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# Written Conversation Technique and its Necessity in Improving Speaking and Writing Proficiencies for EFL Students

## A B S T R A C T

This study aims to investigate the effect of using new strategy (written conversation) in teaching speaking and writing English as a foreign language. Speaking and Writing are the most commonly used and effective means of self- expression in all fields of human life, whether personal, social or professional. This study is not only an empirical examination of speaking and writing methods but also an attempt to understand the concept of speaking and writing as essential proficiencies in learning English. By reviewing the definitions of speaking and writing and their teaching methods, the study presents the writing and speaking proficiencies in a new frame theoretically and practically.

The written conversation technique is intended to improve the students' proficiencies in Writing and speaking through practicing them with their teachers and peers. A test is designed to determine the students' level in speaking and writing and identify the impact of using the new technique (written conversation) on learning the writing and speaking. The experimental design of the study consists of two groups, namely, control group and experimental group, with 40 female students for each.

After analyzing the data, the experimental group shows better performance than that of the control one. This indicates that teaching the writing and speaking proficiencies by using written conversation technique is more effective than teaching by traditional method.

تقنيـة المحادثـة الكتابيـة وضرورتها في تحسـين مهارات التحدث والكتابـة لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزيــة كلغة اجنبية

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**الخلاصة:**

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من تأثير استخدام استراتيجية جديدة هي (المحادثة الكتابية) في تعليم التحدث والكتابة كلغة أجنبية. تعد التحدث والكتابة الوسيلة الأكثر استخداما وفعالية للتعبير عن الذات في جميع مجالات الحياة سواء أكانت شخصية أم اجتماعية أم مهنية. إذ إنها ليست مجرد دراسة تجريبية ولكنها أيضا محاولة لفهم مفهوم التحدث والكتابة كمهارات أساسية في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. من

خلال مراجعة تعريفات التحدث والكتابة وطرق تدريسها، تقدم الدراسة مهارات الكتابة والتحدث في إطار جديد نظريا وعملياً.

تهدف المحادثة المكتوبة إلى تحسين مهارات الطلاب في الكتابة والتحدث من خلال تزويدهم بفرص لتعلم الكتابة والتحدث من خلال ممارستها مع معلميهم واقرانهم. حيث تم تصميم الاختبار لفهم مستوى الطلاب في التحدث والكتابة واكتشاف تأثير استخدام التقنية الجديدة (المحادثة الكتابية) في مهارات الكتابة والتحدث. يتكون التصميم التجريبي للدراسة من مجموعتين، مجموعة ضابطة ومجموعة تجريبية، تتكون كل مجموعة من (40 طالبة) بعد تحليل البيانات، أظهرت المجموعة التجريبية أداء أفضل من المجموعة الضابطة. هذا يشير إلى أن تعليم الكتابة والتحدث باستخدام تقنية (المحادثة الكتابية) أكثر فاعلية من التدريس بالأسلوب التقليدي.

## 1.1 Problem of the study

Richards and Rogers (2001:1) state that "several strategies and methods are approaching in universities to expand learners' abilities to acquire foreign languages. Methodologists and applied linguists seek this topic and the motivation for change in approaches to languages teaching came about from the innovation in linguistics, psychology and changes in teaching methods".

It is a matter of fact that teaching any language implies the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Davies and Pearse (2000:96) indicate that Writing also involves cognitive skills such as gathering information and ideas, organizing the information, structuring the sequence into the section, expressing the information and editing the draft and writing out a final text.

Nowadays writing is very necessary because it is an essential means of communication Crystal (2006:97) opines that "there are many other ways of presenting written language, using such technologies as the printing press, the typewriter, the computer and the mobile phone".

Furthermore, Bygate (1987:14) believes that "speaking in a second language (L2) involves the development of a particular type of communication skill, oral language, because of its circumstances of production, tends from language in its typical grammatical, lexical, and discourse patterns". Two decades ago, speaking has emerged as a branch of teaching. Before that, researchers have not focused on speaking because of grammar- translation approach, which has influenced the teaching process, and the technology has not been provided for learners to practice talking like native speakers.

The present study attempts to investigate one of the new technique to improve writing and speaking proficiencies, which is written conversation. Written conversation is a significant technique to improve the communicative competence in a foreign language and enables the students to be in touch with their teachers through writing and speaking in an effective way and reflect their capacity in learning (Gebhard, 2006).

## 1.2 Aims of the Study

This study aims at:

1- Utilizing a new method (written conversation) to improve writing and speaking abilities because it is an essential means in adapting instruction and encouraging independent thinking.

