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Interactive Intervention Strategy for English as a Foreign Language Classes Versus Traditional Methods to Teach Speaking

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Abstract

This paper proposes Interactive Intervention Strategy (IIS) as an effective activity to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Arab world and other similar EFL environments. It explores the impact of IIS on the speaking skills (fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) of EFL students in the Jordanian context. The study used a quasi-experimental quantitative design to analyze the data. The sample of the study consisted of 30 students as a control group and 30 students as an experimental group. Both groups were enrolled in a speaking course in their first semester. The study employed an interview post-test to evaluate the effectiveness of IIS in teaching speaking skills. IIS is sought in this context to excite the minds of the learners with target subjects using untraditional techniques. It is designed to help in eliminating L2 learners' confusion and increasing their motivation by adapting the activities of the traditional teaching environment. IIS is thus proposed as a strategy that challenges the traditional approaches to teaching EFL in helping the learners to use English as a communicative language through developing extra-class interactive sessions demonstrated to support EFL speaking classrooms.

Keywords: Interactive Intervention Strategy (IIS), EFL, speaking skills, competence, Arab learners of English.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The average English proficiency score in the Arab world and the Middle East in general “remains the lowest in the world by a wide margin” for many consecutive years (Education First, 2019). Considering that English is taught in schools and universities in most Arab world and Middle East countries as a foreign language (Al-Khatib, 2008), the findings of Education First (EF)¹ indicate a problematic situation and call for action. On the level of scholarship, much research has been produced seeking to identify the problems Arab learners of English encounter. Scholarship focusing on designing new techniques and strategies to address those problems is, however, below expectations.

Designing effective solutions to deal with the previous condition requires an examination of the major problems that encounter the Arab learners of English in the classroom. The investigation of those problems is also essential to help design an effective strategy that can contribute to the solution. Rabab’ah (2005) argues, in this context, that the main problem facing the Arab learners of English is the lack of communicative competence and that their opportunity to “learn English through natural interaction in the target language” in the classroom is very rare (p.181). The limited opportunity of practice and communication in L2 results in creating anxiety that negatively affects the process of learning as pointed out by Koçak (2010). Horwitz et al. (1991) argue that L2 classroom anxiety is related to factors as self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with the learning process, rather than being only related to the language itself. Increasing the chances of communication in L2 among the Arab learners of English, motivating them, and addressing their anxiety related to dealing with English in the classroom are therefore important factors that any designed solution should consider.

Jiménez (2015) emphasizes the impact of some factors that affect learning English and language competence, including learners’ lack of motivation and learning environment problems. She links the lack of motivation with the limited opportunity of practice and communication, stating that “demotivated” students prefer to “abstain from participating” in-class activities (p. 225). Fareh (2010), in this respect, examines the challenges of teaching English in the Arab world; he states that “school and university teachers often complain of the low proficiency of their students” and claim that they “are not motivated to learn” (p. 3601). Abukhattala (2013) highlights teachers’ unconstructive traditional role as a major problem in the English classroom in the Arab world. He recommends cooperative learning and student-centered classrooms as significant practices to boost the effect of learning. Consequently, lacking communicative competence, the opportunity to interact in the target language, the motivation to learn, and the appropriate learning environment represent major challenges that face EFL classes in the Arab world. These problems were argued above to be linked to the traditional classroom environment; this study, therefore, highlights the significance of the IIS method compared with the conventional methods of teaching.

¹ Education First (EF) is an international education company specializing in language training and ranking of countries by English skills.

1.1 Rationale

The researchers' experience in teaching English at Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan has revealed that not all solutions, which are recommended to solve the problems of teaching English for Arab learners, are feasible. EFL researchers have recommended different solutions to problems facing L2 learners which can be strictly classified into two categories. The first category includes solutions as "incorporating more English language courses in the [English language] program, and... teaching the educational courses to students in English rather than in Arabic" (Abdel Latif, 2014, p. 45), and also defining "English language education outcome hierarchies through policy mechanism", developing "awareness that struggling learners are... individuals whose problems should be of a major concern for authorities" and involving "Arab researchers and educationalists to take part in research and policy processes" (Alhabahba et al., 2016). The solutions in this group are dated, too ambitious, or ineffective in terms of obtaining the desired goals.

