

## **English Language Teachers' Suggestions to Overcome the Challenges They Face in Teaching Oral Skills**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to explore English language teachers' suggestions to overcome the challenges they face in teaching oral skills to basic stage students in Jordan. The participants of the study consisted of 130 EFL teachers in public and private Jordanian schools who were selected randomly during the academic year 2017/2018.

Data was collected via a questionnaire and some interviews with participants of the study. Means and standard deviations were used to analyze data. The results revealed that teachers (regardless of their teaching experiences, gender, grade, or school type) have a high degree of agreement on the suggestions to overcome their challenges of teaching oral skills.

Based on these results, the authors recommend that the Ministry of Education in Jordan benefit from teachers' suggestions to improve the teaching of oral skills (i.e. listening and speaking).

**Key Words:** Suggestions, Basic stage, EFL teachers, Jordan.

### **Introduction**

English is a means for communication and interaction among people in different countries. It is a global language that is significant to respect other cultures and comprehend others' opinions and feelings. It is the language of education, trade, economy, technology, and medicine...etc. English language empowers its learners when they become able to communicate with international communities. (Crystal, 2012). Oral communication is seen as the core of acquiring English language. The main goal for many learners of English is to communicate with people from different cultures. In order to improve oral skills, learners should practice English in authentic situations, participate in oral classes and organize information. Oral interaction is required in classrooms in order to achieve mastery of English language (Richards, 2003).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been adopted in Jordan in 1984. EFL curriculum in Jordan has been constructed on a basis of CLT which is based on the communicative competence that focuses on both fluency and accuracy. Students are expected to master the four skills

of English language which are: listening, speaking, reading and writing in order to be able to express their own opinions and communicate in English. In other words, all the four skills should be emphasized (Kailani, 1995).

Activating previous knowledge is highly recommended to develop listening skills. In order to comprehend the new listening texts, students should relate their own cognitive background of vocabulary and structure with the new information they are exposed to. Actually, students need to adopt "top down and bottom up" processes so that they can understand the new knowledge found in listening materials. Top down processing concentrates on getting the main idea of the whole listening text and anticipating what is going to be presented. In contrast, bottom up processing means the exploration of new details and specific data. To reach efficient understanding, the two processes should be mixed together while doing classroom activities. (Brown, 2006)

According to the "General Guidelines and General and Specific Outcomes for the English Language Curriculum for Basic and Secondary Stages", all grades are grouped into 4 stages: Lower Basic Stage (1-6) grades, Upper Basic Stage (7-10), Secondary Stage: General English, Secondary Stage: Vocational English. In each stage, there are four organizers which are the four skills of English language: reading, writing, listening and speaking. In each organizer, there are general descriptors which represent the general outcomes for each stage. For example, The descriptor of Listening for Upper Basic Stage is : " Listen to understand spoken English in a variety of simple authentic formats and contexts", and the descriptor of Speaking is : " Speak in English to participate in discussions and present information in various simple authentic contexts". (MOE, 2013, P.10)

There is a real demand to involve teachers in the process of curriculum development. Qualified teachers are able to construct oral tasks which suit students' learning styles. Handler (2010) explored the importance of teachers' collaboration in syllabus development. When teachers cooperate with curriculum developers to design textbooks and materials, they can cater for individual differences, and vary tasks to fulfill students' needs. To empower teachers in the process of curriculum development, they should have the required knowledge and needed skills to make appropriate decisions on curriculum planning.

Learning atmosphere is very essential in teaching oral skills simply because communication in EFL classroom causes worry, disappointment and shyness to some students. So, teachers should motivate their students to practice English in a warm learning atmosphere. Since English is taught in Jordan as a foreign language, students should be encouraged to speak fluently in oral activities. (AL-Masadeh & Al-Omari, 2014)

Several studies asserted the fact that teachers face serious challenges in teaching EFL. For example, AlKhalwaldeh (2010) studied the types of challenges that 125 EFL teachers faced in the first and second directorates of Education in Amman. The findings of the study indicated that one of the obvious challenges is the inability of students to communicate in English besides the negative attitudes towards English.

The researchers noticed that many teachers complain that teaching oral skills seems so hard in classrooms. Many teachers asserted that they usually find difficulty in teaching and assessing students' oral skills. Their students feel not only shy but also unable to speak English language although many oral exercises are included in the Jordanian EFL textbooks" Action Pack".

