

The Impact of Flexible Learning Strategies on Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students Speaking Performance

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of flexible learning strategies on Iraqi EFL preparatory students' speaking performance. The study sample were (60) male preparatory fourth-grader students for the academic year (2024/2025) in Al-Qabas Preparatory School for Boys. To achieve the objective of this research, an experimental design was administered in which 40 students were allocated to two groups that had either flexible or conventional instruction. Test of speaking performance was done prior to and after intervention in both groups. The results indicated that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in post-test, and outperformed it in learners' fluency ability, pronunciation ability, use of vocabulary as well as general confidence about speaking English. This finding indicates that incorporating diversified teaching strategies might be an effective way to foster EFL learners' performance in speaking. This would suggest that strategies like these should be embedded in our teaching practice as a means of promoting student engagement and independence, and stimulating speaking.

Key-words: flexible learning strategies, speaking performance, preparatory school students

أثر استراتيجيات التعلم المرن في أداء التحدث لدى طلبة المرحلة الإعدادية العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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المستخلص

يهدف البحث الحالي إلى التعرف على أثر استراتيجيات التعلم المرن في أداء طلبة المرحلة الإعدادية العراقيين في مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تألفت عينة الدراسة من 60 طالباً من طلبة الصف الرابع الإعدادي الذكور في ثانوية القبس للبنين خلال العام الدراسي (2024-2025). ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة، اعتمد الباحث التصميم التجريبي، إذ قُسم الطلبة إلى مجموعتين: مجموعة تجريبية دُرست باستعمال استراتيجيات التعلم المرن، ومجموعة ضابطة دُرست بالطريقة التقليدية. وقد استُخدم اختبار في الأداء الكلامي قبل تنفيذ التجربة وبعدها للمجموعتين. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة وجود فرق ذي دلالة إحصائية لصالح المجموعة التجريبية في الاختبار البعدي، إذ تفوق طلبة المجموعة التجريبية في الطلاقة، والنطق، واستخدام المفردات، والثقة أثناء التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن استراتيجيات التعلم المرن تُعد أسلوباً فعالاً في

تحسين أداء متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في مهارة التحدث. كما توصي الدراسة بدمج هذه الاستراتيجيات في الممارسات التدريسية لدعم مشاركة الطلبة، وتنمية استقلاليتهم، وتشجيع التفاعل والتواصل الشفهي داخل الصف.
الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات التعلم المرن، الأداء الكلامي، طلبة المرحلة الإعدادية.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem and its Significance

Due to the global dominance of the United States in throughout human history, English has become the de facto lingua franca when it comes to wide-spread international communication across peoples and cultures, education, science, and technology. Therefore, improving speaking ability is seen as one of the key objectives in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. It is an important component of schooling; speaking allows learners to articulate ideas, relay information and engage in both academic and social interactions. Nevertheless, the EFL preparatory school students in Iraq spend a lot of time learning English in classrooms with some non-native speakers; and as a result find it notably difficult both to speak in English fluently and confidently due to lack of speaking practice, fear of errors, traditional teaching approaches and relatively little communicative opportunity (Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2020).

In the recent past, educational systems around the world placed an increasing importance on student-centered methods which promote flexibility of teaching and learning processes. Flexible learning strategies involve instructional tactics that allow learners various ways, methods, and environments to learn in a manner that meets their unique needs, abilities, and preferences. Thus, these strategies may vary from collaborative to blended or self-directed learning, and technology-facilitated instruction, interactive tasks and differentiate activities to engage the learners actively (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2021). Accordingly, it is claimed that these strategies contribute to increased learners' motivation, autonomy, confidence and communicative competence.

One of the most common strategies used in Iraqi EFL teaching is closing students to use what they know and memorize from one side, as for using grammar instruction and a teacher-centered method that put them on a dilemma without any real oral participation around from another side (Zahra et al., 2014). By consequence, a lot of preparatory school students are nervous and unwilling to talk English outside or even inside the classroom. Thus, using flexible teaching techniques can offer more supportive and communicative conditions that develop the speaking skills of students more effectively and efficiently (Ahmed & Mohammed, 2022).

