

# IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL EFL LEARNERS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE USING CEFR-BASED SPEAKING PRACTICES\*

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## ABSTRACT

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) encourages language learners to think about what they do when communicating and what they can do to help themselves and others learn a language better. Related research supports CEFR's contribution to language learning. This study aims to improve Kurdish EFL learners' communicative competence through some proposed CEFR based speaking practices in Northern Iraq. A mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative) research design was used in the study. The study was conducted in a high school in Erbil city with CEFR level B1. The supposed speaking practices were applied to 50 high school students in which 24 of the students were the experiment group students, and 26 of them were the control group students. The post-test results depicted that the treatment was very useful and fruitful in assigning that the treatment process and the supposed speaking activities were really in favor of developing the students' communicative competence. The qualitative results indicated that the developed materials increased motivation and self-confidence in interaction and communication in the target language.

**Keywords:** communicative competence, speaking skills, CEFR, motivation, self-confidence

## Introduction

As interaction and communication have become the essential tools for sending and receiving messages among people, speaking fluently and communicating understandably are the speakers' core needs. The English language has gone global, and this globalization needs speakers of different languages to be at least competent to communicate and interact with ease. According to Mufawene, "English has emerged as a pre-eminent world language, and global English facilitates communication worldwide" (Mufwene, 2010: 31&34). The CEFR has given a great deal of interest to communicative competence to equip language learners with excellent communicative skills. CEFR "is widely used in setting language proficiency requirements, including for international students seeking access to university courses taught in English" (Green, 2018: 59). However, there are other aspects of CEFR. As Shermis highlights, "The purpose of the CEFR is to create a system that has similar meaning across all languages" (Shermis, 2018: 180). According to Deygers, et al., "because of its effect on language tests, the CEFR has potentially affected the lives of millions" (Deygers et al., 2018: 4).

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As there are different levels of language placed in the CEFR such as A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, there are also different styles according to different approaches for such levels. The majority of the teachers are familiarized with the Non-CEFR language levels. The teachers and language experts have to bring in interactive techniques and methods that are recognizable and acceptable based on the CEFR. The so-called techniques and methods recall the learners' needs based on the Can-Do descriptors. The learners' levels' difficulty is well illustrated based on what the learners need in each proposed level of the language. The illustration focuses on the speaking strategies and practices that are connected with the learners' oral production outcome. They facilitate the learners' communicative competence and communicative performance in different social and educational contexts and settings.

Oral communication fulfills several general functions in language pedagogy; learning to speak is the most crucial aim that is used by the students in their entire life. Rivers (1981) explains that speaking skill is regarded as the essential skill which the learners use twice as much as writing and reading in interaction and communication. Speaking is the mode of communication at most, it is used to express opinions, offer explanations, deliver information, and make impressions upon others. Students still suffer from a grammar-based English language teaching method in the northern part of Iraq, where Kurdish is the first language of EFL learners. The present study attempts to overcome this problem using some useful and preferable speaking practices to develop the B1 level Kurdish EFL High school students' communicative competencies. The study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Have the activities and practices developed in parallel with the CEFR contributed to improving the students' speaking abilities?
2. Is there a significant difference in the progress of the experiment and control groups following the practice of the speaking activities in experiment group classes?
3. What are the assumptions of the observant teachers about the activities developed for the speaking classes?
4. What are the assumptions of some students about the effect of the activities?

### **Review of Literature**

Indeed, speakers who speak a second language will rarely be exact speakers as the natives, but it is widely accepted that these speakers could be native-like speakers as they are grown up and taught foreign language settings and contexts. Such an issue is well-placed in the communicative approach as it mainly pays a great deal of interest to communicative competence. There have been two different views of competency between Hymes (1971) and Chomsky (1975). The former focuses on every aspect of speech, during the later heavily focused on the learners' linguistic competence. While Hymes's focus is on communicative competence, Chomsky's focus is on an ideal native speaker. It can be said that Hymes's approach to the progress of communicative competence can be seen as valid and effective for better and clear communication among students. According to Savignon, "Hymes's focus was not language learning but language as social behavior" (Savignon, 2002: 2). Hymes's communicative competence also overlaps with Halliday's meaning potential. In fact, "the wider the variety of communicative, or meaning-based activities, the greater the chance for involving all learners" (Savignon, 2002: 13). Thus, Hymes's "theory of communicative competence has been taken as an aim within the communicative approach, the aim of making a non-native communicatively competent in the target language" (Acar, 2005: 58).

