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Enhancing the Conversational Section in 'Vision 1': Perspectives from Iranian EFL High School Teachers"

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Conversational Section,
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This research investigates methods to enhance the conversational portion of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook called 'Vision 1' that is utilized in Iranian high schools. The study involves 50 Iranian EFL high school teachers within the age range of 25-40, who have been teaching for 3-7 years and currently incorporate 'Vision 1' into their English curriculum. The collection of qualitative data was accomplished by conducting semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of their viewpoints. The findings highlight challenges faced by teachers, such as limited oral practice opportunities, lack of authenticity in dialogues, and difficulty in engaging students. Proposed solutions include incorporating authentic dialogues, increasing oral practice opportunities, incorporating interactive activities, and providing teacher support materials. Implementing these insights can benefit not only the designers of EFL textbooks but also curriculum developers and language educators in Iran and similar educational contexts. By addressing the identified issues and incorporating the proposed solutions, it is expected that the conversational component of the 'Vision 1' textbook can be significantly enhanced, leading to more effective English language learning experiences for Iranian high school students.

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1. Introduction

Developing speaking skills is crucial for EFL/ESL students to effectively communicate in different situations. Language experts emphasize that verbal communication is equally important as language knowledge, as it is the primary form of human interaction (Lazarton, 2001). However, according to some experts, EFL learners find speaking challenging. Brown (2001) suggests that informal language, shortened forms, variable performance, unnecessary repetition, fast delivery, stress, rhythm, and intonation are some of the characteristics that make speaking difficult to acquire. Moreover, Lazarton (2001) points out that spoken English is particularly challenging because it involves interacting with another person. This requires learners to constantly understand other speakers, consider their own contributions, provide responses, and evaluate the impact of their communication, among other factors.

The current condition of formal English education in Iran is extremely exasperating. Despite completing a six-year English curriculum, students face difficulties when it comes to speaking and effectively communicating in English. The main focus of Iran's Ministry of Education is to enhance students' proficiency in all four language skills, but the result is that they are only able to comprehend written English. The aspects of speaking, listening, and writing in real-life scenarios are often neglected. During middle school, the main emphasis is on teaching students the alphabet, pronunciation, and vocabulary. As students progress to high school, the focus shifts towards enhancing reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar rules (Ekstam & Sarvandi, 2017). In Iran, formal English education follows the grammar-translation method (Zarrabi & Brown, 2015). To be prepared for English tests in the university entrance examination at the pre-university level, students need to attend expensive private English institutes. This not only requires a significant financial investment but also consumes a considerable amount of students' time.

According to Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010), being skilled in oral communication in a foreign language is extremely important in today's society. If learners are unable to speak a foreign language fluently, they cannot be considered proficient language users, and this can result in misunderstandings and issues in communication. However, there are obstacles to acquiring speaking skills, such as the mismatch between classroom materials and courses, as mentioned by Derakhshan et al.

(2016). This implies that many teachers do not offer enough opportunities for students to practice speaking in real-life situations, and it is important for learners to engage in speaking activities where they can freely express their thoughts in their second language. Building confidence and having enthusiasm are critical factors in developing oral language abilities, as effective oral communication often involves taking risks and being spontaneous.

According to the research conducted by Efrizal (2012) and Nasiri and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2016), speaking skills are crucial in fostering interaction among learners, enabling them to engage in casual conversations and express their thoughts verbally. To promote English communication, it is important for teachers to incorporate real-life communication into their lessons. Fink (2003) and Ramírez Ortiz and Artunduaga Cuéllar (2018) emphasize the significance of connecting classroom knowledge with learners' everyday lives, allowing them to apply what they have learned in different situations. However, learners may find speaking activities daunting if they feel that they lack relevance in their everyday experiences. As a result, this study aims to investigate strategies that can improve the conversational aspect of "Vision 1," an English as a Foreign Language textbook used in Iranian high schools.

2. Literature review

2.1. Concepts of speaking

Speaking skills have been described differently by scholars. According to Bashir, Azem, and Dogar (2011) and Ngan (2013), speaking involves oral communication and is not as simple as it may seem initially. It goes beyond the ability to pronounce words. Hornby (1995) and Ngan (2013) define speaking as the skill that individuals are evaluated on in real-life situations. It is important in everyday interactions and plays a key role in forming a person's initial impression, based on their fluency and comprehensiveness in speaking. Moreover, Grognet (1997) and Ngan (2013) view speaking as one of the competencies that students must acquire while learning English. It is a crucial tool for effective communication.

