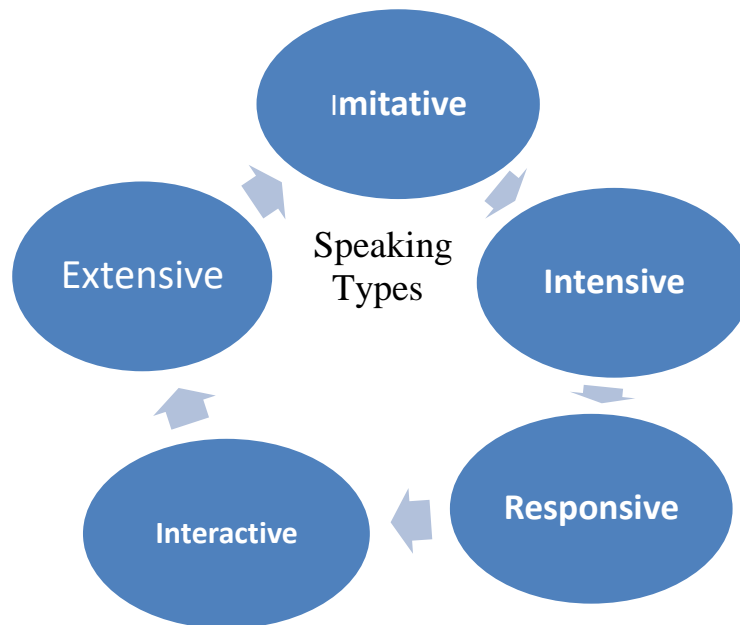
neglected and has been given a least importance and the EFL / ESL teachers have been teaching speaking skills just like memorization of dialogues, repetition of drills and recite memorized textbooks dialogues. However, the modern society demands the importance of developing learners' speaking skills as the learners can settle down well in their professional jobs. Developing speaking skills requires a lot of classroom practice, motivation to both speaking and various language activities.

Oral communication skills are learned in two contexts, namely; foreign language and second language situations. In a foreign language context, the target language is not the language of communication in the society, for instance studying France in the United States of America or learning Arabic in Australia. Learning oral communication skills is a challenging task for learners as they get very less opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom. In a second language context, the target language is the communication in the society, for example, English in the United Kingdom or Spanish in Mexico. Here the second language learners are immigrants, international students and refugees.

In a foreign language or a second language classroom, the learners should have some important factors. They should clearly understand the content when speaking and they should have the ability to use effective oral communication skills. In addition, they need a real-time exposure that is implemented by the teachers with a set of classroom language activities developed in a dynamic interactive learning environment where both teachers and learners co-operate with one another to create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere for a perfect productive conversation in the classroom environment. The process of learning and applying oral communication skills in English are very closely related. Because this technique enables the learners to connect them with what they learn and what they apply while speaking in the classroom. To achieve this objective, the foreign language or second language teachers should develop their learners' communicative competence through a diversity of classroom language activities that include various types of expressions, situations as well as different language discourses, and the different accents and dialects of native speakers.

## **2.6 Teaching Oral Communication Skills**

In the modern EFL classrooms, English teachers apply different methods and techniques in the classroom to teach oral communication skills. Equally important, they focus on communicative language teaching (CLT) and collaborative learning because communicative language teaching (CLT) is based on real-life situations and it is more useful in developing communication skills among EFL learners. Collaborative learning is also encouraged by EFLK teachers to involve EFL learners in many task-based language activities. It is applicable to both EFL / ESL settings. While teaching oral communication skills to EFL learners, EFL teachers are required to focus on speech sounds, sound patterns, stress and intonation patterns, the selection of suitable words and sentences; according to social setting, subject-matter and situations. The EFL teachers help the EFL learners organise their ideas, thoughts meaningfully in order to use English to express with values and judgments. Because speaking skill is considered as one of the language productive skills, according to the intention of the speaker, Brown (2004) categorized speaking into five types: imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive and extensive.