The communication between the learners in the classrooms with their peers and interlocutors is of very much concern. So, the teachers must bring in practical and interactive teaching approaches and familiarize them with real-life topics and issues. Sauvignon highlights that "language experience is the use of language for real and immediate communicative goals" (Savignon, 2002: 11). Proposing various speaking activities and formulating real and authentic communication and interaction are the main issues of language teachers. Marzano et al. (2001) suggest that cooperative learning strategies are beneficial for classroom settings because they can promote learning and develop speaking skills.

On the other hand, they develop social skills and promote self-esteem among students. CEFR is suitable for teaching, as mentioned above skills, and as Hulstijn, Alderson, and Schoonen (2010) state, the CEFR is one of the successful tools to teach foreign languages. Recent studies "show that the CEFR has become a daily reality in foreign language teaching in Europe; however, they also reveal that teachers are usually inexperienced in

using the framework" (Fleckenstein et al., 2018: 91). On the whole, "the influence of the CEFR has been the object of studies in Europe and beyond" (Díez-Bedmar & Byram, 2018: 2).

Competently speaking and being fluent in the target language needs real-time exposure that is met with a set of practical and useful communicative speaking practices. These speaking practices have to be in parallel with the CEFR criteria. They should have dynamic and interactive learning settings in which the teacher and the students should collaborate and cooperate to bring about a safe and relaxed atmosphere when tackling the development of speaking skills and communicative competence. CEFR based activities are considered as "instruments aiming at describing learner proficiency and enhancing communication among language practitioners" (Harsch & Hartig, 2015:333). In fact, "the framework describes what L2 learner-users can *do* in their L2s in five communicative language activities" (Talor, 2015: 516). CEFR has been approved as a successful method of language teaching. As Alderson & et al. maintain, "to fulfill its functions, the CEFR was planned to be comprehensive, transparent, and coherent" (Alderson & et al., 2006: 5). Haynes (2007) and Genesee (2006) both agree that having sufficient input and exposure of the language learners towards the target language will have higher outcomes and language proficiency. Many studies support the idea that improving teaching and learning quality must be part and parcel of every curriculum development improvement design and process (Abdurrahman et al., 2019; Hartina et al., 2020; Sriyakul, et al., 2020).

### Research Methods

For the present study, some speaking practices' importance and effectiveness based on CEFR were tested. These speaking practices were used as a tool of instruction to develop the students' speaking skills and communicative competences. A quasi-experimental research design was used with an experimental group and a control group. On the one hand, the control group followed their present speaking syllabus.

On the other hand, the researcher created some classroom activities for communication and speaking concerning CEFR instruction. The experimental group practiced these activities as they had four hours speaking classes; they had two hours for the current speaking practices. Brown (2001:270) supports the idea that the speaking practices have to be designed in a way to give learners sufficient opportunity to talk and interact and engage the whole class in performing any tasks. To develop the speaking practices for what the learners need a structured note disguised questionnaire was given to the students before the instruction process's commencement. The researcher produced speaking practices according to the CEFR criteria. As these activities are so suitable for the B1 level they could be the combination of:

1. Items 3 and 14 focus on Plans and Expressing Opinions.
2. Items 2 and 4 focus on Discussing free-time activities
3. Items 6 and 10 focus Best or Worst (Pros and Cons)
4. Items 7 and 16 focus on Agreeing and Disagreeing
5. Items 11 and 18 focus on Comparing and Contrasting