Additionally, flexible learning strategies can also facilitate learners to participate in meaningful communication at different levels via pair work, group discussions, role-playing as well digital storytelling, online platform and problem-solving



(Horton et al., 2020). Richards (2022) states that these practices may enhance pronunciation, fluency, use of vocabulary, and speaking performance by allowing students to engage actively in real-life communicative scenarios. Diverse multimedia tools and constant interaction is another strong factor from tech integration that aids learning on a flexible basis or better known as the flexible learning environment.

Many previous studies in language acquisition and speaking skills have shown that flexible learning strategies for students can be beneficial. As an example, Derakhshan et al. (2021) and Zhang (2023) report flexible and interactive approaches in instruction improve students' confidence, involvement, as well as oral proficiency in EFL classrooms. Although flexible learning approaches are paying more attention around the world, there is few research studies on Iraqi preparatory school students and their speaking performance.

Hence, this study intends to examine the effect of flexible learning strategies on Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' speaking performance. This study aims to investigate whether the use of varied instructional strategies can enhance students (fluency, accuracy of speech, pronunciation, vocabulary and confidence in speaking English. The study might help Iraqi schools to improve the EFL teaching practices due something novel, which is providing teachers and people involved in designing English curriculum with effective strategies for the speaking skill improvements.

Although speaking is one of the components of English, and it is placed in priority in language teaching, there are many Iraqi EFL paramilitary preparatory school pupils who still experience problems with oral communication through flue or confident speech. Teacher centered methods are still the norm and show orthodoxy in generally connecting to memorization and text book related activities with little to no time for actual communicative practice taking place at these Iraqi public schools. In turn, they know lack confidence to speak and their vocabulary is not very wide during speaking activities (Mahmood & Hasan, 2020).

Some flexible learning methods have been identified as a legitimate instruction based approach that promotes learner autonomy, agency orientation and diverse modalities of learning preferences which provide an avenue for greater engagement in speaking related activities (Andrade, 2020). However, due to the shifting world towards flexible learning and the scarcity of empirical evidence regarding the effect of FL on speaking achievement among Iraqi EFL preparatory school students. This study is interested in investigating whether an adapted FL programme can enhance speaking fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use and confidence of well-prepped EFL students.



This research aims to elucidate the importance of flexible learning strategies that can improve Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' speaking performance. Now a days plenty of students are availing the facility of on-line learning. Supports training. Many students are studying through online course and IT should be better used on large scale. It's a Learning area which comes with wired and wireless access to students. It gives the most direct way for users to have access in content, tools, training, resources and support which could help them use school given technology and personal devices to create and move forward their learning relevance and effectiveness. First, this study aimed to improve students speaking achievement in general. The current study was warranted in this case.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The present study aims to:

1. Examine the effect of flexible learning strategies on the speaking performance of Iraqi EFL preparatory school students.
2. Identify whether flexible learning strategies improve students' fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and confidence while speaking English.
3. Compare the speaking performance of the experimental group taught through flexible learning strategies and the control group taught through traditional instruction.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

To achieve the aims of the study, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1. There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the pre-test of speaking performance.
2. There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the post-test of speaking performance.
3. There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-test and the post-test of speaking performance.

1.4 Limits of the Research

The limits of the research are:

1. Fourth-grade preparatory male students at Al-Qabas Preparatory School for Boys during the academic year (2024–2025).
2. The first semester of the academic year (2024–2025).
3. Speaking performance skills, including fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and confidence in speaking English.
4. Flexible learning strategies applied in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

5. Units selected from the prescribed English textbook for the fourth preparatory stage.

1.5 Plan of the Research

1. A Sample of (fourth) grade preparatory male students from Al-Qabas Preparatory School for Boys in Tikrit have been randomly selected, and divided into two equal groups: the experimental group and the control group each one (30) students.
2. Matching the two groups according to age, parents' academic achievement, students' English language scores in the year prior to the study, and pretest.
3. Constructing a pre-post achievement test.
4. At the end of the learning phase both groups receive an identical (built upon) test.
5. Determining how valid, reliable, difficult these tests are.
6. Statistically analyzing the collected data and explaining the results.
7. Discussing results, drawing conclusions, and proposing recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

1.6 Definition of the basic terms

1.6.1 Flexible Learning Strategies

Learning on demand is a description of instructional practices providing learners with opportunities for decision making space in terms of timing, location, modality, activity and assessment related to their learning; practice allowing them to customize how they engage with that learning (Dziuban et al., 2021)

The operational definition used in this research simply refers to classroom speaking activities learners are exposed to, which can comprise different formats and tasks catering to their learning styles for practicing English.