**This study aims at answering the following question:**

- What are the EFL teachers' suggestions to overcome the challenges of teaching oral skills?

## Review of Literature

Nation & Newton (2008) stated that teachers can teach English as a foreign language effectively if they concentrate on the four skills equally in their classrooms so that they can help their students develop their language proficiency. It's not acceptable to ignore any of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers should encourage students to listen to native speakers and speak fluently to communicate better in English.

In Jordan, English is taught in schools as a foreign language to appreciate other cultures without losing the Arab-Islamic values. According to the General Guidelines for the English Language Curriculum, all EFL students' at all Jordanian schools are expected to achieve general and specific outcomes at the end of lower basic, upper basic and secondary stages. Integration of the four skills of English is highly required in the English class. There are new roles for both teachers and students according to ERFKE which was adopted in 2003 in Jordan. One of the most important roles of teachers is to vary instructional strategies to meet the Intended Learning Outcomes. (MOE, 2013)

Kaski-Akhawan (2013) studied teaching and learning oral skills in a Finnish Upper Secondary School. The purpose of the study was to investigate teachers and students' attitudes towards oral skills. Separate questionnaires were filled by eighty-four students and four teachers. The results revealed that both students and teachers had positive attitudes towards oral skills. Students felt excited to participate in oral discussion. Teachers were interested to employ discussion and oral exercises in English classes. The study recommended that further studies should be conducted to investigate students' interest in oral topics .

Usman & Mustafa (2014) investigated some of the main challenges that teachers face in teaching oral skills in secondary schools. Questionnaires were distributed to collect teachers' and students' opinions about the problem. The sample of the study was English teachers and students in secondary schools. The results showed that unqualified teachers and the lack of resources are the main challenges that English teachers face in their schools. The study suggested that both teachers and students should be motivated to activate oral skills.

Ahmad & Rao (2013) explored the suitability of implementing the communicative approach in teaching English at Higher Secondary level in Pakistan. The study consisted of two parts: the first part was an experimental study which aimed to compare between Grammar Translation Method and CLT. The second part was a survey to find teachers' beliefs of Communicative Language Teaching .Questionnaires and interviews with ten teachers were used to achieve the purpose of the study. The first part concluded that CLT encouraged students to communicate in English. The survey revealed that teachers understood CLT well although they had certain challenges such as the large number of students in classrooms, the concentration of grammar in exams and the insufficient equipment in schools.

Al Asmari (2015) conducted a study about the challenges of applying CLT with students at Taif University in Saudi Arabia. A questionnaire was used to collect data. The sample was 100 male

and female teachers from the English language Centre at the University. The findings showed that teachers faced different challenges of applying CLT such as students' low achievement, their less confidence to communicate, the large number of students in classrooms, lack of suitable equipment and the need for teacher training programs. This study recommended providing teachers with suitable resources and teaching aids, equip classes with suitable materials and facilities, conduct training courses for teachers and minimize the number of students in classes.

Al-Hourani & Khwaileh (2007) studied the teaching practices of oral skills in Action Pack curricula as perceived by EFL teachers in U.N.R.W.A schools in Jordan. The study included 170 teachers. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, a questionnaire, interviews and observation were used to collect data. The findings revealed that the EFL teachers highly perceive their own oral practices in the classroom; most interviewed teachers confirmed that the teaching of oral skills is significant. The researcher recommended that it is important to use teaching aids in oral classes in order to improve students' participation in the classroom. Variables such as qualifications and experience affected teachers' own perceptions of their oral practices while the gender variable didn't.

Al-Zurqan (2005) investigated the perceptions of Basic Stage English language teachers in Jordan of teaching and assessing oral skills. The sample of the study consisted of (84 ) teachers. Questionnaires, interviews, and samples of teachers' tests were utilized to elicit data from the participants findings revealed that teachers encountered many obstacles while teaching or testing oral skills such as limitedness of time, the low achievement of students, unclear tapes. The study recommends that teachers should attend workshops held by the Ministry of Education.

## Methodology

### Population and Sample of the Study

The population of this study consisted of 850 upper basic stage English as a foreign language teachers ( EFL) in Amman- Jordan during the academic year 2017/2018. Using the simple random technique, one hundred and thirty teachers were chosen to participate in this study. Three teachers' variables were taken into consideration in this selection: school type (private or public); teaching experience (short, average, long), and the grade level they teach. Twenty teachers from this sample were selected randomly for the interview.

