

**A Strategic Technique to Teaching  
and Assessing Students Oral Proficiency  
in English at Intermediate Stage  
in Saudi Arabia**

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### **Abstract:**

Speaking is considered the most important skill of language communication. That is because languages are found first spoken, but later might be read or written. At intermediate stage in Saudi schools students are unable to speak English fluently although that they have studied English for three years since fourth grade elementary. Students at intermediate school encounter some problems in producing English orally due to uneffective strategies of teaching, insufficient activities of practice and inadequate devices of assessment, Further, the contrast between Arabic and English may increase such a handicap and make it more complex. Therefore, speaking must be taught as a skill to bring about psychomotor experiences for students and as an ability to produce communicative competence.

### **Preface:**

Of the four language skills, speaking is generally considered the most difficult to learn, Students tend to be silent listeners rather than active learners in the oral English class because of the physiological pressure of making mistakes in the presence of their classmates and their lack of vocabulary. The communicative approach to speaking dictates that the use of the language should be above the level of the sentence which is known as the ability to speak. If “speaking deals only with reporting the language, then it is termed as the skill of speaking. Teaching speaking whether as a skill or ability can’t carried out effectively unless some particular psychomotor experience are learned first. These experiences are prerequisites for enabling the Saudi Arabic tongue and other speech organs to operate as required by the new customs of the target language e.g. pronouncing the English alphabet, words, group of words and sentences. The experience should incorporate distinguishing and disseminating between two similar letters, words or morphemes either in English or between English and Arabic. This phase is important for intermediate school students as false beginners since the contrasts between Arabic and English pronunciation are wide. This phase is absent in the English language intermediate syllabus – Full Blast. Even the linguistic experiences of the skill of speaking are not demonstrated, yet the communicative experiences are also neglected as a consequence of the absence of language functions. This study attempts to map out a strategic technique to teach and assess oral proficiency of EFL students at intermediate Saudi school.

### **The study Problem:**

A pilot study which is conducted by the researcher on intermediate stage students oral production of EFL test

results shows low achievement in the skill and ability of speaking. This would deteriorate the mastery of speaking as a crucial means of language communication.

**The Study Objectives:**

- 1- To investigate the reasons of intermediate school students defects in speaking English.
- 2- To argue considerations of highlighting speaking skill and ability.
- 3- To construct a strategic technique to teaching speaking skill and ability .
- 4- To conceptualize a framework of assessing speaking skill and ability.

**The Study Inquires:**

- 1- Why students at intermediate school are incompetent to speak EFL?
- 2- What handicaps students at intermediate school encounter in order to speak EFL?
- 3- Does the contrast between Arabic and English hinder students at intermediate school, to speak English?
- 4- What instructional strategies can be used to promote students oral production of English at intermediate school?
- 5- How can test be devised for students at intermediate school to assess their competence of speaking skill and performance of speaking ability?

**Significance of the Study:**

- 1- Speaking is the most prominent ability that meets the needs of false beginners at intermediate school for exchanging their interpersonal information and socializing in English, therefore conducting this study would offer a strategic technique for EFL Saudi teachers to teach and assess speaking skill and ability.

- 2- EFL syllabus developers may benefit from such scheme of teaching and assessing speaking skill and ability when developing a new English syllabus.
- 3- The study supplies English teachers and supervisors with updated strategies and techniques of teaching practicing and assessing speaking skill and ability.

### **Limitation of the Study:**

This study is only concerned with intermediate school students and their English syllabus – Full Blast. It does not prescribe any materials, however, suggests possible contexts and situations for teaching, practicing and assessing speaking skill and ability.

### **Literature Review:**

Speaking is considered as one of the complicated skills since it involves more than just pronouncing words. Voice quality, intonation, animation, eye – contact, setting time space, clarity and understanding the purpose of communication are all involved (Harbar & Commine, 2007). Some educators consider oral production the true measure of language learner's proficiency (Yagang, 1993). The two main functions of spoken language which are interactional and transactional function are to convey information and express ideas. Contextual material for teaching / Learning speaking should be selected in the light of the two functions (Buck, 1995). "Owens" (2016: 28) defines speech as a verbal means of communicating or converting meaning through speech sounds (phonemes) combined in various ways to form language units. Further, "Flores" (1991: 1) says that speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information. These definitions imply that in addition to the above mentioned functions of speaking understandable speech requires that attention should be paid to the sub-categories of speaking ability,

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namely, accuracy and fluency (Mendelson, 1994). Accuracy, which is the focus of controlled or guided classroom activities, involves the correct use of vocabulary, grammar, structure and cohesion; meantime, fluency is a speaker's ability to produce continuous utterances when speaking spontaneously, using normal pauses, intonation and stress (Harlow & Comines, 2007). "Thompson et al" (2012) believe that neglecting speaking in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom may severely destroy the development of certain of other skills. Students at intermediate stage should be encouraged to speak English from the first English lesson since communication in English is recognized mainly through speech. Communication is defined as the exchange of ideas and information between two or more persons. In a language it means using the functional aspects and means to fulfill certain purposes or arrive at particular target (Richards + Rodgers, 2001). In teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) "Clark" (2009) suggests some characters that distinguish communicative tasks from non-communicative. The Communicative task, to him, is the one which is unpredictable, purposeful, coherent, has an information gap and has the participant involved. Widdowson (1998) referred to such communication when he was talking about usage and use. As the starting point in EFL, classroom communication is more relevant to the authenticity of the class than presentation since it stimulates student's desires to interact and formulate the basis for intrinsic motivation. Real communication may take place in classroom setting in the form of socializing in English either between two or more students or between a student and a teacher. The classroom is not always a natural environment for learning EFL in situations which are likely to be met in foreign countries. Simulation techniques, consequently, offer the possibility of extending the scope of