1.6.2 Speaking Performance

When it comes to performance in speaking, it is the ability of learners to communicate orally in a second/foreign with confidence (with mental fluency, proper pronunciation and appropriate vocabulary) (Harmer, 2018).

Operationally, speaking performance in this study is simply measured and operationalized based on a speaking test that assesses fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary and self-confidence.

1.6.3 EFL Students

English as a Foreign Language Students who learn English in an environment where speakers of English are non-native and not using the language on daily basis (Richards, 2015).



Operationally: in the current work, male Iraqi Fourth Grade preparatory school students studying at Al-Qabas Preparatory School for Boys during 2024–2025.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Flexible Learning

According to Shurville et al. (2021) flexible Learning is a menu or grab bag of educational philosophies, policy initiatives, and delivery methods encompassing all modes of education provision and usage, if necessary in combination (Rumble 1997:4), which give the learners choice over what to learn, when to learn it; how fast; where; and from whom. In particular, flexible learning gives students option with respect to the where, when and how of Learning" Flexible learning strategies are often developed using a wide range of educational theory, philosophy and practice so as to provide students with opportunities to access information (and expertise), exchange ideas and views, and converse with other learners or tutors. This can be done through online tools (Virtual Learning Environments or Learning Management Systems), discussion boards, chat rooms and a blended approach where content may be electronically available which e.g. went about at a remote setting (Joan, 2013:39).

Collis and Moonen (2001) state that an institution providing flexible learning offers "more image leeway and trajectory in the flexibility of its programs as well as on the dynamics of the content to be learned". As with the flexibility of delivery models of provision of higher education, so too should an academic entry requirement not apply. Flexible learning is aimed at hybrid modes of delivery and, in general, uses it.

2.1.1 Components of Flexible Learning

Flexibility has four components in education: institution, implementation pedagogy technology (Collis & Moonen 2001, p. 27). Technology is however the driving force of flexible learning. The worldwide standard demand of flexible and inclusive learning is enabled by e-learning (including online learning). Information and communication technologies as the primary delivery agent in flexible learning programs Therelevance of technology to flexible delivery Palaskas and Muldoon (2003) Examples of educational technologies used to facilitate and support flexible learning include the Internet (Web, e-mail, chat rooms), mailing lists, teleconferencing, videoconferencing and computer simulations and teaching software.

Pedagogy: The second component of Collis and Moonen's (2001) definition of flexible learning is the teaching and learning processes of the teacher, as well as the context in which the design and implement of the programme. Learner Categories through Online Tools: Coursework, Lecture(s)/Contact sessions, Self-Directed



Study/Assignment(s), Major Assignment(s)/(exam). Other common flexible learning implementation strategies are mentored learning for support. Internet by allowing flexible delivery of course content and resources from anywhere creates accessibility with freedom, but also puts some responsibility on students as well.

Flexible learning consists of three parts, and implementation approaches is the third part. Collis & Moonen (2001) state that to increase the likelihood for the implementation process to proceed successfully, steps taken throughout this should be educationally effective, program mediated and easy to implement in favourable environmental conditions and private involvement. They say that the effectiveness of flexible learning providers comes down to the strength of an integrated, cross functional team all united in pursuit of a common goal. Area of organisation / provider is the institution where the programs are delivered. Institutions provide the infrastructure and support staff, while educators are connected to training, education and (professional learning) opportunities that help them gain a new perspective or learn how to teach differently. Infrastructure is also understood as: The availability of resources to the teacher during instruction (Collis&Moonen, 2001, p.27).