Eight weeks were used to design the practices, pre-testing, actual instructional period, and post-testing. The current study intends to focus on developing the learners' speaking skills and communicative competence via some speaking activities for the B1 level of Kurdish students in a high school, a co-educational one, and these students are supposed to be EFL speakers. A descriptive and quantitative method is used in this study based on a questionnaire, its analysis, a pre-test, five-week speaking practices for material development, and on the other hand, a post-test with its analysis. The questionnaire was adapted from Holt & Van Duzer's (2000). The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire is 0.93. A high school is used in this study and based on the CEFR for the B1 level, and mixed-mode quasi-experimental research methodology is used that is carried out with a treatment and a control group. A structured and non-disguised questionnaire was applied to (100) students. Five of the most problematic issues were fixed by referring back to CEFR to improve and develop five spoken interaction and production materials. In fact, CEFR "has increasingly become a key reference document for language test developers who seek to gain widespread acceptance for their tests within Europe" (Claudia & André, 2011: 1, 2). The majority of the scholar "agreed that the CEFR could serve as a starting point for test development and as a tool to trigger reflection and discussion" (Harsch, 2018:104).

On the other hand, five weeks were provided for giving the learners (participants) instructions based on the developed practices. From the very beginning step of the study, SPSS was used to analyze the results of the questionnaire. Next, the experimental and control groups' results were obtained in a pre-test and a post-test, the former before the five-week practices, and the latter refer back to after the five-weeks practices. In a nutshell, the mix mode method of this experimental research design was used as the current study intends to bring about and develop some speaking practices to speak skill and communicative competence.

Practically, the current study falls into two main phases; the first one is the Needs Analysis practiced on 100 high school students. The second one is the implementation phase of the developed speaking practices. These practices have been applied to 50 students as these students were classified into two main groups; 24 Experimental Group and 26 Control Group. Participants study English for nine years. The textbook that participants used in learning English are Sunrise, which is used primarily in Northern Iraq. To be more reliable and valid, the Needs Analysis phase has been applied for the whole students by focusing on the speaking ability and the other hand, their communicative competence. The study's data collection procedure intakes various instruments such as a need analysis (NA) questionnaire, pre-test, and post-test questions and interviews. These instruments played a paramount role in obtaining a clear-cut result for the development of the B1 level of high school students' oral practices and outputs. These sorts of instruments meet quantitative and qualitative data as the questionnaire. The pre-test and post-test that were applied on the experimental group and the control group were for quantitative data. The interviews were for the qualitative data.

For the treatment process, which the researcher implemented, he just focused on the experimental group, which means the control group did not receive the treatment process. He used pre-test and post-test on both the two mentioned groups before the supposed speaking practices implemented. The researcher developed these activities and practices for communication and interaction that take place among the learners when they are about to develop their speaking skills and communicative competence. Through the results that are obtained from the so-called mentioned tests, the researcher will find it natural that the Kurdish learners of the English language will be promoted towards the target language, which is the development of their speaking skills and communicative competence. Ur (1996) suggests that language learners have to be provided with sufficient opportunities and time for doing any designed activities to approach the target language. Such activities and practices and even the ones like these will be beneficial and fruitful for the learners to improve the language's targeted area, which is speaking skills and communicative competence. Littlewood (1981) proposed that designed speaking practices should meet some practical results in order to go across the language to get meaning.

## Findings and Discussion

The needs analysis questionnaire was designed in a way that could present the deficiency of the learners in interaction and production. The Can-do descriptors had a significant role in eliminating this insufficiency and paving the way for the learners to improve their speaking and communicative competence. The NA questionnaire was applied to 100 high school students as they were all considered to be B1 level students. The researcher himself carried out the speaking classes with these students with the help of his English Co-teachers. Twenty items were chosen among the Can-Do statements, and a Five-point Likert Scale was used to design the items from *too difficult* to *least difficult (no problem)*.

