

The Effect of Oral Communication Strategy Training on  
Developing EFL Speaking Skills of Second Year  
Secondary School Students

*By*

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## Abstract

The main concern of this research was to investigate the effect of training on the use of oral communication strategies on EFL speaking skills of 2<sup>nd</sup> year secondary school students. Participants of the present study consisted of (69) of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students at Zaweit Razine secondary school for boys and girls, Menofya governorate. They were divided into two groups (No.= 35) for the experimental group and (No.= 34) for the control one. The experimental group was treated by training on the use of some oral communication strategies while the control group was treated by using Traditional Teaching. The pretest- posttest control group design was utilized. Instruments included an EFL speaking test and a rubric for assessing students 'speaking skills. The study lasted for 6 weeks, two sessions a week, in addition to the pre-and posttest sessions. T-test results revealed that the experimental group students outperformed the control group on the EFL speaking skills as a result of the use of oral communication strategies. Findings also indicated that students of the experimental group in the post-test of EFL speaking skills outperformed those in the pre-test.

## Keywords

- Oral communication Strategies (OCSs)
- Strategic Competence
- EFL Speaking Skills

## Introduction

**Speaking in a second or a foreign language has often been viewed as the most demanding of the four skills and the ability to speak coherently and intelligibly on a topic is surely recognized as a necessary goal for ESL/EFL learners (Richards and Renandya,2002). Thus, of all the four skills, speaking seems to be the most important. This importance emanates from the fact that people who know a language are set to be speakers of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowledge (Ur, 1996 :120).**

**Being able to speak to friends, colleagues, visitors and even strangers in a foreign language is surely the goal of very many learners. To most people, mastering the art of speaking is the single most important aspect of learning a foreign language, and success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language (Hedge,2000; Lazaraton, 2001).**

**The importance of speaking skills has recently been considered, and the development of such pivotal skills started to attract the attention of EFL researchers and curricula designers. Theorists of foreign language teaching and learning have stressed the importance of**

giving learners the tools needed in order to communicate successfully (Faucette,2001; Richards and Renandya ,2002; Wannaruk,2003; Brown,2003; Dobao and Martinez,2007; Akpinar, 2009, Nakatani,2010). This led to increasing emphasis on preparing learners to use the language smoothly and fluently in order to express their ideas appropriately.

However, speaking represents a big problem for EFL learners as they lack the resources to use the language in real life situations. Nunan (1994 cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001:110) found the biggest challenges in the EFL classroom to be lack of motivation, getting students to speak (a cultural issue for some where speaking in class is prohibited except when called on), and the use of the first language. In addition, large classes are often the norm overseas limiting both student opportunities to talk and teacher opportunities to provide feedback. Other problems may arise if the curriculum does not stress speaking skills or views them solely as an avenue to grammatical accuracy. Furthermore, if the teacher is a non-native speaker of English, he\she may not be competent or confident to speak in English. Additionally, language anxiety plays an important affective role in foreign or second language acquisition. All Learners suffer from speaking anxiety whether at its beginning state or aggravated one that result most of the time in the performance-based evaluation teachers pursue to fulfil the nowadays lesson objectives after the shift from a spoon-fed teaching to a self- feed learning which requires more fluent, communicative and motivated learners rather than rote and over- reliant ones (Harmer, 2007; Shastri,2010).

Since speaking encounters, a big challenging in the EEL classroom, speaking skills should be the components of the English language curricula for they provide the basis for growth in reading and writing abilities as well as vocabulary development (Attia 2005: 336). In this sense, oral skills should be deemed in the EEL classrooms through providing opportunities to practice the language effectively in oral tasks.

Enhancing learners' communicative competence is one of the aspirations of a considerable number of high school EEL teachers and EFL scholars. That is why different foreign language teaching methods for example, (communicative language teaching approaches) have been devised to contribute to this enterprise (Nazari, 2007:203). Therefore, EFL learners need explicit instruction in speaking which like any language skill, generally has to be learned and practiced (Richards and Renandya ,2002:204).

Learning to speak a foreign language requires more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. Learners also must acquire the knowledge of how native speakers use the language in the context of structured interpersonal exchange, in which many factors interact. So, it is necessary to examine the factors affecting learners' oral communication, components underlying speaking proficiency, and specific skills or strategies used in communication. With this in mind, the researcher is going to teach and raise EFL learners' awareness of the strategies employed by speakers to help them overcome the problematic things during speaking due to performance variables or to insufficient competence. Canale and Swain (1980:30) showed that communication strategies available to language learners can be considered as ploys "to compensate for breakdowns in communication. This implies, as Sinor (2002) indicated, the uniqueness of both the learners' responses to language-related difficulties and their readiness to address rather than avoid communicative difficulties.

