

Dr. Al-Mohanna, Ayedh Dhawi Mohammed
English Division
Department of Humanities
King Khalid Military Academy

Developing English Learners' Listening-Speaking Skills Interactively: An Analytic Study in Saudi Arabian Context

تطوير مهارات الاستماع والمحادثة بشكل تفاعلي لدى متعلمي

اللغة الإنجليزية : دراسة تحليلية من واقع البيئة السعودية

Abstract

This study looks at current status of teaching listening-speaking skills to Saudi EFL learners. The focus of the study is on a group of EFL teachers and their classroom teaching practices in Saudi state schools in Riyadh city-the capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. After considering the practices of these teachers, it places those practices in relation to the relevant literature. This is to find our way in developing language listening-speaking skills interactively in Saudi Arabian context. The study adopts the qualitative inquiry approach used for looking at people in natural settings where classroom observation employed as an instrument for collecting data. A closer examination of data reveals that the EFL classroom communication is extremely centred on the teacher. The EFL teachers initiate the talk, ask questions, decide who is going to participate and evaluate the answers. They are in control of the period from the beginning to the end. The students are left with limited or non-communicative options.

ملخص البحث :

تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على الوضع الراهن لتعليم مهارتي الاستماع و المحادثة للطلاب السعوديين متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. حيث تركز الدراسة على مجموعة من معلمي اللغة وعلى ممارساتهم الصفية في مدارس التعليم العام بمدينة الرياض - عاصمة المملكة العربية السعودية. وبعد التفكير و التأمل في ممارسات هؤلاء المعلمين فإن الدراسة تضع تلك الممارسات الصفية أمام ما تم استعراضه في الأدب بهذا الخصوص. والهدف من ذلك هو محاولة الوقوف على الطرق و الأساليب التي من شأنها تطوير مهارات الاستماع و المحادثة باللغة الإنجليزية بشكل تفاعلي في البيئة السعودية. تتبع هذه الدراسة المنهج النوعي الوصفي للبحث العلمي المستخدم في ملاحظة ومتابعة الأشخاص في أوضاعهم الطبيعية و الحقيقية ، حيث تم توظيف الملاحظة الصفية كأداة رئيسة في جمع البيانات لهذه الدراسة. وتسفر الدراسة عن أن التواصل اللغوي (الاستماع و التحدث بلغة الدراسة) وتبادل الآراء و الأفكار داخل القاعة الدراسية يتمركز بشكل كبير جدا حول المعلم. فمعلمو اللغة هم الذين يبادرون بالتحدث ، و طرح الأسئلة على الطلاب ، و تحديد من يشارك منهم ، ومن ثم تقييم إجاباتهم على الأسئلة المطروحة. فهؤلاء المعلمون يتحكمون في الدرس من البداية و حتى النهاية في حين أن الطلاب تمنح لهم فرص محدودة جدا ، أو تكاد تكون معدومة للتفاعل التبادلي من حيث الاستماع والتحدث بلغة التعلم أثناء الدرس.

Introduction

The practice of teaching English in Saudi Arabian state schools is usually determined by the textbook or the series of textbooks being used. This ranged from the traditional Grammar-Translation method to the current claim that ELT in Saudi Arabia is communicative. The current series of textbooks used in Saudi Arabian state schools adopt the Communicative Approach which is also referred to as the Functional-Notional Approach. These textbooks are designed under the directions of the Ministry of Education that supervises Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia. The textbooks for intermediate level, which is the focus of this study, are called 'Say It In English'. In each year of the intermediate level, English materials consist of two pupil's books, two workbooks and two teacher's books; that is one book for each semester of the academic year. Each pupil's book contains eight units. Each unit is divided into four forty five-minutes lessons.

The Communicative Approach, on which English curriculum in Saudi Arabia are based, stresses the importance of all the language skills with more emphasis on listening-speaking skills. The ultimate goal of adopting the Communicative Approach in the language classroom is to help students become "*communicatively competent*" (Larsen-Freeman 1986, p.131). To achieve this goal, students have to master certain aspects of the learned language. Larsen-Freeman (Ibid, p. 131) draws our attention to the following, which I will present in a list form:

- Students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings and functions.
- They need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a function and also that a single form can often serve a variety of functions.
- They must be able to choose from among these most appropriate form, given the social context and the roles of the interlocutors, and
- They must also be able to manage the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors.

If this is the expected from language learners in the communicative classroom, what will be their role as well as their teachers'?

Inside the language classroom, the teacher plays different roles depending on the needs of the learners and the aims of the instructional materials. In the communicative classroom, as Breen and Candlin (1980) argue, the language teacher works as an organiser of resources and as a resource himself and as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities. The teacher is there to facilitate the communicative process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities in the text and to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group.

As for the language learners, Breen and Candlin (Ibid, p.101) represent their roles as:

“The role of the learner as negotiator-between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning-emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator with the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way. In expression and negotiation, the learner adopts the dual role of being, first a potential teacher for other learners and, second, an informant to the teacher concerning his own learning process. In this latter role, the learner can offer the teacher and other learners a source for new direction in the learning teaching process of the group.”

With reference to the Saudi Arabian context, the involvement of young learners in the negotiation process needs to be practiced gradually due to their limited and humble knowledge of the language as they are first introduced to it at the age of 11. Therefore, the expected participation of more competent peers should be gradually implemented by given enough time for those competent ones to reach their level of potential development.

However, the main aim of this study is to investigate the current status of ELT, with special focus on listening-speaking skills, in Saudi state intermediate schools. It is also to shed light on the roles that teachers and students play in the language classroom. This is an attempt to provide information that would help in developing and improving Saudi EFL students' listening-speaking skills interactively which, in turn, would make them communicatively competent.

Before we go further for our investigation, it is worthwhile to touch upon the importance of spoken language in the learning process. This will be the concern of the following section.

The importance of spoken language in the learning process

The importance of spoken language in the learning process began to receive an increasing attention from educators. This is applied to first language although children live the learning experience since birth. Brown et al. (1984, p. 5) argue that all languages, even first language, is learned with some direct teaching of the spoken component. They state:

“For many years it was assumed that native English speaking children would naturally acquire the spoken form of the language. Since it is demonstrable that normal children at five, or ten or fifteen do indeed speak English and do show progressively greater command of English as they grow older, it seems reasonable to suppose that if they’re simply left to grow up in an English-speaking environment they will naturally acquire competence in using the spoken language. ... People concerned with the role of language in education have pointed out that not all children acquire the sort of spoken language which is highly valued within the educational system.”

In school, children use language not only for communication but also for learning. Shafer et al. (1983, p.2) point out the significance of spoken language in learning as: *It “is a way of representing the conscious world to ourselves and to others. It has become increasingly clear that success in school is a product of learning the language of the schools. ... Interaction through talk at home and in school is essential in bringing about oral language fluency and ultimately literacy.”*

Browne (1996, p.10) also stresses the importance of children’s listening and speaking in the process of children’s learning and language learning at school. She states *“Whilst listening may be an essential part of the oracy curriculum, the opportunity for children to develop their own meaning through talk is a vital part of learning.”*

The National Curriculum Report for Key Stages 2, 4, English (cited in Howe 1992, p. 6) states that: *“Pupils should be given the opportunity to*

learn how to: present their ideas, experiences and understanding in a widening range of context across the curriculum and with an increasing awareness of audience and purpose."

The realisation of the crucial role of the spoken language in children's learning process is not new. The Newbolt Committee on the teaching of English (1921) (cited in Lockwood 1996, p. 1) has concluded that: "*Oral work is ... the foundation upon which proficiency in the writing of English must be based ; more than that, it is a condition of the successful teaching of all that is worth being taught.*"

The value of oral language is stressed in the 'National Oracy Project'(1991). The aim is to emphasise the role of the spoken language in learning. Hughes (1994, p. 7) states "*the message for teachers is clear: developing children's oral language is now an essential part of their work*". In relation to that, creative thinking which can be expressed through spoken language especially at the early years of formal education is part of the rhetoric of education. Policy makers acknowledge its importance in their report. However, the way in which the national curriculum is structured, and English curriculum is part of it, makes it difficult even in English schools. This suggests the conflict between what is hoped and what can be possibly achieved in a given structure.

