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ماجستير المناهج وطرق التدريس

**The Effectiveness of Using Virtual Learning Environment
Tools on Developing Sixth Graders' English
Conversational Skills in Khanyounis Governorate**

فاعلية استخدام أدوات البيئة التعليمية الافتراضية في تطوير
مهارات المحادثة لدى طلبة الصف السادس
الأساسي في محافظة خان يونس

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إقرار

أنا الموقعة أدناه مقدمة الرسالة التي تحمل العنوان:

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نتيجة الحكم على أطروحة ماجستير

بناءً على موافقة شئون البحث العلمي والدراسات العليا بالجامعة الإسلامية بغزة على تشكيل لجنة الحكم على أطروحة الباحثة/ أمل إبراهيم سليمان الانقر لنيل درجة الماجستير في كلية التربية/ قسم مناهج وطرق تدريس وموضوعها:
فاعلية استخدام أدوات البيئة التعليمية الافتراضية على تطوير مهارات المحادثة لدى طلبة الصف السادس الأساسي في محافظة خانيونس

The Effectiveness of Using Virtual Learning Environment Tools on Developing Sixth Graders' English Conversational Skills in Khanyounis Governorate

وبعد المناقشة العلنية التي تمت اليوم الأحد 24 ربيع الثاني 1438هـ، الموافق 2017/01/22م الساعة الحادية عشر صباحاً، اجتمعت لجنة الحكم على الأطروحة والمكونة من:

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وبعد المداولة أوصت اللجنة بمنح الباحثة درجة الماجستير في كلية التربية/قسم مناهج وطرق تدريس.

واللجنة إذ تمنحها هذه الدرجة فإنها تؤيدها بتقوى الله ولزوم طاعته وأن يسخر علمها في خدمة دينها ووطنها.

والله ولي التوفيق ،،،

نائب الرئيس لشئون البحث العلمي والدراسات العليا

أ.د. عبدالرؤف علي المناعمة

ABSTRACT

Study Aims: This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using virtual learning environment tools on developing sixth graders' English conversational skills.

Study Approach: To achieve the study aims, the researcher adopted the experimental approach with two groups pre-post design (experimental and control).

Study Sample: To collect data, the researcher designed the following study instruments and tools: content analysis, an oral conversation test , a written conversation test and a conversational performance rating scale for eight selected conversational skills (speaking fluency, speaking rate , vocal confidence, articulation, vocal variety, volume, accuracy, asking questions). After examining the validity and reliability of the tools , they were implemented on the study sample represented in (70) students from Hatem El Tae School . The sample was randomly selected from the original population of (3009) sixth graders students in Khan Yuonis Directorate of Education 2015-2016.

The sample of the study was divided into two groups: the experimental group consisting of (35) students and the control one consisting of (35) other students. The two groups were similar in their age, previous learning, achievement in general and achievement in English language. The virtual learning tools were used in teaching the experimental group, while the traditional method was used with the control one in the second term of the scholastic year (2015-2016). The experiment lasted for 8 weeks (3 lessons per week). The researcher used the following statistical methods to reach the results: (Holesti Formula, Mean, Standard Deviation, Alpha Cronbach, Pearson Coefficient, Kuder-Richardson (K_R20) Formula, Spearman Brown Equation, effect Size Formula and T-Test).

Study Results: After the statistical analysis, the findings of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the scores of the control and the experimental groups in favor of the experimental group which is attributed to the virtual learning tools.

The implementation of the effect size equation revealed that virtual learning tools had a very large effect size favoring the experimental group.

Study Recommendations: Based upon the previous findings, the study recommends that teachers use the virtual learning tools in teaching conversational skills, hold educational courses and workshops for teachers in general and of English in particular in employing virtual learning tools to enrich the teaching learning process and develop students' performance level. It also suggests that further research should be conducted on the effect of virtual learning tools on other English language skills, and on developing lower- higher order thinking skills.

ملخص الدراسة

هدفت الدراسة إلى التعرف على فاعلية استخدام أدوات البيئة التعليمية الافتراضية في تطوير مهارات الحوار باللغة الانجليزية لدى طلاب الصف السادس.

منهج الدراسة: لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة استخدمت الباحثة المنهج التجريبي المعتمد على تصميم قبلي - بعدي لمجموعتين (ضابطة وتجريبية).

أداة الدراسة وعينتها: ولجمع البيانات صممت الباحثة أدوات ومواد بحثية تمثلت في : تحليل المحتوى، اختبار شفوي لمهارات الحوار، اختبار تحريري لمهارات الحوار، مقياس للأداء الحواري لثمان مهارات حوارية مختارة وهي (طلاقة الكلام، معدل الكلام، الثقة الصوتية، اللفظ، التنوع الصوتي، درجة الصوت، الدقة، وطرح الاسئلة. وبعد التأكد من صدق أدوات الدراسة وثباتها تم تطبيقها على عينة الدراسة العشوائية المتمثلة في طالبات الصف السادس الاساسي في مدرسة حاتم الطائي والتي تكونت من (70) طالبة. ولقد تم اختيار العينة بشكل عشوائي من المجتمع الاصلي البالغ (3009) طالبة في مديرية التربية والتعليم - خانيونس للعام الدراسي 2015-2016م.

قسمت عينة الدراسة الى مجموعتين : المجموعة التجريبية مكونه من (35) طالبة والمجموعة الضابطة مكونه من (35) طالبة. تماثلت كلتا المجموعتين في العمر، والتعلم السابق، والتحصيل بشكل عام والتحصيل باللغة الانجليزية بشكل خاص. استخدمت أدوات التعلم الافتراضي في تعليم المجموعة التجريبية ، في حين أن الطريقة التقليدية استخدمت مع المجموعة الضابطة وذلك في الفصل الدراسي الثاني من السنة الدراسية 2015-2016. استغرق تطبيق الدراسة مدة ثمانية اسابيع (بواقع 3 دروس اسبوعيا). وقد استخدمت الباحثة الاساليب والمعالجات الاحصائية التالية للتوصل الى النتائج: (معادلة هولستي، المتوسط الحسابي، الانحراف المعياري، معامل ارتباط بيرسون، معادلة كودرريتشارد سون 20، معادلة سبيرمان براون، معادلة حجم الاثر، واختبار (ت).

نتائج الدراسة: وبعد اجراء التحليل توصلت الدراسة الى النتائج التالية: وجود فروق ذات دلالة احصائية عند مستوى الدلالة (0.05) في مستوى تحصيل المجموعتين لصالح المجموعة التجريبية ويعزى ذلك الى فاعلية أدوات البيئة التعليمية الافتراضية. ويتطبيق معادلة حجم الاثر تبين أن لأدوات التعلم الافتراضي أثر كبير جدا على أداء الطلبة.

توصيات الدراسة: في ضوء ما سبق أوصت الدراسة بتوصيات عدة ابرزها تبني معلمو اللغة الانجليزية استخدام ادوات البيئة التعليمية الافتراضية في تعليم مهارات الحوار، عقد دورات ومشاغل تربوية للمعلمين بشكل عام ومعلمي اللغة الانجليزية بشكل خاص في توظيف أدوات التعلم الافتراضي مما يثري العملية التعليمية ويساعد في تنمية التحصيل الدراسي للطلاب. كما اقترحت الدراسة اجراء دراسات علمية في فاعلية استخدام الادوات الافتراضية في تدريس مهارات اللغة الانجليزية الأخرى تطوير مهارات التفكير العليا و الدنيا.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

ن وَالْقَلَمِ
وَمَا يَشْتَرُونَ

[الفلم: 1]

صَدَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمِ

"Nun. By the pen and that which they write"

(The Holy Quran, Al-Qalam, verse 1)

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to

- The loving memory of my father, who has successfully made me the person I am becoming. You will always be remembered.
- My beloved mother whose continuous prayers guided me throughout my project work.
- My husband, sons and daughter for their encouragement, support and putting up with the long hours.
- My adorable brothers and sisters whose educational and professional degrees have motivated me to start my work.
- All those who gave me love, strength and patience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

I am very grateful to Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala, the owner of the universe , whose blessings have empowered me to finish this thesis.

Being one of the most inspiring and demanding works I have ever done, writing this thesis would not be achievable on my own. It required not only my experience, knowledge and skills but also motivation and support of some guiding people in my life. Thus, I would like to acknowledge those people who helped me bring this work into reality.

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Researcher

Amal Ibrahim Alankar

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Chapter I

Introduction

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1. Study background

English is a global language due to the political and economic power of its native speakers. It is the dominant language of international communication and technology. As speaking is one of the central elements of communication, most of the world's language learners study English to enable them to develop proficiency in speaking. Speaking seems to be the most intimidating to the majority of English learners. This is due to the nature of the speaking process which is firmly linked with the listening skill. When students learn a foreign language, they very often accumulate a lot of knowledge (grammatical rules, lists of vocabulary items), but then they find out that they cannot actually use this language to communicate when they want to. Scrivener (2005, p.147) claims that there seems to be some difficulty in moving language from passive knowledge into active usage. Without experience in using the language, learners may tend to be nervous about trying to say things. Partly they may fear seeming foolish in front of others, they may worry about getting things wrong, or they may want to avoid teacher's comments or correction and so on. It takes quite a long time for some students to express themselves, which leads to long embarrassing pauses while learners are trying to find out how to say what they really want to say.

Speaking is an ongoing activity which demands attention, alertness, and clarity among others. Speech is not just a string of words or sentences that are grammatically attached to each other. This can be at most a piece of writing. Shumin (2002, p.204) stated that learners must acquire the knowledge of how native speakers use the language in the context of structured interpersonal exchange, in which many factors interact. Thus, for conversation to take place learners need to have pragmatic knowledge about the conversation situation, certain conversational skills and an ability to carry on a conversation. Producing spoken language has often meant a difficulty and an obstacle for English learners. There might arise a question why? The answer is obvious. In the natural spoken language students are required to be aware of characteristics of fluent speech, such as reduced forms, fixed phrases,

collocations and most importantly the pace of speech. All of these have to be taken into consideration while practising conversation in class. Without these, the spoken language would sound bookish and unnatural. To avoid this, it is essential to introduce and practise “real” communication with the students within the learning process. If it is neglected, it may be a reason why students are often shocked and disappointed when using a foreign language for the first time whilst interacting in foreign environment. They have not been prepared for spontaneous communication and could not cope with all of its simultaneous and competing demands.

Foreign language ‘fluency’ is a major goal of many language learners, teachers, program and material designers, and it is so. Fluency can be thought as the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously. When speaking fluently, students should be able to get the message across with whatever resources and abilities they have got, regardless of grammar and other mistakes. To communicate clearly and naturally with native speakers of a language is the end that makes the means of studying, memorizing vocabulary, and practicing the language worth the effort. “It is imperative for second language learners to be familiar with the intricacies of ordinary conversation so they can have access to the target language community and become social participants in that community” (Barraja 2000, p. 65). Achieving ‘fluency’ through foreign language education, however, has focused historically on the standard, written language, rather than the acquisition of conversational competence. The Communicative Language Teaching Movement created a shift towards language learning through spoken communication, but the majority of language learners still are not reaching levels of proficiency that would allow them to be considered ‘fluent’ by native speakers of the language. The issue remains that students are being taught standard, written language spoken aloud, rather than being taught actual native speaker norms of conversation.

What a second language learner truly needs from the language class experience is more conversation practice. Learners of English need a classroom with different arrangements, tools and enrichment activities that allow them to practice a conversational process in order to acquire conversational competence through doing conversation work. This can be achieved through pair, group or carefully designed individual or autonomous work where learners do all of the talking and are exposed

to more opportunities to speak using a greater variety of conversational strategies and skills than those used in traditional class activities. Pair work which most of the teachers prefer in their conversation classes, gives more students the opportunity to speak, learn from each other and learn from doing. It gives students a degree of privacy and allows them to try things out that they might not attempt in the more public forum of a class discussion or a teacher-fronted activity Berčiková (2007, p.16).

Most English learners feel that they need more conversation practice. In fact, over the years I have noticed that the number one requested skill by students is conversation practice. I think this points clearly to the fact that students need English to communicate first and foremost. Grammar, writing and other skills are all very important, but in the students' minds conversation is the most important. Unfortunately, teaching conversational skills is much more challenging than teaching grammar. Many teachers offer English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching materials that are geared toward rote learning and focus on language used on examinations rather than providing practical ways for students to obtain English language skills because teacher-centered teaching is a unique way of transmitting wisdom based on traditions. Liu (2014, p.71) explains this may be as a result of deep-rooted cultural traditions and thoughts about traditional teaching.

In our schools learners need to do things with language rather than just learn about language. learners cannot simply develop in conversational skills based on input. They must be engaged with other people using that language, and try to make meaning together. If learners do not produce language with someone else, they have no way of knowing whether others can understand what they say or write. Learners trying to learn English as a second language need further language support. They need to practice in hearing language, reading language, speaking language, and writing language in order to develop their experience and skills (Ybarra & Green, 2003). For doing such tasks, they are in need of using various tools which can help them learn the language easily and effectively.

Our life today is highly affected by the era of information technology which plays an important role in today's human society development. Science offers "opportunities to create well-designed, learner-centered, interactive, affordable,

efficient, flexible e-learning environments" Khan (2005, p.168). The range of technologies available for use in language for both teachers and learners has become very diverse and the ways that they are being used in classrooms all over the world have become central to language practice. According to Wang (2005, p2), there are many advantages integrating technology in classrooms especially for EFL students. English language learners use computers, software programs to check their work and correct themselves, improve their language skills; use Internet, e-mails to search information, join in threads, publish their work, read technology texts, communicate each other even worldwide. He also says that, "Technology integration in foreign language teaching demonstrates the shift in educational paradigms from a behavioral to a constructivist learning approach" Wang (2005, p.6)

Recently teachers can use technology which provides students with a large number of tools that help them do their own and conversational practice and tasks individually away from schools but designed and guided by their teachers. Technology allows individuals the ability to be continuously connected and to share and exchange ideas and information across time and space using a wide variety of modalities. The role of the instructor together with the role of the technology can lead to advanced learning results Sharma (2009, p.65). Technology can help facilitate the attainment of learning goals for individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, move, read, write, understand English, sustain attention, organize, engage and remember. Moreover technology provides learning feedback or immediate reward of learners' performance which is necessary for learners to improve their ability. It can help learners learn effectively while providing them with corrective feedback rather than only giving them learning input Chiu, Liou & Yen (2007, p.19)

It is known that traditional formats, which are preferred by most of the teachers in our schools, are not always successful and efficient Milliken & Barnes (2002, p.87). Modern computer programs can generate voice signals and decode human sound. These types of programs are defined as artificial intelligence computer programs and can be a very useful tools for improving the speaking capability. Practicing with such programs will strengthen vocabulary and pronunciation abilities as well Nomass (2013, p.114). New technologies offer opportunities for taking

account of individual aptitude and interest. Technology provides so many options as making teaching interesting and also making teaching more productive in terms of improvements. Based on this fact, it is crucial to take advantage of the modern technological facilities in aiding the task of English language education.

Today's learners are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach Prensky (2001, p.1). "Digital natives" as Prensky call them start experimenting with their new devices right away and not waiting for anyone to teach them. This is because the digital natives adopt a fast way of thinking which makes them not afraid of making mistakes because they learn more quickly that way. They use devices experientially, and have no problems getting help online. Digital technologies are ideally placed to help teachers working with "digital native" learners who seem like working independently these days due to their strong attachment to everyday technology. "Students generally feel positive about web-based learning tools, when they are well-designed, easy to learn and user friendly".Amiri (2012, p.104).

Online teaching opens up new levels of creativity and opportunity for both the teacher and the learner. It drives the teacher to surpass himself and focus more on best practice as well as innovation. Teachers should be encouraged to use technology and be stimulated to do so. Kadel (2005, p.34) states, "having technology does not guarantee its effective use. You have to have the right attitude toward technology". As for learners, they are our "digital natives" who deserve to be taught with 21st century technology. Even if teachers are not drawn to technology, they realize that computers are here to stay, and inevitably, they must resign themselves to developing sufficient technology skills. Technology is not the teacher; it is a tool the teacher uses to widen the student's reach and should complement and enhance what a teacher does naturally. Bassett (2005, p.77) acknowledged that the digital age is not about technology; it is about what the teachers and the learners are doing with the technology to extend their capabilities .

Education has benefited from a real e-revolution. Many schools and universities nowadays attempt to function new digital technologies such as Virtual Learning Environment Tools (VLETs), at the heart of their teaching and e-learning programs. This allows teachers to share educational materials with the learners via

the web which allows a second nature to learners and educators outside of the classroom. Moving from a traditional classroom to a virtual environment is a real shift from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered instruction. That is exactly what our learners really need. This change in the delivery of instruction and acquisition of knowledge modifies faculty's instructional roles, which places a greater responsibility for learning on the learners. Such a shift of responsibility can be attributed to the increased opportunity and responsibility for learner participation in the online environment often observed in learner discussion boards or sent assignments to the teacher's email on social media account.

Learners of English can have a real experience to improve their conversational skills while using Virtual Learning Environment Tools (VLETs) according to their levels and abilities. Lan's (2015) study approved that the usage of virtual contexts in EFL learning could provide students with learning opportunities without the time and space limits. In addition to providing students with a game-like scenario for English learning which will enhance learners' EFL performances. Richards and Renandya (2010) remind us that an effective way of developing the oral production skill in a FL environment is the exposure to a visual stimulus for commentary. For example, it is possible to work with scenes from movie trailers, documentary excerpts or cartoons, YouTube videos, dictionaries and virtual games for observation in oral communication activity. Therefore, using Virtual Learning Environment Tools (VLETs) offer countless opportunities for interaction and real individual learning.

In addition, Virtual Learning Environment Tools (VLETs) are an alternative to traditional teaching methods that can provide rich learning experiences. There is a necessity of implementing virtual classes in teaching English language to achieve better outcomes in students' competence in English language. Teachers are advised to use virtual classes in teaching speaking skills, employing virtual classes learning to enrich the teaching learning process and develop students' speaking competence (Aljadili, 2014). Integrating digital technologies in the English language classroom allows for individualization in classes; facilitates multimodal practice; encourages collaboration; and increases the "fun" factor for learners. The results of the study conducted by (Parrott, 2014) showed that the students felt that 3D world was

challenging and fun, and that they believe it is a useful adjunct to typical German classroom activities.

Having read only one study conducted in Gaza about the effectiveness of virtual learning environments, by Aljadili, the researcher believes that the learning process does not consist any longer in just attending teacher's explanations in class; it has turned out to be also autonomous. The virtual learning environments (VLE) help both teachers and students to carry out with this autonomous learning. Digital tools are central and a core part of English language teaching in general. The researcher strongly thinks that the accurate implementation of Virtual Learning Environment Tools (VLETs) while teaching English conversational skills will be a real shift from teacher-led classes which provide insufficient practices to the young learners who deserve new utilization of appropriate tools.

Thus, investigating the effectiveness of Virtual Learning Tools (VLETs) may be the solution that may enhance and promote the learners' English conversation competence in Gaza governorates.

1.2. The Need for the Study

The researcher has observed that learners of English are unable and reluctant to communicate with each other using English even in very simple situations. They suffer a lot in speaking mainly because they do not get enough opportunities to practice speaking, in addition to the lack of appropriate educational tools devised to help them acquire the language with ease.

The researcher, reading previous studies, has figured out that utilizing virtual learning tools in teaching conversational skills will motivate the students more than what they currently experience while being taught. However, it seems that there is a lack of studies which have investigated the effectiveness of using virtual tools on developing conversational skills in governmental schools. Accordingly, the researcher tries to conduct a study on the effectiveness of virtual tools on improving the conversational skills. Learners of English can improve their conversational skills and teachers can also utilize new tools that may contribute in developing conversational skills.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Unfortunately, the research on teaching conversational skills is limited. This lack of research is due partially to the fact that teaching authentic conversation as part of a language education program has been a relatively recent development. However, many ‘conversation’ classes are still based on communicative activities in which “teaching conversation is equated with making students talk” (Barraja-Rohan, 2000, p. 65). Being a teacher of English for many years, the researcher believes that teaching speaking poses different issues than do teaching writing, listening, and reading. She thinks that getting learners of English to speak meaningfully in a natural environment is difficult. This is due to the fact that speaking while being observed and evaluated is threatening to many, even in native language situations. Students in Gaza schools have general English knowledge to enable them to use English. However, they are often unwilling to participate in class conversational activities. The reason for their unwillingness may be the result of fear of speaking in front of friends, negative attitudes towards activities used for developing oral skills, or the lack of appropriate tools which facilitate and motivate them in carrying out conversational practices.

Innovations in educational technology enables teachers and students to facilitate teaching and learning speaking skills. Research studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of virtual tools to improve English learners’ proficiency in reading, writing and listening. However, little research has been carried out investigating development of conversational skills by using virtual tools. Therefore, this study will investigate the effectiveness of virtual learning tools on improving the conversational skills for English learners in the primary stage.

1.4. Research Questions

The problem of the study can be stated in the following major question :

What is the Effectiveness of Using Virtual Learning Environment Tools on Developing Sixth Graders' Conversational Skills in Khan Younis Governorate?

The following sub questions have emerged from the above major one:

1- What are the chosen conversational skills for sixth graders?

- 2- What are the Virtual learning tools used for developing sixth graders' conversational skills?
- 3- Are there statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean scores in the conversational post-written test between the students who learn conversational skills through using Virtual Learning Tools (experimental group) and those who learn conversational skills through the traditional method (control group) in the post test?
- 4- Are there statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean scores in the conversational post-oral test between the students who learn conversational skills through using Virtual Learning Tools (experimental group) and those who learn conversational skills through the traditional method (control group) in the post test?

1.5. Research Hypotheses

- 1- There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean scores in the conversational post-written test between the students who learn conversational skills through using Virtual Learning Tools (experimental group) and those who learn conversational skills through the traditional method (control group) in the post test.
- 2- There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean scores in the conversational post-oral test between the students who learn conversational skills through using Virtual Learning Tools (experimental group) and those who learn conversational skills through the traditional method (control group) in the post test.

1.6. The purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of virtual learning tools on developing Palestinian sixth graders' English conversational skills. The study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- 1- Investigating the effectiveness of using virtual learning tools on Palestinian sixth graders' conversational skills.

- 2- Improving sixth graders' English language conversational skills through the use of virtual tools.
- 3- Familiarizing teachers with methods of implementing virtual tools to help facilitate teaching conversation inside their classrooms.

1.7. Significance of the Study

According to the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first to be conducted in the field of English language teaching in Gaza using virtual tools to develop conversational competence. Therefore, the study may be of high significance for the following:

1. Teachers will be able to utilize new educational tools which will strengthen their coping up with the latest technology used around the world in the field of teaching, especially in teaching conversation.
2. Supervisors will be able to conduct workshops and training sessions for English teachers about the importance of using virtual tools in teaching conversation. Moreover, it will aid in the preparation of language teachers to teach in virtual environments.
3. Researchers will benefit from the contribution of this study to the area of Virtual World research by carrying out more researches and studies on virtual tools in a way that will increase the students' command of the four skills of the English language.
4. Administrators will have new ideas about equipping their schools with more technology tools and train more teachers in using virtual ones.
5. Students in the virtual learning environment will have more opportunity to participate and interact with others. This will help them have a good command of English language and will enable them to use it anytime and anywhere when needed.

1.8. Limitations of the Study

- 1- The study is limited to develop English language conversational skills of the sixth graders in governmental schools in Gaza Southern governorates.
- 2- The study is restricted to teaching English conversational skills (speaking fluency, speaking rate, vocal confidence, articulation, vocal variety, volume, accuracy,

asking of questions) in "English for Palestine 6B " second term through implementing Virtual learning tools.

3- The study is applied in the second semester of the scholastic year 2015– 2016.

4- The experiment lasts for eight weeks from March to May 2016.

1.9. Operational Definition of Terms:

1. Effectiveness

According to the Online Oxford Dictionaries effectiveness is "the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result; success."

The researcher defines effectiveness as the degree of improvement in the learners' performance level in English conversational skills as a result of using a virtual learning tools. It is measured by two tests: a written conversational test and an oral conversational test in addition to a conversational rating scale which depended on the CSRS (The Conversational Skills Rating Scale) and which has been modified by the researcher. See appendix (A3).