*Have the activities and practices developed in parallel with the CEFR contributed to improving the students' speaking abilities?*

This table is for the Needs Analysis Questionnaire, in which twenty items were chosen from the 'Can Do' statements, and these items were designed through a Five-Point Likert-scale that starts from too difficult and ends with no problem/least difficult. On the other hand, for the analysis purpose, values from 1 to five were used, and for the assessment process mean values; 2.18 to 3.20 were supposed as negative, 3.20 to 3.72 were regarded as neutral, and 3.72 to 3.99 were considered. It can be said that 1=Too difficult, 2=Very difficult, 3=Neutral, 4=Ok, 5=No problem for the assessment criteria. The table which is provided below indicates the results that were gained from the questionnaire:

**Table 1. SPSS-Based Results for the Questionnaire**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Item 1	100	1.0	5.0	3.810	11.432
Item 2	100	1.0	5.0	2.940	10.330

Item 3	100	1.0	5.0	3.120	11.571
Item 4	100	1.0	5.0	2.940	11.705
Item 5	100	1.0	5.0	3.990	10.963
Item 6	100	1.0	5.0	2.180	13.587
Item 7	100	1.0	5.0	2.870	13.307
Item 8	100	1.0	5.0	3.740	12.683
Item 9	100	1.0	5.0	3.720	11.554
Item 10	100	1.0	5.0	3.200	11.634
Item 11	100	1.0	5.0	3.060	12.294
Item 12	100	1.0	5.0	3.490	11.763
Item 13	100	1.0	5.0	3.790	12.251
Item 14	100	1.0	5.0	3.150	12.175
Item 15	100	1.0	5.0	3.920	13.002
Item 16	100	1.0	5.0	2.300	10.964
Item 17	100	1.0	5.0	3.990	11.590
Item 18	100	1.0	5.0	2.190	13.158
Item 19	100	1.0	5.0	3.530	13.667
Item 20	100	1.0	5.0	3.490	13.142
Valid (listwise)	N	100			

As already stated, the difficulty levels of the items in the table are shown via the low levels of the mean values. By using such a procedure, it can be noticed that item 6 has been chosen and found as the most difficult one in the questionnaire. On the other hand, item 18 has received the second level of difficulty, shown through the mean value level. So, based on the students' needs, ten items/subjects have been selected to develop and improve the interaction and the activities with the materials that are needed as production.

*Is there a significant level of difference in the progress of the experimental and control groups after the practice of the speaking activities in the experimental group classes?*

**Table 2. Group Statistics and Independent Samples t-test results**

Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P	Sig
Pretest	Control	26	17.04	4.33	0.51	p < .05
	Experimental	24	17.79	3.65		
Posttest	Control	26	16.35	4.13	0.01	p < .05
	Experimental	24	27.46	3.31		

Table 2. depicts the results of the pretest and posttest results of the control and experimental group. As can be seen from Table 2, the researcher obtained remarkable results in the different levels of the groups in the post-test scores after the treatment process. It can be noticed that the experimental group performed as (M=17.79) in the pre-test scores before the treatment process, while it performed as (M=27.46) in the post-test scores after the treatment process. The p-value is smaller than .05, so there is a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group in favor of the experimental group. Thus, the Kurdish students are in a great need of speaking practices that are designed for interaction and communication. Such activities helped them to develop their spoken-production aspects, especially speaking skills and communicative competence. By doing so, the students are going to be competent speakers of the English language.

In a nutshell, it can be said that the proposed speaking practices that were implemented in the experimental group of the Kurdish students can quickly develop and improve their speaking skills and communicative competence as what was obtained from this study. The results of this study are in line with other studies such as (Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1987; Dam, 1995; Smith, 2000; Benson, 2001; Barfield and Brown, 2007; Murphy, 2008) which focus on learners' reflections and responsibilities of their learning processes for bringing about personal ways in targeting the language. On the other hand, letting the students feel autonomous and providing a student-centered class where the teacher is the facilitator and negotiator will contribute to their development in speaking and communicative competence. Meaning that the suggested speaking practices and the student-centered approach, if processed together, will bring about such expected results. So, the activities that were implemented and the results obtained from the post-test best answered the second research question as it made a significant contribution to the students' speaking skills development.

