



*Using Conversation in  
Teaching EFL Assessment at  
College*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Using conversation in teaching EFL assessment subject is a student-centered technique that belongs to the active learning by which students compose their own conversation to explain the material themselves using all their potentials, innovations, technologies... etc to help their instructor have an objective impression about what they really can do in class if they are given the opportunity. After being taught according to a traditional method for twenty hours, two hours per a week, a test in EFL assessment subject was administered among eighty-six seniors in the department of English-College of Education-University of Samarra to choose the sample of the study. The average score of the students' scores was calculated and only fifty students whose scores had one standard deviation above or below the average score had been chosen as the sample of the study. Then, the average score of the scores of the sample was calculated. The test consisted of twelve items. The sample then had been taught for twenty hours, two hours per a week by using conversation as a kind of active learning.

According to this technique, students were allowed to compose their own conversation to explain the material using all what they want to use of strategies, technologies and equipment. The instructor's interference was very limited. After that a post-test consisting of nine items was administered among the students of the sample. The first aim of the study was measuring the effectiveness of the technique of using conversation while the second aim was finding out whether there was a significant difference between the males' achievement and the females' achievement in the pre-test and the post-test. Results were analyzed by using SPSS. Concerning the first aim, the technique proved to be effective and regarding the second aim, there was no significant difference between the males' achievement and the females' achievement in the pre-test and the post-test.



## ***I-Theoretical background***

Tending to be social, the human being has always tried to devise new ways of communication, among which is conversation, the most prominent one. ([improveyoursocialskills.com](http://improveyoursocialskills.com))

Conversation can, make communication more effective, help the person receive a quick direct response from the others and it can help all parts involved in it rapidly develop ideas about the issue being discussed. (Keller, 2013: 10)

In order to have a conversation, the participants have to open a channel and this happens when one of them sends a message to another one about a common ground to talk about. The message receiver commits to engage if he agrees to be interested in the common topic and gives it due amount of what it is worth of time, effort and attention. This way the participants will be able to construct meaning since conversation helps them build or rebuild a particular interpretation to the topic being discussed. In any conversation, participants try to understand their concepts, reach an agreement about this understanding and if the conversation is effective, one of them or more may take an action about some issue which is something positive and useful. In other words, participants will learn valuable lessons and strategies related to different topics since conversation is a means of exchanging information about concepts and reaching an agreement about them. To reach an agreement with each other, the participants need to co-ordinate their actions usefully while conversing.

Moreover, they need to collaborate and negotiate about their targets so conversation is an essential requisite to do so. After any conversation there is a big chance that one of the participants if not more may change and advocate new views about thoughts, objects and circumstances. If this happens that means the conversation has been effective and one participant has succeeded in convincing the other one to adopt his beliefs and change his look towards the topic. (Dubberly and Paul, 2009)



Since conversation can provide all these facilities, it can definitely be used inside the class to create a kind of active learning class which is based on a group of teaching and learning activities for better learning.

Such kind of techniques is essential to focus on what students can do and to encourage teamwork among them in the active learning class. (Drake and Battaglia, 2014: 6)

### ***Why is Active Learning Valuable?***

To answer this question we have to make a comparison between passive learning in which the students' role is limited to only receiving from the teacher and active learning in which students are involved in various types of activities, exchanging different views and exploring them, instructors give students immediate feedback and students get engaged in using higher cognitive skills like analysis, problem solving and evaluation. In other words the students' role is bigger than the teacher's. (McKeachie, et al, 1987: 70-71)

Active learning is desirable regardless whether the students' task is simple or complex for eventually they will have a great chance to express themselves and undoubtedly students better learn what they are interested in and they surely remember what they comprehend. (Ericksen, 1984: 51)

Some instructors may be unwilling to take the risk of implementing strategies of active learning thinking that the time of lecture available may not be fair enough to comprehensively cover the whole material especially when the size of the class is large. To overcome this problem the students can be divided into small groups. Each group will be involved in a certain activity. This way all students will get the chance to effectively participate in class which is the ultimate aim of active learning strategy. The other obstacle that may face the instructors is the long time consumed in preparing for implementing the strategies but regarding the positive results they may get, it is worth doing so. (Jr., 1991: 70-72)



