

Language Quality and Its relationship with Performance of Iraqi EFL Undergraduate Students' Language Productive Skills

Tariq Dhiab Ahmed AL-ahbaby

General Directorate of Salahudin Education/ Tikrit Education

Department

Tariqdhiab7@gmail.com

جودة اللغة وعلاقتها بأداء الطلبة العراقيين الجامعيين الدارسين للغة الانكليزية كلفة اجنبيه في المهارات

اللغوية الانتاجية

طارق ذياب احمد

المديرية العامة لتربية صلاح الدين قسم تربية تكريت

Abstract

The current study attempts to explore the construct of "Language Quality" in terms of the interplay of Accuracy and Fluency among 3rd-year EFL undergraduate students of Tikrit University and Samarra University for the academic year 2025–2026 based on Larsen-Freeman's Dynamic Systems Theory (2006) as its philosophical paradigm and employing descriptive-correlational methodology with respect to the assessment of cognitive load in writing and speaking diagnostic tests taken by 100 participants (50 males, 50 females). Findings from one-sample t-test indicated statistically significant deviations from the theoretical mean in both domains for both genders ($p < 0.05$), pointing to the existence of substantial problems with combining the requirements of grammar accuracy with speed of speaking. On the other hand, two-independent-sample t-test results revealed that there were no statistically significant gender differences between the tested students' scores ($p > 0.05$, $t_{\text{written}} = 0.74$, $t_{\text{spoken}} = 0.87$), which can be associated with the influence of university curricula and social factors. Implying that sociocultural elements and university curriculum have an equal impact on both sexes. The study advocates a pedagogical shift toward holistic, output-oriented teaching techniques in Iraqi higher education, concluding that mastery of academic grammar does not necessarily translate into communicative fluency.

Keywords: Language Quality, Accuracy, Fluency, Productive Skills, Dynamic Systems Theory

المستخلص

تحاول الدراسة الحالية استكشاف مفهوم "جودة اللغة" من حيث التفاعل بين الدقة والطلاقة لدى طلبة البكالوريوس في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية (EFL) في سنتهم الدراسية الثالثة بجامعتي تكريت وسامراء للعام الدراسي ٢٠٢٥-٢٠٢٦، وذلك استناداً إلى نظرية الأنظمة الديناميكية (Larsen-Freeman 2006) بوصفها نموذجاً فكرياً (فلسفياً) للدراسة، ومن خلال تطبيق المنهج الوصفي الارتباطي لتقييم المجهود المعرفي في الاختبارات التشخيصية التحريرية والشفوية التي خضع لها ١٠٠ مشارك ومشاركة (٥٠ ذكور، ٥٠ إناث). وأشارت نتائج اختبار (t-test) لعينة واحدة إلى وجود انحرافات ذات دلالة إحصائية عن المتوسط النظري في كلا المجالين ولدى كلا الجنسين ($p < 0.05$)، مما يشير إلى وجود مشكلات جوهرية في الجمع بين متطلبات الدقة النحوية وسرعة الكلام. ومن ناحية أخرى، كشفت نتائج اختبار (t-test) لعينتين مستقلتين عن عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين درجات الطلبة تعزى لمتغير الجنس ($p > 0.05$)، $t_{\text{written}} = 0.74$ ، $t_{\text{spoken}} = 0.87$ ، وهو ما يمكن ربطه بتأثير المناهج الجامعية والعوامل الاجتماعية، مما يعطي مؤشراً بأن العناصر الاجتماعية-الثقافية والمنهج

الأكاديمي يؤثران على كلا الجنسين بشكل متساوٍ. كما وتوصي الدراسة بضرورة إحداث تحول تدريسي نحو تقنيات تعليمية شاملة وموجهة نحو المخرجات الإنتاجية في التعليم الأكاديمي العراقي، مسببةً ذلك بأن إتقان القواعد الأكاديمية لا يترجم بالضرورة إلى طلاقة تواصلية. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** جودة اللغة، الدقة، الطلاقة، المهارات الإنتاجية، نظرية الأنظمة الديناميكية

1.1 Background of the Study

In terms of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the most critical factor determining success is the ability of the student to use language productively. Speaking and writing are seen as major measures of productive skills. For the EFL undergraduate students studying in Iraqi universities, their task is to move from grammatical knowledge to "Language Quality." As regards Language Quality, it is important to note that this notion is quite complicated and includes several components such as accuracy, lexical variety, and syntactic complexity. According to Larsen-Freeman (2003), accuracy is not about the absence of errors but the proper use of grammatical elements in connection with the context. Moreover, fluency is described by Hedge (2000) in Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom as a capacity to connect different speech units easily and rapidly. The field of English language instruction in Iraq has changed from rote learning to communicative competence. The College of Education for Humanities requires a certain level of "Language Quality" from its students who prepare to become language instructors; such quality involves more than mere grammar. In the final stages of their studies, in particular, students should show a well-developed productive competence that implies complex cognitive processes and diverse linguistic skills. The current investigation is concerned with the way these students cope with difficulties in both oral communication and writing. Using Larsen-Freeman's (1997) dynamic approach, elaborated at the University of Michigan, the present study aims at understanding the dynamic nature of English as a foreign language acquisition process. According to Larsen-Freeman's theory, the concepts of accuracy and fluency should be regarded as competing and collaborating factors in learners' performance

1.2 The Problem of the Study

In spite of several years of studying the language in formal classroom environments, the majority of Iraqi EFL undergraduate students at the College of Education for Humanities do not seem to have managed to attain a high quality of language productivity in conversational situations. It seems that there exists a wide gap between students' academic competence with regard to language structure and actual ability to use language in fluent communication. Though students seem to know all the necessary grammatical rules, it appears that they fail to achieve accuracy, or producing utterances free from mistakes, due to the need to keep up the flow of speaking. Third-year Iraqi EFL undergraduate students face considerable difficulties in reconciling their theoretical competence in language use with practical language proficiency. Observing students, one may find out that while being very successful in discrete grammar tests, their "Language Quality" drops when it comes to speaking. It seems that students' problems stem from the inability to integrate Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency (CAF). In order to communicate efficiently, students seem to either sacrifice accuracy for the sake of keeping a smooth flow of speech or fail to speak freely, monitoring grammatical correctness (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Additionally, there is no evidence to determine whether certain factors like gender or the context of the institution have an impact on how learners reconcile this contradiction. There is a lack of data concerning whether the social dynamics arising from gender and university variation could impact learners in their decision as to which aspect of language proficiency they should prioritize above the other. This study aims to discover the factors that hinder students' performance of language proficiency.

