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Using the ACTFL Guidelines in Evaluating Student-Teachers' Speaking Proficiency

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المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى قياس كفاءة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية لدى الطلاب العراقيين المعلمين الدارسين اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وفقاً لإرشادات ACTFL وكذلك تقييم كفاءة الطلاب العراقيين في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في كليات التربية الأساسية وفق هذه الإرشادات. واستخدم البحث المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. حيث قام الباحث بتصميم اختبار يهدف إلى جمع البيانات ذات الصلة بعملية الدراسة.

يتكون مجتمع الدراسة من طلاب السنة الرابعة في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية بكليات التربية الأساسية للعام الدراسي 2022-2023. توجد هذه الكليات في جامعة ميسان، الجامعة المستنصرية، جامعة بابل، جامعة ديالى، جامعة تكريت، وجامعة الموصل، ويبلغ عدد المجتمع 1127 طالباً. وقد تم اختيار عينة مكونة من (63) طالباً مدرساً تم اختيارهم عشوائياً من أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في كليات التربية الأساسية في جامعة بابل وجامعة ميسان.

أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الطلاب المعلمين العراقيين في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لا يطورون كفاءتهم اللغوية من خلال التطوير الذاتي، وهناك ضعف واضح في كفاية التكلم للطلاب المعلمين العراقيين في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطلاب المعلمين، الكفاءة، التحدث، إرشادات ACTFL

Abstract

This study aimed at Measuring English language speaking proficiency of Iraqi EFL student- teachers according to the ACTFL guidelines. Besides, assessing this proficiency of Iraqi EFL Student- Teachers at the Colleges of basic Education According to The ACTFL guidelines. The research used a descriptive analytical method. The researcher designs a test that sought to collect data relevant to process the study.

The population of the study consists of the fourth-year students at the Departments of English, Colleges of Basic Education, for the academic year 2022-2023. These colleges are at University of Missan, University of Babylon, University of Diayla,

Tikrit University, and university of Musol, the total number of the population is 1127. a sample of (63)

student-teachers has been selected randomly from the English departments at the colleges of basic education at University of Babylon and University of Misan.

The findings of this study show that Iraqi EFL student-teachers do not develop their linguistic proficiency through self-development and there is a clear weakness in the Iraqi EFL student-teachers' linguistic proficiency.

Keywords: Student-Teachers, evaluation, Proficiency, speaking, ACTFL Guidelines

1. Problem of the Study and its Significance:

The necessity for English as a foreign language has induced notable transformations in the requirements of many educational systems globally. Consequently, critical aspects of English teaching, such as curriculum, methodology, and evaluation, have garnered substantial importance worldwide.

Nunan (1992:44) asserts that the nature of language and language learning encompasses a broad range of diverse and sometimes conflicting views. Curriculum developers must consider and respond to data from various sources, including learners, teachers, and specialists in the field.

Annually, hundreds of students enter classrooms, commencing one of their final experiences before assuming the role of classroom teachers. A well-executed student teaching experience has the potential to refine a prospective teacher and foster a mutually beneficial and cooperative dynamic among the student, student-teacher, cooperating teacher, and the cooperating school.

In today's globalized context, achieving high levels of language proficiency is imperative for effective communication (ACTFL, 2012:15; Swender, 2003:32). Language programs aiming to equip students with language skills for real-world settings must establish a framework to define and measure the abstract concept of language proficiency. The researcher, drawing on past experiences supervising student-teachers, noted deficiencies in their speaking proficiency.

1.2 Aims of the Study:

This study aims at using the ACTFL Guidelines in evaluating student-teachers' language proficiency of speaking.

1.3. question of the study:

How can ACTFL guidelines be used in evaluating speaking proficiency?

1.4. Limits of the Study:

This study is limited to:

1. Iraqi EFL student-teachers at the English Departments in the Colleges of Education at the Universities of Misan , Babylon, at the academic year 2022-2023
2. Evaluating English language speaking proficiency for the EFL student-teachers according to the ACTFL guidelines.

1.5. Procedures:

The following steps will be conducted to achieve the aims of the present study:

1. A sample of EFL student teachers will be selected for the study.
2. A test will be constructed as the instrument of the study.
3. Validity and reliability of the instruments will be specified statistically.
4. Appropriate statistical means will be used for deriving and discussing the results obtained.

