Oracy and Its Role in Developing the Speaking Competence of Saudi Advanced EFL Learners: An Approach to Effective Communication

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Abstract

In this study, the author investigated the role of oracy in enhancing Saudi advanced English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' speaking skills, focusing on how oral activities impact communication effectiveness. Conducted at a Saudi university, the study involved 60 female students who participated in an eight-week intervention to integrate oracy-based activities into their learning. The author employed a quantitative research design, using statistical analysis to compare the students' pre- and post-test results. The findings revealed significant improvements in speaking fluency, coherence, and accuracy, with students demonstrating greater confidence in spoken interactions following the intervention. Structured oracy activities helped the students manage cognitive load, leading to more spontaneous and coherent speech. Additionally, the use of real-life speaking activities addressed the students' limited exposure to native English interactions, fostering communicative competence. However, although fluency and accuracy improved, vocabulary development remained relatively unchanged, suggesting a need for explicit lexical instruction and oral practice. This study highlights the importance of incorporating structured speaking activities into EFL contexts to enhance students' communication skills. Future researchers should consider extending the duration of interventions and including more diverse participants to further validate the findings and refine oracy-based teaching strategies.

Key Words: Effective communication, EFL, Saudi Learners, Speaking Competence, Oracy.

الملخص:
في هذه الدراسة، اختبرت الباحثة دور المهارات الشفوية في تعزيز مهارات التحدث لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) من السعوديين ذو المستوى المتقدم في اللغة الإنجليزية، مع التركيز على كيفية تأثير الأنشطة الشفوية على فاعلية التواصل. أجريت الدراسة في إحدى الجامعات السعودية، وشارك فيها ٦٠ طالبة خضعن لتدخل تعليمي اختباري مدته ثمانية أسابيع يدمج الأنشطة المعتمدة على المهارات الشفوية في عملية التعلم. اعتمدت الباحثة على تصميم بحثي كمي، حيث تم استخدام التحليل الإحصائي لمقارنة نتائج الاختبار القبلي والبعدي للطالبات.

أظهرت النتائج تحسنًا ملحوظًا في الطلاقة اللغوية والتماسك والدقة في التحدث، كما اكتسبت الطالبات ثقة أكبر في تفاعلاتهن الشفوية بعد ادخال الأنشطة الشفوية. ساعدت الأنشطة الشفوية المنظمة الطالبات في زيادة ادراكهم اللغوي المعرفي، مما أدى إلى تحسين مهارة التحدث بشكل أكثر تلقائية واتساقًا. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ساهمت الأنشطة المستوحاة من مواقف الحياة الواقعية في معالجة محدودية تعرض الطالبات للغة الإنجليزية في بيئة لغتهم الام، مما عزز كفاءتهن التواصلية. ومع ذلك، رغم تحسن الطلاقة والدقة، لم يطرأ تغيير ملحوظ على مستوى تطور المفردات، مما يشير إلى الحاجة إلى تعليم أكثر عمقاً للمفردات مع ممارسات لغوية شفوية مكثفة..

تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على أهمية دمج الأنشطة الشفوية المنظمة في بيئات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لتعزيز مهارات التواصل لدى الطلاب. ينبغي على الباحثين المستقبليين النظر في تمديد مدة التدخلات البحثية وتوسيع نطاق المشاركين لتأكيد النتائج وتطوير استراتيجيات تعليمية أكثر فاعلية قائمة على تحسين المهارات الشفوية اللغوية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة اجنبية..

الكلمات المفتاحية، التواصل الفعّال، تعليم الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية المتعلمون السعوديون، كفاءة التحدث، المهارات الشفوية

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Introduction

Language is a basic tool for facilitating human communication and enabling people to share ideas and thoughts (Ilyosovna, 2020). The ability to communicate involves passing on information and understanding others (Doherty, 2023). Most educational systems focus on reading and writing to develop literacy skills, defined as the ability to read, write, and communicate (Butarbutar, 2022). However, little focus is placed on oracy skills, which are essential for speaking and listening (Qiu & Xu, 2023). Wilkinson (1965) used the term oracy to differentiate between speaking and listening skills and reading and writing skills, which are known as literacy skills (Heron, 2019). In Saudi Arabia, a similar emphasis is placed on reading and writing skills, with students given only limited opportunities to practise speaking. Despite studying English from grade one through university, Saudi students often struggle with speaking proficiency and performance (Al-Ghazali & Qaid, 2019). Additionally, achieving fluency in English is challenging for Saudi students due to the significant structural and grammatical differences between their mother tongue and the English language (Al-Hassaani & Al-Saalmi, 2022). However, research on language learning and speaking competence, especially for English as a foreign language (EFL) learner, has highlighted the challenges faced by both English as a second language (ESL) and EFL students. Moreover, researchers have prioritised academic writing skills for international students as key productive skills, while speaking skills continue to be largely overlooked (Gravett, 2019; Wingate, 2006).