Harmer (2001) categorized speaking skills into two main aspects: accuracy and fluency. Accuracy entails the correct usage of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, which can be developed through controlled and guided activities. On the other hand,

fluency refers to the ability to speak spontaneously, without any interruptions. According to Byrne (1986), accuracy involves the use of language forms that are free from errors, phonologically, syntactically, semantically, and in terms of discourse features. Byrne also defines fluency as the capacity to communicate effectively, without excessive hesitations or pauses that disrupt the flow of communication. Other scholars such as Brown (1994), Burns and Joyce (1997), Leong and Ahmadi (2017), and Fouladi Nashta and Rahimy (2018) view speaking as an interactive process in which individuals produce, receive, and process information to construct meaning.

To become fluent and adept at speaking a foreign language, it is necessary for learners to go beyond just comprehending grammar and meaning. They must also understand how native speakers use the language in structured interactions that involve multiple components. This complexity presents a challenge for adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in achieving fluency and appropriateness in their speaking skills. (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

The study conducted by Ishihara and Cohen (2014) emphasizes that the appropriateness of language usage is strongly connected to the sociocultural context and pragmatic elements. It is not enough for second language (L2) speakers to simply possess linguistic knowledge; they must also possess a deep understanding of the social and cultural aspects. Being accurate and fluent alone is inadequate; they must also have the ability to communicate in a respectful, straightforward, and suitable manner according to the level of formality required. Furthermore, they should be familiar with the specific social conventions related to various situations, such as greetings, expressing gratitude, and expressing disagreement. Authenticity, when referring to language teaching materials, refers to how closely they resemble natural speech or writing.

According to Richards and Renandya (2002), a considerable number of people around the world opt to learn English to enhance their speaking abilities. Speaking in a language that is not native to them is a complex and challenging task as it involves various skills and serves different purposes. Harmer (2007) further suggests that there are three main reasons for promoting speaking activities in the classroom among students. Firstly, these activities create a secure environment where students can practice speaking in real-life situations. Secondly, students can utilize their existing

language knowledge and receive feedback from their teacher, enabling them to evaluate their progress and identify any language difficulties they may encounter.

2.2. Importance of textbooks

The textbook plays a crucial role in teaching and learning the English language, especially for individuals who are learning English as a foreign language. It allows teachers to follow a structured approach and offers multiple benefits for both students and instructors in ESL/EFL classrooms, as stated by Sheldon (1988). Hutchinson and Torres (1994) argue that textbooks are extensively used in teaching, while Cortazzi and Jin (1999) suggest that textbooks fulfill various roles, including being a teacher, guide, resource, mentor, authority, restrictor, and ideology. According to Cunningsworth (1995), a textbook serves as a source of activities and a syllabus to manage the teaching and learning process, as well as a support system for inexperienced teachers.

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) suggest that language textbooks can be classified into three categories: source culture materials, target culture materials, and international materials. When it comes to Iran, the predominant use of source culture materials, which represent the learners' own culture, is observed. This means that the textbooks used in Iran primarily focus on Iranian society and culture, allowing learners to easily recognize and relate to the content. Essentially, the textbooks mirror the source culture. Similarly, EFL textbooks in Islamic countries mostly revolve around their own respective cultures.

According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), a textbook in Venezuela puts emphasis on national figures and predominantly showcases Venezuelan cities, with limited reference to locations outside of the country. Their study also reveals that English textbooks in Turkey primarily reflect the native culture rather than the target culture. Faruk (2015) demonstrates that a large portion of English language teaching (ELT) textbooks in Saudi Arabia (68.41%) consists of religious and local aspects, while only a small percentage (5.26%) includes Western elements, and the remainder is culture-neutral. Hajjaj (1981) comments that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks in Kuwait are centered on Kuwaiti culture.

Another group consists of textbooks that focus on the target culture by using the culture of a country where the foreign language is spoken as its primary language. In these textbooks, students primarily learn about life in English-speaking countries such as the United States, Great Britain, and Australia. The third category is comprised of international target culture materials, which encompass a wide range of materials from different cultures in English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries around the world. Aliakbari (2004) added a separate category called "neutral," which refers to texts that have minimal emphasis on culture. Brumfit (1996) argues that an unbiased and standardized version of English provides the most widespread access to the language globally. Conversely, a model based on a specific locality would be unpopular among learners due to its limited scope.