2. Conversational Skills

Conversational skills are defined by Zhang (2008,p.60) as the learners' competence to apply their acquired language knowledge fluently and creatively to the communication with contextual consciousness.

The researcher defines conversational skills as those which enable the learners to engage in a dynamic process of on going, interactive and satisfying conversations in ease that result comprehensible utterances. Those skills need to be practiced by the learners for better conversational outcomes. The researcher has chosen eight conversational skills to improve using the virtual learning tools. These skills are : speaking fluency, speaking rate , vocal confidence, articulation, vocal variety, volume, accuracy and asking questions.

3. Virtual Learning Environment Tools

The term Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) refers to a dynamic Internet environment created to respond to the needs of students and to provide them with supporting learning activity. A VLE is a flexible system for working with a large number of students; rapid processing and updating of teaching materials; time and place of study. The main requirements for a VLE, according to Britain and Liber

(1999,pp 14-15) are: availability of discursive tools (that is, tools for maintaining communications); adaptability (how easy the content of the subject can be presented through the activities); interactivity (the possibility for students to get the material, edit and customize it); reflection (the possibility of providing feedback from teachers).

A virtual learning environment (VLE) is a set of teaching and learning tools designed to enhance a student's learning experience by including computers and the Internet in the learning process. The principal components of a VLE package include curriculum mapping (breaking curriculum into sections that can be assigned and assessed), student tracking, online support for both teacher and student, electronic communication (e-mail, threaded discussions, chat, Web publishing), and Internet links to outside curriculum resources. In general, VLE users are assigned either a teacher ID or a student ID. The teacher sees what a student sees, but the teacher has additional user rights to create or modify curriculum content and track student performance.

VLEs facilitate the changes in education and pedagogy towards more learner centered approaches, enhancing interactivity in learning and helping constructional knowledge building. "A VLE is an electronic system that can provide online interactions of various kinds that can take place between learners and tutors, including online learning" (JISC, 2003).

As for Valentini and Soares (2005), a virtual learning environment VLE is a social space, consisting of cognitive and social interactions on, or around, an object of knowledge, in which people interact mediated by the language of hypermedia aimed at teaching learning. According to this concept, the focus is not on the way the process of teaching and learning (via the Internet and hypermedia resources), but the object of knowledge attained by this form. Virtual learning environments (VLEs) are commonly referred to as learning environments mediated by computers and digital technology (Weiss 2006, p.2). The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) (2002) defines virtual learning environments as: "the components in which learners and tutors participate in online interactions of various kinds, including online learning." The definition of JISC also includes the dimension of learning.

The definition of virtual learning environments that will be used in the thesis is an adaptation of the definition by JICS: “a web-based environment where learners and tutors participate in online activities supporting learning”.

The researcher defines Virtual learning tools (VLTs) as a set of teaching and learning tools used to enhance a learner's learning experience by including computers and the internet in the learning process. They are typically used to deliver instructional materials and facilitate communication.

In this study, the researcher implemented two virtual learning tools: Voki and Lingt language classroom. These tools are free sites which provide supporting learning and assessing activities that are designed by the teacher in order to enhance the students' conversational skills.

Voki is a free service which requires registration from the teacher's side first in order to create a voki classroom account to be used by all the students. After getting the teacher's voki classroom account, the students can log in and participate in all the activities posted by the teacher. Moreover the students can create their own avatar talking characters by which they can develop their conversational skills. The teacher can review the students' work and assignments in addition to providing a feedback for each student using the review page. Appendices (B2, B3).

Lingt language classroom is an online-assignment creation tool that allows educators to create exercises that incorporate voice, images, video, and text. Using the editor, teachers can craft assignments that can assess and train students' speaking proficiency in a consistent and individually-intensive way. In addition, Lingt classroom provides a simple and intuitive interface to manage assignments, keep track of student submissions, and provide feedback on an individual response level. Appendices (B3, B5).

4. Sixth Graders

They are (female) students whose ages are between (11-12) and those who study "English for Palestine 6B" in the governmental schools. Those students have been studying English for six years.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conversation

At present, speaking English represents one of the essential requirements of today's society. Besides other skills and knowledge, it is considered as one of the most influencing factors while applying for a job or sustaining in a particular work position under the condition of advancing the language level. Based on my work experience, I can confirm that knowing English is a necessity for everyone in general, and mainly students who need a sufficient level in the English language in order to complete their higher education successfully.

Speaking is often broken down into sub skills, one of which is the ability to take part in a conversation in the target language. This ability is often believed to be part of a learner's communicative competence (Faerch and Kasper, 1983), the ultimate goal of second language learning. Nunan (1991, p.39) suggested that "to most people, mastering the art of speaking is the single most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language, and success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language". The importance attached to conversational competence can be seen in the inclusion of a conversation section in many language proficiency/achievement tests. Teaching materials continue to present contrived and artificial dialogues which purport to be developing learners' speaking skills. Classroom procedures for teaching conversation often amount to nothing more than the "parroting of dialogues" (Richards and Schmidt, 1983, p126). After years of conversation practice, many learners are still unable to engage in genuine conversation in the target language. General methodology course books give guidance on the teaching of speaking but are in fact paying little attention to the teaching of conversation.

2.1.1. Difference Between Speaking and Conversation

Although the terms "speaking" and "conversation" may seem clear, they often get misunderstood. Speaking as a skill taught at schools manifests the student's ability to express his or her opinions, thoughts and ideas on a particular matter.

Speaking practice, which is usually based on storytelling, giving speech or presentation, is the necessity for later successful conversation. Nevertheless, the focus on speaking activities has diminished in recent years. This has been caused by many factors, especially by realizing the need of everyday communication. Temerovã (2007, p.7).

Giving speeches or presentations is not what teachers should concentrate on in their lessons. Even though these are crucial prerequisites for later conversational practice, teachers need to focus on communicative activities as the main goal of speaking lessons. It is very important for teachers to think through the purpose of speaking and communicative activities being prepared for lessons and also the target group of learners.

Nolasco and Arthur (1987, p.3) mention that being able to speak reasonably correct and even fluent English is one thing, but being able to engage in on-going, interactive, mentally satisfying conversation is another. Conversation is such a natural part of our lives that many people are not conscious of what happens within it. However, conversation follows certain rules which should be obeyed in order for participants to feel relaxed and be satisfied with it.

The main purpose of conversation is the exchange of information among people. While communicating, our students may find themselves in different social situations playing various social roles and the main task for language teachers is to prepare them for these real situations they might participate in. This also includes leading students to develop the ability to initiate and sustain conversation whenever it occurs.

2.1.2. Definition of Conversation and Conversational Skills

2.1.2.1. Definition of Conversation

Many people believe that informal everyday conversation is random and conversational unstructured. This is, in fact, far from true. Although conversation may take many forms and the speakers and situations vary widely, all conversation follows certain patterns. There are, for example, subtle rules determining who speaks and when, and for how long. By following these rules, people in conversation can take turns neatly, and avoid overlaps and simultaneous talk.

Dornyei and Thurrell (1994, p.41) mention that there are rituals and set formulae for starting or closing a conversation and for changing the subject. There are conventions prescribing how to interrupt and how to hold the floor, and even determining which style is most appropriate in a given situation. These conventions are fairly strong and consistent within a given culture: when someone breaks them, people can tell immediately that something has gone wrong. This is why language learners who are familiar with the grammar of a language and know a vast amount of vocabulary may still ‘fail’, that is, let themselves down in real conversation. They may need practice in the specialized skills that determine conversational fluency.

Adolphs and Carter (2003,p.48) describe oral conversation texts from a corpus using two axes of classification: a context- type axis and an interaction-type axis. Along the context axis are various levels of interpersonal relationship between the speakers, ranging from very close to very distant . Adolphs and Carter call their broad categories intimate, socializing, professional, and transactional. The interaction axis measures the level of collaboration from all members of a conversation, from a low- collaboration, speaker-dominated conversation to a task-based conversation demonstrating collaboration from every member group .

Conversation is a multifaceted construct. Thornbury and Slade point out that this complexity derives from conversation being so ubiquitous in our daily language usage (2006, p.5). In other words, conversation is so intertwined with daily interactions that it is difficult to define. Also, various fields of study have informed conversation: linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. So it becomes harder to compile a concise yet comprehensive definition of conversation. It is necessary to define conversation by its characteristics, its functions and its conditions.

2.1.2.2. Conversation Characteristics

Conversation is “*a type of speech event*” (Richards, 1980, p.14) that is distinct from lectures, discussions, interviews and courtroom trials. Conversation is cooperatively constructed, which is based on contributions, assumptions, expectations, and interpretations of the participants’ utterances (Richards, 1980, p.414). Awareness of differing assumptions, expectations and interpretations would be vital for learning conversation in a cross cultural classroom. Since conversation is

cooperative, it becomes a negotiated, self-regulated process (Sayer, 2005, p.17) that is segmentally created through short, frequent turns consisting of phrases and clauses (Thornbury and Slade, 2006, p.13). Active monitoring is also needed to link utterances together and is maintained through active listening. This interaction means that the participants have equal rights to produce utterances (Sayer, 2005, p.16).

2.1.2.3. Conversation Functions

Conversation is a way to verbally communicate for mostly interpersonal and somewhat transactional purposes (Nunan, 1999, p.228). Interpersonal language engages people for social reasons and maintain in social bonds, whereas transactional language is for service encounters, to complete a task and/or exchange information like buying tickets or ordering food.

Within these situations, conversations can either be casual, occur among close friends or family where little or no information is given and is not known to the participants, or consultative which occur among strangers where all necessary background information is supplied and more elaborate politeness procedures are added to the well-known formulae for requests, questions, orders, and suggestions (Power, 2009, p.2).

Conversation is also a way to initiate actions through linguistic means such as speech acts or functions (apologizing, promising, and inviting). Functional language is used directly or indirectly in various ways and contexts and therefore it is neither exhaustive nor complete (Richards, 1980, p.417).

Furthermore, conversation can be used to mark relationships, which suspends social distance, status, and power through linguistic neutrality, equality, sympathy, and antipathy (Cook, 1989, p.87). So to generate conversation, these functions must be present and practiced in a conversation class.

2.1.2.4. Conversation Conditions

Conversation usually happens when people are face-to-face which, makes it highly interactional and social. However, Thornbury and Slade (2006, p.23) point out that ‘computer-mediated communication’ (CMC) shares many conversational characteristics where face-to-face may not be the only way to have a conversation. Conversation happens when there is a small group of people with a minimum of two

(Cook, 1989, p.51). It happens within shared contexts such as in situational, institutional, social and cultural environments (Thornbury and Slade, 2006,p15). Conversation happens in real time and demands spontaneous decision-making and improvisation leading to a very dynamic discourse (Nunan, 1999, p.226).

In summary, conversation is a specific spoken discourse that is primarily social and engaged in for social purposes and in social contexts. Conversation entails the knowledge of the language system and the factors that create socially cohesive discourse (Cook, 1989, p.116).

2.1.2.5. Definition of Conversational Skills

One of the biggest challenges to current language teaching methodology is to find effective ways of preparing students for spontaneous communication. As one answer to this challenge, a new type of language lesson, the conversation class, has appeared, whose main teaching objective is to improve the students' conversational skills. Foreign language 'fluency' is a major goal of many language learners, teachers, and teaching material designers, and is rightly so. To communicate clearly and naturally with native speakers of a language is the end that makes the means of studying, memorizing vocabulary, and practicing the language worth the effort (Donaldson, 2011, p.1).

In spite of the growing popularity of such conversation classes, they are often not systematic enough, having been put together from a random variety of communicative activities. Conversation classes are not systematic because the methodology has not provided information about which conversational skills or language input should be used (Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994, p.40). The teachers running a large number of activities can hardly be blamed for this, because while communicative language teaching methodology has offered detailed guidelines for how to create genuine communicative situations in the language classroom, it has failed to specify which conversational skills and what kind of language input teachers should focus on. This section discusses how the selected conversational teaching skills can be presented and practiced in the language classroom.

2.1.2.5.1. Speaking Fluency

Richards (2009,p.14) mentions a brave definition of fluency, “natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence”. The definition of fluency has the Latin origin meaning as “flow”. It can be the same as other language educators who define fluency as flow or fluidity.

Fillmore in (Richards, 1990,p.75) identifies four abilities that might be subsumed under the term fluency as follows:

“...the ability to fill time with talk...the ability to talk in coherent, reasoned and semantically dense sentences” showing “a mastery of the semantic and syntactic resources of the language”; “the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts”; and the ability to “be creative and imaginative...in language use.”

The more present study about fluency adopting Lennon's (Jamatlou 2011, p.11) that is fluency might be rapid, smooth, accurate, lucid, and efficient translation of thought or communicative intention into language under the temporal constraints of on-line processing. This earlier concept of fluency was acceptable by most of the teachers and researchers since they have to realize that fluency is different in nature from other components of oral proficiency such as range of vocabulary and complexity of syntax which are associated with linguistic knowledge of accuracy.

Overall, the researcher goes on the conclusion of being fluent in speaking can be defined as the natural ability to speak spontaneously quickly, smoothly, accurately, lucidly, efficiently and comprehensibly as with few number of errors that may distract the listener from the speaker's message.

Teaching Fluency

The researcher believes that fluency can be acquired by continuous practices and very careful designed tasks that can be offered by the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) which are implemented by the students.

The following points highlight a clarification of what teachers can do while teaching their students to be fluent speakers. Teachers should :

- Provide careful preparation – give lots of vocabulary practice and language practice beforehand.

- Offer visual support – a grid to follow, a table to complete, a series of pictures will help students focus and remember language.
- Half an hour is too long. Short ten minute bursts are better.
- Plan class management – everyone has to know what they are supposed to be doing.
- Do not rely on verbal instructions. Show them what to do.

Fluency Activities

In a fluency activity the teacher is expected to monitor the class and encourage the students to speak with minimum interfering and correction. Scrivener (2005, p.162) states that “it is a way a competent language speaker helps a less competent one to communicate by encouraging and providing possible elements of conversation.” In practice it means to encourage the weaker one by nodding, eye contact, repeating the last word in order to encourage the speaker to continue, or asking tag questions. The aim of this encouragement is to make a student speak as much as he or she is able to. Considering a fluent activity and correcting the mistakes should be done after finishing this activity.

2.1.2.5.2. Speaking Rate

Speaking rate is the term given to the speed at which one speaks. It is calculated in the number of words spoken in a minute. Studies show speech rate alters depending on the speaker's culture, geographical location, subject matter, gender, emotional state, fluency, profession or audience. There is a lack of comprehensive understanding of these factors and their interactions. The problem is a difficult one because of the large number and variable definition of potentially relevant factors, the many different ways to define and analyze rate, and the great variability of the phenomena under any definition.

Among demographic factors, the effect of age on speaking rate has been consistently reported. In general, older speakers have a slower speaking rate, perhaps due to both physiological and psychological reasons. This effect has also been confirmed by perception studies. Studies on speaker sex and dialect region have, however, reported contradictory results. Sex and dialect region were shown to have

significant effects on speaking rate. It was also reported that nonnative speakers have a slower speaking rate than native speakers (Amermans and Parnell 1994, p.65)

Speaking rate is also affected by utterance length and utterance position. It has been found that there is an inverse relation between segment duration and utterance length, i.e., the longer the utterance, the shorter the average segment duration. On the other hand, taking into account the effect of phrase final lengthening, and more general, boundary adjacent lengthening, a short utterance is expected to have a longer average word duration (slower speaking rate) than a long utterance. Quené (2005) states that speaking rate depends mainly on utterance length

2.1.2.5.3. Vocal Confidence

Vocal confidence can be acquired by teaching students to be confident while speaking through continuous practice that help them master the needed goals of the teaching . According to Brown (2001, p.62), self-confidence is the students' belief in their ability that is fully capable of accomplishing a task. Self-efficacy and self-esteem are two main things that contribute to self-confidence. The students will gain a sense of self-efficacy when they see themselves mastering skills and achieve goals in the teaching learning activity. Self-efficacy comes in when the students feel they are capable of completing a given task. It means that self-efficacy refers to the students' belief in their capacity to perform and handle specific tasks.

One of the most frequent problems in the conversations class is language anxiety. Language anxiety is a feeling of fear and worry associated with language learning and use. The students' self-confidence that is low will create a language anxiety. It is believed that self-confidence has a role to minimize the students' language anxiety and optimize the students' motivation in learning English. Clement in Kees de Boot, et.al. (2005,p.201) proves the relationship among self-confidence, anxiety, and motivation. He also states that the absence of anxiety in learning or using the language will promote self-confidence and success in language learning.

According to Kurniawati (2013, p.34), there are several ways to build the students' self-confidence. First, the teacher can give verbal and nonverbal supports to the students. The supports can be giving rewards to the students' achievement verbally and nonverbally, avoiding criticism that breaks down their self-confidence

and learning motivation, making motivating words that can inspire the students to attain success.

The second way is providing the students with materials or tasks from easier to more difficult ones and using appropriate teaching techniques. The students' ability to finish the tasks will promote their self-confidence to finish the next tasks.

2.1.2.5.4. Articulation

Articulation is a way how sounds are pronounced by speakers marking their social class, education. Dalton and Seidlh (1994) think there are two ways how pronunciation as a production of significant sounds can be characterized:

"First, sound is significant because it is used as part of a code of a particular language. So we can talk about the distinctive sounds of English, French, Thai, and other languages. In this sense we can talk about pronunciation as the production and repetition of sounds of speech. Second, sound is significant because it is used to achieve meaning in context of use. Here the code combines with other factors to make communication possible. In this sense we can talk about pronunciation with reference to acts of speaking" p.3 .

When studying the functions of language and the pronunciation itself we have to break down the constituent units. There are two main features of pronunciation- the segmental and supra segmental features. The segmental features are sets of distinctive sounds of particular language and the supra segmental features are related to intonation; stress and change of sounds in connected speech (Kelly 2002).

When teaching pronunciation we use different strategies in order to achieve comprehensible pronunciation. According to Dalton and Seidlhofer there are two approaches that aim at pronunciation teaching- the bottom-up approach and top-down approach.

Bottom-up approach means that learners start with learning how to pronounce individual phonemes and then they work their way to intonation (Dalton and Seidlhofer). Generally speaking, when teaching the segments of pronunciation, the supra segmental features will take care of themselves (Dalton and Seidlhofer 1994,p.70).

2.1.2.5.5. Vocal Variety

Vocal variety refers to the way people use their voices. It is a combination of elements: pitch, tone, volume and rate. Vocal variety in speech is a way to communicate by changing the sound of the voice using different speeds and tones while speaking. Good vocal variety helps keep the audience engaged and clues them in on the meaning, feelings, or emphasis. Vocal variety can be practiced and improved upon.

2.1.2.5.6. Volume

How loudly or quietly people speak is called volume. Some people are habitually loud and others quiet, regardless of their speech content. Being able to control the loudness or softness of the voice helps to keep the audience's attention. Speaking too loudly for a long time will bother the audience. Speaking too softly for a long time will annoy listeners too, as they struggle to grasp words. Students should vary their volume level for emphasis.

2.1.2.5.7. Accuracy

Accuracy and fluency are terms characteristic for a successful and productive conversation. Scrivener (2005, pp.160-162) maintains that accuracy is the ability to speak correctly without making serious mistakes and therefore a greater use of instant teacher's correction within a speaking activity is appropriate. On the contrary, fluency is the ability to speak confidently without irrelevant pauses or hesitation, however, often with making major mistakes. In this case, instant correction may be inappropriate and could interfere with the aims of the speaking activity.

In his study, Kheidher (2013, P.13) clarifies that teachers should be aware of whether their main goal in a speaking activity is accuracy or fluency and adapt their role in class eligibly. If the main aim is to get students to speak, then one way to achieve that would be reducing teacher's contribution. It is supposed that the less he or she speaks, the more time and space it will allow the students to. If the main aim is accuracy, the teacher should concentrate on students' mistakes and devote time to their correction.

However important speaking without mistakes is, a promoted trend at present seems to be to lead students to a fluent conversation in everyday situations. Taking

this into consideration, this approach best fits the needs of today's society which is based on fast exchanges of information. Nevertheless, it would be injudicious to qualify accuracy as less important in communication and underestimate its importance. It is also essential for the ability to speak a foreign language well.

Accuracy Activities

In an accuracy based activity the teacher is required to correct students' mistakes whenever possible. While practising accuracy, students become aware of their own mistakes in speaking straight away because the teacher does not wait until finishing the task. This approach is suitable while focusing on grammar mainly and enables the students to realize and correct their mistakes and also prevent their recurrence.

2.1.2.5.8. Asking Questions

A question is a linguistic expression used to make a request for information which is provided with an answer. Perrott (1986) states a question as "an uninterrupted query directed toward a single pupil. Question in general refers to a problem or puzzle which is presented to some one – in this study to the learner – so as to give answers. According to Seime,(2002,p.10) a question in the classroom is "any statement intended to evoke a verbal response".

From these definitions, we can generalize that the word question refers to any idea that requires a response from the listener. Above all, in classroom settings, teacher questions are defined as instructional cues or stimuli that convey to students content elements to be learned and directions for what they are to do and how these elements to be learned and directions for what they are to do and how they are to do it.

Questions play a great part in communication. Questions and responses are inevitable in exchanging ideas and negotiating meanings. Therefore, they are one of the important tools to enhance education in general and language teaching in particular. Moreover, questions in language classrooms enable the teacher to evaluate his or her students and motivate students to attend lessons attentively.

In line with this, Richards and Lockharts (1994,p.185) have stated the following as justifications for the importance of questions in teaching.

- They stimulate and maintain students' interest.
- They encourage students to think and focus on the content of the lesson.
- They enable teachers to check students' understanding.
- They enable a teacher to elicit particular structures or vocabulary items.
- They encourage student participation in a lesson.

2.1.2.6. Mechanics of Conversational Skills

The mechanics of conversation are often used in conversation training to explain how conversation works at the technical level. This concept also is very helpful in increasing awareness of how people communicate. Conversation can be broken-down into three core areas.

1. The conversation components
2. The conversation message
3. The conversation process

1. The Conversation Components

The components of conversation separate into three points. They are words, tone and non-verbal, or normally referred to as body language. These all take up a certain percentage of the message meaning.

2. The Communication Message

When people are conducting face to face dialogue the message can be separated into two independent parallel messages that are being sent. The information message and the emotional response message. The information message comprises words and facts, whilst the emotional response message comprises emotions people are conveying in the message.

3. The Communication Process.

The third core area of conversation relates to the systematic way conversation works. Simply explained, there are three steps.

1. Producing and sending the message
2. Receiving and interpreting the message
3. Giving and receiving of feedback.

The current study focuses on developing mechanics or components of conversational skills especially: speaking fluency, speaking rate, vocal confidence,

articulation, vocal variety, volume, accuracy and asking of questions. The researcher believes that the mentioned conversational skills will enable the students to engage in a dynamic process of ongoing , interactive conversations if practiced well.

2.1.3. The Importance of Conversation

English conversation is vital in an ESL, or English as a Second Language class because students tend to prioritize the ability to converse in a language above the ability to read, write or understand grammar. ESL students need to learn to read, write, listen and speak English, but speaking is actually the most difficult to learn because of its reliance on real-time comprehension and access to vocabulary.

Conversation is generally person-oriented, face-to-face with a shared context, and highly interactive (Cullen & Kuo, 2007). With these features, the conversational context can vary greatly from moment to moment, and the participants must constantly adjust and respond to the immediate issues they face . More than just a feature of conversation, however, spontaneity (and achieving it in the classroom) is a primary goal and challenge for foreign language educators (Eckard & Kearny, 1981; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1994; Jakobovits & Gordon, 1980).

Techniques for teaching conversational skills include separating conversational topics from the actual skills. If students are assigned topics and even opinions, they do not have to think about the content of what they want to say as much and are able to focus on how to say it.

Teachers should also avoid talking as much as possible. Students may feel intimidated by the teacher's absolute command of English and perfect accent and therefore withdraw and find themselves uncomfortable conversing. Students should control 70 percent of the conversation in an ESL class. Teachers should refrain from interrupting to make corrections and should instead wait until the conversation is over to discuss grammar or vocabulary errors. Classroom activities should be designed around conversation, with worksheets or language labs used as homework instead. Learning conversational English is a skill that requires as much practice as possible.

