

**AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENTS' MOTIVATION THROUGH ENGLISH
ORAL ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENT IN SAUDI ARABIAⁱ**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines students' motivation to learn English in Saudi Arabia schools. It explores the important role teachers should have in increasing their students' desire to learn. The paper reviews the current context of teaching English in Saudi schools and suggests several approaches and techniques to motivate students to learn as well as to lower their feelings of anxiety. These approaches consist of various communicative oral activities and alternative assessments which introduce students to real-life situations and give them feelings of comfort, self-confidence, and independence. The study concludes with some recommendations to maintain students' motivation while learning English in Saudi Arabia.*

KEYWORDS: student motivation; oral activities; EFL; ELT; communicative oral assessment; Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

Language learners' motivation has been a major issue of interest for educators all over the world and in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in particular. Teachers, curriculum writers, and administrators in Saudi high schools and universities face the challenge of students' inclination to do badly in language learning because of lack of motivation. Many English language instructors are very much able to utilize the best teaching methods in their classrooms, but they may lack specific directions, guidelines, and appropriate skills and training to motivate their students. They may also lack the logistical support from decision makers on how to deal with these students and where to send them for support.

Motivation is an important and essential element in the learning process (Brewer & Burgess, 2005). When learning a new language, the learner must have a desire and/or a need to learn in order to achieve or attain learning. Actually, when English language students are motivated during the language learning process, their acquisition and especially production of the language can improve tremendously and can be faster than others who are less motivated (Cook, 2000). In other words, learning occurs through

motivation and learning improves only when the person has a desire and motivation to do so (Ellis, 1994). Therefore, the importance of motivation as a factor in learning in general, and languages in particular, generally cannot be undermined.

Students' motivation has been an important part of research in the field of second language learning and teaching (Simmons & Page, 2010). A host of researchers from different fields, specialties, and nationalities have examined students' motivation and attitudes in different contexts: English as Second Language, English as a Foreign Language, and English as an Additional Language (Ahmed, et al., 2015; Alshenqeeti, 2018; Dailey, 2009; Elsheikh, et al, 2014; Koca, 2016; Kondal, 2015; Mahadi & Jafari, 2012; Springsteen, 2014; Ushioda, 2001).

The body of research on motivational educational approaches remains sparse. Several studies have examined the effectiveness of classroom motivational approaches. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) and Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) surveyed EFL teachers to rank motivational approaches in terms of their importance in motivating students. In their study, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) used several research instruments, such as questionnaires and classroom observations to examine the effect of motivational approaches of language teachers on their students' motivation. The study found a significant and strong link between teachers' motivational approaches and the students' classroom desire to study the language. The study by Moskovsky et al. (2013) provided strong evidence that utilizing motivational approaches in EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia led to positive changes in student's motivation. Finally, in his quantitative study, Alrabai (2014) investigated the beliefs of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia about their motivational practices as well as the beliefs of students about motivation in language classrooms. The study findings show that motivational techniques are not frequently utilized in English language classes in Saudi Arabia and that very important aspects of students' motivation like reducing learners' language anxiety and promoting their autonomy are frequently ignored in teacher's practices.

GENERAL STATE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SAUDI ARABIA

English was originally taught in middle and high schools at the time it was introduced in Saudi Arabia in the late 1950s (Al-Shammary, 1984; Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2017). Nowadays, English in Saudi Arabia is taught starting from grade four of elementary school until grade 12 in secondary school. At the university level, all students must take and pass a preparatory year for four quarters of English, and it is a requirement to be admitted to national universities and technical colleges. It is also a condition for finishing higher education in some specializations in Saudi higher institutions, such as engineering, medicine, and business administration where it is usually the medium of instruction (Troudi & Jendli, 2011). Because of the reliance on the native Arabic in most daily activities, English has been relegated to a foreign language, rarely used in society (Al-

Maini, 2006). Unlike the case of its neighbors in the Arabian Peninsula, the dominance of Arabic language in society has resulted in relatively fewer opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom (Al-Otaibi, 2004).