2- Integrating written guided conversation and discussion into the classroom to help the students to improve deeper understanding of the topics and materials being taught.

3- The present study may help the curriculum designers in approving a new technique, which reflects the students' capacity and their competency in writing, speaking, and express opinions

## 1.3 Written Conversation

Written (electronically or manually) or orally recorded discussions between students and teachers are used in a writing program, about school topics or other topics of interest to students (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:156). Written Conversation is performed between two or more people through the use of notebooks or computer (Gebhard, 2006: 220). It refers to a written dialogue between a student and the teacher.

Written conversation is an effective approach to integrating reading and writing instruction that should become an essential part of beginning literacy instruction, a bound composition book or a notebook contains a written conversation between the teacher and the students, and may continue for some time during the course of a semester or year  (Hedge, 2000:311).

Written conversation is kept in a special notebook reserved for that purpose revolving around a variety of topics generated by the learners or guided by the teacher. In written conversation, a student and teacher communicate regularly (daily, weekly etc. depending on the educational setting) over a semester, school year, or course (Oxbrow, 2005: 54).

Carter (1998), Francis (1995), McMahon (1997) and Forlenza Bailey (2000) have suggested that written conversation is an effective means of promoting reflective thinking among prospective teachers (German, 2001:37).

Many teachers and students have found written conversation as interactive writing on an individual basis to be a crucial part of their classes. Written conversation do not only open a new channel of communication, but it also provides another context for language and literacy development. Students have the opportunity to use English in a non-threating atmosphere in interaction with a proficient English speaker, because the interaction is written. It allows students to use reading and writing in purposeful ways and provides a natural, comfortable bridge to other kinds of writing (Woytak, 2006:37).

It is obvious that most methods and techniques of teaching have basis in theories of learning and languages and the new trends in methodology (i.e. learning by learning).

## 2.1. Theoretical Background

The historical discoveries state that the beginning of writing is just drawings. It is difficult to decide that all those images are the primitive writing. Crystal (2006:107) points out that the matter is complicated by the fact that in this

period, it is by no means easy to decide whether a piece of graphic expression should be counted as an artistic image or as a symbol of writing.

Hattyar (2005:17) shows that "the first step in the direction of writing, the use of picture to record some events or observation cannot be called writing, since they depicted the objects themselves". He adds that writing the use of symbols rather than pictorial rendering to communicate thoughts, appeared in two parts of the world, independently America and the other in Asia Minor.

The important thing in studying the writing chronically is to identify the writing systems. Carroll (2008:91) classifies the writing systems into three kinds:

1- A logography takes the word or morphemes as the linguistic unit and pairs the unit with some pictorial symbol, called logograph or character. Chinese is the best -known example of logography.
2- A syllabary takes the syllable as the linguistic unit and associates it with some visual representation (example Japanese).
3- The alphabet is a system in which each letter is supposed to represent a phoneme (English).

Speaking is important in Second language learning. Despite the fact that speaking is the most significant Skill for business and other different jobs, it was before ignored in Schools. That is, teachers did not teach or test the speaking ability to their students since the emphasis was on grammar and language structure.

People are concerned with what the speaker sounds like since listening to what they hear may allow them to make some judgments about the speaker's personality, attitudes, and native/ non – native (speech). The speech can be an obvious image of speakers. Speed, pausing, variations in pitch, volume, and intonation may create a texture for their utterance that encourages and improves what they are saying. The sound of people's speech is significant because it is used for assessing speaking, and people tend to judge whether the speaker has native/ nonnative status depending on his/her pronunciation (Luoma , 2004: 9-10).

Oral Communication must be considered during teaching the English language since people nowadays have to speak English fluently, especially for those who want to improve that language in some fields of humanities (Al- Sibai, 2004:3 as cited in by Al-Hosni, 2014:22).

**2.2 The Definition of Writing**

The simple definition of writing is mapping out the speech sounds (Carroll, 2008:91).The basic elements of writing are graphemes. Crystal (2006:105) defines graphemes as "the smallest units in a writing system capable of causing a contrast in meaning."

Several of the phonological notions used in the study of speech have also been applied to the study of written language. The term graphology used by some linguists to refer to the writing system of a language (Crystal,2003:211). Phonology is a sub-discipline in linguistics concerned with the sounds of language. More narrowly, phonology proper is concerned with the function,

behavior and organization of sounds as linguistic items, and the basic element of phonology is phoneme (Lass, 1984:11).

A graphological analysis is concerned to establish the minimal contrastive units of visual language (grapheme); therefore, the grapheme analysis is the main business of Graphemics (graphology) (Crystal, 2003:211).