2.1.4. The Process of Conversation

Dubberly and Pangaro (2009, p.1) state that Claude Shannon has developed a rigorous model of a transmission channel used to convey messages between an information source and a destination. Only in conversation teachers can use channels to teach new concepts, share and evolve knowledge, and confirm agreement. Dubberly and Pangaro clarify that conversation at its simplest takes place when participants perform these tasks:

1. Open a Channel

When participant A sends an initial message, the possibility for conversation opens. For conversation to follow, the message must establish common ground; it must be comprehensible to participant B.

2. Commit to Engage

Participant B must pay attention to the message and then commit to engaging with A. Such a commitment may amount to nothing more than continuing to pay attention. For conversation to persist, the commitment must be symmetrical, and either side may break off for any reason, at any time.

3. Construct Meaning

Conversation enables people to construct (or reconstruct) meaning, including meaning that is new to the destination. Conversation theory has a highly detailed model that one must leave to other descriptions though it is useful even in this skeletal form. Messages are composed with topics or distinctions that are already shared, on the basis of prior conversation or shared contexts, such as common language and social norms. Participant A uses the message channel to convey what these topics are and how they are distinct from one another (descriptive dynamics), along with a kind of “glue” that explains just how these topics interact to make up the new concept (prescriptive dynamics). Participant B “takes all this in” and “puts it all together” to reproduce A’s meaning (or something close enough).

4. Evolve

Participant A or B (or both) are different after the interaction. Either or both hold new beliefs, make decisions, or develop new relationships, with others, with circumstances or objects, or with themselves. An effective conversation is an

interaction in which the changes brought about by conversation have lasting value to the participant

5. Converge on Agreement

Participant B may wish to confirm understanding of A's concept. To do so, B must create and transmit a different formulation of the topic(s) under discussion, one that captures his model of the concept. On receipt, participant A attempts to make sense of B's formulation and compares it with the original intention. This may lead to further exchanges. When both A and B judge that the concepts match sufficiently, they have reached "an agreement over an understanding." Such agreement may involve a fact about the world or merely shared belief.

6. Act or Transact

Sometimes one or more of the participants agrees to perform an action as a result of, and beyond, the conversation that has taken place. For example, they may agree to play a game together or enter into a relationship. Or they may agree to an exchange, as when money is traded for a product or service. Thus this is a simplified description of conversation. All of people experience breakdowns in conversations; it is near miraculous that they understand each other but if they comprehend this, the process of conversation will be working right.

2.1.5. What Does Conversation Offer?

Dubberly and Pangaro (2009, p.3) clarify that conversation enables participants to:

1. Learn

People learn a great deal via conversation, including conversations with themselves. They learn highly valuable life lessons. At an opposite extreme, what they learn might seem simple. This is a valuable benefit of interactions that have memory and that evolve into relationships.

2. Coordinate

People spend a great deal of time with each other not merely synchronizing ("You've arrived, so let's start!"), but also coordinating their actions in ways that are mutually beneficial. Anytime people negotiate one favor for another, they use conversation to reach an agreement to transact.

3. Collaborate

Coordination of action assumes relatively clear goals, but many times social interaction involves the negotiation of goals. Conversation is a requisite for agreeing on goals, as well as for agreeing upon, and coordinating, our actions.

2.1.6. What can Designers do?

If conversation is important to users, teachers should explicitly model conversation as they design. Teachers should view every user as a participant in a conversation, and every scenario as a conversation to define or achieve one or more goals. Dubberly and Pangaro (2009, p.6) point out that teachers should use models of conversation to make design decisions such as:

1. What channel is being opened to begin the conversation?
2. Is the first message clear? Does it offer something to the recipient?
3. Once accepted, does the ongoing exchange convey the potential benefits in continuing the engagement? Is there learning or delight? Is curiosity or interest stimulated?
4. Is meaning easily understood; that is, do the messages speak to the participants' context, needs, interests, values, and in their language? How difficult is it for users to "put together"? How can messages be made more efficient or clear or entertaining, as appropriate?
5. How can users convey intention and meaning to the software? Are those means sufficiently expressive or easy or delightful? Where do they fall short?
6. Do participants evolve during the interaction? Aside from entertainment or delight, do they acquire something useful, learn a new point of view, or gain new knowledge?

Dubberly and Pangaro (2009, p.7) mention that teachers can invest in a better understanding of conversation, they can:

1. Review past projects and recast them as conversations: How could design outcomes be improved?
2. Look at new technologies or techniques in terms of conversation: Do they help generate more effective conversations?
3. When developing new projects, do models of conversation help in choosing technologies or techniques?

4. Can teachers design for conversations that directly improve self-confidence for learners?

2.1.7. Principles of Teaching Conversation

The following principles are suggested by Dubberly and Pangaro (2009,p.8) and should be considered when teaching conversation:

1. Do not confuse the teaching of conversation with other activities that are done orally, such as grammar drills, language games, information gap activities, language functions incorporated in dialogues, etc.
2. Distinguish between speaking skills and conversation skills. In the words of Nolasco and Arthur (1987, p.3), "being able to speak reasonably correct and even fluent English is one thing. Being able to engage in on-going, interactive, mentally satisfying conversation is another".
3. Do not assume that all of one's conversational competence in the mother tongue is transferable to a second language. Because of cultural differences, transfer of features of first language conversational competence into English may have much more serious consequences than errors at the level of syntax because conversational competence is closely related to the presentation of self, that is, communicating an image of ourselves to others.
4. The teaching of conversation should be organized and should form a coherent part of the overall language program.
5. Students should be made aware of the dynamic nature of conversation. An utterance in a conversation produces meaning by interacting with other utterances in the conversation.
6. The interactional function of language should not be neglected. This means helping learners with strategies for casual conversation.

Based on the above principles, Dubberly and Pangaro suggest(2009, p.9) some classroom activities that develop conversation skills:

1. Expose students to recordings of unscripted conversations between native speakers. If such recordings cannot be obtained, semi prepared conversations such as interviews, forums, and phone-in talk shows on the radio and television, also provide examples of the skills of conversation. Draw their attention to the

conversation skills involved, such as opening and closing a conversation, turn-taking , providing feedback to the speaker, negotiating and changing a topic.

2. Conversation involves nonverbal strategies. Hence, the use of video recordings should also be considered in conducting the awareness-raising activities mentioned above.
3. Many second language learners think that (a) spoken English is written English said aloud, and (b) utterances produced by native speakers are always perfectly organized and constructed . As a result, they tend to over monitor their speech, or produce utterances which are bookish.
Show students transcripts of informal conversation so they have a better idea of what spontaneous speech by native speakers is like.
4. Even in conversations that really practice language form or function, have students practice asking questions after they have made a response.
5. A fluency activity may be attempted twice. In the first attempt, students concentrate on conveying meaning. In the second attempt, they repeat the activity, paying special attention to appropriacy of language.

2.1.8. Approaches for Teaching Conversational Skills

Different approaches have been used to develop speaking skills for the learners via the teaching of conversations. In direct approach, oral communication skills are built up through question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students (Richard and Rodgers, 1986, p.10). In audio-lingual approach, the teaching of a dialogue starts with the learners' listening to the dialogue before repeating each line after the recording. The next step involves further practice with the replacement of certain key vocabulary until learners can form the key structures (Bilbrough, 2007, p.6). In these two approaches, the learners' imitation of key structures in the dialogue seems to be prioritized. By contrast, Dornyei and Thurrell (1994) support an approach which emphasizes fluency tasks and consciousness-raising activities. Via a 10-step procedure, Byrne (1986) focuses on involving students in the context of the conversation and helping them understand the conversation. This approach emphasizes the instruction to help students understand the conversation which is similar to Dornyei and Thurrell's model.

Paul Sze (1995) includes learners' purposeful use of the language in the teaching process, with speech training, followed by drills and pattern practice, before learners' purposeful use of language. He suggests that the first step is to expose learners to recordings of unscripted conversations before using video recordings to raise students' awareness and deploying fluency activities. These fluency activities start with getting messages across before focusing students' attention on appropriacy of language. Thornburry and Slade (2006) suggest a flexible model which involves exposure, instruction and practice in any order. Similar to Thornburry and Slade's model is Bilbrough's model (2007) which is even more detailed in that it shows a 'gradual progress' in teaching conversations from understanding conversations to free production of similar conversations through nine steps: understanding, analyzing, reproducing and reconstructing, memorizing, rehearsing and performing, co-constructing, creating and personalizing, communicating and dialogue as learning. Memorizing and parroting conversations in new and unusual ways are followed and engaging students' feeling at this phase.

2.1.9. Techniques in Teaching Conversations.

The suggested ways of teaching conversations by Bilbrough are similar to those found in the teaching guide of modern English textbooks, such as Top Notch 2 (Saslow and Ascher, 2006) or Step – by – Steps 2 (Adelson and Goldstein, 2007). The procedure suggested by Saslow and Ascher (2006) is as follows:

- Set the scene to establish the context
- Have students listen and read along silently
- Teach vocabulary
- Ask students to listen again
- Get students to repeat chorally by stressing on intonation and rhythm
- Teach structures
- Ask students to create similar conversations

Similarly, the procedure recommended by Adelson and Goldstein (2007, p.11) consists of three main stages: presentation, guided practice, and communicative practice and application. Adelson and Goldstein (2007) also add a listening task in presenting the conversation and asking some students to model the conversation in front of the class.

In teaching conversations, Goldstein-Adelson (2007, pp. 10 – 11) seems to emphasize the teaching of pronunciation practice in various stages. First, the teacher allows the students to listen and repeat to have general pronunciation practice. Then, he suggests extracting some utterances in the conversations for students to practice the target intonation pattern. The last task is to ask students to read the conversation with the appropriate intonation pattern.

Besides, Ascher and Saslow (2006,p.16) recommend the use of pictures to help the students to visualize the content to the conversations. These scholars tend to divide the time for various aspects in the conversations of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Nolasco and Arthur (1992) categorise the activities conducted to teach conversations into controlled activities, awareness activities, fluency activities and feedback tasks in order of the teaching procedure. While controlled activities are aimed to develop the students' confidence, awareness activities are to develop their sensitivity to what they are learning, fluency activities are for the students to practice communication and feedback tasks are for students to reflect on their own performance. Thus, Nolasco and Arthur's model is similar to the previous suggestions, but it also adds feedback tasks to help students reflect on their performance.

By comparison, those proposed by Nguyen et al. (2008) for teaching conversations in 'Tieng Anh 8' that secondary school teachers often use as a guiding in designing activities for their classes tend to be simpler as there are only three activities of listening to the conversation, pronunciation practice and comprehension questions. These activities only carry out some steps in Bilbrough's model (2007). The instruction does not cover the steps to help students create similar conversations such as co-constructing, creating and personalizing, communicating and dialogue as learning. As presented in the teacher's book (Nguyen et al., 2010, p.143), recommended steps and activities in teaching a conversation are detailed as follows.

1. Introduce the context.
2. Let students listen to the recording while reading the conversation.
3. Ask students to listen and repeat the conversation.
4. Explain some vocabulary.
5. Bring students' attention to the structure(s) in the conversation.

6. Ask students to do role-play to read the conversations.
7. Ask one or two pairs to perform the conversations in front of the class.
8. Ask students to do the task in the textbook and then correct it.

2.2. Virtual Learning

This section deals with virtual learning; concept, virtual learning environment, technology and virtual learning tools, the requirements for virtual learning design as well as the task design in a virtual learning environment. Advantages of virtual learning are also discussed along with approaches that can be used to teach material virtually. The chapter ends with the impact of virtual learning environments on teacher and students, the student perspective , challenges and barriers of the implementation of a virtual learning environment.

2.2.1. What is Virtual Learning Environment?

A VLE refers to the components in which learners and tutors participate in online interactions of various kinds, including online learning. However, not all interactions have to be online since a VLE can act as a focus for students' learning activities. A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is designed to act as a focus for students' learning activities and their management and facilitation, along with the provision of content and resources required to help make the activities successful. These systems allow students and tutors to interact locally or remotely. They can collaboratively share and generate knowledge in the virtual environment without having to travel out of their local setting (Britain and Liber, 1999; Milligan, 1999).

Personal computers and the Internet have revolutionized entire sectors of modern societies. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Skype and other online communications media have allowed billions of people around the world to share ideas in a matter of seconds, mostly at a very low cost. These advances in computer technology are as remarkable as they are familiar.

But most people are not aware of how computers and Internet technology are transforming the way students learn. This emerging education paradigm is often called virtual learning, and it has the potential to improve student achievement, educational access and schools' cost-effectiveness.

Specifically, virtual learning uses computer software, the Internet or both to deliver instruction to students. This minimizes or eliminates the need for teachers and students to share a classroom. Virtual learning does not include the increasing use of e-mail or online forums to help teachers better communicate with students and parents about coursework and student progress; as helpful as these learning management systems are, they do not change how students are taught (Beek 2011).

Beek (2011) mentions that virtual learning comes in several forms:

- *Computer-Based:* Instruction is not provided by a teacher; instead, instruction is provided by software installed on a local computer or server. This software can frequently customize the material to suit the specific needs of each student.
- *Internet-Based:* This is similar to *computer-based* instruction, but in this case, the software that provides the instruction is delivered through the Web and stored on a remote server.
- *Remote Teacher Online:* Instruction is provided by a teacher, but that teacher is not physically present with the student. Instead, the teacher interacts with the student via the Internet, through such media as online video, online forums, e-mail and instant messaging.
- *Blended Learning:* This combines traditional face-to-face instruction, directed by a teacher, with *computer-based*, *Internet-based* or *remote teacher online* instruction. In effect, instruction comes from two sources: a traditional classroom teacher, and at least one of the forms of virtual learning described above.
- *Facilitated Virtual Learning:* This is *computer-based*, *Internet-based* or *remote teacher online* instruction that is supplemented by a human “facilitator.” This facilitator does not direct the student’s instruction, but rather assists the student’s learning process by providing tutoring or additional supervision. The facilitator may be present with the learner or communicating remotely via the Web or other forms of electronic communication.

2.2.2. Teaching-learning Strategies for Traditional Environments

Traditional language teaching is known for its didactics of preserving the four language skills: reading writing, listening and speaking (Silva, Shitsuka & Morais

2013). Therefore, usage of grammar is an indispensable work tool, as that's where the structure of a language is usually found. However, other tools have been created for enhancing vocabulary in a way that student and teacher would not be stuck to grammar as mere reproduction of scripted content followed by strict rules.

As observed by Richards Rodgers (2001), many teachers have used books with short passages in foreign languages, containing vocabulary lists for silent and out-loud reading for content discussion. It is important to highlight that contextualization of culture in FL is also relevant, so that the student, stretching beyond vocabulary, is able to learn how to use the language in a certain communication situation. For that purpose, traditional teaching has adopted dialogue and discussion strategies in the classroom in an attempt to get the student to interact and speak.

Furthermore, usage of recorded texts and songs are complemented with the teacher's intermediation for repetition and listening comprehension of the FL, as well as creation of simulated real-life scenarios of daily situations, portraying contexts where the language is used. In that situation, the roleplaying works as a strategy for persuasion and approximation of the student to the FL and the use of communication in a myriad of day to-day situations, when the students are faced with the need of expressing themselves in "real life" situations, using the foreign language, with the focus on contact and interaction.

(Silva, Shitsuka & Morais 2013) mention that other strategies are still quite valid, such as writing essays on chosen topics, out-loud reading and personal storytelling, (i.e. oral genre) with the purpose of getting the student to develop his writing and reading abilities and express his mind on family topics. In all levels of FL command, whether English or any other language, these strategies have challenged the virtual teaching model.

Generally, the traditional model of language teaching-learning process has its limitations, especially concerning the effectiveness of learning a second language without any actual time of coexistence with it. Many times students only dedicate a few days of the week to the FL, therefore greatly restricting the contact with it. In those terms, language teaching-learning contrasts between the traditional and

distance-learning models meet equal conditions and therefore, carry no differences apart from the dedicated support.

2.2.3. Teaching-learning Strategies in Virtual Environments and Technological Resources

Teaching-Learning of Foreign Language, as well as of other contents, has had to evolve in the virtual environment in order to adapt to the cyber molds as adjustments became increasingly necessary. In that regard, as pointed out by Lévy (2001), the internet has opened new communication possibilities with different tools, with knowledge being built through exchange of experiences and the sharing of a new culture – cyber culture.

In that aspect, knowledge building is limitless to a degree where content, once enclosed and settled, crosses all boundaries in search of new horizons. In that aspect, the DL student must adopt the virtual culture profile in order to fit into the active and participative environment of the model. In the same respect, the role of the teacher in digital media is directed to the organization, control and coordination of educational practices, adopting teaching learning methodologies that follow the molds of multiple technologies. It must be considered that, in that case, such technologies are strong allies in motivating, illustrating, presenting and composing content for classes and making them attractive and interactive, as highlighted by Hack and Negri (2010, pp. 89-99). The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in virtual learning VL is, in itself, a revealing new approach to teaching learning, where the teacher is the mediator and the student has the opportunity to explore different types of media as learning takes place.

(Silva, Shitsuka & Morais 2013) state that multiple abilities are required from the teacher, given the need to reinvent strategies in teaching-learning using digital tools. Initially, an attempt to transfer strategies used in traditional models adapted to the virtual environment has been observed. However, interaction has become more predominant and, consequently so has the orientation of teacher practice towards a principle of joint knowledge building. Therefore, it is necessary that the teacher creates his or her didactics considering multiple media. In that context, it can be stated that these tools are trying to compensate for the lack of physical presence for a better learning experience in the virtual world.

With the advent of DL, the teacher adapted his/her teaching methodology once exclusively focused on personal and collective contact in the classroom, to other forms and content activities for the FL in the digital environment. To meet that purpose, it was necessary to invest in digital tools as new strategies, such as the use of electronic mail, forums, social networks, applications and the Virtual Environment for Teaching and Learning.

Richards and Renandya (2010, p.433) remind us that an effective way of developing the oral production skill in a FL environment is the exposure to a visual stimulus for commentary. For example, it is possible to work with scenes from movie trailers, documentary excerpts or cartoons, YouTube videos, dictionaries and virtual games, and both printed and TV news in the FL for observation in oral communication activity. Therefore, usage of ICT offers countless opportunities for interaction.

The impact generated by the transformations brought by ICT caused a new cultural concept to emerge – cyber culture, a new information market. Within that concept, the presence of technological elements in society is transforming the way in which individuals communicate, establish relationships and build knowledge. “Today, we are practically lived by new technologies” (NOVA & ALVES, 2002, p. 1). Nowadays, ICT are tools for a new generation and for the construction of knowledge.

The difference between traditional and virtual FL teaching, in this context, is solely focused on the difference in support. In VL, Internet is the only contact. Therefore, it is fundamental that the didactic pedagogical orientation is organized around the technological resources. Thus, VL in foreign language can have the same quality as the traditional system, as long as ICT is applied adequately and with the teaching process focused on interaction and language practice. Accordingly, didactic-pedagogical capacity building of the teacher is necessary for the correct and updated use of ICT and transference of adequate didactics to the distance-learning method. It should be expected that students would start perceiving VL as a natural system, not necessarily inferior or that provides lower quality support.

In many of these virtual environments, all of the design work is aimed at keeping the student focused on the learning process (Silva, Shitsuka & Morais 2013).

In that case, it is not enough to simply adapt content to a presentation model, but to use real examples of an imaging nature, such as recorded material, answered samples, and others, which help creating interactivity. In that aspect, it must be noticed that said technologies are used as sources for creating learning conditions over the content. In other words, coming up with creative ways of working the information.

2.2.4. The Role of Technology in Education

When teachers talk about technology in teaching and learning, the word integration is often used (Eady, M. J. & Lockyer, L. 2013). The idea of integrating technology into the curriculum came about through a concern that we may have been teaching about and teaching how to use technology but not addressing how students can apply technology related knowledge and skills. To address this problem, there was a move to integrate technology into each key learning area. With technology now being part of our everyday lives, it is time to rethink the concept of integrating technology into the curriculum and instead aim to embed technology into pedagogy, to support the learning process. This means that technologies become an integral part of the learning experience and an important consideration for teachers, from the onset of preparing learning experiences through to teaching and learning with students.

(Eady, M. J. & Lockyer, L. 2013) manifests that the important role that technology plays in education gives teachers the opportunity to design meaningful learning experiences that embed technology. This is not a new area for teachers; who have always considered the tools and resources that can best support learning activities for students. However, advances and accessibility of technologies have made the possibilities seem almost endless. It is important not to use technology for its sake, but rather to embed technology appropriately. Here, teachers draw upon their expertise and experience in what to teach and how to teach it. A teacher has many considerations and influences in designing learning experiences for students, and the appropriate use of technology is but one of those considerations. Just as teachers keep up to date with curriculum developments, new educational policies and advances in the art and science of teaching practice, they keep up to date with the technological tools that are available to them. This means that sometimes

experimentation and trial and error are just as important as experience in what influences teachers' lesson plans.

The role and expertise of teachers are critical because teachers are at the front line of designing and delivering the learning experience. It has been well argued that just making technology available in schools does not mean that teachers will make use of the technology, nor will it necessarily be used.

(Eady, M. J. & Lockyer, L. 2013) clarify that Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are nowadays used as auxiliaries to the traditional teaching activities. In the virtual learning, based on the resources made available to them, the students can perform activities similar to those in the traditional learning, involving however a certain degree of personal effort: they can independently study contents, solve exercises, or analyze case-studies.

(Eady, M. J. & Lockyer, L. 2013) point out that the Virtual Learning Environment includes the following elements:

- Administrative information including the venue (location the event takes place), conditions for enrolment, information concerning the number of credits awarded to the course;
- Basic materials for teaching the course (full contents of the course, if we are to speak about distance learning, copies of supporting documents, etc.);
- Additional resources including links, virtual libraries, etc.
- Self-evaluation tests;
- Evaluation procedures;
- Electronic communication space (e-mail, chat);
- Different access rules for the teacher and for the students.

2.2.5. Virtual Learning Environment Tools

Using a VLE is one of the most important decisions for any educational organization, one that has major implications for it, and should be seen as significant as using a major new teaching aim or strategy. The choice of VLE will be significant across all areas of the organization and especially in the way in which teaching and learning are undertaken.” (Minshull 2004, p.20).

The decision to implement a virtual learning environment (VLE) in a primary aged school presents advantages to, and raises issues for school management, and is

certainly not one that should be taken lightly (Gill & Shaw 2004,p.264).VLEs appear to offer schools a number of benefits, such as: anytime, anywhere access, improved motivation, access to higher or novel learning styles, opportunities for independent learning, better integration of information and communication technology (ICT) tools, and increased parental engagement. There is therefore the potential for a significant impact on the process of teaching and learning.

A Virtual Learning Environment is a collection of integrated tools enabling the management of online learning, providing a delivery mechanism, student tracking, assessment and access to resources. These tools can support student learning in a number of ways (JISC-Infokit, 2004). Typically VLEs integrate the following tools:

Communication

Firstly, they support communication between students and tutors, between students and students or across student groups through synchronous (or real-time) chat and asynchronous online discussions tools. Students can use these facilities to build upon their existing knowledge and create new ideas through online practice quizzes and tests. Other communication tools include submission dates for assessments, email facilities which can be used for communicating on a one-to-one or one-to-many basis.

Assessment

Secondly, VLEs have tools for formative and summative assessment. Self-tests can be used by students for quick concept-checking and 'formative' feedback. Quizzes can provide guidance for both the tutor and the students; the results can highlight key areas that have not been fully understood by the student. Tutor feedback provided in these assessment tools is a key element in helping students develop an understanding of a subject; it is essential that tutors provide comprehensive feedback and not just indicate whether a question is right or wrong. Students can submit assignments within a particular area of the VLE. This can be set up to indicate the time and date of submission. Assessment marks can be released to students (individually) online.

Collaboration

Thirdly, there are tools that can support collaboration within and across student groups. For example, the file upload facilities in a VLE allow tutors and students to share resources by moving learning materials (for example articles, notes, images, PowerPoint files) into the VLE. This can be achieved by dragging-and-dropping the file into a designated area within the VLE.