The second category proposes creative solutions that, apart from educational systems and policies, address the teachers of English to deal with certain conditions they encounter in the teaching/learning environment. Recommendations by Fareh (2010) fit well here. He recommends "learner-centered" educational activities, "creating environments that are conducive", integrating "language skills", "adopting interactive communicative teaching activities" and "promoting creative and independent thinking skills" (p. 3604). These recommendations are more practical than those in the first category and can deal with problems of lack of communication competence, learners' anxiety, lack of motivation, and traditional classroom environment. They can create a successful basis for designing a strategy that effectively addresses the most critical problems facing Arab learners of English.

This study, accordingly, proposes an Interactive Intervention Strategy (IIS) to be implemented in undergraduate speaking skills classes at Jordanian universities to deal with L2 problems that EFL learners face. This strategy includes three activities: role-play, storytelling, and voice recording. The researchers believe that the use of these integrated activities is better than using only one activity, which in turn will improve all components of speaking skills. They argue that the IIS procedure can handle the above problems of L2 learning and reduce their effects. It is basically designed to be applied in English departments that teach speaking skills. It exploits the most appropriate among the facilities available in the educational institution to be its workspace and employs them for extra-class educational activities that support the classroom's role. This aims at achieving two purposes. The first is to prepare an L2 training space to implement IIS with the least possible preparations, cost, and time. The second purpose is to provide a new learning environment that can help to eliminate learners' anxiety and lack of motivation and challenge the traditional role of teacher/learner to help improve the communicative and language skills of EFL students. Overall, it aims at improving the speaking abilities of Jordanian EFL learners.

1.2 Gap of the Study

The reason that the researchers selected to apply the IIS procedure in a speaking class is the way speaking classes in Jordan and other Arab countries are conducted, whether in universities or high schools. For example, improving grammar as the sub-

skill of speaking relies on memorization as a method to solve questions rather than learning grammar as a way to understand the structure of language and achieve communicative competence. This problem attracted the attention of [Pineda \(2010\)](#) who investigated teaching grammar for students studying other different languages as an L2 such as French, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Italian, and German. He comments on learning grammar arguing that “the learning of grammar is still viewed by students as purely memory-based as opposed to being an organic and progressive discovery” (p. 99). Another problem related to speaking classes is that students do not have the opportunity to practice English a lot. Thus, students may memorize the rules of English and a huge number of words, but they still cannot use them appropriately in context; knowing the grammatical rules of English and vocabulary is not enough to use the language. Additionally, Arab students face a real problem in pronunciation and fluency because of the lack of practice and feedback. The researchers developed IIS to ensure that the students will practice English in a friendly environment, apart from the traditional ineffective environment of EFL classrooms in the Arab world demonstrated in [Rabab’ah’s \(2005\)](#) and [Abukhattala’s \(2013\)](#) studies. Thus, the researchers chose three useful activities (role-play, storytelling, and voice recording) to deal with the problems that accompany the process of teaching EFL in the traditional classroom.

The researchers assume that the IIS procedure can help lower L2 learners’ anxiety since it can deal with their concerns restricting effective learning highlighted by [Horwitz et al. \(1991\)](#) as self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. The researchers also suppose that IIS can enhance L2 learners’ motivation to learn by creating an educational environment more exciting than the traditional classroom environment. Besides, IIS should increase the opportunity of practice and communication in L2 in a friendly environment, which can eliminate learners’ anxiety, encourage them to interact, hence improve their communicative competence. IIS should also improve the speaking skills of learners because it uses three different activities (role-play, storytelling, and voice recording) in one class. All in all, IIS attempts to support the efforts teachers of English exert in the classroom by adopting an interactive interventional procedure to improve speaking skills.

1.3 Questions of the Study

The present study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What is the impact of the IIS method on the speaking skills (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency) of Jordanian EFL learners?
2. Is the IIS method better than the traditional method of instruction in teaching speaking skills?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers and teachers use many techniques and strategies to improve the speaking skills of EFL learners. A number of studies investigated the impact of role-plays on enhancing the speaking skills of students. Many studies found out that role-plays can enhance the speaking skills of EFL learners. A study by [Yuliana et al. \(2014\)](#) investigated the effect of role-play on students’ performance in speaking skills. The

sample of the study consisted of an experimental group taught using role-play and a control group taught using information gap. The results of the study showed that the scores in speaking of the experimental group were better than the scores of the control group. Similarly, [Alzboun et al. \(2017\)](#) explored the effect of role-play on the speaking skills of Jordanian tenth-grade English students. The sample of the study included 44 students as a control group and 42 students as the experimental group. The results of the study showed that the experimental group learned speaking skills better than the control group who got exposed to traditional methods of teaching speaking.