#### Literature Review

Research works in the field of second /foreign language acquisition have focused on learning strategies (Brown,1991; Cohen,1990; Oxford,990 and O'Malley and Chamot,1990). Learning strategies are broadly defined as "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (Rubin, 1975:43). The significance of language learning strategies includes facilitating learning and teaching of simple or complex tasks, gaining command over a foreign language skill, and making language learning more effective. Language strategies are used by good language learners "to assist in improving required language skills. (Naiman, Frothlich, Stern and Todesco, 1978)

The goal of language learning strategies according to Weinstein and Mayer (1986: 315), is to "affect the learner's motivation or affective state, or the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organizes or integrates new knowledge. The fact that there are identifiable strategies used by good learners which might be trained in the classroom has led to great interest among teachers and textbook writers who have attempted both to find ways of improving the strategies learners already have and raise their awareness about others they might develop (Hedge, 2000 :19). Strategies for second or foreign language oral communication are commonly known as communication strategies (Lam, 2000). Speakers use communication strategies to resolve difficulties they encounter in expressing an intended meaning" (Tarone ,2005: 488).

Furthermore, Ellis (1985:187) indicated that communication strategies play a constitutive role in second or foreign language acquisition. "The main contribution of communication Strategies is to keep the channel open. Thus, even if the learner is not provided with the particular structure he needs, he will be exposed to a number of other structures, some of which may constitute a suitable intake for his learning strategies to operate on. The most important thing of all has to be "don't give up. Communication Strategies are one of the main ways of keeping going". By the same token, Hedge (2000:52) assured that communication strategies come to play when learners are unable to express what they want to say because they lack the resources to do so successfully. They compensate for this either by changing their original intention or by searching for other means of expression.

Faerch and Kasper (1983) clarified that language learning and language use involve not only language-related knowledge but also language-related abilities. Teachers can still remind students of what they already do in their L1 and encourage them to do the same in the L2. Therefore, as Dornyei (1995:62) indicated, even if learners use communication strategies effectively in L1, communication strategy instruction could aid strategic transfer by raising awareness of communication strategies, providing training on how to properly use communication strategies in L2, and providing opportunities for practice. Such practice should help learners develop foreign or second language communicative competence.

Proponents of learning strategy instruction claim that teachers should directly teach learning strategies. They should provide training on how to transfer such strategies to other learning situations (Oxford, lavine & Crookall, 1989). In their study on the effectiveness of strategy training, Bajarano, Levine, Olshtain and Steiner (1997) indicated that the negotiation process in a group discussion can be facilitated by training learners on the use of interaction strategies. They found that learners participated more actively and that the quality of participation was improved by the use of appropriate interaction strategies.

According to other research, strategy instruction should focus upon strategies students really need to know, should be authentic and relevant, and should be woven into regular language instruction (Cohen, 1998). Therefore, to improve language learning proficiency, strategy instruction should be explicit.

Additionally, Lourdunathan and Menon (2004:1) pointed out that the inability of students to play an effective part in the group discussion

is due not only to a lack of vocabulary but also a lack of effective interaction strategies. In order to play an active role in group discussion, students first of all need to know how to interact and this requires interactive strategy training.

There is no generally agreed typology upon communication strategies. Various typologies have been proposed. Hedge (2000:265) distinguished two kinds of communication strategies: avoidance behavior, in which learners try to eliminate a problem by changing the topic or not participating in a conversation, and achievement behavior, in which ways are found to cope with the problem. Also, Ellis (1994) gave a summary of a typology of communication strategies differentiating between reduction strategies (which include formal reduction strategies and functional strategies), and achievement strategies (which include compensatory strategies and retrieval strategies).

Communication Strategies Used in the Present Study

The typology provided by the proponents of communication strategies are grouped according to certain criteria: (1) the learner's choice as to whether to reduce or to achieve the goal; (2) to consult different source of information L1 or L2; and (3) to use the conceptual or linguistic knowledge. Therefore, it can be inferred that different researchers have used different typologies for classifying communication strategies. Some researchers used the same label of typology and some others use different names but refer to the same concepts of communication strategies (Muhammad, 2014).

Based on the typology of communication strategies proposed by the researchers in the field of foreign or second language learning, it was concluded that there are basically only two main categories of communication strategies: reduction strategies and achievement strategies. The former is adopted by the learner who attempts to do away with a problem. They involve the learner giving up part of his/her original communicative goal. The latter is taken by the learner when he/she decides to keep the original communicative goal but compensates for insufficient means, or makes the effort to retrieve the required items. However, after analyzing the two main strategies, the present study deals with the following communication strategies: approximation, circumlocution, appeal for help, self-repeat, filler words, and comprehension check.

Based on the previously mentioned review of literature about the crucial importance of developing speaking skills and potentials

communication strategies hold for such skills, the researcher thought of experimentally investigating the effect of oral communication strategy training on developing speaking skills of secondary school second graders' speaking skills.

Need for the Study

Learning a second/foreign language clearly includes not only being competent grammatically and linguistically but also being competent communicatively as the primary function of language is enabling interaction between interlocutors. Richards (1990) assured that mastering speaking skills in English is a priority for second-language or foreign-language learners. Consequently, learners often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course on the bases of how much they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency.