activities and tasks beyond those of the class to reinforce the students interactive performances which bring about the authentication of English. About uses of spoken English "Halliday" (1985) has identified three major functions of language: the ideational, the textual and the interpersonal. Two of these, the ideational, and interpersonal have particular relevance to discussion of how the spoken EFL is used. The ideational function corresponds to a function of English quite different from its use for social relations. This is the use of EFL to express content and to communication information. The interpersonal function of EFL is reflected in the kind of social talk that students participate in throughout the day in controvertional exchange with friends, teachers and classmates. There is still a controversial matter underlying students at intermediate speaking EFL relating to accuracy and fluency. Accuracy and fluency are two distinctive terms which are widely debated in literature of EFL. Brumfit ( 2005) considers such a strategy as methodological rather than physiological or linguistic "Halliday" ( 1985) indicates that in EFL course it is all too easy to make the mistaken assumption that students competence can be developed by just any kind of speaking activities. If the focus in instruction is on conversational skills then this would not ensure that students develop the ability to use EFL for informative purposes which is the aspect of spoken English that students most often have difficulty with nevertheless, accuracy and fluency are interactive connected with correctness and feedback of speaking which are all mechanized and synthesized by maturation. Despite Brumfit's view, accuracy and fluency have psychological implications which are found in the sense of security and confidence in the learner's attempts to challenge. Concerning pacing and spacing "Halliday" (1985) has

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shown the complications facing a learners of English in attempting to achieve phonetic empathy with native speakers. Students utterances might be divided up in several way depending on the rhythm of the sentence or utterance as expressed by the speaker. Not only the rhythm changes but also the speed at which the syllabus is carrying the main stress arrived. There are, therefore, two real time factors affecting the placement of main stress by a speaker in an utterance: pacing that is the speed which stress word which are spoken; and spacing, that is the proportion of stressed word to total number of words on average. Al Amri ( 2001) in her study about "the effectiveness of using computer assisted language learning on the achievement of student's in Saudi Arabia" refers that many classroom materials designed for teaching speaking skills are inappropriate and often misleading and disempowering. They frequently fail to provide adequate conversational data as effective strategies for facilitating spoken communication. There is therefore, a need for authentic material and genuine EFL situation to exploit oral production. "Gower etal" (1998) recommend that EFL students need to take advantage of very possible speaking opportunity in order to eventually use the language to communicate and realize their needs, noting that the more they speak, the more they increase their influence and confidence. Achieving this goal requires a greater emphasis on materials selection, lesson design and teaching methodology composed to other language skills. "Wang" ( 1990) reports that in Chinese schools reading has always received priority at all stages of English teaching while speaking have been neglected, thus students remain deaf and dumb in English. Focusing on oral skills is new trend in the reform of English teaching in the schools which promotes an all round development of English in young learners. In the Shanghai Foreign language school many

students speak English even better than university students who major in it, that is because Chinese students are so delighted to have English classes that they no longer feel it a burdensome subject. Focusing on speaking well has not at all degraded but rather has promoted, learners mastery of reading and writing. On the other hand, problems of Arab speakers as "Smith" reports (1987) may arise from attempting to pronounce English words phonetically and the influence of the written form. Arab students have problems grasping the unpredictable nature of English word stress because Arabic is a stress – tuned language and word stress in particular is predictable and regular. Another problem is that phrase and sentence rhythms are similar in both languages, thus primary stress occur more frequently in Arabic and unstressed syllables are pronounced more clearly with neutral vowels, but not swallowed as in English. Arab student tend to intone or chant, reducing information to a low fall at the ends of phrases and sentences. Speech making news reading religious recitation are all quite different in rhythm and intonation from normal informal speech. A third problem of speaking is the difficulty of students to assess the background knowledge of their listeners. "Merial" (1986) states that when teachers conduct a class in EFL communication, problems often arise with false – beginners.

A well-established teaching technique involves the use by teachers of elicitation. Elicitations are important in language classes, not only because they provide the means of checking what students have learned, but also because they create the opportunity for pupils to participate verbally in the lesson. Elicitations in the data fall into main groups: content – oriented and language – oriented, and communication problems sometimes occur because students fail to recognize the orientation of an elicitation.

Saudi EFL researches and studies concerning speaking skill are very limited and have recorded only (9.36%) among other language skills and sub-skills. The studies identify weaknesses and difficulties of Saudi students in pronouncing certain English consonant sounds (Ahmed, 2011; Hago & Khan, 2015). Further, Hamouda (2013) Al Asmari (2015), Younes & Al Balawi (2013) state such weaknesses of Saudi Students in the oral production at pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary, the different accent of speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety, bad quality of recording, inappropriate structures, hesitance to use the target language, conceptual knowledge, listening ability, confidence, maturation to speak, contrasts between Arabic and English, lack of feedback during speaking activities, shortage of time allowed to speak, fear of making mistakes, shyness of some students and inefficient teaching, learning and evaluation of speaking (Alsowat, 2016).