2.3. Iranian EFL Teachers' Views on Textbook Evaluation

Numerous studies have been carried out to assess the English textbooks utilized in schools and institutions in Iran, with the goal of providing valuable resources for both teachers and students. Yarmohammadi (2002) conducted a study to evaluate senior high school textbooks using a modified version of Tucker's model. The results indicated that these textbooks lacked authenticity due to the interchangeability of English and Persian names and a limited emphasis on oral skills practice. To address these shortcomings, recommendations were made for textbook improvement. Azizifar (2009) conducted another study which evaluated two series of English language teaching textbooks used in Iranian high schools from 1970 to 2010, employing Tucker's textbook evaluation model. The findings showed that the textbooks played a significant role in enhancing learners' language skills but needed to place greater emphasis on communicative language learning practice.

Ghorbani (2011) conducted a study where they examined an Iranian senior high school English book 1 by using a checklist. The results of their analysis revealed that the textbook placed a strong emphasis on grammar and did not include any activities that promoted communication. The book also lacked material for all four language skills and did not come with an audio CD or a teacher's guide. On the other hand, Zohrabi et al. (2012) evaluated an older version of an Iranian first-grade high school English textbook using various checklists. They assessed different aspects of the textbook, such

as layout, vocabulary, topics, grammar, exercises, language skills, pronunciation, language function, and social and cultural activities. The findings indicated that the textbook had an unattractive layout and centered heavily on grammar with a particular focus on reading skills. Additionally, it offered insufficient opportunities for practicing pronunciation and had limited material regarding language function and social/cultural activities.

In 2011, Rahimpour and Hashemi carried out a research project which aimed to assess the quality of three English textbooks used in Iranian high schools. They utilized a questionnaire to gather data from 50 teachers. The questionnaire encompassed different aspects including reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, as well as practical considerations and physical presentation. The results revealed that teachers expressed discontentment with all the factors that were evaluated.

In 2012, Nahrkhalaji conducted an evaluation of the Top-Notch series, which was being used in Iran. The evaluation consisted of two phases. The first phase, referred to as a while-use analysis, aimed to assess the attractiveness and availability of the materials, suitability of exercises and tasks, practicality, effectiveness in facilitating short-term learning, clarity of instructions, comprehensibility of the text, and teachability of the textbook. In the second phase, known as the post-use analysis, a long-term evaluation was conducted by asking twenty teachers to respond to checklist questions regarding the effectiveness of the textbook materials. The results indicated that the textbook was advantageous for learners in understanding their objectives and enhancing their language proficiency. The checklist questions demonstrated that all language skills were addressed and integrated in a communicative approach within the textbook. Teachers believed that the materials encouraged interaction among language learners. On average, teachers agreed that the textbook was appropriate, and the materials were inspiring.

Pouranshirvani (2017) conducted a study where they assessed Vision 1 and internally evaluated the English textbook utilized by tenth-grade pupils. To collect data, a modified questionnaire containing 82 items was distributed among 30 English teachers in Isfahan, Iran. The outcomes derived from the teachers' feedback suggested that improvements were needed in several aspects of the Iranian tenth grade English textbook, particularly concerning sociocultural activities.

Masoudi (2018) conducted a study on the cognitive levels present in the textbook series "Vision 1" by analyzing both the students' book and the workbook. The prevalent cognitive levels found in this series were applying, remembering, and understanding, while evaluating and creating levels were completely absent. Only 0.6% of the activities focused on higher order thinking skills, particularly analyzing. Previous research mainly examined older versions of the textbooks and there is a lack of research investigating the integration of the Task-Based Language Teaching framework and appropriate task-based activities in the "Visions" textbooks for the improvement of all language skills. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to address the following research questions:

1. What are the difficulties confronted by Iranian high school students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) when it comes to actively engaging in the conversational part of 'vision 1'?
2. What strategies can be implemented to enhance the conversational section of 'Vision 1' and improve language learning outcomes for Iranian EFL high school students?

3. Methodology

This study investigated the difficulties experienced by Iranian EFL high school students when participating in the conversational section of 'vision 1'. It used a triangulated approach, specifically focusing on the content analysis method. The study also involved conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers to gain insights into the aspects of the conversational section that they find most challenging and to come up with possible solutions. The identified problems and proposed solutions were categorized into different groups.

3.1. Participants

The study involved 50 high school teachers from various schools in Gonbad-e-Kavous, a city in Golestan province, Iran. There were 30 female teachers and 20 male teachers, with ages ranging from 25 to 40 and teaching experience of 3 to 7 years. These teachers were currently using the 'Vision 1' curriculum to teach English. The selection of these teachers was done using convenience sampling. Among the participants, 30 had a background in English language teaching, 5 had education in English literature, and 15

had education in English language translation. Additionally, 30 participants held a master's degree, 15 had a bachelor's degree, and 5 had a PhD. The researcher also had personal interactions with some of the teachers, where they explained the objective of the study and the semi-structured interview process. After the explanation, the teachers were politely asked to respond attentively to the questions.