Speaking as a productive language skill is considered to be a creative and complex process. In many countries where English is taught mainly as an academic subject, this skill is often neglected which could provide the primary foundation for practical communication (Khan, 1998). Furthermore, as Attia (2005:361) indicated, despite developing listening and speaking is the ultimate goal aspired for EEL learners, they are mostly too timid or inhibited to speak wherever they are heard. That is, because they are mostly too shy of making mistakes or because they are usually uncertain about how to express what they want to say in English. By the same token, Amer (2013) reached that students are weak in their oral ability. Every time when they are asked to speak in class, so many of them find their minds blank and their tongues tied. They also do not have any knowledge about strategies that may aid them to cope with the oral situations. This is considered a source of very serious frustration of many of EFL learners.

On the other hand, speakers need to check that they have been understood and may need to repeat or clarify what they have said. That is to say, they need to adjust what they say in order to be comprehensible. Listeners play a part in this process by asking for explanation, correction, and so on. Teachers might, therefore, consider the usefulness of early instruction in the language needed to ask for repetition or clarification in order to help students in negotiating meaning (Hedge, 2000:262).

Celce Murcia (2001:104) maintained the importance of strategy training on promoting speaking skills by stating that: "Training learners to use strategies and encouraging strategy use is another

prominent feature of today's oral skills classroom. While the utility of teaching "communication Strategies" is a debated theoretical issue, it is clear that language learners must become competent at using strategies, such as circumlocution, hesitation devices and appeals for help, and that oral skills teacher should at least advocate and model their use".

Communication strategy training aims at equipping learners with a sense of what successful speakers do to achieve success and to aid them to develop their unique individual pathways to succeed in speaking (Thompson and Rubin, 1996; Grant, 1997; Lam, 2000; Lam, 2005; Littlemore, 2003). With this mind, the researcher aims at exploring the effect of oral communication strategy training on developing speaking skills of second year secondary school students on the basis that training students to use communication strategies may promote and facilitate such pivotal skills.

The problem of the study

Most of secondary school students in Egypt lack speaking skills required for successful communication and are in a dire to develop them (see eg, El-Matarawy; 1998; Habib,1999; Hamid, 2003; Attia, 2005; Desouky, 2012). Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate the effect of oral communication strategies on developing secondary school second graders' speaking skills on the basis that some studies (see, Dornyei, 1995; Rossiter, 2003; Lourdunation and Menon, 2004; Nakatani, 2005; Lam, 2006; Farooqui,2007; Nakatani,2010) pointed out that explicit teaching of communication/speaking strategies may help students overcome communication problems they encounter when involving in oral tasks. More specifically, the present study tries to answer the following questions:

Questions of the study

- 1- What are the EFL speaking skills required for secondary school students?
- 2- What are the communication strategies suitable for developing EFL speaking skills for those students?
- 3- What is the effect of explicit teaching of oral communication strategies on developing EFL speaking skills of 2<sup>nd</sup> year secondary school students?

The purpose of the study

The present study seeks to achieve the following purpose:

- Developing speaking skills of 2<sup>nd</sup> year secondary school students.

Hypotheses of the study



- 1- There are no statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores attained by the experimental group and the control group students in the pretest of speaking skills.
- 2- There are statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores attained by the experimental group and the control group students in the posttest of speaking skills in favour of the experimental group.
- 3- There are statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the pre-and the posttest of speaking skills attained by the experimental group students in favour of the post-assessment.

#### Methodology

##### Participants

The participants of the research were 69 of 2<sup>nd</sup> year secondary school students at Zaweit Razine Secondary School for Boys and Girls, Menofya Governarate. They were divided into two groups (No.= 35) for the experimental group and (No.= 34) for the control one.

##### Research Design

The type of the research was an experimental research. The experimental design used was pretest-posttest control group design as the research had two group; the experimental group and the control one. Both groups were administered a pretest, and each group received a different treatment. The experimental group was treated by receiving explicit teaching of oral communication strategies followed by exercises while the control group was treated by carrying out the content and the exercises using the traditional teaching. Both groups were post tested at the end of the study. Posttest scores of the two groups were compared to determine the effect of the treatment.

##### Instruments

The researcher prepared the following instruments.

- ❖ The EFL speaking test (see appendix A) aimed at assessing students' ability to express their ideas in English and collaborate in the creation of interaction by taking their interlocutor's contributions into account and making use of them in the discussion. The test comprised four components in each of which students did different tasks. Each component represented a criterion of speaking assessment criteria. The four criteria reflected the EFL speaking skills as follows:

- Syntax which comprises the skills of Grammar and Vocabulary.