### Research Design

This is a quantitative – qualitative descriptive study which aimed at investigating EFLteachers' suggestions to overcome the challenges of teaching oral skills. Data were collected via questionnaires and interviews with some teachers.

### Research Instruments

The following two research instruments were used to achieve the purpose of the study:

- *A Questionnaire.* A twenty- three item questionnaire was developed by the researchers to

explore teachers' suggestions to overcome challenges they face in teaching oral skills to basic stage students in Jordan. There was also an open-ended question which requires teachers to write any additional challenges and suggestions regarding teaching oral skills in English. ( *see appendix 1*)

- **An Interview**

The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers, 10 teachers from public schools and other 10 teachers from private schools. The main purpose of the interview was to elicit more teachers' suggestions to overcome the difficulties of teaching oral skills. ( See appendix 2)

### **Validity of the Instruments**

The questionnaire was distributed to a panel of fourteen EFL experts (university professors and school supervisors) to ensure its content validity. Those experts provided some comments on the clarity, accuracy, comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the items of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. All the comments were taken into consideration to write the final draft of the two instruments.

### **Reliability of the Instruments**

To establish the reliability of the questionnaire, it was administered to 30 EFL teachers from the population of the study as a pilot group. Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient was calculated for the whole questionnaire. The computed alpha value for Suggestions was (0.72). This value was considered satisfactory to apply the questionnaire to the participants of the study

As for reliability of interviews, intra-rater reliability was calculated by using Holsti's reliability formula:  $C.R. = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$ , where "M is the number of coding decisions on which the researcher was in agreement with herself, and N1 and N2 referred to the number of coding decisions. The calculated percentage of agreement between the two ratings was 90%. This percentage was considered appropriate to analyze the results of the twenty interviews.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The four -Point Likert Scale was used to measure the degree teachers agree on the items of the questionnaires. In the four- point scale, "Strongly agree" was given a score of (4), "Agree" a score of (3), "Disagree" a score of (2) and "Strongly disagree" a score of (1).

Teachers' responses on the questionnaire were analyzed by using the SPSS package for statistical analysis. This included computing means and standard deviations of the respondents to the questionnaire.. The qualitative data collected via interviews and the open-ended question were used to support the discussion of the results.

### **Findings**

**Results Related to the question of the study:** *What are the EFL teachers' suggestions to overcome*

*the challenges of teaching oral skills?*

To answer this question, means and standard deviations were calculated. Results are presented in Table 1:

**Table 1: Means and standard deviations of teachers with regard to their suggestions to overcome the challenges of teaching oral skills**

Rank	No	Item	Mean	SD	level
1	15	Students should participate in English conversation clubs or debates at school.	3.63	.500	high
2	14	Students should watch English TV shows, programs, documentary films, interviews....etc)	3.59	.566	high
3	19	Oral activities in textbooks should be more related to students' needs and interests	3.50	.502	high
4	23	The content of CDs should be available on mobile applications so that students can listen to the content at home.	3.45	.660	high
5	1	Teacher education programs at the university should include more courses on teaching oral skills.	3.44	.671	high
6	22	Schools should have microphones and speakers that can be connected to computers.	3.43	.596	high
7	2	Teacher education programs at the university should include more courses on evaluating oral skills.	3.42	.621	high
8	12	Students should benefit from available social media ( smart phones, I pads, Facebook, Skype ,Twitter...etc) to communicate in English outside the classroom.	3.42	.608	high
9	16	Schools should make oral skills' CDs of good quality available to all English teachers.	3.42	.691	high
10	21	Both teachers and students should have free access to the listening material on the website of the Ministry of Education	3.42	.554	high
11	7	Teachers should give more emphasis to teaching and evaluating oral skills for all grade levels	3.41	.631	high
12	6	Teachers should look for more internet sources to learn how to create extra communicative activities in oral classes	3.39	.616	high
13	11	Students should use e-dictionaries to check the right pronunciation of	3.39	.604	high