Assessment is a significant aspect that is seen as a teaching-learning process. It is a teacher concern that helps him/her estimate the amount of students' learning and achievement. (Journal of Nelta, 2011: 97)

All teachers as well as learners are concerned with having effective assessment techniques in class for assessment is useful for both of them. Assessment can be used in the form of formative and summative tests. Formative assessment can be expressed as assessment for learning and summative assessment can be expressed as assessment of learning. Assessment for learning is used for the purpose of helping students to progress in their learning, while assessment of learning is used to grade and rank learners or students. (Boraie, 2013)

Assessment in an active learning class can be done by using effective techniques that focus on what students can do and create in class for the benefit of better learning, so students must be involved in role-play, creative thinking, group work, problem solving and every activity linked with active learning that helps in improving their skills and abilities.(Collins and O' Brien, 2003: 5)

**Keywords: (Conversation, Active Learning, Language Assessment)**



## ***II- Review of Literature***

### ***A. Language Assessment***

- In teaching, the process of assessment involves the various methods and instruments used by educators to measure, discover and evaluate potential skills, comprehension, educational requisites and learning desire and progress of students. ([edglossary.org/assessment](http://edglossary.org/assessment))

Language assessment as being one of the targets of anyone interested in the teaching-learning process of English as a foreign language means in dual language the way that insures providing equal opportunities for EFL learners to progress and continue their learning. ([edglossary.org/dual-language-education](http://edglossary.org/dual-language-education))

- "The act of collecting information and making judgements about a language learner's knowledge of a language and ability to use it". ([languagetesting.info](http://languagetesting.info))

- "The process of gathering information to monitor progress and make educational decision if necessary". ([www.slideshare.net](http://www.slideshare.net))

### ***B. Active Learning***

While active learning refers to "anything course-related that all students in a class session are called upon to do other than simply watching, listening and taking notes" according to (Felder and Brent, 2009: 2), (Bell and Kahrhoof, 2006: 1) state that "active learning means getting all students actively involved in developing their own concepts about thoughts, skills and realities throughout the lesson according to the teacher's instruction to complete definite tasks".

Edwards (2015: 26) interprets active learning as the process of having students engage in some activity that forces them to reflect upon ideas and how they are using those ideas. Requiring students to regularly assess their own degree of understanding and skill at handling concepts or problems in a particular discipline. The attainment of knowledge by participating or contributing. The process of keeping students mentally, and often physically,



active in their learning through activities that involve them in gathering information, thinking and problem solving.

### ***C. Conversation***

- Conversation: "A talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information is exchanged". ([dictionary.cambridge.org](http://dictionary.cambridge.org))
- "Informal interchange of thoughts, information, etc., by spoken words; oral communication between persons; talk; colloquy". ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com))
- "A talk, especially an informal one, between two or more people, in which news and ideas are exchanged". ([en.oxforddictionaries.com](http://en.oxforddictionaries.com))
- "The exchange of thoughts and feelings by means of speech or sign language". ([www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com))



### ***III-Methodology***

The sample: fifty seniors in the English Department at the College of Education-Samarra University-Iraq.

The procedure: Eighty-six seniors in the English Department-College of Education-Samarra University had been taught for twenty hours, two hours per a week by using a traditional method in EFL assessment subject. Then a test consisting of twelve items was administered among them to choose the sample of the study. The average score had been calculated and fifty students whose scores had one standard deviation below or above the average score had been chosen as the sample of the study. Then the average score and the standard deviation of the sample had been calculated. After that, the sample was taught EFL assessment subject for twenty hours, two hours per a week by using conversation as follows:

- 1-Giving an assignment to the students.
- 2-Selecting two students to prepare the material in the form of conversation using all their potentials, innovations, technologies and techniques freely.
- 3-For feedback, the two students ask the class questions about the material and if the questions are insufficient, the teacher may interfere and direct the class to ask questions about unexplained parts of the material.
- 4-The two students themselves choose another two students for the following performance. After the twenty hours teaching, a post-test consisting of nine items was administered among the students of the sample.

***The Aims:*** the study aims at,

- 1-Measuring the effectiveness of the techniques of using conversation in teaching EFL assessment subject for seniors in English Department-College of Education-University of Samarra as manifested in the students' achievement.