- Discourse management which comprised the skills of content, fluency and semantics.
  - Interactive communication which comprised the skills of Pragmatics.
  - Pronunciation
- ❖ **A rubric for analyzing students' oral performance (see appendix B). It consisted of seven parts which reflected the EFL speaking skills. Each had four items, ranging from high to low, according to which students' oral performance was assessed. These items were superior, adequate, minimal and inadequate. The first part of the rubric was devoted to pronunciation, part two dealt with grammar, three with vocabulary, four with "content, five with fluency ", six with semantics and seven with pragmatics. Students were given marks according to the four items of each part of the rubric as follows:**
- 4 marks for vocabulary
  - 4 marks for grammar
  - 4 marks for content
  - 4 marks for fluency
  - 4 marks for semantics
  - 8 marks for pragmatics
  - 8 marks for pronunciation

For vocabulary, grammar, content, fluency and semantics, superior = 4, adequate =3, minimal =2 and inadequate =1 while for semantics and pronunciation, superior = 8, adequate =6, minimal =4 and inadequate =2

The total mark of the EFL speaking test is 36. Reliability alpha of the test was 0.83.

#### Treatment Material

The treatment material comprised six lessons about the selected communication strategies. Each lesson dealt with one strategy. It consisted of:

- An assigned oral communication strategy to be used.
- Activities on the strategy being trained.
- Students' worksheets.

#### Procedures

The main focus of the experimental teaching was improving learners' speaking skills. A pre-test was applied to experimental and control

group without a prior announcement. For a period of six weeks (a session a week), students of the experimental group received training on how to use oral communication strategies during speaking in addition to two sessions for the pretest and the posttest. The selected communication strategies (6 strategies) were: approximation, circumlocution, appeal for help, self-repeat, filler words, and comprehension check.

Features and purposes of the Selected Communication Strategies

- Approximation serves as one of the communication strategies whereby the speaker uses a single target language vocabulary item or structure, which the speaker knows is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item. Lacking vocabulary or inability to reach or catch it is a usual thing that may happen during speaking. So, in order to keep the channel of conversation going smoothly, do not stop because of lacking certain vocabulary or structures. Instead, try to approximate the words / expressions / structures or whatever they are, by using an alternative which means “Approximation “.
- Circumlocution is saying in many words what may be said in few words. More specifically, circumlocution is defined as a change in preverbal message involving more than single chunk. Realizing that the speaker encounters communication problem with the interlocutor, he/she circumlocutes the words by describing the properties of the object or action instead of using appropriate target language item or structure. There are 7 features of circumlocution used by the students, i.e. material, locational, elaboration, color, shape, function, and size. Material type of circumlocution was characterized by linguistic features such as it is made of/from/by...., it is from...., it is the mixture of..., you need cement, sand. Locational was characterized by linguistic features such as it is found in front of..., it is found in..., it is located in..., etc. Elaboration was characterized by linguistic features such as conditional relation (if + subject +verb, subject+ verb), cause and effect relation (because + Subject + verb, subject + verb), and sequential relation (before/after + Subject + verb, subject + verb). Color was characterized by linguistic features such as it is yellow/green/white/red..., and the color is ..., and the color can be ...etc. Shape was characterized by linguistic features such as the shape of this object is..., ...and the shape is like..., it is square/triangle.... etc. Functional was characterized by linguistic

features such as it is used to/for/by..., the function of this object is for..., you use this object for..., you can use it for... And lastly, size was characterized by linguistic features such as the size is ....., it is big/small/large..., the height is etc.

- Appeal for help is used in order to maintain the flow of communication. This strategy is characterized by the use of expression signaling direct appeal such as “What is this?”, “Do you know how to say this in English?” etc. A question was used as a clue of appeal for assistance to the interlocutors.
- Self-repeat is defined as the speaker’s passing on the old information by repeating what he/she had said in the previous turns. Repetition occurs in word level and expression level. Examples of the word level may be “to open”, “the bottle”, “rice”, “to dig”, whereas the examples of expression level such as in “we use it”, “it is used”, “it is useful to take the water”, etc.
- Filler words or time-stalling devices is an oral communication strategy that means to use gambits to fill pauses, and to gain time to think in order to keep the communication channel open, and maintain discourse at times of difficulty. The rationale for using time-stalling devices or filler words is stated when a partner asks you a question sometimes you cannot answer quickly. Thus, you can say fillers to gain time to think such as: *Hmm. Let me think, Hmm, let me see, that is an important, a good, a nice, or a pivotal question, you know, actually, etc.* These previous expressions or words are very important to be used in a conversation. Most people have to hesitate now and again during conversation. So, it is better to use fillers during speaking to avoid hesitation and to give yourself time to think of what to say.
- Comprehension Check is an oral communication strategy the speaker resorts to check the interlocutor’s comprehension of what is being said. In order for the conversation to go on smoothly, there should be negotiation or interaction between a speaker and a listener. This will not happen unless there is comprehension to what is being said between the speaker and the listener. So, in order to check comprehension, a speaker may use the following: *Right? You are with me? You follow me? You see? You agree with what I am saying? Do you understand? Is it OK? Do you know what I mean?* The purpose of these phrases/expressions is to check the listener’s understanding of what is being said and to keep the conversation goes on smoothly.