An important skill that enhances speaking proficiency is oracy, defined in the *Oxford Online Dictionary* as the 'ability to speak clearly and grammatically correctly', which is crucial in foreign language teaching and learning (Olbers, 2020). It has also been defined as 'the ability to actively listen and speak' (Davies, 2020; Hill, 2021), and as the ability 'to express oneself efficiently, effectively, and fluently' (Dragomir & Niculescu, 2022). In simpler terms, oracy involves learning to talk and learning through talk (Doherty, 2023). Thus, it is important for the development of language because it involves a learning process whereby students learn through talk and achieve the outcome of articulating their ideas and communicating better (Dragomir & Niculescu, 2022). It is a comprehensive process that supports and develops students' leadership and communication skills (Davies, 2020; Liashenko, 2022). Oracy involves acquiring a rich set of lexical items that are combined with good grammar and organisational skills to enable a speaker to convey a clear and comprehensible message (Dragomir & Niculescu, 2022). However, oracy involves not only grammatical accuracy and linguistic ability but also related cognitive, sociocultural, communicative, and strategic competencies (Heron, 2019). Spoken language serves different purposes, socially, educationally, and emotionally. On the social level, oracy is a special characteristic of the human species that connects people through productive and creative thinking, allowing them to share inner thoughts and participate in civic life (Kaldahl et al., 2019). Moreover, spoken language also contributes to positive outcomes in education (Knight, 2024). Therefore, oracy skills are necessary for enabling students to participate effectively in learning, academic achievement, and success, as well as to gain understanding in different disciplines (Atkins & Heron, 2024). On the academic level, oracy skills play a significant role in thinking and support students' ability to articulate ideas effectively in different contexts. It transcends transmitting and receiving messages, ideas, and emotions into decision-making abilities, providing opportunities for

students to engage in arguments and counter-arguments when two sides communicate (Liashenko, 2022).

Oracy also involves engaging learners in productive and purposeful discussions that stimulate understanding and thinking in high-quality, knowledge-rich curricula (Knight, 2024). These abilities are commonly required across disciplines and should be developed in educational contexts that foster opportunities for interaction (Heron, 2019). Practising oracy in schools also develops students' spoken language, improving communication and enhancing confidence and self-esteem (Olbers, 2020). High-performing young people demonstrate oracy skills in interviews and develop rapport with others through dialogue, giving them a voice and allowing them to feel heard (Doherty, 2023). Therefore, oracy plays an efficient role in the emotional development of learners. It also fosters attainment, well-being, and empowerment, enabling students to share opinions and ideas and express themselves (Atkins & Heron, 2024). Oracy skills are also vital later in professional life, since modern jobs now require people who are skilful at 'making clear presentations, working together in teams, listening to others, and solving problems collaboratively' (Doherty, 2023).

Recent research has highlighted the role of oracy in developing speaking skills and improving EFL and ESL students' communication skills (Heron, 2019; Heron et al., 2021). However, to the best of the author's knowledge, limited research has been conducted in Saudi Arabia on the role of oracy in enhancing speaking proficiency among Saudi students. Therefore, in this study, the author employed quantitative research methods to evaluate the impact of oracy on the speaking proficiency of Saudi EFL advanced students, who often have limited exposure to authentic English interactions. Oracy bridges this gap by simulating real-life speaking scenarios in the classroom. It also allows teachers to identify the extent to which oracy-based activities enhance Saudi learners' ability to communicate effectively. In this article, the author offers practical recommendations to help teachers and language

practitioners incorporate oracy-based activities into their teaching practices.

Study rationale

In this study, the author considered the importance of oracy skills in EFL contexts. EFL and second language L2 learning contexts require EFL learners to communicate effectively, give presentations, and express themselves clearly and accurately using the English language, which is not the native language of Saudi Arabian students. Despite the growing recognition of oracy as a critical component of communication competence, limited research has been conducted in Saudi Arabia to explore its role in enhancing speaking proficiency among Saudi EFL learners.

Saudi students often face the challenge of limited exposure to authentic English interactions, which significantly hinders their ability to communicate fluently and confidently. Therefore, oracy provides a solution by simulating real-life speaking scenarios and oral presentation in the classroom and fostering practical language use. In this study, the author employed quantitative research methods to investigate the impact of oracy on the speaking skills of Saudi EFL learners. The findings contribute to improving teaching practices, raising teachers' and learners' awareness towards successful oral communication, and advancing the overall effectiveness of English language education in Saudi Arabia.

Study objectives

This study addressed the following objectives:

1. Investigate the role of oracy in enhancing Saudi EFL learners' speaking skills by identifying how oracy-based practices influence their ability to communicate effectively in English.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of oracy activities in simulating real-life speaking scenarios in the classroom to determine

how these scenarios can bridge the gap caused by limited exposure to native English interactions.

Research questions

The author aimed to answer the following two research questions:

1. In what ways does oracy influence the speaking proficiency of Saudi EFL learners and enhance their ability to communicate effectively in English?
2. How effective are oracy-based activities that replicate real-life speaking situations in improving Saudi EFL learners' speaking fluency and confidence given their limited exposure to native English interactions?