The role of language in learning process is vital. Barnes (1976) reminds us that children are not passive receivers of knowledge. Through language they are able to make knowledge and thought processes available to introspection and revision. He remarks that: "*Language is not the same as thought, but it allows us to reflect upon our thoughts. The metaphor contained in 'reflect' is here highly appropriate: what we say and write mirrors our thought processes, and enables us to take responsibilities for them. Thus children and adults alike are not receiving knowledge but remaking it for themselves*" (Barnes 1976, p. 19-20).

By beginning compulsory education, children turn into new demands to develop language for a range of different functions than the ones they have before. After mastering the spoken language, they have to use talk

to learn in a formal school setting. This means learning to use the language for different purposes and in different ways than at home. Lockwood (1996) sees that it is the teacher's task to bridge the gap between the language demands of the classroom and curriculum and each child's own language resources. If the significance of teaching the spoken language to native speakers is important, it is even more significant to teach it to second and foreign language learners. However, despite all the focus on the importance of listening and speaking in the learning process, the spoken language seems to be undervalued.

Why is spoken language undervalued?

Bygate (1987) sees that talk is undervalued in the classroom. He relates that to several reasons like all students come from home equipped with the ability to speak, and this makes teachers take it for granted that their students can talk. Another reason is that the spoken language is "*transient and improvised and can therefore be viewed as facile, superficial or glib*" (Ibid, p.vii). Browne (1996, p.10) thinks that the reason for overlooking the importance of talk as part of the learning process is the "*prioritizing of pupils' learning*". Teachers are faced with many competing requirements on the time available during the lesson period. As they see students listen and talk they think that there is no need for planning for productive talk which they see as an "*organisational headache*". Teachers under pressure of covering an intensive curriculum find themselves concerned more about covering the curriculum rather than exploring ideas. In that sense classroom interaction is seen as providing answers for the teacher's questions. In addition, teachers see children talking as a sign of not following the lesson or not doing the work. They view children's talk as noise and not a sign of learning. Such a reaction to children's talk will have a negative impact on how children view their talking and listening in the classroom. Children will see it as a means of socialising and not learning.

Rowland (1987) investigates the role of control in classroom. How should teachers see control? What is it controlling of? He draws that

teachers perceive control as keeping order. It is control over the behaviour of children to avoid losing control. This is quite dangerous as it becomes *"a matter of controlling the situations and the understandings that develop in the classroom"* (Ibid, p.121). The control of behaviour leads to another type of control. It is the control teachers practise over the important tool of thinking, i.e., language. This happens in the authoritarian and oppressive learning settings, where everything is in the hand of the teacher. Such a control over language is also seen as a control over the minds of the learners as they have to take the teacher's instructions unquestionably. Rowland's view is that *"the process of negotiation between teacher and learner is a logically necessary element of teaching"*. According to him, learning is viewed as *"a process of construction or reconstruction by the learner and that therefore, teaching, which is a deliberate intervention in the learning process, must be found upon an attempt to understand the learner's present state of knowledge"* (Rowland 1987, p.122). Rowland (Ibid, p. 122) stresses the importance of allowing children to practise some control over their thinking through negotiation, otherwise *"learning is liable to the sterile, to be dependent upon the teacher and ultimately to produce conformity without thoughtfulness"*. He also draws the teachers attention to give a real chance to children to explore what they learn before reaching the learning points planned to be achieved during the lesson. However, if the children are suggested one way or another to consider the teacher's direction towards achieving the development of knowledge, skill or concept, *"then children's control will be illusory. ... A superficial technical competence may be gained, but at a high cost to the imagination which surely is the source of continued learning"* (Rowland 1987, p. 123).

Tarleton (1988, p.1) points out that *"Talking is still regarded as a time-wasting, low status activity ..."*. Teachers view children's classroom talk as a sign of poor concentration, distraction and disobedience. However, Tarleton believes in oracy as a valuable method of learning which gives listening high priority. In this regards, Tarleton (Ibid, p.2-3) states that:

"Oracy is a process or an activity which places equal emphasis on speaking and listening and recognises their independence. As a process,

oracy is a valuable method of learning which encourages thinking and sharing of ideas. It assumes a dual role and reminds children that communication is a two-way affair, giving listening a high priority. Oracy is also a series of skills, and understanding these skills and knowing how to use them enables children to be effective learners in school and effective citizens when they leave school.”

Teachers have to consider the importance of talk as a mark of effective learning and promote during lesson time instead of suppressing it and viewing it as a sign of distraction and time-wasting. Ments (1990) mentions that teachers are expected to involve students in active learning. Thus their role is seen as facilitators of learning through helping students reflect on their experiences. This is achieved through talking and discussing matters of concern where students listen and talk to each other. This would help developing their language listening-speaking ability. Ments (Ibid, p.12) elaborates on that issue saying:

“One of the commonest skills which is needed is that of taking an effective part in verbal discourse; in other words talking and discussing matters of concern. Students must be taught how to listen to what others are saying, to analyse their arguments and to compare them with their own experiences. They must be able to clarify their own thoughts, to present them to others in their group, and to defend them logically and persuasively when challenged. Talking is an essential part of this process. It enables students to assess the importance of what they have experienced, and gives them an opportunity to integrate new information into their scheme of things.”

Teachers are expected to play that role of talk facilitators at all levels of learning. Foreign language learning is no difference from that however children need to learn enough vocabulary to practise it. This, however, cannot be accomplished without being involved in classroom interaction and discussion.

What then is the nature and the quality of discourse between teachers and students in EFL classroom in Saudi state intermediate school? This is the concern of the present study.

Now and before going inside the language classroom to identify the structure of discourse between teachers and students, it is time to give a brief description of the methodology used in this study. To that we shall now turn.

Methodology

Data collection method

The present study is meant to be a naturalistic inquiry about the status of ELT, particularly teaching listening-speaking skills, in Saudi Arabian context. Therefore and in order to “*record behaviour as it is happening*” (Merriam 1988, p.8), classroom observation is employed as an instrument for collecting its data. According to Genishi (1982, p.565) observation method is the best way to answer research questions. “*It is the fundamental method for understanding a phenomenon in which naturalistic observation is the instrument for other researchers*”. Boehm and Weinberg (1977, p.1) also writes “*the observation process allows us to obtain essential information for drawing inferences and making decisions ...*”. Wajnryb (1992) views observation as an appropriate method for increasing understanding of the complex relationship between teaching and learning in the language learning classroom. He remarks that “*Being in the classroom as an observer opens up a range of experiences and processes which can become part of the raw material of a teacher's professional growth*” (Wajnryb 1992, p.1). In an educational setting, observation in the language classroom is considered of crucial importance in providing trainee teachers, teacher trainers with perspectives for teacher preparation, practice and professional development. In this sense, the language classroom from a teacher's point of view is: “*The primary source of information out of which teachers will develop their own personal philosophy of what makes effective teaching and learning. It is also the domain where they will find out about their professional roles and responsibilities*” (Wajnryb 1992, p.13).

The study site

The present study is conducted in intermediate schools for boys in Riyadh city, the capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For the purpose of this study, nine intermediate schools are randomly selected from the nine directorates of educational supervisory spread all over Riyadh city, that is one school from each directorate. Such a selection is intended to enable me to view the English language teaching/learning

process in all the different directorates of educational supervisory in Riyadh city, as these schools are ought to be a representative sample of the intermediate school in all Riyadh different educational parts.

However, because of a time constraint, I observe only two EFL teachers from each school. The criterion that directs my choice for teachers to be observed is to select the teachers who teach and cover the three intermediate grades (grade one to three) and the ones who show willing to participate in the study. This enables me to observe classes from different intermediate years that are taught by different EFL teachers. Each EFL teacher is observed for four periods (lessons).