### Training Procedures

The explicit strategy instruction of each CS followed by practice lasted 50 minutes in each session. In order to practice using the six taught CSs, students were encouraged to work in pairs or in small groups. In each session, students received training on an assigned oral communication strategy. The procedures of the session were as the following:

#### A- Objectives of the session

- 1- Raising students' awareness of the oral communication strategy being trained that can be used during speaking.
- 2- Having students use the oral communication strategy being trained during speaking.

#### B- Presentation

In this step, students received a detailed explanation for the target strategy included definition of the strategy, its purpose, when and how to use it, and an example to imitate it.

#### C- Practice and Production

In this step, the instructor assigned an activity or more for students to be practiced. Students carry out the activities according to the procedures and features of the oral communication strategy they have received training on.

#### D- Evaluation

In this step, the instructor assigned an oral activity to be practiced by students. The oral activity may be making conversations, assigning topics for discussions, filling in spaces etc. The purpose of this step was to evaluate the use of the strategy that have been trained by students.

During the intervention, students of the control group practiced the content and did the activities in the traditional way.

#### Data analysis

T-test was used to find out the difference between experimental and control group students in the EFL speaking posttest. T-test was also used to find out the differences between the Pre and the post scores of the experimental group in the EFL speaking test.

#### Findings

The results of the present study were presented and interpreted in the light of its hypotheses, theoretical framework and related studies. As stated earlier, the main purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of oral communication strategy training on developing EFL speaking skills of 2<sup>nd</sup> secondary school students. Therefore, to achieve this purpose, the following hypotheses were tested.

Hypothesis (1)

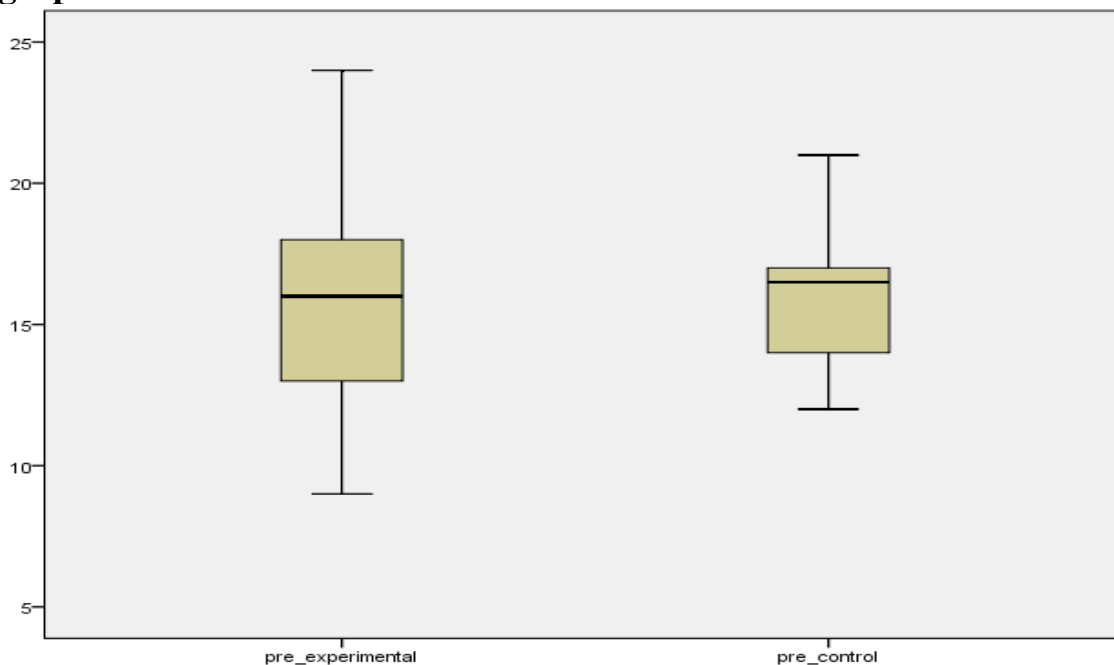
**There are no statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores attained by the experimental group and the control group students in the pretest of speaking skills.**

Table (1): The Results of 't-test' Comparing the Experimental Group and the Control Group in the pre-test of speaking skills.

Groups	No.	M	S.D	T- value	D.F	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	35	15.5882	3.33137	.253	67	0.802
Control	34	15.7647	2.24363			

Significant at 0.01 level.

Table (1) shows that there are no statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores attained by the experimental group and those of the control group in the pre-test of speaking skills where t-value (0.253) which is not significant. Consequently, the first null hypothesis of the current research was verified. This result may be interpreted that there was a homogeneity between both groups and there were not any significant differences between students in the experimental group and those in the control group in the pre-test of speaking skills. The following figure (1), shows the results of table (2) as graph:



- pre\_experimental = the experimental group in the pre-test
- pre\_control = the control group in the pre-test

Hypothesis (2)