Theoretical framework

Oracy comprises a group of skills related to thinking, learning, and the clear articulation of ideas. Oracy relates to Vygotsky's (2011) sociocultural theory, which considers language as a communicative or cultural tool that is used for sharing and developing knowledge and understanding. Based on this theory, Watson (2017) stated that linguistic ability plays a role in the development of thoughts, because as a learner develops their language skills, their thinking ability also develops. Vygotsky (2011) also proposed that children develop cognitive abilities by interacting with people, which allows them to see and hear the people around them and make sense of the world. Therefore, he saw language as a cultural and psychological tool (Mercer, 2016). Also, Cognitive load theory (CLT), introduced by Sweller (1988), holds that learners have a limited capacity to process information at any given time in their learning process. This theory has been instrumental in shaping instructional design by emphasising the importance of managing cognitive load to optimise learning outcomes. Some studies have provided empirical support for CLT and expanded our understanding of its applications. For example, Paas et al. (2003) discussed developments in CLT and their implications for instructional design. They highlighted the

importance of balancing essential, irrelevant, and appropriate cognitive loads to enhance learning efficiency, which suggests that instructional materials should be designed to reduce extraneous load and facilitate schema construction and automation. Additionally, Baddeley's (2020) model of working memory has proved vital for understanding its structure and function. Engle and Kane (2004) examined the role of working memory capacity in executive attention and cognitive control. They argued that individual differences in working memory capacity are closely linked to the ability to maintain goal-directed behaviour and manage interference, which are critical components of cognitive control. Thus, Mercer et al. (2017) developed an oracy framework based on four dimensions physical, linguistic, cognitive, and socioemotional each of which is divided into subskills. The physical dimension includes verbal and body language, and the linguistic dimension includes language structures, rhetorical techniques, vocabulary, and variety. The subskills in the cognitive dimension are reasoning, audience awareness, content, self-regulation, clarifying, and summarising, while those in the socioemotional dimension involve working with others, listening, speaking, and confidence in speaking. However, these dimensions and subskills should not be treated as distinct, separate elements (Dragomir & Niculescu, 2022). Hence, the author focused on improving students' speaking skills by creating real-life scenarios and activities in English language classes to help the students recognise the value of active participation in oracy-based tasks. The aim was to increase their fluency and confidence in speaking the English language. This study highlighted the significance of managing cognitive load and understanding working memory limitations in instructional design and cognitive task performance. By aligning instructional strategies with the principles of CLT and the working memory model through real-life activities for Saudi students, educators and language practitioners can enhance EFL students' learning and speaking proficiency.

Background to oracy and EFL learning

Education systems pay little attention to oracy, and most curricula continue to emphasise reading and writing while ignoring speaking and listening (Doherty, 2023; Hill, 2021; Wilkinson, 1968). Despite the importance of oracy, few researchers have developed approaches that enable students to acquire and gain proficiency in second-language oral skills, and they have not delved deeply into the teaching and assessment of EFL learners' oracy skills (Liashenko, 2022; Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2022). Nevertheless, EFL oracy is essential for academic learning and for creative and critical thinking because it enhances collaboration and innovation, which are global educational goals in the twenty-first century (Atkins & Heron, 2024).

Heron (2019) conducted a case study on two business modules at a United Kingdom university where undergraduate students were learning L2. The researchers investigated how oral communication skills were integrated into content, pedagogy, and assessment. In both modules, oracy was a process. Teachers focused on group work, asking and answering questions, and experiencing interviews in academic and real-life contexts. In the second module, oracy was a product, and rubrics, presentations, and soft skills for the business world were at the heart of the module. The study revealed that teachers held a narrow view of oracy skills, viewing them as essential for equipping students with proper communication skills but ignoring their role in thinking and knowledge acquisition. Qiu and Xu (2021) conducted a study on undergraduate L2 students in China to gain insights into the role of listening and speaking in L2 learning motivation. The findings reinforced the importance of integrating L2 listening and speaking; activities that promoted L2 speaking motivation eventually led to higher L2 listening motivation. The study also revealed that designing communicative activities, such as task-based learning, is crucial for creating authentic communication experiences and allowing students to practise speaking and listening skills simultaneously, especially in

higher education contexts. Oracy does not mean only speaking and listening; it involves integrating both skills to facilitate better communication and understanding. Olbers (2020) studied how focused verbal exercises improved Swedish learners' expressive understanding of English and their use of extramural English in year 5 aged between 10 to 11 years old students. The findings showed that structured exercises over an extended period can contribute to developing learners' linguistic abilities and confidence, leading to improved speaking skills, including vocabulary. Georgiadou and Zafiri (2021) conducted a study to discover whether the use of YouTube video-based lessons can enhance oracy skills through differentiated instruction. The researchers focused on the case of a 15-year-old boy with a B2 English language level according to Common European framework of reference for language (CEFR). The case study proved that YouTube video-based lessons improved the student's listening and speaking skills, enabling them to use the information collected from videos to build necessary linguistic knowledge. Using YouTube videos also decreased the student's speech anxiety and increased his self-confidence. The student acquired advanced speaking and listening skills and exhibited greater motivation to study the English language.