1.3. The aim of the study

- 1-Identifying the EFL university students' conversational performance at the level of quality of language according to gender at the two universities?
- 2-Comparing the EFL university students' conversational performance at the level of quality of language according to gender at the two universities?

1.4. The question of the study

- 1-Is there statistical difference among the EFL university students' performance in the written and spoken tests according to their genders separately at the level of quality of language?
- 2- Is there statistical difference in the comparison among the males' against the females' in EFL students' performances at the quality of language level according to written and spoken tests at the two universities?

1.5. The Value (Significance) of the Study

This study is significant for several stakeholders:

1-For Pedagogy: This gives teachers at universities in Iraq a way to design their teaching strategies for enhancing certain “qualities” in students’ language use.

٢-For Curriculum Development: This draws attention to the importance of having a curriculum that takes into consideration receiving input as well as producing quality output.

3-For Students: This enables students to know the standards of success (Larsen-Freeman Model) for their language use..

1.6 The Limits of the Study

These are the limitations of the present research in order to ensure depth and concentration of scope:

١. 2025-2026 is the academic year.

٢. Third-year undergraduate students are the sample of present study .

٣. Specialization in the Department of English.

٤. Institutional Environment: In the two colleges of education selected, namely the College of Education of Samarra University and College of Education for Humanities of Tikrit University.

5. Skills: Language Productive Skills (written and speaking skills, especially conversation).

1.7 The Model of the Study:

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Diane Larsen-Freeman’s (2006) perspective on language. Her model emphasizes that language learning is not a linear path but a process where various components (Accuracy, and Fluency) interact. In this study, the concepts (Accuracy, and Fluency) will be used as the primary metric to evaluate "Language Quality," especially through students' written and spoken conversations. This model allows the researcher to analyze how students manage cognitive load during conversation and whether their performance varies significantly based on gender.

II. Literature Review

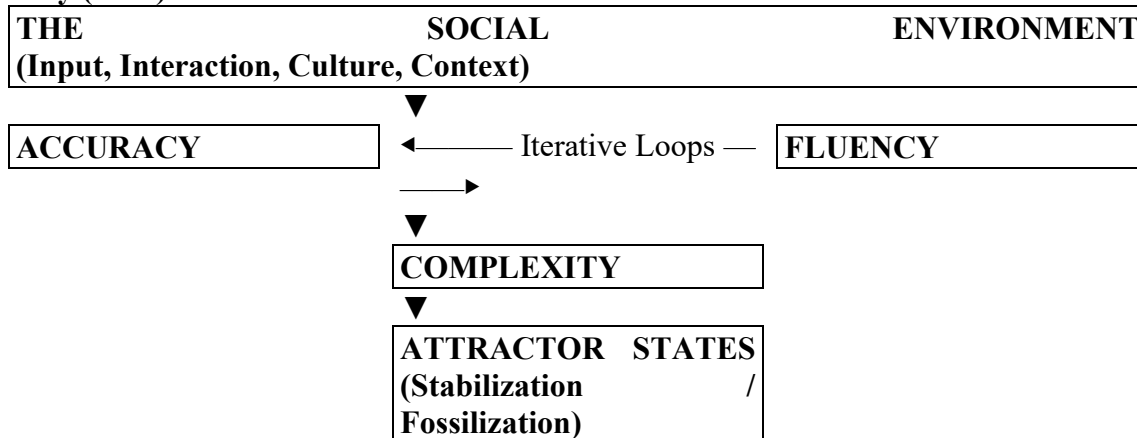
2.1 Introduction

The landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) has transitioned from a structural focus to a more holistic view of communicative competence. For Iraqi undergraduate students, the ability to produce language that is both precise and fluid remains a primary goal. As noted by Jack C. Richards (2006) in his book *Communicative Language Teaching Today*, the shift toward "performance" requires a balance between grammatical rules and the ability to use them in real-time. This chapter explores Language Quality—defined through Accuracy and Fluency—within the context of productive skills of speaking and writing. Central to this investigation is the theoretical grounding of Diane Larsen-Freeman’s (2006) Dynamic Systems Theory, which treats language development as a complex, non-linear process rather than a static accumulation of rules. By exploring the interconnectedness of Accuracy and Fluency within the Iraqi EFL undergraduate context, this review establishes the framework necessary to understand how conversational performance emerges as a result of both cognitive resources and social environmental pressures.

2.2 The Theoretical Framework: Larsen-Freeman’s (2006) Dynamic Perspective CAF

The theoretical foundation of the research lies in Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) as applied to Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which was introduced in great detail by Diane Larsen-Freeman (2006) in her article "The Emergence of Complexity, Fluency, and Accuracy in the Oral and Written Production of Five Chinese Learners of English." According to Larsen-Freeman, complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) should be viewed as variables that are "coupled" rather than distinct linguistic categories because CAF interacts in a "self-organizing" way. The concept implies that language development is a dynamic process which cannot be defined in linear terms as language quality is constantly changing and depends on the interaction between cognitive resources and task demands of the learners. It can be seen that according to Larsen-Freeman and Lynne Cameron (2008), these three aspects tend to compete with each other in terms of demanding attention resources, thereby creating the observed “trade-off” effect in the performance of Iraqi EFL undergraduates. Moreover, S. Housen and F. Kuiken (2009) argue that the CAF approach needs to be considered from the perspective of being a unified construct encompassing multiple dimensions, wherein progress in one dimension, like fluency, might destabilize accuracy at a certain point of time. Within the dynamic approach, the attractor state of the learner's interlanguage represents the highly sensitive state in which the learner's performance depends largely on the communicative context characteristics. In this respect, the proposed Larsen-Freeman approach allows for assessing the performance variability of Iraqi students in writing and speaking as an important sign of linguistic

development rather than mere error. **Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Larsen-Freeman's Dynamic Systems Theory (2006)**



Note: According to Larsen-Freeman's (2006) Dynamic Systems Theory framework, this chart shows how language quality variables (Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency) are interconnected.