Another study by [Krebt \(2017\)](#) explored the effect of role-play on the speaking skills of Iraqi students in EFL classes. The participants of the study were 40 students divided equally into a control group and an experimental group. The post-test scores of the two groups showed statistically significant differences in favor of the experimental group. These results indicated that role-play positively enhanced students' speaking skills. Similarly, [Juvrianto \(2018\)](#) found out that role-play enhanced the speaking skills of high school students in Indonesia.

In another study, [Ayuningtias et al. \(2019\)](#) represented the importance of role-playing in improving speaking skills. The participants were 30 students at SMKN 3 Karawang in Indonesia in the academic years 2017 and 2018. Students' participation showed that role-play positively affected their speaking skills. In a similar comparative study, [Neupane \(2019\)](#) found out that the students exposed to role-play learned speaking skills better than those exposed to conventional teaching.

Other studies investigated the role of story-telling in improving the speaking skills (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency) of EFL learners. Some studies found a significant impact of story-telling on different speaking skills. [Zuhriyah \(2017\)](#) found out that the speaking skills (comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) of 23 students enrolled in the Intensive English Program at Hasyim Asy'ari University (UNHAS) in Indonesia improved. [Marzuki et al. \(2016\)](#) discovered that storytelling increased the EFL learners' speaking ability of 22 junior and senior high Indonesian EFL learners. The research further revealed that the speaking ability of the participants improved from 72.27% to 100% after they participated in the storytelling method.

In another study, [Sembiring and Ginting \(2019\)](#) used storytelling techniques to improve the speaking skills of eighth-grade students. The results of the study showed that storytelling enhanced the oral skills of those students since the mean score increased in the post-test by 57.2 %. Similarly, [Khodabandeh \(2018\)](#) showed that storytelling has a positive effect on English language speaking skills. Thirty participants were enrolled from 18 to 22 years old students; they were divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The control group was supposed to answer some questions related to a story and record them. The other group retold the story by recording, too. The result showed that the experimental group had a tangible development in their speaking skills. [Ahmadi and Mohamadi \(2017\)](#) also found that storytelling improved the motivation and fluency of 60 Iranian EFL learners.

Other studies investigated the impact of voice recordings on improving the speaking skills of EFL learners. [Le \(2018\)](#) used voice recording techniques to enhance the speaking ability of Vietnamese EFL learners. The experimental group was asked to make recordings and upload them on a private Facebook group. The results showed that the voice recording technique enhanced the vocabulary and fluency of students.

Kim and Chang (2010) examined the role of voice recording on speaking skills. Their experimental group participated in an online voice recording, whereas the control group was taught using conventional methods of teaching speaking. The findings of the study proved that the voice recording method improved the learners' speaking skills and increased their motivation and confidence. In another study, Huang (2015) explored the effect of voice blogging on learning speaking among Taiwanese EFL students. The students were asked to prepare an idea, record, and share their recordings on the blog. The study found out that voice recordings had a significant impact on speaking skills, especially pronunciation.

The previous literature makes it crystal clear that role-play, storytelling, and voice recordings were effective strategies to improve the speaking skills of EFL learners. What makes this study significant is its employment of these three integrated techniques to design a strategy that aims to improve the fluency, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary of Jordanian EFL learners.

3. METHODS

This is a quasi-experimental quantitative study that used a pre-test and a post-test design to analyze the data.

3.1 Participants

The study sample included 60 second-year students majoring in English at Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan. They were chosen randomly and divided equally into control and experimental groups. Both groups were enrolled in a speaking course in their first semester. The participants were chosen regardless of their gender, religion, or socio-economic background.

3.2 Instruments

The present study used a pre-test and a post-test to measure the speaking skills of the control and experimental groups. The pre-test was given before the experiment, while the post-test was conducted at the end of the experiment. Both tests came in the form of an interview. The researchers interviewed each student and asked them different questions about different topics such as sports, daily routine, shopping, coronavirus, global warming, hobbies, reading, food, internet, music, etc.

3.3 Procedure and Data Analysis

Before the study was conducted, both the experimental and control groups sat for a pre-test to ensure the equivalence of linguistic knowledge of both groups. The pre-test was an interview and each student was graded out of eight according to a speaking rubric. The researchers conducted an independent-samples t-test after collecting the answers of both groups as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the pre-test.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	Control	30	3.9000	2.56434	.336	.738
	Experimental	30	4.1000	2.00603		

Table 1 shows that both groups have the same linguistic knowledge since the pre-test revealed that there were no significant differences between them; the P-value was larger than .05.