Whiteboard software is a useful way of 'visualising' ideas and concepts. This software allows students to draw images collaboratively or, alternatively, to upload images and discuss them using chat facilities (text or audio communication) while simultaneously viewing the image.

Other Facilities

Other facilities which may be available in a VLE include student tracking which will provide tutors with information about when a student first accessed a course, how frequently they have accessed it and which areas they have accessed. It is essential that students know that you have access to this. VLEs can be linked (either directly or via a web link) to other online learning tools, which are not part of the VLE (JISC-Infokit, 2004).

2.2.6. Requirements for VLE Design

There is a large volume of published studies describing the requirements for a VLE (Rosell-Aguilar 2005, Hampel 2006, Gerard 2007, and Vlachos 2009). Many researchers describe the development of Web 2.0 tools as such, but for practitioners it is important to analyze these instruments from the perspectives of implementation into the learning process. From a practical perspective, a VLE requires user-friendly operational tools, clear organization of the teaching material and suitable appearance. From a strategic perspective, all teaching modules should be presented and an experienced e-learning coordinator should provide necessary workshops (Gerard, 2007,pp.202-205). Craig (2007) pays attention to the impact of changing technology on managed learning environment, and integration technology into the teaching-learning environment. Educators need to take into account learners' experience in social networking and create flexible user-centered VLEs, based on Web 2.0.

2.2.7. Task Design in a VLE

Representing an essential part of a VLE, a task should have clear settings, instructions for the procedure, criteria of assessment and dates of submission. Learners have to be familiar with the tools of a VLE to fulfill the task. Another important issue, is the possibility of communication between students and the instructor. The theories of task-based language learning and socio-cultural theories of language acquisition are the basis for task design.

Task types in a VLE are examined by Hampel (2006). Her study, which evaluated various kinds of appropriate tasks, was set up at the Open University of Cambridge in 2003. She explored the design and implementation of tutorial tasks in a synchronous audio-graphic environment (the combination of technologies used for real-time communication) called Lyceum. Hampel suggests a three-level approach to designing and implementing online tasks. Under the term “approach” the author means theories about language learning. The term “design” stands for how tasks are embedded into the teaching materials, the types of tasks, and their role in the teaching material. The term “procedure” includes teacher’s recourses, strategies and interaction between the participants. Hampel has found the realization of the pedagogical principles about the nature of language teaching in the designed tasks. Firstly, the student-tutor negotiation on meaning fostered communication, needed in language acquisition. Secondly, the input provided by the structured material, tutor support and collaborative work between the tutor and students encouraged students to construct their knowledge through active participation and engagement. Moreover, the tasks implementation allowed teachers to shift control over the learning process to students. Hampel states that the tools in the computer mediated environment are designed to be used flexibly, depending on the needs and particular technological specifications. Provided that in the Lyceum environment video conferencing is unavailable, communication cannot rely on the help of body language. So, the interaction between students and tutors are set differently and tutors have to take into account that the absence of the immediate student’s response may be caused by technical problems or by the poor technical skills of a student (Hampel, 2006, p.118).

2.2.8. Advantages of Virtual Learning Environments for Tutors

The advantages for tutors using a VLE center on improving the learning experience and using the tools within a VLE to help with the management and administration of the teaching material (JISC_infoKit, 2004).

Administrative Tools

Tutors can benefit from the 'administrative tools' within a VLE. Many VLEs provide information to staff about how often and when students have accessed a VLE through the tracking tool. They may also provide information about when and what they have done in the online submission area (JISC_infoKit, 2004).

For distance learning students, tutors can track if students are engaging with the online communication and associated materials. The assessment option allows students to submit assessments virtually. These are collated and time-stamped by the VLE ready for collection in one area by the tutor. After marking, feedback can rapidly be distributed to the students individually, through the VLE. However, a drawback is that many VLEs do not allow submission which supports anonymous marking.

Collaboration and Communication

A VLE also offers tutors tools to encourage collaboration and communication. For instance, a VLE can provide a virtual space where students, staff and other learning support specialists can discuss, interact, share learning, ideas and materials (JISC_infoKit, 2004). For example, continuing Professional Development students may work together on a specific case study before loading their summary into an online discussion. This summary can be compared with other summaries posted. The feedback will draw upon a wide range of working experiences which can then be related to the specific area of discussion. This draws on the experience of the whole group which is particularly useful in multi-disciplinary courses.

Active Engagement

It is often difficult to find time or a way to ensure students actively participate in face-to-face sessions. Through online discussions it is possible to help students engage more actively with a teaching material and with the learning process at a time and place that is convenient for both tutor and student (JISC_infoKit, 2004). Positive feedback can motivate students to learn in new ways and encourage them to join in.

A VLE provides an area for students to work together without the necessity of physical meeting.

Community of Learners

The result of this collaboration and communication may be to develop a unique space which the student follower builds into its own identity and community: a community of learners. Case studies have shown that VLEs are particularly good at bringing people together and creating what Wenger (1998) would refer to as a community of practice. Regardless of physical location and time zones, VLEs will allow the tutor/s, to create an area where students can develop an area to listen and debate key areas for their studies at a place and time convenient for them.

Signposting

Through careful course design, tutors can support the communication and collaboration in a VLE with specific signposting and access to a vast array of up-to-date, multimedia, interactive online materials for students (JISC_infoKit, 2004). This can be material that is developed by the tutor, for example, lecture notes, diagrams and images. It could include links to web resources, the institution's online library resources, web resources developed by publishers for core texts, online articles, graphics or searchable online databases. These resources will need to be linked to the online activities in the VLE, may offer a focus for students who need additional support, provide a gateway for those who will be studying at an intensive level or encourage those who wish to study at a higher level. It is also extremely helpful for students to have all their course information including timetable, regulations, past exam papers and administrative information in one place and from one authoritative source.

Saving Time

There is much debate as to whether VLEs save time for students and tutors. In the case of lectures, a VLE can help teachers to change the focus of their time since much time is lost through students copying complicated diagrams and references and general administration; these can be transferred to the VLE (JISC_infoKit, 2004).

It will also reduce time required for photocopying. However, as teachers will see from the course design section, designing a course to use a VLE requires

planning time. Nevertheless, once teachers have created their materials online, they can easily update them with a few mouse clicks. Adding a new online resource, a clearer color image can take a few minutes. It does not require a teacher typing up the material, photocopying and then distributing to students. If a teacher is careful in his planning, he can use and re-use the materials in his VLE in many and different ways.

2.2.9. Using a Virtual Learning Environment

So far the integrated online tools (focusing on collaboration, communication and assessment) that are available within a VLE and the advantages they provide for tutors have been discussed. This section provides some specific examples of how a VLE may help a teacher or a group of teachers, to overcome problems that they may encounter in their day-to-day teaching environments.

Virtual Learning Environments Summary

According to (JISC_infoKit, 2004) a VLE :

- Is web-based and accessible to both students and teachers through a web browser on any computer connected to the Internet anywhere, any time.
- Organizes students into virtual classes, with individual, secure, logins.
- Comprises a range of integrated online tools that aims to support collaborative and co-operative student learning.
- Provides a focus for student learning activities.
- Has a wide range of benefits for teachers including improving the learning experience (through using the collaborative, communication and assessment tools) and assisting in course management and administration.
- Has the flexibility to support a range of learning scenarios but needs careful and thoughtful course design to ensure that the VLE is used to its fullest.

2.2.10. Approaches to Teaching Material Design with Technology

Traditionally, models of learning adopted by teachers have tended to focus on what the teacher does rather than on what the student will do in order to learn (JISC_infoKit, 2004). These models portray face-to-face meetings in which the teacher is seen to pour information into the students' heads by talking about important concepts, ideas and facts. Unfortunately, this allows few, if any,

opportunities for the students to ask questions and start to formulate ideas. Early forms of computer-assisted teaching mirrored this model of teaching, with the teacher being substituted by a computer. This often led to online teaching material that concentrated on content rather than what the student was doing.

The result was that students were not fully engaged with the online learning process and perceived webpages and areas developed in VLEs as an add on or an adjunct to their learning but not essential.

More recently, models about the use of online learning including VLEs have focused more on the students than the teacher (JISC_infoKit, 2004).

As working through teaching material design, it is essential for teachers to be reflecting on:

- The reasons a teacher intend to use a VLE especially the intended benefits for him and for his students.
- The varied ways in which the VLE will assist the teacher's students accomplish the learning outcomes of the teaching material.
- The student activities a teacher is going to use in the VLE.
- The content a teacher will need to support these activities.
- Gathering student feedback.

In the past, many early adopters of VLEs explored the possibilities of the technology at a basic level. For example, they frequently used the VLE to allow students to access and download supplementary learning materials – similar to an electronic filing cabinet. Although this may have some benefits students, it is not harnessing the full potential of the VLE.

Sigala (2002, p.30) in her overview of the evolution of Internet pedagogy describes this as the first stage in the use of e-learning; at this stage many teachers use e-learning including VLEs to provide a web version of their classroom activities. In other words, teachers webify their face-to-face sessions.

Unfortunately, the impact of this transfer of the didactic, transmission approach to learning and teaching from face-to-face to web-based instruction is very limited. This approach to teaching material development within a VLE is inefficient: a teacher may spend a lot of time on developing materials for his course in a VLE for little reward. To get the best out of his VLE, it is worthwhile thinking

about the underlying theory of his approaches to learning and teaching and how they can best be exploited for his teaching in the VLE.

Accordingg to (JISC_infoKit, 2004) the following characteristics of teaching–learning are valuable for improving learning outcomes:

1. Encouraging student–staff contact;
2. Encouraging co–operation among students;
3. Encouraging active learning;
4. Giving prompt feedback;
5. Emphasizing time on task;
6. Communicating high expectations;
7. Respecting diverse talents and ways of learning.

Encouraging student–staff contact	A VLE can help contact between teachers and their students through the communication tools in a VLE. Students can post messages at a time and place convenient for them.
Encouraging co–operation among students	The discussion tools can be used to encourage student co–operation in small or large groups, face–to–face or online. Areas can also be created in a VLE for students to share work
Encouraging active learning	Through careful course design, focusing on student activities, a teacher can encourage active learning.
Giving prompt feedback	The assessment tools including quizzes and the assessment drop box assist timely feedback. Quizzes can provide a wealth of feedback for students.
Emphasizing time on task	By using a VLE, to link to Library resources and online resources, students can spend time working through activities that a teacher has developed rather than searching through shelves and surfing the web.
Communicating high expectations;	As a teacher, one can use a VLE to show what he expect of his students.
Respecting diverse talents and ways of learning	The online discussion area can be used to build a community of learners which shows how the diverse talents of its learners can all contribute to everyone's learning.

There are a number of current models of learning dealing specifically with the use of learning technologies in learning and teaching. Many of these are based on the early work by Vygotsky (1962). In his theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Vygotsky observed that children learned skills more effectively when they were working in collaboration with an adult. This was not always due to the adult teaching them how to perform the task but the process of engagement with the adult which enabled children to refine their thinking or their performance to make it more effective. These observations formed the basis for constructivist theory in which these ideas have been expanded and can inform adult learning.

Doolittle (1999) maintains that constructivist learning can lead to a set of pedagogical principles:

- Learning should take place in authentic and real–world environments;
- Learning should involve social negotiation and mediation;
- Content and skills should be made relevant to the learner;
- Content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge;
- Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences;
- Students should be encouraged to become self–regulatory, self–mediated, and self–aware;
- Teachers serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning, not instructors;
- Teachers should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.

2.2.11. E-Pedagogy

Pedagogy is a widely contested term (Watkins & Mortimore 1999), nevertheless, simply put the word pedagogy means ‘the science of teaching’. According to Oxford dictionary meaning, pedagogy is the method and practice of teaching ; a pedagogue is a teacher, a strict one. Pritchard and Woollard (2010), define pedagogy as the heart of teaching. It is about rules and principles that guide effective and efficient activities which lead to learning.

Pedagogy can be defined as the art of teaching. It refers to the strategies, methods and styles of instruction. The adoption of technology adds another element in teaching material design to consider. To produce, effective online learning and teaching requires a comprehension of the processes by which students learn and interact with technology. Before new teaching materials are created it is recommended that teachers acquire an understanding of the pedagogy which will support their online environment. This guide aims to provide the foundation by which teachers can comprehend the strategies for creating successful online teaching materials.

Definition of E-Learning

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) defines eLearning as: ‘Learning facilitated and supported through the use of information and communications technology (ICT). eLearning includes -

- delivery of courses;
- on-line assessment;
- student to student and student to teacher communications;
- use of Internet resources;
- and other learning activities involving ICT and the Internet.’

2.2.12. Models of Learning and Teaching

Two models of learning that have been developed specifically for learning and teaching with technology are Maye Conceptualisation Cycle and Laurillard's Conversational Model. A third model proposed by Salmon focusses on computer-mediated communication. Finally there is the work of Biggs (JISC_infoKit, 2004).

2.2.12.1. Mayes: The Conceptualisation Cycle

This model provides a support frame-work to student learning by means of access to; Students resources, Activities and Feedback. It does this through the opportunities for Dialogue with teachers and peers. Within his study of the ‘interactivity’ within online programs Mayes identifies three clear levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. His expectation was that learning would only occur at the tertiary level. Mayes states that learning with technology involves a cycle of conceptualisation, construction and dialogue. In an article written by Mayes

&Fowler, Mayes examines how different learning activities support students' understanding of new concepts and the revision of inaccurate concepts. This is achieved in three stages, known as the Conceptualisation Cycle. Figure 2.1 clarifies May's Learning Stages.

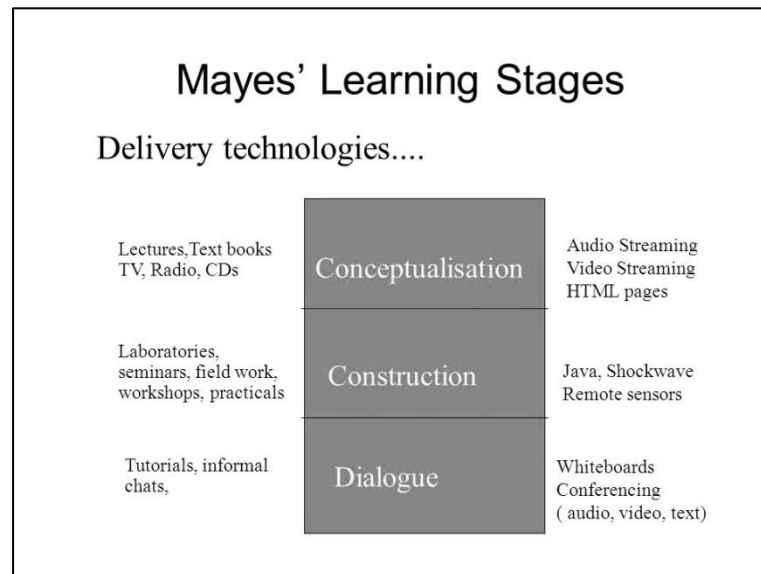


Figure (2.1): May's Learning Stages

- At the conceptualisation stage, students are exposed to other people's ideas or concepts (for example in traditional face-to-face sessions or accessing content on the WWW).
- At the construction stage students apply these new concepts in the performance of meaningful tasks.
- However, it is only at the dialogue stage, in the performance of tasks in which these new concepts are tested during conversation with teachers and peers, that learning takes place. The feedback provided enables students' inaccurate conceptions to be resolved.

Mayes suggests that each of the three levels of learning activity can be supported by three different classifications of courseware, or online material intended to promote students learning, into three categories:

- Primary courseware is used to support, for example, online explanatory clips, reading lists etc, which are a good way of giving students information.

- Secondary courseware supports students in performing a task. For example, computer assisted assessments in which the student is asked to answer questions. Examples of this include computer-aided assessments or online tests.

It is only at the level of tertiary Courseware where there is two-way dialogue that learning can occur. Examples include online discussions, videoconferencing and shared workspaces where feedback is extrinsic and online simulations. It is useful to begin developing online materials at the primary level. However, Mayes stresses that focusing too much on primary courseware will not provide sufficient support for learning. In order to ensure that learners are supported at all three levels of the conceptualisation cycle, a variety of teaching methods need to be within the course design. High level learning will not take place until there is two-way dialogue (either tutor to students, peer student dialogue, or the sort of internal dialogue which may go on within a student's head). This can only take place at the tertiary level – either using courseware or face-to-face methods of learning which are integrated with technology enhanced teaching. Although it is useful to begin by developing primary courseware, it is important for teachers not to stop at this stage but to continue development to the level at which student learning can occur.

2.2.12.2. Laurillard's Conversational Model

Laurillard developed a conversational model, based on earlier theories of Vygotsky, in which dialogue between a teacher and a student is seen as central to learning. Laurillard stresses that, for higher level learning, dialogue must take place at both a theoretical and practical level. This not only enables students to link theory with practice (which is sometimes difficult to achieve in many subjects), but also allows the teacher to evaluate whether or not he or she has set appropriate tasks for the student. This model is illustrated in figure 2.2.

One of the major characteristics of this model is the way in which the student and teacher interacts. In face-to-face teaching, many of these interactions are so spontaneous and intuitive that they can be overlooked in the design of technology supported teaching. Therefore, Laurillard made these interactions explicit. Technology can support these interactions in the following ways. It can be:

- narrative – this involves the telling or imparting of knowledge to the learner;

- interactive – this is based on the outcome of the learning. The teacher provides feedback to students based on the outcomes of tasks students undertake in order to help consolidate learning and improve performance;
- In addition, the teacher uses this information to revise what learning has occurred and, if necessary, change the focus of dialogue (adaptive);
- Communicative/discursive – the teacher supports processes where students discuss and reflect upon their learning.
- The teacher and student agree on learning goals and task goals, which can be achieved using 'productive' media, such as online presentations or recorded material.

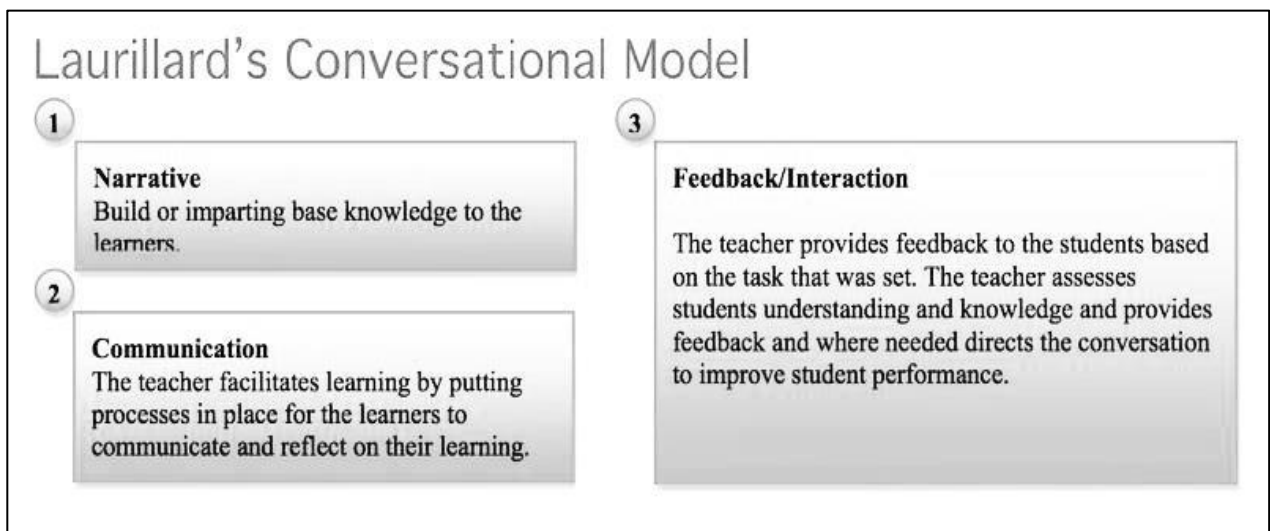


Figure (2.2): Laurillard's Conversational Model

2.2.12.3. Gilly Salmon: 5-Stage model and E-Moderating

For computer-mediated communication (CMC), Salmon has proposed a highly practical five-stage model based on her own research (see table and figure 2.3 below). The first two stages of Salmon's model focus on acclimatizing the learner to the online environment and developing a supportive social environment. The third stage 'information exchange' is characterized by learners interacting with teaching materials and activities online and providing each other with further resources. In the fourth stage, 'knowledge construction', we see learners working collaboratively sharing ideas, posing problems and challenging each other in a spirit of enquiry. The

final stage leads participants to take responsibility for and reflect on their own learning. The role of the teacher – the moderator – is essential to the design and implementation – supporting, encouraging, focusing to ensure all learners meet the intended outcomes.

<p>Stage One: Access and Motivation</p>	<p>For this first stage, it is critical that the teacher ensures that the learner can easily and quickly access in a VLE. Usually this will be to ensure there are no technical problems, for example, with passwords. Technical support is critical at this stage as the learner can easily become frustrated. Simultaneously, the teacher needs to ensure that the learners understand the need to put time and effort into the online activity. All the learners will need to know why they are accessing the online environment and what they can receive from it.</p>
<p>Stage Two: Online Socialization</p>	<p>During this stage, learners need to become comfortable in the online environment and to socialize with each other. There are a number of barriers which may inhibit this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the embarrassment of making a mistake in front of other participants; – the text-based nature of CMC can be daunting; – it is a new and strange environment for many; – lack of non-verbal and visual cues. <p>Salmon provides a number of online activities that can help new learners in the online environment become comfortable and ready to talk and collaborate online. It is essential to create an environment where learners feel respected and show respect to each other. Salmon states that this stage is over when learners have started to share a little about themselves online.</p>
<p>Stage Three: Information Exchange</p>	<p>Usually this stage is characterized by the fast and energetic exchange of messages. The learner will interact with the resources in the VLE . One of the issues at this stage is information overload. The role of the teacher is to give some structure and to keep things organized. It is critical that the teacher does not respond to all messages at this stage but summarizes and focuses the online discussions. Some learners at this stage may move away from the 'social' stage but it is essential that it remains for some.</p>
<p>Stage Four: Knowledge Construction</p>	<p>The main focus is building an online community focusing on learning, at this stage. The teacher will be relating messages back to concepts and theories and encouraging other learners to respond. The teacher will be summarizing but also moving the group along to new subjects and topics when appropriate. At this stage, the teacher may also be sharing the leadership with learners.</p>

Stage Five: Development	It is at this stage where we clearly see Salmon's link to constructivism. The online learners are taking responsibility for their own learning and becoming more confident. The focus is on high-level learning with the teacher encouraging the learners to discuss concepts and ideas at a deeper level.
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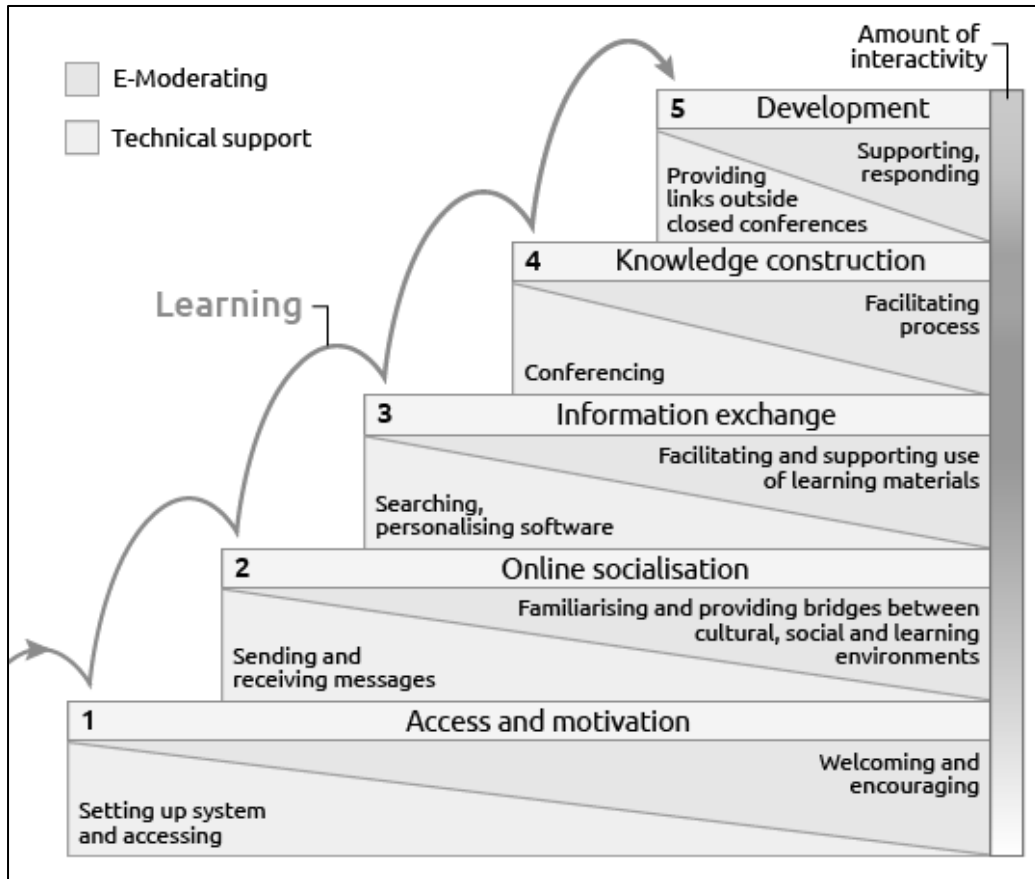


Figure (2.3): Gilly Salmon 5- Stage Model

Using this model in practice gives rise to some issues :

- If the student does not succeed in setting up their access to the system then they will not be able to learn via an on-line system. Although this is a very obvious point it has implications for the provision of technical support to enable student participation. The on-line tutor is likely to have a role in this process either at the level of referring the student to technical support from help desks and maintaining their motivation through what can be a very frustrating time period or by actually providing them with technical support.