### Brown, H. (2004)

1. Imitative speaking is the learners' ability to repeat the others' speech as a word, a phrase or a sentence. This type of repetition involves grammar and lexis which are very important to interact in a conversation or convey the meaning.
2. Intensive speaking is the product of short discourses where the learners have to complete the tasks like reading aloud and completing sentences and dialogues.
3. Responsive speaking involves two persons or two groups in short conversations, small talks and simple requests to make them authentic.
4. Interactive speaking involves transactional language and interpersonal language. Transactional language is meant for exchanging information whereas interpersonal language is meant for social relationships.
5. Extensive speaking is more formal for extensive tasks and it involves speeches, oral presentations and story-telling.

The role of EFL teachers in training the EFL learners in developing their oral communication skills is vital and effective in English classrooms. According to Vilar (2003), "Teachers have two primary functions in education: the managerial and the instructional functions. The latter refers to the conditions that teachers create for learning to take place and the other is the knowledge that the teachers impart in the classroom. Teachers should carry out these functions simultaneously for efficient language instruction because they cannot be separated".

EFL teachers are expected to play a basic role in imparting quality education in ELT classroom, both in EFL / ESL settings, especially in teaching language skills. To achieve this quality, EFL teachers should use their academic skills, knowledge and various techniques to motivate the learners towards the learning of language skills. In this context, EFL teachers should act as facilitators, motivators, organisers, participants, assessors, observers, and so on. When it comes to teaching oral communication skills, the role of EFL teachers is fundamental because oral communication skills can be taught effectively by EFL teachers applying various techniques such as encouragement, motivation and interaction.

In order to develop the oral communication skills of EFL learners, the English

language teachers have to focus mainly on vocabulary and grammar and then on speech sounds, stress intonation patterns and finally on patterns of sentences. In order to enable the EFL learners to enrich good vocabulary and to have good knowledge over grammar, the EFL teachers should concentrate more on speech sounds, stress and intonation patterns which are the essential components required for speaking skills. After training in these fields, the EFL teachers have to provide the EFL learners with a number of opportunities to make use of them in their speaking practice sessions. Furthermore, the EFL teachers are supposed to conduct some learner-focused activities like activity-based or task-based activities that involve the EFL learners to develop their speaking skills in the real classroom environment. In this regard, EFL teachers can implement innumerable activities such as JAM (Just a Minute) sessions, role-plays, group discussions, preparing for both interviews and presentations and preparing the EFL learners to present papers in conferences, seminars, workshops, etc. The role of teachers is very critical here to prepare the EFL learners for their future career and prepare them to be competent in their speaking skills as the classroom is the main platform for EFL learners to perform these tasks.

Harmer (2007) argued that "The role of a teacher is related to organise learners in the classroom when doing different tasks, this means grouping students and providing them with information about the way they are going to do such activity in a limited time. The teacher, when plays this role in the classroom, has to be aware of making learners understand what they are going to do in order to make them involved and benefit from the activity they are practicing". EFL teachers should organise their students in terms of work-groups and pair work and involve them in their activities because they cannot be successful without their active participation in speaking activities. EFL teachers should guide the EFL learners in their language activities by giving them instructions, instruct the tasks and give them feedback as the end. Moreover, Harmer displays the role of a teacher as an organiser in the following way:

#### **Engage ► Instruct (Demonstrate) ► Initiate ► Organise ► Feedback**

Speaking skills help EFL learners in acquiring success in all aspects of life. A good knowledge of vocabulary and a wide range of English skills help EFL learners in acquiring better opportunities in their future career. Once EFL learners achieve good knowledge over both grammar and vocabulary, they can perform well in their speaking skills. Having talent in expressing their own thoughts and ideas with good speaking skills is a passport to success in their life. Good speaking skills even widen the options in selecting a suitable job. With excellent speaking skills, EFL learners can advance in their professions or jobs in the areas of business, sales, communications, computers, teaching, information technology, law, administration, management, marketing, reception, software industry, pharmaceutical industry, hospitality industry, tourism, government jobs, customer service, and so on. Furthermore, Freeman (1994) stated that "Language develops in context of functional use". "Teachers should create situations in which all their students use language for a variety of purposes and with a variety of people" (Mc Cafferty, 2006). From this quotation, we can deduce that doing a group work in the classroom increases the learner-learner interaction since working in groups provides EFL learners with opportunities to speak with one another, give suggestions and so on.