### **Study Procedures:**

#### **Introductory**

Some justifications for giving speaking prominence above other skills in teaching / learning EFL at intermediate school are illustrated in addition to the identification of study tool and its validation. Teaching, learning and practicing speaking skill, sub-skills and ability are demonstrated thereafter, meantime assessing students oral production of speaking is discussed at the end of this chapter with some exploited materials incorporated in examples which are expressed in terms of languages exercises, activities and games.

#### **Justifications for focusing on speaking:**

Although attention is drawn to the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, yet speaking is emphasized for the following reasons:

- 1- The approach adopted by the English syllabus “ Full Blast” is communicative which presupposes the dominance of oral English; firstly, to meet the needs of the students, and secondly to fulfill the objectives stated by the syllabus ( Ministry of Education, 2017) .
- 2- Speech usually precedes writing, people are frequently found speaking a language but rarely write it.
- 3- The students at intermediate stage have good grasp of Arabic and therefore involving them in oral English gives them a chance to recode and encode Arabic and English aspects of thoughts and English phenomenon to promote mastering English.
- 4- Students come to intermediate stage with a strong conviction that they have to use English in expressing themselves, in seeking others feeling and desires, and in entertaining and playing with the language. If they find English treated not as a skill but as any content subject they might be frustrated and lose their interests and motivation.
- 5- Empirical findings also show that younger learners are superior in acquiring pronunciation skill which is an essential part of the effective oral communications.
- 6- Young learners at intermediate school are supposed to be confident and unfear of making mistakes when speaking in English. This quality might not be found in the same student when they grow up.
- 7- Students at the intermediate school (adolescents ) tend to acquire language rather than learn it which helps them to process information and knowledge embedded in English better than adults.
- 8- Delaying speaking to a later stage of secondary might risk developing in students certain inhibitions about making strange sound in public and make it difficult for

them to encode what they have already learned to express themselves spontaneously.

- 9- Allowing a student to express himself in English which he meets for the second time (after elementary school) would stimulate his eagerness and promote his desire to learn more in order to express more of his feelings and attitudes.

### **Study Tools and Validation:**

The tool of this study is the description and analysis of the process of teaching, practicing and assessing students at intermediate school in the skill and ability of speaking. The content of teaching practicing and assessing analysis is validated by exposing it to two specialist referees in EFL instruction and language planning. Their comments and suggestions are taken into consideration when illustrating the processes of teaching, practicing and assessing the speaking skill and ability.

### **Teaching and Practicing Speaking Skill:**

The teaching of pronunciation should be an integral part of any EFL course. Skilled pronunciation teaching gives life to a class because it reflects feeling and personal reactions to different situations. In classroom practice, it gives variety to repetition or dialogues which have only a neutral meaning. Teaching pronunciation varies so much depending on the situation and mood of the speakers, that it seems impossible to standardize anything. It is possible to lay down general guidelines for English pronunciation. Once the teacher has grasped it, he can extend his knowledge by further reading and by classroom practice. English pronunciation is part of the speaking skill. It embraces the spoken code of pitch; intonation, duration tone of voice and other phonemic features which are found in psychomotor experiences. What matters vitally in English pronunciation is the phonemic difference rather

than the phonetic difference since it affects the code of communication. For example, Arabic has no “P” so that students may say ‘ bin’ where, meaning is entirely changed. On the other hand, if he says ‘ tab ‘ instead of tap the message is still conveyed and understood since aspirated ‘P’ does not affect communication so much when it appears at the end of a word. Such differences can be demonstrated through minimal pairs where two words differing in one phoneme contrasting in similar positions but resulting in a semantic difference (Al-Subahi, 1988). Accordingly, the student should say ‘b’ before ‘p’ ‘f’ before ‘v’ ‘l’ before ‘e’ and ‘o’ before ‘g’. Encoding such features requires thorough drilling so that interval associations can be developed which make students produce a correct form. The psychomotor experiences should be given in brief utterances within one situation till the student retains easily, proceeding with the same situation and topic to longer sentences, then to combination of sentences since the process of encoding does not only depend on the growing familiarity with English phonetics but also on his ability to recognize clues of redundancy and analogues pronunciation of the word (s) from its position in the context. The teacher should give a model pronunciation, whether by his voice or native speaker on a tape, and then the students repeat and follow him in as much as recognition precedes production. Signals by hands, mirrors or drawings on the blackboard are some techniques which can be used when difficulty occurs, to explain the position of speech organs in difficult cases of pronunciation. The ability of speaking rests on the skill of talking which is the usage of the sound system and the assimilation of the phonological features of English (Widdowson, 1998) Linguistic experiences prepare the students to produce English but with less guidance from the teacher. They include producing answers to questions raised

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by teacher classmates, or test, correct forms and patterns in accuracy exercise and games, familiar expression and reading aloud materials from the blackboard or the textbook. The transition from the psychomotor experiences to the communication experiences should run through linguistic experiences directed and controlled by the teacher, despite the risk of Arabic transference of structures or word order which may happen.