According to Rahman & Alhaisoni (2013) and Mitchell & Alfuraih (2017), the Saudi government has increasingly recognized the importance of English language by making it an obligatory subject in schools and universities and by initiating several reforms in the English language curriculum. However, the level of achievement in learning English is still below expectations. Most Saudi students are unable to communicate in English and have only basic reading and writing skills. Mitchell & Alfuraih (2017) indicate that there are two factors that have been identified to contribute to students' low abilities in English. First, even though teachers assign homework for their students, not all of their students complete the homework tasks. The second contributing factor is that students need more English classes. The majority of teachers surveyed in this study think that students should be exposed to learning English prior to the fourth grade. The study also found that teachers may lack competency in, and require professional development programs to upgrade, their teaching skills (p. 323). In fact, most teachers who completed the survey in this study think that they need more English proficiency classes and by implication the assessment and testing that come with the training (p. 324).

All these challenges contribute to the phenomenon of low degree of motivation to learn English by Saudi students, and it is therefore essential that language teachers are trained and instructed on how to integrate motivational approaches in their daily teaching practices (Alrabai, 2014).

As noted above, one of the motivating factors for students is their teachers' delivery methods and teaching approaches in the classroom. Some English language teachers, however, have been known to have preference for teaching reading and writing skills at the expense of speaking and listening skills in the English classroom. Moreover, there is undoubtedly a need for more emphasis on teaching and assessing of speaking and listening skills in elementary, preparatory, and secondary schools as well as universities. Most English curricula and local textbooks barely provide the grounds for encouraging and assessing oral communication competence. Even if these activities do exist in some textbooks, teachers and instructors still need support to implement them in the classroom. Thus, while some English language teachers might have the desire to utilize current communicative teaching and assessment approaches in their classrooms, including assessment of oral competence, they lack the proper training on how to do so. In this paper we attempt to look critically at one of the motivating factors in learning English which is effective teaching approaches and assessments of oral competencies in Saudi Arabia. We will survey some existing approaches to assessing English oral competencies and suggest alternative communicative practices to promote teaching and assessing oral competencies and to increase students' motivation to learn the language.

WORKING DEFINITIONS

Several key terms are discussed in this paper and therefore should be clarified from the onset: these terms are communicative competence, communicative language teaching, and communicative oral assessment.

Communicative competence

The term communicative competence (Canale, 1988; Bachman, 1990) is crucial to this study and therefore needs to be examined. This term has been used to describe the multi-faceted skills required for the effective use of language. Bachman and Palmer (1996) noted that effective language use requires both “organizational knowledge” (what is said) and “pragmatic knowledge” (how it is said). Not only must a speaker demonstrate lexical and structural language knowledge, but also effectively implement that knowledge in real time conversations (Venema, 2002). According to Ellis (1994), communicative competence is “the knowledge that users of a language have internalized to enable them to understand and produce messages in the language” (p. 696).

Several models of communicative competence have been proposed (Ellis, 1994). Hymes (1971), who invented the term ‘communicative competence’, emphasized social, interactive, and negotiating process of language. Hymes expanded Chomsky’s notion of grammatical competence (1965) into communicative competence by including both grammatical rules and rules of language use (Hymes, 1971; Taylor, 1983).

Canale and Swain (1980) proposed three distinct elements of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic. Grammatical competence includes one’s knowledge of lexical items, morphology, syntax, semantics, and phonology in a language. Sociolinguistic competence encompasses the knowledge of rules governing the production and interpretation of language in different sociolinguistic contexts. Lastly, strategic competence is defined as one’s capability to maintain communication using various verbal or nonverbal strategies when communication breakdown takes place. This model was updated by Canale (1983). He proposed a four-dimensional model of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence.

Bachman (1990) suggested a theoretical framework for communicative language ability. It includes knowledge structures, strategic competence, psychophysical mechanisms, context of situation, and language competence. Language competence is further divided into organizational competence (grammatical and textual competences) and pragmatic competence (illocutionary and sociolinguistic competences). Bachman (1990), in his discussion of ‘language competence’ takes a broader view of the role of strategic competence than Canale and Swain (1980) do. Bachman separates strategic competence from what he calls ‘language competence’.

Agreement on what components should be included in a model of communicative competence is never unanimous (Weir, 1993). In spite of many disputes by applied linguists (Lluda, 2000), these concepts of communicative competence outlined above could be useful in communication-oriented language proficiency assessment (Bachman and Palmer, 1984). However, “it must be emphasized that they are still themselves in need of validation” (Weir, 1990, quoted in Hyun, 2003).