Recording method

For the purpose of this study, I have depended on an audio tape recorder and on written field notes as 'aide-memoire' for later analysis. The tape recorder is used to record the teacher-student interactions as it is physically impossible to record everything that happen during the teaching period. I also take notes as some events which happen in a classroom cannot be captured by the audio recording. As the main purpose of bringing along with me the tape recorder is to record the teaching session, I have to seek teachers' approval. It seems that they understand my reason for the research and they agree that I can capture the classroom interaction and teaching practice by placing the tape recorder on the edge of the board or on the teachers' desk.

Reading the classroom observations

Looking at the observational data, I just wonder how I am going to report it. There are different ways to go about presenting the data. I can sort it by schools, or by teachers. I can even present it by teaching units, as it is a coincidence that some of the teaching units of a particular year are taught at the same time in some schools. Yet, within the limited space of this study, I have to select among the conducted classroom observations to have observational lessons that clearly illustrate the status of teaching listening-speaking skills.

However, the classroom observations reveal that each EFL teacher observed in this study conducted all of his four observed lessons in almost the same way with insignificant slight differences. Therefore to avoid repetition and also because of the space limitation in this study, I will choose only five accounts of the classroom observations from five different intermediate schools that ought to represent the five different parts of Riyadh city; that is, North, South, East, West and Centre of Riyadh. To these five accounts we shall now turn.

Structure of discourse between teachers and students

In relation to the function of listening and speaking in learning and their importance in encouraging thinking and sharing knowledge, the following are five excerpts from five different classrooms taught by five different EFL teachers. These excerpts are chosen from the classroom observations conducted in the nine intermediate schools under study to represent the five different parts of Riyadh City: north, south, east, west and centre. Looking at the interaction between the EFL teachers and their students well help in identifying the structure of discourse and the relation between the adult and the child in the learning context. After each excerpt, attention will be paid to the kind of discourse focused on during that part of the lesson.

Intermediate School One (North): Teacher 1

Nationality:	Saudi	Qualification:	BA in English
Age:	32 years	Experience years:	9 years
Students' grades:	1 st & 2 nd level	Students' age:	12 – 13 years

The context is grade 1 intermediate class. The teacher begins a new lesson of the first unit in the textbook. As it is the case with previous lessons, today's lesson is divided into three sections. Section 'A' is a revision of what has been taught previously. Section 'B' is "*the presentation stage*" Byrne, 1986) through which students will be introduced to the new vocabulary and theme of the lesson. For today they will learn the words 'ink, lamp, key, juice'. Byrne (1986, p.2), referring to the language teacher, states that: "*Your main task is to*

serve as a kind of informant. You know the language ... and present this in such a way that the meaning of the new language is as clear and memorable as possible."

Byrne (Ibid, p. 2) warns the language teacher not to be overexcited and carried away with that role as *"there is a danger of speaking to much time presenting so that the students do not get enough time to practice the language themselves"*. Section 'C' is meant for practice. At this stage, students have a simple exercise which is meant to be reminder of the vocabulary they have learnt so far. According to Byrne (1986) students have to do most of the talking. The teacher will be there to *"devise and provide the maximum amount of time for practice"*, which must at the same time be both *"meaningful and memorable"* (Ibid, p.2). Here Byrne describes the teacher as the 'skilful conductor of an orchestra' whose job is to give a chance to each one of his students to participate and see how satisfactory his performance is.

The most important stage in the language classroom is the production stage. At this stage the teacher's role is seen as a manager and guide to help give his students the opportunity to know the functions of the language and be able to initiate and start an interaction with others in a meaningful way. In other words, enable them to listen and talk to others interactively and effectively. However, 'does such a structure of interaction exist in the foreign language classroom?' If not, the questions to be asked then are 'why does it not happen?' 'How is it possible to make it work?'

The teacher begins the lesson by asking students to pay attention to him and look at the board to read the date. It seems that the teacher is controlling the class and dominating the interaction from the very beginning of the period. The students repeat after him the day and the date. After that he reminds them and revises with them the previously taught lesson. The students are following the teacher's instructions, but 'are they enjoying it?' 'Is it meaningful for them?' Or 'are they merely repeating previously taught material to satisfy the teacher?' Students, in this intermediate classroom as in other observed ones, sit in rows in which two or three students sit next to each other. The students are 12-13 years old. The teacher holds his hands to his chest and walks around

the students. After that he asks them about the meaning of the word 'dirty'.

T: What is the meaning of dirty? Yes Adel. What is the meaning of dirty?

Adel: Dirty. (The answer is given in Arabic)

T: Right. Who is going to write it on the board? Yes Saad.

Ss: Sir. Sir. Sir. (They stand up calling him sir, sir as a way of trying to attract his attention to call their names to write the word on the board).

T: Sit down, keep sitting and raise your hands on the desk please.

T: Yes Saad (back to the boy who was asked to write the word on the board)

(Saad wrote the word on the board)

Ss: Wrong. (They say it in Arabic)

T: Is it correct? ... Hussam, correct it please.

(Hussam corrected the word)

T: Correct. Clap hands for him.

The teacher depends on the oral language in presenting the lesson and its new vocabulary. He does not seem to rely on any teaching aids like a tape recorder, flash cards or posters. He even allows students to explain and give the meaning of the vocabulary in Arabic. In such a brief interaction between the teacher and his students, it shows that he dominates the interaction, and that students use one-word answers. The question to be raised is, 'are those students really benefiting from the teacher's talk?' As we can see from the brief interaction quoted above, the teacher has the greater part of it. He has 6 turns to 1 from Adel and 2 from the whole class. They all speak in Arabic.

Now standing in front of the class, the teacher says:

T: Now look and listen to me. (He switches off and then on the classroom light) I am switching off the lamp, I am switching on the lamp. What is the meaning of lamp?

Ss: Lamp. (The answer is given in Arabic)

T: Who is going to write word lamp on the board? (A student did that with a help from the teacher)

The teacher attracts his students' attention to another part of the lesson by saying "*Now listen to me*". It is a speech marker which indicates a transactional stage. The teacher emphasises the importance of writing as he, together with many other language teachers, believe it helps students to remember learned vocabulary. They see it as a forgotten element in the language learning.

T: Now look at me (He walks around and points at some students' desks and says) **your desks are not clean. They are dirty. There is ink on them.**

(One of the student makes an attempt to clean his desk using a piece of paper)

T: Do not make any thing. Listen to me. (He points at that student and says) **Listen to me. Do not be dirty. Do not write on your desks. Keep your desks clean. What is the meaning of keep your desks clean?**

(One of the students is talking to his mate)

T: You, shut up and listen to me. Attention please. Look at me.

(He points at that student and says)

T: You, you. Come here. Stand to the door. I told you do not speak.

The teacher uses the speech marker again to draw the students' attention to another point. He does not take advantage of the fact that a student wanted to clean his desk. The fact that a student attempts to clean his desk as a reaction to the teacher's sentences suggests that he understood the teacher's sentence and its implication, i.e., cleaning it whether that was within the intention of the teacher or not. This is what Austin (1962) calls the illocutionary act of an utterance in which an act is performed by saying something. According to Austin, the 'illocutionary act' is one of two other performance acts, i.e., the locutionary act, the act of saying something, and the prelocutionary act, the act performed by or as a result of saying. Searle (1969) developed the concept of 'illocutionary act' to indicate that the learner's interpretation is not in the speakers intention. The teacher, here, should have taken that action into consideration to talk more about it and involve the other students in the interaction. Instead he asks that student to stop that and listen. I wonder if such a reaction reflects his concern about not to disturb the flow of the lesson and the loss of time? He does the same thing again when one of the students is engaged in a side conversation with his mate. The teacher does not ask him what he is

talking about or what can be the reason for his distraction. That can be the focus of the classroom discussion and interaction and will be an opportunity to join the rest of the class in by knowing the reason for their mate distraction. It would be a great chance for the teacher to have his students talk and listen to each other in an interactive and meaningful way. Instead all he does is punish him by letting him standing up next to the door of the classroom.

Then he goes around and asks the students if anyone of them his father has a new car.

T: Ahmed, come here. Does your father has a new car?

Ahmed: (shakes his head indicating yes).

T: Right. Now tell me about it. Is it big?