1.6. Value of the Study:

This study is hoped to be beneficial for:

1. Policy makers in framing important policies to enhance standard of English language in the country.
2. Iraqi EFL Student-teachers teaching practicing may develop their teaching performance through making use of the current study as a core text for skill – oriented course with practical Proficiency focus. The skills dealt with in this study may be thought of as minimum repertoire that all teachers should acquire.
3. Helping Iraqi EFL student-teachers notice and respond to both strong and weak aspects of their teaching. They could get the benefits from the suggested.

2.Literature Review:

2.1. ACTFL

Believing in the intrinsic importance of language and communication in the human experience, ACTFL emphasizes the necessity for the U.S. to cultivate indigenous, immigrant, and global language resources. Additionally, ACTFL advocates for the education of students to be linguistically and culturally prepared as global citizens. Positioned uniquely to lead in this endeavor, ACTFL focuses on specific actions, including:

- Addressing the needs of language professionals.
- Ensuring an organization that is dynamic and responsive.
- Proactively engaging in advocacy and outreach.
- Working towards a language-teaching profession that mirrors the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of U.S. society.
- Promoting research that plays a role in shaping professional programs and enhancing the overall quality of language teaching and learning.

The Standards of the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages:

The national standards for foreign language education revolve around five core elements known as the five Cs of foreign language education: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities (Blaz, 2013:35).

Under the category of Communication, it is recommended to address oral, written, listening, and presentational activities. It is advisable to begin by reviewing the text and workbook for activities that engage in the oral production of the target language (interpersonal mode) and presenting it to others (presentational mode).



Figure: (1) Evaluation details of the sub-standard: Oral Production and Presentation Questions

- Cultures: Acquire Knowledge and Insight into Other Cultures by considering the three Ps of Culture—Practices, Products, and Perspectives. Start by exploring various visuals such as overheads, book illustrations, or videos.
 - Standard 2.1: (Culture Questions for Visual Materials)
 - Standard 2.2: (Questions about Cultural Content)
- Comparisons: Identify sections that draw comparisons between the foreign language and English.

1.2. Language Proficiency Test:

It should be noted that standardized proficiency tests are available since these tests are obviously not correlated with any particular textbook, and they would be inappropriate for use as a final examination over the textual materials used in the class. However, they are valuable asset in curriculum evaluation and for comparing any particular students with the norms on the national sample .By comparing the scores over a period of years ,the teacher can obtain a more objective measure of the quality and focus of instruction .

In order to test language proficiency, the test will vary from teacher to teacher and school to school. Some schools may decide to measure proficiency level from time to time to determine whether the students are achieving the objectives that the school has set for their program (Valette ,1977:6). For example, a university language department may want to rate their majors to monitor the skill levels being reached by students in their program. As part of their ongoing self-evaluation process, others may choose to compare their students' achievement to that of students in other similar schools.

Two types of tests have been suggested as being suitable for testing this general language proficiency factor: cloze tests and dictations. A cloze test is a written passage with everynth word deleted in which students are required to complete the test by replacing the missing words or supplying suitable equivalents. In the case of dictation test, the student's task is to write passage that they hear (Jorstad ,1974:223).

Both are integrative in the sense that students' attention is focused on language in context rather than bit and pieces of language and both test the students' expectancy grammar in the sense that their ability to complete the item depends on their ability to anticipate the language that is coming text. (Ibid, 225-73)

Oller (1979: 3-10) proposes the existence of an expectancy grammar that constitutes a general language proficiency factor. Although many second language experts disagree with this concept, researchers regularly report a rather high correlation between students' scores on language in each of four skills, which seems to indicate that students have some types of underlying knowledge or skill that they use to receive or to produce a message.

3.The Procedures:**3.1. Population and Sample of the Study**

A population refers to a collection of items or individuals with shared and observable characteristics from which a sample can be drawn. Conversely, a sample is a selected group of individuals chosen to represent a population (Richards and Schmidt, 2010:506).The population of the study consists of the fourth-year students at the Departments of English, Colleges of basic Education, for the academic year 2022-2023. These colleges are at University of Misan, Al-Mustansiriya University, University of Babylon, University of Diayla, Tikrit University, and university of Musol, the total number of the population is 1127.

3.2. Instrument of the Study:

To achieve the aims of the current study a test has been constructed to be the essential instrument that used to assess student teachers' proficiencies. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative method.