2.2.1 Language as a Living System

According to Diane Larsen-Freeman (2015) states that language development is characterized by "soft assembly." This suggests that Iraqi EFL undergraduates do not simply "add" new rules but rather reorganize their entire linguistic system to meet communicative demands. This concept suggests that Iraqi EFL undergraduates do not merely engage in the linear "addition" of grammatical rules but rather undergo a continuous reorganization of their entire linguistic system to meet shifting communicative demands. This perspective is further supported by Larsen-Freeman and Lynne Cameron (2008), where they posit that performance is highly sensitive to the immediate communicative and the specific constraints of the task at hand. In this view, language is treated as an organic, self-organizing entity rather than a static body of knowledge. For the undergraduate learner, this means that "Language Quality" is not a fixed attribute but a variable outcome of the interaction between their internal cognitive state and external social pressures. While, N. Ellis (2007) emphasizes that this "living system" relies on frequency and usage-based patterns, where the student's ability to produce accurate and fluent speech is deeply rooted in their history of meaningful interaction. Ultimately, the transition from a structured linguistic competence to a functional conversational performance represents the system's adaptation to the real-time complexities of human communication.

2.2.2 The connections among CAF (Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency)

The triad of CAF is a hallmark of the dynamic model. Peter Skehan (1998) discusses the "Limited Capacity Hypothesis," suggesting that students often face a trade-off between being accurate and being fluent due to cognitive load. When the cognitive load of a conversational task increases, Iraqi EFL undergraduates may prioritize one dimension at the expense of another. Larsen-Freeman (2009) emphasizes that accuracy and fluency are not static traits but "attractor states" that shift during a student's undergraduate journey. Furthermore, S. Housen and F. Kuiken (2009) argue that these components are deeply "coupled," meaning a change in the complexity of a student's sentence structure will inevitably force a reorganization of their accuracy and fluency levels. In this dynamic view, "Language Quality" emerges from the stable yet flexible interaction of these three forces, where the development of one often depends on the temporary destabilization of the others.

2.2.3 Variability as a Signal of Development

The fundamental concept of the Larsen-Freeman (2006) approach is that variability is not indicative of a mistake made by the learner but an essential part of the process of development itself. According to Larsen-Freeman, learners' written and oral performance showed substantial differences throughout the course of her long-term study, which led to the conclusion that the language system remains consistently self-organized. Intra-learner variability is one of the most important parameters in this research. As pointed out by Lowie & Verspoor (2007), these oscillations signify that the subject explores the language's "state space." In case of Iraqi students, moving from classroom English into more spontaneous language implies a new "attractor state" characterized by an occasional dominance of fluency over accuracy. This concept, known as "dynamic instability," is confirmed by Larsen-Freeman & Lynne Cameron (2008), who maintain that the observed peaks and troughs of competence reflect the development and evolution of the system. The temporary decrease in grammatical accuracy in terms of a dynamic approach should not be interpreted negatively, as it signifies the so-called "phase shift," when a learner opts for the smoothness of delivery over other considerations. Finally, all these oscillations illustrate the

soft assembly of interlanguage that defines the quality of the Iraqi undergraduate's EFL as the result of interactions between internal and external factors.

2.2.4 The Context-Dependency of Performance

Larsen-Freeman (2006) points out that the social context is a part of the system. The performance is not something "in the head" of the learner; it is something "in the room". This is particularly true for the case of the Iraqi EFL setting. Al-Mutawa (1997) argues that the particular setting, be it an official exam or digital communication, defines the student's preference regarding a certain quality of language. From the dynamic viewpoint, the "Language Quality" of a student represents the reaction of a learner to the pressure of a conversational task. In accordance with Larsen-Freeman and Lynne Cameron (2008), co-adaptation implies that performance of a student cannot be separated from his/her partner and from the social context. In other words, the social context functions as a trigger changing the attractor states of a learner between precision and flow.

2.3 Defining Language Quality: The Core Metrics

In this study, "Language Quality" is considered as a combination of two features, Accuracy and Fluency, in particular, the former being measured through the students' conversation.

2.3.1 Accuracy: The Degree of Conformity

Accuracy is defined as the production of error-free language. Najat Al-Mutawa (1997) highlights that for Arab EFL learners, accuracy is often a byproduct of the "monitored" learning environment where students prioritize correct syntax over speed. Furthermore, Rod Ellis (2003) identifies accuracy as the extent to which the language produced conforms to target language norms. This dimension of quality is particularly critical in the Iraqi undergraduate context, where H.A. Al-Juboury (2013) argues that morphological and syntactic precision are the primary benchmarks for academic success. Beyond mere grammar, accuracy also encompasses lexical choice and phonological correctness in spoken conversations. According to Diane Larsen-Freeman (2006) shows that the accuracy serves as the "stabilizer" of a learner's interlanguage, ensuring that the intended meaning is not lost to ambiguity. Thus, accuracy represents the degree of adherence to linguistic standards that allows for clear, professional communication.