Ahmed: (shakes his head indicating no).

T: Is it small?

Ahmed: (shakes his head indicating yes).

T: Does it have a key? (he takes out some keys of his pocket, raises them up and says).

T: What is the meaning of key?

Ss: Key. (The answer is given in Arabic)

T: Ahmed, does it have a key?

Ahmed: (shakes his head indicating yes)

T: Yes. It ... (then he waits for other students to finish the sentence).

Ss: It have a key.

T: It has a key. It has a key. Okay Ahmed, sit down.

T: Now, who can write the word key on the board? (a student did that).

The teacher does not ask the student to speak in English nor to say 'yes' or 'no' in English. I wonder why he is happy with such a passive role from that student. He stresses correctness by repeating the sentence but he does not ask the students to repeat the correct form. Instead he asks the student to sit down and asks another student to write the word 'key' on the board. From the four short quoted interaction extracts, it is clear that the teacher is dominating the classroom interaction and directing it according to a pre-planned agenda which he did not want to

go out of. Such a strict plan has prevented him from benefiting from those incidents in which students either show interest in the lesson by willing to perform an act or disinterest by being distracted and keeping busy with something out of the lesson focus. The answers are either given in Arabic (the students' mother tongue), repeated after the teacher or students keep quite and provide no answer. This suggests that when students provide the answer they display knowledge passed already to them and they have no chance to ask questions or direct the focus to something they like to talk about.

Intermediate School Two (South): Teacher 2

Nationality:	Sudanese	Qualification:	BA in English
Age:	40 years	Experience years:	17 years
Students' grades:	1st & 3rd level	Students' age:	12 – 14 years

The teacher is done with section 'A' of this lesson. That section covers the game 'Memory'. Now the teacher brings the students' attention to the next section of the lesson. He raises his voice to bring order to class. He calls on one of the student to come to the front of the class. His aim seems to be to take control of the class to give a smoother flow to the lesson and finish the plan on time. According to Edwards and Westgate (1987, p. 44) teachers' continuous control over classroom interaction as a precondition for attaining their educational goals are probably not far from their minds. This is not only because of "*the immediate problems of managing turns and topics in such crowded condition, but also because of their failure to 'keep the noise down' is likely to be severely judged, both by their students and their colleagues.*"

On the board, the teacher writes two groups of words:

book ---- books
pen ----- pens
door ----- doors
egg ----- eggs

brush ----- brushes
watch ----- watches
box ----- boxes
tomato ---- tomatoes

He then turns to the class and starts explaining, in English then in Arabic, when we add –s to form the plural of the words and when we add –es. The students are sitting silent and quite.

As a kind of revision, the teacher goes back to the words written on the board and asks several students to read the singular form followed by the plural form of each word.

Now, the teacher stand in front of the students and asks a student to come to front of the class:

T: Open your mouth please. Open your mouth.

(the student opens his mouth)

T: He has .. He has ..

Ss: He has teeth.

T: He has a tooth, one. Show me one tooth. Yes one tooth. Who can spell tooth for me?

Ss: (All in one voice spell tooth) t.o.o.t.h.

T: Okay, tooth, tooth.

Ss: Tooth.

T: Just one tooth. This is one tooth. These are teeth.

Ss: Teeth.

T: Teeth

Ss: Teeth.

T: Yes, spell teeth please

T: Tooth

Ss: Tooth

T: Teeth

Ss: Teeth.

On the board, the teacher writes some irregular words with their plural forms: ‘man-men, woman-women, foot-feet’. He reads these words asking the students to repeat after him.

The teacher dominates the class talk-time and the students as a whole class repeat after him. They wait for his instructions or questions before they respond. He wants to draw the students' attention to the difference between the singular and plural forms of irregular words. However, it seems that he confuses his students a little bit because they all expect that he will talk about the plural 'teeth' as that what probably come to their minds when he asks that student to open his mouth. The answer 'teeth' is not wrong in the first place. However, the teacher could have elicited the answer he has in mind by pointing at one tooth. That would assure the students that their answer was not wrong, yet not the one the teacher expected. Shafer et al. (1983, p. 28) remind us: "*Children in the classroom should believe that their ideas are valued even if they do not correspond to what the teacher had in mind ... Children should also believe that the form their language takes is valued. Teachers should accept a child's language as it is, and allow child the freedom needed to test his or her hypothesis and make revision.*"

Basically the nature of interaction between the teacher and his students does not reflect the adult-child interaction (i.e., listening and speaking in an interactive and meaningful way) at home or at any other social context where the focus is on the meaning and on shared experiences, which allows the child to listen, reflect on his ideas and speak them out. As the interaction is teacher dominant, students cannot predict what will take place next. They are passive and such a role does not ensure that learning takes place. Such a 'parrot-like' learning by the students is not "*simulating knowledge of the corresponding concepts but actually covering up a vacuum*" (Vygotsky 1962, p. 83).

Intermediate School Three (East): Teacher 3

Nationality:	Jordanian	Qualification:	BA in E. Literature
Age:	34 years	Exper. years:	11 years
Students' grades:	1 st & 2 nd level	Students' age:	12 – 13 years

The class begins at 8:50 am. Students are back to the classroom after having a break. Today the teacher gives revision as he has covered the syllabus. The teacher walks in with a smile and greets his students. He

asks them about today' s date. He arranges his books and flash cards on his desk, then he calls on four students to participate in the scrambled flash cards' game. The following excerpt is taken after the first 15 minutes of the lesson. He gives 10 cards to each group and asks them to match each one with either the correct answer or the completion of a sentence. The game will begin shortly and the rest of the class is following quietly. I will not focus on the game at this point of the lesson as I want to give an account of another part of it where is more interaction between the teacher and students.

Now the attention is paid to the whole class. All students will participate in the game, but this time it is the teacher who is going to ask the questions. The competition is between three groups in the class instead of two sets of pairs as it was the case at the beginning of the lesson. The teacher moves to the front area of the class.

T: Now. I mix these cards. If you 'remember'. What does the word remember mean?

Ss: Remember. (The answer is given in Arabic)

T: Good. If you can remember the answer, complete this card. Okay, I will take one. We buy sandwiches from Who can remember? Group B, we buy sandwiches from

S: the playground.

T: from the playground! No. No. Okay, another one. Yes.

S: from the cafeteria.

T: Group B got a star. It is group C now. We read and write Do you remember?

S: In our classroom.

T: Yes, in our classroom.

The teacher's initiation and feedback, characterises of many ESL/EFL classrooms, are clearly dominant in this excerpt. Even the choice of topic or types of questions or sentence competition are based on the teacher's preference and what he thinks is important to go over. Turn taking and who can participate and speak during the period are left to the teacher's decision. Looking at the game chosen for today's lesson, although it is meant to be part of the revision and to remind students

with previously taught elements of the syllabus, yet it is not something genuine as the students have heard the questions and answers many times before this period. However, there are several students who are not participating or do not know the answers.

The teacher-students interaction in the above extract raises the following question: 'Was the lesson done in a mechanical way so it did not attract the students' attention and interest?'

The teacher continues the game with the class:

T: **Where do people pray together?** (He points at a student called Nasser, but he seems not ready with the answer. The other members of the group raise hands to participate. But the teacher asks those who know the answer to tell it to Nasser).

Nasser: **A people ...**

T: **A people! No.**

Nasser: **The people ...**

T: **The people ... No.**

Nasser: **People pray ...**

T: **No you missed the word ...**

Nasser: **People pray together in the mosque.**

T: **Very good. People pray together in the mosque.**

The teacher's teaching style encourages group work and co-operative learning, but 'is the group work functional and communicative?' 'Are students going to be able to benefit from it in real life conversation?' Certainly, in the extract used here and in the one before, students are not given the opportunity to initiate the conversation, instead they respond to the teacher's questions and these answers are most of the time single-word answers. They also rely on the teacher's feedback to guide them on how to proceed from there. According to Bygate (2001), a learner's speaking competence is determined by his success in conducting a conversation. A study by McCarthy and O' Keffe (2004) has also shown that much classroom conversation involves the teacher taking the role of initiator, yet knowing how and when to open a conversation is a key speaking competence that learners must be

taught. Turn-taking and adjacency pair practice will provide learners with indispensable knowledge of when it is appropriate to listen and talk, for how long and the preferred response pattern to adopt. This is the interaction management skill that learners would do well to acquire (Bygate, 1998 & Fulcher, 2003).