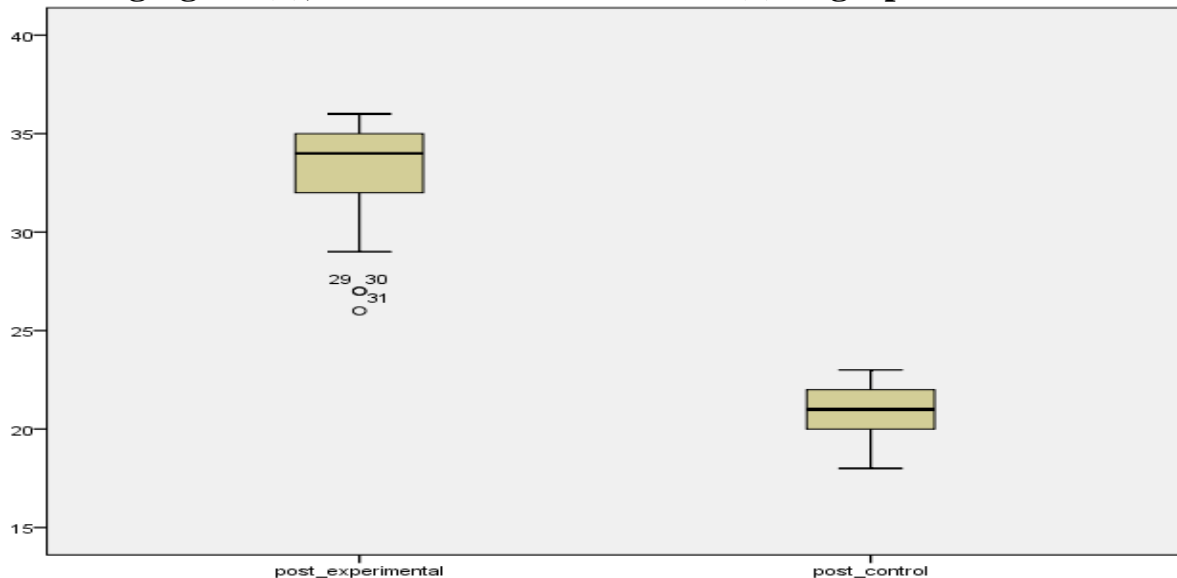
There are statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores attained by the experimental group and the control group students in the posttest of speaking skills in favour of the experimental group.

Table (2): The Results of 't-test' Comparing the Experimental Group and the Control Group in the posttest of speaking skills.

Groups	No.	M	S.D	T- value	D.F	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	35	<b>32.9118</b>	<b>2.74544</b>	<b>19.283</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>0.000*</b>
Control	34	<b>20.7059</b>	<b>1.40409</b>			

\* Significant at 0.01 level.

Table (2) shows that there are statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores attained by the experimental group and those of the control group in the posttest of speaking skills in favour of the experimental group where t-value (19.283) which is significant. Consequently, the second statistical hypothesis of the current research was verified. This mean that students of the experimental group outperformed those of the control group due to training on the use of oral communication strategies. In other words, comparing the means of the two groups indicated the out performance of the TBLT group. The following figure (1), shows the results of table (2) as graph:



- post\_experimetal = the experimental group in the post test
- post\_control = the control group in the post test

Hypothesis (3)

There are statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the pre-and the posttest of speaking skills attained by the experimental group students in favour of the post-assessment.

Table (3): The Results of 't-test' Comparing the pre-test and posttest of speaking skills of the Experimental Group

Experimental group	No.	M	S. D	T- value	D.F	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	35	15.5429	3.29298	24.844	68	0.000*
posttest	35	32.8857	2.70915			

\* Significant at 0.01 level.

Table (3) shows that there are statistically significant differences at 0.01 level in EFL between the mean scores of the pre-test and posttest of speaking skills attained by the experimental group in favour of the posttest where t-value (24.844) which is significant. Consequently, the third statistical hypothesis of the current research was verified.

Several interpretations could be given for the superiority of the experimental group to the control group students in the EFL speaking posttest. An interpretation could be attributed to the oral communication strategy training. Explicit teaching or training in these strategies and raising students' awareness of a repertoire of strategies that can be used in communication helped the experimental group students to function and retrieve these strategies in new situations (as it happened in the EFL speaking post-test). Explicit training on communication strategies provided alternatives for students to use effective strategies to fit the current communicative situation.

This interpretation may be in line with Faucette's (2001) views who called for the need for training to bring learners' attention to these strategies and help them become more aware of a repertoire of strategies available to them, including those they may already make use of in the L1. Instruction could also help learners develop and automatize more effective strategies to meet the communicative situation. Similarly, Dornyei (1995) indicated that communication strategy instruction could aid strategy transfer by raising awareness of communication strategies, providing training on how to properly use them and providing opportunities for practice. Such practice should help learners develop second language communicative competence.

A second interpretation to the superiority of the experimental group to the control group might lie in the fact the oral communication strategies were the tools used to maintain the conversation. Instead of staying silent, students of the experimental group could keep the



communication channel open through functioning a suitable communication strategy that coordinates with the communicative situation whatever it was. This ability to function a suitable communication strategy may be due to training on how to retrieve and use it.