Consequently, EFL teachers need to conduct various language activities in the

classrooms and language laboratories such as JAM (Just a Minute) sessions, role-playing, discussions, interviews, presentations, seminars, and so on in the process of developing speaking skills among the EFL learners by adopting activity-based or task-based approach. Without the effective and active participation of learners, it is not possible for teachers to train them in speaking skills. Therefore, both teachers and learners have to engage themselves in various language activities of speaking.

Oral communication is a science that has been scientifically investigated by many scientists who have conducted research in other branches of knowledge, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, physiology and linguists. Many scientists agree that oral communication is an inherent physiological feature of human nature. For other scientists, oral communication is a personal interactive and dynamic process that involves sending and receiving messages in order to achieve deep and mutual understanding. Many linguists have studied the development of oral communication and its roles in teaching and learning foreign languages. Richards (1985) stated that "Teaching of English language is a complex issue that includes cultural, linguistic, and educational dimensions. So, effective program planning and use of methods to develop oral communication are necessary for any language learning program. In this regard, the needs and abilities of students should also be considered". Lightbown and Spada (1992) asserted that "Learning to communicate orally in English is related to factors such as motivation, skills, learning style and learning environment". Freeman (1998) argued that "Individual differences, age, motivation for language learning, beliefs, emotional states and personality of the student are important factors in developing oral communication skills in a foreign language learning".

## **2.7 Definition of Speaking**

Language has four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and speaking are the major skills of oral communication in language. Speaking is the verbal use of language to communicate with others. Students should be encouraged to orally interact in expressing their ideas and forming social relationships through speech. Florez (1999) defined speaking as "It is an interactive process of constructing meaning depending on the context, the experiences of the participants, the environment and the purpose of speaking". She (ibid) explained that "language learners should demonstrate a degree of linguistic competence and a corresponding awareness of sociolinguistics to be able to interact in class". In addition, Gebhard (1996) mentioned that "Speaking is one of two productive skills in language learning. It can be defined as a process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal or oral language form". Moreover, Nunan and Brindly (2003) defined speaking as "It is the language skill that consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning".

EFL students need to improve and develop their oral communication skills because they seriously want to express their ideas orally in different situations and they feel that using English can be done through oral communication. Richards (1985) stated that "The mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second-language or foreign-language learners". Consequently, EFL learners often evaluate their success in English language learning on the basis of how much they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency. Recently, English becomes the priority because it is an international language spoken all over the world. According to Thornbury (2006), "Speaking is a part of daily life that we take it for granted. In other words, in our daily



life, speaking is an important tool that we use to communicate through the words arrangement that we produce. As been stated above, we knew that mastering speaking skill is the priority in learning a language". Furthermore, Scheter (1999) said that "Speaking is to utter words or to articulate sounds, as human beings to express thoughts by words, as the organs may be so obstructed that a man may not be able to speak".

## **2.8 Definition of Listening**

Listening is one of the essential language skills. It is also one of the important communication tools. Richards and Schmidt (2002) stated that "Listening comprehension is the process of understanding speech in a first or second language. The study of listening comprehension in second language learning focuses on the role of individual linguistic units (e.g. phonemes, words, grammatical structures) as well as the listener's expectations, the situation and context, background knowledge and the topic".

Listening is the language process in which listeners interpret information in order to understand what the speakers say or express. Listening is a scientific term used in linguistics, psychology, physiology, etc. It plays vital roles in affective, cognitive and behavioural processes. In affective processes, it functions in the motivation to attend other people; in cognitive processes, it functions in understanding, receiving and interpreting content and relational messages; and in behavioural processes, it functions in responding to verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

## **2.9 The Development of Oral Communication and Linguistic Competence**

Oral communication plays a vital role in language learning and teaching processes. Effective teaching implies effective communication between the teacher and the student. If the student wants to develop his/her communication skills, he/she has to be a good communicator. Scientifically, communication starts with listening because effective communication requires careful and attentive listening with an open mind. The best way for EFL teachers to develop learners' oral communication skills is through classroom discussions or through small group works. Rika (1996) indicated that "oral communication begins and develops at very young age as children when they interact with each other in natural surroundings of the home environment". Moreover, Yaden (1988) pointed out that a child's home environment greatly impacts the quality and ability to communicate effectively.