The teacher outlines to the students the context of a question he is to ask or the expression he is to contextualize. Correction in both stages is essential to provide feedback in the new habits students acquire. Accuracy is maintained especially in encoding aspect of pronunciation. The two stages are prerequisites for oral communication ability where fluency rather than accuracy is demanded. Communication experiences set for speaking ability are graded according to such norms and criteria as: the instant use of English, simplicity and difficulty, mutation and pedagogy of learning. They start with simple conversation or dialogues between two students or the teacher and student which involve greeting identification and inquiring but end with more sophisticated exchanges of English in : reporting, describing and simulating rules in drama, role – play or problem – solving. In dialogue and conversation student should emphasize smooth transition from word to word and sound to sound according to the conventions of rapid speech in English. Topics of conversations should be selected carefully to cover a wide field of interests for students to ensure full participation from all members of the class. When communication games become the class discourse the topics should also be provocative for ripe interaction in simulation, role – play, problem – solving and drama. Comprehension is an important factor in discussing or playing communicative

games, therefore speed of delivery should restrain talkative students and encourage taciturn or shy students to interact because personality should be recognized as a factor affecting participation in oral production. The rank of experiences as such does not propose rigid steps in developing speaking ability. It has been said that the classroom in English begins from the first day of learning which means that although communication experiences are ranked as a final step, yet they can be mastered before psychomotor and linguistic when situations call for it. Despite the difference in the range of sounds between English and Arabic there are eight vowels and diphthongs and thirty – two consonants in English, Saudi false – beginners would not face serious problems in dealing with the English sound – system. This is because they are still adolescents, superior in acquiring pronunciation skills ( Littlewood, 1984). Technical description and phonetic script are not suitable for the students at this growing phase, though some general description of the script might be required by older learners (Finocchiaro & Brunfit, 1995). English segmental consonants and vowels – cause less difficulty for the students than the supra-segmental although students exert a great deal of effort in pronouncing such sounds as /p/v/q/, /g/ since they do not exist in Arabic. Consonant clusters should also be presented with a special emphasis on initial clusters which do not appear in Arabic e.g / pr/ problem / Pl/ ( plug) /gr/ (green). Nevertheless, some might not be difficult for students as they are accustomed to similar words in Arabic like ‘green ‘ guranful’. The English teachers should be aware of the short vowels added usually by his students before the final consonant in final consonant cluster e.g. ‘desik’ instead of ‘desk’. Presentation of segmental for the elementary level students relies very little on intellectual mastery or logical

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explanation : they are mechanically drilled via mimicry whether by initiating the teacher or a tape – recorder. At the intermediate school, when the students vocal organs are more liable to produce English consonants and vowels, they should not depend only on auditory clauses of imitation but also on a general description of the tongue – position or lip-rounding. Using contrasting features from both languages – Arabic and English – is another method of presenting segmental and word-stress. The presentation of English stress, rhythm and intonation is more difficult because they are quite different from Arabic. Reduced vowels of English in stressed syllables may cause some problem to students. For instance / ai et bred / instead of / eit breid, because they are uttered as connected speech rather than single words. The fact that English is a stress – timed language, unlike Arabic, causes problems for presentation of supra – segmental where the quickly pronounced syllables in sentences stress vary according to the speaker’s intention, attitude and emotion. For example, consider the sentence ‘Where did you buy the ice-cream? The main stress may fall on where, you, or ice-cream; and each is appropriate only when a particular meaning is to be conveyed. In demonstrating such features, the English teacher can use either his voice e.g. saying the sentence, exaggerating the difference between stressed and unstressed, representing each syllable with a sound or gestures, e.g. using arms or clapping. He can also use dots, dashes or lines to underline positions of stress on the blackboard. Rhythm is often difficult for Saudi students since Arabic speed is not stress – timed. Intonation is another area of difficulty which needs to be addressed by repeated models of sounds and contrasting sound from Arabic when available. The rising and falling tones are the most important tones for school students of English. Rising tone is presented by asking

Yes/No question or expressing surprise and disbelief, whereas falling tone is presented by statements, commands and 'Wh' questions. English suprasegmentals are better acquired naturally by listening to the teacher or a native speaker on a tape or a film. There are some English sounds which have to be taught later when students have a good command of the system and become accustomed to the contrasts with Arabic:

- 1) Short vowels occur in English script but do not occur in Arabic script and so the false beginners at intermediate stage would treat them as long vowels when they occur in English script e.g / ko:m/ instead of / k^m/.
- 2) The past participle form -ed - when comes with verb ends with consonant e.g clim. Students tend to be reluctant to drop the verb's last consonant - b and so pronounce it as / Klaimbd/ instead of / klamb/.
- 3) The short vowel in -ed- past participle when comes with consonant, e.g / kiki d/ instead of / ki kd/ .
- 4) Initial consonant clusters which do not exist in Arabic and cause a problem for false beginner at intermediate stage. e.g. pr-programme, gr-ground, sp-spoon.
- 5) Compound and difficult word like: government, accelerator homework, dictionary, textbook, stewardess.
- 6) The stress when changes meaning since most Arabic stresses are regular and predicable .
- 7) A juncture when it is represented by consonant clusters and certain phonemes are changed through juncture: / dIdzð/ changed to / JIjði/.

The practice stage is seen as necessarily involving a limited amount of drills relating to English pronunciation. This stage is a part of the communication phase but since it requires a type of systematization so it is incorporated in the practice phase. The type of production which the students

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need is the bridging of information gaps. In other words, there should be an information gap needing to be filled by asking students to say something unknown to them. To be communicative in such exercises students should not be asked to see a picture of a man on a horse and a cat eating ‘ and then asked question like: where’s the man? ‘what is the cat doing?’ who is near the window? Since they know the place of the man and what the cat is doing from the picture they see. But a teacher (or a student) can have a picture while the other students have a similar picture with some features missing which they must find out from the teacher (or the student). All tasks and activities in the production stage should be conducted communicatively by setting up situations where information gaps exist. Yalden ( 2014) suggests that there should also be a reason which works as a stimulus for a student to bridge the gap. The reason in the exercise is in the instruction given by the teacher, the C.D room or the textbook to students to listen and say which keeps the students working towards bridging the gaps of communication. These exercises are of different types, and use different aids and instructional media. e.g.