This interpretation is consistent with the results of Maleki (2007) indicating that the superiority of the class B over the class A may lie in the communication strategies which have served the class B as tools to maintain the conversation and to get the opportunity to receive more language input in the Cambridge ESOL speaking test. Also, Larsen – Freeman and Long (1991) viewed that the foreign language learners' ability to maintain a conversation is a very value skill because he/she can benefit from receiving additional modified input. Such conversational maintenance is a major objective for language learners who regularly invoke communication strategies.

A third interpretation may also lie in the fact that students of the experimental group were able to improve their comprehension and acquisition of the input of the language through using some communication strategies in which they had received training such as: appeal for help, approximation and comprehension check. Through using such strategies, students could acquire new input which they used later in producing the language. This input may be related to learning new vocabulary, structures or the right pronunciation of a word.

This interpretation was supported by the views of Yule and Tarone (1991) indicating that the roles of participants within interaction that lead to negotiation of meaning can be effectively described within communication strategy framework which focuses upon cooperative moves by both speakers. Circumlocution and appeal for assistance are the communication strategies that best facilitate interaction. By the same token, as supporting to that interpretation, Faucette (2001) pointed out that if learners can put communication strategies to use as a way to negotiate meaning then, not only will their comprehension improve, but also, they can learn new words and have the opportunity to talk in the L2.

A fourth possible interpretation for these findings may lie in the fact that students of the experimental group worked in pairs or in small groups while implementing the activities in each session that dealt with a specific communication strategy. This cooperative or interactive environment provided a chance for everyone to give and take support and consequently increased the effectiveness of training to use the

communication strategies with one another. Thus, working in pairs or in a cooperative environment to carry out strategy training may be behind the superiority of the experimental group in the post assessment.

This interpretation is in accordance with the results gained by Lam and Wong (2000) who concluded that strategy training should emphasize teamwork, so that when learners recognize the need for clarification and co-operation, they would be motivated to use clarification strategies. Subsequently, if members were to offer peer support, learners would be encouraged and pushed to try clarification strategies. Peer help and cooperation therefore, are of paramount importance to sustaining clarification for genuine interaction. A lack of sympathy and peer support would only result, at best, in sporadic and unstructured attempts to clarify oneself, or to seek clarification. At worst, learners who have attempted to deploy strategies might be discouraged, and stop using them altogether. Therefore, learners should also exhibit appropriate cooperative behaviour and peer support to compensate for the ineffective use of interaction strategies due to limited language proficiency.

A fifth interpretation for the superiority of the experimental group students in the post assessment may be due to using fillers or hesitation devices. These strategies helped students to overcome the problem of not flowing the meaning smoothly and thus stay in the conversation. So, these oral strategies were the direct reason for developing students' fluency and gave them a chance to take time to think of what to say and how to say it in order to produce related ideas. Thus, the content was related to the topic and, in the same time, was produced fluently.

This interpretation is in accordance with the views of Dornyei (1995) pointing out that fillers or hesitation devices play an important role in helping a speaker to remain in the conversation and gain time to think. These strategies bring about an improvement in students' fluency. This claim was also supported by what Brown (2003) indicated about the purpose of using fillers in conversation. Such fillers are to fill silence which, in turn, make communication seems more natural – and – fluent. Native speakers of English do hesitate and purse, but they do not seem to be able to tolerate long silences. Instead, they will use fillers to appropriately avoid long silence. A nice effect of all this is that the process of using fillers also gives them time to think.

Conclusions and Implications

The overall findings of the research have specific and broader implications which may contribute to the pedagogical and methodological implications for future research. The following implications are highlighted:

- ❖ The findings obtained in this research have added to the growing body of research on developing speaking skills for secondary school students through the use of oral communication strategies.
- ❖ The use of oral communication strategies is effective in enhancing EFL speaking skills. Thus, EFL learners should be explicitly trained on the use of oral communication strategies to compensate for the imperfect knowledge of linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse rules.
- ❖ Working in pairs or in small groups to carry out the activities as the oral communication strategy being trained requires, is a fertile ground to promote speaking.
- ❖ Students' strategic competence can be developed by raising their awareness and by training them to use CSs when encountering communication problems. As it was happened in the training procedures, the students' strategic awareness was raised through explicit CS instruction. To teach CSs, the definition and concept of the target strategy are introduced. Then, the students have their awareness of strategy use raised by discussing why and how people use the strategy. Next, they are encouraged to take risks and use the strategy. After that, examples of the actual use of the strategy are provided and the students practice using it. Finally, they evaluate their strategy use at the end of the lesson.
- ❖ The findings of this study are supportive the idea of "keeping the channel of the conversation open" which all communication strategies try to prove as they come to fill the pause during speaking.
- ❖ The findings reached in this study evoke EFL teachers to explicitly introduce oral communication strategies to less fluent learners and encourage them to consciously use a greater variety of oral communication strategies to promote their ability to cope with difficulties during speaking. Related literature (see e.g. Brown, 2000; Maleki, 2007; Nakatani, 2005) has validated this by stating that "by learning how to use communication strategies appropriately, learners will be more able to bridge the gap between pedagogic and non-pedagogic communication situations".