2.3.2 Fluency: The Flow of Communication

Fluency pertains to the capability of using language in real-time without unnecessary pauses. According to Paul Nation (1989), fluency is defined as the ability to process language focusing on the message and not on its form. In the Iraqi scenario, as mentioned by K. Patten (2011), breakdown fluency or the silent pause rate can be considered an important indicator in assessing the quality of oral performance by undergraduates. On the other hand, according to S. Housen and F. Kuiken (2009), fluency is not simply based on the rate; it is also about repair fluency, which refers to the ability of a student to cope with self-repair without causing the conversation to fall apart. Thus, for EFL students in Iraq, achieving such fluency is necessary to facilitate the transition from classroom activities to performance. It is through fluency that language quality is assessed temporally

2.4 Productive Skills and Conversational Performance

Speaking and writing are the visible expressions of a student's underlying linguistic competence.

2.4.1 Spoken Conversational Performance

Speaking is a cognitively challenging activity. According to Zoltan Dörnyei (2005), speaking and conversational skills are highly affected by the person's "Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate." Anxiety is a psychological factor that serves as a filter in conversational skills; hence, an elevated level of anxiety often causes "performance paralysis." A.M. Al-Kairy (2013) in his research concluded that "The cause of low fluency is often due to psychological considerations of accuracy rather than communication." It is argued that such "monitoring" process discussed by Stephen Krashen (1982) is detrimental to fluent conversations because, when Iraqi EFL undergraduates monitor themselves too much and constantly edit their speech, the flow of the conversation will be interrupted. Moreover, Paul Nation (1989) claims that to achieve high spoken quality, learners should move from "form-focused" production to "meaning-focused" production.

2.4.2 Written Conversational Performance

Linguistic performance in contemporary times can be seen in the form of written interactions like chat or dialogues. According to Ken Hyland (2003), indicates that when we talk about written texts, their quality can be determined by the levels of cohesion and coherence. This becomes even more significant in case of written conversation when the use of non-verbal indicators to facilitate understanding on the part of the reader become fewer. As reported by Rod Ellis (2003), while the process of written language involves some form of pre-planning, unlike oral communication, the "conversational" aspect of digital interaction forces Iraqi EFL undergraduates to rely more on fluency rather than accuracy. Moreover, according to M.T. Ahmed (2020), the

quality of written interaction tends to be affected by the "interlanguage interference" when learners apply the rules of Arabic structures to the context of written English. It is therefore evident that successful written dialogue involves the proper balance between lexical accuracy and flow.

2.5 The Relationship Between Quality and Performance

The key issue in the current research revolves around the interaction between Accuracy and Fluency in determining a student's overall performance. According to S. Housen and F. Kuiken (2009), these two constructs often work against each other. For example, in the Iraqi EFL context, it has been argued that the performance of third-stage students tends to exhibit the principle of "fluency first" in informal situations, whereas an academic setting induces "higher accuracy" yet a slow performance. The same idea is also discussed in the article written by Peter Skehan (1998). Specifically, it can be concluded from the article that task demand affects the decision of the learner to focus on either meaning or form. Adopting the ideas of Diane Larsen-Freeman (2006) implies considering performance as an "emergent property" when quality does not mean just a score achieved. The relationship between the two levels turns out to be non-linear for Iraqi undergraduates: as fluency improves, accuracy becomes destabilized for achieving better results in the future.

2.6 The Iraqi EFL Undergraduate Context

The Iraqi academic environment provides unique constraints. H.A. Al-Juboury (2013) notes that the assessment of productive skills in Iraqi universities has traditionally focused more on accuracy. often due to a history of grammar-translation methods. This focus has created a "competence-performance gap, where students possess theoretical knowledge but struggle with spontaneous communication. However, newer trends in the University of Tikrit curriculum, as discussed by F.S. Aidan (2018) are beginning to integrate more "fluency-based" tasks to mirror global standards. The goal of this change is to overcome the problem of "Foreign Language Anxiety," as defined by A.M. Al-Kairy (2013), which acts as a major obstacle for Iraqi university students during their oral communication. The pedagogical system prevailing in Iraq at present is undergoing a transition, shifting its focus from being too focused on linguistic forms to a "Balance between Accuracy and Fluency". In summary, the synthesis of the literature shows that while accuracy and fluency are distinct components of Language Quality, they must be viewed as an integrated, dynamic system. Following the Larsen-Freeman (2006) model, this study views the performance of Iraqi EFL undergraduates as an emergent property where quality is a shifting relationship between precision and flow.

2.7 The Notion of the Writing Skill

One may consider writing as a language ability that is necessary for mastering a foreign language such as English; it is comparable to listening, speaking, and reading. According to Nunan (1991), written language performs numerous functions in people's daily activities including public messages, product labels, instructions, magazines, novels, and subtitles to films. Moreover, written language enables us to interact with other people through written texts no matter where they are and whenever it is convenient for them (Brown, 2007). Noaman (2013) writes that "Writing is skill that is productive and interactive at the same time. It is productive in the sense that when we write, we actually produce language in order to express our ideas to other people. On the other hand, it is interactive in the sense that when we write, we always have an objective that we need to convey through the process of writing and we do so to an imagined reader" (p. 127).

2.7.1 Types of Writing Performance

In this section, we will consider the four types of written performance offered by Brown & Abeywickrama (2019) to demonstrate the diversity of written production. The analysis of the four types of written performance described by Brown and Abeywickrama.

A. imitation

Such writing activities include in (hand-)writing Letters, words, and punctuation, dictation, copy, puzzle choice listening, picture prompting activities, form filling, number and abbreviation translation into words. In addition, identification tasks, which contribute to grapheme-phoneme relationships through spelling practice, picture prompting tasks, multiple choice questions, and phonemic symbol matching (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2019).

B. Intensive

The writing tasks that can be considered include intensive dictation, dicto-comp, vocabulary testing tasks, sequencing tasks, short answer and sentence completion tasks, grammar transformation tasks, and picture prompting activities, including short sentences, pictures description, and sequence pictures description.

C. Responsive

Tasks that entail both responsive writing and extensive writing include paraphrasing, questioning and answering, and paragraph formation.

D. Extensive

It entails performing a task, organizing the information logically, thinking up of ideas, utilizing facts as support to the idea or explain the idea, variety in syntax and vocabulary, and use of facts in explanation or support to ideas. Editing of drafts is the only process used to focus on grammar skills (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2019).