T: Now listen to this. ... 'In grade one'

S1: How?

T: No.

S2: When?

T: No.

S3: What?

T: No.

S4: Which grade ...

T: Which grade. We agree that which grade is part of the answer.

S4: Which grade you are?

T: No.

S4: Which grade are you?

T: In which grade are you?

T: Ali. This is a very easy question. Do you know the meaning of easy?

Ss: Easy (The answer is given in Arabic).

T: I am from Bahrain.

Ali: What?

T: What!

Ali: Where are you from?

T: Where are you from? Good.

Once again, a speech marker is there to indicate a move to another question. The extract above shows the following:

- Teacher's control and plan are strongly dominant.
- Teacher's feedback and students' single word answers are dominant.
- The teacher has a greater number of turns than the students.

- It is only student 4 who has an extended chance to talk. He has 3 turns because he is loser to the correct answer than others.

Intermediate School Four (West): Teacher 4

Nationality:	Saudi	Qualification:	BA in English
Age:	36 years	Experience years:	13 years
Students' grades:	1 st & 2 nd level	Students' age:	12 – 13 years

The teacher commences the period with a greeting to the students then writing the date, the unit and the lesson to be covered. Students along with him state the date of the day. The teacher goes directly into the lesson and the following is an excerpt of the first part of the lesson.

- T: I want you to give me a sentence with 'can' or 'cannot'. So, I can ...
- S: Play football.
- T: Play football. Very good. I can play football.
- T: Yes, who can give me another sentence?
- S: I can draw
- T: Excellent. I can draw. Yes who can make a sentence using 'cannot'?
- S: I cannot swim.
- T: Very good. I cannot swim.
- T: Khalid, can you think of a sentence?
- Khalid: I cannot go in
- T: I cannot go to..
- Khalid: I cannot go to school.
- T: I cannot go to school. Good.
- S: I cannot cook.
- T: Excellent. I cannot cook.
- T: Now, pay attention, listen to me. I want you to give me a sentence with like. So I like....
- S: To read.
- T: I like reading. Another one.

S: I like to swim.

T: Excellent. I like swimming. After like we use the 'ing' form, I like swimming, I like running, I like eating, I like drinking, I like shopping.

Ss: We like playing.

T: Yes, so we use the 'ing' form after like. When do we use the 'ing' form also? When do we use it? After 'am', 'is' and 'are'. For example, I am playing, I am swimming. Also, we say he is eating. So remember to use 'ing' after am, is and are. I like playing. We do not say I like to play.

Again it is clear that teacher question, students respond and teacher feedback are the dominant patterns in the language exchanges. From the very beginning the teacher has determined the focus of the lesson and the type of sentences students should produce. He as well chooses those students who will participate. He even gives the beginning of the first sentence and leaves the rest for them to complete. Students answer in full sentences and give interesting ones. However, the teacher does not stop at any one of them to expand or elaborate on it and encourage the students to express their ideas and practise their language. Part of the teacher's feedback is repeating students' sentences, yet when it comes to errors he does not tolerate it. He stops the student directly after he says "*I cannot go in ...*". He does not give any further grammatical explanations of why he has to use the preposition 'to' instead of 'in' when talking about going to places. Shafer et al. (1983, p.28-29) provide their opinion concerning corrections. They point out:

"Corrections frustrate children. As children are trying to produce meaning, teachers are blocking their efforts by responding solely to form. A teacher's job is to get children talking, and corrections stifle talk. Teachers need not totally ignore children's use of nonstandard grammar... Teachers can model the correct form ... The differences between correcting and modelling the correct form may at first be subtle, the latter involves accepting the child's language while responding to the meaning that the child is attempting to convey."

The teacher finds it necessary to give an explicit explanation of the correct form after using 'like' in the sentence. He does not stop at that stage. He draws their attention to another way of using the 'ing' form which is after 'am, is, are'. Here he does not go further in stating that these are the different forms of the helping verb 'Be' which require the 'ing' form to indicate the present progressive. Instead he finds it

enough to give several examples. This shows that the teacher decides how much grammar he wants to supply his students with. However, the explanation is given in passing and that does not indicate that the students will remember it or comprehend it to apply it in their answers.

Asking the class to pay attention and listen to him carefully, the teacher says:

T: Okay. Today's new vocabulary (He goes to his desk and picks up a flash card) **Airport.**

Ss: Airport.

T: Airport is the place in which we can see ...

Ss: People.

T: People! In the airport we can see ...

S: Airplane.

T: Yes. In the airport we can see airplanes.

T: Okay. What we call the one who operates and drives the airplane? Driver or pilot?

S: Driver.

T: No. Driver drives car.

Ss: Pilot.

T: Yes. The one who operates and drives the airplane is called a pilot.

The teacher initiates the discourse by asking a question. Students' response leads to teacher' feedback and further questions. It is clear that the responses given show that students are only demonstrating knowledge that the teacher already possesses and looks for in their answers. This suggests the limited scope of listening-speaking competence students will develop as they lack the opportunity to develop it during the language lesson. Yet, the questions to be asked are, 'who is responsible for limited chances of interaction students encounter during the language lessons?', 'Is the purpose of ELT in the intermediate stage to provide learners with survival English and not a competent command of the language?'

Intermediate School Five (Centre): Teacher 5

Nationality:	Saudi	Qualification:	BA in L. & Trans. E.
Age:	28 years	Experience years:	5 years
Students' grades:	2 nd & 3 rd level	Students' age:	13 – 14 years

On Monday at 10:30 am, the teacher meets his intermediate 2 class at the 5th period on the school timetable. The teacher asks the students to sit down after that he greets them and reminds them to remain quite. He states "*do not talk, do not talk*". He puts his books on one of the students' desks and asks the following:

T: Now, what is today? (He instructs the students to raise hands and remain quiet).

S: Monday.

T: Very good, clap hands for him. Thank you very much.

T: So today is Monday. Repeat after me. Monday.

Ss: Monday (they repeat three times).

The teacher makes the students repeat the day and the date as he writes them on the board. They ever repeat the title of the unit they are going to study today which is Unit 7 lesson 2. The teacher continues asking questions about the days of the week. He reminds the students that "*today is Monday, but what was yesterday?*" He does not like students to participate in unison, so he always instructs them to raise hands. One of the students gives the answer "*Sunday*". The teacher repeats the answer in a sentence saying: "*yesterday was Sunday*". He proceeds in his questions "*what will be tomorrow?*" he provides the first part of the answer, stating "*tomorrow will be ...*". Students give wrong answers as "*Saturday*", "*Friday*". The teacher shakes his head and says "*No*". He reminds the students to raise hands. One of the students says "*Tuesday*". This leads the teacher to say "*Very good, clap hands for him*". Students clap hands, and then the teacher reminds them to be quiet again and pay attention to him.

The teacher begins asking questions related to today's lesson. He starts his questions with Sami saying "*when do you sleep?*" The teacher

follows a certain pattern when asking questions. He either provides part of the answer or gives the entire answer if he does not find any respond from the student he is asking. Thus, the teacher helps Sami answering the question by giving a model answer.

T: When do you sleep? I sleep at eleven o'clock. When do you sleep?

Sami: Sleep

T: I sleep at ..

Sami: Ten o'clock.

T: I sleep at ten o'clock.

Sami: I sleep at ten o'clock.

The teacher asks another student and the same process occurs. The teacher requires the class to repeat the sentence "*I sleep at ten o'clock*". He gives another model answer which is "*I sleep at nine o'clock*". He goes around and asks several students who give different times for their bedtime. The teacher stresses the importance of giving a full sentence when answering. Thus, he repeats the students' answers and requires them to repeat after him.