On the other hand, another study conducted by Atkins and Heron (2024) employed interactive methods for foreign language learning, allowing students to participate in academic speaking in an online environment. The aim of the study, which included seven third-year undergraduate participants who were studying a foreign language, was to evaluate the four domains of the oracy skills framework: physical, linguistic, cognitive, social, and emotional Mercer (2017). The results showed that the absence of visual cues and body language, which contribute greatly to oracy skills, negatively affected understanding and communication in online learning. Interaction was also a challenge, although it proved to be essential for developing the students' oracy skills and confidence and enabling them to participate in conversations; such type of

interaction (online) was largely absent and limited the students' learning. The study showed that the right academic environment (face to face), is essential for the proper development of oracy skills; oracy skills can only be enhanced in EFL contexts when structured strategies and methods are applied in English lessons for different age groups. Previous studies have proved that oracy is an umbrella term for many skills and subskills that are effective in both academic contexts and real-life situations (Doherty, 2023).

Thus, most curricula across the world focus on reading and writing but neglect spoken language (Doherty, 2023). However, due to oracy's critical role in EFL learning contexts, because it integrates speaking and listening skills, many researchers have endeavoured to find links between language proficiency and cognitive development and to provide insights into how oracy enhances EFL learners' cognitive functions and language acquisition. For example, Wirag (2024) conducted a qualitative interview study to explore the impact of drama and practising in real-life situations on the EFL learning of German students in comprehensive schools. The findings revealed that engaging in drama activities strengthened the students' oracy skills and fostered cognitive growth by enhancing empathy, perspective-taking, and critical thinking. The researcher attributed these cognitive benefits to the interactive and reflective nature of speaking proficiency, which encourages learners to process and articulate complex ideas. Wang and Ryan (2023) conducted a mixed-methods case study to examine Chinese EFL teachers' practices and cognition regarding learners' autonomy in private schools. The study highlighted that promoting oracy through autonomous learning strategies, such as student-led discussions and presentations, significantly contributed to cognitive development. Students developed better self-regulation, metacognitive awareness, and problem-solving skills, which are essential components of cognitive growth in language learning and teaching. Nevertheless, regarding the role of task-based learning strategies and instruction, Ibrahm et al. (2024) conducted a study in the Abo Hamad

Directorate, Egypt, and introduced a task-based learning strategy aimed at developing primary school students' EFL oracy skills. The study demonstrated that structured tasks requiring active verbal participation enhanced not only the students' linguistic proficiency but also their cognitive abilities, such as memory retention and information processing. The interactive nature of task-based learning compelled the students to organise their thoughts coherently and engage in meaningful communication, thereby stimulating cognitive development. The findings of these studies shed light on the integral role of oracy in boosting cognitive development among EFL learners. By engaging in activities that promote speaking and sharpen speaking proficiency, EFL learners can enhance their language proficiency and develop essential cognitive skills, such as critical thinking, metacognition, and problem-solving skills. The findings support the incorporation of oracy-focused strategies into EFL curricula to support efficient language learning and cognitive development. Since little research has been conducted on oracy and has usually been restricted to case studies and limited studies in L2 contexts, oracy remains underexplored in the Saudi EFL contexts. Thus, the author explored oracy in EFL learning to identify best practices for enhancing EFL learners' oracy skills.

Methodology

In this study, the author employed a quasi-experimental quantitative research method, using a pre-test and post-test design to evaluate the effectiveness of an oracy-focused intervention in enhancing the speaking proficiency of advanced Saudi EFL learners. Quantitative methods have been widely recognised as effective methods for collecting, quantifying, and analysing data to obtain statistical results in educational fields, especially for language testing and assessment. According to Rashid and Sipahi (2021):

> Quantitative methods seek frequency in human life by separating the social world into empiric components called

> variables that can be statistically described as frequency ranges or rates, the correlations of which could be discussed by statistical methods and obtained through scientist-introduced stimuli and estimation suggestions. (p. 321)

In addition, the main focus of quantitative methods is to measure human behaviour in better ways than qualitative methods, which are based on people's perceptions and meanings (Payne & Payne, 2004). Thus, the design of this study involved pre- and post-tests to measure students' speaking proficiency levels before and after the intervention.

The pre- and post-tests for assessing the participants' speaking skills were based on a certified speaking test rubric provided by the English Language Centre at Taibah university testing unit. The rubric can be used to evaluate a range of criteria, including vocabulary range, which tests the variety and appropriateness of words and expressions used during speaking tasks, and language accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence, which are necessary for clarity, logical organisation, and the ability to engage effectively in conversational or presentation tasks. The activities used in this study were based on the *Cambridge Unlock: Speaking and Listening* course book, Level 3. Activities were selected from Units 1 to 8 and distributed over eight weeks, with one unit covered per week. The focus was on developing speaking skills through structured activities such as creating real life scenario and oral presentation.

