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# A Study to Find Out the Best Approach for the Iraqi Teachers to Teach English Language Conversation

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## 1-ABSTRACT

Being able to converse is an essential part of a complete foreign language education. However, the teaching of conversation is often equated with the teaching of speaking . A **Conversation Norms Approach** to teaching conversation incorporates aspects of authentic native speaker (or expert speaker) conversation, such as spoken grammar and pragmatics, into instruction. This study takes a closer look at conversation, and examines issues connected with the effective teaching of conversation. An informal inquiry of the foreign language conversation in the classroom also provides insight into the reality of teaching .

**Key Word:** English Language , Conversation , Iraq , Norms Approach.

## 2-INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Background of the Study:

Foreign language “fluency” is a major goal of many language learners and teachers. To communicate clearly and naturally with native speakers of a language is the end that makes the means of studying, memorizing vocabulary, and practicing the language worth the effort. Achieving ‘fluency’ through foreign language education has focused on the written language. The issue remains that students are being taught written language spoken aloud, rather than being taught actual native speaker norms of conversation.[1]

If language learners were never expected to use their language with native speakers in the target culture, this approach towards teaching would be logical. However, the increasing reality of a global community—one in which nationality is less important than world-wide citizenship—creates a stronger need for language education that enables language learners to communicate with speakers beyond the borders of their own culture.[2]

The component that is missing from the type of foreign language education that would support this global citizenry is instruction in conversation. While language learners in typical language education programs are using the target language orally and internationally, they are not being taught to engage in authentic conversation as would native speakers of that language. It has been thought that knowledge and understanding of these native speaker norms of authentic conversation can be learned only through direct immersion in the target culture, and for this reason, instruction of conversation norms is generally not included in language curriculum. [3]

The lack of instruction in conversation can cause language learners to seem overly formal in their interactions in the target language, and can often be the root of cultural misunderstanding.[4]

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Moreover, failing to instruct language learners in conversational expectations can prevent them from successful integration into the target culture. English language needs more interaction and communication between learners of EFL and others who know how to speak English. Students learn the material of English in the primary stage and until the end of the secondary stage, then when they come to post-secondary and access to colleges and universities to study other sciences such as medicine, engineering and computer science, they face problems this is because all the sciences taught in English.[5]

The proposed study titled “A Study of the Problems Faced by the Iraqi Teachers in Teaching English as a Foreign Language with Special Reference to the Conversational Skills” will analyze the problems the foreign teachers face in teaching English conversation and will find out the appropriate approach for teaching conversation[6].

## **2-2 English Language Teaching (ELT):**

The component that is missing from the type of foreign language education that would support the international citizenry is instruction in conversation.[7] While language learners in typical language education programs are using the target language orally and internationally, they are not being taught to engage in original conversation as would native speakers of that language.

It has been thought that knowledge and understanding of these native speaker norms of actual conversation can be learned only through direct mix with the native speakers, and for this reason, instruction of the norms of conversation is generally not included in language curriculum. However, the lack of instruction in conversation can cause language learners to seem overly formal, rude, or awkward in their interactions in the target language, and can often be the root of cultural misunderstandings between native and non-native speakers. Moreover, failing to instruct language learners in conversational expectations can prevent them from successful integration into the target culture.[8]

## **3.Challenges and Difficulties in Teaching and Learning English language**

To teach English as a foreign or second language is a challenge for each teacher to deal with, whether this teacher is a beginner or an experienced person. Teachers must work continuously to find the best ways to improve the levels of students and finding appropriate solutions to these difficulties to achieve success through dealing with students in a positive way.[9]The difficulties that the teacher face are:

3.1Difficulty 1: Pronunciation.

3.2 Difficulty 2: Thinking in Language.

3.3 Difficulty 3: In Using Authentic Materials.

3.4 Teachers and Dealing with Difficulties.

3.5Difficulties of the English Learners.[10]

## **4-Teaching English Conversation Approaches**

To discuss the teaching and learning of conversation, it is necessary to first describe what does conversation mean? Conversation is the Exchange of Thoughts, Feelings, Opinions, and

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Ideas. Although it is often regarded as any oral production of a meaningful combination of words and phrases, real conversation requires a “true communication of ideas”.