2.7. 2 Factors Influencing Writing Skills

Writing ability are a unique mode of thinking that allows writers to express their thoughts in writing. Students interact with words and messages in their minds through the use of writing skills. Writing skills are important in learning languages. Language is depicted through writing by a set of symbols. Writing skills are difficult though. Writing can be considered as one of the most difficult activities. One needs to have good writing skills in order to become a successful writer. Writing is an interesting activity since the students get a chance to express their feelings about certain issues. Defazio et al., suggest that "writing may instead be a laborious and even dreaded exercise of attempting to place thoughts on paper while developing mastery over the rules of writing, such as spelling, citation format, and grammar" (Defazio et al. 2010, p.34; as cited in Abbas & Al-bakri, 2018, p. 24). "Many students have difficulties when writing motivational stories, especially writing a story has been gradually incorporated into other instructional methods", says Frak (2020, p. 4). "The use of group testing as an effective method of assessment contributed positively to improving the students' achievement in writing compositions," says Mohammed (2022, p. 685)

2.8 The Notion and Elements of the Speaking Skill

According to Akdeniz (2017), speaking ability is the most important skills in a language and is frequently used as a gauge of language proficiency. Speaking is arguably the most difficult talent to teach, evaluate, and assess when compared to other skills, so teachers must come up with new ways to help students improve their speaking abilities. Student video recordings could provide various benefits for students to enhance their speaking skills. Oral skills entail grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. The oral skill is regarded as one of the most important skills in any language, and it has been used as the standard for measuring the proficiency level of language learners by Akdeniz (2017). Speaking compared to other language skills, can be said to be the hardest skill to train, test, and evaluate. This problem needs to be addressed through developing novel techniques that assist learners to acquire oral skills. Oral skills include grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. Abdulrazzaq (2023) indicates, "When it comes to speaking activities, there have been many speaking skill activities which EFL teachers have tried many times and have helped in improving the speaking skills of the learners." These speaking skill activities include role plays, storytelling, and discussion within groups" (p.384).

2.8.1. Barriers to Development of Speaking Skill

Some of the significant barriers exist when students intend to improve their skills in this area. These include:

A. Insufficient Language Exposure

According to Khan, one of the possible factors that could prevent the students from mastering L2 is insufficient exposure to it. As for Arabs, this issue affects people in other places, too, which means that it is not something unique to Arab students (Khan, 2011).

B. Lack of Motivation

For mastering a second or foreign language, motivation is a key factor (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The cognitive learning theory advanced by Ausubel indicates that there exists a two-way connection between motivation and learning since "motivation can promote learning and learning can produce motivation again" (Hong & Ganapathy, 2017, p. 17).

C. Anxiety and Insecurity Among Students

Even though anxiety and insecurity are internal feelings, they can either increase or decrease depending on the influence of the environment. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), students who suffer from foreign language anxiety are the ones that acquire this type of anxiety. A student's competence in communicating in the target language is affected by his level of anxiety .

D. Insufficient Familiarity with English

A person needs to understand the target language before communicating in it, and this constitutes the outside variable. For one to produce the correct sounds using the phonemes, they need to know about sound productions, which include phonemes and their combination as discussed by Canale & Swain (1980).

E. Insufficient Teaching Methods

Fareh (2010) identifies inadequate preparation of EFL teachers in Arab countries as an important problem. Alhaisoni and Rahman (2013) agree with Fareh and stress that students should be equipped with a strong base regarding essential skills. They also note that English language teachers must get rid of obsolete modes of teaching, such as the lecture method and dictation.

III. Methodology

٣.١. Research Design

The current study adopts a descriptive-correlational research design. This design is deemed appropriate as the primary objective is to investigate the nature and strength of the relationship between two specific variables: Language Quality (Accuracy and Fluency) and Productive Performance (Speaking and Writing). Following the dynamic perspective of Larsen-Freeman (2006), this design allows for the observation of how these variables interact within the students' interlanguage system without external manipulation.

3.2 Test Construction

To measure the productive skills of the participants, a dual-component test was constructed. The test was designed to elicit spontaneous and structured language production:

1.The Oral Component (Speaking): A series of conversational prompts and picture-description tasks designed to measure "real-time" fluency and accuracy.

2.The Written Component (Writing): A guided paragraph writing task where students respond to a specific communicative prompt, allowing for the measurement of syntactic precision and lexical choice.

The test items were designed to align with the curriculum of the third-stage English departments in Iraqi universities, ensuring content validity. The draft was submitted to a panel of experts in TEFL and Linguistics to ensure face and content validity.

3.3. Population and Sampling

In this research, the population refers to the Third -year students in the departments of English Language at the two Colleges of Education in Iraq . Those students enrolled at Tikrit and Samarra Universities (College of Education for Humanities) in the period of (2025 /2026). The number of the population amounts to (270) students, of which (100) were selected as a sample. This sample is divided into (50)males and (50) females.

Table 3.1: Distribution of the Study Sample across the two Universities.

No	Universities	Colleges	Gender		Number of students
1	Tikrit	College of Education for Humanities	25 males	25 females	50
2	Samara	College of Education	25 males	25 females	50
Total					100

3.4. Instruments

The following instruments have been utilized to collect the required data:

1. Writing composition as a diagnostic test to gauge students ' writing ability.
2. Real life situations as a diagnostic test to gauge students' speaking ability.

3.5. Validity of the Test

Validity is the most fundamental consideration in developing and evaluating a measurement tool. As defined by Bachman (1990) that validity refers to the extent to which the inferences made from test scores are appropriate, meaningful, and useful. To ensure the research instrument accurately measures the relationship between Language Quality and Productive Performance, the following types of validity were established:

3.5.1. Face Validity

Face validity refers to the extent to which a test appears to measure what it claims to measure, based on the judgment of experts (Huge, 2003). The research instrument was submitted to a jury of experts specializing in EFL and Linguistics at the University of Tikrit and the University of Samara. The experts assessed whether the writing and speaking prompts were appropriate for third-stage Iraqi undergraduates. The prompts were slightly modified based on their feedback to make sure they were academically and culturally appropriate.