Table 1 The Demographic Information of the Teachers

| Male | Female | Age | Years of Experience | Education Background | Degree |
|------|--------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|
| 20 | 30 | 25-30 (n:12) | 3 (n: 15) | English Language Teaching (n:30) | M.A (n:30) |
| | | 31-40 (n: 17) | 3-7 (n: 18) | English Literature (n:5) | B.A (n:15) |
| | | 41-50 (n: 21) | 7 (n: 17) | English Language Translation (n:15) | PhD (n:5) |

3.2. Material

The research used a textbook called Vision 1 English for Schools, which was created by the educational research and planning organization in Iran. This textbook was made specifically for tenth-grade students in high school. It consists of four lessons - saving nature, wonders of creation, the importance of knowledge, and exploring the world. Each lesson follows a consistent structure and includes different activities.

3.3. Instruments

To ensure the reliability and relevance of the collected data, the researcher opted for a qualitative approach. The study included 50 EFL teachers, who were chosen using stratified random sampling to guarantee fairness. The participants were divided evenly, with 20 males and 30 females. The data collection process involved conducting semi-structured interviews where open-ended and opinion-based questions were asked (see Appendix A).

This approach was used to gather a wide range of information and gain a comprehensive understanding of the speaking challenges faced by the participants. To safeguard their confidentiality and maintain their privacy, pseudonyms were utilized as

substitutes for their actual identities. The researcher depended on her recollection and took succinct notes in her notebook regarding the main topics discussed during the interviews, with the intention of reducing the potential sensitivity associated with the subject matter.

3.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

To gather data, a method called cluster random sampling was employed to select 50 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers from various high schools in Gonbad-e-Kavous, located in Golestan province. This group consisted of 20 male and 30 female teachers. These selected teachers were subsequently interviewed to examine the challenges their students face in speaking. Each interview lasted between 10 and 15 minutes and was recorded using audio equipment over a four-week period. The recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed using an analytical coding method.

To examine the data collected from the participants, an extensive assessment of the material was performed. The investigator utilized traditional instruments like pens of different colors, paper, and sticky notes to sort out the details and identify common trends. No electronic software was employed at any stage during the process of analyzing the data. Afterwards, the patterns and themes that were frequently mentioned in the answers were identified and categorized (Dörnyei, 2007). Finally, the findings of the study were examined and discussed in a qualitative manner.

4. Result

To obtain the required data, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 50 educators who teach English as a foreign language (EFL). The selection of these instructors was made through stratified random sampling from the total participants involved in the study. All comments made by the teachers were recorded and written down in detail for future examinations. The individuals being interviewed were given reassurances that their information would be kept confidential. To safeguard their privacy and maintain anonymity, false names were substituted for their real identities. The ideas and thoughts expressed were organized and developed into broad subjects, extensively explained and expanded upon in the subsequent sections.

“Mr. Baghban conveyed a point that is subsequently elaborated upon in Table 4.2. During the conversational section of 'Vision 1', the main goal is to enhance students' English conversation skills. This is achieved by equipping them with the essential vocabulary, grammar rules, and speaking techniques required to effectively communicate in real-life scenarios. The focus of this section lies in honing speaking abilities through diverse activities like engaging in dialogues, participating in role-plays, and partaking in group discussions”.

Table 2 Conversational Section of 'Vision 1'

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Aim | To develop students' ability to engage in meaningful conversations in English |
| Objective | To provide students with the necessary vocabulary, grammar, and speaking |
| Focus | Developing speaking skills through various activities |
| Activities | Dialogues, Role-plays, and Group discussions |

Based on the table 2, the expected results for the conversational section of 'Vision 1' aim are:

1. Improved ability of students to engage in meaningful conversations in English.
2. Enhanced vocabulary skills of students.
3. Increased proficiency in English grammar.
4. Strengthened speaking skills through various activities.
5. Improved confidence and fluency in spoken English.
6. Enhanced ability to actively participate in dialogues, role-plays, and group discussions.

These expected results suggest that the students will develop their communication skills, expand their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and become more confident and competent in speaking English through engaging in dialogues, role-plays, and group discussions.



Maryam is visiting the Museum of Nature and Wildlife. She's talking to Mr. Razavi, who works in the museum.

- Maryam:** Excuse me, what is it? Is it a leopard?
Mr. Razavi: No, it is a cheetah.
Maryam: Oh, a cheetah?
Mr. Razavi: Yeah, an Iranian cheetah. It is an endangered animal.
Maryam: I know. I heard around 70 of them are alive. Yes?
Mr. Razavi: Right, but the number will increase.
Maryam: Really?! How?
Mr. Razavi: Well, we have some plans. For example, we are going to protect their homes, to make movies about their life, and to teach people how to take more care of them.