### Assessment of Qualitative Data

The primary source of the qualitative data that was gained for the current study was through the interviews in which they were carried out with the teachers and the students. These interviews have substantial implications on the data gained from the questionnaire and the tests. On the other hand, the teachers' performance evaluation forms were beneficial for the researcher, and he made good use of their comments and feedback they gave within the speaking practices implementation period. These sorts of data were beneficial to illustrate and explain the teachers' and the students' perception of the implemented speaking practices on the one hand and their contents on the other hand.

*What are the assumptions of observing teachers about speaking activities?*

#### The oral reports:

As mentioned earlier, the teachers who are interviewed are those who have a good experience in the process of teaching the English language, and they are those who participated as observant in the speaking practices implementation phase. The data and information that were gathered from teachers' interviews were very beneficial and significant as they will have real and practical insights into the current study. Generally, the reports they had in the teacher evaluation forms and their answers to the interview questions can be illustrated as:

#### First Teacher

*a) The most problematic aspect of learning the English language is the implementation of Sunrise Curriculum. As the curriculum is a Swedish based one, it brings about difficulties for the Kurdish learners because there is a vast difference between the Swedish and the Kurdish ones. The facilities that are provided for the students in Kurdistan do not meet the needs of the students.*

*b) Another problem is that; though there are four primary skills in the curriculum, the only attention is given to reading and writing, whereas listening and speaking skills receive the least priority. This brings about deficiency in the learners' oral production, which is communication and interaction.*

*c) As the Kurdish community has been widely opened to internationality, the need to speak the English language has become necessary to the academics and even the local people. Knowing the English language has become a must in most workplaces.*

*d) English is taught here to get high marks in grade 12<sup>th</sup> and get a pass on the subject. It is not taught basically to learn the language but rather to master the target language structures and rules. They lack motivation and having fewer opportunities to communicate.*

*e) When a perfect curriculum is available for the language learners to focus heavily on oral production respect, they will be to develop their speaking skills and communicative competence. The right approach, such as communicative one, is needed for the students because interaction and communication make it easy for the learners to overcome the obstacles.*

**His written report after Observation:** The students were unwilling to communicate, meaning that they lacked motivation, but the techniques the researcher use, which is the communicative one, made it easy for the learners

to find self-confidence and motivation to participate and interact with their interlocutors. Students were very eager to share their ideas and viewpoints on the speaking activity the researcher taught.

### Second Teacher

a) *The Kurdish students find it difficult to communicate due to the lack of knowledge of sufficient vocabulary and phrases needed to talk and discuss a given topic. So they get in trouble as they cannot express what they think and want to say.*

b) *Most of the students feel nervous, and they are afraid of making mistakes. As they make mistakes, they are laughed by the others. Building confidence and motivation is of the most critical issues that have to be tackled.*

c) *Applying the communicative language teaching and having a proper curriculum that meets the needs of the students because our students need to have self-confidence and a student-centered class setting in which they can express themselves freely and without hesitation.*

d) *Most of the Kurdish learners suffer from poor pronunciation as there are certain sounds in the English language that bring about difficulties for the students when they speak. They need to practice more on pronunciation and phonetics. There have to be proper techniques available for the learners to overcome pronunciation problems.*

e) *Mother tongue use makes the students effortless to speak and interact in the target language. Our students use a great deal of their first language. It is better to encourage the students to speak the target language only.*

**His written report after Observation:** Having a proper lesson plan like the one the researcher provided best fits the needs of the learners because they find autonomy, and they do not feel they hesitate to participate in the class. Bringing about a fun class for the students as English was taught as fun was constructive for the development of communicative competence and speaking skills.