The teacher shifts the focus from the notion of sleep to the notion of getting up. He mimes to the students this contrast with his hands. He holds his hands tight and put them under his head to indicate that he is a sleep. Then, he stretches his arms widely and yawns to exemplify the notion of getting up. Afterwards, he explains the contrast in sentences. The teacher states, "*I sleep at eleven o'clock, and I get up at six o'clock*". After this example, he selects several students to inquire about the time they get up. Some students provide their answers at the same time and this creates a high level of noise. The teacher does not approve and says, "*silence, do not talk, okay. Pay attention to me*". Then, he asks another student about the time he gets up:

T: Nader, listen. When do you get up?

Nader: I get up at six o'clock.

T: Now, Yasser. What do you do when you get up?

Yasser: I wash my ...

T: I wash my face.

Yasser: I wash my face.

T: Good. Okay Majed, after you wash your face and hands what do you do?

Majed: I go to school.

T: Yes, but before you go to school what do you do? Do you have breakfast?

Majed: Yes.

T: Then I have my breakfast. Now after you have your breakfast do you brush your teeth? Say brush.

Ss: Brush.

T: Spell brush please.

Ss: B.r.u.s.h.

T: Brush.

Ss: Brush.

T: We brush our teeth after we eat. We brush our teeth with toothbrush.

T: Brush.

Ss: Brush.

T: Tooth.

Ss: Tooth.

T: Tooth brush.

Ss: Tooth brush.

The teacher relies on a speech marker, which is calling a student's name and asks him to listen, to attract their attention to a new part of the lesson. The teacher asks a chain of related questions which he may have thought will help the students to predict the answers. However, this is not the case so he has to help and provide either the rest of the answer as "*I wash my ...*" or to give the whole answer like in "*I have my breakfast*". As a matter of fact he does not seem to give that student a chance to finish his sentence "*I wash my ...*". In addition, he asks him a leading question as if the student's task is to confirm helplessly the teacher's answer. The presentation stage of the lesson lacks the element

of creativity. There is a big difference between an adult-child interaction (i.e., listening and speaking in an interactive and meaningful way) at home or in real life and teacher-student interaction in the language classroom. The teacher asks questions which the answers are either known or available for the students to copy or say. There is no element of information transfer in the interaction. In other words there is no information gap to fill as it is in real life conversations. Furthermore, it seems that the teacher does most of the talking, as is the case with all the observed EFL teachers. I wonder if the EFL teachers are instructed to dominate the teacher-student interaction. 'Is this normal teaching practice?' 'How does this attitude help in developing interactively students' listening-speaking skills?'

Analysing Classroom Interaction and Discourse

In this section, I want to discuss the methodological issues which we need to think about when analysing classroom communication. As we can see, all of the five excerpts illustrated above represent one stereotyped picture of the classroom in which communication is extremely centred on the teacher. The five EFL teachers initiate the talk, ask questions, decide who is going to participate and evaluate the answers. They are in control of the period from the beginning to the end. It is noticed that students are left with limited or non-communicative options. Johnson (1995, p.4) gives us important role to the classroom as a communication context. He points out that:

"The communication context can ... determine the rules that govern how speakers communicate or the structure of communication. In classrooms, the structure of communication is easily recognizable. Teachers tend to control the topic of discussion, what counts as relevant to the topic and who may participate and when. Students tend to respond to teacher-directed questions, direct their talk to teachers and wait their turn before speaking."

Edwards and Westgate (1987) believe that the above mentioned are the main ingredients in any common sense view of what classroom communication is normally like. Genuine communication, where the students talk about things of interest to them and are able to initiate topics, is fundamental for language learning. Therefore, it is essential

for language teachers to understand the dynamic of classroom communication as that will help to understand *“how language students participate in classroom activities, and how their participation shapes the ways in which they use the language for classroom learning ...”* (Johnson 1995, p. 3). Amidon and Hunter (1966) indicate that the research of many educators indicates that the kind of verbal behaviour in which the teacher engages has a direct and immediate effect upon the verbal behaviour of students.

However, before going further into analysing classroom interaction and the discourse that takes place in the language classroom it is necessary to touch upon two definitions. The first one is what is a classroom? The second one is what is teaching? Tsui (1995, p.1) defines the classroom as:

“... a place where more than two people gather together for the purpose of learning, with one having the roles of the teacher. The teacher has certain perceptions about her role in the classroom ... the teacher also has certain ideas about how the lesson should proceed, what kinds of questions to ask, what kinds of activities to do and what they expect students to get out of this lesson. Lessons are judged as good or bad on the basis of whether they turn out the way they were planned and whether the expected outcome is achieved.”

Teaching which takes place in the classroom is described by Amidon and Hunter (1966, p.1) as *“... an interactive process, primarily involving classroom talk, which takes place between teacher and pupils and occurs during certain definable activities”*. In addition, Stolurrow and Pahel (1963, p384) state that *“... teaching is fundamentally a social process involving communication and interactions between at least two people, a teacher and a student”*. The common aspects found in the definition of classroom and teaching are: teacher, learners and interaction.

The three aspects create a perfect triangle for learning to take place. However, the conflict in keeping the three aspects of classroom learning in harmony and copies ‘real life’ interaction (i.e., listening and speaking in an interactive and meaningful way) emerges when theory is put into practice. Teachers have their own frames of reference and

perceptions about their roles as teachers, how teaching should take place and how students should respond.

What is significant about classroom interaction is the teacher, who is the person in control of the classroom dynamics. Amidon and Hunter (1966, p.9) state that: *“Many educators believe that systems for studying classroom verbal interaction hold great promise for the field of education. Studies seem to show that teachers are remarkably similar in their verbal behaviour, and since the teacher is the most influential person in the classroom, the interaction patterns between teachers and pupils are similar.”*

What is missing really in the previous excerpts of the classroom interactions is the third aspect of the learning triangle which is the interaction between the teachers and their students. Talk is initiated by the teacher and students respond accordingly and almost in most cases the answers are single word answers. In order to investigate the classroom communication context more closely, discourse analysis will be the method to do so. *“Systems for analysing classroom talk can tell us what actually occurs in classrooms, and they may also provide us with tools for preparing teachers who will be able to consciously select their verbal teaching patterns according to the goals they want to achieve”* Amidon and Hunter (Ibid, p. 9).

Hatch and Long (1980, p.33) reminds us that *“Analysis of discourse shows us how the learner, simply by being a learner, receives language of a very special”*. According to Mehan, 1979 and Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975, the classroom interaction is described as following a pattern of acts IRE:

- ‘I’ stands for an Initiation act by the teacher;
- ‘R’ stands for a Response act by the learner; and
- ‘E’ stands for an Evaluation act by the teacher.

Form the above it is noticeable that the teacher has 2 turns while the learner has 1 turn only. This makes the teacher in control of the content

and structure of language (Johnson, 1995). As for the content of the language, in the 5th teacher's interaction in the 3rd extract, it shows that he wants the learners to describe their daily routine in a certain order. When the students miss the sequence of the routine, the teacher stops them by saying "*But, before you go to school ...*". Another example comes from the 1st teacher's interaction in the 3rd extract. His control of the content of the lesson is strong. He does not want to be distract with either a positive participation, when one of the students attempts to clean up his desk, or a negative one when one of the students is talking to his classmate although both incidents are good opportunities to involve the students in a 'real life' interaction.

The control over the structure of the classroom interaction is seen in the 4th teacher's initiation of certain language forms to be used when forming sentences. He gives explicit grammatical explanations only to those areas which he thinks are important to highlight. This indicates that the teacher not only uses a certain structure but also wants the students to use it. That will make the students conscious not only about the expected answer but also conscious about the structure of the sentence which they need to use to meet the teacher's expectations. This does not help students explore their language and share their limited knowledge of it for developing their linguistic and communicative competence. Languages can be unconsciously acquired through conversation and exposure to 'comprehensible input', this is based on the notion laid out by Krashen and SLA theorists (Schmitt 2002). Explicit or direct focus on form is unimportant because children learning their first language receive no such input, yet they eventually become competent users of language (Hedge, 2004).