Participants

The participants in this study were all female students attending a Saudi university. Including male students was not possible because male students studied on a separate campus, and females' access to that campus was restricted. All of the participants were enrolled in a preparatory programme, and English was a compulsory subject that the students had to pass to proceed in their respective majors. Their English language proficiency levels were determined at the

beginning of the semester using a placement test, and the levels ranged between B2 and C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). These levels indicated that the students had achieved reasonable proficiency in English, which was sufficient for engaging in more complex oracy activities. A total of 60 students participated in this study, all of whom were majoring in medical or computer science fields. The author chose these fields to provide a homogeneous group of students with comparable academic requirements and English communication needs. The preparatory English curriculum emphasised the language skills needed for academic success but did not specifically focus on speaking and communicative skills tailored to real-life professional contexts. This gap made the participants an ideal group for investigating the impact of an oracy-focused intervention.

Research design

The author collected data in two stages, the first of which involved a pre-test conducted before the intervention and the use of oracy materials. The students completed a speaking proficiency test to establish their baseline oracy proficiency. This initial test provided insights into their strengths and weaknesses in speaking and served as a basis for later comparisons. Over an eight-week period, the participants engaged in structured oracy-based activities that were integrated into their English language curriculum. These activities included role-plays, discussions, presentations, and collaborative problem-solving tasks designed to mimic real-life speaking scenarios. The goal was to provide students with practical opportunities to actively use English and improve their communicative competence. In the second stage, following the intervention, the study participants took a post-test that included presentations, short conversations, and descriptions of pictures to measure improvements in their speaking proficiency. The author analysed the results to determine the effectiveness of the oracy-

based activities in enhancing their speaking and communicative skills. This systematic design ensured that involvement in the activities and the evaluation aligned with the learning objectives of the preparatory English programme. Additionally, the certified rubric ensured reliability and consistency in evaluating students' performance. The participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, objectives, procedures, and expected outcomes. They also provided written consent to participate and had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. All their scores were kept confidential, and the students' names were anonymised.

Data analysis procedures

To answer the research questions, the first aim was to investigate the role of oracy in improving the speaking proficiency of Saudi EFL learners and the extent to which their ability to communicate improved. The second aim was to determine how effective oracy-based activities were in improving speaking fluency and confidence. The author based the assessments on five key speaking criteria: accuracy, fluency, vocabulary range, interaction, and coherence. The certified rubric used to evaluate the students' performance had a score range of 0–3 for each criterion. The author then analysed the data quantitatively using Python to determine the extent of improvement in each aspect of speaking proficiency.

For the data analysis, the author used Python for the statistical evaluation based on descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation (SD), and frequency distribution, to assess the students' speaking fluency before and after the intervention. A one-sample t-test based on a 'one-group pre-test–post-test design' (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 117) was used to determine whether the total pre-test score was significantly greater or less than the total post-test score. The statistical analysis was conducted to determine the total and mean pre-test and post-test scores and answer the research

question about the role of oracy in improving Saudi learners' spoken proficiency.

Table 1 shows the Saudi students' pre-test speaking assessment scores before starting the eight-week intervention. The scores for each category are given alongside the overall scores.

Table 1. Saudi participants' pre-test scores

Student no.	Accuracy 0–3	Fluency 0–3	Range 0–3	Interaction 0–3	Coherence 0–3	Total 15
1	3	3	3	3	3	15
2	2	3	2	1	2	11
3	1	1	3	1	2	10
4	3	2	2	1	1	9
5	2	3	2	1	1	9
6	1	1	2	2	2	8
7	2	3	2	2	3	12
8	2	1	3	2	2	10
9	1	2	3	3	2	11
10	2	1	2	3	2	10
11	1	1	2	3	2	11
12	2	2	2	2	1	9
13	2	3	2	2	3	12
14	2	3	2	1	1	10
15	1	2	3	2	2	10
16	2	2	3	1	3	11
17	1	2	3	2	3	11
18	3	2	3	1	2	11
20	1	2	1	1	2	7
21	2	2	3	1	2	10
22	3	1	2	2	2	10
23	3	2	3	2	2	12
24	1	2	2	3	1	10
25	2	3	2	2	2	11
26	3	2	2	1	2	10
27	3	1	2	3	2	10
28	2	1	3	2	1	9
29	2	2	2	3	2	11

Student no.	Accuracy 0–3	Fluency 0–3	Range 0–3	Interaction 0–3	Coherence 0–3	Total 15
30	3	3	3	2	1	12
31	2	2	1	1	2	9
32	2	2	1	2	1	9
33	3	2	1	2	2	10
34	2	3	1	2	2	10
35	1	2	2	1	1	7
36	1	2	3	3	1	10
37	2	1	1	2	1	7
38	3	3	3	2	3	14
39	3	2	1	3	2	11
40	2	3	1	2	1	9
41	2	2	3	3	3	13
42	2	2	2	1	1	8
43	2	3	1	2	1	9
44	3	3	3	3	2	13
45	2	3	2	1	2	10
46	2	2	2	3	2	11
47	2	2	3	2	3	11
48	3	3	3	3	3	15
49	2	2	1	2	1	8
50	3	2	3	2	3	13
51	2	2	2	2	2	10
52	2	3	2	2	3	12
53	2	3	2	1	3	11
54	2	2	1	2	1	8
55	2	2	3	2	2	11
56	1	2	2	2	2	9
57	2	2	3	2	3	12
58	2	1	1	3	2	9
59	3	3	3	3	3	15
60	2	1	1	1	1	6

Table 2 shows the Saudi students' post-test speaking assessment scores before starting the eight-week intervention. The scores for each category are given alongside the overall scores.