### Third Teacher

a) *Students do not dominate the class, and this produces silent students or inactive students. Such a problem puts barriers in front of the process of language teaching and learning. Students need to be free without being punished, they like to talk in the class, but more teacher talk deprives them of being directed towards the target language. I can say that interactional activities and chances make learning happen.*

b) *A significant obstacle comes from listening skills. Students cannot understand what a native speaker says when he listens to someone talking. This is because they use a great deal of linking when they speak. They have fewer chances to listen to the native speakers as it will lead to a higher speaking production.*

c) *Tenses also are of the fundamental problems they cannot use properly. Most of the students cannot differentiate among the tenses, and thus, they mix up uses of tenses. They only master the structures for memorization purposes. However, when they find themselves in interaction and communication, they will face grammatical errors and have problems with the cohesive devices.*

d) *Another problem is that students cannot express their ideas in the English language because they make many pauses as they speak. They face break downs in communication and get nervous about what they are going to say. They are obliged to use some of the mother tongue use when they are frustrated.*

### His written report after Observation:

The students were suffered from having no authentic materials and subjects of interest. Brandl (2008) supports that via using authentic materials, the learners would be targeted towards the real language in contexts, and these so-called materials will provide the learners with what they need. The use of authentic materials and daily life issues related to the students' interests and hobbies develops the students' awareness and builds in motivation and willingness to communicate. The researcher made use of what the students are familiar with or interested in, and thus, he had an interactive and active class. He could overcome the students' silenced status and encourage them to communicate and interact with their peers and the whole class.

#### Fourth Teacher

a) *A significant problem is the learning environment; the students are not provided with sufficient meaningful input. The students do not have sufficient access to the necessary learning materials. The classes' cognitive and physical status is not necessarily compatible with the needs of the learners to be motivated towards the target language.*

b) *Though these students have studied English for many years, they still have problems learning how to speak and interact in the target language. The lack of a proper curriculum that best fits the students brings about difficulties and obstacles. They are just taught to master the target language structures and rules and neglecting speaking and interaction.*

c) *In most of the cases, the teachers use the grammar-translation method, but a few of them follow the communicative approach. Students who are taught with the grammar-translation method have poor communication and interaction, and they cannot express themselves in the target language.*

**His written report after Observation:** Authenticity is the main path to get the students involved in the target language. Teachers have to bring in the real world into their classrooms, as the researcher did. He made use of loads of authentic and meaningful materials for better interaction among the students to happen. He was aware of the students' needs, and thus, he worked as a facilitator and negotiator in the class and mostly provided the student-centered course for the students.

The interviews that were carried out with the teachers and their results and the teachers' perceptions about the speaking practices that were developed by the researcher indicate that these speaking practices and activities are compatible with what the learners need. They are compatible with what the learners need to develop their speaking skills and communicative competence. These speaking practices motivate the learners and make them aware of how to overcome their weaknesses in developing those two areas of language, which are speaking skills and communicative competence.

The authenticity of the teaching materials that the teacher brings in with himself to the classrooms has a pivotal role in the students' progress and development. Teachers have to connect their classes with the real world or bring in the real world into their classes. When the students have motivation and self-confidence, they are eager to learn and communicate in the target language. However, when they are frustrated and unwilling to communicate, there will be produced silent or inactive readers. According to Harmer (2001), motivational factors encourage the learners to set up efficiency and language development among the learners. Thus, there should be genuine reasons for performing any speaking practices.

Proficient teachers in language teaching and learning have to be provided for the high schools, especially those who are best familiar with the CEFR-based curriculum and design. The curriculum available in Kurdistan Region needs more reforms and development. There has to be a more favorable environment for teaching and learning so that the students could benefit from them.