- Different learners may be at different stages in this development process. As in face-to-face situations the tutor must manage and support students in the same group who may be at different stages in the Five Step Model.
- The underlying philosophy and program design will have a bearing on how far students develop along this process.

What can teachers gain from these models?

The educational models described in the previous section provide a framework to help guide a teacher's thinking while designing a teaching material using a VLE (JISC_infoKit, 2004). Each of these models provides just one way of viewing how a teacher could design a course using a VLE – so a teacher's design will be based around a single model.

2.2.13. The Impact of VLEs on the Roles of Teacher and Students

When applying these theories to the design of a teaching material in a VLE, it will certainly have an impact on the teacher and the style of his/her teaching. Using a VLE will provide teachers with an opportunity to think about how they teach and how they facilitate their students to learn (JISC_infoKit, 2004). They will probably find that they will become more of a guide for students as they become more independent learners. Since teachers are providing activities and materials for students to use online, the students will usually take more charge of their learning at a time and place convenient for them but simultaneously will look to teachers for advice and guidance especially in the early stages of the teaching material. Teachers will also find themselves working more in a team with support staff from the Library, IT and other teachers. This can be very exciting but it can also be rather challenging to let go of the comfortable and the familiar.

Goodyear (2002) has developed a number of indicators that show how the teacher and student roles might be expected to change when moving into an online environment, for example, a VLE. These roles include:

2.2.13.1. Changing Teacher Roles

- From oracle and lecturer to consultant, guide and resource provider;
- Teachers become expert questioners rather than providers of answers;

- Teachers become designers of student learning experiences rather than just providers of content;
- Teachers provide only the initial structure to student work, encouraging increasing self-direction;
- Teacher presents multiple perspectives on topics, emphasizing the salient points;
- From a solitary teacher to a member of a learning team (reduces isolation sometimes experienced by teachers);
- From total control of the teaching environment to sharing with the student as fellow learner;
- More emphasis on sensitivity to learning styles.

2.2.13.2. Changing Student Roles

- From passive receptacles for hand-me-down knowledge to constructors of their own knowledge;
- Students move from memorizing facts towards solving problems;
- Students view topics from multiple perspectives;
- Students devise their own questions and search for their own answers;
- Students work as group members on more collaborative/co-operative assignments: group interaction significantly increased;
- Increased multi-cultural awareness;
- Students work towards fluency with the same tools as professionals in their field;
- Increased emphasis on students as autonomous, independent, self-motivated managers of their own learning;
- There is a change in emphasis from receiving information from the teacher and learning to 'pass the test' towards using knowledge;
- Emphasis on developing effective learning strategies (both individually and collaboratively);
- Students have greater access to resources.

2.2.14. Preparing Students to Use a VLE

When teachers are designing their teaching material using a VLE it is important to think about how they are going to introduce this way of learning to their students. Students can struggle in this environment and drop-out rate can increase unless there is a thoughtful induction. (Lynch,2002). Moore &Aspden (2004) indicate that students will use a VLE when they know why it is being used and how it will benefit them. Students are not negative or particularly positive about using a VLE but need it to have an explicit role and that needs to be explained and reinforced by the teacher.

Some of the issues that a teacher may consider when introducing the use of a VLE to his students include:

Access to a Reliable Computer

Although the majority of students are likely to have access to a computer and the Internet, it cannot be assumed that all students will. It is important to communicate with the IT department regarding the facilities for students to access computers within the school. Make sure that the students know about these facilities since lack of or restricted access will have a significant impact on the use of the VLE by the students (Williams, 2002).

IT skills

Although many students will have adequate or more than adequate IT skills to access the teacher's teaching material on the VLE, there may be some who will feel ill-prepared to be learning online. Studies indicate that pre-conceived ideas about information technology skills being a barrier were not substantiated; students found VLEs easy to use and a way of developing their confidence with information technology (Moore &Aspden, 2004). Nevertheless, some students will need help. Teachers may need to offer.

If the teacher is using tools within a VLE that require specific IT skills, for example, synchronous chat, it is important to check that everyone in the group has similar ability in typing (neither too fast nor too slow) since this can lead to students dominating the discussion or feeling isolated.

2.2.15. Evaluating Technology for Teaching and Learning

Teachers evaluate all kinds of materials that they use for teaching and learning. There are many similar considerations when evaluating technological tools, and some criteria that are unique (Eady, M. J. & Lockyer, L. 2013). Some criteria and questions teachers might ask themselves when evaluating educational software, applications and resources are listed below. How relevant each of these considerations is depends on the form of the technology; for example, a digital learning resource or software that might not include instructional content (Eady, M. J. & Lockyer, L. 2013).

Age/year Level:

- Is the application appropriate for the age and year level of the students?
- Is the reading level of the text and type of media appropriate?

Curriculum Links:

- Are there links between the content/functions of the application and the expectations of the curriculum?
- Are the content and examples relevant to the curriculum?
- Will this help teach the curriculum in new or different ways?

Instructional Content:

- Is the information accurate, complete and current?
- Are sources reliable?
- Does the content encourage higher-order thinking?
- Is the content culturally appropriate? Does it present multiple perspectives?

Engaging and Interactive:

- Will the learner(s) be actively involved in using the tool?
- Is feedback provided? Is the feedback appropriate and meaningful?

Assessment:

- Are assessment tasks included, or can the teacher develop relevant assessment tasks that link to the use of the tool?

Flexibility:

- Can all aspects of the tool be integrated easily into classroom activities?
- Can the tool be used for multiple curriculum units?

Media:

- Does the medium used support or distract from the learning activity?

Usability:

- Is the tool easy to use and intuitive?

Technical Considerations:

- Does the tool work consistently?
- Are there special technical requirements for using the tool? Does the school have access to those requirements?

Support materials:

- Does the tool have multiple forms of help (manuals, context-sensitive help, and tutorials)?
- Are teaching support materials or online resources available to help a teacher embed the tool into lessons?

2.2.16. Challenges and Barriers

It is true that not all teachers are embedding technology into their teaching. A significant body of research has investigated why this occurs. The barriers to using technology in the classroom are many and include, among others, resource limitations, teacher knowledge and skills, and teacher attitudes and beliefs (Hew & Brush, 2007). Some resource barriers are being overcome with an increasing number of computers and software applications and faster, more reliable networks in schools.

But teachers tend not to use technology if they become frustrated when it does not work properly or when there is a lack of technical support in their school (Hew & Brush, 2007). Teachers also report having limited time to review and learn about new technology tools that they can use in their teaching (Hew & Brush, 2007). Teacher knowledge and skills are important factors in the use of technology in the classroom. Lack of specific technological skills is a common reason teachers give for not using technology (Hew & Brush, 2007). However, those teachers who take the opportunity to build skills through professional development activities are much more likely to integrate technology into their teaching than those who do not (Mueller et al., 2008).

But teachers realize that the knowledge and skills they need to be able to use technology in the classroom goes beyond understanding what functions are under the

menu items and what buttons to click. Using technology effectively to promote student learning means thinking about effective learning strategies and effective classroom management. Teachers are faced with challenges and barriers all the time. Technology's place in society causes teachers to consider the implications for them in their role as educator and as lifelong learners themselves. The constant challenge for teachers is to draw upon their continually developing knowledge and skills about what to teach and how to teach. Technology is just one, but an important consideration in that equation.

Summary

The pace of technological change in society and in schools has been exponential and will continue to be so. Teachers are using ICT to support their role in providing students with structure and advice, monitoring their progress and assessing their accomplishments. When students use technology to conduct research projects, analyze data, solve problems, design products and assess their own work, they work with others to create and communicate new knowledge and understandings. This chapter has presented a range of tools and a range of teaching and learning strategies. These strategies are based on theories of learning that allow teachers to provide different experiences for their students. Technology is changing all the time and what we know about how to use that technology effectively is developing continuously. As a future teacher, one will continue to develop his understanding and practice regarding the use of technology to help his students learn effectively.

2.3. Review of Related Literature

The fast-paced growth of technologies has entered the domain of second language acquisition through the technology-supported pedagogies (Beetham, H., & Sharpe, R. 2013). The web opens up opportunities for language learning by enhancing the learners' abilities. It provides the learners with extensive sources of authentic input materials that are immediately available with constant up-to-date information. It is necessary for the teachers to take a step to encourage learning through technology.

The digital native learners anticipate their teachers to create a learning environment that includes technology since it is an intrinsic part of their lives. A language teacher has to meet the needs of the learners who prefer to practice language in their idle hours and according to their own learning style, it is really challenging and a necessity for a language teacher to think of innovative approaches to be employed to address the learners' proficiency level. According to Wang, L. (2005), integrating technology into the language classroom not only saves time and work but also inspires creativity and brings opportunities to learners, connecting them to new ideas and people.

Integrating technology , virtual learning tools in particular, into the language learning has been an area of discussion among educators for over thirty years. Literally thousands of articles and studies have been published recommending the effectiveness of virtual tools which support learning.

This chapter deals with some previous studies conducted to identify the effect of using virtual learning tools on developing the students' performance in many areas.

2.3.1. Studies Related to Using Virtual Learning in Teaching English

English teaching has adopted virtual learning to create a learner-centered class. Several studies were conducted in this respect.

In their study, Khoshsima & Sayadi (2016) aimed at investigating the effect of virtual language learning method on Iranian intermediate EFL learners writing ability. The study was conducted with 20 English Translation students at Chabahar Maritime University who were assigned into two groups, control and experimental, after ensuring of their homogeneity by administering a TOEFL proficiency. The participants of the experimental group received virtual learning by sending PowerPoint through their e-mails. The participants of the experimental group did not have to attend the classes, however they had to study the PowerPoint and send the assigned task on the mentioned deadline. A writing posttest was administered to find the impacts of both methods. A paired sample t-test and an independent sample t-test were run to analyze the posttest scores using SPSS. The findings of the study indicated that both groups showed some improvements in terms of their writing

ability since the obtained p value of both groups were (0.000) which is smaller than (0.05). However using virtual method appeared to be a more fruitful tool since the mean score of the experimental group (12.75) was much higher than the mean score of the control group (9.8).

Gupta (2015) investigated one of the methods of learning a new language, or Second-Language Acquisition (SLA), which is immersion. Using this method, the learner relocates to a new place where the target language is the dominant language and tries to learn the language by immersing themselves in the local environment. As an alternative solution, the researcher used virtual reality (VR) as a new method to learn a new language. VR is an immersive technology that allows the user to wear a head-mounted display to be immersed in a life-like virtual environment. Ogma, an immersive virtual reality (VR) language learning environment was introduced and compared to traditional methods of language learning. For this study, teaching a foreign vocabulary was focused only. Participants were given a set of ten Swedish words and learn them either by using a traditional list-and-flash-cards method or by using Ogma. They then return one week later to give feedback and be tested on their vocabulary-training success. Results indicated that percentage retention using the VR method was significantly higher than that of the traditional method. In addition, the effectiveness and enjoyability ratings given by users were significantly higher for the VR method. This proves that the system has a potential impact on SLA by using VR technology and that Immersive Virtual reality technique is better than traditional methods of learning a new language.

Lan (2015) developed virtually immersive EFL learning contexts for EFL learners in Taiwan to pre- and review English materials beyond the regular English class schedule. A 2-iteration action research lasting for one semester was conducted to evaluate the effects of virtual contexts on learners' EFL learning. One hundred thirty two elementary school students participated in this study. Both qualitative and quantitative data, including observation and English learning performances, were collected and analyzed. The positive results obtained from the study approved that the usage of virtual contexts in EFL learning could (1) provide students with learning opportunities without the time and space limits, (2) provide students with a game-like scenario for English learning, and (3) enhance learners' EFL performances. The

learning mode proposed and experiences gained in the study not only serve as a practical reference to diverse foreign language educational occasions but also add to the knowledge pool of foreign language learning and teaching in virtual worlds.

In the same context, Aljadili (2014) investigated the effectiveness of using virtual classes on developing the tenth graders' speaking skills and reducing their speaking anxiety. The researcher adopted the experimental approach with two groups. He designed both an oral and written speaking tests besides an anxiety scale. The study sample was represented in (40) students, who were randomly selected. The virtual classes were used in teaching the experimental group while the traditional method was used with the control one. The results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between both groups in favor of the experimental group due to the virtual classes. The results of the scale indicated the existence of significant differences in the speaking anxiety of the experimental group before and after the experiment of utilizing the virtual classes to reduce their speaking anxiety in the favor of the post experiment. The study recommended the necessity of implementing virtual classes in teaching English language to achieve better outcomes in students' competence in English language. The study also recommended that teachers are advised to use virtual classes in teaching speaking skills, holding educational courses and workshops for teachers in general and of English in particular in employing virtual classes learning to enrich the teaching learning process and develop students' speaking competence. It was also suggested that further research should be conducted on the effect of the virtual classes on different areas of learning English language and other school subjects.

In his attempt to examine the use of a virtual world language activity for high school students who were studying German. Parrott (2014) carried out a study whose goal was to provide a functioning 3D environment for German language students to experience as avatars. The student's impressions, attitudes, and perceptions of this learning activity were recorded and analyzed.

The students entered a virtual world village called Plauderstein as avatars and interacted in role-playing activities to practice their German language skills. There were 52 students in three grade levels involved in the study which took place over three weeks in a high school in central Pennsylvania. The students participated in

four role-playing activities in different locations (a restaurant, hotel, train station, and campground). The researcher conducted interviews with some of the students from each class after each role-playing activity was completed. When all the activities were complete, the researcher administered a survey to the student subjects. The results of the study showed that the students felt that this sort of learning activity in a 3D world was challenging and fun, and that they believed it is a useful adjunct to typical German classroom activities.

In Spain, Carruthers (2013) investigated the effect of two different types of conversation hours, face-to-face and virtual, on the oral proficiency levels of students enrolled in intermediate Spanish classes at the college level. Oral proficiency was measured using the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI), before and after treatment. The face-to-face conversation hours took place at the language laboratory in a classroom and the virtual conversation hours took place in the online multi-user virtual environment known as Second Life. The research question was: What is the effect of attending virtual conversation hours or face-to-face conversation hours on students' oral proficiency?

The statistical data analysis was conducted using the conversation hours as the independent variable (face-to-face or virtual), the SOPI posttest scores as the dependent variable, and the SOPI pretest scores as the covariate. A total sample of 52 students was involved.

Posttest data were collected following 14 weeks of treatment during which students in each group attended the weekly conversation hours. Data analysis showed there was significant difference in oral proficiency gain between the face-to-face group and the virtual group. The results of the ANCOVA test allowed the rejection of the null hypothesis, as there was a significant difference in effect on the adjusted SOPI posttest scores of the participants in the virtual conversation group versus those in the face-to-face conversation group. The virtual group improved their oral proficiency significantly better than the face-to-face group. In addition, the SOPI scores of both groups increased significantly. The SOPI posttest scores were significantly higher than the SOPI pretest scores for both groups. Therefore, both face-to-face and virtual conversation hours could yield a supplemental method to the traditional approach of the language laboratory to improve communicative competence.

Another study was conducted by Tseng and Tai (2013) to examine the perceptions of 38 student teachers of second language (L2) interaction in relation to the learning and teaching of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) by using multi-user virtual environments 3-D MUVES. The data that were collected through reflection reports and interviews revealed that the key to the success of promoting L2 interaction may be contingent on the access to realistic scenarios and the presence of non-verbal cues. The participating teachers also offered suggestions regarding the future use of 3-D MUVES to foster L2 interaction in the learning and teaching of CFL. Overall, the teachers considered this unique platform to be a promising venue where enhanced interaction may contribute to the understanding of target linguistic input, as well as the communication of the learners. This study has provided insight into the dynamic forces that mediate L2 interaction in 3-D MUVES from the viewpoints of CFL teachers.

Abal (2012) used a true experimental treatment control group repeated measures design to compare the perceived speaking anxiety levels (as measured by an anxiety scale administered per simulation activity) of 11 English Language Learners (ELLs) (5 in the control group, 6 in the experimental group) when speaking to Native English Speakers (NESs) during 10 simulation activities. Simulations in the control group were done face-to-face, while those in the experimental group were done in the Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVES) of Second Life. The results of the repeated measures ANOVA revealed after the Huynh-Feldt epsilon correction, demonstrated for both groups a significant decrease in anxiety levels over time from the first simulation to the tenth and final simulation. When comparing the two groups, the results revealed a statistically significant difference, with the experimental group demonstrating a greater anxiety reduction. These results suggest that language instructors should consider including face-to-face and MUVE simulations with ELLs paired with NESs as part of their language instruction. Future investigations should investigate the use of other multi-user virtual environments and/or measure other dimensions of the ELL/NES interactions.

Similarly, Silva (2012) investigated the competencies language teachers need in order to teach in Second Life (or a similar virtual world) and the best ways to prepare them to integrate virtual worlds into their language classes. Language

teachers participated in a course specifically designed to train them to use Second Life and teach in this 3D virtual environment. A case study methodology was employed in this study. Two groups of teachers were part of two teacher development courses carried out in Second Life on the topic of teaching languages in this 3D environment. Both quantitative, two Likert-scale surveys administered before and after the course, and qualitative data sources (interviews, reflective blogs, and transcripts from synchronous meetings) were analyzed.

Findings indicated that, besides knowing how to use Second Life and identify its affordances and constraints, language teachers need to be able to make pedagogical decisions such as choosing an in-world place to teach and decide how to monitor their students' work.

The results of this study help shed light on this new area of research. The identification of a list of key competencies helps provide guidance for teachers interested in integrating virtual worlds into their language classes. By knowing how to use these 3D environments, teachers will be prepared to design meaningful and pedagogically-sound language learning experiences. In addition, teacher educators can use the recommendations presented in the study to determine the best ways to prepare teachers for this enterprise. Similarly, knowledge gained from this study is not limited to teaching in Second Life but may also extend to other similar virtual worlds.

Özkan, M. (2011) aim in this study was to find out the effects of virtual learning environments, with an emphasis on social constructivism, on speaking skills of university level non-English major students. The participants of the study, 51 non-English major university students, who had three hours of compulsory English education per week, used a virtual learning environment named 'Moodle' for 1 hour each week, spending the other 2 hours in classroom-based courses.

In order to investigate the effects, the participants were administered a computer readiness scale at the beginning of the study. At the end, two questionnaires were distributed, and to support the data fifteen participants were interviewed. The results showed that the social constructivist virtual learning environment has, in the participants' opinions, significant positive effects not only on speaking skills but also on various language skills and areas. In addition to these

findings, the results also revealed the benefits of integrating virtual learning environments into classroom-based foreign language education.

A case study conducted by Kastoudi (2011) examined the potential of 3D virtual quest games to enhance vocabulary acquisition through interaction, negotiation of meaning and noticing. Four adult students of English at advanced level and a native speaker of English formed two groups, one group of two students and one group of two students and the native speaker. The groups took part in the Pot Healer Adventure Quest in Second Life. Qualitative analysis showed that (a) there was a great amount of output and meaningful interaction, as well as negotiation of meaning and negative feedback for the words tested, (b) small but substantial quantities of incidental learning of vocabulary occurred, together with some small samples of incidental learning from some students, and (c) noticing worked very well in the activity, due to the combination of the written chat, the virtual environment and the game itself. There is a need to promote the creation of quests that will combine the attractive elements of games with the aim of second language learning. The researcher suggested that more research is needed to see how teachers can have effective language learning while interacting in virtual environments. More study cases with various samples should be conducted for more conclusive evidence.

Fanning's (2011) study contributed to studies of virtual environments in relation to secondary schools in the UK. A number of common themes were identified from the literature review that was part of the researcher's original critical analytical study and which is updated. The themes included assessment, differentiation, collaboration and flexible learning practices. These were investigated in one school, over the course of one year, during the introduction of a local authority approved virtual learning environment. The researcher had assumed that the use of the technology would have a transformational effect on teacher practice. In reality for most of the time the technology was used to reaffirm an existing classroom way of doing things. The conceptual framework that guides the investigation was based on action research, influenced by social constructionism and critical theory. It employs aspects of a second-generation model of activity theory to explore the tensions that may arise in a classroom when technology is introduced. A phased approach was adopted towards the collection of data, given the complexities of both classroom

practice and the technology employed. This ranged from the use of questionnaires and technical data from the VLE when it was initially introduced, to interviews and classroom observations as teachers became more confident in its use. This research revealed that where the use of the technology was most effective in supporting approaches to personalized learning, a number of key components were combined. The researcher has proposed that where teachers have the technical skills to use a VLE, linked to an understanding of the theories and models associated with online learning and where they structure their teaching outside the confines of the traditional lesson format, then online technologies support personalized learning.

Zair (2010) conducted his study to explore the use of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for teaching reading and writing in English to a group of learners in Syria. Action research was adopted for the study. One cycle of action research could be completed which comprised four phases, i.e.; action planning, action taking, action monitoring and action evaluation. A VLE was created by using a combination of different technology tools such as a wiki and survey tool. Nine learners from the researcher's home city Salamieh, Syria participated in this study. Data were collected through online written semi-structured interviews, observation, reflective journal, test, and learners' work and reflection. The key findings of the study suggest that a teacher can create a VLE by selecting the available tools. VLE offers flexibility for learners who cannot avail formal education opportunities for themselves. Tasks that appeared suitable for reading and writing via VLE were those where learners were able to learn collectively. ICT tools used in the study were suitable for all stages of reading and writing processes. The facilitating factors of using VLE include the potential of VLE to provide individualized and instant learning opportunity. The study also showed that while learners lacked theoretical knowledge about ICT, they knew how to use these tools. Furthermore, a VLE can be used to promote collaboration and group work between learners. Issues related to poor ICT infrastructure and lack of reliable access to Internet in Syria and Pakistan posed problems. These findings have implications for how reading and writing in English could be taught in the Syrian context. Face-to-face activities can be modified to become suitable for VLE. Teacher education programmes will need to be modified to make room for the use of ICT for language teaching purposes. Recommendations

for future research include determining the potential of VLEs for encouraging collaborative language learning. Other areas of research are also identified.