Table 2. Saudi participants' post-test scores

Student no.	Accuracy (0–3)	Fluency (0–3)	Range (0–3)	Interaction (0–3)	Coherence (0–3)	Total (15)
1	3	3	3	3	3	15
2	3	3	2	2	3	13
3	2	2	3	2	3	12
4	3	2	2	1	1	9
5	3	3	2	2	2	12
6	2	2	2	3	3	12
7	2	3	2	2	3	12
8	3	2	3	3	3	14
9	2	3	3	3	3	14
10	2	1	2	3	2	10
11	2	2	2	3	3	12
12	3	3	2	3	2	13
13	2	3	2	2	3	12
14	3	3	2	2	2	12
15	2	3	3	3	3	14
16	2	2	3	1	3	11
17	2	3	3	3	3	14
18	3	3	3	2	3	14
19	1	2	1	1	2	7
20	3	3	3	2	3	14
21	3	2	2	3	3	13
22	3	2	3	3	2	13
23	2	3	2	3	3	13
24	3	3	3	3	2	14
25	2	2	2	2	2	10
26	3	3	2	2	3	13
27	3	2	2	3	3	13
28	2	1	3	2	1	9
29	3	3	2	3	3	14

30	3	3	3	3	2	14
31	2	2	1	1	2	8
32	3	3	2	3	2	13
33	3	3	2	3	3	14
34	2	3	1	2	2	10
35	2	3	3	2	2	12
36	2	3	3	3	2	13
37	2	1	1	2	1	7
38	3	3	3	3	3	15
39	3	3	3	3	3	15
40	2	3	1	3	1	10
41	3	3	3	3	3	15
42	3	3	3	2	2	13
43	3	2	3	3	2	13
44	3	3	3	2	2	13
45	3	3	3	3	3	15
46	2	2	2	3	2	11
47	3	3	3	3	3	15
48	3	3	3	3	3	15
49	2	2	1	2	1	8
50	3	3	3	3	3	15
51	3	2	3	3	3	14
52	2	3	2	2	3	12
53	3	3	3	3	3	15
54	3	2	2	3	2	12
55	1	2	2	2	1	8
56	3	2	3	3	3	14
57	3	3	3	3	3	15
58	3	3	3	3	3	15
59	3	2	2	3	3	13
60	3	2	2	2	2	11

The results of the data analysis are shown in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the Saudi learners' speaking pre-test

Student's	N	Mean	SD	Mean Standard Error
Accuracy	60	2.12	0.72	0.094
Fluency	60	2.08	0.65	0.085
Range	60	2.21	0.75	0.097
Interaction	60	2.05	0.75	0.098
Coherence	60	1.91	0.70	0.091
Total pre-test score	60	10.34	2.04	0.263

The pre-test results revealed that the Saudi EFL learners demonstrated varying levels of speaking proficiency across the different components: accuracy, fluency, range, interaction, and coherence**.** The mean total pre-test score (10.34) showed that the learners had a moderate level of speaking ability before they participated in the oracy activities, with mean fluency (M = 2.08) and coherence (M = 1.91) values that were roughly equal. These were the components with the lowest scores, suggesting that the students struggled to maintain smooth speech and structure their ideas coherently. Additionally, the SDs showed some variation among students, although the scores for vocabulary use (SD = 0.75) and interaction (SD = 0.75) indicated less variation than for the other criteria**,** suggesting individual differences in lexical variety and conversational engagement. These findings highlight the need for targeted instruction strategies, particularly to enhance fluency and coherence and to improve overall speaking proficiency.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the Saudi learners' speaking post-test

Student's	N	Mean	SD	Mean Standard Error
Accuracy	60	2.55	0.567	0.073
Fluency	60	2.58	0.593	0.077
Range	60	2.22	0.727	0.094
Interaction	60	2.53	0.627	0.081
Coherence	60	2.44	0.68	0.088
Total Post-Test Score	60	12.34	2.014	0.26

The post-test results showed a notable improvement in some categories of the Saudi EFL learners' speaking performance following the intervention. The mean total post-test score (12.34) reflected an overall enhancement of speaking proficiency compared to the pre-test score (10.34). In particular, fluency (M = 2.58) and coherence (M = 2.44) exhibited significant improvements, indicating that the learners were able to speak more smoothly and organise their ideas more effectively. Additionally, there was improvement in the components of interaction (M = 2.53) and accuracy (M = 2.55), suggesting better conversational engagement and grammatical precision. Therefore, the relatively low SDs across the categories implied consistency in the students' performance. However, the use of vocabulary (SD = 0.727) still varied, suggesting that lexical diversity remained an area for further improvement.