*What are the assumptions of some students about the effect of the activities?*

#### The oral reports:

##### First Student

*To speak the language, most of the students need being fluent when they are talking. Personally, the most problematic aspect of the language for us was to speak fluently in the English language because, in the future, I will step into university. As the curriculum is in English at university, we have to be fluent in the language because even after university, we may apply for a job at companies. The speaking practices were very useful and beneficial because we feel no hesitation, and we feel autonomous when we speak the language.*

##### Second Student

*We all study to get degrees and be employed somewhere. Speaking fluently in the English language is essential for us because our future career calls for it. When you are fluent in the language, you can quickly get a job, but*

*lacking fluency will get you in trouble. After taking this course, I do think that my English level has changed. Meaning that my interaction and communication ability have been increased.*

### **Third Student**

*Compared to the other skills of the language. I find speaking skills essential and useful because we will have to speak and interact in English until we finish university. So, to be fluent in the English language, we see it as our will and wish which we want our speaking skills to be developed. This course, which we participated in, helped us a lot as it built in us self-confidence and self-awareness, and it helped us in developing my verbal interaction.*

### **Fourth Student**

*The topics which we discussed and debated in the speaking classes had significant impacts on us because we were interested in them. The helped us to believe in me and try hard to participate with my classmates. Previously, I felt hesitant and nervous about interacting and communicating in English because I was afraid of making mistakes and to be laughed at by my classmates, but this course gave me strengths and built-in me motivation and encouragement. Fluently speaking is very necessary for me because I will need to speak excellent and acceptable English when I graduate and get a job.*

As the main focus of this study is on the students, the researcher used a student-centered approach in designing the speaking practices that were carried out with the students. The answers that were taken from the students in the interviews were beneficial and fruitful for this doctoral thesis, especially for the qualitative data assessment. All the students who were interviewed gave a great deal of interest to fluency. They find it the most problematic aspect of the language to develop. They also worried about self-confidence and self-awareness, as they declared and answered in the interview the current speaking practices built-in them self-confidence and self-awareness. They found the speaking practices motivating and encouraging. Rubio (2007) explains that having low self-confidence can bring about insufficiency in both the learners' social and psychological respects in which the learners' commencement in the language learning process will have an inactive route.

English language teachers have to be motivating and encouraging in a way that the students would not feel frustrated and nervous in the classes. The English curriculum in Kurdistan Region needs a proper update, and the teaching and learning environment also has to be systematized and arranged in a better way. The students' communicative competence and speaking skills have to be the great interest of the well-educated and well-trained teachers in the field of language teaching and learning. Teachers have to be innovative and effortless in designing new techniques and practices for their learners.

### **Conclusion**

English language globally has made different people in different countries to give a lot of emphasis and interest to learn the language to communicate with English speaking people, whether for occupation purposes or for the sake of being more socialized. This will come out in the form of needs in which they have needs for their language development, and meeting these needs requires specialists and experienced people in the field of language teaching and learning. Besides the needs, people have difficulties in learning the target language, and they need unique and academic techniques to overcome such difficulties. The academic centers mainly focus on the successes they gain from different eras of education and profitable outcomes. If failure is taken place, they try to find out the best solutions in their pedagogical systems, such as updating their way of teaching and bringing about better practices for language development.

The researcher tried hard to find out proper solutions in language development for students' needs. He brought about remarkable techniques and strategies to develop and improve what the students desire to take place in their oral spoken production field. They aim to develop their speaking skills and communicative competence to be more competent in the target language. He designed and implemented proper proposed speaking practices in order to make the learners meet their needs and become competent speakers. As an experienced educationalist, the researcher was well aware of the students' needs, and based on his experience in the field of language teaching and learning, he made use of a questionnaire where the needs of the learners would be met and analyzed. He prepared the so-called reliable and valid questionnaire, and such qualities in any research bring about meaningfulness for the research and its outcomes obtained.