Figure 1 Conversation of lesson 1, "vision 1"

Ms. Mahmoudi in table 2 portrays the difficulties that Iranian EFL high school students encounter when it comes to actively engaging and effectively participating in the conversational part of 'vision 1'.

"Ms. Mahmoudi made a point known Iranian EFL high school students face several challenges when it comes to engaging and effectively participating in the conversational section of 'Vision 1.' One common challenge is a lack of exposure to authentic English conversations outside the classroom, which hinders their ability to understand and respond appropriately. Some students also struggle with shyness or fear of making mistakes, which inhibits their participation. Additionally, limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge may hinder their ability to express themselves fluently".

Table 3 Challenges Faced by Iranian EFL High School Students in Conversational Section of 'Vision 1'

| Challenges | Description |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Lack of exposure to authentic | students have few chances for authentic English conversations |
| Shyness or fear of making mistakes | The shyness or fear of making mistakes in some students hinders their participation |
| Limited vocabulary and grammar | Limited vocab and grammar knowledge hinders fluency |

Table 3 provides an extensive breakdown of the obstacles encountered by Iranian high school students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) when participating in the conversational segment of 'Vision 1'. This table underscores the importance placed on developing conversational skills in language learning and

teaching. It suggests that merely comprehending language structure and grammar is insufficient; students must actively engage and effectively participate in conversations as well. The mention of challenges faced by Iranian EFL high school students implies that this is a prevalent issue within this specific group, potentially attributed to factors like cultural disparities, limited practice opportunities, or a lack of exposure to English-speaking environments.

Table 4 displays the observation of students' level of confidence during the 'vision 1' activity.

“Mr. Rad effectively conveyed a complete message. It is essential to pay attention to the students' confidence levels in the 'Vision 1' class. Certain students may exhibit strong confidence and actively engage in conversations, while others might be hesitant or unwilling to contribute. Educators should prioritize establishing a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere that motivates all students to freely express themselves in English”.

Table 4 Observing students' level of confidence during the 'vision 1'

| Classroom Observation Variables | Observation Description |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Confidence Levels | Some students demonstrate high |
| | Levels of confidence and actively |
| | Participate in discussions |
| | Others may be hesitant or reluctant |
| | Speak up |
| Teacher Role | Importance of creating a supportive |
| | Encouraging all students to feel |
| | Comfortable expressing themselves in English |

Based on table 4, Mr. Rad effectively conveyed a complete message regarding the importance of paying attention to students' confidence levels in the 'Vision 1' class. It is suggested that certain students in the class may exhibit strong confidence and actively engage in conversations, while others may be hesitant or unwilling to contribute. The information emphasizes the need for educators to prioritize establishing a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere that motivates all students to freely express themselves in English. The expected outcome of creating such an environment would be increased participation and confidence among all students in the 'Vision 1' class.

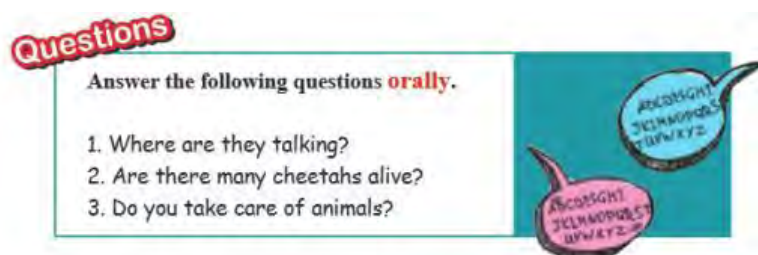


Figure 2 Activity of the conversation part in "vision 1"

The Table 5 displays the factors that influence the engagement of Iranian EFL high school students in 'Vision 1'.

“Ms. Nejati explained that there are various linguistic and cultural elements that impede Iranian high school students studying English as a foreign language from actively engaging in the conversation section of 'Vision 1.' These factors include dissimilarities in Persian and English sentence structures, which can affect how students construct their sentences. Additionally, cultural factors, such as a formal and indirect communication style in Persian, may affect students' capability to participate in informal English conversations. Furthermore, students might show reluctance to actively participate because they fear potential embarrassment or judgment from their peers, ultimately hindering their willingness to take risks.