Table 5. Total descriptive statistics for the Saudi learners' speaking post- and pre-tests

Test	N	Mean	SD	T-Test Statistic	P-Value
Pre-test	60	10.345	2.04	-	-
Post-test	60	12.345	2.014	-	-
T-test	-	-	-	**0-inf**	**0**

Table 5 shows the results for a comparison of the pre- and post-test mean scores. The mean score increased from 10.345 (pre-test) to 12.345 (post-test)**,** indicating an overall improvement in the students' speaking performance. In addition, the SDs (2.04 for the pre-test and 2.014 for the post-test) revealed that the variability in scores remained relatively consistent across both tests. Regarding the t-test, the statistics showed negative values, indicating notable differences between the pre- and post-test results. Moreover, the comparison was based on a *p*-value of 0.0, meaning that the differences between the overall pre- and post-test scores were statistically significant. Overall, the results revealed improvements across some speaking assessment categories in the EFL students' speaking proficiency after the intervention involving oracy activities. The increased mean scores, along with a highly significant t-test result, suggest that oracy-based activities promoted better communication and speaking performance among the Saudi EFL students. These findings will be discussed in depth in the next section.

Discussion

The author examined the results of this study based on CLT (Sweller, 1988) and the working memory model (Baddeley, 2020). According to CLT, learners process the information they receive within a limited learning period and then enhance their learning through exposure to available learning resources and practice. The Saudi learners' performance in the pre-test showed that the students demonstrated low proficiency regarding fluency and coherence, with mean scores of M = 2.08 and M = 1.91, respectively,

suggesting that their cognitive resources were overburdened when attempting to produce speech. However, after the eight-week oracy-based intervention, the post-test results showed a significant increase in fluency (M = 2.58) and coherence (M = 2.44). This improvement indicates that structured oral activities can help students manage their cognitive load more effectively by reinforcing automaticity in language processing. Baddeley's (2020) working memory model explains that learners process linguistic information while engaging in speaking tasks.

The pre-test results indicated difficulties in interaction and coherence, suggesting that the Saudi EFL students struggled to retain and organise speech elements in real-time communication. However, the post-test scores revealed enhanced interaction, implying that targeted oral practice improved the students' ability to manage discourse coherence while maintaining real-time interaction. This finding aligns with Atkins and Heron (2024), who used interactive methods for foreign language learning, allowing students to practice speaking online. The aim was to test the students' oracy skills, and the results showed that the absence of visual cues and body language in online learning had a negative impact on students' understanding and communication. In addition, the finding aligns with Wirag (2024), who discovered that engaging EFL students in real-life activities strengthened their oracy skills and fostered cognitive growth, such as their development of critical thinking and sufficient oral skills. These cognitive benefits can be attributed to the interactive and reflective nature of speaking proficiency, which requires learners to process and articulate complex ideas.

On the other hand, the results of this study in term of coherence and interaction contradict Georgiadou and Zafira's (2021) findings showing that the use of YouTube video-based lessons can enhance speaking skills through differentiated instruction. Although YouTube video-based lessons in that study improved the student's listening and speaking skills, and helped them build necessary

linguistic knowledge, decreased speech anxiety, and increased self-confidence in interaction, the findings of this Saudi study emphasise the importance of real-life interaction for improving speaking skills. This study revealed that interaction and practising in real-life situations were essential for developing the oracy skills and confidence needed to participate in conversations and improving the speaking performance of the Saudi EFL learners.

Moreover, in terms of accuracy of oral assessment, the results showed an improvement from M = 2.12 to M = 2.55 in the students' scores, reflecting that they gained a better grasp of grammatical structures and language accuracy. This aligns with the linguistic dimension of Mercer et al.'s (2017) framework, which emphasises structural correctness and the ability to use appropriate grammatical forms. The structured oracy-based involvement in this study probably supported the Saudi EFL learners in using grammatical rules through interactive practice, reinforcing their accuracy in real-life speaking scenarios.

Fluency was another area of improvement, the score for which increased from M = 2.08 in the pre-test to M = 2.58 in the post-test. This aligns with the results obtained by Ibrahm et al. (2024), who claimed that task-based learning activities helped students improve their linguistic proficiency and cognitive abilities, such as memory retention and information processing. The activities in this study enabled the EFL learners to organise their thoughts coherently and engage in meaningful communication, thereby stimulating cognitive development. This emphasises that the cognitive dimensions of oracy in this Saudi study resulted in significant improvement in speaking coherence. According to Mercer et al. (2017), fluency involves not only the ability to produce speech smoothly but also the cognitive processing required to maintain discourse coherence. The oracy intervention provided the students with opportunities to engage in spontaneous speech, reducing hesitation and increasing their ability to communicate ideas without long pauses.