- a. "Guessing exercises" which stimulate students to find out something through guessing. They can be played to characterize the variation of an item within the same structure, but they may also involve a variety of structures. For example, a teacher draws a diagram on the blackboard which the students have to complete by guessing the answer and asking the teacher for necessary information. Another example is one student has some pictures with names and actions, the second has only the pictures without name. The second students asks name of each picture according to the action in the pictures.

- b. Sentence building exercise where each student adds to the sentence a word or a set of words to stretch its meaning. They are suitable for team work for example: student A : Ali went to student 'B' the zoo yesterday. He....., student 'C' : saw some animals which...
- c. Describe and say exercises where different pictures of objects like: clock, pencil, stapler, rubber, paper clip; can be on cards, each student selects what describes his object without revealing the name or its use and the others listen and guess the object. For example ( pencil). Student : B 'is it something you can eat? Student A: No, Student c': is it something that you write on? Student A: No, Student D : 'is it that we can write with? Student 'A' yes, it is, Student 'D' is it a pencil?
- d. Memory Exercise where students recall objects shown to them quickly on a picture and then disappeared. C.D. picture can be effectively used here where they are shown out of focus and the students attempt to identify each item included in the picture.
- e. Describe and draw exercises where a student describes to others a picture which they do not see. The rest of the players ask questions about the picture to identify and draw it.
- f. Listen and communicate exercises, where some students listen to the C.D material on laptop and then they communicate their contents to other students in the classroom.
- g. Intonation exercise where a dialogue is printed on cards and each student takes a part in it. All statements questions and examinations should uttered correctly by the students according to the dialogue contextual situations.

- h. Look and say exercise where pictures of similar pronunciation, but not identical and have different meaning, are disputed to the students and they should pronounce each two e.g. goat / coat, port/ part, lamp / Lamb.

The activities and exercises of speaking should be conditioned by the explicitness in the information content they convey in order to bridge a gap with an accurate piece of information. They should be intended to teach and entertain students. The teacher is required to explain these exercises and activities clearly and may use Arabic if the need arises. He should prepare them at home and try them out before implementation in the class, especially, the use and the manipulation of the instructional media communicatively.

### **Teaching and Practicing Speaking Ability:**

Since communication means using language for a purpose through games involving the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, fluency games have a paramount role in developing the students competence in speaking. The activities are not real in the sense that they provide vicarious experiences, but the language used within these games is exploited to supply necessary functions, notions and situations. Students in these games are encouraged to participate in activities involved in them regardless of their command of the linguistic patterns. In other words, fluency rather than accuracy is emphasized in such games in order to allow more innovations and free exponents in the language form. Unlike the practice activities, speaking games and activities involve the students on a personal level. The more freedom they are given to select their roles, the more communicative the play will be, and the more the gap between the classroom and the English environment is bridged. It is,

therefore, important when constructing such games and activities that their topics should be familiar to student's everyday life since this gives them a feeling that English can become theirs, related to their interests and fulfilling their needs. Speaking games and activities are numerous, but the most common types are role – play, simulation drama, problem solving and interview, all of which can be utilized by the teacher to encourage learning and incite communication.

### **1. Role play:**

Realistic role play serves efficiently the present objectives since it manipulates everyday situations such as : buyer, seller, grocer, ironmonger, greengrocer, butcher, doctor, taxi – driver, chemist, patient. Nevertheless, fanciful role–play is also recommended especially for the false beginners as it is stimulating by providing the students with fun and pleasure. Moreover, it expands the student's own imagination and develops their creativity in English. An example is: a picnic which should be planned by students and their teacher, or a plan for a pilgrimage to Makkah or visiting the Prophet's Mosque in Madina. Role – plays are different in the way they are designed to have some focus on specific language used by the student to give him opportunities for using English and stretching his knowledge; here the teacher's orientation is important. It can be free language where the players are free to use whatever language they wish, but restricted by specific situations or settings. Both types are more compatible for false beginners at intermediate stage because students' knowledge of English is still limited at the first two levels. At the end of the intermediate stage, students are more able to cope with free language role–play, yet this does not mean that the teacher cannot use the three types of role–play interchangeably at intermediate in different grades when it is relevant. The

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later role play bring about an element of surprise of innovating words, structures and use of English as a result of managing integration in English. Teachers should be careful when dealing with such role-play not to take more time than is fixed for them. Role-play cards should be prepared by the teacher as to include the languages to be used by the students but the teacher's sensitivity is required in this place to address roles to those who will feel comfortable with them. Roles can be identified as: pilgrim – passport officer, pilgrim – Murshid (Leader), foreigner–student, player – commentator, pilot – passenger, taxi driver, rider, factory manager – visitor.

## **2) Simulation:**

Like role –play, simulation accomplishes certain communicative targets , yet simulation should be preceded by background information which is provided to participants about the setting which is wanted to be simulated. This may require role –cards to lead the simulation to the proper direction. Large classes are divided into two groups, each of which simulates the same situation, or may be given two different simulations. For the simulation to be effective, there are some tasks which should be undertaken by the teacher before and during the simulation:

- a. identifying the problem of the simulation which should be based on the specific objectives of the lesson and the characters who participate in it.
- b. writing the contextual material and preparing the role–cards for the players.
- c. presenting the scenario to the whole class with the blackboard information.
- d. selecting students carefully and sensibly to take the roles as interactants and as reporters of simulation.