2- Finding out whether there is a significant difference between the males' achievement and the females' achievement in the pre-post tests.

**The Results:** SPSS was used to analyze the results.

As it was mentioned before the whole sample was an experimental group. The researcher didn't use a controlling group in order to discover the potentials of as many students as possible. So the sample was chosen according to quasi-experiment which is "an empirical study used to estimate the causal impact of an intervention on its target population without random assignment to treatment or control. Instead, quasi-experiment designs typically allow the researcher to control the assignment to the treatment condition, but using some criterion other than random assignment". (en.m.wikipedia.org)

So the researcher used the results of the pre-test and the post-test of the sample as shown in the tables No.1 and No.2 to achieve the first aim.

**Table No.1**  
**Group statistics**

<u>Scores of Test</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std.</u> <u>Deviation</u>	<u>Error</u> <u>Mean</u>
Pre-test	50	12.2200	2.01312	0.28470
Post-test	50	13.8200	4.18788	0.59226

**Table No.2**  
**Independent Samples Test**

	<u>T-test for Equality of Means</u>		
	<u>T</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>
<u>Scores</u>	2.435	98	0.17

As it appears, the results of the t-test shows that there is a significant difference in the achievement of the sample after applying the technique

showing that the technique of using conversation proved to be effective for the calculated t-test value (2.435) is bigger than the tabulated t-test value (1.96).

In order to find out whether there is a significant difference between the males' achievement and the females' achievement in the results of the pre-post tests, t-test formula was used as shown in the tables No.3 and No.4.

**Table No.3**

**Pre-test Group Statistics**

<u>Sex</u>		<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Deviation</u>
<u>Scores</u>	<u>Male</u>	16	12.0625	2.29401
	<u>Female</u>	34	12.2941	1.89943

**Table No.4**

**Pre-test Independent Samples**

	<u>t-test for Equality of Means</u>		
	<u>T</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>Sig (2-tailed)</u>
<u>Score</u>	0.376	48	0.708

As it is shown in the table No.4 there is no significant difference between the males' achievement and the females' achievement for the calculated t-test value (0.376) is less than the tabulated t-test value (1.96).

In order to find out whether there is a significant difference between the males' achievement and the females' achievement in the results of the post-test, t-test formula has been used as shown in the tables No.5 and No.6.

**Table No.5**

**Post-test Group Statistics**

<u>Sex</u>		<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Deviation</u>
<u>Scores</u>	<u>Male</u>	16	14.2500	4.32820
	<u>Female</u>	34	13.6176	4.17071



**Table No.6**  
**Post-test Independent Samples**

	<u>T-test for Equality of Means</u>		
	<u>T</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>Sig (2-tailed)</u>
<u>Scores</u>	0.494	48	0.623

As it appears in table No.6 there is no significant difference between the males' achievement and the females' achievement in the results of the post-test for the tabulated t-test value (1.96) is bigger than the calculated t-test value (0.494).



## **Conclusions**

From all the forgoing information we conclude that techniques included in active learning are obviously underestimated, so educational institutions should give due weight to this urgent need of students regardless whether they are males or females because its effective impact is strongly realized in discovering the students' potentials and skills in identifying the most appropriate ways of learning once you give them the opportunity to think and express their own concepts about language assessment and eventually they will be able to find the best way to do so as long as they converse with each other and use their own technology, tools and techniques.

Moreover, this will be a reliable training to prepare them for their future career as teachers being senior students at College of Education.

## ***Recommendations***

- Intensive studies are needed in investigating the effectiveness of techniques included in active learning that can be helpful in encouraging students to participate effectively and willingly in class.
- Consolidate students' self-esteem throughout giving them the chance to demonstrate their innovations in dealing with the text material which will create a kind of information exchanging between the students and the teacher and the students with each other.
- Related to the teacher's role he/she should direct the students to get involved in blended learning as a way of creating active learning class. Further studies that shed light on this are advisable.