٣.٥ ٢. Construct Validity

Construct validity ensures that the test scores are consistent with the theoretical framework of the study. This is particularly crucial for this research as it follows Diane Larsen-Freeman's (2006) Dynamic Perspective on CAF. As Bachman (1990) states that construct validity involves the empirical investigation of the qualities a test

measures. Construct validity was achieved here by ensuring the test elicited both "Accuracy" and "Fluency" across different productive modes. This confirms that the test effectively captures the "soft-assembly" of language and the "trade-off" effects characteristic of the dynamic model of language development.

3.6. Reliability

A sample of (25) students from the Department of English in the Colleges of Education at Universities of Tikrit/ Samara , was employed to perform the pilot testing of the instrument in an attempt to meet the following objectives:

١. Testing the clarity of the test items
٢. Checking the amount of time needed by the participants in answering the questions
3. Determining the reliability of the test

To determine the internal consistency reliability of the test, the Cronbach's Alpha formula was employed. Based on this method, the correlation coefficient of quality of language in productive skills tests was found to be (0.89) and (0.90), respectively. In addition to that, The Spearman-Brown Formula is mainly used for determining a test's dependability when its duration is altered. Split- half reliability as the part of the tests are divided into two halves to examine reliability.

3.7. The Pilot Study

In order to measure reliability, validity, and time of the research tools, a pilot study has been done. This pilot study was carried out using random samples, which comprised 15 students chosen from the College of Education for Humanities at the University of Tikrit and College of Education at the University of Samarra.

Purpose of conducting a pilot study is to help the researcher fine-tune instructions, timing of productive activities, and ambiguous items that may pose difficulties for participants during data collection

Table.3.2. Pilot Study

No	University	College	Gender		Total
1	Tikrit	College of Education for Humanities	Males	4	8
			Females	4	
2	Samarra	College of Education	Males	4	7
			Females	3	
					15

3.7.1. Results of the Pilot Study

The pilot study was an initial step in confirming the test's psychometric properties. The results related to time allocation, item clarity, and statistical reliability are compiled in the table below.

Table 3.3: Summary of Pilot Study Evaluation (N=15)

Evaluation Criteria	Component	Statistical Measure / Value	Result/Decision
Clarity of Instructions	Speaking & Writing	Percentage of Comprehension	96% (High Clarity)
Time Allotment	Speaking Task	Average Time	5 - 7 Minutes
Time Allotment	Writing Task	Average Time	20 Minutes
Reliability	Accuracy Scores	Cronbach's Alpha	0.82 (Reliable)
Reliability	Fluency Scores	Cronbach's Alpha	0.79 (Reliable)
Item Discrimination	Productive Prompts	DP Range	0.35 - 0.55

3.8. Analysis of Discrimination Power (DP)

As shown in the table above, the Discrimination Power was calculated to ensure that each item in the test effectively distinguishes between the "Upper Group" (high achievers) and the "Lower Group" (low achievers) among the Iraqi EFL undergraduates.

According to the formula applied:

$$DP = \frac{U - L}{N}$$

(Where U is the number of correct responses in the upper group, L is the number in the lower group, and N is the total number of students in one group). Items that yielded a DP of 0.30 or higher were retained for the final version of the test, as they successfully captured the intra-learner variability emphasized in the Larsen-Freeman (2006) framework.

٣.٥. Scoring Rubric for Language Quality

To maintain objectivity during the evaluation of the 370 students in the main sample, the following criteria were established based on the pilot study observations:

- Accuracy (Grammatical Conformity): Measured by the "Error-Free T-Unit" count, where every clause is checked against standard English norms.
- Fluency (Temporal Measures): Measured by "Speech Rate" (Total words divided by total time) and the frequency of "Filled Pauses" (e.g., uh, um) which are common in the Iraqi EFL context.

٣.٩ . Statistical Tools

For the collecting and analyzing of data and answering of research questions, the following statistical tools have been used with the help of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences):

- Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r): For finding the relationship between Language Quality and Performance.
- Mean and Standard Deviation: To describe the performance levels of the students across the different universities.
- T-test: To determine if there are significant differences in language quality based on the type of productive skill (writing vs. speaking).

IV. Data analysis and Discussion of the Results

4.1. Results Related to the First Aim

In order to reach the first objective of the present research which is to identify and compare the conversational competence of EFL university students at the level of quality of language in the written and spoken discourses by gender at the two universities, through exploring the following question: " Is there statistical difference among the EFL university students' performance in the written and spoken tests according to their genders separately at the level of quality of language?"

