

The Relationship Between Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students' Social Learning Strategies and Speaking Performance

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Abstract:

The current study investigates the relationship between Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' social learning strategies and speaking performance. The sample of the study includes (375) Iraqi preparatory males and females students. The instruments used in the study are ; A questionnaire adopted from Phothongsunun(2006) and speaking performance test constructed by the researcher . The results showed a positive relationship between the variables. The students have an average level of social learning strategies.

Keywords: Learning strategies, Social Learning Strategies, Speaking Performance .

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the most important language skills that EFL learning programs have sought to develop in order to enable students to express their ideas in a proper way and to communicate successfully. Speaking is the main evidence that learning a language is achieved . However, speaking is considered the most challenging skill in mastering a language because of its spontaneous nature which includes thinking of what should be said while uttering what has already been thought . (Shabani, 2013). It is difficult for EFL learners to speak appropriate English in the classroom because of the limited language use in their real lives, (Y.T.Anfal,2016). Due to lack of grammar or vocabulary knowledge, learners may pause or stop speaking to other interlocutors in the target language.' Alimova E. Ne'matillayevna & Y. M. Bokijonovna(2022). The main purpose of speaking is to communicate and to interact with others . In order to inform thoughts well, speakers must understand what they are going to say. Language is the most important tool for communication. Language is a type of social behavior since it is a means of communication among people. The process of learning a language involves other people, and social strategies are very important. In EFL learning, "social learning tactics have a major importance since they boost the language learner's opportunity to use the language for communication with activities like going to the movies, reading books, or talking to people who speak English extremely well." (R. Maissa and M.

Narmeen.,2015). In this study. The current study tries to answer the following research questions:

1-What are Iraqi EFL school students' levels of Social Learning Strategies and Speaking Performance ?

2-Is there a statistically significant correlation between Iraqi EFL Preparatory school students' Social Learning Strategies, and their speaking Performance ? 3-To what the extent Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' Social Learning Strategies contribute in explaining the variation in their Speaking Performance ?

The present study aims at:

1-Finding out Iraqi EFL preparatory students' Social Learning Strategies and the levels of their speaking Performance.

2- Identifying the relationship between Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' Social Learning Strategies and their speaking Performance.

3-Identifying the extent to which Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' Social Learning Strategies contributes in explaining the variation in their Speaking Performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Learning Strategies

Social learning strategies are sets of approaches to get students to become active participants in class through interaction with others and sharing of knowledge they have.

2.1.1 Language Learning Strategies

According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 1), learning strategies are "the special ideas or behaviors that individuals utilize to help them absorb, remember, or retain new information." Oxford defines learning strategies as the "steps taken by learners to enhance their own learning" (1990, p. 1). Later, Oxford,(1999,p.518) expands on the term by

referring to "specific actions, behaviors, steps or techniques that students use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language."

"Strategies are most frequently deliberate and goal-driven, especially in the early phases of handling an unfamiliar language problem," claims Chamot (2005, p. 112). Learning strategies may be applied automatically once it has been accustomed via repeated practice. Learning strategies are deliberate actions that students take, at least in the beginning of their studies, to speed up their language acquisition and develop into more responsible and independent learners. Teachers can support these student efforts by giving them advice on how to approach their assignments. Due to their concealed nature and the need for introspective data gathering methods, the majority of learning strategies cannot be observed in the classroom, (Sundus A.J. 2022).

Students learn more quickly when they employ learning strategies, such as planning, competition, deliberate manipulation, and progress toward a goal. Social skills are important for learning English as a foreign language (EFL) since they boost language learners' chances to use the language for communication when partaking in activities like reading, watching movies, and speaking with native English speakers, among others. Learning strategies are intentional behaviors or ideas that students adopt to better understand, absorb, or remember new linguistic information (Richards and Platt, 1992 ,p. 209). Oxford is still developing the idea of learning strategies as specific actions taken by the student to make learning easier, quicker, more enjoyable, self-directed, successful, and transferable to diverse settings. Oxford (1990) emphasizes that the effective use of learning strategies can increase second language proficiency, and Nunan supports this by pointing out that tasks and activities that motivate students to consider their own learning and develop their self-checking, monitoring, and evaluation abilities can help them develop into strategic learners. Learning strategies are "any sets of operations, procedures, plans, routines utilized by the learner to ease the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information," (Tseng, 2005, p. 321) Additionally, learning methods are the ideas and behaviors people utilize to achieve a learning objective (Chamot, 2004,p. 13)

2.1.2 The Importance of Learning Strategies

Learning strategies go beyond cerebral processes, enhancing learning as an all-encompassing activity. Although numerous factors influence learning tactics, they may also be modified to meet the requirements and abilities of individual students. Even better, learners can consciously choose their learning strategies, which will eventually lead to a more independent learning process. Students can be taught how to make these decisions ,(R. K. Elaf(2022). As a result, instructors play important roles in the quest of the best methods to achieve the best results in the learners.