Samuel's (2009) examined the benefits of integrating ICT tools, the success factors and obstacles encountered by English Language option teachers in ICT integration. This study used a multiple-case design approach, involving mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative approaches. Teachers from nine areas in West Malaysia were involved in the study. A cross sectional questionnaire survey was used to find out the level and extent of ICT integration carried out by English option teachers. Open-ended questions in the last part of the survey were used to find out the reasons for the poor oral communication skills of the students. Teacher and pupil interviews that were transcribed and carefully coded together with teacher observations were analyzed to find out in detail the factors that were withholding the students from verbalizing their thoughts in simple English. User requirements obtained from the research findings were subsequently used in the creation of the Virtual English Language Tool (VELT). The end objective of this tool is to improve the English language proficiency of students in particular their oral communication skills. VELT incorporates a series of interactive lessons customized to local themes, topics and language variations. The VELT modules cater for the development of different communication skills namely pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, basic conversational English with appropriate structure, word order and appropriate semantic elements. VELT was implemented among 29 Year 5 pupils in Banting District in Selangor for a period of 9 months in 2005. Further implementation and evaluation of the tool were carried out in two other schools in 2007, namely in Ampang District and in Kuchai Lama District in Selangor. The evaluation findings on the usefulness of VELT among students in the above mentioned three case studies showed that ICT integrated lessons and the online tutorial using Instant Messaging tools not only improved their oral communication skills but further increased their attainment levels in terms of academic achievement and classroom participation. Another pertinent finding in the case studies revealed that the free audio and video conferencing tools embedded in Instant Messaging tools could be exploited by English Language teachers to enhance students' communication skills. Besides the practical contribution of VELT, the study has developed an empirical-based

framework on ICT integration which could act as a training model for pre-service and in-service English option teachers on ways of enhancing English Language teaching and learning in particular oral communication skills.

Varli's (2009) study aimed to investigate; (a) how sociocultural aspects of teaching and learning ESL/EFL manifest in three-dimensional (3D) virtual worlds, (b) how language teachers perceive such teaching and learning activities, and therefore adapt their pedagogies, design ESL/EFL course content, and deliver courses in a virtual setting in this respect.

The researcher adopted a qualitative research framework, a descriptive and in depth comprehension of the educational activities in three-dimensional (3D) virtual worlds. Data were collected through participant observation in Second Life and personal interviews with 5 online ESL/EFL teachers.

The findings and results showed that three-dimensional (3D) virtual worlds offer unique learning opportunities with respect to sociocultural paradigms/patterns of learning, and support ESL/EFL teachers by providing several invaluable tools in online language education.

Shih's & Yang's (2008) study has designed A 3D virtually synchronous communication architecture for situated language learning to foster communicative competence among undergraduate students who have studied English as a foreign language (EFL). The researchers presented an innovative approach that offers better e-learning than previous virtual reality educational applications. The proposed method supplied learners with autonomy in virtual communications, allowing learners to achieve a variety of shared goals. The traditional text-based or web-based virtual reality systems are generally less attractive to students because of their lack of 3D immersion and real time voice interaction. Three-D virtual reality technology can be exploited to compensate these weaknesses. The researchers proposed an immersive and interactive virtual English classroom, entitled VEC3D, that integrates a goal-based instructional design, vivid 3D graphics, and real-time voice communication. The ultimate goal of the VEC3D project was to enhance learners' English communicative competence. This research determined how learners perceive their experiences in the virtual space and use communication strategies (CSs) in the process of advancing communicative competence. The ethnographic study results

revealed that the proposed application promoted positive student attitude and interactive learning experiences.

The aim of Bakar's (2008) case study was to examine if the newly created Virtual English Language Tool (VELT) could be used to improve the listening and speaking skills of primary school pupils in a sub-urban environment in Malaysia. A Year 5 class used VELT for a period of nine months. Donald Kirkpatrick's four-level model was used to evaluate this e-learning tool. The findings of the case study were quite encouraging.

2.3.2. Commentary on the Previous Studies

It is noticeable that nearly all the studies have examined the effectiveness of virtual learning tools in the teaching learning process. Nearly all the studies have displayed virtual learning tools to be significant in supporting students' achievement, attitudes and performance which assisted teachers to employ them as an alternative for completely face-to-face learning.

The previous studies proved that virtual learning tools were suitable and highly recommended for use inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, the researchers in most of the studies outlined variant suggestions and recommendations to enhance the employment of virtual learning tools in the teaching learning process.

The pre-mentioned studies were conducted in various environments such as America, Taiwan, United Kingdom, Iran, Korea, Spain, Syria, Texas, Germany, Malaysia, Turkey and China. At the same time, one study was conducted in Islamic University-Gaza namely Aljadili's (2014).

On the other hand, two studies were conducted to examine the effectiveness of virtual learning tools on speaking in English like Aljadili's (2014) and Carruthers's (2013). Yet only one of the studies reviewed here was conducted on Arab Palestinian school students dealing with the effectiveness of virtual learning tools in teaching and learning EFL in general or in developing conversational skills in particular. So, this current study is the first study to be conducted on investigating its effectiveness in the Palestinian environment for Palestinian sixth graders.

Also, samples of the previous studies were different in number, gender and age. However, it is worth mentioning that the largest sample number was 132 participants in (Lan, 2015). The smallest sample number was a single case study of 4

adult students from Greece in (Kastoudi, 2010). Some of the participants were at university and sometimes at high and primary schools. In this study, the sample is (70) female students. They are all about 12 years-old.

Concerning the methodology implemented, most of them used the quasi experimental approach while some adopted the descriptive one and one study used the case study approach. Some studies explored the effectiveness of virtual learning as well as the participants' attitudes towards either the virtual tools or the subject taught such as Parrott's (2014).

Furthermore, the majority of the previous studies are very recent as one study was conducted in 2016, two studies 2015, two studies in 2014, two studies in 2013, two studies in 2012, three studies in 2011, one study in 2010, two studies in 2009 and two studies in 2008.

To sum up, the varied instrumentation used in the previous studies has shown clear insights to conduct the present study efficiently. The most commonly used tools to conduct these studies include pre-posttest, survey, questionnaires, interviews and observations, but this study used a pre-post written conversation test to measure the effectiveness of using virtual learning tools on developing sixth graders' conversational skills, a pre-post oral conversation test in addition to a rating scale to assess students' conversation performance

From the previous studies the researcher concluded the following:

1. All the previous studies dealt with virtual learning as an independent variable.
2. Several previous studies indicated that there is a strong relationship between virtual learning and its positive effect on the students development of English skills.
3. The recommendations of the previous studies highlighted the importance of considering the virtual learning tools in improving the students' achievement and performance in different skills.

The researcher benefited a lot from reviewing the related studies serving as a guide, helped in:

- Choosing and designing the tools of the study.
- Designing the tools to be implemented.
- Choosing the right statistical treatments for the study.

- Writing the outlines of theoretical framework.

This study is characterized by the following:

1. Concentrating not only on the correlation between virtual learning and conversational skills, but also on suggesting a program based on virtual learning tools to develop the students' conversational skills.
2. As far as the researcher knows, it is the first study to be conducted in Gaza's schools and which deals with virtual learning and conversational skills.
3. Unlike the previous studies, this study suggested a program based on virtual learning tools to develop conversational skills.

Reviewing the literature, the researcher found that virtual learning tools are very beneficial if administered systematically along with enough period of time. In other words, virtual learning seems to be a good tool for enhancing EFL skills, English learners' confidence, self-evaluation, and interaction as well. Also, it has been argued that it has its positive impact on the students' attitudes, too. However, the gains of virtual learning vary in the degrees and size effects due to the context in which they are applied, and the methodology used for constructing programs.

Chapter III

Methodology

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the procedures followed throughout the study. It introduces a complete description of the methodology of the study, the population, the sample, instrumentation, the pilot study, a description of the virtual learning environment tools used in the study and the research design.

3.1. Research Approach

After determining the study statement and reviewing the related literature, the researcher adopted the experimental approach because it suits the nature of the study ,which aimed at examining the effectiveness of using virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) on developing sixth graders' conversational skills. To know the effect of the independent variable (Virtual Learning Tools) (Voki) and (Lingt language class) on the dependent variable (conversational skills), two groups of the students were selected: an experimental group and a control one. Virtual learning tools were used in teaching the conversational skills with the experimental group while the traditional method was used with the control group.

3.2. Research Design

To test the study hypotheses, the researcher adopted the equivalent groups design (Experimental and Control groups) through selecting two similar groups and applying the experimental factor (independent variable) presented in the usage of two virtual tools on the experimental group while the traditional method was used with the control group. As Ebeedat et al. (2005,p.230) clarify "Researchers adopt this design to avoid the defects of one group design; more than one group are used when applying the experimental factor on one of them and leaving the other in its natural circumstances. Thus, the difference will be the result of the experimental factor on the experimental group provided that the groups are completely equivalent except for the experimental variable which affects the experimental group". So, the researcher depended on the following design to test the study hypotheses as shown in Figure (3.1).

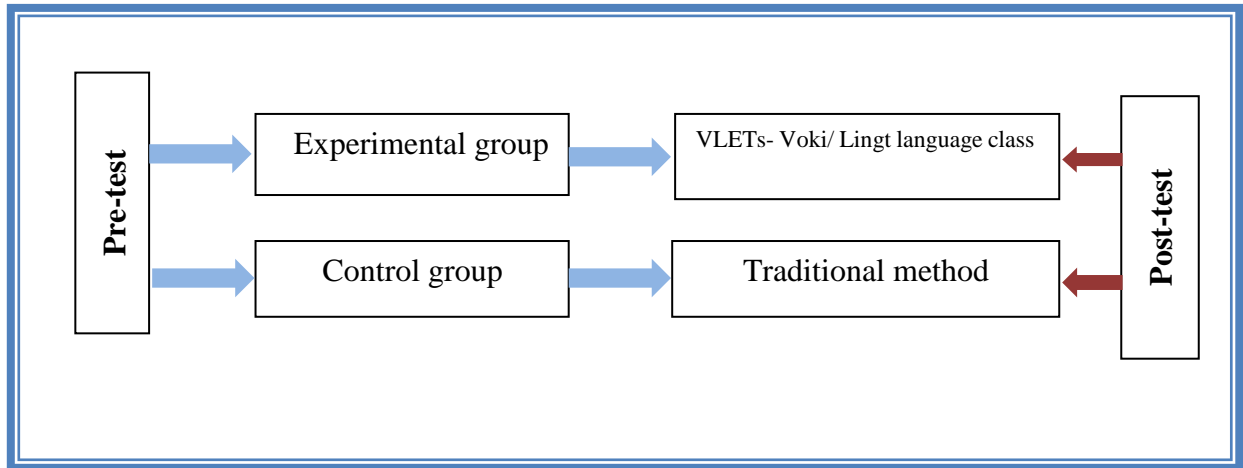


Figure (3.1): The study experimental design

3.3. Population of the Study

The population consisted of all female sixth graders in Khan Younes governorate schools for the scholastic year 2015- 2016. This population counts (3009) according to the Ministry of Education records.

3.4. Sample of the Study

The study sample was determined through the simple random method. In Khan Younes, there are nine (female) schools that have sixth grade. The researcher used the lot to select the sample from them. Hatem El Tae Basic School was selected. The sample was selected randomly from grade six classes. It consisted of (70) students divided into two groups; the experimental group consisted of (35) students and the control group consisted of (35) other students.

The subjects in both groups were similar in their general achievement in accordance with the statistical treatment of their results in the second term of the scholastic year (2015-2016). They were also equivalent in their English language achievement according to the statistical treatment of their results in the second term exam of the scholastic year (2015-2016). The age variable of the sample was also controlled before carrying out the experiment.

3.5. Variables of the Study

The study included the following variables:

A- The independent variable represented in

1- The teaching method

1.1 Virtual learning environment tools (VLETs)

1.2 Traditional method.

B- The dependent variable represented in

1- Conversational skills.

3.5.1. Controlling the Variables

To assure the accuracy of the results and avoid any extraneous interference, the researcher tried to control some variables prior to the study.

Both groups were taught by the same teacher, the researcher. This was to prevent any other factor related to the differences in the teachers from affecting the results. Both groups received eight weeks of instruction. The control group was taught traditionally while the experimental group was led by the same teacher but using the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs). The researcher controlled the following variables:

3.5.1.1. Age Variable

The researcher recorded the students' ages from their school personal files at the second term of the scholastic year (2015-2016). T-Test was used to measure any statistical differences. Table (3.1) shows the results.

Table (3.1): T-test results of controlling age variable

Variable	Group	No.	Mean	Std.	T	Sig.
Age	Control	35	11.691	0.523	1.053	0.296
	Experimental	35	11.866	0.822		

* T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) equal (1.99)

** T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha \leq 0.01$) equal (2.66)

Table (3.1) shows that sign value is more than (0.05), and t calculated is less than t tabled. So there were no statistically significant differences at (0.05) between the experimental and the control group concerning the age variable.

3.5.1.2. General Achievement Variable

T-test was used to measure the statistical differences between the groups due to their general achievement. The subjects' results in the second term test of the scholastic year (2015-2016) were recorded and analyzed. Table (3.2) shows the results.

Table (3.2): T- test for differences between control and experimental groups in general achievement

Variable	Group	No.	Mean	Std.	T	Sig.
General achievement	Control	35	452.443	55.66	1.170	0.246
	Experimental	35	423.914	64.623		

* T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) equal (1.99)

** T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha \leq 0.01$) equal (2.66)

Table (3.2) shows that sign value is more than (0.05), and t calculated is less than t tabled. So there were no statistically significant differences at (0.05) between the experimental and the control groups concerning the general achievement variable.

3.5.1.3. General Achievement in English Language Variable

T-test was used to measure the statistically significant differences between the groups concerning their English language achievement. The results in the second term test of the school year (2015-2016) were recorded and analyzed. Table (3.3) shows the results.

Table (3.3): T test for differences between control and experimental groups in English language achievement

Variable	Group	No.	Mean	Std.	T	Sig.
English language achievement	Control	35	69.274	12.755	0.949	0.346
	Experimental	35	66.080	15.283		

* T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) equal (1.99)

** T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha \leq 0.01$) equal (2.66)

Table (3.3) shows that sign value is more than (0.05), and t calculated is less than t tabled. So there were no statistically significant at (0.05) between the experimental and the control groups concerning the English language achievement variable.

3.5.1.4. General Achievement in English Conversational Skills Variable

To make sure that the sample subjects were similar in their previous English conversational skills performance, the researcher applied the pre-performance test. The results of the subjects were recorded and statistically analyzed using T-Test technique. Table (3.4) outlines the results of the test.

Table (3.4): T-test results of controlling previous learning in English variable on the Pre- applications

Tools	Group	No.	Mean	Std.	T	Sig.
Conversational skills rating scale	Control	35	27.00	10.9	1.277	0.206
	Experimental	35	24.057	8.2		
Oral conversation test	Control	35	2.371	1.9	1.050	0.298
	Experimental	35	2.8857	2.3		
Written conversation test	Control	35	11.5714	4.7	0.229	0.819
	Experimental	35	11.257	6.5		

* T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) equal (1.99)

** T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha \leq 0.01$) equal (2.66)

Table (3.4) shows that sign value is more than (0.05), and t calculated is less than t tabled. So there were no statistically significance differences at (0.05) between the experimental and the control groups concerning the pre-applications.

3.6. Instrumentation

In order to collect the data that help achieve the goals of the study, the researcher employed the following tools:

- 1- Content analysis card.
- 2- Conversational skills rating scale.

- 3- Oral conversation test.
- 4- Written conversation test.

3.6.1. Content Analysis

3.6.1.1. Preparing the Conversational Skills List

A) The Initial Draft of Conversational Skills

The researcher reviewed the literature in addition to the related previous studies in order to identify the required conversational skills for the sixth graders in the second semester. The researcher prepared the conversational skills initial draft which included ten conversational skills.

B) The Referees' Validity

To examine the list's suitability to the English content for sixth graders, the list, in its initial draft, was introduced to a panel of specialists in English language and methodology from Islamic university Gaza, Ministry of Education, and experienced supervisors and teachers in governmental schools. The items of the list were modified according to their recommendations.

C) The Final Draft

The researcher modified the conversational-skill list according to the referees' recommendations and suggestions, the final draft consisted of eight conversational skills.

3.6.1.2. Content Analysis Procedures

Content analysis was conducted according to the following procedures:

Purpose of the Analysis:

The analysis aimed at identifying to what extent the second semester units in "English for Palestine" for sixth grade (student book 6B) included the suggested list of the prepared conversational skills.

Sample of the Analysis:

The analysis sample included the conversational skills in "English for Palestine" sixth grade student book in the second semester of the scholastic year (2012-2013) for units (10-11-12-13).

Category of Analysis:

The researcher used the conversational skills as the main categories for the content analysis. The required eight conversational skills were in twenty pages.

Unit of Analysis:

The researcher considered the twenty pages as units of analysis so as to determine the conversational skills.

Unit of Registration:

The registration unit is the topic (lesson) which includes the conversational skills.

Limitations of the Analysis:

- The analysis includes all the lessons in units (10, 11, 12, 13) in "English for Palestine" sixth grade (student book 6B).
- Using a card to observe the results and the frequency of each analysis unit.
- Develop a conversational skills list based on analysis results.

Steps of Analysis

- Adequate and careful survey of the content and identifying the conversational skills.
- Computing the number of indicators to the conversational skills in the card and the frequency of each one.

Analysis Validity

The tool was presented to a panel of supervisors and experienced teachers to discuss the suitability of the analysis for the aim it was prepared for and to make sure that the determined conversational skills are included in the sixth grade curriculum which will be analyzed.

Analysis Reliability

To examine the reliability of the analysis, the researcher used two ways; reliability through people and reliability through time.

Reliability through People

The researcher analyzed the content for the units. A colleague supervisor carried out another analysis for the same units. Holesti formula was used to know the percentage of agreement between the two analyses.

Reliability through Time

The researcher analyzed the content for the units. Then after (20) days the researcher analyzed the same units.

The researcher monitored the results in tables 3.5 and 3.6

$$\text{Holesti formula } R = \frac{2(c1*c2)}{(c1+c2)} * 100$$

R = Reliability coefficient.

2(C1 C2) = Number of agreements between the two analyses.

C1 = Total frequency in the first analysis.

C2 = Total frequency in the second analysis.

**Table (3.5): Reliability coefficient by Holesti formula
(Reliability through time method)**

Skills	The first analysis	The second analysis	agreement	Reliability coefficient
Speaking rate	20	24	20	90.90
Speaking Fluency	16	20	16	88.89
Vocal confidence	20	24	19	86.36
Articulation	16	20	15	83.33
Vocal Variety	20	24	18	81.81
Volume	20	24	18	81.81
Accuracy	20	24	18	81.81
Asking of questions	16	20	14	77.78
All Skills	148	180	138	84.14

According to Table (3.5), the reliability coefficient between the two analyses was (84.14), which is acceptable. This is a clear evidence of the reliability of the analysis process.

**Table (3.6): Reliability coefficient by Holesti formula
(Reliability through people method)**

Skills	The first analysis	The second analysis	agreement	Reliability coefficient
Speaking rate	20	18	17	89.50
Speaking Fluency	16	21	15	81.08
Vocal confidence	20	23	17	79.10
Articulation	16	16	15	93.75
Vocal Variety	20	19	17	87.18
Volume	20	25	19	84.44
Accuracy	20	21	20	97.56
Asking of questions	16	19	14	80.00
All Skills	148	162	134	86.45

According to Table (3.6), the reliability coefficient between the two analyses was (86.45), which is acceptable. This is clear evidence of the reliability of the analysis process.

3.6.2. Conversational Skills Rating Scale

The conversational skills rating scale depended on the CSRS (Spitzberg and Adams III, 1998). It was modified by the researcher to measure the students' performance level in the conversational skills. The researcher depended on the content analysis results, English language curriculum for sixth grade students, and related studies in modifying the conversational skills rating scale. See appendix (A3).

The Aim of the Conversational Skills Rating Scale

The aim of the conversational skills rating scale was to measure how skillfully the student used, or didn't use the selected conversational skills. Since the rating scale is the most suitable tool for collecting accurate data that could help in making more accurate decisions, the researcher used it to measure the improvement in the conversational skills mainly (speaking rate, speaking fluency, vocal

confidence, articulation, vocal variety, volume, accuracy, asking of questions). The rating scale was designed according to the content analysis.

Description of the Conversational Skills Rating Scale

The conversational skills rating scale consists of five levels of rating that measure the students behavior in eight conversational skills as the follows :

1	INADEQUATE	(use is awkward, disruptive, or results in a negative impression of conversational skills)
2	FAIR	(occasionally awkward or disruptive, occasionally adequate)
3	ADEQUATE	(sufficient but neither noticeable nor excellent)
4	GOOD	(use was better than adequate but not outstanding)
5	EXCELLENT	(use is smooth, controlled, results in positive impression of conversational skills)

From table above the highest score equal ($5 \times 8 = 40$), and the lowest score equal ($1 \times 8 = 8$).

The Conversational Skills for Sixth Grade

- 1- Speaking rate (neither too slow nor too fast),
- 2- Speaking fluency (pauses, silences,..etc),
- 3- Vocal confidence (neither too tense nor overly confident),
- 4- Articulation (clarity of pronunciation and linguistic expression),
- 5- Vocal variety (neither overly monotone nor dramatic voice),
- 6- Volume (neither too loud nor too soft),
- 7- Accuracy (usage of lexical and syntax items), and
- 8- Asking of questions (related to the given topic).

1- Speaking Rate

Description: Speaks neither so rapidly (e.g., words per minute) nor so slowly as to disrupt partner comprehension and/or response.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

- 1 = Speaking pace makes utterances consistently difficult to comprehend, or disruptive to normal response and flow of partner response.
- 2 = Speaking pace makes utterances occasionally difficult to comprehend, or disruptive to normal response and flow of partner response.

- 3 = Speaking pace is, only a small number of instances, difficult to comprehend, or disruptive to normal response and flow of partner response.
- 4 = Speaking pace is occasionally varied, and never seems to impair partner comprehension or response.
- 5 = Speaking pace is varied compatibly with articulation and vocal variety so as to facilitate partner comprehension and response.

2-Speaking Fluency

Description: Displays speech disturbances or dysfluencies such as stutters, omissions, repetitions or noticeable pause fillers (e.g., um, uh, er, ah, okay, like, you know, I mean, etc.).

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

- 1 = Displays almost constant use of dysfluencies in manner that is disruptive to the partner responses, and/or receives partner negative sanction (e.g., frowns, statements of inappropriateness, furrowed brow, etc.).
- 2 = Displays frequent use of dysfluencies in manner that is disruptive to the partner responses, and/or receives partner negative sanction (e.g., frowns, statements of inappropriateness, furrowed brow, etc.).
- 3 = Displays occasional use of dysfluencies in manner that is disruptive to the partner responses, and/or receives partner negative sanction (e.g., frowns, statements of inappropriateness, furrowed brow, etc.).
- 4 = Displays few dysfluencies, and those used do not appear to be disruptive to partner.
- 5 = Displays no noticeable dysfluencies.

3- Vocal Confidence

Description: Displays paralinguistic firmness, calmness/forcefulness, and steadiness of expression.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

- 1 = Vocalizations are almost constantly nervous, shaky, breaking in pitch, and/or equivocal in tone or volume.
- 2 = Vocalizations are frequently nervous, shaky, breaking in pitch, and/or equivocal in tone or volume.

3 = Vocalizations are occasionally nervous, shaky, breaking in pitch, and/or equivocal in tone or volume.

4 = Vocalizations are generally calm and/or forceful, firm, composed.

5 = Vocalizations are consistently calm and/or forceful, firm, composed, assertive.

4- Articulation

Description: Pronounces words such that they are understandable to the partner.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

1 = Speaks with frequent errors, slurs, and/or incomprehensible utterances, resulting in frequent partner clarification gestures or statements.

2 = Speaks with occasional errors, slurs, and/or incomprehensible utterances, resulting in occasional partner clarification gestures or statements.

3 = Speaks with only a small number of errors, slurs, and/or incomprehensible utterances, resulting in no noticeable partner clarification gestures or statements.

4 = Speaks with no noticeable errors, slurs, and/or incomprehensible utterances, and no noticeable partner clarification gestures or statements.

5 = Speaks with clearly comprehensible utterances, but not with excessive “clip” or stilted pronunciation.

5- Vocal Variety

Description: Varies pitch, tone, and range of verbal utterances while speaking.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

1 = Speaks in an extremely monotonous manner without variation.

2 = Speaks in a fairly monotonous manner with minimal variation.

3 = Speaks in a somewhat monotonous manner with occasional variation. 4 = Speaks with modulated and varied tonalities.