Communicative language teaching

The communicative approach to language teaching has gained prominence and even dominance in the last twenty years. What is actually meant by ‘communicative ability’ has been a matter of academic interest and research. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) starts with a theory of language as communication. The classroom goal of instruction is focused on developing learners’ communicative competence. Thus, learners are encouraged to communicate with target language (English) through interaction from the beginning of instruction.

Broadly speaking communicative ability should include the following skills:

- Grammatical competence. How grammar rules are actually applied in written and oral real life language situations.
- Sociolinguistic competence. Knowing the rules of language use, ‘taking turns’ during conversation discourse or using appropriate language for a given situation.
- Strategic competence. Being able to use appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication strategies (Bynom, 2001).

In CLT, conveying meaning is most important. In order to encourage learners to communicate better, errors should be tolerated with little explicit instruction on language rules. Naturally, CLT favors small group activities by students to maximize the time each student has to interact and communicate with others. CLT employs information-gap activities, problem-solving tasks, and role-plays through pair and group work (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

Another feature of CLT is that it should be learner centered (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). According to Savignon (1991), every individual student possesses distinctive interests, learning styles, needs and goals. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers strive to develop materials based on students’ demonstrated needs and interests.

CLT also emphasizes the use of authentic materials in teaching language as much as possible (Widdowson, 1996). It also encourages giving students the opportunity to respond to genuine communicative needs in real-life situations. This is to help learners develop strategies for understanding language as actually used in its native environment (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hyun, 2003).

THE STUDY’S CONTEXT

The current situation of English language teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia’s public schools - with some variations - can be best illustrated by these points:

- English is taught in Saudi public schools as a passive subject, not an active one. There is little exposure to interaction in the English-language classroom. Students communicate orally in class only when the teacher asks questions about assigned textbook readings and when students do grammar tasks and answer questions at the teacher's request.
- Evaluation of oral communication proficiency is allocated a small percentage of the whole course grade. Most of the grade is allocated to the written paper exams. However, because there is no actual oral examination, teachers usually must find ways to give students these marks. Occasional participation in class, group activities and pair work are among the criteria used by some teachers for the evaluation of oral skills. In many instances, the oral grade has turned into a means to patch up or rescue a student's low grade in the written paper exams.
- All public-school students are taught the same material. Textbooks used in high-school classrooms are approved and placed by the ministry of education; teachers may use additional materials but usually have neither the time nor the opportunity nor the desire to introduce additional materials as they must complete the required and prescribed curriculum set in the textbook. English textbooks do not usually encourage oral interaction and do not include activities or exercises to practice or to test competence in oral skills.
- Material taught in secondary school English classes is not usually communicatively based; rather it is directed toward students' preparation for the midterm and final examinations, which principally test a student's general ability to memorize.
- Most classrooms in high-school are teacher-oriented and teacher-directed. Furthermore, classes are crowded (frequently 30 to 35 students in a classroom), which decreases the time for any student-teacher interaction. Moreover, students have little or no acceptance of, or responsibility for, their own learning.
- English teachers' preparation and training does not always emphasize communicative practices, but rather a more traditional approach. This approach recapitulates and reinforces the students' misconceptions and prejudices about learning English as a Foreign Language. However, there have been many attempts in the past few years to develop English teachers professionally in the area of communicative teaching approaches. These endeavors emerged in the form of workshops organized by national and regional conferences organized by KSAALT an affiliate organization of TESOL International, IATEFL and TESOL Arabia which is active in the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East, and North Africa, and thanks to professional development lectures and seminars secured through partnerships with local and national universities. The result of the combination of these factors in a typical Saudi public high school is that, when students finish high school:
 - Most students generally have low confidence in their own communicative ability.
 - Most students generally have low motivation to learn to speak English, and a high motivation to memorize English in a non-communicative form.

- Some students have little or no understanding of, or ability to reproduce, English sounds.
- When these students reproduce English sounds in their shy attempts to speak English, interference of their native language sounds, Arabic, is usually reflected strongly in their pronunciation, demonstrating lack of practice, and use, of the English language.
- Some students lack the ability to creatively express their own thoughts and opinions in English and are therefore at a disadvantage in the university.