Education professionals continue to wonder why certain students do not use learning tactics effectively, nevertheless. Goetzke, 2019), explores this question. Three major responses to this query are proposed in reflection: Lack of awareness, false sense of competency, and excessive time and effort. She argues that students adopt methods that give them a false sense of competency (such as rereading and reviewing), are ignorant of the value of retrieval practice, and think that learning about and employing new tactics will take more time and effort. Goetzke (2019) proposes creating some activities that use the methods and clearly teaching them in class to address these problems. This will help students understand the value and effectiveness of the strategies. These activities might inspire students, increase their autonomy, and promote intentional and self-directed learning. Students must therefore be aware of and adept at using learning tactics. Allwright (1990) and Little (1991) expanded on this idea by stating that learning strategies enable learners to become independent language learners who continue to learn throughout their lives. It is obvious that applying learning techniques is very important when learning a language, but it is also crucial for teachers to give students opportunities to develop the various tactics and mentor students as they use them. Hismanoglu (2000) argued that when students are supported by teachers who are engaged in fostering both communicative competence and language learning methodologies, they can become better language learners. Thus, in order to successfully learn a language, it is important to be aware of and use various learning strategies,(AL Saadi Shatha & H.Shahad,2016).

2.1.3 Oxford's Classification of Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990) further divided LLSs into two main categories: direct learning strategies and indirect learning strategies.

A- Direct Strategies include :

١ -Memory strategies , These tactics, like grouping or using images, serve a particular purpose in aiding pupils in storing and retrieving new information. To remember information that is useful, memory techniques are employed. When the learner employs affective techniques, like calming their worry through deep breathing, and affective metacognitive methods, like paying attention, these strategies are more effective (Oxford,1990).

2-Cognitive strategies , like summarizing or using deductive reasoning, help learners understand and produce new language in a variety of ways. Learning cognitive processes is a crucial part of learning a new language. The learner's manipulation or alteration of the target language is the common purpose of cognitive methods (Oxford,1990).

3-Compensation Strategies , Allow learners to use the target language for understanding or production despite their knowledge gaps, such guessing or employing synonyms. Without perfect knowledge of the new language, learners can nevertheless develop spoken or written expression. These tactics are employed to make up for a lack of suitable vocabulary or grammatical expertise ,(Oxford,1990).

B- Indirect Strategies include the following :

١- Metacognitive Strategies, to focus on coordinating or arranging learning aid language learners in organizing and planning their language acquisition in an effective and efficient manner. For students interested in learning a new language, the metacognitive strategy of looking for practice opportunities is crucial. They must be accountable for looking for numerous chances outside of the classroom. Language learners struggle to keep track of their mistakes. (Oxfrd,2003).

٢--Affective Strategies, The term affective refers to emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the affective factors influencing language learning. Language learners can gain control over these factors through affective strategies, (Oxford, 2003; Vlčková et al., 2013; Kozmonová, 2008).

3- Social Strategies , Social techniques support the growth of students' interpersonal and cooperative abilities. The acquisition of these abilities is a crucial aim of language study. As a result, this collection of techniques offers tools that language learners can use in their everyday activities (Oxford, 2003; Vlková et al., 2013).

2.1.4 Social Learning strategies

Since social strategies are used among people, they are crucial in the field of communication. Asking questions, cooperating with others, empathizing with others and seeking opportunities are the categories of social language acquisition , Oxford (1990). In all cases, asking questions is most beneficial and gets you the closest to the meaning. Collaboration with others replaces rivalry and fosters a sense of community. Because educational institutions place such a great emphasis on competition, learners do not naturally utilize cooperative strategies. In communication, empathy is crucial, it is the ability to understand others. Students can utilize social skills to learn about different cultures and become sensitive to the feelings and views of others. Since language is used in communication and occurs between people, students will be more interested in how to learn than in what to learn and in the communicative rather than the grammatical aspects of language learning, which will make them more eager to look for opportunities to use English outside of the classroom (Richards and Renandya, 2002 , p.122). Other social strategies include helping others and showing empathy for them. By engaging in cooperative activities in the language they are learning, students can put the cooperative behavior technique into practice (Samida, 2012).