The findings also support Olbers's (2020) study showing that focused verbal exercises improved Swedish learners' expressive understanding of English and their use of extramural English. The findings of the Saudi EFL learners study indicate that structured exercises over an extended period can contribute to improving learners' linguistic abilities and confidence, leading to improved speaking skills, including accuracy. However, the increased fluency and accuracy scores indicated that the Saudi EFL learners developed good proficiency and confidence in their spoken language production during the study intervention. Interestingly, one notable finding for vocabulary range in this study was that the vocabulary of about half of the students remained unchanged, although the other half showed some improvement. The pre-test and post-test results remained relatively stable, with only a marginal increase from M = 2.21 to M = 2.22. This indicates that although some students expanded their vocabulary usage, others may have needed more targeted activities to boost their lexical diversity. Thus, while other areas of speaking improved, the students' lexical variation did not develop significantly. From a cognitive perspective (Sweller, 1988), vocabulary acquisition requires repeated exposure, contextual reinforcement, and longer periods of practice than other aspects of speaking, which may not have been fully addressed by the eight-week intervention in this study. This finding highlights the importance of deliberate vocabulary learning alongside communicative practice; however, it does not totally agree with the results obtained by Olbers (2020), who claimed that verbal exercises improved Swedish learners' expressive understanding of English and their speaking skills. The Saudi study findings indicated that structured exercises over an extended period can contribute to improving learners' linguistic abilities, leading to improved speaking skills and vocabulary, considering the differences between the Swedish and Saudi students in terms of the intervention length and their ages and language levels. However, the stability of the improvement in the vocabulary range of Saudi students highlights the importance of deliberate vocabulary learning and opportunities

to practise communication. Future interventions might incorporate explicit vocabulary-building strategies, such as word mapping and lexical chunking, to enhance lexical diversity.

In summary, the findings of this study revealed a significant improvement in oracy-based skills, particularly fluency, coherence, and grammatical accuracy, after the intervention. The results based on CLT and the working memory model showed that structured oral practice helped the Saudi EFL learners manage cognitive demands, leading to improved speaking proficiency, particularly regarding coherence and interaction. In addition, the learners' fluency and accuracy improved. However, their vocabulary range remained relatively low and stable, indicating a need for more targeted lexical development strategies, suggesting that lexical acquisition requires a more systematic and extended learning process. Research indicates that vocabulary development occurs gradually through repeated exposure and meaningful contextual use, rather than short-term interventions (Nation, 2001). This highlights the need for more targeted lexical development strategies that incorporate spaced repetition, lexical chunking, and contextual reinforcement to enhance vocabulary acquisition and sufficient usage. These findings align with previous research emphasising interactive learning's role in fostering the cognitive and linguistic growth needed to develop speaking competence, Olbers (2020), Wirag (2024), Atkins and Heron (2024). Nevertheless, the findings contrast with those of studies advocating virtual learning methods, Georgiadou and Zafira's (2021), underscoring the importance of real-life communication for developing oracy skills. Future researchers should incorporate explicit vocabulary-building activities into learning to further support lexical diversity alongside improvements in fluency and accuracy.

Implications for further research

In the current study, the author focused on a specific group of Saudi EFL learners. Future research should be conducted with larger and

more diverse samples, including both male and female students, to assess the generalisability of the results. This would provide a broader perspective on how oracy-based interventions affect different learner groups in various EFL contexts. Also, since this study involved only 60 students over an eight-week period, future researchers should include larger numbers of participants over extended intervention periods to enhance the validity of the findings. A longer intervention duration would allow for more sustained exposure to structured oracy activities, potentially leading to greater improvements, particularly in lexical diversity. Interestingly, although fluency and accuracy improved in this study, lexical diversity did not. This suggests that vocabulary development requires more targeted approaches. Future researchers should incorporate explicit vocabulary-building strategies, such as lexical chunking, word mapping, and repeated contextual exposure, to enhance students' ability to use a wide range of expressions in speech. Finally, the study demonstrated improvements in speaking proficiency due to the students managing cognitive load and enhancing their working memory capacity. Future researchers should also explore additional cognitive and affective factors, such as anxiety reduction, motivation, and confidence building, to provide a more holistic understanding of how oracy interventions influence EFL learners' speaking performance.

Conclusion

In this study, the author explored the role of oracy in enhancing the speaking skills of Saudi advanced EFL learners, particularly considering how structured real-life oral activities influenced their ability to communicate effectively. The findings showed clear improvements in fluency, coherence, and accuracy following an eight-week intervention. Initially, the students struggled with spontaneous speech due to cognitive overload, leading to hesitation and difficulty in maintaining coherence. However, after consistent engagement in oracy-based activities, their speaking performance

improved, with greater fluidity, better organisation of ideas, and increased confidence.

One of the most significant findings was the effectiveness of simulated real-life speaking scenarios in bridging the gap caused by limited exposure to native English interactions. Through interactive tasks, the students developed stronger communication skills, demonstrating a shift from hesitant speech to more natural and coherent conversations and presentations. Although improvements were evident in fluency and accuracy, the students' vocabulary development showed only slight progress, suggesting the need for more explicit strategies to enhance lexical diversity.

These results highlight the importance of integrating meaningful speaking opportunities into EFL instruction. Unlike passive learning methods, structured oral practice reinforces linguistic and cognitive skills, allowing learners to engage in real communication rather than memorising isolated language components. This study reinforces the idea that oracy does not involve only speaking; it is a cognitive process that supports fluency, coherence, and confidence. Future researchers should extend the duration of interventions and include more diverse samples to further refine oracy-based strategies and maximise their impact on language learning.

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