Thus, high-school students receive considerable passive exposure to grammar, translation, vocabulary, and semantic information from written sources, but little exposure to communicative situations. The underlying theory of high school English learning is based on the premise that, by studying the structure of the written language, students will be able to produce the spoken language (or comprehend the spoken language) easily. This ignores basic language acquisition principles, that there needs to be a consciously constructed process of converting passive or static knowledge of English to active or dynamic communicative ability (Gilfert & Croker, 1999). Students complete high school with little communicative ability, little exposure to communicative strategies, and little knowledge of how to develop communicative ability. Years of traditional translation-based teaching also encourage learning preferences in the students which, though inefficient, are all that they know, and determine their perceptions regarding acceptable teaching and learning styles (Brindley 1984, Horwitz, 1985, 1988). The result is that students in general arrive at university or their new place of work with undeveloped oral skills and with awareness of this fact, which impedes motivation or further improvement. As Bromley (1995) explained, “For many students, their beliefs about the nature of language-learning may constitute a serious impediment that could affect their language-related attitudes and behaviors” (quoted in Finch & Taeduck, 2002).

THE SOLUTION: Communicative oral activities and assessment

Testing oral proficiency has become one of the most important issues in language testing since the role of speaking ability has become more central in language teaching with the advent of communicative language teaching (Hartley and Sporing, 1999; Nakamura, 1993). As Bostwick and Gakuen (1995) state, assessment can be used to improve instruction and help students take control of their own learning. That is more likely to be accomplished when assessment is communicative and authentic.

Assessment can be described along a scope ranging from traditional (translation-based) to communicative. The traditional assessment is the paper test (currently used in Saudi high schools), which involves usually rote memorization, application of strict rules, and frequently only one acceptably correct answer. The advantages of this assessment method are: students are familiar with it, the grading is explicit and relatively easy, and the results are easy to interpret. The disadvantages of this assessment method are: students are graded against each other in a competitive atmosphere and grading takes no account of students' real communicative ability. Communicative assessment involves conversational

interaction between the teacher and the student either at the end of each class (continuous assessment), or only at the end of semester. This periodic assessment shows a "snapshot" of the student's communicative abilities. The advantages of this assessment method are: students use their English abilities in a "real English" situation to reflect and encourage their communication ability, and teacher and student have a greater chance to bond. The disadvantages of this assessment method are: it takes a fair amount of time to do individual interviews, and the results are not always easy to quantify (Gilfert & Croker, 1999).

Communicative oral assessment is concerned not only with students' knowledge of rules but on the students' ability to demonstrate them in actual situations. Communicative oral assessment should attempt to replicate real life situations. Within these situations communicative ability can be tested as representatively as possible. Emphasis is placed on appropriateness more than on ability to form grammatically correct sentences and on understanding the communicative intent of the speaker. The importance of context is recognized. There should be both authenticity of task and genuineness of context. When engaged in oral assessment teachers should attempt to reflect the interactive nature of normal speech and assess pragmatic skills being used (Bynom, 2001, Khaleghi et al., 2020).

With this technique of developing communication strategies through interaction, the assessment method can be varied according to a teacher's individual teaching style and situation. The assessment should not be norm-based (assessing the groups along a bell-curve by comparing them against each other) but criterion-based, that is comparing the student to a pre-determined standard. This encourages and motivates the students to improve to that standard (Gilfert & Croker, 1999).

The theoretical status of communicative oral assessment is still subject to criticism by some sceptical researchers, yet as language teachers see the positive benefits accumulating from such assessment, it is becoming more and more acceptable. This relatively recent brand of assessment not only helps teachers develop communicative classroom competence but also bridge the gap between teaching, assessing, and real life. Communicative tests are useful tools in the areas of curriculum development and in the assessment of future needs, as they aim to reflect real life situations. This can only be beneficial for those who adhere to this type of assessment as students could finally see the connection between classroom and real life and become increasingly motivated to learn to use English outside (Bynom, 2001).

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Some researchers refer to communicative oral assessment as *alternative assessment* (Al Ruqeishi, 2015; Brown & Hudson, 1998; Ghaicha & Omarkaly, 2018; Nasab, 2015; Tan,

2012). Alternative assessment is characterized by a deliberate move from traditional formal assessment to a less formal, less quantitative framework (Shaaban, 2001). Pierce and O'Malley (1992) defined alternative assessment as “any method of finding out what a student knows or can do that is intended to show growth and inform instruction and is not a standardized or traditional test” (p. 2). Specifically, alternative ways of assessing students take into account variation in students' needs, interests, and learning styles; and they attempt to integrate assessment and learning activities. Also, they indicate successful performance, highlight positive traits, and provide formative rather than summative evaluation.