2.1.5 Categories of Social Strategies

Social Strategies include four types of sub strategies. These strategies are: asking questions, cooperating with others, empathizing with others and seeking opportunities , each of which includes two particular strategies as in Figure(1)

Figure (1) Social Learning Strategies adopted from (Phothongsunan,2006)**a-Asking questions**

It is one of the most significant social interactions that aids in bringing learners' comprehension levels closer to those of the intended meaning. Asking questions involves:

1-Asking for Clarification or Verification

2-Asking for Correction

b. Cooperating with others

Language learners must cooperate in general, both with peers and with more experienced speakers of the target language. Cooperating with others includes;

1-Cooperating with peers

2- Cooperating with proficient users of the new

c. Empathizing with others

Increasing cultural sensitivity and awareness of the emotions and opinions of others (Oxford ,1990). Successful communication in any language, especially while learning a new one, depends on empathy

1-Developing Cultural Understanding

2-Becoming Aware of Other's Thoughts and Feelings

d. Seeking Opportunities, it means to find any opportunity to listen , read ,speak and write in the target language.

2.2 The Concept of Speaking Performance

Language plays a significant part in our lives since as humans, we need to communicate and combine our ideas. People have this kind of arbitrary system to engage with others as a result. Speaking is the first product of every language and it is the only ability that requires practice with a partner. You can read a book, listen to an audiobook, or write a letter on your own, but you can't speak by yourself; you need someone to talk to. Speaking is a form of communication that is crucial to our daily lives, according to Gaskill (2010). Speaking is considered to be a key component of contact in many facets of life, including social and personal interactions.

2.2.1 The Importance of Speaking Performance

Speaking is one of the four skills that must be learned in order to learn a foreign language. Speaking is the art of communication. Producing words that listeners can understand is a sign of good speaking abilities.. Speaking ability that entails information production, reception, and processing (Burns & Joyce, 1997).

2.2.2 Features of Speaking

The reasoning behind some challenges to learners' oral performance is that features of speaking need to be carefully examined, which helps in designing educational activities to organize students to be able to communicate effectively in real-world situations and to search for a number of the values for understanding this skill, Burns (2019, p.3). These features are :

1-Speaking is Face to Face Most of the conversations take place when the listener and the speaker are at the same time and in the same place with the chance to get direct feedback. The interaction between the listener and the speaker consist of using gestures, facial expressions, and body movements (Ann, 2014, p.11).

2-Speaking is Interactive

If the interaction happens face to face or on the telephone, its continues for a long time because the conversation enters at the acceptable moment, which is recognized as taking turns in conversations with either at least one person or a group of individuals (Brownell, 2015, p.353).

3- Speaking Occurs in Real Time

False starts occur when speakers begin a conversation by thinking erratically, during which they mention something and change their minds halfway through (Foster et al., 2000, p.368). In contrast to the lengthy and complex sentences the speaker uses in writing, Miller (2001, p. 27) notes that the speaker utilizes short, basic sentences to make himself understandable.

1.2.4 Roles of Speaking

Speaking is very important, especially in everyday communication and interpersonal contact. When someone speaks, they are aware of what to talk about and understand the concepts being discussed. Many linguists have attempted to understand the role of speaking in human contact in order to identify the various roles of speaking, (Luoma,2004, p. 185). The explanations of those roles are :

1-Speaking as interaction

To make an effected interaction, learners need to have the capacity to speak in the first place. Being incapable to use the language confidently, learners avoid such circumstances that force them to use the language to speak which each time start and end quickly since they feel difficulty and lose words (Willis ,1996, p.7).

2- Speaking as transaction

The level of linguistic correctness that students attain when performing different forms of interactional activities is a significant issue raised by talking as a transaction, which is related to their utilization. The most important presumption is that the student and the teacher would take care of the structure spontaneously (Krebt, 2017, p.864).

3-Speaking as Performance

According to Richards (2007, p. 27), this type of speech is used by public speakers to provide information to an audience during speeches, public reports, and classroom presentations. Talk as performance is more likely to fall into the category of a monologue than an interlocutor since it primarily adheres to a recognizable format (e.g., a speech of welcome).