## 2.3 Teaching Writing

The starting point in teaching writing is the different phase that most teachers encounter in teaching writing or giving assignment. The goal of the teacher should expose the students to a variety of strategies for getting started with a writing task and to encourage them to discover the best strategies. Kroll (1990: 245) describes the following strategies to provide the students with a repertoire of techniques for getting started and generating ideas.

### 2.3.1 Brainstorming

This is often a group exercise where all students in the class are encouraged to participate by sharing their collective knowledge about a particular subject. One way to do this by the teacher to suggest a broad topic, while the students could suggest their topics and the teacher write them on the board. Then, all students can utilize and write down any or all of the information when turning to the preparation of their first drafts (Meyers, 2006:12).

### 2.3.2 Listing

Unlike brainstorming, listing can be a quiet and essentially individual activity. In this strategy, the students are encouraged to produce a list of all the subcategories that come to mind as they think about the topic at hand. This is very useful actively for students who might be ensured for expressing their thoughts in grammatically. Correct sentences because lists do not require complete sentences (Daniel, 1986:144).

### 2.3.3 Free Writing

It is also a useful strategy for the students who face difficulty of getting started. Free writing is also known by various other terms such as (wet ink) writing and quick writing (Parrott, 2004: 186). The main idea of this technique is to write continually for a specified period of time (usually about 5 minutes) without taken the pen from the page. This technique often works best when the teacher provides an opening clause or sentences for the students to start with.

### 2.3.4 Clustering

Another technique for getting many ideas down quickly is clustering. It begins with a keyword or central idea placed in the center of a page (or on the board) around which the students or the teachers are using student-generated suggestions. After that, the students write down in a few minutes all of the free ideas by using words or short phrases. Unlike listing, the words or phrases generated are put on the page or board in a pattern which takes shape from the connections the writer sees as each new thought emerges. (Harmer, 2001: 258).

### 2.4. Definition of speaking

Bashir et al. (2011:38) claim that "Speaking is a productive skill in the oral mode. It is like the other Skills, is more complicated than it seems at first and involves more than just pronouncing words ".

According to Bashir et al.(2011)." There are three kinds of Speaking situation in which we find ourselves; Interactive, partially interactive, non-interactive". Face – to -face conversations and telephone calls are cases of Interactive speaking where interlocutors are completely listening and speaking. The listener can ask for clarification, repetition, or slower speech from the conversation partner…. Therefore, speaking includes producing, receiving, and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997 as Cited in Bashir, 2011). On the other hand, partially Interactive speaking situation involves giving a speech a live audience, where the speaker can see the audience and judge whether they understand from the expressions on their faces and body language, yet the audience does not interrupt the speech. Recording a speech for a radio broadcast is one of the few totally non- Interactive speaking situation (ibid).

When there is a conversation, the speaking takes place. Some theories of experts give a support to the speaking theory .For example, River (1981) states that in interaction is not sufficient to include expression of one's thoughts but comprehension of those ideas. In addition, he mentions that there is reciprocal {I.e. turn- taking} interaction between listener and speaker…one speaks while others listen and directly or indirectly give an answer. Speaking is a process whereby two or more people engage in shared interactions.

**2.5. Teaching Speaking**.

According to Bygate (1987, p.4), training Students to use the language is one of the main problems in foreign language teaching.  Apparently, Knowing basic rules of grammar and certain vocabulary is important in order to be able to acquire the language.  In addition, there are things in speaking are worthy to be included in teaching the foreign language. For example, teachers should evaluate their learners ' ability to speak by encouraging them to say something through giving them ' speaking practice 'and ' oral exams'.

Richards (2008:19) indicates that, the mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second-language or foreign-language learners. Consequently, learners often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course based on how much they feel that they have improved their spoken language proficiency. "He also states that oral Skills have nowadays been in EFL courses though the best way of teaching of speaking Skill is to focus on the methodological debate.

Bashir et al. (2011,p.38- 39) claim that large numbers of language learners agree that speaking ability is the measure whether or not the speaker knows a language. Those learners explain fluency that it is the ability to speak with others more than the ability to read, write, or understand what they hear. For them speaking is the most important skill that they must have, and their advancement in learning a language is assessed by their accomplishments in spoken communication. They add that speaking involves three areas of knowledge:

* Mechanics (pronunciation, grammar, and Vocabulary): The right words, the proper order, and the correct pronunciation are what are used.