2.1.2 Flexible Learning Strategies

Flexible learning strategies are the way in which students take control of their own learning, using a variability of metacognitive, cognitive, resource management and practical strategies to achieve a change in learning outcomes. Healey (2019): Online learning is changing, led by the students discovering a greater flexibility of learning just fits to their lifestyles. And for students, succeeding in virtual courses also means brushing up on old skills and adjusting to new (learning management) systems.

So, some of the ways that students can adopt learning strategies. Depending on the occasion and learning goals, these learning strategies can be opted for by students. As a result of that, some researchers have categorized types of learning styles that could be utilized by students as supporting their learning. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) identify three types of learning strategies. They are metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategy. O'Malley elaborated on the significance of each tactic.

1. Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive strategies as defined by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) comprise of: self-monitoring, self-plan, self-signmaning directed attention and organization planning. Self-monitoring. It is a task of rectifying comprehension and fluency. For example, when performing in front of the class, they ask fellow students to correct pronunciation. Self-management. The individuals' choice of controlling



performance that allows students to successfully complete the clearing task. The students try to manage their own data by studying in class or out of class, for example.

2. Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive Strategies: Repetition. They are effort which help students to mimic another person speech into Practices by themselves. For example, the students repeat their pronunciation again and again until they can do it perfectly. Resourcing. That was an approach of learning, where students may learn the target language through reference that they might pull knowledge from such as internet, textbook, encyclopedia and dictionaries. For example, students try to discover words using a dictionary. Grouping. The students refer to these more accurately as the organization of word, concept and term around material meaning related language tasks. For example, learners try to deduce meaning from words in context and organize them into one overall sense and then memorize it. Translation. Students learn the first language with which to process a target language independently. In other words when someone is speaking up front of the class, students try and convert the sentences. Inferencing. The students would try to guess the meaning of words and sentences related to the language tasks they performed. For example, by students contemplating the meaning of new words to reveal the answer. Deduction. The students try to understand the rules of their target language. For instance the students explore and identify a pattern to fix sentences. Summarizing. The summaries the students write that provides information about the materials in their own words. Students wrote the key points of the last lecture as it is. Elaboration. The strategy stated that the students connect the material with their experience. Barkaoui (2020) compared the two ontological forms of beliefs that students search for more information as well as try to integrate the information into memory by conceptualizing it in saying that "students search for more information and attempt to integrate the material, re-elaborate on the concept in their memory' (p.30).

3. Socio-Affective Strategies

O Malley and Chamot (1990) regarded the strategy of questioning for clarification and cooperation with others as sociolinguistic strategy. Questioning for clarification. This method helps students ask for verification and modify requests. For example, the students asked that their friends should correct them rather than getting it wrong on stage. Cooperation. This is one of the collaborative learning techniques that involve working with friends as collaboration in problem-solving learning process. As an example, a pair of groups see the students talk over a problem with friends.



Resource management strategy: agreement on the definition or understanding the resource management strategy (Mjaku, 2020) as a plan or action intended to achieve objectives and desired outcomes with a purpose and vision by students. It's every choice we make about what to do next, how to spend our resources, where to deploy our assets and where we want to steer our ship as the conditions change--and its all done with one goal in mind: sustaining success over the long term. Management plans comprises situation analysis, goal setting, planning, execution and monitoring & evaluation. Management strategy as the important and practical tool for achievement of success of students is proving adaptability of students in this new environmental conditions. Strategize and take proper action to use their optimum resources and reach places in the long run.

2.2 Speaking Performance

speaking performance, the sending of messages from speaker to listener in words and utterances and sentences. They will unconsciously exhibit their good or bad ability in their Speaking. According to the reasons above Husnawati (2017) said that speaking is very essential because we could understand easily what someone explained. Other characteristic attributes of FBI are: spoken language so that his students are required to reason orally at a high level; also, ST offers classes for several years and will participate in various performances linked to oral competence in higher education. Thus, should be prepared an oral work organization, conceptualization, explication and simplification of their emotions, feelings and thoughts for others.