- e. following up the process of simulation by giving correction and advice when the need arises. The teacher may interfere in a discussion if he recognizes that someone is talking too long or if the participants find no solution for the problem. He may record or identify linguistic or socio – cultural mistakes he noted and demonstrate them later.

### **3) Drama:**

It feeds the imagination of the students and gets them to experiment with the knowledge they have already mastered in English in a fun, fanciful but purposeful way. Gestures, facial expression and proxemics are involved in drama in addition to the four skills. The most important part drama plays is its transmission of English cultural aspects into the Saudi intermediate classroom. Students in the drama associate a large number of mannerisms with people of English. The content of drama is not only the textual words uttered by the player but it also embraces all verbal and non-verbal behaviors, features of intonation and pronunciation, movements and gestures. Drama can be played inside or outside the classroom, however, clothes and personal appearance might be a part of communications in drama. The teacher can use drama either to find out what feelings are expected from an enumeration task, especially when moral aspects are involved, or to construct more sophisticated relationships among terms of English functions and notions.

### **4) Problem – Solving:**

Since it appeals to the cognitive part of consciousness, unlike other games which often appeal to the affective as well as cognitive part, problem solving needs a further amount of linguistic knowledge and background information for making a decision. The teacher of English should select the problem with reference to:

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- a. it levels of student language. It should not include items which have not been taught or practised.
  - b. its appropriateness to the settings and the current event of the local atmosphere.
  - c. the motivation it gives its participants to simulate their responses and reactions.
  - d. the acceptability of moral and cultural features it contains which do not go against the acceptable manner and culture of the society.

Problems displayed to students should be linked to their real life whether at home or at school, since they would then be enthusiastic to discuss them willingly. The language should be graded according to the level of student. Problems can be for example arriving late at school, smoking at school or in general, going to bed late because of watching TV., missing Fajr Prayer in time, praying Zuhr at school, playing football in the street near home, different subject in the timetable, school's lack (physical conditions), classrooms lacks. Such examples and others supply the students with some basic, new vocabulary and expressions and reinforce old ones as a problem provokes their communication abilities. The role of the teacher is to construct the guidelines of the problem on pieces of paper and distribute them among the participants to read. He could sketch up the scenario in order to promote competency to deal with the problem. Students might be divided into two or more groups each of which discusses the same or a different problem and each with a reporter to conduct and conclude the discussion and write down the suggestions or solutions. Teacher's role in following up the discussion is essential for reading communicative and linguistic gaps – slips or error brought about as a result of natural impulse accompanying the process of solving a problem.

### **5) Interview:**

The theme of the interview can be selected by the student or by the teacher, but the most appropriate themes of interviews which promote communication are those relating to students needs and interest such as football matches, police and military schools and training institutes, piloting and aviation. The interview, then can be a footballer, a soldier, a policeman, a pilot and a captain. The interview as a game or activity for encouraging the student to listen and produce English is very promising because it reflects the lived interaction between two interlocutors which may involve innovations or what Littlewood (1984) calls strategies of communication. In the process of interviewing, the teacher should be acquainted with such devices as:

- a- avoiding communication where learners are short of its vocabulary.
- b- adjusting the message by omitting some items and altering others in order to simplify meanings as information.
- c- Paraphrasing words e.g. 'seat – belt' into 'tie myself'.
- d- using approximation 'some fruit' instead of 'pineapple'.
- e- creating new words.
- f- using Arabic word and insert them in English
- g- using non-verbal communication e.g. 'mine' and 'gesture'.
- h- seeking help from the listener or others.

Monitoring interviews by the teacher is necessary for improvising such circumstances as mentioned above.

### **6) Mime stories:**

A teacher mimes out a simple story, or event and students have to tell what is happening in correct English. This focuses the students' attention because they are trying to decipher actions. Language areas should be selected

beforehand which can be run through the whole sequence first and then mime it section by section or go straight into it. The first strategy makes it easier as students already have an idea of the whole sequence, while the latter brings more suspense.

An example: Mime: teacher sits down and drives imaginary car; then faces the class and wait for suggestion, suggestions: 'I'm a taxi driver'. Teacher shakes his head.' I'm driving a car'. Teacher points his thumb over his shoulder to indicate the past: 'I was driving a car'. Teacher puts his hand on top of his head. The class repeat: 'I was driving a car'.

### **Testing Speaking Skills:**

The students at intermediate stage can be tested reasonably objectively in their pronunciation, stress and intonation (phonology). Distinguishing between English and Arabic sounds is important for testing pronunciation. Many letters in both languages are nearly identical. False beginners at intermediate stage might be addressed with such test which measure their skill to discriminate between English and Arabic words such as: low, lamp, sugar. The test should also assess their sub – skills to pronounce English sounds incorporated in consonants and vowels and combined letter such as: 'put', 'that'.

The most common type of phonology test is the repetition test. The student is simply asked to repeat words, phrases or sentences which he learns from either the teacher or CD. Some examples are given below.

#### **a) Testing Pronunciation:**

The teacher (or CD) says play: pray, pen: bin, chalk: shall, sin: thin. The student repeats and the teacher identifies his correct pronunciation and scores it. For testing sentences and phrases the student hears such a sentence

like: 'please put the ball in the box and bring it here', and then repeats it with the correct pronunciation of the ' p ' and ' b '.