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and Sampling

The population of this study is Iraqi EFL preparatory school students in Baghdad governorate, directorate of education Al karkh 3rd during the academic year 2022/2023. The total number of the population is (7966) students (375) of which are chosen as the sample.

3.2 Instruments

The following instruments have been used in order to collect the required data:

- 1- Social Learning Strategies Questionnaire is adopted from Phothongsunun,(2006). The questionnaire consists of (29) items ,the items are distributed into four sub-strategies: Asking questions for clarification /verification/repetition and correction, Empathizing with others, Cooperating with others , and Seeking opportunities. In terms of the questionnaire's practical application, a five-point Likert scale is used. Given the alternatives:
always 5 , usually 4 , sometimes 3 , rarely 2 , never 1
- 2- Speaking Performance Test is an interview constructed by the researcher. it consists of two different phases, the items of the first phase are about students' daily routine, the 2nd phase is to choose a given picture and describe it. The scoring scheme to assess the students' responses to each item of the speaking test, has been adopted from Brown (2001, pp.406-407). It consists of five components (grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, pronunciation). The rating scale is (1-5). Accordingly, the highest score of the test is (25), whereas the lowest score is(5) .

3.3 Pilot Administration of the Instruments

A group of (40) Iraqi EFL 5th preparatory school students (not included in the main sample) from the schools of Educational Directorate of Baghdad, Al Karkh 3rd is randomly selected for the purpose of conducting the pilot administration of the two tests. The pilot administration is carried out to achieve the following goals:

1. Examine the clarity of the items on the questionnaire and the tests.
2. Check the time participants take to respond.

3.4 Reliability : Reliability "refers to the quality of a measurement

procedure that provides repeatability and accuracy" (Kumar, 2018, p.26).

Table (1) Reliability Coefficient Re-test for each Social Learning Strategies

Key strategy	Reliability coefficient
Ask questions	0.89
Empathizing with others	0.90
Cooperating with others	0.88
Seeking opportunities	0.87

The reliability of Speaking Performance test is estimated by using Cronbach Alpha equation. After applying the formula, the reliability of Speaking Performance is(0.91) .

4 . Results

4. 1 Results Related to the First Aim

In order to achieve the first aim, which is (finding out Iraqi EFLpreparatory school students' social learning strategies and the level of their speaking performance) . Two instruments have been applied on the study sample:

4.1.1 Students' Social Learning Strategies

Regarding Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students' level of Social Learning Strategies, the researcher applied the scale of social learning strategies on a research sample consisting of (375) students. and the results were as shown in Table (4).

Table(4) The arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and t-value of the Social Learning Strategies scale

Social Learning Strategies	Sample	Mean	S.deviation	Hypothetical mean	T. value*		Significance (٠,٠٥)
					Cal.	Tab.	
Asking questions	٣٧٥	٢٦,٢٨٨	٤,٠٦٨	٢٤	١٠,٨٩٢	١,٩٦	Significance
Empathizing with others	٣٧٥	٤١,٣٤١	٨,٤٠٦	٣٩	٥,٣٩٤	١,٩٦	Significance
Cooperating with others	٣٧٥	٨,٨٦٤	٢,٩٦٩	٩	٠,٨٨٧	١,٩٦	Not significance
Seeking opportunities	٣٧٥	١٤,٧٢٥	٣,٢٦٢	١٥	١,٦٣١	١,٩٦	Not significance

The following appears from the above table:

1. The arithmetic mean of the sample on the (asking questions) means that the research sample uses this strategy to a good degree.
2. The arithmetic mean of the sample on the (empathizing with others) strategy means that the research sample uses this strategy to a good degree.
3. The arithmetic mean of the sample on the (cooperating with others) means that the research sample uses this strategy to an average degree.
4. The arithmetic mean of the sample on the (seeking opportunities) means that the research sample uses this strategy to an average degree.

Table (5) Social Learning Strategies data after converting scores to percentage

Social learning strategies	Mean of the ratios	S.Deviation of the ratios
Asking questions	٠,٦٥٧	٠,١٠١
Empathizing with others	٠,٦٣٦	٠,١٢٩
Cooperating with others	٠,٥٩٢	٠,١٩٨
Seeking opportunities	٠,٥٨٢	٠,١٣١

4.1.2 Students' Speaking Performance

To achieve this aim, finding out the level of Iraqi EFL preparatory school student's speaking performance, the researcher applied a speaking performance test on a research sample consisting of (375) students. The results of the research showed that the research sample has an average degree of speaking performance.