* Functions (transaction and interaction): Language learners need to know when the message should be clear (transaction/ information exchange) and when they do not need to comprehend every single word (Interaction/ relationship building).
* Social and cultural rules and norms (turns, speed of speech, length of pauses between speaker, and roles of participants): Learners should pay attention to the speaker, to whom he/ she is speaking, in what context, about what, and for what reason.

## 2.6. The Difference between Speaking and Writing

Most methodologies and linguists focus on spoken language, and the good reason is that speech is more basic than writing. Every society has a language, but only some societies have writing system.

Linton (2006:402) mentions some differences between Writing and speaking as follow:

●With spoken language, people can talk about their lives, with writing; they record them in detail; analyze and fictionalize them, and share them with people they will never meet.

●With spoken language, people can communicate complex information to other people near them; with writing they can communicate that information to others far away or yet to be born; who can then compare and combine it with information in other written documents.

●In most cases, people speaking to each other can rely on a shared context when they are producing their utterance and interpreting what other people are saying. Writers cannot rely on shared context with their readers, so they have to construct the relevant context more explicitly in their text.

●People speaking to each other can use facial expressions, gestures and eye gaze (and other paralinguistic cues) to express more than what they usually say. Writers must rely almost exclusively on their language; they cannot wink to show that they are being ironic.

●Speakers usually have the immediate to check to see if they have understood each other. Writers must anticipate and try to avoid possible sources of misunderstanding. Readers typically cannot ask the writer of a text what he/she meant and must read between the lines without confirmation that they have correctly inferred the writer's meaning.

●Once a text is written and published (shared formally or informally) , it is fixed, and the written record can be referred to and analyzed. We may argue about what the text actually said. It is much easier to deny saying something (or at least having said particular words, in a particular way).as well as an interpretation of an utterance.

In contrast, the written language is usually more grammatically complete. The main reason for this is that, unlike listener, readers do not have tones of voice, facial expressions, and gestures, or a real situational context to help them to

understand messages. Written text has to create context and make the reference and connections of the messages clear through the language itself.

## 2.7. The Benefits of Written Conversation technique

Written conversation is a technique to improve writing and speaking proficiencies:

• Written conversation assists students become motivated to do reading assignment:

When the students write their ideas and experience, they may pass them to other students to read them or to the teacher to get response. This would help them get an opportunity to read what they wrote because they are the first readers for their writing.

• Encourage students to see the writing/speaking connection:

The give-and-take of a connection and the knowledge of acceptable conversational markers and feedback are acquired early by all children. However, writing and speaking are learned, and are often treated as disconnected behaviors by parents and schools. Written conversation highlights the connection between speaking and writing, allowing students to converse with the text. The more experience they have with this conversation, the more natural speaking and writing become.

• Help students see audience and purpose:

Written conversation helps students learn about the importance of audience and purpose.

• Written conversation assists students to think:

Using written conversation offer a mechanism for deep thinking and self-reflection. The students need to be motivated by new concepts and new experiences, instead of listing and forgetting; students can immediately process new information and this needs higher-level cognitive skills more than memorization of facts and forms.

• Written conversation assists students to discover:

Students who are allowed to write informally, as well as formally, are allowed the time to interact with new ideas or literacy works before being expected to be experts in their more formalized academic writing.

• Written conversation helps personalized learning style

Written conversation allow students to process information based on their personal learning style. Students' interaction with the text does not occur in a vacuum. The students are free to add pictures or refer to the music they are listening to, the food they are eating.

(Smith, A. D. 2001)

## 2.8. The Experimental Design:

Experimental designs are especially useful in determining the effectiveness and impact of programs, methods and techniques. The definition of an experiment is " a situation in which the researcher objectively observes phenomena which are made to occur in strictly controlled situation where one or more variable are varied and the others are kept constant " (Best and Kahn, 1986:157). The present

study follows the true experimental designs in which (the Students) are randomly assigned to experiment and comparison groups.

### 3.1. *Methodology*
### 3.1.1 Sample of the study
The sample consisted of (80) female students, studying English in university of Tikrit, College of Education for women. They were divided into two groups: experimental (40) Students, taught by the researcher; and control group. Both groups were chosen randomly.
### 3.1.2 The final Scores of the Students in writing and speaking
To check the equivalence level of students' performance, their final scores in essay (writing skill) and conversation (speaking skill) in the first term have been taken from the record of the English Department. These scores indicate the Students' proficiency in essay as a (writing skill) and a conversation as a (speaking skill). The t- test result shows that there is no significant difference between the means of the two groups in this variable. The mean score of the experimental group is 46.61 and that of control group is 45.77. The calculated t- value is 1.99. (see table 1).