5 = Speaks with frequent variation in tonality, but not excessively ‘cartoon-like’ or excessively animated fashion.

6- Volume

Description: Speaks at audible but not extreme levels; no strain or distraction of attention.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

- 1 = Speaks at extremely quiet/soft or extremely loud level.
- 2 = Speaks at very quiet/soft or very loud level.
- 3 = Speaks at somewhat quiet/soft or somewhat loud level.
- 4 = Generally speaks at audible and comfortable level.
- 5 = Consistently speaks at audible, comfortable, and adaptive level.

7- Accuracy

Description: Uses accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to given and different topics.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

- 1 = Constantly uses not accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.
- 2 = Very frequently uses not accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.
- 3 = Frequently uses not accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.
- 4 = Uses generally accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.
- 5 = Uses mostly accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.

8- Asking Of Questions

Description: Seeks information about given topics or pictures.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

- 1 = Never seeks information about given topics or pictures..
- 2 = Rarely seeks information about given topics or pictures.
- 3 = Occasionally seeks information about given topics or pictures.
- 4 = Frequently seeks information about given topics or pictures.
- 5 = Frequently asks questions that seek information about given topics or pictures.

Validity of the Conversational Skills Rating Scale

The researcher checked both the validity of the conversational skills rating scale to the trial application. The following steps were adopted:

The Pilot Study

The conversational skills rating scale was applied on a random sample of (35) pupils; from (Shohadaa Khan Younis School). The results were recorded and statistically analyzed to measure its reliability. The items of the conversational skills rating scale were modified in the light of the statistical results.

Referee Validity

The conversational skills rating scale was refereed by a panel of specialists in English language and methodology, in Gaza universities and colleges, supervisors and experienced teachers; see Appendix (A3). According to their recommendations, some modifications were made such as giving helping ideas during the selection and the rating of the conversational skills rating scale.

Internal Consistency Validity

The researcher used Pearson correlation coefficient to compute the internal consistency of the conversational skills rating scale. To measure such validity, Pearson Correlation computed the correlation of the following: the items with their domains. Table (3.7) show the internal consistency results.

Table (3.7): Correlation coefficients between conversational skills rating scale items and all degree

Items	Correlation coefficients	Sign value	Items	Correlation coefficients	Sign value
1	**0.895	Sign at (0.01)	1	**0.872	Sign at (0.01)
2	**0.901	Sign at (0.01)	2	**0.882	Sign at (0.01)
3	**0.935	Sign at (0.01)	3	**0.907	Sign at (0.01)
4	**0.830	Sign at (0.01)	4	**0.807	Sign at (0.01)
5	**0.887	Sign at (0.01)	5	**0.905	Sign at (0.01)
6	**0.864	Sign at (0.01)	6	**0.886	Sign at (0.01)
7	**0.891	Sign at (0.01)	7	**0.856	Sign at (0.01)
8	**0.888	Sign at (0.01)	8	**0.880	Sign at (0.01)

** r table at (df.= 33), sign level (0.01) = (0.463)

* r table at (df.= 33), sign level (0.05) = (0.361)

From table (3.7) we can see that all correlation coefficients are sign at (0.01), so the conversational skills rating scale items are valid.

Reliability of the Conversational Skills Rating Scale

The scale is reliable when it provides equal outcomes if it is re-applied in equivalent conditions. The researcher used the pilot study to calculate the reliability of the scale which was measured by Alpha Cronbach and Split-Half methods.

Split- Half Method

The researcher calculated the correlation between the even-numbered items with odd-numbered items. Then, the researcher used Spearman-Brown formula to modify the length of the scale to find out the reliability coefficient as shown in table (3.8).

Table (3.8): Reliability for the conversational skills rating scale by spilt half method

Model	Items	Correlation	Correction Correlation	Sig. Value
The first scale (Observer 1)	8	0.957	0.978	Sign at (0.01)
The second scale (Observer 2)	8	0.925	0.961	Sign at (0.01)
all scores	16	0.982	0.991	Sign at (0.01)

Table (3.8) shows that the reliability coefficient by using Split- Half after modification is (0.991) for all items.

Alpha Cronbach Method

The researcher calculated the cronbach's Alpha coefficients for domains and all scores. Table (3.9) shows the results.

Table (3.9): Reliability for the conversational skills rating scale by Alpha Cronbach Method

Model	Items	Alpha Cronbach Coefficient
The first scale (Observer1)	8	0.959
The second scale (Observer2)	8	0.955
all scores	16	0.979

Table (3.9) shows that Alpha Cronbach coefficients are more than (0.6), and Alpha Cronbach Coefficient for all scores equal (0.979).

This result indicates that the conversational skills rating scale is suitable for conducting the study.

3.6.3. English Oral Conversation Test

The General Aims of the Oral Test

The test aimed to measure the effect of the Virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) on the development of the conversational skills in English. It was built according to the criteria of test specification. It also aimed to measure the students' performance level in oral conversation, and test the hypothesis of the study. The objectives of the test were to examine students' ability to:

1. Speak at normal pace.
2. Speak without dysfluencies.
3. Speak with confident vocalization.
4. Speak with correct pronunciation.
5. Speak with variant vocalization.
6. Speak at audible level.
7. Use suitable lexical and syntax items.
8. Ask questions related to given topics.

The oral conversation tests administered as pre-test and post-test were designed to test the students' performance. The questions were to some extent

normal to be answered by most of the students. The students were given enough time before the test to enable them to think or talk about their answers.

Each question aimed at evaluating the students' performance according to the selected skills. The questions were familiar to the students, therefore, they were suitable to their levels and interests. The Oral conversation test consisted of (3) questions:

(Q1): Two dialogues between the teacher and a student.

(Q2): Given situations which require a reply from the student.

(Q3): Describing a picture.

Source of Designing English Oral Conversation Test

Depending on the sixth grade textbooks, teachers' guide, content analysis results, and Palestinian Ministry of Education document, the researcher designed the English oral conversation test. The researcher also referred to many sources in designing the test. She reviewed the related literature, checked the opinions of juries, supervisors, and experienced teachers.

Validity of the Test

The researcher checked both the validity of English oral conversation test according to the trial application. The following steps were adopted:

Referee Validity

The test was refereed by a panel of specialists in English language and methodology, in Gaza universities and colleges, supervisors and experienced teachers. According to their recommendations, some modifications were made such as giving helping ideas during English oral conversation test; see Appendix D

Internal Consistency Validity

The researcher used Pearson correlation coefficient to compute the internal consistency of English oral conversation test items. To measure such validity, Pearson Correlation computed the relationship between the items and total degree of the test. Table (3.10) describes the internal consistency of oral conversation test items.

Table (3.10): Correlation coefficients between items and all degree

Questions	Items	Correlation coefficients	Sign value
Q1: dialogue 1	1	**0.589	Sign at (0.01)
	2	**0.465	Sign at (0.01)
	3	*0.370	Sign at (0.05)
Q1: dialogue 2	4	**0.505	Sign at (0.01)
	5	*0.412	Sign at (0.05)
	6	**0.504	Sign at (0.01)
Q2	7	**0.546	Sign at (0.01)
	8	**0.446	Sign at (0.01)
	9	*0.354	Sign at (0.05)
Q3	10	**0.447	Sign at (0.01)
	11	**0.612	Sign at (0.01)
	12	**0.466	Sign at (0.01)

** r table at (df.= 33), sign level (0.01) = (0.463)

* r table at (df.= 33), sign level (0.05) = (0.361)

From table (3.10) we can see that all correlation coefficients are sign at (0.05), so the test questions are valid.

Difficulty Coefficient

Difficulty Coefficient means the percentage of the failing students to the total of pupils who took the test. It can be calculated by using the following equation:

$$\text{Co. of difficulty} = \frac{\text{Number of students who gave wrong answers}}{\text{Total number of students}}$$

Table (3.12) shows the difficulty coefficient for each item of English oral conversation test items and total degree.

Discrimination Coefficient

Discrimination coefficient refers to the test ability to differentiate between high achieving students and the low achieving counterparts.

$$\text{Co. of discrimination} = \frac{\text{No. of correct items of high achiever} - \text{No. of correct items of low achievers}}{\text{No. of high achievers} + \text{No. of low achievers}}$$

Table (3.11) shows the discrimination coefficient for each item of English oral conversation test items and total degree.

Table (3.11): Difficulty coefficients for discrimination coefficient of each item and all scores

Items	Difficulty coefficients	Items	Discrimination coefficients
1	0.485	1	0.490
2	0.571	2	0.510
3	0.315	3	0.600
4	0.426	4	0.420
5	0.426	5	0.460
6	0.60	6	0.700
7	0.40	7	0.690
8	0.657	8	0.420
9	0.40	9	0.400
10	0.40	10	0.525
11	0.542	11	0.350
12	0.714	12	0.400
All scores	0.495	All scores	0.497

Table (3.11) results show that the difficulty coefficients range between (0.315) to (0.714), with the average of all difficulty coefficients (0.495). The values

show that each item was acceptable or in the normal limit of difficulties according to the viewpoint of assessment and evaluation specialists.

In addition the results show that the discrimination coefficients range between (0.350) to (0.70), with the average of all discrimination coefficients (0.497). The discrimination coefficients of all test items are also acceptable since they are above (30%). This means that the test items have good difficulty and discrimination coefficients.

Reliability of the Test

The test is regarded reliable when it gives similar results if it is administered twice within similar conditions. The researcher computed the test reliability coefficients through:

Split Half Method

This method depends on splitting the oral conversation test items, and calculating the correlation between the parts, then making a correction for the correlation coefficient by Prophecy Formula.

$$\text{Spearmen- Brown Coefficient} = \frac{2R}{R + 1}$$

Table (3.12) show split half coefficients for the oral conversation test items.

Table (3.12): Reliability for oral conversation test items by spilt half method

Model	Items	Correlation	Correction Correlation	Sig. Value
Spilt half method	12	**0.668	0.801	Sign at (0.01)

Table (3.12) results show that the reliability coefficients is acceptable because it is above 0.7 (O'dah, 2002: 176), which means that the test is reliable and valid to apply.

Kuder -Richardson (K-20) Method

K-R20 test depends on calculating the percent of students who got an item right, and percent of students who got an item wrong, then applying the following formula:

$$\text{K-R20 formula} = [k/(k-1)][1-(\sum pq/s^2)]$$

p = item difficulty (percent of students who got an item right)

q = 1- p (i.e., percent of students who got an item wrong)

The results shows that reliability by using above formula equal (88.80%).

Time Estimation

The trial application helped in estimating the time needed for answering the questions according to the following equation:

$$\text{Time Estimation} = \frac{\text{Time of first five students} + \text{Time of the last five students}}{10}$$
$$\text{Time Estimation} = \frac{(66) + (104)}{10}$$

From above equation the researcher identified the test time approximately (17) minutes.

3.6.4. English Written Conversation Test

A pre-post written conversation test was prepared by the researcher to measure the students' performance in the written conversation skills.

The written conversation test administered as pre-test and post-test were designed to test students' performance. The questions were to some extent normal to be answered by most of the students. The questions were given enough time to enable the students to think and write their answers.

Each question aimed at evaluating the students' performance according to the selected conversational skills. The written conversation test consisted of (30) items distributed into (6) questions:

Q1: What would you say in the following situations (3 items).

Q2: Respond according to the picture (3 items).

Q3: Match (A) with (B) (4 items).

Q4: Complete the dialogue (3 items).

Q5: Correct the mistake (5 items).

Q6: Complete questions /answers with suitable words (12 items).

The General Aim of English Written Conversation Test.

The test aimed at measuring the effectiveness of using virtual learning environment tools on developing sixth graders' English conversational skills in southern Gaza governorate, and it also aimed to measure the students' performance level in written conversation, and check the hypothesis of the study.

Source of Designing Written Conversation Test

Depending on the sixth grade textbooks, teachers' guide, content analysis results, and Palestinian Ministry of Education document, the researcher designed the English written conversation test. The researcher also referred to many sources in designing the test. She reviewed the related literature, checked the opinions of juries, supervisors, and experienced teachers.

Validity of the Test

The researcher checked both the validity of English written conversation test according to the trial application. The following steps were adopted:

Referee Validity

The test was refereed by a panel of specialists in English language and methodology, in Gaza universities and colleges, supervisors and experienced teachers. According to their recommendations, some modifications were made such as giving helping ideas during writing the English written conversation test.

Internal Consistency Validity

The researcher used Pearson correlation coefficient to compute the internal consistency of English written conversation test items and questions. To measure such validity, Pearson Correlation computed the relationship between items and total degree of the test, and the relationship between questions and total degree of the test. Table (3.13) describes the internal consistency of written conversation test items and questions.

Table (3.13): Correlation coefficients between items and all degree

Questions and items	Items	Correlation coefficients	Sign value
Q1:	1	**0.447	Sign at (0.01)
	2	**0.823	Sign at (0.01)
	3	**0.575	Sign at (0.01)
question 1		**0.566	Sign at (0.01)
Q2	1	*0.345	Sign at (0.05)
	2	**0.564	Sign at (0.01)
	3	**0.570	Sign at (0.01)
question 2		**0.681	Sign at (0.01)
Q3	1	**0.573	Sign at (0.01)
	2	**0.753	Sign at (0.01)
	3	**0.487	Sign at (0.01)
	4	**0.452	Sign at (0.01)
question 3		**0.648	Sign at (0.01)
Q4	1	**0.730	Sign at (0.01)
	2	**0.642	Sign at (0.01)
	3	**0.836	Sign at (0.01)
question 4		**0.527	Sign at (0.01)
Q5	1	**0.463	Sign at (0.01)
	2	**0.531	Sign at (0.01)
	3	**0.537	Sign at (0.01)
	4	**0.527	Sign at (0.01)
	5	**0.612	Sign at (0.01)
question 5		**0.670	Sign at (0.01)

Questions and items	Items	Correlation coefficients	Sign value
Q6	1	**0.610	Sign at (0.01)
	2	**0.582	Sign at (0.01)
	3	**0.591	Sign at (0.01)
	4	**0.583	Sign at (0.01)
	5	*0.398	Sign at (0.05)
	6	**0.485	Sign at (0.01)
	7	*0.421	Sign at (0.05)
	8	*0.370	Sign at (0.05)
	9	**0.435	Sign at (0.01)
	10	**0.492	Sign at (0.01)
	11	*0.364	Sign at (0.05)
	12	*0.380	Sign at (0.05)
question 6		**0.704	Sign at (0.01)

** r table at (df.= 33), sign level (0.01) = (0.463)

* r table at (df.= 33), sign level (0.05) = (0.361)

From table (3.13) we can see that all correlation coefficients are signed at (0.05), so the test questions and items are valid.

Difficulty Coefficient.

The researcher calculated difficulty coefficients for each items and all degree of written conversation test. Table (3.14) shows difficulty coefficients for each item of English written conversation test and total degree.

Discrimination Coefficient.

The researcher calculated discrimination coefficients for each items and all degree of written conversation test. Table (3.14) shows discrimination coefficients for each items of English written conversation test and total degree.

Table (3.14): Difficulty coefficients and for discrimination coefficient each items and all degree

Items	Difficulty coefficients	Items	Discrimination coefficients
1	0.40	1	0.550
2	0.342	2	0.475
3	0.342	3	0.68
4	0.485	4	0.54
5	0.371	5	0.70
6	0.371	6	0.56
7	0.342	7	0.39
8	0.314	8	0.65
9	0.428	9	0.68
10	0.342	10	0.70
11	0.514	11	0.69
12	0.314	12	0.42
13	0.342	13	0.62
14	0.371	14	0.37
15	0.342	15	0.50
16	0.342	16	0.60
17	0.342	17	0.67
18	0.371	18	0.62
19	0.314	19	0.54
20	0.371	20	0.43
21	0.40	21	0.57
22	0.657	22	0.35

Items	Difficulty coefficients	Items	Discrimination coefficients
23	0.40	23	0.49
24	0.657	24	0.67
25	0.428	25	0.54
26	0.457	26	0.60
27	0.428	27	0.57
28	0.457	28	0.60
29	0.457	29	0.42
30	0.485	30	0.37
All scores	0.406	All scores	0.553

Table (3.14) results show that the difficulty coefficients ranging between (0.314) to (0.657), where the average of all difficulty coefficients (0.406). Which means that each of the items was acceptable or in the normal limit of difficulties according to the viewpoint of assessment and evaluation specialists.

In addition the results show that the discrimination coefficients ranging from (0.350) to (0.70), where the average of all discrimination coefficients (0.553). The discrimination coefficients of all the test items are also acceptable since they are above (30%). This means that the test items have good difficulty and discrimination coefficients.

Reliability of the Test.

The test is regarded reliable when it gives similar results if it is administered twice within similar conditions. The researcher computed the test reliability coefficients through:

Split Half Method.

This method depends on splitting the written conversation test items, and calculating the correlation between the parts, then making a correction for the correlation coefficient by Prophecy Formula.

$$\text{Spearman- Brown Coefficient} = \frac{2R}{R+1}$$

Table (3.15) shows split half coefficients for the written conversation test items.

Table (3.15): Reliability for written conversation test items by spilt half method

Model	Items	Correlation	Correction Correlation	Sig. Value
Spilt-half method	30	**0.570	0.727	Sign at (0.01)

Table (3.15) results show that the reliability coefficients is acceptable because it is above 0.7, which means that the test is reliable and valid to apply.

Kuder -Richardson (K-21) method:

K-R21 test depends on calculating the percentages of correct answers to the test items and also on the variance of every item.

$$\text{K-R21 formula} = \frac{N}{N-1} \left[1 - \frac{m(N-m)}{\sigma^2 \times m} \right]$$

N: Number of test items.

m : Marks means.

σ^2 : Marks contrast.

Table (3.16) describes (K-R21) for written conversation test.

Table (3.16): Reliability for written conversation test by Kuder -Richardson (K-21) method

Model	N	m	σ^2	K-R ₂₁
Kud-Richardson (K-21) method	30	17.82	17.55	83.00

Table (3.16) results show that the reliability coefficients by Kuder- Richardson method equal (83%), which means that the test is reliable and valid to apply.

Time Estimation

The trial application helped in estimating the time needed for answering the questions according to the following equation:

$$\text{Time Estimation} = \frac{\text{Time of first five students} + \text{Time of the last five students}}{10}$$

$$\text{Time Estimation} = \frac{(140) + (200)}{10}$$

From above equation the researcher identified the test time approximately (35) minutes.

3.7. The Virtual Learning Environment Tools

After reviewing the literature of education technology and scientific studies of developing and designing educational tools models according to design criteria, the researcher decided to follow Gilly Salmon 5 stages model to design the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) which aim at developing sixth graders' conversational skills . The following diagram illustrates the five steps of developing the tools according to Salmon model (access and motivation stage, on-line socialization stage, information exchange stage, knowledge construction stage and development stage) as shown in Figure (3.2).

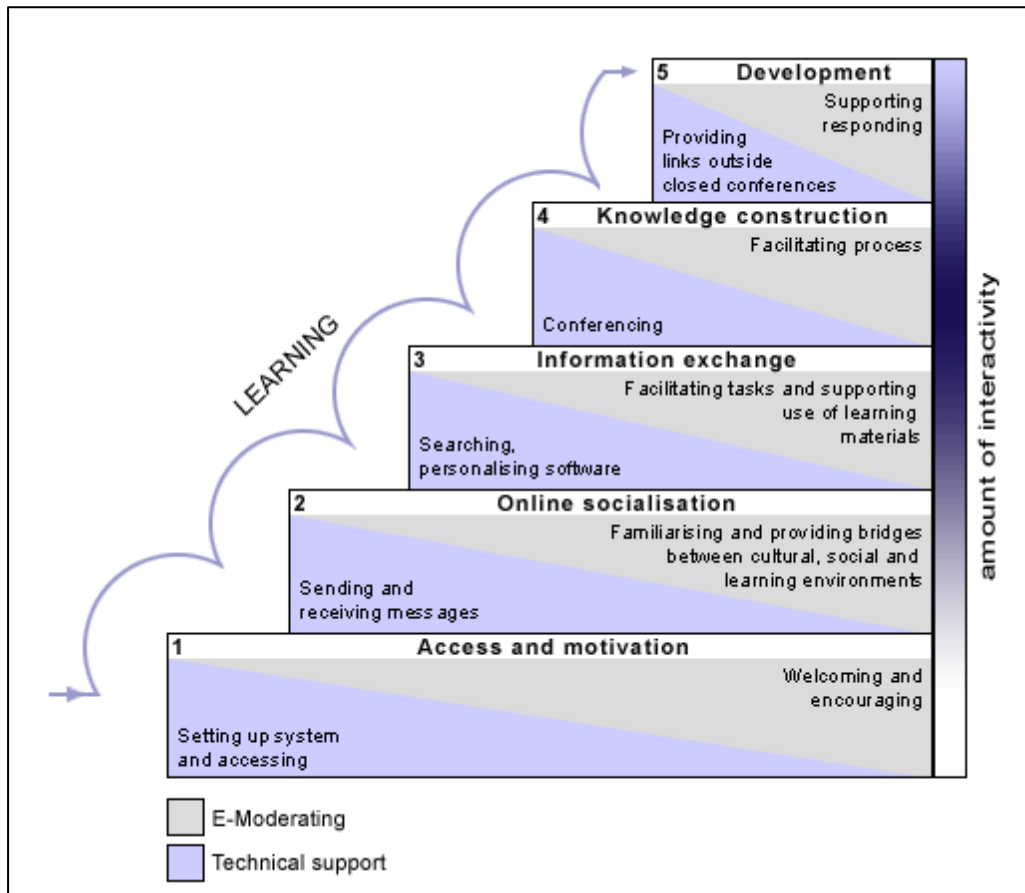


Figure (3.2): Salmon 5 stage Model

Description of the Virtual Learning Environment Tools

Designing the Virtual Learning Environment Tools

The instructional design for developing the Virtual Learning Environment Tools was based on the stages of the Salmon instructional model (JISC-info-Kit.2004).

According to this standard, the design steps are:

Stage 1 Access and motivation

Stage 2 On-line socialization

Stage 3 Information exchange

Stage 4 Knowledge construction

Stage 5 Development

The researcher incorporated the Salmon model with the Virtual Learning Environment design process. Then, she followed the Salmon stages in developing the Virtual Learning Environment Tools (VLETs) as well as dividing each stage to many secondary stages as the following:

- Step 1: Access and motivation
 - Students require individual access and the skills to use the communication tools.
- Step 2: Online socialization
 - Students create an identity online and finding others with whom to interact.
- Step 3: Information exchange
 - Students give information relevant to the course to each other. Up to and including stage three, a form of cooperation occurs, that is, support for each other's goals.
- Step 4: Knowledge construction
 - Course related group discussion takes place and interaction becomes more collaborative. Communication is dependent upon common understandings.
- Step 5: Development
 - Students look for benefits from the system that will help them achieve their goals and explore how to integrate their online discussions into other forms of learning and reflect on their learning processes.

This model can be used to identify the typical activities tutors may be involved in at different stages of the students' learning processes. Gilly Salmon identifies the following typical tutor activities:

Stage 1 Access and motivation

- Ensure that the on-line group is set up with a welcome message
- Ensure students know how to access the on-line group

The researcher gathered information from various sources as surfing the net, reviewing literature, reading many books and references related to the present study. These sources were helpful as they helped in designing and identifying the Virtual Learning Environment Tools (VLETs) objectives, content, resources, activities, techniques and evaluation.

The general objective of the Virtual Learning Environment tools (VLETs) was to improve the sixth graders' English conversational skills namely (speaking fluency, speaking rate, vocal confidence, articulation, vocal variety, volume, grammar, vocabulary, asking of questions).

The project was based on the use of the virtual learning environment as a teaching and learning tool supportive to the process speaking approach. The researcher created both the teacher virtual learning environment and a conversational virtual class. Then, she gave the experimental group students a training session for two weeks before the experiment in order to enable them use the virtual environment tools and create their own speaking avatars by themselves without the help of the researcher in addition to completing virtual assignments that are related to conversational tasks.