Table 5 The Impact of Various Factors on the Involvement of Iranian EFL High School Students in 'Vision 1'

| Factors | Impact on Iranian EFL High School Students |
|-----------------------|--|
| Linguistic factors | Persian sentence structure differs from English |
| Cultural factors | More formal and indirect communication style in Persian Difficulty in engaging in casual conversations in English |
| Psychological factors | Fear of losing face Fear of judgment from peers Reluctance to take risks Lack of active participation |

Based on the provided table, the impacts on Iranian EFL high school students according to different factors as follows:

1. Linguistic Factors:

Persian sentence structure differs from English: This may result in difficulties for Iranian students when it comes to constructing sentences and producing grammatically correct English sentences.

Difficulty in engaging in casual conversations in English: Due to differences in linguistic norms between Persian and English, students may struggle with informal communication and find it challenging to participate in casual conversations in English.

2. Cultural Factors:

More formal and indirect communication style in Persian: Iranian students may face challenges in adapting to the direct and less formal communication style that is prevalent in English-speaking cultures, communicating effectively and confidently in English might pose a challenge for them.

1. Psychological Factors:

Fear of losing face in Iranian students could hinder their language acquisition as they prioritize avoiding embarrassment over actively engaging in English conversations. Additionally, the fear of being negatively judged by peers may decrease their confidence and discourage participation in English-speaking activities. Furthermore, the reluctance to take risks in language production or experimentation, driven by the fear of making errors or being perceived negatively, can limit their language development.

Lack of active participation: The combination of fear, lack of confidence, and cultural and linguistic differences can result in Iranian students being less likely to actively participate in English-speaking situations, leading to limited practice and progress in their English language skills.

Overall, Iranian EFL high school students are likely to face challenges in language acquisition and proficiency due to linguistic, cultural, and psychological factors such as Persian sentence structure, cultural communication norms, fear of judgment, reluctance to take risks, and lack of active participation.

Table 6, outlines different assessment methods along with their descriptions.

“Mr. Khajavi expressed that students' progress in conversational skills during the 'vision 1' course can be evaluated using a mix of formal and informal assessments. Teachers have the option to assess their speaking abilities through oral presentations, individual interviews, and group discussions. Furthermore, providing continuous feedback and engaging in self-assessment activities can enable students to track their own development and recognize areas where they need to improve”.

Table 6 Assessment Methods for Evaluating Communication Skills

| Assessment Method | Description |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Oral Presentations | Students deliver prepared speeches to assess speaking skills |
| Individual Interviews | One-on-one conversations to evaluate conversational abilities |
| Group Discussions | Students participate in group conversations to assess interaction skills |
| Continuous Feedback | Ongoing feedback from teachers to gauge progress |
| Self-Assessment Activities | Students evaluate their own skills and identify areas for improvement |

Based on the given information, Table 7 presents various assessment methods for evaluating communication skills. These methods include:

1. Oral presentations: In this assessment method, students deliver prepared speeches to evaluate their speaking skills. This method allows for the observation of their ability to communicate effectively, articulation, body language, and presentation skills.

2. Individual interviews: This assessment method involves one-on-one conversations between an evaluator (usually a teacher) and the student. It aims to assess the student's conversational abilities, including their ability to listen, respond, and hold a coherent conversation.

3. Group discussions: In this assessment method, students participate in group conversations or discussions. The purpose is to evaluate their interaction skills, including their ability to engage in productive conversations, express themselves clearly and concisely, and listen and respond to others effectively.

4. Continuous feedback: This assessment method involves ongoing feedback from teachers, which aims to gauge the progress of students' communication skills. Teachers offer valuable feedback on students' progress, focusing on areas that need to be enhanced and providing helpful suggestions for further growth.

5. Self-assessment activities: Students engage in self-assessment activities to evaluate their own communication skills. These exercises enable students to contemplate their strengths and weaknesses, recognize areas in need of enhancement, and establish objectives for improving their communication abilities.

Table 7 presents effective strategies for teaching conversational English to students.

Table 7 Effective Strategies for Teaching Conversational English

| Teacher | Strategies |
|----------|--|
| A | Provide explicit instruction on English pronunciation and the differences between Persian and English phonetic systems. Incorporate regular pronunciation practice activities in the classroom. Encourage students to listen to and imitate native speakers through audio recordings or videos. |
| B | Implement various speaking activities like dialogues, role-plays, and group discussions to provide students with ample conversational practice. Scaffold conversations by providing necessary vocabulary and grammar explanations. Offer feedback and error correction to help students improve their speaking skills. |
| C | Design activities that expose students to authentic English conversations outside the classroom (e.g., listening to podcasts, watching English movies or TV series). Create a supportive and non-judgmental class environment. Regularly introduce new vocabulary and grammar structures and provide explicit instruction on how to use them in conversations. |
| D | Foster a supportive and inclusive classroom environment through team-building |

activities and icebreakers. Encourage all students to participate by providing opportunities for low-stakes speaking activities and gradually increasing their complexity. Praise and acknowledge students' contributions to boost their confidence and motivation.