Using formative assessment can help to decrease the level of anxiety generated by concentration on linguistic accuracy and increase students' comfort zone and feeling of success by stressing communicative fluency (Jendli, 2005; Jendli, 2007; Jendi & Albarakati, 2019). Some teachers and researchers call for allowing students to have a say not only in deciding the format of the test but also in deciding its content and the way it is administered. Friel (1989) recommended involving students in suggesting topics for the test or in generating some questions.

Murphey (1995) ventured beyond this concept to recommend that students make their own tests. He considered that student-made tests are an effective “way to mine students' different perceptions and use them, building upon what a group knows as a whole and getting them to collaborate in their learning.” He suggested the following process: students choose the questions that will go into the test under the guidance of the teacher; a few days later, working in pairs, they ask each other questions during class; later on, the questions are asked again with a new partner to reinforce what is being learned. Students are graded by their partners or by the teacher for the correctness of their answers and for the appropriateness and correctness of their English (Shaaban, 2001).

While Friel's and Murphey's suggestions sound plausible and might have value, it seems that application of these ideas may prove challenging depending on the cultural and educational contexts in which they are implemented. Involving students in such an important process requires a certain level of critical thinking, decision making and overall maturity in students, not always present when it is required.

CLASSROOM ORAL ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

The following activities and assessment techniques can be motivational and can be used for effective and practical measurements of students' abilities, progress, and achievement in a variety of educational settings. Teachers of English in Saudi schools can choose from this list of techniques.

Reading Aloud: Reading offers a useful way of testing pronunciation provided that the student is given a short time to examine the reading text first. Texts which are normally read aloud in real-life situations are more effective. Hughes (1989) recommended against this technique when assessing oral competence as the teacher (assessor) should be constantly aware of the difference and interference between “reading” and “speaking.” There is no interaction in this activity.

Re-telling a Story: This oral activity is more creative in certain ways. Reading a story silently first and then retelling it can be very interesting and formative for the student. Emphasis here is on pronunciation and not on accuracy of summary. Again, there is little interaction in this assessment activity.

Using Pictures: Using visual cues in oral interviews can be beneficial at the early stages of acquisition (Pierce and O’Malley, 1992). Thus, a student may be asked to choose pictures to talk about, and the teacher's role is to guide the student by asking questions that require the use of related vocabulary.

- *Pictures for description:* Single picture, photographs, and posters may be used for simple descriptions from students. Students need plenty of practice describing pictures of objects, people, and scenes before taking such a test. Students should be encouraged to use their imagination and to guess what is taking place in the picture.
- *Pictures for Comparison:* A description of two fairly similar pictures may be very interesting. Two students are each given a picture and instructed to talk about it. The purpose of this activity is to find out in what ways the two pictures are different (without either student actually seeing both pictures.) Conversation is then triggered in addition to the more formal descriptions of the pictures (Heaton, 1990)

Additional ways of using pictures as visual cues for oral assessment include the pictures sequences which involve a story that the student needs to tell, and pictures with speech bubbles, where the student is required to guess what the people inside the picture are saying. Obviously these activities for oral assessment are interactive with the teacher, and may be very informative for the student.

Role-Play: This informal activity combines oral performance and physical activity. Students of all ages, when assessed through this technique, feel comfortable and motivated, especially when the activity lends itself to cooperative learning and is seen as a fun way of learning. Kelner (1993) believed that role play can be an enjoyable way of informal assessment that could be used effectively within a content-based curriculum. For example, he recommends the use of role play to express mathematical concepts such as fractions, to demonstrate basic concepts in science such as the life cycle, and to represent historical events or literary characters.

Student-Teacher Conferences: Student-teacher conferences, including structured interviews, can be an effective informal way of assessing a student’s progress in language

learning. Conferences and interviews provide opportunities for one-on-one interactions where the teacher can learn about a student's communicative abilities, emotional and social well-being, attention span, attitudes, pace of learning, and strengths and weaknesses (Smith, 1996; Allerson & Grabe, 1986). Care should be taken to prevent the conference from becoming an interrogation.