Rank	No	Item	Mean	SD	level
		words.			
14	18	English textbooks should be accompanied by CDs for students to practice oral skills at home.	3.39	.688	high
15	3	Teacher education programs at the university should include more courses on using Communication Technology(ICT) to teach English oral skills	3.38	.602	high
16	13	Students should guess the meaning of new words in context when they listen to English	3.38	.615	high
17	8	Teachers should include more communicative classroom games and fun in oral classes	3.36	.610	high
18	17	Special arrangements should be made at school so that all EFL students can use computer lab during their oral skills classes	3.33	.652	high
19	10	Teachers should help students to correct their own oral mistakes and those of their peers	3.32	.598	high
20	5	There should be intensive teacher training courses on evaluating oral skills of mixed abilities EFL students	3.30	.666	high
21	20	Teachers should be encouraged to review the teaching tips in the teacher's book before they go to the oral skills class.	3.30	.552	high
22	4	There should be more intensive teacher training workshops on teaching oral skills to mixed abilities EFL students	3.28	.662	high
23	9	Pre-service teacher training programs and workshops should focus on planning oral lessons.	3.25	.683	high
		Suggestions	3.40	.356	high

\*High degree = 3-4 , Moderate = 2-2.99 , Low= 1-1.99

Table 1 reveals that the level teachers agree on suggestions to overcome the challenges of teaching oral skills is high since the mean scores range between 3.63 and 3.25. This simply means that all EFL teachers, regardless of their teaching experiences, gender, grade, or school type) greatly share the same suggestions to overcome the challenges they face in teaching oral skills.

They are eager to improve their students' oral skills. Teachers can succeed in motivating students to listen to English if they join workshops, update their own knowledge of English language and vary their own methods of teaching ( Alrawashdeh & AlZayed, 2017)

As for interviews, 20% of public school teachers suggest that teachers should employ ICT in their teaching, involve students in different activities such as games, debates and discussions, and

encourage students to talk about pictures. 40 % of private school teachers think that teachers should activate their own oral curriculum since reading and writing skills are overemphasized in the EFL curriculum. 30% suggest that the use of Arabic should be forbidden in classes. 20% of them believe that teachers should praise their students all the time, break the ice and communicate very well with their students.

As for the open-ended question, teachers strongly believe that *"English teachers should not focus on accuracy so that students can speak freely"*. *"Students should be exposed to authentic situations in order to improve their oral skills"*. *"Making competitions, investing students' abilities in acting, supporting students and motivating them can help them improve their oral skills"*. *"Teachers in different schools should exchange various activities between each other"*. *"Much time should be given to teaching oral skills in English language classes"*. *"Teachers should relate what is given in classes to their students' own lives"*. *"Oral skills should be given more value in assessment (monthly and final exams)"*.

### Conclusion

Teachers have strong consensus on the suggestions for improving the teaching of oral skills to EFL students in Jordan. This also means that all EFL teachers, regardless of their teaching experiences, gender, grade, or school type highly share the same suggestions to overcome the challenges they face in teaching oral skills.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the authors recommend that more teachers should be involved in curriculum development. It was also recommended that similar studies be conducted on English language teachers' suggestions to overcome the challenges they face in teaching oral skills to secondary stage students in Jordan. The Ministry of Education should provide public schools with suitable equipment to facilitate the teaching of oral skills.

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## Appendix (1)

## Suggestions to Overcome Challenges of Teaching Oral Skills

No	Items	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1.	Teacher education programs at the university should include more courses on teaching oral skills.				
2.	Teacher education programs at the university should include more courses on evaluating oral skills.				
3.	Teacher education programs at the university should include more courses on using Communication Technology(ICT) to teach English oral skills				
4.	There should be more intensive teacher training workshops on teaching oral skills to mixed abilities EFL students				
5.	There should be intensive teacher training courses on evaluating oral skills of mixed abilities EFL students				
6.	Teachers should look for more internet sources to learn how to create extra communicative activities in oral classes				
7.	Teachers should give more emphasis to teaching and evaluating oral skills for all grade levels				
8.	Teachers should include more communicative classroom games and fun in oral classes				
9.	Pre-service teacher training programs and workshops should focus on planning oral lessons.				
10.	Teachers should help students to correct their own oral mistakes and those of their peers				