#### **4.1 Approaches of Teaching Conversation.**

##### **4.1.1 The Controlled Communication Approach:-**

The Controlled Communication Approach values the importance of LLs speaking the language in the classroom, but it does not necessarily emphasize authentic or relevant uses of the language. In reaction to the drills and the rigidity of the audio-lingual method, this approach encourages LL communication that is partially flexible, but not spontaneous.[11]

##### **4.1.2 The Free Communication Approach:-**

The Free Communication Approach, or what Dörnyei and Thurrell (1994) call the “indirect approach” for teaching conversation, sees appropriate instruction in conversation as having learners participate in activities that will foster ‘conversation,’ such as role play, problem solving tasks, info-gap activities, and language games.[11]

##### **4.1.3 The Conversation Norms Approach:-**

The Conversation Norms Approach is similar to the Free Communication Approach in that it emphasizes authentic exchanges of ideas; however, it additionally focuses on form that looks at skills, strategies, and processes of the TL and systematically integrates language input that will raise LLs’ awareness of the TC norms [11] It recognizes the LLs’ need to understand the more subtle issues of foreign language communication. As Barraja-Rohan (2000) points out, “just getting students to talk is not teaching them conversation...Students may be learning from using the TL, but in doing so they are not taught how conversation works and how participants manage talk-in-interaction” [8][10][11].

Often, in this approach, the role of instructors is to co-research authentic language samples with the LLs. They also must bring to the LLs’ attention to two main features of the approach that are not typically present in classrooms using the earlier two approaches. They are:-

##### **a. Spoken Grammar**

##### **b. Pragmatics.**

#### **5-FINDING.**

The findings are discussed in detail through the information collected from the questionnaire made on fifteen Iraqi teachers.

Table No. 1: Distribution of Questions in Questionnaire

Section	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3
Questions			
Questions	Demographic background	Related to the causes of the most difficulties in teaching the conversation	Related to approaches and materials

### 5.1-Section One: This Section Is Related to the Demographic Information.

#### 5.1.1 Teacher's Gender

As for teacher's gender as it is indicated in table above, the majority of participants are male, as indicated in (Fig.no.1). Thirteen teachers, i.e. 86.6% were male and two teachers, i.e. 13.3% were female.

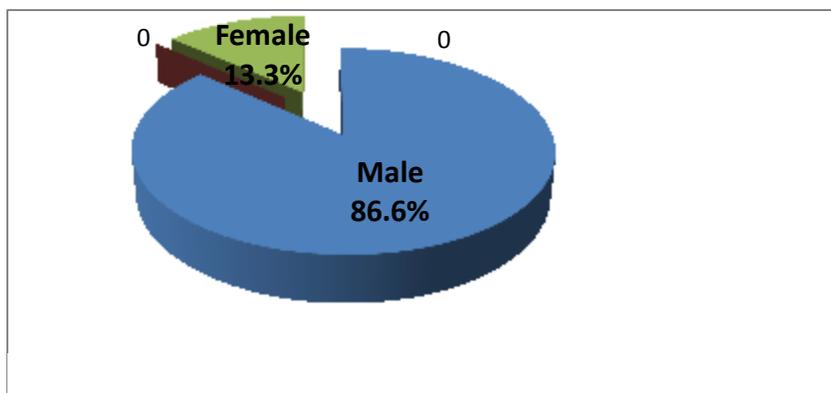
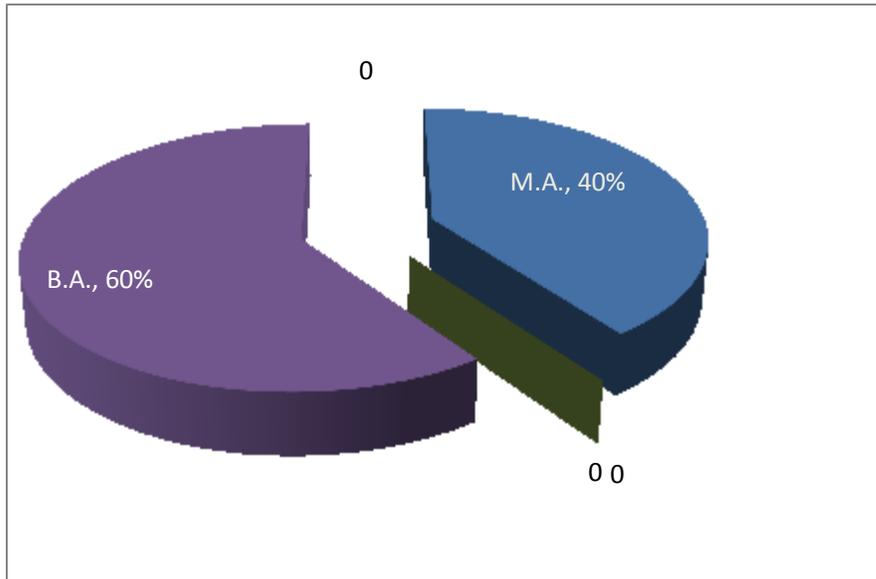


Fig.No.1 Distribution of Teacher's Gender

#### 5.1.2-Teacher's Level of Education:

The majority of teachers are B.A. holders i.e. nine (60%), while six teachers had M.A. degree holders (40%). The figure No.2 below explains the detailed results.