E Incorporate authentic listening materials like podcasts or videos to expose students to natural conversational English. Provide explicit instruction on idiomatic expressions, pronunciation patterns, and conversation strategies. Offer regular speaking practice activities and provide constructive feedback to help students improve their conversational skills.

F Teach students the differences between Persian and English sentence structures and provide practice activities to improve their sentence formation in English. Raise students' awareness of cultural differences in communication styles and encourage adaptation to casual English conversations. Create a safe and supportive classroom environment to reduce students' fear of taking risks or being judged by peers.

G Conduct formal assessments (e.g., oral presentations, individual interviews) to evaluate students' speaking abilities. Include group discussions and peer assessment activities to assess students' ability to engage in conversations. Provide continuous feedback, emphasizing strengths and areas for improvement, to help students monitor their progress in conversation skills.

H Include authentic listening materials like podcasts or videos in class activities to expose students to natural conversational English. Design role-play activities, real-life simulations, or project-based learning tasks that require students to engage in conversations. Provide interesting and relevant resources to keep students engaged in conversation practice.

I Utilize online discussion forums or chat rooms to give students additional opportunities to practice conversational English with peers outside the classroom. Introduce interactive language learning apps or educational websites with engaging exercises to improve vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Encourage students to use technology resources to practice conversational English skills independently and track their progress.

Based on table 7, these strategies involve explicit instruction on pronunciation and phonetic systems, regular pronunciation practice, listening and imitating native speakers, and engaging in speaking activities such as dialogues and role-plays. The table also suggests scaffolding conversations by providing necessary explanations, feedback, and error correction, as well as incorporating authentic materials like podcasts and movies. Furthermore, it emphasizes creating a supportive environment, introducing new vocabulary and grammar, teaching idiomatic expressions, and promoting inclusivity through team-building activities. Other strategies involve instruction on sentence formation, cultural differences in communication styles, and conducting formal assessments using oral presentations and interviews.

4. Discussion

The outcomes of the interview conducted with Iranian EFL teachers revealed that students face difficulties with their speaking abilities. This suggests that these issues may persist even after several years of studying English. The challenges students face with pronunciation and fluency can be attributed to differences in the phonetic systems of Persian and English. The primary discovery of this research is that there are numerous strategies that can be utilized in the classroom to enhance oral communication skills. These strategies comprise the use of genuine and practical dialogues, granting students increased opportunities for speaking practice, integrating interactive activities and tasks, and equipping teachers with supplementary materials to assist them in facilitating meaningful conversations.

The study found that Iranian high school students who are learning English as a foreign language face difficulties in practicing the language outside of the classroom, which is a common issue in foreign language learning situations. This problem is particularly severe in Iran due to political circumstances, leading to a decrease in English-speaking tourists and hindering students from interacting with them directly. As a result, it may be beneficial to encourage students to organize debate and discussion sessions outside of class to improve their speaking skills in environments where opportunities for language practice are limited. A similar study conducted by Senel (2012) on Turkish students learning English as a foreign language also demonstrated

that the lack of language use outside of class posed challenges for their oral communication.

Another issue faced by Iranian EFL students when it comes to improving their speaking skills is the lack of effectiveness in speaking classes. The participants in the interview mentioned that this problem arises because their instructors use inadequate techniques, materials, and tasks. The reason for this lack of effectiveness is believed to be the limited practical and theoretical knowledge of the instructors in teaching speaking skills. According to Kayi (2006), EFL instructors often ignore the importance of speaking skills and instead focus primarily on drills, repetition, and memorizing English conversations. To address this problem, Kayi (2006) suggests that instructors should employ various techniques, such as discussions, role plays, simulations, information gap activities, brainstorming, storytelling, interviews, story completion tasks, reporting tasks, playing cards, picture narration, picture description, and more, to help EFL students improve their spoken English proficiency. Additionally, encouraging students to engage in debates and discussions outside of the classroom could be beneficial in EFL environments where opportunities for practicing speaking skills are limited.

The findings of this study differ somewhat from Jamshid-Nejad's (2010) findings, which indicated that Iranian EFL students' primary difficulties in speaking were connected to psychological factors. They also contradict the findings of Soo and Goh (2013), who similarly found that Malaysian EFL students' reluctance was influenced by emotional factors. However, the current study's results are consistent with Liu's (2005) and Grengersen and Horwitz's (2009) findings, which suggest that a fear of making mistakes was one of the psychological factors that had a negative impact on students' participation in speaking classes.