## **3. Methodology**

The present study adopted the descriptive analysis method in collecting and analyzing the data of the study. The tool used to collect the data of the study was a questionnaire for EFL secondary school teachers. The data collected was classified and analyzed statistically.

### **3.1 Population of the Study**

The population of the present study is all secondary school EFL teachers in Babylon Province.

### **3.2 Sample of the Study**

The sample of the current study was (80) intermediate school EFL teachers in different three cities in Babylon Province.

### **3.3 Method of the Study**

The researcher used the descriptive-analytical method and a questionnaire as a tool

for collecting the required data of the study. The questionnaire consisted of (20) statements. The questionnaire was designed to investigate the problems of secondary school EFL students' oral communication in Babylon Province.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The data collected was analyzed and displayed in tables according to the order of the statements of the questionnaire. In addition, the hypotheses of the study were tested in relation to the results of the study.

##### 4.1 The Analysis of the Questionnaire

**Statement (1):** The EFL secondary school students are not given enough time to speak during the English language lessons.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	58	72.4%	72.4%
Not Sure	17	21.2%	21.2%
Disagree	5	6.1%	6.1%
Total	80	99.7%	99.7%

Table: (4.1)

Table:(4.1) reveals the EFL secondary school teachers' responses to statement (1). The statistical results are: (72.5%) agree, (21.2%) are not sure, (6.2%) disagree. These results clearly indicate that the students are not given enough time to practice speaking during the English language lessons. Therefore, this statement is accepted.

**Statement (2):** Group works help EFL secondary school students to practice oral communication.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	68	84.2%	84.2%
Not Sure	10	12.5%	12.5%
Disagree	2	3.3%	3.3%
Total	80	100.0%	100.0%

Table: (4.2)

According to statistical analysis of statement (2), most EFL intermediate school teachers agree (84.2%) that group works help EFL secondary school students to practice oral communication, (12.5%) are not sure and (3.3%) disagree. Therefore, this statement is highly accepted.

**Statement (3):** EFL secondary school students do not have previous experiences in speaking skills.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	69	86.2%	86.2%
Not Sure	7	8.8%	8.8%
Disagree	4	5.0%	5.0%
Total	80	100.0%	100.0%

Table: (4.3)

Table (4.3) shows that (86.2%) EFL secondary school teachers agree, (8.8%) are not sure and (5.0%) disagree that EFL intermediate school students do not have previous experiences in speaking skills.

**Statement (4):** Most oral communication exercises are done inside the classrooms by

teachers rather than students.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	62	77.5%	77.5%
Not Sure	11	13.7%	13.7%
Disagree	7	8.8%	8.8%
Total	80	100.0%	100.0%

Table: (4.4)

Table (4.4) reveals that (77.5%) EFL secondary school teachers agree, (13.7%) are not sure and (8.8%) disagree that most oral communication exercises are done inside the classrooms by teachers rather than students.

**Statement (5):** EFL teacher need effective training in teaching speaking skills.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	59	73.8%	73.8%
Not Sure	19	23.8%	23.8
Disagree	2	2.4%	2.4%
Total	80	100.0%	100.0%

Table: (4.5)

According to table (4.5), (73.8%) EFL secondary school teachers agree, (23.8%) are not sure and (2.4%) disagree that EFL teachers need effective training in teaching speaking skills.

**Statement (6):** Academic training courses give EFL teachers good and effective opportunities to express their ideas orally and develop their oral communication experiences.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	61	76.2%	76.2%
Not Sure	17	21.2%	21.2%
Disagree	2	2.5%	2.5%
Total	80	99.9%	99.9%

Table: (4.6)

According to table (4.6), (76.2%) EFL secondary school teachers agree, (21.2%) are not sure and (2.5%) disagree that academic training courses give EFL teachers good opportunities to express their ideas orally and develop their oral communication experiences.