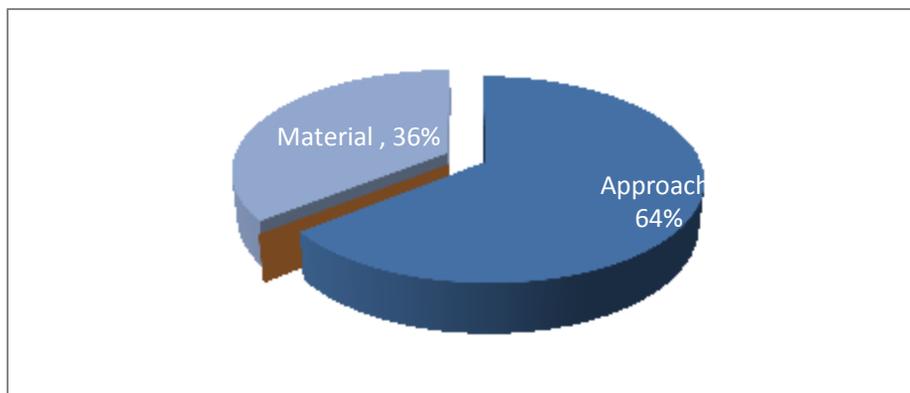
**Fig.No.2 Distribution of Teacher’s Level of Education**

## 5.2 Section Two :Related to the Difficulties in Teaching Conversation

The findings of this question are explained below:

### Q1. What are the causes of the difficulties in teaching conversation?

The majority of the teachers (9) answered the causes of the most difficulties in teaching conversation was in the approach they use and (6)of the teachers responded the difficulties was in the materials. This is shown below:



**Fig.No.3 Results of Causes of the Most Difficulties in Teaching the Conversation**

### 5.3 Section Three : Tests the Results Related to the Approaches and Materials

This part contains five questions. The findings of those questions are explained below:

#### Q2-What approach do you prefer to use in teaching conversation?

The majority of teachers (ten of fifteen) answered the free communication approach while three of them responded Controlled communication approach and two mentioned Conversational norms approaches as indicated in table no. 2 as below.

**Table No. 2 Results of the Approaches Used to Teach Conversation**

Q2		Approach	No. of participants	Percentage %
	a	Free communication approach	10	67
b	Controlled communication approach	3	20	
c	Conversational norms approach	2	13	

#### Q3- What are your goals for your students when they finish the course?

The majority of teachers (12) answered that the goal is to teach students to Speak freely and (1) teacher responded to Use conversation norms. Two teachers didn't answer this question.

**Table No. 3 Results of the Goals for the students**

Q3		The goals	No. of participants	Percentage %
	a	Speak freely	12	80
b	Use conversation norms	1	6.4	
c	Skipped	2	13.3	

### 6-Conclusion and Recommendation

At one time, it was thought that native speaker norms of conversation could be acquired in immersion environments only, and that it was ineffective to teach them in the classroom. However, the study suggests that instruction can and will help in the acquisition of conversation norms, both in the second language and in the foreign language environments. While the immersion experience is, without doubt, a helpful experience in target language acquisition, it alone is not sufficient to teach LLs everything they need. Moreover, most LLs do not have the opportunity to go abroad for a period of time long enough to acquire these norms 'naturally'. For these reasons, LLs must receive supplemental instruction to acquire TL conversation norms. It is understandable that the Conversation Norms Approach has not been adopted in the teaching of foreign language conversation, and the lack of instruction in conversation norms will continue to negatively affect students who intend to use their language in the TC or with NSs of that language.

In order to improve the situation of teaching conversation, the researcher recommends to perform educational training courses in how to deal with syllables and texts. Moreover the educational institutions should provide teachers more courses and training in this field to gain experience and to learn modern methods to improve their teaching.

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