According to Scrivener (2011), some students may hesitate to use their knowledge when speaking because they are afraid of being ridiculed or sounding foolish. As a result, they may choose not to speak in order to protect themselves from embarrassment. To address this, EFL instructors should strive to create a comfortable and safe environment where students feel encouraged to participate in class discussions. Furthermore, it is crucial for EFL instructors to be aware of their students' interests so that they can provide engaging topics for discussions. Nunan (1999) emphasizes that

interesting topics are essential for effectively motivating students. In addition, EFL instructors should not assume that speaking activities or discussion topics are automatically interesting and promote communication, as this may not always be the case. These topics might not be challenging enough for students, leading them to respond with simple answers and ultimately becoming disengaged and bored.

This lack of awareness among EFL instructors regarding the impact of oral communication strategies (CS) instruction on speaking skills can hinder the development of students' speaking abilities. According to Zhang and Goh (2009), it is crucial for EFL instructors to help increase students' repertoire of oral communication strategies and build their confidence in using these strategies effectively. With the addition of oral communication strategies, EFL learners can improve their fluency and conversational skills (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991). However, the importance of CS in the development of speaking skills is often overlooked by language instructors.

There has been limited research done on speaking skills problems from the perspectives of the EFL teachers. However, a few studies have investigated the issue from the viewpoints of EFL instructors. For instance, Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) found significant differences between Iranian EFL students and their instructors when it comes to demotivating factors affecting speaking skills. Hojati and Afghari's (2013) study also revealed that grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency were problematic for Iranian EFL students' speaking skills.

5. Conclusion

According to the search results, Iranian high school students who are learning English as a foreign language face multiple challenges. These challenges include difficulties in practicing English outside of the classroom, ineffective speaking classes, and anxiety related to language learning. The students' struggles with pronunciation and fluency can be attributed to the differences between the phonetic systems of Persian and English. However, there are several strategies that can be used in the classroom to enhance the students' oral communication skills. These strategies include using authentic and real-life conversations, increasing opportunities for speaking practice, incorporating interactive activities and tasks, and providing teachers with support materials to assist them in facilitating meaningful conversations.

The results of this research have various implications for educators who teach English as a foreign language and those who design the curriculum. It is recommended that teachers concentrate on improving students' ability to speak by utilizing different strategies and creating chances for them to practice their skills beyond the classroom. Meanwhile, curriculum designers should contemplate integrating genuine and everyday conversations, along with interactive activities and tasks, in order to foster meaningful discussions. Furthermore, training programs for teachers should highlight the significance of both practical and theoretical knowledge when it comes to teaching speaking skills.

The research solely concentrates on Iranian high school students studying English as foreign language (EFL) , potentially restricting the applicability of its conclusions to EFL settings or age groups different from the one studied. The study primarily highlights obstacles linked to English practice beyond the classroom, inadequacies within speaking classes, and anxiety arising from language learning. Other possible challenges, such as difficulties in writing or reading, are not investigated.

Future studies could examine various methods that can be employed to enhance oral communication abilities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. These could include incorporating genuine and real-life dialogues, interactive tasks and activities, as well as providing teachers with adequate support materials. Furthermore, investigations could be undertaken to explore the correlation between anxiety and language acquisition in EFL environments, and to determine successful strategies for minimizing anxiety among EFL learners. Lastly, research could focus on examining the obstacles encountered by EFL students in different settings and draw comparisons between the challenges faced by Iranian high school EFL students and those faced by students from other contexts.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Can you please share your experience with teaching Iranian EFL high school students?
2. How would you describe the conversational section of 'vision 1' in terms of its goals and objectives?
3. In your opinion, what are the typical challenges that Iranian EFL high school students face when it comes to engaging and effectively participating in the conversational section of 'vision 1'?
4. How do you observe students' level of confidence when engaging in conversation during the 'vision 1' class?
5. From your experience, what are some common difficulties that Iranian EFL high school students encounter while practicing conversational English in the classroom?
6. Have you noticed any specific linguistic or cultural factors that hinder Iranian EFL high school students from actively participating in the conversational section of 'vision 1'?
7. How do you assess the progress or improvements in students' conversational skills throughout the 'vision 1' course?
8. Are there any resources or materials that you find particularly helpful in engaging Iranian EFL high school students in conversation and fostering effective participation?
9. Based on your observations, how do you think technology, such as online platforms or interactive tools, can support Iranian EFL high school students in enhancing their conversational abilities within the context of 'vision 1'?