In the observed teaching sessions, it was noticed that EFL teachers talked most of the class time and students were left with limited opportunity to practise the language. This inhibited the development of spontaneous use of the foreign language. Research concerning teachers' behaviour in the foreign language classroom has emphasised the fact that the talk in foreign language classrooms should not be largely teacher-initiated and teacher-dominated. According to Moskowitz et al. (1973), foreign language classrooms "*should not be described by Flanders' rule of two-thirds, where the teacher talks two-*

thirds of the time.” This is because one of the main objectives in foreign language classes is for students to learn to speak and use the language and students learn to speak and use the language by engaging in conversations where they can listen and speak to each other interactively and in a meaningful way. Teachers, thus, need to limit the amount of their talk in order to get more students involved in the class for a longer portion of the class time. Furthermore, they need to engage their students in much conversations and dialogues.

The classroom observations also reveal that the interaction between the teachers and the students, typically takes the form of a one-to-one exchange between the teacher and one student in a whole class setting, instead of other possible patterns of interaction, which develop out of exchanging ideas, feelings and thoughts, for example, in pair and group work where the teacher can have his students conduct a pair conversation or a group discussion. This would help developing his students' listening-speaking skills as they would gradually learn how to listen and speak interactively to others. In contrast, the literature on language classroom interaction emphasises that teacher directed and dominated classrooms cannot, by their nature, be interactive classrooms (VanLier, 1996). Rather, for genuine interaction to take place, teachers and learners must be viewed as equal partners in classroom interaction (Rivers, 1987; Brown, 1994). Rivers (1987, p. 9) asserts that, “*for the genuine interaction language learning requires, ... individuals (teachers as well as students) must appreciate the uniqueness of other individuals.*” In interactive language classrooms, students need a teacher who can understand their special needs- not one who will manipulate or direct them or decide for them how they will learn, but one who will encourage, guide and build self-confidence and create enjoyment while leaning the language. Central to an interactive classroom is the belief that language is acquired by the provision of opportunities for learners to modify input through interaction where they can listen and talk to each other in an interactive and meaningful way (Long, 1985) and to practise using the language in a secure environment (Swain, 1985). Thus, the provision of activities, which develop the cognitive process, such as comprehension, adjusting,

comparison, description, and compromising in group, as well as whole class settings, is considered essential.

To conclude, it has been argued that learners should not be viewed as passive recipients who need to receive their input from an outside stimulus, which will be the teacher in the educational context. They also should not be viewed as active learners by themselves who need to be given the time to construct their own thought and knowledge as they proceed through the stages of development. On the contrary, learning is a socio-constructed process that requires the involvement of instruction from an adult or more competent and the effort the learner makes when learning. Through the assistance of an adult or a more competent peer, learners progress and move from one developmental level to another. The first level is the actual level of development which learners can achieve independently. The second level is the potential level of development which learners reach through the guidance and assistance of others to complete a task which is beyond their current capacity.

Conclusion

Daily life is conducted in spoken language. People regularly converse, negotiate, discuss and debate the issues and decision of their lives. The ability to listen and speak effectively and interactively often makes the crucial difference between success and failure. Research studies emphasise the important role that listening and speaking play in the process of language learning at school. Therefore, it is very important to pay a special attention to these important language skills and teach them effectively to second/foreign language learners. However, according to the literature the spoken language is undervalued in classroom. This is due to several reasons like all students come from home equipped with their ability to listen and speak and thus teachers take it for granted that their students can listen and talk. Another reason is that the pressure of covering an intensive curriculum make teachers concerned more about covering the curriculum rather than exploring ideas. Furthermore, children talk is seen as a sign of not following the lesson or not doing the work. In addition, children's classroom talk is viewed as a sign of poor concentration, distraction and disobedience.

Based on the classroom interactions observed, the structure of teacher-students interaction takes the IRE pattern. In other words, teacher Initiates, students Respond and teacher Evaluates. Such a pattern of interaction keeps the lead and initiation with the teacher. In that respect, EFL teachers control the content of the lesson which makes them disregard any unplanned topics when initiated by the students to avoid distraction from the pre-planned lesson. EFL teachers as well have control over the structure of the classroom interaction which makes them often, if not always, ask the students to answer with a particular form of language. Even when EFL students come up with correct but differently structural answers, teachers repeat the ones in mind. In addition, the IRE pattern indicates that the EFL teacher is dominating the classroom talk-time. When it comes to the EFL students, their classroom talk-time is limited in both quality as they give one word answers most of the time, and quantity as they have less turns than their teachers.

The nature of such classroom interaction leaves EFL students with limited chances to practise their language which will prevent them from developing their understanding of it and reaching a sufficient level of communicative competence (i.e., listening and speaking interactively and effectively) to use it naturally and fluently. EFL students miss the opportunity to initiate the interaction and that leaves them incompetent in how to converse with others by taking the initiative. EFL students, in advanced levels, might be able to produce and structure short turns but with that kind of teacher talk dominated classroom, the chances to structure long turns is beyond expectations as students do not have the chances to practise short turns in the first place. To achieve that, EFL students need to be trained and given the opportunity to initiate and sustain dialogue.

Recommendations and Developmental Implication

Recommendations:

As a consequence of the above discussions, some recommendation remarks can be made regarding teaching the EFL listening-speaking skills in state intermediate schools in Saudi Arabian context.

From the classroom observations, it seems that spoken language is undervalued as an important aspect to learning. Therefore, EFL teachers in Saudi Arabian context should valued and foster listening-speaking skills as an important aspect to the learning process in general and to language learning in particular.

The classroom observations also reveal that EFL teachers are learning controllers and directors. Thus, EFL teachers in Saudi Arabian context need training to be learning facilitators.

For Saudi EFL students to be competent, EFL teachers have to be made aware of two important elements which are crucial to facilitate the learning process in their students:

- First, to look at classroom interaction and discourse as an important factor in fostering the learned language. EFL students should be encouraged to take an active role in the classroom interaction. EFL teachers should give them the opportunity to do so by focussing on topics and activities of interest to the students. This will help in involving them to be part of the teaching/learning process.
- Second, EFL teachers need to view teaching/learning process as an active one in which both teachers and students participate in constructing knowledge and sharing it. The role of teachers becomes that of learning facilitators. In other words, students do not have to seek a particular form of correct answer in the teachers' mind to give as a means of gaining their teachers' approval. Students' understanding should help them shape their learning and knowledge. It should not be a matter of parrot-like learning in which they conform to what was done during the lesson and what they are required to say.

Developmental Implication:

To complete the picture, I believe it is appropriate to include this development implication remark which is introducing an Oracy Hour within students' weekly time-table.

To enhance the learning and production of the spoken language, EFL students should become more familiar with it and be able to take chances in producing it. They need to be given the opportunity to try it out. Being limited with classroom time does not permit such exploration to happen. Therefore, an oracy hour should be included within students' weekly time-table. Through introduction of an oracy hour, EFL teachers will be less pressured and students will have a better opportunity to practise the language. This will create more confident language learners as they will be allowed to accomplish a balance between linguistic and communicative competence which will provide them a balance between accuracy and fluency. Considering the different age groups of intermediate students and the limited language input they begin with, I would like to suggest that the oracy hour revolves around three elements: barrier games, storytelling and drama.

(I) Barrier Games

They are information gap games that help students communicate in English in an authentic way. One student has information, the other student needs that information. They exchange information using the language. Table 1 shows some activities that can be done as a whole class with the teacher as the leader.

Table 1

Activity 1 (Describe and Draw)	Activity 2 (Find the differences)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each student need a sheet of paper and a pencil. • Student 1 describes to student 2 what he has drawn (or is drawing). • Student 2 reproduces the drawing according to student 1's description. • The drawing may be of real objects or shapes such as cars, houses, squares or triangles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students need two pictures which are identical except for a number of minor differences. • The students' task is to find the differences. • The students may ask questions or describe their own picture. • The students might be told how many differences there are.

Activity 3 competition game (Predicting vocabulary and sentences from pictures)

- Teacher divides his students into two groups.
- The teacher shows his students a picture.
- The teacher asks his students to tell him everything they can about the picture and the people/ objects in the picture.
- After listing all the ideas, the teacher makes a web or categorize the list of comments.
- The teacher asks his students to repeat the comments listed.