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- [www.slideshare.net](http://www.slideshare.net)



## Appendix (1)

### The Sample's Pre-test Scores

No.	Scores	No.	Scores
1	14	26	9
2	10	27	10
3	14	28	10
4	14	29	12
5	14	30	11
6	14	31	12
7	14	32	13
8	12	33	9
9	12	34	10
10	14	35	13
11	13	36	11
12	15	37	15
13	12	38	14
14	14	39	9
15	14	40	12
16	12	41	14
17	11	42	15
18	9	43	11
19	13	44	10
20	15	45	10
21	15	46	14
22	15	47	11
23	15	48	12
24	10	49	10
25	10	50	9



## Appendix (2)

### The Sample's Post-test Scores

No.	Scores	No.	Scores
1	20	26	13
2	17	27	12
3	17	28	16
4	14	29	14
5	10	30	15
6	14	31	7
7	15	32	11
8	18	33	11
9	16	34	11
10	19	35	13
11	19	36	14
12	15	37	15
13	13	38	10
14	19	39	17
15	3	40	17
16	16	41	17
17	14	42	15
18	17	43	11
19	17	44	12
20	18	45	12
21	19	46	14
22	19	47	6
23	16	48	7
24	8	49	1
25	11	50	16



**Appendix (3)**  
**The Males' Pre-test Scores**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Scores</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>



## Appendix (4)

### The Females' Pre-test Scores

No.	Scores	No.	Scores
1	10	18	12
2	14	19	11
3	14	20	12
4	14	21	13
5	14	22	13
6	12	23	11
7	12	24	15
8	14	25	14
9	13	26	9
10	15	27	12
11	12	28	14
12	13	29	10
13	15	30	14
14	15	31	11
15	10	32	12
16	9	33	10
17	10	34	9



## Appendix (5)

### Males' Post-test Scores

No.	Scores
1	20
2	15
3	19
4	3
5	16
6	14
7	17
8	18
9	19
10	11
11	16
12	11
13	11
14	15
15	11
16	12



## Appendix (6)

### The Females' Post-test Scores

No.	Scores	No.	Scores
1	17	18	14
2	17	19	15
3	14	20	7
4	10	21	11
5	14	22	13
6	18	23	14
7	16	24	15
8	19	25	10
9	19	26	17
10	15	27	17
11	13	28	17
12	17	29	12
13	19	30	14
14	16	31	6
15	8	32	7
16	13	33	1
17	12	34	16



## Appendix (7)

### The Sample's Pre-test

**Samarra University**

**College of Education**

**English department**

**Monthly exam in assessment**

**2016-2017**

**Class 4**

**Q.1-Define the following:** (6 marks)

- 1-aptitude tests
- 2-continuous assessment
- 3-the analytical assessment

**Q.2-Fill in the blanks with suitable words:** (7 marks)

- 1-The purpose of ..... assessment is to place or classify students on a suitable course.
- 2-Proficiency tests aim to assess ..... ability.
- 3-The language elements are ....., ..... and..... .
- 4-..... assessment compares each student with his .....

**Q.3-What are the types of validity? Explain one.** (5 marks)

**Q.4-Answer with ✓ or ✗** (2 marks)

- 1-The (TOEFL) is the best example of integrative tests.
- 2-The test must be long enough to provide a generous sampling of the area tested.
- 3-According to the essay-translation approach the tests are mainly oral exercises.
- 4-Achievement tests are more formal than class progress tests.



## Appendix (8)

### The Sample's Post-test

**Samarra University**

**College of Education**

**English department**

**Monthly exam in assessment**

**2016-2017**

**Class 4**

**Q.1-Define the following:** (6 marks)

1-objective items

2-true/false items

3-re arrangement items

**Q.2-Match the information in list (A) with the information in list(B):** (4 marks)

**A**

**B**

1-Semi-objective questions may  
require the examinee to

a-correctly grammatical and  
meaningful sentences

2-In labelling the testee is  
required to

b-produce sentences

3-Completion items are used  
to test the students' ability  
to produce

c-complete a sentence or compose  
one or more of his own sentences

4-Transformation items are used to  
test the student's ability to

d-decode interrupted messages

e-describe certain areas of a  
diagram or picture

f-supply the most appropriate words

**Q.3-What are the suggestions for constructing (multiple choice) tests?**

(5 marks)

**Q.4-What are the considerations of choosing assessment techniques?**

(5 marks)