**Statement (7):** Training EFL secondary school teachers in oral communication with native speakers of English helps in enhancing EFL students' verbal communication skills.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	57	71.2%	71.2%
Not Sure	20	25.0%	25.0%
Disagree	3	3.8%	3.8%
Total	80	100.0%	100.0%

Table: (4.7)

The results given in table (4.7) reveal that (71.2%) EFL secondary teachers agree, (25.0%) are not sure and (3.8%) disagree that training EFL intermediate school teachers in oral communication with native speakers of English helps in enhancing EFL

students' verbal communication skills.

**Statement (8):** Some EFL secondary school teachers do not focus teaching students oral communication exercises.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	53	66.2%	66.2%
Not Sure	21	26.2%	26.2%
Disagree	6	7.5%	7.5%
Total	80	99.9%	99.9%

Table: (4.8)

The statistical results presented in table (4.8) show that (66.2%) EFL secondary school teachers agree, (26.2%) are not sure and (7.5%) disagree that some EFL secondary school teachers do not focus teaching students oral communication exercises.

**Statement (9):** Watching TV. and video films and listening to the radio in English are good ways of improving EFL students' oral communication skills.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	63	78.8%	78.8%
Not Sure	15	18.7%	18.7%
Disagree	2	2.5%	2.5%
Total	80	100.0%	100.0%

Table: (4.9)

The statistical results given in table (4.9) show that (78.8%) EFL secondary school teachers agree, (18.7%) are not sure and (2.5%) disagree that watching TV. and listening to the radio in English are good ways of improving EFL students' oral communication skills.

**Statement (10):** Technological aids can effectively improve EFL students' oral communication skills and motivate them as well.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	64	80.0%	80.0%
Not Sure	11	13.8%	13.8%
Disagree	5	6.2%	6.2%
Total	80	100.0%	100.0%

Table: (4.10)

The statistical results shown in table (4.10) reveal that (80.0%) EFL secondary school teachers agree, (13.8%) are not sure and (6.2%) disagree that technological aids can effectively improve EFL students' oral communication skills and motivate them as well.

**Statement (11):** EFL students can learn good pronunciation and listening and speaking skills through the computer.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	61	77.7%	77.7%
Not Sure	13	16.8%	16.8%
Disagree	6	5.5%	5.5%
Total	80	100.0%	100.0%

Table: (4.11)

The statistical results shown in table (4.11) reveal that (77.7%) EFL secondary school



teachers agree, (16.8%) are not sure and (5.5%) disagree that EFL students can learn good pronunciation and listening and speaking skills through the computer.

**Statement (12):** Technology enhances the quality of EFL students' oral communication because they always spend much time on the computer.

	Frequency	Percent	Validity Percent
Agree	68	85.0%	85.0%
Not Sure	8	10.0%	10.0%
Disagree	4	5.0%	5.0%
Total	80	100.0%	100.0%

Table: (4.12)

The statistical results given in table (4.12) show that (85.0%) EFL secondary school teachers agree, (10.0%) are not sure and (5.0%) disagree that technology enhances the quality of EFL students' oral communication because they always spend much time on the computer.

#### 4.2 Testing the Study Hypotheses

The current study tested three hypotheses. After collecting and analyzing the required data, the study arrived at the following testing explanations:

**1. Hypothesis (1):** Iraqi EFL secondary school students are weak in producing good oral communication.

The statistical results showed in table (4.1): (72.4%), table (4.2): (84.2%), table (4.3): (86.2%) and table (4.4): (77.5) emphasize hypothesis (1).

**2. Hypothesis (2):** EFL teacher-training in oral communication can help in developing secondary school students' oral communication skills in English. The statistical results given in table (4.5): (73.8), table (4.6): (76.2%), table (4.7): (71.2%) and table (4.8): (66.2) emphasize hypothesis (2).

**3. Hypothesis (3):** Modern technology develop and enhance the quality of secondary school students' oral communication skills in English. The statistical results showed in table (4.9): (78.8%), table (4.10): (80.0%), table (4.11): (77.7%) and table (4.12): (85.0%) emphasize hypothesis (3).