4.1.1 Identifying EFL Students' Performance at the Quality of Language Level according to the Genders.

Otherwise, to achieve the fifth aim, it is applied identification of the EFL students' performance in realizing the quality of language level of the written test. T- test formula is used for one independent sample. At Tikrit University, the obtained results show that the males' mean score is 37.05 with 9.79 standard deviation, and the computed t-value is 6.61 which is more than the tabulated t-value 2.06. This indicates that there is significant difference at a degree of freedom 24 and a significance of 0.05 level. Whereas the female's mean score at Tikrit university is 42.06 with 16.69 standard deviation, the computed t-value is 2.37 which is higher than the tabulated t-value 2.06. This indicates that there is statistically significant difference at a degree of freedom 24 and a significance of 0.05 level. With regard to the written test of the quality of language level at Samarra university, the males' mean score is 31.45 with 15.86 standard deviation, and the computed t-value is 5.84 which is more than the tabulated t-value 2.06. This indicates that there is significant difference at a degree of freedom 24 and a significance of 0.05 level. Whereas the females' mean score is 30.92 with 14.75 standard deviations, the computed t-value is 6.46 which is more than the tabulated t-value 2.06. This indicates that there is statistically significant difference at a degree of freedom 24 and a significance of 0.05 level. On the other hand, identifying EFL students' performances in the spoken test of the quality of language level in accordance to their gender. At Tikrit University, the obtained results show that the males' mean score is 31.84 with 29.28 standard deviation, and the computed t-value is 3.100 which is higher than the tabulated t-value 2.06. Whereas the female's mean score at Tikrit university is 26.82 with 9.46 standard deviation, the computed t-value is 12.23 which is more than the tabulated t-value 2.06. The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences at a degree of freedom 24 and a significance of 0.05 level. With regard to the spoken test of the quality of language level at Samarra university, the males' mean score is 26.71 with 12.50 standard deviation, and the computed t-value is 9.31 which is higher than the tabulated t-value 2.06. This indicates that there is significant difference at a degree of freedom 24 and a significance of 0.05 level. Whereas the females' mean score is 25.60 with 11.86 standard deviations, the computed t-value is 10.28 which is more than the tabulated t-value 2.06. This indicates that there is statistically significant difference at a degree of freedom 24 and a significance of 0.05 level. See the table 4.1. Table 4.1. The Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and One Sample T-Value of the Students' Conversations of the Quality of Language Tests in the Written and Spoken Discourses at the Tow Universities According to Gender.

Univ	Gender	The test	No	Mean	S.D	T- value		D.F	Sign 0.05
						Comput ed t- value	Tabulat ed t- value		
Tikrit	male	written	25	٣٧,٠٥	٩,٧٩	٦,٦١	٢,٠٦	٢٤	Sign
	female	written	25	٤٢,٠٦	١٦,٦٩	٢,٣٧	٢,٠٦	٢٤	Sign
Samarra	male	written	25	٣١,٤٥	١٥,٨٦	٥,٨٤	٢,٠٦	٢٤	Sign
	female	written	25	٣٠,٩٢	١٤,٧٥	٦,٤٦	٢,٠٦	٢٤	Sign
Tikrit	male	spoken	25	٣١,٨٤	٢٩,٢٨	٣,١٠٠	٢,٠٦	٢٤	Sign
	female	spoken	25	٢٦,٨٢	٩,٤٦	١٢,٢٣	٢,٠٦	٢٤	Sign
Samarra	male	spoken	25	٢٦,٧١	١٢,٥٠	٩,٣١	٢,٠٦	٢٤	Sign
	female	spoken	25	٢٥,٦٠	١١,٨٦	١٠,٢٨	٢,٠٦	٢٤	Sign

4.1.3 Comparison Between the Theoretical Mean and Students' Performances in the Quality of Language Level at the Two Universities According to Gender. In order to reach the second objective of the present research which is to identify and compare the conversational competence of EFL university students at the level of quality of language in the written and spoken discourses by gender at the two universities, through exploring the following question: " Is there statistical difference in the comparison among the males' against the females' in EFL students' performances at the quality of language level according to written and spoken tests at the two universities?" The table 4 shows another comparison among the males' against the females' at the two universities, in order to evaluate the EFL students' performances at the quality of language level according to written and spoken tests. In realizing to the written test, the males' mean score at the two universities is 34.25 with 13.34 standard deviation. While the females' mean score is 36.49 with standard deviation 16.57. The computed t-value for the two universities is 0.74 which is less than the tabulated t-value 1.96. This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences at 0.05 level. In concerning with spoken test of the quality of language level, the males' mean score at the two universities is 29.28 with 22.43 standard deviation. While the females' mean score is 26.21 with standard deviation 10.64. The computed t-value for the two universities is 0.87 which is less than the tabulated t-value 1.96. This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences at 0.05 level. See the table 4.2.

Table 4.2. The Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Two Independent Sample T-Value of the Students' Quality of Language Tests in the Written and Spoken Discourses Between the Two Universities According to Gender.

Univ	Gender	The test	No	Mean	S.D	T- value		D.F	Sign 0.05
						Computed t- value	Tabulated t- value		
Tikrit	male	written	٥٠	٣٤,٢٥	١٣,٣٤	٠,٧٤	١,٩٦	98	

	female	written	٥٠	٣٦,٤٩	١٦,٥٧				No Sign
Tikrit & Samarra	male	spoken	٥٠	٢٩,٢٨	٢٢,٤٣	٠,٨٧	١,٩٦	98	No Sign
	female	spoken	٥٠	٢٦,٢١	١٠,٦٤				

4.2. Discussion of the Results

a- With regard to the first aim of the current study which is identifying EFL university students' performance at the level: Quality of language at the written and spoken discourses according to gender in the two universities. The obtained written test results of the quality of language level at the two universities identify that the males and the females have statistically significant difference in favor of the theoretical mean. This means that both gender have lower performance. On the other hand, the spoken test results of the quality of language level at the two universities identify that the both males and females at the two universities have statistically significant differences in their performances in favor of the theoretical mean. This means that both gender have lower performance. Generally, the reasons behind that it may be the substantial difference in spoken test performance could be due to varying language fluency, confidence levels, or cultural factors influencing communication styles among different genders, moreover, differences in teaching methodologies or learning environments between universities might contribute to varying test performances.

b- Regarding the first objective of this study which is to compare the performance of EFL university students at the level of: Quality of language in both written and oral discourse in relation to gender in both universities. The comparison results in the written of the quality of language level between the males and females at two universities are revealed that there are no statistically significant differences in their performance. In addition to that the spoken test results of the quality of language level between the males and females at two universities are revealed that there are no statistically significant differences in their performance. The above similarities might mean that there is nothing to differentiate in terms of language skills or capabilities between males and females. There are some external conditions, such as teaching methods, curriculum, or socio-cultural influences that may affect on males and females, resulting in similar performance levels.