The authenticity of the teaching materials that the teacher brings in with himself to the classrooms has a pivotal role in the students' progress and development. Teachers have to connect their classes with the real world or

bring in the real world into their classes. When the students have motivation and self-confidence, they are eager to learn and communicate in the target language. However, when they are frustrated and unwilling to communicate, there will be produced silent or inactive readers. Allwright (1990) argues that materials heavily focus on learning and teaching, and they control them, whereas O'Neill (1990) insists that they help to learn and to teach. The Needs Analysis questionnaire was used based on the CEFR for the B1 level to meet the students' needs.

Results obtained from the Needs Analysis questionnaire's quantitative data revealed that the students were having difficulties in communication and interaction with their peers and interlocutors. On the other hand, they were insufficiently competent in their spoken production. The lack of opportunity to interact and the absence of authentic materials in the speaking classes were the main reasons and obstacles behind their inactiveness and incompetency. Bowman et al. (1989: 40) claims this fact as one of the reasons as he says, "traditional classroom seating arrangements often work against you in your interactive teaching." The researcher himself had to prepare and design the so-called proposed speaking practices to bring about more interaction and communication opportunities for the learners to practice their target language and be promoted towards the development of their speaking skills and communicative competence.

He provided a student-centered class in which the students felt autonomous and were having self-confidence and self-esteem. On the other hand, they were motivated and encouraged and willing to communicate and interact with peers and interlocutors. He focused on the CEFR as a means to meet the students' needs because CEFR for itself entails communication and interaction as it focuses on the communicative approach. Also, speaking practices and the teaching materials he used in the speaking classes were very significant for the students' development and success.

From the start of the research process, the researcher carried out a pre-test with both groups' participants. This oral test was given just before the commencement of the proposed speaking activities. This pre-test aimed to know the students' level to go with the treatment process implementation carefully. The treatment process was successfully implemented within five weeks' time, and a post-test was given just after the implementation of the speaking practices. It has to be said that the same questions were used in both tests. The results that were obtained from the post-test indicate that the experimental group who were given the treatment process performed better and scored higher than the control group. There was a significant and remarkable difference in their success level. The data gained from both tests were so useful and fruitful to develop further speaking practices and know what the learners need to interact and communicate and develop their spoken production. As the pre-test was given and the results obtained from it showed no significant difference in both groups' level, meaning that both the control group and the experimental group performed the same but with a slight difference. On the other hand, as the control groups were doing their usual classes and the experimental group practiced the speaking classes of the treatment process just after, a post-test was given. The results obtained via the sample t-test indicate that the experimental group outperformed the control group. They scored higher than the control group.

The instruments were used to play paramount roles throughout this research study. By obtaining quantitative and qualitative results, the study was enriched with useful and clear-cut solutions for the insufficiency of the relevant materials and learners' language development. The teacher evaluation forms with the reports they gave after each taken class were beneficial for the whole study. There was seen that the students' level of confidence and motivation increased due to the techniques and practices the researcher implemented. On the other hand, the interviews with the teachers and the students were very significant and helpful because, via the data obtained in both respects, the researcher had clearer insights to the students' success level.

Lastly, the proposed speaking practices and the student-centered approach used by the researcher made it easy for the learners to feel autonomous and confident, and their level of motivation increased. By doing so, the students in the experimental group made significant development and progress in their speaking skills and communicative competence. Meeting the students' needs and having effective speaking practices would best serve the students in terms of being more competent and active in class and even outside class setting. On the whole, it is possible to say that using CEFR based practices improve "students' awareness of their speaking skills by providing them with a language they could use to describe their abilities" (Glover, 2011: 131).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Unwillingness to participate as a whole is one of the most remarkable obstacles that happened at the time of speaking activities which was caused by their motivation and self-confidence in the class settings. The class

environment was another obstacle in which the classes were not educationally designed for educational purposes. Another constraints is that it was seen essential to participate the three grades of 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>, but not only grades 11<sup>th</sup> due to time constraints that 12<sup>th</sup> grade was entering the baccalaureate examinations. Taking just a high school is another hindrance for this study if not so, the objectives would be generalized to many high schools in this region. Future studies can be conducted on other language skills alongside each other in meaningful social interaction.

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