#### 5. Conclusions

The present study deals investigates the problems that EFL secondary school students encounter in oral compunction. The study concluded the following:

1. EFL secondary school students are weak in oral communication because they do not have effective previous experiences in oral communication skills.
2. EFL secondary school students' listening and speaking skills can be improved and developed through working in small groups discussions.
3. EFL teachers need in-service training to develop their teaching techniques, and they should focus on teaching oral communication. EFL teachers should be well trained in how to teach oral commination effectively as well as giving them chances to activate the modern techniques of teaching oral communication.
4. Modern technology enhances EFL secondary school students' oral communication.

Oral communication at secondary schools should be taught through effective means of technology rather than the traditional techniques.

5. As communication skills play an essential role in the modern society, the responsibility increases more on the EFL teachers to train the EFL learners in those skills. Speaking or oral communication is very much important in personal and professional life. Thus, English language teachers have to give importance to speaking skills in classrooms and encourage the EFL learners to communicate in English not only in the classrooms but also in social life as far as ELT is concerned.

6. In research findings, the need of teaching oral communication skills in English classrooms has been identified and stressed. More importance has to be given to speaking skills in order to make the EFL learners communicate effectively at all places. Furthermore, the focus has been on the assessment of speaking skills in a systematic way.

### **Bibliography**

- Abdul Hameed, Yasmin Hikmet (1998). **An Introductory Course in General Linguistics**. Baghdad: University of Baghdad Press
- Allen, J. S. (1975). **Papers in Applied Linguistics**. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Brown, H. D. (2004). **Language Assessment Principles and Classroom Practices**. Pearson Edition.
- Celce-Murcia, M. (2000). **Discourse and Context in Language Teaching**. CA Guide for Language Teachers (P. 102). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Chaney, A. L. (1998). **Teaching Oral Communication**. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, c. 1998
- Florez G. H. (1999). **Speaking Skills and Foreign Language Communication**. London: Longman
- Freeman, D. (1994). **Language Development**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Freeman, D. (1998). **Motivation and Language Learning**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Freeman, D. (2008). **The Teaching of English as an International Language**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Gebhard, K. (1996). **Productive Skills and Language Learning**. New York: Routledge
- Harmer, J. (2007). **The Practice of English Language Teaching**. London: Longman
- Iqbal, J. (2012). **Four Language Skills**. Retrieved from <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/es>
- Khamkhien, A. (2010). **Teaching English Speaking and English Speaking Tests in Thai Context: A Reflection from Thai Perspectives**. English Language Journal, (pp. 184-200)
- Lightbown H. and Spada S. (1992). **Oral Communication and Motivation**. London: Routledge
- Lyons, John (1977). **Semantics**. London: Cambridge University Press
- Lyons, John (1981). **Language and Linguistics**. London: Cambridge

University Press

Mc Cafferty, S. G. (2006). **Cooperative Learning and Second Language Teaching**. New York: Cambridge University Press

Nation, I. S. P. & Newton, J. (2009). **Teaching ESL / EFL Listening and Speaking**. New York: Routledge

Nunan, D. and G. Brindly (1989). **Writing Skills and Language Communication**. London: Cambridge University Press

Nunan, D. and G. Brindly (2003). **Teaching Speaking Skills**. London: Arnold

Richards, C. Jack (1985). **Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics**. London: Pearson Education Limited

Richards, C. Jack and R. Schmidt (2002). **Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics**. London: Pearson Education Limited

Scheter, M. (1999). **Speaking and Speech Articulation**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Thornbury, F. (2006). **Speaking and Communication**. London: Longman

Underwood, M. (1089). **Teaching Listening Comprehension**. London: Longman

Vilar, E. (2003). **Roles of Teachers: A Case Study Based on Diary of a Language Teacher**. Retrieved from: <http://www.uji.es/bin/publ>

Wallace, C. (2001). **Reading Skills: The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Wilkins, D. A. (1972). **Linguistics in Language Teaching**. London: Arnold