The control and experimental groups were taught speaking lessons three hours per week and for four months. The control group was exposed to traditional methods of teaching speaking, while the experimental group was taught using the IIS procedure which includes the following activities:

3.3.1 Activity 1: Role-play

This activity was organized following the points as follows:

1. The experimental group was divided into six sub-groups; with five students in each group.
2. The researchers met the students for one hour per week.
3. The learners were given instructions about the role they have to play on the stage.
4. The six groups were distributed among the hall chosen for this purpose and given twenty minutes to prepare their performance on any topic they want.
5. The groups were consecutively called to the stage to perform their roles; each group was given five minutes for performance.
6. While the groups were performing their roles, the researchers/teachers gave notes and instructions as needed to help the students improve their grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency.
7. The students' performance was monitored by the researchers/teachers to assess each learner.
8. The learners were corrected as needed whether during or after the conversation.
9. After all of the groups finished their performances, the researchers/teachers made general comments and recommendations for the involved students to assist them in the process of improving their speaking skills.

3.3.2 Activity 2: Storytelling

The current activity included the following points:

1. The researchers met the students for one hour per week.
2. The students were asked to summarize a story they knew in front of the class.
3. Each story should be different from the previous one/s.
4. They were given 20 minutes to prepare their stories.
5. Then each student was given five minutes to present his/her story.
6. While the students were presenting the conversation, the researchers/teachers gave notes and instructions as needed to help the students improve their utilization of the selected vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and grammar.
7. Their speech was monitored by the teachers to assess each learner.
8. The students were corrected as needed whether during or after the conversation. The other students were allowed to ask questions and make comments.

9. After all of the groups finished their stories, the researchers/teachers made general comments and recommendations for the involved students to help them employ these speaking skills in a better way.

3.3.3 Activity 3: Voice recording

The current activity consisted of the following steps:

1. The researchers/teachers created a WhatsApp group and added the members of the experimental group to it.
2. The students were asked to choose a topic and make one recording every week for four months.
3. The recording should not be less than 5 minutes.
4. The students were encouraged to listen to their recordings before sending them. They can repeat the recording as much as they want before sending the last version. This process enabled students to correct their mistakes and rehearse more than once.
5. After making the recordings, the students were asked to upload them on the WhatsApp group.
6. The researchers/teachers listened to these recordings and wrote down their comments.
7. The researchers/teachers met the students for one hour per week.
8. The students were asked to comment on each other's recordings.
9. The researchers/teachers gave the students feedback on their recordings to improve the fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary of students.

After the experiment process was achieved, the two groups sat for a post-test (oral test). The test was scored following a speaking rubric.

After collecting the data, the researchers used the statistical test 'the Independent Samples Test' to find whether there were statistically significant differences between the two groups in the post-test. If there were significant differences in favor of the experimental group, where the p-value is higher than 0.05, it is an indication that the IIS procedure is better than the traditional methods in enhancing the speaking competence of the learners.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the results related to the impact of the IIS procedure on the speaking skills (fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) of EFL students.

4.1 The Impact of IIS on Grammar

The results of the Independent Samples Test showed statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups' performance in grammar in the post-test, and in favor of the experimental group as the p-value is less than 0.05. Consider Table 2:

Table 2. Results of the post-test.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post- test	Control	30	4.8333	2.24505	8.720	.000
	Experimental	30	8.7333	.98027		

The value of the mean achieved by the experimental group (8.7333), which is higher than that achieved by the control group (4.8333), indicates that the students exposed to the IIS procedure performed better in grammar than those who attended the traditional classes. These results highlight the significance of applying the IIS procedure in EFL classes. The significant improvement of the members of the experimental group is attributed to the application of the IIS procedure as the members of the control group who did not attend the IIS procedure achieved a mean significantly lower than those of the experimental group. In the same vein, [Zuhriyah \(2017\)](#) and [Marzuki et al. \(2016\)](#) have discovered that storytelling can increase EFL learners' language skills because the interactive process allowed them to receive direct feedback from their teachers on their mistakes or errors in speaking.