- ❖ As regards material development, teachers can use some of the lists of CSs, class activities, and training materials contributed by this study as a guideline in teaching different types of CSs to their students in an English-speaking course.
- ❖ Finally, the current study provides some evidence to support the potential benefits of the instruction of CS. Despite the argument against the teachability of CS, this study lends support to previous research on CS instruction and provides more empirical evidence that the instruction of CSs is possible and desirable among second or foreign language learners.

#### Limitations of the Research

- ❖ The duration of data collection for the study (6 weeks) was probably not enough for verifying the effect of oral communication strategies on developing speaking skills.
- ❖ Each of the experimental group and the control one comprised male and female students and it was not categorized them into groups according to their gender which might have affected the findings regarding the effect of gender in education.
- ❖ Another methodological limitation in this research was the non-random selection of sample, which has an impact on the external validity (i.e., generalizability) of the findings. In other words, the non-random selection of sample limits the generalization of the findings to only schools similar in nature to that used in the study.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

- ❖ In-service teachers should be trained on how to develop their students EFL speaking skills especially via oral communication strategy training.
- ❖ Those who are responsible for planning and preparing EFL curricula should consider incorporating learning strategies particularly the ones for speaking in their curricula as effective ways that have considerable potentials for developing speaking skills.
- ❖ To investigate the effect of using oral communication strategies for enhancing speaking skills on a larger sample and for a longer period is a required research to support the results of the present study.
- ❖ Further research is needed to investigate the effect of training on the use of oral communication strategies on students' attitudes towards language learning.

- ❖ It seems necessary for future research to investigate the relationship between students' speaking ability and their use of CSs.
- ❖ As the present study showed that oral communication strategies have a considerable potential for promoting EFL speaking skills, further research studies might make comparisons between the use of oral communication strategies and other instructional strategies on other group samples and contexts.

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Appendix (B): The EFL Speaking Test Rubric

Assessment Criteria	Grade	Can / can't do statements that describe the speaker's performance	
Pronunciation	Superior	- Can produce comprehensible utterances - Can use appropriate linking of words - Can use the right stress and intonation	
	Adequate	-Can produce comprehensible utterances with some minor errors in pronunciation	
	Minimal	- Can speak with some errors in pronunciation now and again which sometimes affect the meaning	
	Inadequate	- Can speak with frequent errors in pronunciation which affect the meaning clearly	
Syntax	Grammar	Superior	- Can produce accurate and appropriate sentences of syntactic forms.
		Adequate	- Can produce sentences with some minor errors in grammar without affecting the meaning
		Minimal	- Can produce sentences with frequent errors in grammar which affect the meaning
		Inadequate	- Cannot produce meaningful grammatical sentences
Syntax	Vocabulary	Superior	- Can use a range of vocabulary which meet the task requirement
		Adequate	- Can use understandable words but insufficient to meet all the task requirement
		Minimal	- Can use understandable vocabulary but in a limited range which meet few points of the task requirement
		Inadequate	- Cannot use understandable and appropriate words for the task requirement
	Content	Superior	- Can produce content which is superior in meeting the task requirements
		Adequate	- Can produce content which is enough to meet the task requirements
		Minimal	- Can't produce enough content to meet the task requirements
		Inadequate	- Can't produce relevant content
	Fluency	Superior	- Can speak fluently without any hesitation
		Adequate	- Can speak with occasional hesitation

Discourse Management		<b>Minimal</b>	- Can speak hesitantly because of rephrasing and searching for words.
		<b>Inadequate</b>	- Can speak in single word utterances and short patterns
	Semantics	<b>Superior</b>	- Can express ideas and opinions in coherent and connected speech - Can construct sentences and produce utterances in order to convey information - Can present information in appropriate sequence
		<b>Adequate</b>	- Can express ideas and opinions in coherent and connected speech - Can present information in an appropriate sequence but there is some slow in constructing sentences which in the same time, have minor errors.
		<b>Minimal</b>	- Cannot express ideas and opinion in coherent and connected speech. - Cannot present information in an appropriate sequence and sentences have tangible vivid errors in structures.
	<b>Inadequate</b>	- Cannot express ideas and opinions clearly. They are disorganized and the listener cannot understand most of the message.	
Interactive communication	Pragmatics	<b>Superior</b>	- Can interact with the interlocutor by initiating and responding appropriately and at the required speed to fulfill the task requirements. - Can use strategies to maintain or repair interaction when needed and the listener can get the message easily.
		<b>Adequate</b>	- Can interact with the interlocutor appropriately and at suitable speed to fulfill the task requirements. - Can interact with an attempt to use strategies to maintain or repair interaction when needed, and understanding the message requires some effort from the listener
		<b>Minimal</b>	- Can express ideas and opinions but in incomplete and unclear sentences, and in a vivid slow. Understanding requires considerable effort from the listener.
		<b>Inadequate</b>	- Cannot express or provide ideas and opinions to fulfill the task requirements and often stay silently for a tangible period of time which affects comprehension.