Source: Stack (2007)

(II) Storytelling

It is a valuable technique which many parents rely on to entertain their young children, convey information, introduce new ideas and experiences, control their behaviour, draw their attention indirectly to cultural aspects, as well as impart morals. It is powerful in a sense that children remember them and retell them later in life to their own children. I believe that storytelling can be a good start for beginner learners to build their vocabulary and experience different uses and usage of the language by making them experience that creative and imaginative world of story which suits their nature. Through story students will be able to retell events in addition to reshape and adapt them based on their experiences. The story re-telling will create confidence within them. First, they will realise that they are able to use the language and its different words to make their version of the story. Second, they know that their audience is interested in what they say. EFL teachers can rely on different types of stories to convey different pieces of information. Through storytelling and story re-telling EFL teachers will assure that the listening/speaking comprehension skill is active and students are learning. Table 2 illustrates some activities that can be done during or after reading a story:

Table 2

Activity 1 (Story-Round)	Activity 2 (Story-Board)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After reading a story, teacher begins by asking his students "what happened first?" • One student responds by telling one thing that happened in the story. • The teacher chooses another student to continue by asking, "and, then what happened?" • The teacher continues in this manner until the story or the section of the story is completely and accurately retold. • The teacher may stop two or three times during the reading and ask his students why something happened. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher asks his students to recall the main (6-8) events of the story. • The teacher hands out a storyboard form or asks his students to fold a piece of paper into six or eight parts. • The teacher asks his students to number each square. • The teacher asks his students to illustrate (in sequence) the 6-8 major events depends on the number of squares provided on storyboard. • The students retell the story to the class from their storyboard.

Source: Stack (2007)

(III) Drama

Drama can be employed to suit advanced learners who have been exposed to the language enough and have a better command of it. By advanced learners I mean those in intermediate 3. Drama will be a new stage for them to practise their language. They will be more active as they will be able to role-play some of the learnt stories in year 1 and 2. Drama will help in fostering the different communicative competences of the language, i.e., grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic competence. It will be a good opportunity for EFL teachers to develop their students' ability to listen and speak interactively and in a meaningful way.

Final Remark

The main focus of the present study is on the understanding of how aural oral skills of English are taught in Saudi Arabian context, through

identifying the structure of classroom discourse. The study has contributed to the problematic of the issue of teaching these important skills (listening-speaking skills) in Saudi state intermediate schools.

As this study done with classroom context, it can be considered as a basis for further studies to be conducted to see and investigate the broader context outside classroom which might shape the classroom practice and to a great extent influence it. This would help us to identify the factors, if there is any, behind teachers and students' unsatisfactory performance in language classroom. This, in turn, would help in finding an answer to the question that one may ask, 'what change do we need to create a better environment for EFL teachers to teach and develop language listening-speaking skills interactively and for EFL students to acquire them?'

* * *

References

- Amidon, E. and Hunter, E. (1966) **Improving Teaching: The Analysis of Classroom Verbal Interaction**. USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Austin, J. (1962) **How to Do Things with Words**. Oxford: OUP.
- Barnes, D. (1982) **From Communicative to Curriculum**. Meddlesex: Penguin.
- Boehm, A. and Weinberg, R. (1977) **The Classroom Observer: A Guide for Developing Observation Skills**. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Breen, M. and Candlin, C. (1980) 'The Essentials of A Communicative Curriculum in Language Teaching'. **Applied Linguistics**, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 89-112.
- Brown, H. (1994) **Principles of Language Learning and Teaching**, 3rd edition. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice- Hall, Inc.
- Brown, G. Anderson, A. Shillcock, R. and Yule, G. (1984) **Teaching Talk: Strategies for Production and Assessment**. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Browne, A. (1996) **Developing Language and Literacy 3-8**. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- Bygate, M. (1987) **Speaking**. Oxford: OUP.
- Bygate, M. (1998) 'Theoretical Perspectives on Speaking'. **Annual Review of Applied Linguistics**, Vol. 18, pp. 20-42.
- Bygate, M. (2001) 'Speaking', in Carter, R. and Nunan, D. ed. **The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages**. Cambridge: CUP.
- Byrne, D. (1986) **Teaching Oral English**. Harlow: Longman.
- Edwards, A. and Westgate, D. (1987) **Investigating Classroom Talk**. PA: The Palmer Press.
- Genishi, C. (1982) 'Observational Research Methods for Early Childhood Education', in Spoldek, B. ed. **Handbook of Research Methods for Early Education**. London: the Free Press.
- Fulcher, G. (2003) **Testing Second Language Speaking**. UK: Longman.
- Hatch, E. and Long, M. (1980) 'Discourse Analysis, What's that?', in Larsen-Freeman, D. ed. **Discourse Analysis in Second Language Research**. MA: Newbury House Publishers.
- Hedge, T. (2004) **Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom**. Oxford: OUP.
- Howe, A. (1992) **Marking Talk Work**. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

- Hughes, M. (1994) 'The Oral Language of Young Children', in Wary, D. and Medwell, J. ed. **Teaching Primary English: The State of Art**. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, K. (1995) **Understanding Communication in Second Language Classroom**. Cambridge: CUP.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (1986) **Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching**. Oxford: OUP.
- Lockwood, M. (1996) **Opportunities for English in the Primary School**. London: Trentham Books Ltd.
- Long, M. (1985) 'Input and Second Language Acquisition Theory' in Gass, S. and Madden, C. ed. **Input in Second Language Acquisition**. Rowley; London: Newbury House.
- McCarthy, M. and O'Keefe, A. (2004) 'Research in the Teaching of Speaking'. **Annual Review of Applied Linguistics**, Vol. 24, pp. 26-43.
- Mehan, H. (1979) **Learning Lessons**. MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ments, M. (1990) **Active Talk: The Effective Use of Discourse in Learning**. London: Kogan Page.
- Merriam, N. (1988) **Case Study Research in Education**. Oxford: Jossey-Bass.
- Moskowitz G., Benevenuto, J. and Furts, N. (1973) 'Interaction in the foreign class' in James W. ed. **Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages: Sensitivity in the foreign language classroom**. Motpelier, VT: Capital City Press.
- National Oracy Project (1991) **Teaching Talking and Learning in KS2**. York: NCC.
- Rivers, W. (1987) **Interactive Language Teaching**. Cambridge: CUP.
- Rowland, S. (1987) 'Child in Control: Towards an Interpretive Model of Teaching and Learning', in Pollard, A. ed. **Children and their Primary Schools**. UK: The Falmer Press.
- Schmitt, N. (2002) **An Introduction to Applied Linguistics**. London: Arnold.
- Serale, J. (1969) **Speech Acts**. Cambridge: CUP.
- Shafer, R. Stab, C. and Smith, K. (1983) **Language Functions and School Success**. New Jersey: Scott, Foresman and Company.
- Sinclair, J. and Coulthard, M. (1975) **Towards an Analysis of Discourse: The English Used by Teachers and Pupils**. Oxford: OUP.
- Stack, L. (2007) **Improving English Listening and Speaking Skills**. Retrieved January 7, 2009 from <http://www.tmue.edu.tw/~english/Improving%20Listening%20&%20speaking2>.

Stolurow, L. and Pahel, K. (1963) 'Letters from the Editors'. **Harvard Educational Review**, summer, 1963, pp. 384.

Swain, M. (1985) 'Communicative competence: some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output' in Gass, S. and Madden, C. ed. **Input in Second Language Acquisition**. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Tarleton, R. (1988) **Learning and Talking: A Practical Guide to Oracy Across the Curriculum**. London: Routledge.

Tsui, A. (1995) **Introducing Classroom Interaction**. London: The Penguin Group.

VanLier, L. (1996) **Introduction in the Language Curriculum**. Harlow: Longman.

Vygotsky, L. (1962) **Thought and Language**. MA: MIT Press.

Wajnryb, R. (1992) **Classroom Observation Tasks: A Resource Book for Language Teachers and Trainers**. Cambridge: CUP.

* * *