**b) Testing stress and intonation:**

A student repeats the teacher's question and answer: 'What is this?'

'This is a pen'. The teacher may ask the student the question which has rising intonations and have him answer it with falling intonation. Stress, whether sentence or word stress, can also be tested in the same way.

**c) Reading Aloud:**

A Student is required to read aloud a word, a sentence or a passage from the blackboard, flash-card, or the text- the book. Pronunciation, stress and intonation can be tested then with reference to certain points. Native pronunciation is difficult to attain, but the student should be able to acquire near- native received pronunciation. Phonology can be tested by a paper- pencil test. The student in such a test hears words or sentences and marks in his answer-paper, whether it is rising or falling intonation or draws lines or curves which show the type of intonation. He might be asked to mark the syllable carrying the stress.

**Testing Speaking Ability**

Beyond the elementary levels of mimicry and repetition speaking is a difficult and complex ability to test since it does not permit a reliable basis to the weighting to comprehension, pronunciation, need for prompting and expression. Further, successful interaction depends partly on the interlocutor in decoding or encoding the message (Heaton, 2001). Nevertheless, a test should be behavior-based or what Finocchiaro and Brumfit ( 1995) describe as what can the speaker achieve through language. The quality is more important than quantity in oral testing. In other words, the students in oral testing are assessed with

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reference to the complexity of the text and structures they deal with, speed of processing English, prompting appropriately in certain cases, accuracy of linguistic skills, independence from interlocutor, repetition of utterance and hesitation in performing a task. Twenty marks out of thirty five are given to oral testing by the scheme. Many tools and instruments can be used for measuring the student oral proficiency in English, amongst which are: observation-recording, interview, description, narrating, discussing and conversation:

**a- Observation- recording test.**

The testees are asked in this test to carry out roles in communicative games like simulation, role-play or problem-solving similar to those they have done throughout the course as mentioned earlier in teaching and practicing speaking abilities. Each of several groups of five or six students is given a game to play for fifteen minutes. The testees take on the identity of characters from course material as can be assigned by the teacher. The testees may be gradually eased into performance in order to draw out the shy and tongue-tied students. Such an act reduces the level of tension and makes the results of the test more representative of student's true knowledge. During the action of simulation the teacher observes the testees participation and records their comprehension reaction. Comprehension, reaction, communication-verbal and social cultural-aspects, usage of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and the degree of success in imparting and receiving a message. Although the accuracy of using the language is considered as part of effective communication, yet emphasis should be put on fluency of speech and message interpreted. Table (1) illustrates a sample rating scale for the observation- recording test. The assessment

scale has seven behaviors, the first three are considered important than the last four because they determine the structure of the game, thus they are awarded more marks. The total is ten marks which range in three scales from "Good" (6 marks), "Satisfied" (3 marks) "Unsatisfied" (Nil) at the major behaviours, to ( 4 marks) for " Good". (2 marks) for "Satisfied and (Nil) for "Unsatisfied" for the minor behaviours. It should be noted that in such a communicative test there is no one right answer or solution to the problem issued and marks are given on the decisions arrived at. Testees of English at the intermediate stage are better served by simulation, role- play and problem-solving.

**Table (1) : Observation – Recording Scoring Scheme**

No.	Major Behaviors	Good 6 marks	Satisfied 3 marks	Unsatisfied Nil
1-	Identifying and evaluating alternatives	2	1	0
2-	Making decisions or solution with justification	2	1	0
3-	Independence of interlocutor and confidence in self	2	1	0
	Minor Behaviours	4 marks	2 marks	Nil
4-	Speed		½	
5-	Pronunciation ( stress and intonation)	1	½	0
6-	Vocabulary (appropriate and efficient)	1	½	0
7-	Grammar	1	½	0
	Total = ( ----- )out of 10 marks			

**b- Interview test**

This is a subjective test of low reliability but of high apparent validity. It can be used as a pseudo-communicative or real- communicative test, depending on the grade of the testees (first, second or third). To achieve face, construct and content validities, the

interview test should be based on the specific objectives of English lessons. The teacher in the interview is better helped by another teacher of English so that one can be an interviewees and the other is an assessor who sits behind the student- interviewers. The interview should be carefully structured so that it interest and fulfills lessons, objectives. Nonetheless, a very rigid structure of interview questions may restrict interviewees from expressing communicative ideas freely.

A group of five or six student can be interviewed together each one being asked the same question. Scoring such a test can be fairly detailed to encompass fluency and accuracy. The some scheme of scoring can be used as that in observation-recording with a change only in the major performances so as to have in the interview scheme (table 2): understanding questions, expressing himself by using verbal and non- verbal communication and a variety of skills in addition to functions and tones he used. The good student, therefore, is the one who expresses himself very clearly, assimilating without hesitation the questions addressed to him by the interviewer, showing competence in communicating verbally and non-verbally, prompting instantly, nearly native pronunciation and accurate in using grammar and lexis.