In addition, Nirmawati (2015) explained that the speaking is verbal expression of thought or ideas, beliefs and feeling in oral / talk. Speaking, goes to what they are wanting and you to understand whatever the hell it is that the person speaking with them knows. The productive skill of the oral communication as your speaking, which can be simply involved with vocalizing language and pronunciation of words to facilitate the passing of information between players. Most importantly both of them similar to speak and listen of each Speech is a subject taught at the level in formal education that [engage] state intention information disseminates and acquire their audience [hear] through reaching knowledge. Teaching for sure is a significant factor regarding discovering, thus even in the most abstract kind of thinking; teaching approaches are less closely related to actual learning than oral mirror recognition of English Learners so that their English level can develop since it occurs up-to-the-minute 2023 and ascertain things comprehensively as this is the natural way through which people may think.

Arbeit (academic study), may also imply providing reports or opinions on certain topics” (Nation & Newton 2009). Dannels (2001:2) states that academic and



educational speaking 'involves the student giving a speech and leading a discussion.' The topics and subjects invoke an academic approach to the conversation.

Al-Eiadeh et al. (2016, p.181) stated that the majority of students face different problems while speaking English such as miss-communication and hesitation, as they did not practice for speaking sessions properly on school level. They have no idea how to practice it, or use it in speaking. Second, students have a limited vocabulary. Teacher and students do not mostly speak English since there are large classes in Vietnam. Instead, they only focus on reading and grammar.

2.3 Flexible Learning Strategies and Students' Speaking Performance

The last decade saw pedagogy changing. The current educational model focuses on competencies for life-long learning, accountability and the changing nature of organizations. Then global academic organizations will have to reinvent the way work is conducted and negotiate with new-formed and growing markets. Flexible learning delivery options are also ideally expected to be effective, cost-effective and time-efficient mechanisms of developing and delivering higher degree programs in the domains of both a provider and the marketplace (Chae, 2001,p.12).

Due to the development of technology like internet, provision in education has also changed throughout the globe as Kauffman (2015, p.13) stated. It is a great, very powerful way to learning and that makes absolute sense with the needs of society. Therefore, there are some advantages of online learning that traditional learning does not provide. Features of an online education Convenience and flexibility in free time as well as in location for individuals who want or need to work, return to school, and stay at home with their children. Another reason for this is that online students can be motivated (or constructed) by self-presentation and self-regulation (Kauffman, 2015, p.13).

As far as communicative skill or speaking skill is considered, it has virtual importance through human life and that the reason successful conversational usually provides something valuable for both learner peoples and corporate firms. However, there are few places outside of a mainstream English course for them to practice, so learners are terrified of speaking English and scared to approach non-native speakers. Hence, students are used to speaking more in many different forms like using flexible learning tools. Students can use internet media to improve their chances of speaking and better English, they will learn speaking through online media like YouTube videos, BBC News, Duolingo, ELSA, dictionary on the Internet etc. All tools are free web-based learning and need students' access to Internet connection to use software. Or a student learn English comes free flexible learning How to Practice in other words, for students the activities also assists them to be more productive and expressing an initiative (Boonkit, 2010, p. 1305).



Oral Language Writing Speech: Spoken language used to convey messages and ideas. The spread of English as a language requires for skill to acquire communicative competences in several, distinctly idiosyncratic areas of life. Speaking is not easy in EFL: native-speakers from lingua-angelica environments (by way of example Foreign Language (EFL)) select a plan for producing EFL learners speaking. In order to stimulate themselves speaking English reflex, it is necessary to communicate a lot with foreigners in the way of communicative or by using social network service directly or indirectly.

2.4 Related Previous Studies

Many earlier researches have explored the influence of innovative and receptive teaching techniques on EFL students speaking performance and communicative competence. These studies highlighted the significant role that learner-centered approaches, interactive activities, and technology-enhanced learning environments played in enhancing students' oral communication skills.

Ahmed (2021) conducted a study in Iraq based on collaborative learning strategies to see the impact on preparatory school students speaking skills. The study used an experimental design composed of two groups, an experimental group (coolstages) who were taught through collaborative activities and a control group (no instructional activity). Results indicated that the experimental group performed significantly better in fluency, pronunciation and confidence to speak English. The researcher discussed and concluded in favour of the positive role of interactive learning environments to facilitate the speaking skills of EFL learners.

Likewise, Mohammed and Hassan (2022) investigated the effect of blended learning on Iraqi EFL secondary school students' oral communication skills. The sample consisted of 60 students who were divided into experimental group and control group. Researchers incorporated digital tools, class discussions, and online speaking activities into the instructional program. The results showed that students who were trained using flexible and technological-assisted learning strategies had a better speaking achievement and classroom participation than students taught with conventional methods.

Also based in China, Zhang (2023) investigated the mechanism of flexible learning environments on EFL learners' speaking performance. It indicated that providing a variety of instructional methods, allowing learners to take control over their own learning and utilizing communicative activities all contributed to improved oracy as well as feelings of speaking anxiety. "The researcher stressed that not only flexible learning allows learners to communicate meaningfully and express themselves fully.

Moreover, Derakhshan et al. (2021) examined the relationship between learner engagement and communicative performance in EFL classroom findings of this



study revealed that learners reflected on participation, collaborative interaction and student-centered teaching strategies positively influenced perceptions of competence. The researchers called for the incorporation of flexible learning approaches in the language classrooms and making them supportive and motivating to learn.

Another related research conducted by Al-Rubaie (2020) in Iraq to investigate the impact of role-play and discussion-based strategies on Iraqi preparatory students pairs' speaking abilities. The findings indicated that students engaged in communicative and flexible activities to whom the element of traditional teacher-centered instruction was absent, scored better than their counterparts in vocabulary use, pronunciation, and fluency.

The aforementioned studies indicate that flexible learning approaches and communicative teaching methods are important contributors to improve EFL learners' performance in speaking ability. More research, however, has been done on flexible learning strategies and their effect on speaking performance in Iraqi preparatory school students. Accordingly, the current study aims to bridge this gap by examining how flexible learning techniques are effective in enhancing speaking skills among Iraqi EFL preparatory students.

3.Methodology

3.1 1. Research Design

A design for an experiment as described by Creswell (2012) is where researchers do quantitative research, or test a idea (or practice or procedure) manipulating one variable and determine the effect on another variable known as the dependent variable. This study is a (two equivalent groups post test only) experimental design So, two different classes of the same sixth preparatory school are sample that they find by this study. The investigator examined the outcomes of the test for all dependent variables between groups 1 and 2, noting that there are no notable differences.

*Table (3.1)
The Experimental Design of the Study*

Groups	Independent Variable	Pretest	Dependent Variable	Posttest
EG.	flexible Learning	Pretest	Speaking Performance	Posttest
CG.	Conventional Method	Pretest	Speaking performance	Posttest



3.2 The Population and the Sample of the Study

As described by Alvi (2016) a population is the totality of subjects who share some salient characteristic for participation in a study. The study population is second-grade EFL preparatory students from Al-Qabas Preparatory School for Boys.

The sample is considered in (Bluman, 2012) as a collection of people exhibiting the characteristic of interest for the population. The study population is represented as Iraqi EFL fourth-grade preparatory school students of General Directorate of Education for 2024–2025. This study utilized a purposive sample from this population to ensure that the flexible learning strategies could be implemented in the context of a regular classroom.

The study sample consisted of 60 male students at Al-Qabas Preparatory School for Boys, during the year 2024-2025. This study involved 60 students who were divided into two groups , (1) an experimental group of 30 students taught using flexible learning instruction, and (2) a control group of 30 comparison students taught with traditional methods. Both interventions had similar content of instruction, duration (number of sessions), and length of instructional time except for the method (approach) used to deliver each intervention.

The application of this sampling method was to determine if using flexible learning strategies has any difference effect on speaking performance of students in Iraqi EFL preparatory school.

3.3 The Instrument of the Study

A speaking performance test was designed and administrated as the first instrument to collect related variables measurement of the current study. It was created to assess the students on oral communication in terms of pronunciation, fluency, use of vocabulary and confidence. This stage contained tasks with restricted speaking exercises (e.g. picture description, controlled questions and subtle small-talk represents related to a course topic). The experiment was administered to experimental and control group in two times, the pretest to investigate speaking performance before instruction and posttest in order to investigate their speaking performance after treatment.

We developed a scoring rubric to assign a grade to the performance of the students without bias. Scoring rubric: Fluency Pronunciation Vocabulary Confidence Scale marks – (out of 5) (total out of 20) To establish the validity of the instrument, a panel of experts in TEFL and applied linguistics examined the test and scoring rubric who testified to its appropriateness, readability for all items. Tests for construct validity established by administering this test to a pilot group and testing the inter-rater reliability of scores among 2 independent raters indicated fair agreement of scores for the measure in its ability to assess speaking performance within this study population.



3.4 Validity of the Instrument

Panel of TEFL and applied linguistics experts was presented with the tasks of the speaking performance test along with its scoring rubric for validity. Jury members assessed items for clarity, the appropriateness of speaking tasks based on students' language level, and the appropriateness of scoring rubric criteria. Only slight modifications concerning the wording of instructions and test items, complexity levels of tasks and scoring descriptors were made to maximize clarity and linguistic equivalence based on their suggestions. The external reviewers suggested the instrument should be "fit-for-purpose" in terms of the target participants given that there is a measure of what it aims to examine (content validity).

3.5 Reliability of the Instrument

The test was then performed on the pilot sample to ensure that it could be conducted reliably and represented a similar group as that in the study sample. Inter-rater reliability was calculated between the 2 raters scores on students' oral performance using the same scoring rubric. The scores given by two raters were compared and found to have a high correlation value having Pearson's correlation coefficient assigned, indicating good consistency between these two ratings. It was, then, designed with an intention of good faith speaking test performance to be valid in actual use.

3.6 Instructional Materials

The fourth-stage textbook, English for Iraq was used to teach both groups. The instructional period covered four units for both the experimental and control groups in normal classroom instruction.

In the control group, teaching was performed by routine method which is the traditional teaching whereas in experimental group it was taught Process using Flexible Learning Strategies to improve students' speaking performance. The strategies consisted of interactive speaking activities, small group discussion, role-play, pair work and tech-infused tasks that fanned the flames of learners engagement and communication.

An experiment in 3D has been carried out in first semester of academic year 2024–2025. The instructional program was conducted over a period of six weeks. According to the official school timetable, both groups of students had their lessons on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

3.7 Lesson Plans

3.7.1 Lesson Plan for the Experimental Group

Level: fourth Preparatory Students



Class duration: 45 minutes

Class size: 30 students

Lesson Title: The Impact of Flexible Learning Strategies on Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students Speaking Performance

Teaching Technique: Collaborative Learning (Think-Pair-Share + Round Robin)

Objectives:

Express their opinions fluently on social topics.

Cooperate effectively in small groups to build spoken responses.

Reduce anxiety and increase confidence while speaking English.

Materials:

Flashcards with discussion prompts

Whiteboard

Audio recorder (optional)

Worksheets for pair/group work

Procedures:

Stage	Time	Teacher's Role	Students' Role
Warm-up	5 min	Greet students and show a short image about speaking activities. Ask simple questions related to communication and speaking performance.	Answer briefly, relax, and get ready for discussion.
Pre-speaking (Think)	10 min	Present some useful expressions (e.g., In my opinion, I believe that...).	Take notes and practice the expressions individually.
While-speaking (Pair-Share)	15 min	Divide the class into pairs, then groups of four. Give each group a discussion topic related to speaking performance.	Discuss ideas collaboratively, share thoughts, and prepare short group responses.



Round Robin (Group Presentation)	10 min	Ask each group to present their ideas briefly. Encourage participation and equal turn-taking.	Present opinions, listen to peers, and provide feedback.
Reflection / Feedback	5 min	Provide oral feedback and highlight positive communication.	Reflect on performance and share feelings about anxiety and confidence.

Assessment:

Oral performance checklist (fluency, participation, cooperation).

Self-reflection short note on how anxious or confident they felt during the activity.

3.7.2 Lesson Plan for the Control Group (Traditional Method)

Level: Fourth Preparatory Students

Class duration: 45 minutes

Lesson Title: The Impact of Flexible Learning Strategies on Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students Speaking Performance

Teaching Technique: Traditional Teacher-Centered Instruction

Objectives:

Express opinions on familiar topics using simple structures.

Participate in teacher-led discussions.

Materials:

Textbook

Whiteboard

Handouts with short dialogues

Procedures:

Stage	Time	Teacher's Role	Students' Role
Warm-up	5 min	Ask students simple questions about speaking and communication.	Answer individually when called.
Presentation	10 min	Explain expressions for giving opinions; write examples on board.	Copy notes and listen.



Practice	15 min	Ask students to repeat sample sentences and read aloud from textbook.	Repeat after teacher, limited interaction.
Production	10 min	Ask 2–3 students to say their opinions orally.	Respond one by one; minimal interaction.
Feedback	5 min	Correct mistakes and summarize lesson.	Listen and take notes.

Assessment:

Oral participation score.
Teacher observation checklist.

4. Results, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Suggestions

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the statistical analysis and interpretation of the results obtained from the pre-test and post-test conducted to investigate the impact of flexible learning strategies on Iraqi EFL preparatory school students’ speaking performance.

4.2 Results Related to the First Hypothesis

First Hypothesis:
There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the pre-test of speaking performance. To verify this hypothesis, the researcher used the t-test for two independent samples.

Table (4.1)

Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and t-value of the Experimental and Control Groups in the Pre-test

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Calculated t-value	Tabulated t-value	Significance
Experimental	30	61.40	6.12	0.41	2.00	Not Significant
Control	30	60.73	5.88			

The calculated t-value (0.41) is lower than the tabulated t-value (2.00) at the level of significance (0.05). Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test. This indicates that the two groups were equivalent before conducting the experiment.



4.3 Results Related to the Second Hypothesis

Second Hypothesis:

There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the post-test of speaking performance. The researcher used the t-test for two independent samples to test this hypothesis.

Table (4.2)

Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and t-value of the Experimental and Control Groups in the Post-test

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Calculated t-value	Tabulated t-value	Significance
Experimental	30	82.56	5.14	4.97	2.00	Significant
Control	30	70.18	6.03			

The calculated t-value (4.97) is higher than the tabulated t-value (2.00) at the significance level (0.05). This means that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post-test in favor of the experimental group. The result indicates that flexible learning strategies had a positive effect on improving students' speaking performance.

4.4 Results Related to the Third Hypothesis

Third Hypothesis:

There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-test and the post-test of speaking performance. The paired sample t-test was used to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group.

Table (4.3)

Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and t-value of the Experimental Group in the Pre-test and Post-test

Test	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Calculated t-value	Tabulated t-value	Significance
Pre-test	30	61.40	6.12	8.21	2.04	Significant
Post-test	30	82.56	5.14			

The calculated t-value (8.21) is higher than the tabulated t-value (2.04). Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group's pre-test and post-test scores in favor of the post-test. This finding confirms the effectiveness of flexible learning strategies in enhancing Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' speaking performance.



4.5 Discussion of the Results

The results showed that flexible learning strategies positively influenced students' speaking performance. Students in the experimental group became more active and confident during speaking activities. Collaborative learning activities and flexible speaking tasks provided students with opportunities to communicate freely and practice English in a supportive environment. Consequently, students improved their fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and confidence.

4.6 Conclusions

Flexible learning strategies positively affect Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' speaking performance.

Students taught through flexible learning strategies showed better fluency and confidence.

Flexible learning strategies increase classroom interaction and participation.

Traditional methods provide fewer opportunities for communication and speaking practice.

4.7 Recommendations

English teachers should apply flexible learning strategies in speaking classes.

Schools should encourage collaborative and student-centered learning activities.

Training programs should be provided for teachers to improve their teaching strategies.

Speaking activities should be integrated regularly in EFL classrooms.

4.8 Suggestions for Further Studies

Investigating the effect of flexible learning strategies on other language skills.

Conducting similar studies at different educational stages.

Studying the relationship between flexible learning strategies and students' motivation.

Examining the role of technology-assisted flexible learning in EFL education.

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