3.3. Construction of the test :

The test method is an instrument that helps to evaluate student teachers in an effective and practical way. This device helps to ensure the consideration of the important aspects of the act observed (Moore, 2007, 351).

3.4. Validity of the test:

The term validity, in fact, has been viewed differently in the field of ELT. To this, Harris (1969: 19) puts his view of validity within two questions:

1. "What precisely does the test measure?"
2. How well does the test measure?"

Besides, Brown (2000:221) considers validity as "The degree to which the test actually measures what is intended to measure".

Two types of validity are considered in the present research: Face validity and construct validity. To estimate the validity of the test, construct validity and face validity have been considered.

3.4.2.1. Face Validity:

Face validity serves as the suitable method to ascertain the test's validity for the current study's objectives. According to Lado (1964:169), it represents the "degree to which a test measures what it claims to measure." McNamra (2000:133) defines face validity as meeting the expectations of stakeholders such as administrators, teachers, candidates, and test score users.

Wallen and Fraenkel (2011, 89) highlight face validity as a judgment made by acknowledged experts on the measured variable.

To assess construct validity, the correlation between each item's score and the overall test score is calculated using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient Formula. This correlation indicates item homogeneity and serves as a measure of their validity in capturing the phenomenon (Cronbach 1955: 283).

4. Analysis of Data and Discussion of Results:

To achieve the first aim of this current study; i.e., measuring of the English language proficiency of The Iraqi EFL Student Teachers at the Colleges of Basic Education According to the ACTFL, table (1) below shows the descriptive statistics of results related to the language proficiency.

Table 1

The Ranking Order and the Weighted Mean of the language proficiency of The Iraqi EFL Student Teachers at the Colleges of Basic Education According to the ACTFL

Item No.	skill	Weighted percentile	Weighted Means
1	speaking	61.18	3.06

As it is seen from the table (1) above, the weighted mean of the speaking is (3.06) and its weighted percentile is (61.18).

The Speaking Proficiency:

From the inspection of table (1) it is indicated that this area is statistically significant, since the average weighted mean is (3,06) which is higher than the theoretical mean (3). The ranking order and the weighted mean of this area is arranged respectively as follow: the items (12, 10, 8, 11, and 9) take the weighted means (3.63, 3.42, 3.33, 3.22, and 3.17) respectively, which are higher than the theoretical mean. These items are related to: " His pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax may be strongly influenced by his native language", "He can use communication strategies, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution and illustrations", " He tends to function reactively, for example, by responding to direct questions or requests for information", " He can ask a few appropriate questions", "His discourse may still reflect the oral structure of his own language rather than that of the target language".

Table (1)

The Ranking Order and the Weighted Means of the Items Related to the "Speaking Skill"

Item No.	Rank order	Weighted Means	Weighted Percentile
1	11	2.78	55.6
2	10	2.82	56.4
3	9	2.86	57.2
4	7	2.92	58.4
5	6	2.96	59.2
6	8	2.89	57.8
7	12	2.71	54.2
8	3	3.33	66.6
9	5	3.17	63.4
10	2	3.42	68.4
11	4	3.22	64.4
12	1	3.63	72.6

On the other hand, items (5, 4, 6, 3, 2, 1 and 7) are not statistically significant since they take the weighted means (2.96, 2.92, 2.89, 2.86, 2.82, 2.78, and 2.71) which are lower than theoretical mean, these items are related to "He can explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames", "He can discuss, abstractly, some topics related to personal interests and special fields of expertise", "He can use hypothetical discourse for representational discourse", "He can be understood by native speakers", "He can use cultural and historical references to say less and mean more", "He can present his opinions in social and political issues" and "He can communicate with fluency and accuracy in formal and informal settings from concrete and abstract perspectives".

Iraqi EFL student-teachers may face deficiencies in speaking English for several reasons:

1. Limited English Language Exposure in Iraqi Society:

The limited exposure to English language outside the classroom environment in Iraqi society restricts opportunities for student-teachers to practice and reinforce their speaking Proficiency. This lack of exposure further contributes to their inadequate speaking proficiency.

2. Traditional Teaching Methods: The prevalent use of traditional teaching methods in Iraqi EFL classrooms often focuses on rote memorization and grammar drills, neglecting the development of speaking Proficiency. This pedagogical approach fails to provide student-teachers with ample opportunities to practice and refine their speaking abilities.