**Table (1)**

The mean standard deviation and t-value of the final scores in essay as a (writing skill) and a conversation as a (speaking skill) in the first term.

| Groups | No.of subjects | Mean | Standard deviation | t- value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experimental | 40 | 46.61 | 76.599 | 1.99 |
| Control | 40 | 45.77 | 79.163 | |

### 3.1.3 The formation of the written conversation
Written conversation is implemented here as an effective way to develop the Students' ability in writing and speaking because writing and speaking are related to each other. Written conversation helps the students make connections between their experiences and new ideas. The behavioral objectives of the selected material of writing and speaking include:
1- An ability to discover a new method of writing i.e. (process approach).
2- Strategies for Students to use written conversation actively to engage in different writing and speaking situations.
3- An ability to note Students ' observation and to connect new information with things they already knew.
4- An ability to read critically from both their own texts and texts of others.
5- The use of written conversation as learning tools is used on the idea that students write and speak to learn and who uses them believe:
●Through writing and speaking the Students can produce their opinions to a subject and make it their own style.

●Writing and speaking organize and clarify thoughts that enable learners to find out what they know and don't know about what they are trying to learn.

### 3.1.4 The post-test Scores of Both Experimental and Control Groups.

By comparing the mean score of the post-test experimental group (50.625) with the control group (42.256), the test formula, is used to find out whether there is a significant difference in the post-test scores of both groups. The t-test calculated value is found to be 8.276 at the level of significance 0.05 and degree of freedom 78. This indicates that there is a significant difference between both groups, i.e. the achievement of the experimental group taught according to the written conversation technique was higher than that of the control group taught according to the traditional method (paragraph pattern approach). Accordingly, written conversation is more effective than the paragraph patterns approach. (see table 2).

**Table (2)**

Mean, standard deviation, and t-test value of the post-test of the experimental and control group

| Variable Tests | No Of Students | "X" Mean | Standard Deviation | Degree Of Freedom | T- value | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Calculate | T Distribution |
| Experimental | 40 | 50.625 | 76.599 | 78 | | |
| Control | | 42.256 | 69.075 | | 8.276 | 2 |

### 4.1 Discussion of the Results

From the analysis of the data, it is found that the mean of post- scores of the experimental group is 50.625, which is higher than the mean scores of the control group that is found to be 42.256. This indicates that Students' achievement in the experimental group is better than that of the control group. This result shows that written conversation technique is more useful for them in teaching writing and speaking rather than the traditional method. This reveals that written conversation is an effective technique. The results show that written conversation is a successful technique in teaching writing and speaking at all levels of learning foreign languages and this may be due to the following:

1- Written conversation is highly effective with foreign language at various stages of learning. Studies that have examined the use of written conversation report substantial improvement in student's writing and speaking proficiencies.

2- The present study shows that this technique (written conversation) is helpful also in early stages of learning. The Interactive written dialogue, with just a few sentences each day, makes use of the young child's developed competence in written and spoken language.

3-feedback and reflection are important principles because when the teacher responds, the students, the students can get benefit from the language modeling from the teacher.

4-This technique helps the teacher to discover the Students because sometimes the students could not tell the teacher about their problems. By writing, the Students have free space to speak about themselves.

### 4.2. Conclusions

1 According to the findings of this study, the subjects of the experimental groups taught by using written conversation have significantly improved in writing and speaking proficiencies. This result is based on a comparative statistical treatment of the subject's scores in both groups.

2-Most teachers of English in Iraq did not have a clear idea about the methods of teaching writing and speaking proficiencies, and today there are a lot of methods and techniques to teach writing and speaking.

3-ln this technique, writing and speaking proficiencies are not only activities, but also valuable learning tools.

4-written conversation encourages students to express themselves in thoughtful, formal and informal ways and give teachers important idea into their students.

5-written conversation implies the concept of communications triangle of speaking, writing and discussing. Hence the teacher could stimulate the natural interaction of language uses in students to further linguistic development.

6- With written conversation, students could write brief notes about their state of the class perspectives. They could question and comment, as well as answer questions and comments that the teacher has written.

### 4.3 Recommendations

1- Writing and speaking are considered important concepts for learning and discovering the method and techniques of writing and speaking are an essential part of the teachers work.

2- The use of written conversation technique in teaching in schools and Colleges, and the teachers should be trained to use written conversation technique in service training.

3- By using written conversation, teaching English as a foreign language should emphasize the content rather than the form and adapt instruction to meet individuals' needs in writing and speaking.

4- English Curriculum designers are advised to employ written conversation technique in designing written and speaking material in textbooks.

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