1. Conclusion

The results of the study indicate differences between male and female EFL students of Tikrit and Samarra universities in language quality both in their written and oral tests. The results also reveal statistically significant discrepancies in favor of the theoretical mean of male and female students in both universities, especially in their written tests. Additionally, there are statistically significant differences between males and females at both universities, showing lower performance on spoken tests. Comparing the genders based on language quality is another conclusion. According to the survey, there are no statistically significant gender differences in the written or spoken tests at any university.

2. Recommendations

● **Balanced Instructional Focus:** It is recommended that EFL instructors at Iraqi universities shift from a purely accuracy-based approach to a more balanced CAF (Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency) framework. Pedagogy should integrate tasks that encourage "soft-assembly" of language to help students overcome the current low performance levels.

● **Interventions for Gender-Neutral Learning:** As there was no significant disparity in terms of gender in the study, interventions and remedial methods that focus on enhancing productive skills may be devised without any consideration of gender distinction.

● **Enhancing Spoken Discourse Opportunities:** Given that the spoken test results showed significant differences in favor of the theoretical mean (indicating poor performance), universities should increase the frequency of spontaneous oral interaction tasks and digital conversational simulations to build students' confidence and breakdown-fluency.

3. Recommendations for Future Research

● **A Longitudinal Study on Variability:** A longitudinal study on intra-learner variability should be conducted concerning the development of 3rd stage students throughout an entire academic year to get a better understanding of how their "Language Quality" varies and changes over time.

● **Psychological Influence on FLA and Conversational Performance:** As psychological factors might affect language learning adversely, future research might focus on investigating the effect of Foreign Language

Anxiety (FLA) on conversational performance in Iraqi university students. This topic should be considered since it might be the reason behind suboptimal performance that is less than the theoretical mean.

● **Digital Writing Performance vs. Traditional Classroom Writing:** A comparison study between "Written Conversational Performance" when using digital technology and traditional classroom activities might be recommended.

References

- Abbas, S. H., & Al-bakri, S. A. (2018). The effect of pair writing technique on Iraqi EFL university students' writing performance and anxiety. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 9(2), 23-37.
- Abdulrazzaq, A. H. (2023). Teachers' and Learners' attitudes towards the place of the speaking skill in the EFL curriculum. *Alustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences*. 62 (1), 382- 397.
- Ahmed, M. T. (2020). The relationship between fluency and accuracy in the productive output of Iraqi EFL learners. *Tikrit University Journal for Humanities*, 27(5), 12–30. Tikrit University, Tikrit.
- Aidan, F. S. (2018). Integrating communicative tasks in the Iraqi EFL classroom: A shift from accuracy to fluency. *Journal of Education for Women*, 29(4), 1105–1120. University of Baghdad, Baghdad.
- Alhaisoni, M., & Rahman, M. (2013). Teaching English in Saudi Arabia: Prospects and challenges. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistic*, 26(1), 112-118.
- Al-Juboury, H. A. (2013). *A language teacher's guide to assessment*. Baghdad: University of Baghdad Press. University of Baghdad, Baghdad.
- Akdeniz, N. Ö. (2017). Use of student-produced videos to develop oral skills in EFL classrooms. *International Journal on Language, Literature and Culture in Education*, 4(1), 43-53.
- Al-Kairy, A. M. (2013). Iraqi English department students' difficulties in speaking. *International Journal of English Language Education*, 1(2), 166–174. Macrothink Institute, Las Vegas.
- Al-Mutawa, N. (1997). *A course in language teaching methods*. Kuwait: Kuwait University Press. Kuwait University, Kuwait City.
- Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, H.D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Brown, H. D., & Abeywickrama, P. (2019). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. Hoboken.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1-47.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. University of Nottingham, Nottingham.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. University of Auckland, Auckland.
- Ellis, N. (2007). Dynamic systems and SLA: The intertwined cycles of usage and language. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(1), 23–35. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- Fareh, S. (2010). Challenges of teaching English in the Arab world: Why can't EFL programs deliver as expected?. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 3600-3604.
- Frak, K. N. (2020). The Effect of the Stepping Stone Technique on EFL Intermediate School Students' Performance in Short Story Writing. *Alustath*, 59(1). 1-18
- Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Attitude and motivation in second language learning*. Newbury House.
- Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and learning in the language classroom*. Oxford University Press.
- Hong, Y. C., & Ganapathy, M. (2017). To investigate ESL students' instrumental and integrative motivation towards English language learning in a Chinese school in Penang: Case study. *English Language Teaching*, 10(9), 17-35.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- Housen, S., & Kuiken, F. (2009). Complexity, accuracy, and fluency in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics*, 30(4), 461–473. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Huge, A. (2003). *Testing for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.

- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press. University of Southern California, Los Angeles.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (1997). Chaos/complexity theory and second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics*, 18(2), 141–165. Oxford University Press.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2003). *Teaching language: From grammar to grammaring*. Thomson/ Heinle.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2006). The emergence of complexity, fluency, and accuracy in the oral and written production of five Chinese learners of English. *Applied Linguistics*, 27(4), 590-619. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Cameron, L. (2008). *Complex systems and applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2009). Developing second language efficiency. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93(4), 524–539. Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2015). *The complexity of language: New directions in applied linguistics*. London: Routledge. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- Lowie, W., & Verspoor, M. (2007). Variability in second language development from a dynamic systems perspective. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(1), 19-32. University of Groningen, Netherlands.
- Mohammed, H. A., & Jasim, A. A. (2022). The Impact of group testing as a strategy on university students' writing composition development. *Alustath Journal for Human and Social Science*, 61(1), 669-689.
- Nation, P. (1989). Improving speaking fluency. *System*, 17(3), 377–384. Elsevier, Amsterdam. Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington.
- Noaman, N. (2013). Literature and language skill. *Alustath Journal for Human and Social Science*, 2(204).123-134
- Nunan, D. (1991). *Language teaching methodology*. Prentice Hall Int.
- Patten, K. (2011). Metrics for evaluating undergraduate oral performance in EFL contexts. *The Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 22–45. Equinox Publishing, London.
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. New York: Cambridge University Press. SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, Singapore.
- Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Thames Valley University, London.