3. Limited Speaking Practice in Teacher Education Programs: Teacher education programs in Iraq often prioritize theoretical knowledge over practical application, resulting in limited opportunities for student-teachers to engage in authentic speaking practice. The absence of communicative activities and speaking assessments further hinders their speaking proficiency development.

4. Sociolinguistic Constraints: Sociolinguistic factors, such as cultural norms and societal expectations, can create inhibitions and anxiety among Iraqi EFL student-teachers when speaking English. Fear of making mistakes or being judged by peers and superiors can significantly impede their willingness to engage in oral communication.

5. Insufficient Vocabulary and Grammar Knowledge: Inadequate vocabulary and grammar knowledge pose significant challenges for Iraqi EFL student-teachers when attempting to express themselves fluently and accurately. Limited lexical resources and grammatical accuracy impede their ability to convey complex ideas and engage in meaningful conversations.

6. resources can impede the integration of speaking activities into the curriculum.

To enhance speaking proficiency among Iraqi EFL student-teachers, there are some suggestions to develop this proficiency of Iraqi EFL student-teachers:

1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Emphasize the use of CLT methodologies that prioritize real communication, role-playing, and authentic interactions in the classroom. This approach encourages students to use English for practical purposes.

2. Speaking-Centered Curriculum: Revise the curriculum to allocate more time and focus to speaking Proficiency. Incorporate structured speaking tasks, debates, and discussions to provide opportunities for students to express themselves orally.

3. Language Labs and Technology: Invest in language labs equipped with modern technology and software for improving speaking proficiency. These tools can facilitate audio and video practice, pronunciation feedback, and interactive language learning apps.

4. **Professional Development for Teachers:** Provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for EFL instructors to enhance their ability to teach speaking skill effectively. Training programs can include methodologies for fostering speaking proficiency.
5. **Incorporate Pronunciation and Accent Training:** Include pronunciation and accent training as part of the curriculum. Help students improve their pronunciation by focusing on common pronunciation challenges and accent reduction techniques.
6. **Authentic Materials and Contexts:** Use authentic materials, such as news articles, podcasts, and films, to expose students to real-world contexts and accents. This can help bridge the gap between classroom learning and the outside world.
7. **Language Exchange Programs:** Establish language exchange programs or partnerships with native English speakers or English-speaking countries. This provides students with opportunities for real conversations in English.
8. **Encourage Extracurricular Activities:** Promote extracurricular clubs, speaking competitions, or language-related events to motivate students to engage in speaking practice outside the classroom.
9. **Encourage Error Tolerance:** Create an environment where students are encouraged to speak without the fear of making mistakes. Stress that mistakes are part of the learning process and provide constructive feedback
10. **Cultural Exchange:** Integrate cultural exchange components into the curriculum, allowing students to not only practice speaking but also learn about the cultural aspects of English-speaking countries.
11. **Continuous Assessment:** Implement regular speaking assessments as part of the grading system, providing students with clear objectives and feedback to monitor their speaking progress

5. Conclusions:

The outcomes derived from this comprehensive study yield critical insights that bear substantial implications for the landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Iraq. Foremost among these revelations is the discernible imperative for the provision of a meticulously crafted and contemporaneously informed training program tailored to the specific needs of Iraqi EFL student-teachers. The efficacy of these educators in executing pedagogical strategies within the dynamic classroom milieu is contingent upon the infusion of such a program, which addresses the nuances and demands of the educational context.

A more profound exploration into the research findings uncovers a significant lacuna in the linguistic proficiency exhibited by Iraqi EFL student teachers. This deficiency, elucidated through a rigorous evaluative lens, underscores a notable gap that warrants systematic attention and remediation within the broader educational framework. The manifestation of suboptimal linguistic competence among this academic cohort substantiates the necessity for targeted interventions and pedagogical enhancements to uplift their language proficiency to the desired standards.

Additionally, a nuanced observation surfaces concerning the proclivity of Iraqi EFL student teachers towards self-directed linguistic development. The study illuminates a prevailing trend wherein autonomous efforts to augment linguistic proficiency are conspicuously lacking among this cohort. The identification of this inclination, or lack thereof, toward self-development becomes pivotal in shaping strategies for educational improvement.

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