4.2 The Impact of IIS on Pronunciation

The study used the Independent Samples Test to find out whether the experimental group improved in pronunciation better than the other group. The test showed statistically significant differences in the post-test between the control and experimental groups and favor of the experimental group since the p-value is less than 0.05. Consider Table 3:

Table 3. Results of the post-test.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post- test	Control	30	4.4222	2.13021	8.320	.000
	Experimental	30	8.4111	.92014		

These results showed that IIS significantly improved the pronunciation of the experimental group since the p-value is less than 0.5. This result was expected because the experimental group participated in different activities that motivated them to talk. Additionally, the researchers monitored their pronunciation, worked hard to correct their pronunciation, and gave them immediate feedback. Similarly, [Huang \(2015\)](#) also discovered that voice recordings had a significant impact on speaking skills, especially pronunciation, especially when teachers were willing to provide feedback on each of the student's recordings such as the case in this study.

4.3 The Impact of IIS on Vocabulary

The scores of the experimental and control groups in their performance in the post-test in vocabulary were compared using the Independent Samples Test. The findings of the study showed statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups, and in favor of the experimental group (the p-value is less than 0.05) as shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Results of post-test.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post-test	Control	30	3.7124	3.24705	7.270	.001
	Experimental	30	6.4789	.90258		

These findings suggested that the IIS procedure significantly enriched the vocabulary of the experimental group compared with the control group (p-value is less than 0.05). These results were not unexpected, because the students in the experimental group benefited from Activity 2 which enriched their vocabulary significantly. The findings are in line with [Le \(2018\)](#) and [Kim and Chang \(2010\)](#), where voice recording can enhance the vocabulary and fluency of EFL students because they can always replay their recordings and identify their mistakes with the help of their teachers (i.e., feedback), and thus, improve their skills while also increasing their motivation and confidence in language learning in the future.

4.4 The Impact of IIS on Fluency

The researchers compared the fluency scores of the experimental and control groups in the post-test using the Independent Samples Test. The results of the study showed that the experimental group performed better than the control group since the mean of the experimental group (6.4789) is higher than that of the control group (4.6585); the differences were statistically significant as reflected in Table 5:

Table 5. Results of post-test.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post- test	Control	30	4.6585	3.562	3.270	.039
	Experimental	30	9.4789	.72452		

These findings suggested that the IIS procedure positively affected the fluency of the students. The researchers attributed this improvement to the unconventional environment in which the IIS activities were conducted, and where the barriers linked to the traditional teaching environment successfully were eliminated. [Ahmadi and Mohamadi \(2017\)](#) have also found that storytelling improved the motivation and fluency of EFL learners. In this study, the new environment (i.e., students presenting their stories in the storytelling activity) created a better engagement of the students in the teaching/learning process, encouraged them to speak more in the foreign language, and hence reduced their anxiety and increased their confidence, causing them to develop higher levels of concentration and fluency.

The overall results of the study suggested that IIS is a highly valuable method for teaching speaking skills, for the speaking skills of the students involved in the IIS procedures improved better than their peers in the traditional teaching classrooms. Its importance comes from the fact that it involves three different activities (role-play, storytelling, and voice recording) integrated into one strategy. The results of the current study come in line with the results of other studies, such as [Le \(2018\)](#), [Ayuningtias et al. \(2019\)](#), [Neupane \(2019\)](#), and [Sembiring and Ginting \(2019\)](#).

5. CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the effect of the Interactive Interventional Strategy (IIS) on the speaking skills of Jordanian EFL learners. The sample of the study consisted of 60 students divided equally into the experimental and control groups. The results of the study showed that the students who learn speaking using IIS can improve their grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency better than those who learn English through the traditional methods of teaching; the differences between these two groups were statistically significant. Although the experiment was temporarily hindered by finding and creating a new environment that needed many arrangements and preparations, once they became available, it demonstrated great significance. These results indicated that the IIS method significantly improved the speaking competence of Jordanian EFL learners.

Interactive Interventional Strategy (IIS) has proven through application and discussion a significant impact on improving the competence of the EFL learners in the speaking classrooms. The researchers recommend that EFL teachers apply IIS in other EFL classes, such as writing, reading, listening, and university English preparatory programs. The researchers also recommend the implementation of IIS for research purposes by scholars of English in universities and schools to further evaluate its effectiveness. The results of the study imply that IIS can be also employed to improve the students' understanding and appreciation of subjects other than language; however, this part still needs to be studied and investigated by prudent scholars.

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