**Table (2) Interview Scoring Scheme**

No.	Major Behaviors	Good 6 marks	Satisfied 3 marks	Unsatisfied Nil
1-	Identifying question and	2	1	0
2-	paralinguistic features.	2	1	0
3-	Expressing himself by using verbal and non-verbal communication	2	1	0
	Variety of skills, functions and tones used			
	Minor Behaviours	4 marks	2 marks	Nil
4-	Speed	1	½	0
5-	Pronunciation	1	½	0
6-	(stress and intonation)	1	½	0
7-	Vocabulary (appropriate and efficient)	1	½	0
	Grammar			
	Total = ( ----- )out of 10 marks			

**C- Description test**

The student in this test is given a topic to talk about e.g.: home classroom, shops, markets, farm and field. A picture may also displayed and the student be asked to

describe it or describe the series of actions carried out by persons or items in the picture. An oral description test is better administered in the English lab (if one exists in school) so that the processes of administering the test and scoring it would become reliable and practical. The testees are shown a picture, they are allowed two minutes to prepare the description and then each one describes it in two or three minutes (according to the sort and number of items included in the picture). Such a test might be scored on the fluency describing items or actions of the picture in order, coverage of all items and actions in the picture, and the manipulation of these items in terms of their appropriate interrelations. The speed of descriptions, pronunciation, use of appropriate vocabulary and structure are set under minor performances and given four marks. Table (3) illustrates the scoring scheme of a description test.

The description test might be a bit more difficult, therefore the tester is advised to encourage the testees to display their language, especially vocabulary, by asking promoting questions on the topic or the picture. The topic or the picture, rather, should be stimulating to excite the testees to talk about it since the more the topic is enjoyed the more it entices the testees talk about and describe it.

**Table (3) Description Scoring Scheme**

No.	Major Behaviors	To a great extent 6 marks	Satisfied 3 marks	Unsa
1-	Fluency of description items or in order	2	1	
2-	Coverage of all items and series of actions	2	1	
3-	Items are interrelated and interpreted appropriately	2	1	
	Minor performances	4 marks	2 marks	I
4	Speed	1	½	
5	Pronunciation (stress and intonation)	1	½	
6	Vocabulary (appropriate and efficient)	1	½	
7	Grammar	1	½	
	Total = ( ----- )out of 10 marks			

**D-Narrating and summarizing test**

Testees are given a text in this test to read in English and then asked to give a general summary of the principle points in the text. In narration the testees are asked to narrate events that take place in a journey or an experience they have had before such as driving a car or motorbike, swimming in sea while he cannot swim. Daily routines at home ( taking meals, prayers, sleeping) and at school ( time of coming to school, breaks, leaving) can be the topic of a narrating test. Testees are asked to tell about their aspirations and future careers. They can be asked to report

on an article they have in the textbook or a newspaper. Articles from "Arab News" or "Saudi Gazette" can be used in such a test.

### **E- Discussion and conversation test**

The student can be tested orally as he responds to the tester's (teacher's) questions concerning certain matters as favorite subjects, sports, studying time and teeth. The teacher in such a test assesses two points: the fluency of the testee and the appropriateness of his answers. The unpredictability of the testee's reaction and response should be taken into account and rated in his favorite. The linguistic component are eventually considered in so far as the testee receives and transmits the message comprehensibly. A similar scoring scheme to these mentioned above can be applied or adjusted for the test. This test can also be addressed to two or more students discussing a general topic or a particular incident.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

Since some language planners consider oral production as a true measure of a language learners proficiency, yet speaking is a neglected skill in teaching and learning EFL at intermediate stage in Saudi schools. This is because speaking is a complicated skill involving sub-skills as pronunciation, voice quality, intonation, eye-contact, setting time, clarity and understanding the purpose of communication. Saudi intermediate school students face serious problems in communicating orally in English due to the contrasts between Arabic and English, strategies of instruction and techniques of assessment. Teaching students EFL at intermediate school requires the real use of English as a communication. Testing, on the other hand, must be for communication purpose rather than merely linguistic knowledge of English since the students would use the language to fulfill certain functions in their social and

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educational lives. Accordingly, the study has demonstrated some strategies for teaching, practising speaking skill and ability. Further, it has elaborated a number of techniques for testing students in speaking skill and ability.

**The study has recommended that:**

- 1- The "full Blast" syllabus author has to devise methods and techniques for teaching and practising speaking which are embedded in the outcomes of this research and in addition to those mentioned in the Teacher's Guide Book.
- 2- The " Full Blast" syllabus author has to identify a scheme for assessing oral production which is implied in this study including what are involved in the Teacher's Guide Book.
- 3- EFL teachers at intermediate stage should arrange their instruction and conduct their tests and examinations of speaking skill and ability in the light of the assessment schemes of speaking skill and ability described in the study.

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### المستخلص

التحدث يعد أهم مهارات اللغة للتواصل؛ وذلك لأن اللغات وجدت في الأصل منطوقة ثم تكون مقروءة أو مكتوبة. وفي المرحلة المتوسطة في المدارس السعودية فإن الطلاب غير قادرين على التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية بطلاقة على الرغم من أنهم قد درسوا اللغة الإنجليزية ولمدة ثلاث سنوات منذ الصف الرابع الابتدائي. فالطلاب في المدارس المتوسطة يواجهون بعض المشكلات والتحدث شفويًا باللغة الإنجليزية، وذلك بسبب عدم كفاءة استراتيجية التدريس، وعدم كفاءة الأنشطة المصاحبة التي توفر للطلاب التطبيق الصحيح لمهارات التحدث، وكذلك عدم قدرة أساليب القياس والتقويم. إضافة إلى ذلك فإن التضاد بين اللغتين العربية والإنكليزية يزيد هذه الصعوبات على الطلاب ويجعلها أكثر تعقيداً. لذلك فإن تدريس التحدث يجب أن يكون كمهارة - من أجل تزويد الطلاب بخبرات نفس آلية - وكقدرة من أجل تمكين الطلاب من التواصل عبر اللغة الإنجليزية.