Conferences can be most effective when they follow focused observations. Observations could be done in class, for example, in cooperative learning groups, or out of class, for example, on the playground. Gomez, Parker, Lara-Alecio, Ochoa, and Gomez, Jr. (1996) developed an observational instrument for assessing learners' oral performance in natural language settings, which focuses on these seven language abilities: understanding by others, providing information needed by the listener, absence of hesitations, willingness to participate in conversations, self-initiated utterances, accuracy (in grammar, usage, and vocabulary), and topic development.

Tambini (1999) also recommended the use of conferences to assess the oral and written abilities of students. He, too, favored conferences that follow observations and concentrate directly on the learning processes and strategies employed by the student. For assessing oral skills, he suggested that students be evaluated primarily on their ability to understand and communicate with teachers and classmates (Shaaban, 2001)

Presentations: Presentations are important for oral assessment because they can provide a comprehensive record of students' abilities in oral performance. Furthermore, presentations give the teacher some insights into student's interests, work habits, and organizational abilities. Presentations cover a wide range of meaningful activities, including poetry readings, plays, role-plays, dramatizations, and interviews.

Self-Assessment: Students may also participate in self-assessment. Although self assessment may seem inappropriate at first, it can yield accurate judgments of students' linguistic abilities, weaknesses and strengths, and improvement (McNamara and Deane, 1995). Self-assessment could be done using oral reports.

The Everyday Life Performance (ELP) technique:

This technique is a hybrid of several other techniques and aims at improving as well as assessing students' oral communicative competence. This assessment tool makes use of role playing, imitation, and presentation techniques. It is based on a balanced mix between the communicative approach and the more traditional approaches. This assessment activity may be beneficial for Saudi students as it matches their learning styles; they have also been somewhat accustomed to traditional assessment approaches for years and might be familiar with the format. The activity should also be very informative and interesting for the students as it is less formal, draws on and imitates real-life situations, and therefore encourages communicative competence.

ELP is a method for performing naturally occurring conversations in which on-stage actors recreate scenes from everyday life (Stinger, 1998). Unlike the language lab, ELP uses actual conversation of fluent speakers of the target language. Through ELP students gain exposures to samples of a language as it naturally occurs in everyday interaction, especially when total language immersion is not possible, as is in the local context.

Students rehearse these interaction scenes by speaking in unison with tape recordings, using transcription as memory aid. According to Hopper (1993), “actors perform the vocalizations, pauses, and emphases as much as possible in imitation of the recording” which leads the performers to gain an “appreciation for detail and nuance in their own everyday encounters.”

After spending an adequate time (once a week, three to five weeks in the case of Saudi schools) on rehearsal using tape and transcripts, students gradually and methodically attempt to recreate the same conversation without the transcript, and later without the tape (for another three to five weeks). The following stage would be to assess students’ oral abilities while doing the activity.

The ELP method can be a very good instructive tool of the target language. It uses repetition, rehearsal, and attention to details in pronunciation and grammar rules. At the same time, ELP’s main goal is communicative competence since it is interactive and uses real-life situations. A study conducted by Stringer (1998) indicates the success of ELP among students, who gave very positive feedback reporting that the activity was enjoyable and interesting for them.

Many of the assessment techniques discussed above can be integrated into daily classroom activities and give a comprehensive picture of the students' abilities, progress, and achievement. Unlike traditional tests that only provide a numerical description of students, these techniques of communicative oral assessment can document “a story for every student-and what is the ultimate goal of evaluation but to give us the knowledge to be able to reflect upon, discuss, and assist a student's journey through the learning process” (Huerta-Macias 1995).

TIME DEMANDS OF ORAL ASSESSMENT

One of the major problems Saudi schoolteachers experience is lack of time in the classroom given the breadth of knowledge they have to impart during a given year. The textbook is simply too long and there is simply too much to teach and to learn during one academic year. This issue is at the heart of the apparent paucity and sometimes absence of oral assessment.

For oral assessment to be considered seriously in high schools, something in the curriculum has to be taken out. Teaching and assessing oral competence is obviously time consuming and may be the most time consuming of all skills. Therefore, it might be unrealistic to expect Saudi teachers to conduct elaborate oral assessments while expecting the prescribed curriculum to be completed. Policy makers in the ministry of education and the various concerned committees should pay attention to this point and try to rearrange priorities in the English curriculum components.