11.	Students should use e-dictionaries to check the right pronunciation of words.				
12.	Students should benefit from available social media ( smart phones, I pads, Facebook, Skype ,Twitter...etc) to communicate in English outside the classroom.				
13.	Students should guess the meaning of new words in context when they listen to English				
14.	Students should watch English TV shows, programs, documentary films, interviews....etc)				
15.	Students should participate in English conversation clubs or debates at school.				
16.	Schools should make oral skills' CDs of good quality available to all English teachers.				
17.	Special arrangements should be made at school so that all EFL students can use computer lab during their oral skills classes				
18.	English textbooks should be accompanied by CDs for students to practice oral skills at home.				
19.	Oral activities in textbooks should be more related to students' needs and interests				
20.	Teachers should be encouraged to review the teaching tips in the teacher's book before they go to the oral skills class.				
21.	Both teachers and students should have free access to the listening material on the website of the Ministry of Education				
22.	Schools should have microphones and speakers that can be connected to computers.				
23.	The content of CDs should be available on				

mobile applications so that students can listen to the content at home.				
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**Additional information**

Please, write any additional challenges, suggestions or comments regarding teaching oral skills in EFL classroom, *which are not mentioned in the questionnaire*. Be specific; give examples if necessary.

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**Appendix  
(2)  
A Sample of Interviews**

**Interview Questions**

1. Do you think that oral skills receive their due emphasis in the EFL Curriculum? Please explain.
2. What do you do to encourage your students to participate in oral classes? Does this really help? Why? Why not?
3. What are the most serious challenges that really hinder effective classroom interaction? Why do you think so?
4. Do you usually read the instructions for teaching oral skills in the Teacher's Book? Do you think they are useful? Why / Why not?
5. Any other comments or suggestion for promoting oral classroom interaction in English?

**Interview 1****Experience : 4****Grade: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade****Gender: Female****Type School: Public School**

- 1- No, our books do not emphasize oral skills. We need more listening and speaking exercises in our books.
- 2- I encourage them to think critically and talk about a topic.
- 3- Our school lacks cassettes or CDs. Actually we don't have enough equipment or facilities. Students are very shy to speak
- 4- Yes, Teacher's Book is very useful.
- 5- Teachers can download listening materials from the website of the Ministry of Education.
- 6-

**Interview 2****Experience : 7 years****Grade: 9, 10****Gender: Female****Type School: Public School**

- 1- Yes, our books emphasize oral skills, but they are difficult somehow.
- 2- I use flash cards, and data show to enhance the use of new words in sentences.
- 3- Students are not motivated to speak English. In my school, I have cassettes, CDs and technology. Although I believe that public schools lack needed equipment.
- 4- Yes, Teacher's Book is useful.
- 5- Teachers should encourage their students to participate in competitions.

**Interview 3****Experience : 16 years****Grade: 7****Gender: Female****Type School: Public School**

- 1- Actually, oral exercises are not enough in our curriculum.
- 2- I encourage them to watch YouTube videos.
- 3- I have cassette recordings in my school, but our students cannot understand content quickly. I have individual differences in classrooms.
- 4- Yes, Teacher's Book is useful.
- 5- I recommend that there should be language labs in our schools. In addition, teachers should repeat the recordings several times.

**Interview 4****Experience : 22 years**

**Grade: 7, 8, 10**

**Gender: Female**

**Type School: Public School**

- 1- Oral skills are emphasized in curriculum.
- 2- I tried to encourage them by awarding them. I created a box of gifts for my distinguished students.
- 3- I don't have cassettes or CDs in my school. But I read the audio scripts in Teacher's Book. Most students in public schools struggle in oral classes. When I taught in private schools couple of years ago, I noticed that private school students are more courageous to speak English than public school students.
- 4- Yes, Teacher's Book is useful.
- 5- I recommend that homework can be sent to students via e-mails.

### **Interview 5**

**Experience : 15 years**

**Grade: 10**

**Gender: male**

**Type School: Private School**

- 1- Our curriculum is "Write Up". I think oral skills are not emphasized. That's why I have to create my own exercise.
- 2- I tried to encourage them to do presentations and use internet. It's forbidden to speak in Arabic.
- 3- The carelessness of some students could be a challenge. We don't have cassette recorders or CDs.
- 4- Yes, it is good.
- 5- It is the role of the teacher to encourage students to speak.

### **Interview 6**

**Experience : more than 12 years**

**Grade: 7, 8, 9**

**Gender: Female**

**Type School: Private School**

- 1- Textbooks I teach do not emphasize oral skills. " Write Up" textbook do not emphasize oral skills. Action Back is better.
- 2- I encourage my students by talking together about the topic, and asking some questions.
- 3- Not all students listen carefully. They cannot understand the language.
- 4- Yes, it is fine.
- 5- We have CDs and laptops. Students can watch pictures in the classroom.