Table (6) The Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation, and T-value of the Speaking Performance Test

Variable	Sample	Mean	S.deviation	Hypothical mean	T.Value*		Significance (, ,)
					Cal.	Tab.	
Speaking performance	٣٧٥	١٥,٠٧٧	٢,٤٦٨	١٥	٠,٦٠٧	١,٩٦	N.Sig.

4.1.2 Results Related to the Second Aim

To achieve the second aim which is " identifying the relationship between Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' Social Learning Strategies and Speaking Performance. Pearson correlation coefficient and t-test for the significance of correlation have been employed. The obtained results reveal the following:

Table (7) The relationship between social learning strategies and speaking performance

Social learning strategies	Number	The correlation coefficient between social learning strategies and speaking performance	T.value		Significance (, ,)
			Computed	Critical	
Asking questions	٣٧٥	٠,٥٣٤	١٢,١٣٦	١,٩٦	Significance

Empathizing with others	٣٧٥	٠,٤٤٦	٩,٦٩٦	١,٩٦	Significance
Cooperating with others	٣٧٥	٠,٣٨٨	٨,٠٨٣	١,٩٦	Significance
Seeking opportunities	٣٧٥	٠,٤٠٠	٨,٥١١	١,٩٦	Significance

4.1.3 Results Related to the Third Aim:

To achieve this aim which is to "identify the extent to which social learning strategies contribute to explain the variation in speaking performance of Iraqi EFL preparatory school students.

Table(8) The Contribution of the Independent Variable(Social Learning Strategies) to the Total Variance of the Dependent Variable(Speaking Performance) in the Research Sample

Variables	Non-standard coefficients		Standard beta coefficient	PART	T. value	Significance (٠,٠٥)
	Beta	Standard error				
Constant Term	٢,٥٥٠	٠,٧٣٥	-	-	٣,٤٦٩	Sig.
Asking questions	٠,١٦٨	٠,٠٣٣	٠,٢٧٧	٠,١٩٧	٥,١٣٤	Sig
Empathizing with others	٠,٠٠٢	٠,٠١٦	٠,٠٠٧	٠,٠٠٥	٠,١٣١	Not sig.
Cooperating with others	٠,١١٩	٠,٠٣٧	٠,١٤٤	٠,١٢٣	٣,٢١٩	Sig.
Seeking opportunities	٠,١٢٠	٠,٠٣٣	٠,١٥٨	٠,١٤٠	٣,٦٦٠	Sig.

4.2 Conclusions

According to the preceding results and discussions related to the aims of the study, the following conclusions are formulated: Iraqi EFL preparatory school students have an average level in Social learning strategies and Speaking Performance. Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' social learning strategies are statistically correlated with speaking performance.

Findings indicate that Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' (Asking questions strategy) has a high influence on speaking performance then the strategies of (cooperating with others and seeking opportunities). While (empathizing with others) has a weak influence on speaking performance.

4.3 Recommendations

The researcher states the following recommendations:

- 1- Iraqi educational institutions have to employ social learning strategies in curricula and to offer comprehensive training courses for teachers and students to raise their awareness of how to use them.
- 3- Much attention should be given to student's speaking performance and encouraging them to speak fluently .
- 4- EFL teacher training courses should train teachers not only to use different instructional techniques, but also to achieve different methods of investigating students' learning strategies in general and social learning strategies in particular.
- 5- Students should be encouraged to have direct communication with native speakers to be exposed to the target culture and language.
- 6- Teachers should be trained to develop SLs with students unconsciously for the sake of communication inside the classroom.

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العلاقة بين استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعي وأداء التحدث لدى طلبة المدارس الإعدادية العراقيين

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الملخص:

تبحث الدراسة الحالية في العلاقة بين استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعي وأداء التحدث لدى طلاب المدارس الإعدادية العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية . وقد اشتملت عينة الدراسة على (٣٧٥) طالب وطالبة في المرحلة الإعدادية. الأدوات المستخدمة في الدراسة هي ؛ استبيان تم اعتماده من Phothongsunun (٢٠٠٦) واختبار أداء التحدث من إعداد الباحث. أظهرت النتائج وجود علاقة إيجابية بين المتغيرات حيث ان الطلاب لديهم مستوى متوسط من استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعي.