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Yousif Abdul Kareem Hameed Ibrahim

Ministry of Education – The General Directorate
of Education in Holy Karbala* Corresponding author: E-mail :
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Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students' Conversational Skills and Speaking Performance: A Correlational Study

A B S T R A C T

One of the primary goals of learning English is to facilitate communication, which involves exchanging ideas, feelings, and information as well as expressing opinions and negotiating subjects in productive dialogues. Interactive communication which relies heavily on conversation, and masters both verbal and nonverbal communication skills is a key component of language instruction. One of the most important language acquisition skills is speaking, the foundation of dynamic communication. Most people use it to determine if someone can get a FL or an L2. Since learning an L2 or a FL necessitates oral communication that involves both speaking and listening, most students find it difficult to acquire speaking abilities. Accordingly, the present study aims at finding out conversational skills among Iraqi EFL preparatory school students, their speaking performance level, and the relationship between conversational skills and speaking performance. 120 male students from Iraqi EFL preparatory schools (fifth grade) in Karbala Governorate were chosen at random. This paper uses two instruments: a speaking test and a conversational skills test. Data were gathered after confirming validity and reliability and analyzed using statistical methods. Findings show a moderate level of conversational skills and speaking performance, and a direct relationship between them.

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مهارات المحادثة وأداء التكلم لدى طلبة الدراسة الإعدادية العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة

أجنبية: دراسة ارتباطية

يوسف عبد الكريم حميد إبراهيم/ وزارة التربية – مديرية تربية كربلاء المقدسة

الخلاصة:

يُعَدّ تسهيل التواصل أحد الأهداف الرئيسة لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، إذ يتضمن ذلك تبادل الأفكار والمشاعر والمعلومات، فضلاً عن التعبير عن الآراء ومناقشة الموضوعات ضمن حوارات تفاعلية مثمرة. يعتمد

التواصل التفاعلي بشكل كبير على المحادثة، ويُعد إتقان مهارات التواصل اللفظي وغير اللفظي عنصراً أساسياً في تعليم اللغة. كما تُعد مهارة التحدث من أهم مهارات اكتساب اللغة، إذ تمثل الأساس للتواصل الديناميكي. ويعتمد معظم الناس على هذه المهارة للحكم على قدرة الفرد في تعلم لغة أجنبية أو لغة ثانية. ونظراً لأن تعلم اللغة الثانية أو الأجنبية يتطلب تواصلًا شفهيًا يشمل التحدث والاستماع معاً، فإن معظم الطلبة يواجهون صعوبة في اكتساب مهارة التحدث. وبناءً على ذلك، تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التعرف على مهارات المحادثة لدى طلبة المرحلة الإعدادية (الصف الخامس) من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق، ومستوى أدائهم الكلامي، والعلاقة بين مهارات المحادثة والأداء الكلامي لديهم. وقد تم اختيار عينة عشوائية مكونة من (١٢٠) طالباً من مدارس المرحلة الإعدادية في محافظة كربلاء. واستخدم الباحث أداتين: اختباراً للتحدث واختباراً لمهارات المحادثة. وقد جُمعت البيانات بعد التحقق من صدق الأداتين وثباتهما، ثم تم تحليلها باستخدام أساليب إحصائية متنوعة. وأظهرت النتائج أن مستوى مهارات المحادثة والأداء الكلامي لدى الطلبة كان متوسطاً، كما وُجدت علاقة طردية بينهما.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تواصل، مهارات، الأداء الكلامي، دراسة ارتباطية.

1. Introduction

1.1 The problem and its significance

The following topic is the focus of this study: Does the speaking performance of Iraqi EFL preparatory school students correlate with their conversational skills? Based on the aforementioned issue statement, the current study attempts to determine the link between the CSs and SP of Iraqi EFL preparatory school students. Some students may find it challenging to speak English as a foreign language. The qualities of CSs are inaccessible to students who have a bad attitude toward learning.

Assuming that such factors are interrelated in the human brain, students who activate such attitudes would have greater language accomplishment if they were accompanied by CSs, enabling them to take advantage of educational chance, (Bagheri & Andi, 2015). A learner's use of computer-aided simulations (CSs) can be automated, but some students are not aware of the advantages of using them for practice and instruction, (Cottrell, 1999). Thus, the main goal of

CSs is to increase learners' understanding of them and provide them with systematic practice, reinforcement, and the ability to self-monitor how they employ CSs when participating in language learning activities (Cohen, 2009).

One of the four fundamental skills of every language is speaking, which is particularly important while learning a language for the first time. Speaking is an essential skill in the setting of EFL. It is crucial to the process of communication. This is because the primary component of language acquisition is processing the information that is received as input (Gilakjani , 2012).

Additionally, students' SP continues to be a major challenge. Some of these are mostly related to the fact that most students have trouble with SP because the speaker's speaking tempo causes them to lose focus on what is being stated. Because of their limited vocabulary, inability to focus on the person they are speaking to, inability to understand spoken instructions, and lack of motivation to learn, thus, unable to understand numerous speech components and lack of exposure to the language (Ummah, 2016).

1.2 Aims

Finding out the affective-learning strategies of Iraqi EFL Preparatory School students and how they relate to speaking performance, is the aim of this study.

1.3 Limits

This study is confined to Iraqi EFL preparatory school students (fifth grade) for the academic year 2023-2024.

1.4 Definitions of the Basic Terms

1.4.1 Conversational Skills

Conversational skills are the level of interpersonal competency and the necessary communication abilities that an individual may exhibit in a wide range of contexts. To attain this competency, one must be able to demonstrate a variety of interactional abilities (Spitzberg & Adam, 1995). Furthermore, they speak of conversation-specific abilities that facilitate casual communication and continuous, participatory, and intellectually stimulating dialogue (Nolasco & Arthur, 2003).

As an operational definition, Wehmeyer (2007) defines CSs as "responding to a conversation partner's question or statement with relevant statement or answer, initiating conversation at appropriate times, taking turns appropriately, and showing continued interest in a conversation by employing brief speech acknowledgers (e.g. "yes, I see" or "right")".

1.4.2 Speaking Performance

"A system that enables a speaker to express himself/herself effectively during oral conversation with his/her interlocutors in a target language" is what Cheng (2007) defines as speaking performance.

As an operational definition, SP refers to "the learners' efficiency at communicating with others using the target language effectively and this speech must consist of correct, appropriate and understandable interaction, vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency" (Andryani, (2012).

2. Theoretical background

2.1 The concept conversation skills

2.1.1 Nature of Conversation: Definition & Theory

In the ancient French language, "conversation" refers to the way one conducts oneself in the world. It might take place between two or more people

to share news and information, as well as to convey sentiments and opinions. In other words, social cultures are formed via dialogue, and individuals are motivated to accomplish common objectives (Brown, 2019).

Furthermore, conversation has been shown to be crucial in forming relationships, social values, and human affairs through its use in other media like the press and advertisements (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). In a simplified form, Blanchot (2003) describes it as a speech in which two persons alternately talk and have a cohesive discourse with sequences that are broken up with functional pauses as the dialog shifts from one interlocutor to the other.

According to Ranjesh (2020), having conversations is one of the most common human activities that people do on a daily basis and that allows them to encounter a range of life situations. Additionally, it is a social connection that encompasses all individuals, cultures, ages, and ethnic origins rather than being limited to a certain social group. As a result, it has drawn interest from academics and theorists attempting to examine "talk" from their field viewpoint, including those in linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and psychology.

From a philosophical perspective, it is essential to a theory of mind because, as the philosopher Wittgenstein disclosed, "Talk and thought develop together" and conversation is a uniquely human accomplishment. In other words, by emphasizing discourse in a social setting, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis—which holds that language may affect mind and that culture can influence mental processes through language—gains fresh insights (Turnbull, 2003).

Because language is used as a tool for communication and information transfer among people, the code model of communication was developed. It sees communication as a form of information transfer in which the sender encodes the message they wish to convey, sends it via a channel to the recipient, who decodes it (Reboul, 2017).

2.1.2 Sequences and Structures of Conversations

The following serves as an example of the order and format of a conversation:

- 1) **Openings and Closings in Conversations:** Even while talking about the same subject, no two people ever have the same discussion twice. However, there are some fundamentals or aspects of communication that are quite similar, or the same, including conversation openers and closings (Kiss, 2004).

There are starts, finishes, and transitions in every discourse. Openings are typically simple in nature, as seen by the example below:

A: Hi, how are you?

B: Fine thanks, and you?

A: Okay. I am just going for lunch. Are you joining me?

- 2) **Adjacency Pairs:** The term "nextness" (Nordquist, 2020) refers to a two-part interaction in which the second utterance is functionally dependent on the first. The following characteristics define them:

- It is composed of two turns.
- It is by two different speakers.
- It is adjacently places, which means one after the other - The two turns are relatively ordered.

- It comprises a first pair of utterances that initiate an exchange, such as questions, offers, invitations, etc., and a second pair of utterances that respond to previous turns, such as answers, grants, rejects, accepts, declines, etc. (Schegloff, 2007), as in the example below:

- ❖ (Hello, Hi) (greeting- greeting)
- ❖ (Do you know what time it is?, Four o'clock) (question- answer)
- ❖ (Would you like a cup of tea?, No, thanks) (offer, accept/decline)

3) Turn- Taking: According to Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's (1974) analysis of the turn-taking model, speaker-change happens throughout a discussion because one person does not talk continuously; instead, one-person pauses and another starts. Furthermore, one speaker speaks at a time; however, it is rare but brief for many speakers to speak simultaneously (Fetzer, 2004).

4) Repair: "A set of practices whereby a co-intercalant interrupts the ongoing course of action to attend to possible trouble in speaking, hearing, or understanding the talk" is how Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks initially presented the idea of repair. The person who caused the difficulty can launch "Self-initiated repair", for instance, by stopping and reformulating what they just said, such as "really, what I meant was...", or it can be initiated by someone else asking the speaker to repeat "sorry? Have another look?" (Mautner, 2016).

5) Feedback (Backchannels): Backchannels are characteristics or signals that help the speakers take the floor or start a turn. They can be employed by body language and eye contact, or by using response cues like "mm," "yeah," "hm," and "uh huh" to paraphrase what the other person has just said. Notably, they are regarded as a cooperative interactional technique that is urged by speakers and started by listeners (Kim & Williams, 2021).

2.1.3 Communication Process

Communication is critical to comprehend the factors that make it essential for day-to-day operations. Since the concept or message cannot be comprehended by itself, that is, in words, signs, or symbols, it can only be understood if the speakers convey it in a form that other people would understand, (Sen, 2009). Effective communication is therefore achieved through a variety of steps and components in the communication process, including source, message, encoding, channel and medium, decoding, receiver, feedback, and context (Bookboon, 2012).

- **The Source:** The sender serves as the communication's representative, and in order to be a good source, one must be clear about the message, know exactly what one wants to convey, and understand the desired outcomes.
- **The Message:** The information to be conveyed is the message. The sender must be able to summarize the message to be delivered in order to start the communication process, since there would be no purpose for the communication without it (Bookboon, 2012).
- **Receiver:** The receiver of a communication might be either a single person or a collection of people. The recipient must understand the words and nonverbal cues used in order for communication to occur (Fujishin, 2000).
- **Medium:** It is the physical methods of communication between individuals, such as body language and speech, as well as technological and electronic means, such as the telephone (Steinberg, 2007).
- **Encoding:** Once a message has been chosen, the source needs to encode or change the idea, thought, or feeling into both spoken and unspoken symbols that the recipient would probably comprehend. This technique

may be highly creative as the source can convert the idea or feeling into words and actions in an infinite number of ways (Fujishin, 2000).

- **Channel:** Technically speaking, it refers to the method of transmitting the encoded message (Jandt, 2007).
- **Decoding:** The act of providing meaning to the spoken and nonspoken words that others give you is known as decoding (Steinberg, 2007).
- **Feedback:** It results in dynamic, two-way communication and is the receiver's reaction to the message sent by the source. Feedback, both positive and negative, is necessary for effective communication (Chance & Chance, 2002).
- **Context:** According to Jandt (2007), it is the element of communication, which is the setting in which communication occurs.

2.1.4 Conversational Skills: Verbal and Non-Verbal

Conversation skills comprise a variety of verbal and non-verbal skills as illustrated thoroughly in the next sections.

2.1.4.1 Verbal Communication Skills

Verbal messages are thought of as the fundamental components that are produced, shared, and processed during interpersonal communication, (Fourie, 2006). The spoken communications consist of distinct, highly notational, logical elements as well as language data that has been digitally processed, (Eadie, 2009). It includes:

- 1) **Vocabulary and Grammar of Conversation:** According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), "The building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, function, notion, or some other unit of planning and teaching, but lexis, that is, words and words combinations". A spoken word is a sound or a combination of sounds that may stand alone as a

single unit of utterance, according to Moes & Shewan (1996), who also claim that words are the fundamental building blocks of language.

Vocabularies, or words, are regarded as the fundamental building block of language performance and are thought to be crucial for communication, especially during the early phases of learning. Therefore, learners will find it difficult to take advantage of language learning opportunities such as speaking to native speakers and using the language in a range of situations if they lack a large vocabulary and ways for acquiring it (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

To improve conversational skills, it is advised that students learn a "core grammar" which includes the following; basic conjunctions (so, and, but), the use of deictic devices (here/there, now/then, this/that, etc.), simple verb tenses (past and present), modal and semi-modal verbs (can, will, shall, have to, used to, etc.), the ability to formulate questions, and the use of discourse markers (Thornbury & Slade, 2006).

2) Lexical Phrases & Routines: Along with learning vocabulary, other things that should be taught include lexical phrases, routines, and fixed expressions. For example, "it rains cats and dogs" and "he doesn't beat about the bush" are examples of fixed expressions, while "out of the blue" is an example of a lexical phrase that is shorter and cannot be completed with just a subject to form a sentence. Conversely, routines are more or less conventional expressions such as "how do you do?" and "what is that?" but they are not idiomatic. Because they make it easier for language learners to participate in discourse, these more-than-one-word units are valued in casual conversation (Jordens & Lalleman, 1996).

2.1.4.2 Nonverbal Communication Skills

A conversation is supported by a variety of nonverbal cues that are learned from others and are not under the speakers' control. These include posture, body language, and voice characteristics. These cues are important because they convey emotions and feelings and can reinforce, regulate, emphasize, and even replace words (Barker, 2013). Thus, nonverbal communication encompasses all forms of communication that are not written or spoken, such as:

1) Body Language: According to Kuhnke (2016), the statement "without uttering a syllable, you can convey your thoughts, feelings, and intentions through your body language" means that although spoken words can convey information like facts and data, body language can also reveal information like attitudes, intentions, and general state.

- **Gesture:** From the top of their heads to their toes, humans have the unusual capacity to make a wide range of gestures and emotions that convey their intentions. Some of these gestures are universal and indicate certain characteristics of individuals, while others are specific to all people (Kuhnke, 2016).
- **Eye Contact:** Oculistics, the study of eye contact, is a branch of kinesics that includes the study of gaze, eye movement, eye behavior, and nonverbal communication connected to the eyes. People may easily establish rapport and trust by just staring at one another, which allows them to express their sentiments (Verma, 2015).
- **Facial Expressions:** In addition to the significance of the eyes, researchers have long been interested in the other facial expressions (which include their hair, foreheads, lips, chins, and skin condition)

because of their relevance in comprehending human behavior and communicating emotions, (Mandal & Awasth, 2015).

- **Posture:** Body posture, or posture, is another crucial element that reveals people's attitudes and feelings toward one another during a conversation. For instance, a person's posture may be tense or relaxed, or they may lean forward or back to demonstrate attention; leaning forward is an effective posture for active speaking, while leaning back indicates a desire to withdraw from the conversation (Fielding, 2006).

2) Paralanguage: David Crystal was the first to adopt the term paralinguistic, which was first used in the 1950s to describe a range of non-verbal aspects of communication that involve cues like pitch, loudness, and voice qualities (Ladd, 2014). Hence, paralanguage is more closely related to verbal communication than nonverbal communication; nonverbal communication can transmit signals without the use of language, but paralanguage is communication that always takes place concurrently with verbal communication (Noth, 1995).

1) Voice Quality: includes the following voice features:

- **Pitch:** Pitch is the vocal slant of the voice that conveys the speaker's mood; for instance, an excessively high pitch would convey irritation, whereas a monotonous or dull pitch would bore the listener and draw them in (Biyani, 2008).
- **Rate:** It describes the rate at which words are said and conveys attitudes and feelings (McKay et al., 2009). Every speaker has a unique speech rate, which often increases when they are scared, terrified, or thrilled and decreases when they are unsure or depressed (Fujishin, 2009).
- **Volume:** It refers to the typical relative loudness or softness of speakers' voices; some people speak forcefully, while others speak in a whisper-like tone. Given that culture may influence opinions about the proper

speaking volume, speakers can modify their volume based on the communication context (Griffin, 2018).

- **Rhythm:** It offers a hierarchical foundation on which stress is constructed, and intonation elements are linked to these rhythmic hierarchies' high points (Wennerstrom, 2001).
- **Word Stress:** suitable word Stress is seen to be essential to good communication; for instance, if you place stress on one word, then switch it to another, the sentence's meaning will shift (Devaraj & Antonysam, 2009):

Did you see my new pen?

Did you see my new pen?

- **Articulation and Pronunciation:** the vocal signals that reveal a lot about the speaker's social position, upbringing, and IQ (Reiman, 2007). In other words, communicating with confidence and clarity while pronouncing words correctly helps improve meaning transference (Jurin, 2010).

1) Vocalizations: Vocalizations are deliberate sounds that people use to describe emotions; they are not words. For instance, "uh" and "oh" indicate problems and "oh" would indicate surprise, while "Eee!" with furrowed brows indicates fear but with open eyes and wide lips indicates joy. Additionally, when 'Ahh' is followed by a head nod, it lets the speaker know that the audience has understood (Muckle & DeGonzalez, 2016).

According to Liu et al. (2019), vocalizations also include vocal traits including screaming, sighing, sobbing, laughing, swallowing, and clearing one's throat. Additionally, they use vocal qualifiers, which are variations in pitch or loudness that directly affect the message's content. For instance, they may raise

the voice's pitch at the end of a sentence to pose a question or increase the voice's volume to highlight a particular word (Remland, 2017).

2.1.5 Speaking Performance

As stated by Fielding (2006), speaking performance may be assessed in two ways; the bottom-up approach defines speaking as the development of sound related cues intended to evoke a range of linguistic emotions in a listener. According to the top-down view, speaking is a two-way process that involves the actual transfer of ideas, information, or feelings; in other words, spoken texts are the result of at least two interlocutors working together in a shared time and location. To speak the language naturally, EFL students need, nevertheless, acquire a certain degree of linguistic competence and maintain a continual awareness of its sociolinguistic features, considering the importance of speaking performance.

According to Bachman (1990), speaking consists of two fundamental parts: pragmatic and organizational. Organizational competence (e.g., discourse genres) encompasses both textual and grammatical competence (e.g., vocabulary, morphology, syntax).

2.1.5.1 Definition of Speaking

Speaking is defined as "the productive oral ability, which consists of making organized verbal utterances that, convey meaning" by Nunan (2003). According to Folse (2006), speaking is the most fundamental form of human communication, therefore for most people, being able to speak a language means comprehending it. Conversely, speaking in a second or foreign language-learning situation is often considered the most challenging of the four language abilities.

2.1.3.3. Speaking Skill

Speaking is an essential part of a learner's long-term development. Since spoken language is necessary for everything from informal conversation to formal public speaking, learners usually gauge their progress in language acquisition by how much they believe their spoken language performance has improved (Wilson, 2004).

2.1.3.4. The Importance of the Speaking Skill

For many EFL students, speaking English well is a top priority. They require this ability for a variety of reasons, such as making and keeping friends, engaging with others, and so on. When early perceptions of a speaker's level of language proficiency are formed, it is the skill that is used to evaluate them (Hedge, 2001). According to Lindsay and Knight (2006), We speak for a variety of reasons, such as being outgoing, wanting something, communicating our thoughts or feelings about something, sharing information, encouraging others to take action or reply to us, bringing up a past, present, or future action or event, the potential for something to occur. Additionally, "speaking is a skill which deserves attention every bit as much as the literary skills, in both native and foreign language," according to Bygate (2002).

2.1.3.5. Types of Speaking

The six speaking styles that Brown (2000) suggests are all crucial for enhancing the speaking skills of EFL students. Here are the specifics:

- ❖ **Imitative speaking:** Students must properly repeat words, phrases, and sentences while paying special attention to vowel sounds in order to engage in imitation speaking.
- ❖ **Intensive speaking:** The main goal of intensive speaking is to practice the phonological or grammatical components of the target language.

- ❖ **Responsive speaking:** Brief answers to questions or comments from the instructor and/or fellow students are referred to as responsive speaking. Students must, however, interact with one another in the classroom, whether it be through small chat, quick discussions, or just answering the teacher's questions. An illustration of responsive communication is as follows:
 - A: How was the lesson?
 - B: It was very easy.
- ❖ **Transactional dialogue:** A lengthy period of responsive speaking with the goal of conveying information through conversations and discussions led to the evolution of this speaking style.
- ❖ **Interpersonal dialogue:** Through social interaction and the use of idioms, slang, and colloquial language, it helps students improve their speaking skills.
- ❖ **Extensive monologue:** This style is more formal. It challenges students to describe events, summaries, and tales orally, preparing them for the advanced level.

2.1.3.6. Levels of Speaking Performance

According to Charles (1992), speaking ability may be divided into four levels, which are as follows:

- **Novice:** The beginner level is revealed by the ability to use previously taught words and phrases to communicate very little in highly predictable basic everyday circumstances.
- **Intermediate:** It is demonstrated by the ability to imaginatively blend dialect elements that have already been taught. The medium-level speaker has the ability to start, oversee, and wrap up crucial group activities.

- **Advanced:** The propelled level is defined by the capacity to communicate clearly and fluently in a participatory manner.
- **Superior:** The superior level is defined by the capacity to contribute effectively to the majority of formal and informal discussions on rational, social, expert, and theoretical themes.

2.1.3.7. The Components of Speaking Performance

In this research, the researcher uses five components of speaking skill based on (Brown, 2019)

- ❖ **Vocabulary:** One of the linguistic components is the collection of words that are used to form the language when speaking. Although vocabulary is crucial, it shouldn't be the first factor taken into account if speaking is occurring at a very young age.
- ❖ **Grammar:** Grammar is the foundation of both written and spoken language. To achieve a good grade, students must follow the principles of grammar, which are also found in syntax, morphology, and pronunciation. Sometimes, when it comes to speaking skill, neither the speaker nor the listener care about grammar.
- ❖ **Fluency:** it demonstrates that individuals can communicate effectively. A person can be considered fluent if they meet certain requirements, such as being able to pronounce words correctly and fluently.
- ❖ **Comprehension:** Both the speaker and the listener must understand each other well in order for the discussion to have a subject that can both start and respond to speech. However, the researcher will refer to the comprehensibility in this study.
- ❖ **Pronunciation:** According to Harmer (2015), pronunciation is the way we make a language sound, where we put stress, and how we employ intonation and pitch to convey our meaning and feelings. Therefore, it is

also crucial that students strengthen their pronunciation skills so that they can pronounce things clearly and easily so that others may comprehend them.

3. Methodology and Results

The study methodology, sample and demographic selection, and tools used are covered in this section. The statistical methods employed to evaluate the gathered data are also demonstrated and validated, as are the validity, reliability, and other psychometric qualities of the instruments.

3.1 Participants

120 fifth-grade preparatory school students from the Karbala Governorate who were selected at random during the academic year 2023–2024 comprise the study's sample.

3.2 Data Collection (Instruments)

The following tools were first tested and then used to look into the relationship between the two variables:

3.2.1 Conversational Skills Test and its Rating Scale

A variety of themes is chosen from several domains that are well known, and most representative of real-life situations. Participants are assessed verbally during an interview in which a range of speaking techniques are employed between interviewee B and interviewer A. It has 20 elements that were taken from Spitzberg and Adams (1994), and each one is worth five points, ranging from 1 (poor) to 5 (outstanding). A range of verbal and nonverbal communication activities are described in the items. Accordingly, the higher score that can be obtained by the participant is (100) and the lower score is (20), with a theoretical mean of (60).

3.2.2 Speaking Performance Test

A performance test evaluates a language learner's overall proficiency. It assesses general ability rather than a particular course, curriculum, or language proficiency (Brown, 2019). The researcher creates a speaking performance test that includes three distinct assessments. The first question asks about the student's daily schedule; the second asks them to select an application to discuss; and the third asks them to describe a particular image. Five components make up the final version of the speaking performance exam used in this study: grammar, vocabulary, understanding, fluency, and pronunciation.

3.3 Results

The findings of the study are obtained by looking at the students' responses to the SP test and the CSs questionnaire. The responses are chosen based on. CSs and SP had a correlation value of 0.740. A t-test was employed to determine the association's significance. At the significance level of 0.05 and with (358) degrees of freedom, the calculated t-value is (20.555), which is substantially greater than the critical rate of 1.96. According to this t-value, there is a direct correlation between CSs and SP.

4. Discussion of Results

Iraqi EFL preparation students employ effective social learning practices, according to this study. They thus employ their CSs in a manner that favorably raises participants' SP. The students expose a statistically significant degree of SP. Additionally, a statistical association between the students' CSs and SP is demonstrated by the data produced by the research tools. Additionally, the CSs of Iraqi EFL preparatory school students help to explain the variation in SP. Only Iraqi EFL (5th grade) preparatory school pupils from the Karbala

Governorate in Iraq during the 2023–2024 academic year are included in this study.

5. Conclusions

There is a strong relationship between students' conversational abilities and their speaking performance. This result indicates a direct and positive connection between the two variables. Self-directed learners are those who analyze, assess, and form opinions in various contexts; such students usually demonstrate strong speaking abilities and are able to fully understand what they have learned.

As a result, there is a direct correlation between conversational skills (CSs) and speaking performance (SP), meaning those students' speaking performance increases when their conversational skills improve and decreases when their conversational skills are weak.

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