ASSESSMENT SKILLS REQUIRED BY TEACHERS

If decision makers choose to give oral assessment its place back in the heart of the English curriculum, teachers must be equipped with the right skills to create and conduct these assessments. In order to carry out assessments which can meet minimum standards of validity and reliability, teachers need a wide range of skills. These include:

- Observing, interpreting and, documenting learners' use of language
- Designing classroom tests and assessment tasks
- Analyzing test results
- Providing diagnostic feedback to learners
- Evaluating the quality of assessment tasks
- Evaluating the quality of learners' language performances according to rating scales
- Writing evaluative reports for program administrators

However, it is not realistic to expect that teachers should possess these skills, given that assessment is not usually considered a central component of language teacher training courses.

Geoff Brindley (1997) suggested many ways to deal with this issue. Teachers are the people who are actually responsible for implementing assessment. It is important to ensure that they have the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to conduct high quality assessments through appropriately targeted professional development. Some of their needs can be addressed by enrollment in formal degree courses or through attendance of workshops. However, this theoretical knowledge needs to be supplemented by field experience in developing and using assessment tools.

Another way of developing assessment expertise and at the same time improving the quality of oral assessment is through collaborative test development projects in which professional testers work together (Shohamy, 1992). The involvement of teachers in developing specific techniques and tools can help to ensure that assessment content is in line with current teaching practices, thus increasing the likelihood that the assessment will be beneficial to students' learning (Brindley, 1997).

SUPPORT REQUIRED OF POLICY MAKERS

If teachers should assume responsibility for oral activities and assessment as a motivational strategy, they require time and resources to do the job properly. In some cases, however, policy makers and program administrators may need to be convinced of this, since they may not be aware of how much time oral assessment can take, especially when it involves building important communicative assessment. One way to demonstrate the impact of increased assessment duties on teachers' day-to-day work is to pilot the new tests or assessments over a good period of time, documenting the kinds of assessment-related tasks performed by teachers and how long they take. When the time demands of oral assessment become clear, it is necessary to make corresponding changes such as reduction in other curriculum components.

In order to make the teaching and assessing of English oral competence a tangible component of the curriculum in the Saudi Arabia, strong institutional support has to be provided. If students are given time, are encouraged to practice oral communication skills, and are continuously assessed in this area, they will become better speakers of the language and therefore will graduate from high school with improved results and will therefore be equipped with better tools for the university. The result will be that students will have more confidence in their communicative ability; they will be motivated to learn to communicate in English; they will be more aware of what is involved in English pronunciation; and eventually they will be able to express their thoughts and opinions creatively.

CONCLUSION

This article attempted to critically survey the current trends in English oral activities and assessment as a motivational technique in Saudi public schools by shedding light on the conditions in which oral assessment is carried out. It also reviewed some terms and definitions necessary for this study and examined some existing oral assessment activities that are either already in use or ought to be used in Saudi schools. The article suggested communicative techniques of oral assessment deemed effective in that they draw from several other elicitation techniques and methods of oral assessment. These are deemed to increase learners' motivation, lower language anxiety and give students a good sense of how to use English in the real world. Finally, the article looked at some issues closely related to the designing and administration of oral assessment, such as time demands and institutional support.

The study recommends that language instructors should show more interest in their students' motivation by following creative and professional teaching and assessment approaches in the classroom. Teachers should reflect on students' motivation as well as

anxiety triggers. They should grant learners some control over their learning environment and involve them in decision making regarding the types of class activities and oral examination options. Teachers should be supportive as well as enablers of their students and should steer away from being controlling and authoritative (Alrabai, 2014).

When students see and feel that their English language teachers are enthusiastic students will follow suit and become motivated and enthusiastic as well. In addition to being skilled and having good training in language teaching, teachers should be considerate and dedicated by paying close attention not only to the academic development of their students but also to their personal growth and sense of worth. This could motivate the students to learn as they would feel that their teachers care about them. English language teachers should always create and develop new motivational teaching activities which should keep their students totally immersed in the subject matter. Teachers should go beyond the prescribed curriculum and the traditional methods of language teaching and assessment, and involve as many communicative, alternative, and motivational methods as possible in their daily teaching activities

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