The researcher had a deep look at the conversational lessons of the required four units (10 -11-12-13) in the text book in order to investigate the conversational skills that the sixth graders need to carry on a conversation. It is noteworthy that the conversational skills represent one fourth of sixth grade English curriculum. According to the scope and sequence in the teacher's book, the proposed time for teaching conversation is two periods but it is integrated in all lessons with the other skills (Listening, speaking, reading and writing).

The number of the experimental group was (35) female sixth grade students. The researcher made sure that all the students in the experimental group had a computer device connected with the internet either at school or at home before implementing the experiment of the study in order to use the virtual tools which the researcher has selected to be used by her students. The researcher used the computer

lab at the school in which she implemented the experiment of her study after obtaining the approval from the concerned authorities. Almost most of the students' practice and work was done at the school lab since it provided a real virtual environment for them. The researcher made sure that all the students had the opportunity for experiencing learning using virtual learning tools.

Stage 2 On-line Socialization

- Lead a round of introductions with, perhaps, an on-line ice-breaker
- Welcome new team members or late arrivals
- Provide a structure for getting started e.g. agreement of group rules, Netiquette
- If individuals break the agreed group netiquette then tackle them (either privately or through the discussion group)
- Wherever possible avoid playing 'ping pong' with individual group members and ask other people for their opinions and ideas
- Encourage quieter members and browsers (sometimes called 'lurkers' or 'browsers') to join in
- Provide summaries of on-line discussions. This is called weaving and involves summarizing and synthesizing the content of multiple responses in a virtual group.

In this stage, the researcher illustrated the specific objectives of the virtual learning tools.

At the end of the lessons students should be able to:

- Recognize the specified eight conversational skills.
- Recognize the activities that are used for mastering each skill.
- Be familiar with some guided conversational activities.
- Practice conversational tasks.
- Practice publishing vokis using their own voices.
- Complete conversational tasks and get feedback.
- Complete conversational assessment tasks.

The researcher arranged with the IT teacher at school to help her in carrying out the virtual class using the Voki and Lingt language class . The researcher created a teacher virtual environment class and a virtual assessment class and gave students a training session in order to set up their own avatars via the virtual learning tools.

The virtual learning tools were both used as teaching and learning tools supportive to the process of teaching conversational lessons in English for Palestine 6 B, second term from Unit 10 to Unit 13 . The content of the virtual environment tools was selected, arranged and modified according to the skills that the students should acquire and improve when carrying out conversational tasks. Also, the opinions and suggestions of a group of specialists including professors of teaching methodology, supervisors of English language in addition to highly qualified and experienced teachers of English language and technology were taken into account in selecting, arranging and changing the content of the virtual learning environment tools. Besides, when presenting the content in the sites, the researcher considered the students' levels and abilities. The content was varied to suit all the students levels.

The researcher prepared a teacher's guide (direction for using the tools). The instruction of each tool purposely explicates and clarifies the genuine usage procedures and activities that happen among the elements of the classroom environment such as a teacher, students, teaching and learning aids, procedures, and evaluation. It also determines the role of each element of the learning environment tool as well as organizes the time among the activities.

Stage 3 Information Exchange

- Provide highly structured activities at the start of the group life
- Encourage participation
- Ask questions
- Encourage team members to post short messages
- Allocate on-line roles to individual members e.g. to provide a summary of a particular thread of discussion
- Close of threads as and when appropriate
- Encourage the on-line group to develop its own life and history. Welcome shared language, metaphors, rituals and jokes.

To accomplish the objectives of the virtual tools, to create an effective teaching-learning process and to develop the virtual environment , the researcher employed the following resources/teaching and learning aids : computer laboratory, virtual environment, LCD, smart board, computer programs , recording tools and Microsoft Word.

The content of these programs can be seen once students either click on them or download them to their own computer devices. In addition, some links related to the conversational skills were provided. Students clicked on these links to open them and watch their content to get more benefits. The purpose of this was to increase the students' interest, attitudes, attention, understanding and practicing conversational skills. Moreover, the researcher added related activities to each lesson and asked students to answer them and post them on the site of Voki and Lingt language class.

Stage 4 Knowledge Construction

- Provide more open activities
- Facilitate the learning process
- Pose questions for the group to consider
- Encourage group members to question theory and practice e.g. links (or lack of connection) between theory and work-based practice
- Encourage the group to develop its own life and history. Welcome shared language, metaphors, rituals and jokes.

Stage 5 Development

- Encourage group members to lead discussions
- Encourage group members to transfer their skills to other areas of their work
- Support individual 'risk'
- Encourage reflection on different learning processes (individual and group)

Evaluation is defined as a systematic and organized process to collect and analyze information to determine the extent of achieving objectives specified for a certain semester, lesson, and training project. In addition, it indicates a judgment process or a qualitative or quantitative description of the degree or level of performance.

Thus, evaluation is significant as it enables teacher to take a decision about student's performance. (AlNabhan, 2004, pp.38-39). In this study, it was a set of activities planned to judge the advantages of the virtual learning tools. It was used to assess the effect of the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) in terms of the benefits to the students. It was the process of gathering results to decide if the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) were effective. The researcher used two types of evaluation as follows:

Formative Evaluation

AlNabhan (2004, p.43) states that formative evaluation is a diagnostic and an ongoing process aimed at ensuring the occurrence of the requested learning with the provision of feedback as well as improving the outcomes of the both the learning and teaching processes. It indicates the quality and the level of the performance to certain goals within a certain period of time. In addition, formative evaluation can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a training program in the process of implementation and experimentation or to evaluate the efficacy of learning materials and teaching methods.

It aims at giving data that helps in developing the program before being finished as well as it aids modifying, re-structuring, and developing the program before being used in the field. It also aims at developing measurement tools before being used in gathering data from the field.

In this study, formative evaluation aided the researcher to realize if the objectives were achieved in the formative stages of the experiment. It also helped the researcher to gather information to evaluate how to make the virtual learning tools improved.

Therefore, the researcher carried out some activities after every lesson in order to evaluate students' improvement in the conversational skills via the experiment.

Summative Evaluation

AlNabhan (2004, p.44) mentions that summative evaluation aims at issuing a final judgment on the whole program, learning materials and the procedures followed in a program after being finished. It also aims at giving the final judgment on the program in terms of its validity for the future uses or for the purpose of replacing it or giving guidelines about how it can be applied in the future uses. In this study, summative evaluation was employed at the end of the learning. It aimed at examining the effect of using the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) as teaching and learning tools on the development of the students' conversational skills. The post- conversational written test, post- conversational oral test and conversational rating scale were used for this purpose. This was to provide an obvious illustration of the level of progress through the implementation of involvement bit by bit.

The Validity of the Virtual Learning Tools

The researcher presented the virtual learning tools to a group of specialists including supervisors of English language in addition to highly qualified and experienced teachers of English language and technology in order to referee it and to test the virtual learning environment tools validity. The researcher modified the tools according to their precious advice. (Appendices B2, B3)

Additionally, the researcher implemented four conversational lessons on a pilot study which consisted of (21) students. This step was to investigate if there were any technological problems, unclear instruction or the suitability of the technological environment as well as to examine the students' motivation and interaction while using the virtual learning tools and answering the activities presented on the virtual learning tools sites.

Research Procedures

The researcher proceeded along the following procedures to meet the objectives of this study:

- Reviewing literature and previous studies related to the use of the Virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) and their effect on the conversational performance. In addition, the researcher reviewed previous studies related to the use of a new intervention in teaching and learning conversation in order to get benefit from their samples, tools, methodology, results and recommendations.
- Determining the instruments of the study.
- Setting up two tools using two sites Voki and Lingt language class in order to be applied on the experimental group. These tools served as teaching and learning tools.
- Designing the conversation oral test (pre and post) and refereeing its validity and reliability.
- Designing the conversation written test (pre and post) and refereeing its validity and reliability
- Designing the conversational rating scale (pre and post) and refereeing its validity and reliability.

- Obtaining permission from the Islamic University of Gaza and Ministry of Education and Higher Education to carry out the study. (Appendix C)
- Choosing the sample of the study that included the experimental group and the control one.
- Deciding the conversational skills appropriate for the sixth graders as English foreign language learners.
- Consulting experts and specialists in English language and methodology for referring the validity and the reliability of the study tools.
- Implementing the pre oral conversation test .
- Implementing the pre written conversation test .
- Conducting the pre conversational skills rating scale.
- Applying the experiment. The experiment was the use of the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) as teaching and learning tools with the experimental group and using the traditional way with the control group.
- Carrying out the post oral conversation test, the post written conversation test and the post conversational skills rating scale and using statistical analysis.
- Analyzing and interpreting the results.
- Providing suggestions and recommendations in light of the results of the study.

3.8. Statistical Analysis Methods

The researcher used a number of the statistical techniques that were in tandem with the study nature; the data were collected and computed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS IBM 22.0 version) as follows:

- 1- Frequencies and Percentages.
- 2- Correlation coefficient.
- 3- Difficulty equation to identify the difficulty of the test items
- 4- Discrimination equation to identify the discrimination ability of the test items.
- 5- Split-Half Coefficient.
- 6- Alpha Cronbach Coefficient.
- 7- Kuder -Richardson (K-20) formula.

- 8- Kuder -Richardson (K-21) formula.
- 9- T-test Paired Sample was used to measure the differences between a pre and post application.
- 10- Independent Samples T – Test was used to measure the differences between control and experimental groups.
- 11- Effect size (Eta Square).

The researcher implemented a pre oral and written conversation test as a diagnostic test in order to find out the weak points students faced. In addition, she carried out a pre conversation rating scale to determine the skills needed to focus on more. The researcher gave students a training session about how to use the virtual learning environment tools correctly in English speaking (conversational practice) class.

The researcher introduced the virtual learning environment tools and the conversational skills to the students. Next, students became familiar with how to use of the virtual learning tools and the conversational skills. This could be beneficial in developing and enhancing their conversational skills. The study lasted for eight weeks March -April 2016.

The researcher offered her students assistance and modeling. After mastering the usage of the virtual tools the researcher asked the students to produce their own conversational tasks.

The researcher made sure that the eight chosen conversational skills were applied in all of the vokis and virtual classes prepared by the teacher. The students were provided with immediate feedback from the researcher while checking the given assignments . Individual differences among students were taken into account by varying the ways of presenting information and activities as well as using different learning and teaching aids in addition to the virtual tools. The activities were gradually presented in terms of ease and difficulty. The activities presented a variety of questions dealing with and revealing the target conversational skills. The project was a student-centered, and the teacher was a facilitator, guide and director.

Summary

The researcher managed to assign four school classes a week for applying the virtual learning environment tools. Each class period was (45) minutes given for conversational skills practice. At the end of the implementation stage, the researcher implemented both the post written and oral conversational tests in addition to the conversational rating scale to explore the progress in students' speaking performance in general and the improvement in their conversational skills in particular after intervention.

Throughout the implementation of the experiment, the researcher suffered from the lack of the electronic sources which deal with the specified conversational skills that suit the students' level; therefore, this forced her to search for specific education websites that were fit with the students' needs and levels. In addition, she suffered from the shortage of electricity during the implementation of some lessons. Therefore, she exerted great deal efforts to overcome this problem by using generator and extending the time of the lesson.

The researcher adopted the experimental approach. The sample was randomly selected and distributed. After controlling the variables and designing the study instruments and tools so as to collect the data, the virtual learning environment tools were implemented to achieve the aims of the study. Several statistical techniques were used to analyze the data collected.

Chapter IV

Results: Data Analysis

Chapter IV

Results: DATA ANALYSIS

The study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of using virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) on developing sixth graders' English conversational skills. To achieve this purpose, two virtual learning tools were used by both the teacher and the students, three study instruments which included content analysis, pre and post tests ,and a conversation rating scale were implemented. The researcher adopted the experimental approach for her study. The pre-test was conducted on both control and experimental groups, then the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) were implemented on the experimental group and the traditional (face-to face) method on the control group. After that, the post test was re-conducted on both groups. Finally, data were collected and analyzed statistically to answer the study questions and to test the hypotheses. This chapter tackles the results and data analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS IBM Version 22.0) employing different statistical formulae such as frequencies, means, Std. Deviations and T-test. Furthermore, the researcher used effect size through (η^2) as follows:

4.1. Data Analysis

4.1.1. The First Question .

1- What are the chosen conversational skills for sixth graders?

To answer the first question a content analysis was conducted in order to find out to what extent the second semester units (10,11, 12, 13) in "English for Palestine" 6B for sixth graders included conversational skills. In the light of the content analysis results; the chosen conversational skills were:

- 1-Speaking rate: Speaking pace is varied compatibly with articulation and vocal variety so as to facilitate partner comprehension and response.
- 2-Speaking Fluency: Displaying no noticeable dysfluencies.
- 3-Vocal confidence: Displaying paralinguistic firmness, calmness/forcefulness, and steadiness of expression.
- 4-Articulation: Speaking with clearly comprehensible utterances, but not with excessive clip or stilted pronunciation.

- 5-Vocal Variety: Varying pitch, tone, and range of verbal utterances while speaking.
- 6-Volume: Speaking at audible but not extreme levels; no strain or distraction of attention.
- 7-Accuracy: Using appropriate lexical and syntax items related to the selected situations.
- 8-Asking of questions: Asking questions that are suggestive of insights, involve partner in the conversation, or facilitates conversation.

4.1.2. The Second Question.

2. What are the Virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) used for developing Sixth Graders' Conversational Skills?

To answer the second question, the researcher reviewed the educational literature, the previous studies and different virtual learning sites that provide virtual learning teaching and learning, in order to guide and help her choose the suitable virtual learning tools that can be used to develop the students' conversational skills .In addition, she prepared a teacher's guide ,and a student's guide that include how to use Voki and Lingt language classes from signing up to the end ,(Appendices B 2, B3, B4, B5)

Moreover, the researcher created a conversational Voki and Lingt language classes and gave her students training sessions before conducting the study for creating their own Vokis in addition to designing assignment classes to evaluate the students' development in the selected conversational skills . The aim of using the Virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) as a teaching and learning virtual class was to develop the students' conversational skills. The Virtual learning Environment tools (VLETs) included the following:

1- Teacher's Guide

The teacher's guide provides information of the procedures that teachers can use when applying the Voki and Lingt Language classes in conversational lessons. This guide contains detailed explanation of how to use these tools effectively and correctly for conversational lessons . The objectives of each lesson are clearly identified and the activities for each objective are provided. Appendix (B2, B3)

2- Student's Guide

The Student's guide provides detailed explanation for how students can use Voki and Lingt Language classes correctly. This guide is full of pictures and stages to sign in, create, and fulfill conversational assignments in Voki and Lingt language classes. Appendix (B4, B5)

3- Teaching and Learning Aids:

To accomplish the objectives of using virtual learning environment tools (VLETs), to create an effective teaching learning environment and to develop the Voki and Lingt language classes, several teaching and learning aids were used. LCD, several computer programs: power point presentations Microsoft Word, related videos and links were used in the designing of virtual classes and assignments in order to activate the students' interest, attention and interaction with the presented topics as well as with the virtual tools.

The researcher added the components of the chosen virtual learning tools and clarified the steps of creating the vokis as it is shown in the appendices (5) and (6)

4- Evaluation Tools:

The researcher used two tools to evaluate the effectiveness of Voki and Lingt language classes as they represented the virtual learning tools in the researcher study. She used the pre and post conversational skills tests, and the pre and post conversational rating scale. Appendices (A3) , (A4) and (A5)

4.1.3. The Third Question.

Are there statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean scores in the conversational post-written test between the students who learn conversational skills through using Virtual Learning Tools (experimental group) and those who learn conversational skills through the traditional method (control group) in the post test?

To answer this question, the researcher tested the following null hypothesis: There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean scores in the conversational post-written test between the students who learn conversational skills through using Virtual Learning Tools (experimental group) and those who learn conversational skills through the traditional method (control group) in the post test.

To answer the third question the researcher used (Independent Samples T-test). Table (4.1) shows the results:

Table (4.1): T- test for differences between control and experimental groups in post written conversation test

Model	Group	No.	Mean	Std.	T	Sig.	Eta square
written conversation test	Control	35	13.74	6.6	3.365	0.001	0.144
	Experimental	35	18.40	4.8			

* T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha = 0.05$) equal (1.99)

** T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha = 0.01$) equal (2.66)

Table (4.1) shows that sign value is less than (0.01), and (t) calculated is more than (t) tabled. So there are a statistically significant differences between the control and the experimental groups.

From the table above the researcher concludes that there is a statistically significant difference at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the total mean scores in the written conversation test between the students who learn through using virtual learning environment tools (experimental group) and those who learn through the traditional method (control group) in the post test. And these differences are in favor of the experimental group. The researcher attributes these results to the use of virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) and their characteristics. This means that using Virtual learning Tools in English conversational classes is effective in developing the student's conversational skills. So the null hypothesis is rejected.

4.1.4. The Fourth Question.

Are there statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean scores in the conversational post-oral test between the pupils who learn conversational skills through using Virtual Learning Tools (experimental group) and those who learn conversational skills through the traditional method (control group) in the post test?

To answer this question, the researcher tested the following null hypothesis:

There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean scores in the conversational post-oral test between the pupils who learn

conversational skills through using Virtual Learning Tools (experimental group) and those who learn conversational skills through the traditional method (control group) in the post test.

To answer the fourth question the researcher used (Independent Samples T test). Tables (4.2) and (4.3) show the results:

Table (4.2): T- test for differences between control and experimental groups in post conversational skills rating scale

Model	Group	No.	Mean	Std.	T	Sig.	Eta square
The first observer	Control	35	17.514	4.168	5.945	0.000	0.342
	Experimental	35	25.313	6.54			
The second observer	Control	35	18.2857	4.4	5.519	0.000	0.309
	Experimental	35	25.7714	6.73			
All degree	Control	35	35.800	8.50	5.761	0.000	0.327
	Experimental	35	51.0857	13.2			

* T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha = 0.05$) equal (1.99)

** T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha = 0.01$) equal (2.66)

Table (4.2) shows that sign value is less than (0.01), and (t) calculated is more than (t) tabled. So there are statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups.

So there are statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the total mean scores in conversational skills rating scale between the students who learn through using virtual learning environment tools (experimental group) and those who learn through the traditional method (control group) in the post test. And these differences are in favor of the experimental group. The researcher attributes these results to teaching methods, as the experimental group was learning by virtual learning environment tools.

Table (4.3): T- test for differences between control and experimental groups in post oral conversation test

Model	Group	No.	Mean	Std.	T	Sig.	Eta square
oral conversation test	Control	35	6.057	1.76	3.781	0.000	0.181
	Experimental	35	7.743	1.96			

* T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha = 0.05$) equal (1.99)

** T table at (df = 68), ($\alpha = 0.01$) equal (2.66)

Table (4.3) shows that sign value is less than (0.01), and (t) calculated is more than (t) tabled. So there are statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups.

From the table above the researcher concludes that there are statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the total mean scores in oral conversation test between the students who learn through using virtual learning environment tools (experimental group) and those who learn through the traditional method (control group) in the post test. And these differences are in favor of the experimental group. The researcher attributes these results to the use of virtual learning environment tools and their characteristics. This means that using Virtual learning Environment Tools (VLETs) in English conversational classes is effective in developing the student's conversational skills. So the null hypothesis is rejected.

To calculate the size effect of using virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) on developing sixth graders' English conversational skills, the researcher used Eta square " η^2 " employing the following equation (Affana, 2000, p.42):

$$\eta^2 = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + d.f}$$

To determine the size of the effect the researcher compared the value with the rely reference the following table:

Table (4.4): Level of size effect

Level	Small	Medium	Large	Very large
η^2	0.01	0.06	0.14	0.16

To sum up, chapter four dealt with data analysis and results. The results of each hypothesis were analyzed statistically using different statistical techniques. The results of the first hypothesis showed differences of statistical significance between the experimental and the control one in favor of the experimental group due to the teaching method. The results of the second hypothesis indicated significant differences in the experimental sixth graders' oral test in favor of the post application. In other words, the application of Virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) in English conversational classes led to improve students' conversational skills for the experimental group.

Chapter V
Findings, Discussion,
Conclusions, Implications and
Recommendations

Chapter V

Findings, Discussion, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This chapter deals with the interpretation of the statistically analyzed data of the hypotheses of the study presented in chapter four. It sums up the conclusions that were documented in the light of the study findings. It also includes some pedagogical implications that have been reached throughout the research. In addition, the researcher suggests some recommendations which are expected to be beneficial for syllabus designers, supervisors, teachers and researchers. These recommendations could help improve the teaching learning process in general and teaching English conversational skills in particular.

5.1. Discussion

The current study aimed at examining the effectiveness of using Virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) on developing Palestinian sixth graders' English conversational skills.

To achieve this aim, the researcher adopted the experimental approach in which there were two similar groups: the experimental and the control groups. The population of the study was all the sixth female graders in Khan Younes Directorate of Education. The sample of the study, namely (70) students were selected randomly from Hatem El Tae School. Each group had (35) students. Both were proved to be similar in terms of age, general achievement, general achievement in English and English conversational skills achievement. The researcher used four instruments and tools to collect data: content analysis, a pre-post test, conversational rating scale and Virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) ;Voki and Lingt Language Class.

Most of our students in Palestine are weak in using conversational skills. The experiment was designed to determine if these students would make progress in selected conversational skills, positively change and feel confident during conversation. All students of the experimental group showed an increase in their performance during conversational skills rating scale, oral conversation test, and written conversation post-test. Moreover the experiment showed very good improvement in all the selected conversational skills. It was noticed that students who

studied through using virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) (experimental group) are better than those who studied through the traditional method (control group).

The effect size in the hypotheses is very large which provides a clear evidence that using new technologies such as the virtual tools is very effective because most if not all of the students whom are called 'digital natives' by Prensky prefer to learn via modern technologies that are largely used all around the world and which are also the language of our modern life.

Using virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) represents an easy and comfortable method to achieve knowledge in almost every field. Students have the chance to study on their own and mainly for free. Virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) are so effective because students can finish their homework individually and quickly.

(VLETs) offer a wide range of advantages over the traditional classroom environment. Some of the advantages include convenience, flexibility, easy access to materials, elimination of geographical boundaries, and increased retention of knowledge. Additionally, (VLETs) enable learning to become more student-centred, and emphasize interaction and collaboration between students and academics.

5.2. Findings

In the light of the statistical results, the researcher concluded the following findings:

- 1-There are a statistical significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean score in oral conversation test between the students who learn through using virtual learning environment tools (experimental group) and those who learn through the traditional method (control group) in the post test. And these differences in favor of the experimental group.
- 2-There are a statistical significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean score in written conversation test between the students who learn through using virtual learning environment tools (experimental group) and those who learn through the traditional method (control group) in the post test. And these differences in favor of the experimental group.

First: Interpretation of results related to the first and second questions

The researcher investigated the first and the second questions which are about the chosen conversational skills which may contribute to develop the sixth graders' conversational skills and the suitable virtual learning environment tools used to enhance the students' performance in conversation.

The researcher chose the virtual learning tools with consideration to conversational skills and varied activities to enhance virtual learning. The content of the learned material was designed according to students' characteristics and the required conversational skills for sixth graders as well as specialists recommendations. The use of the virtual learning tools started at the beginning of March 2016 and lasted for eight weeks (12 lessons). The tools were validated and experimented by a pilot sample. It was finally applied on the experimental group while the traditional method was used with the control group. At last, a post test was applied on the two groups and the results were statistically analyzed using (SPSS).

Finally, results showed positive effect of the tools and clear development in conversational skills reflected on students' performance in the post tests for the experimental group.

Second: Interpretation of results related to the first hypothesis

The researcher examined the first hypothesis which investigates whether there are statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the performance level in conversational skills in the written post test between the students of the experimental group (virtual learning) and their counterparts of the control group.

The findings indicated that the "T" computed value, (3.365), was higher than "T" tabulated value (1.99) in all domains and the total degree. This meant that there were differences of statistical significance in the students' general performance of all the conversational skills in the post test in favor of the experimental group. There was also a significant difference between the mean of both groups in favor of the experimental group. The mean of the experimental group is (18.40), whereas the mean of the control group is (13.74). In addition, the researcher found that the effect size is very large in the total scores.

This high effect could be attributed to the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) which had several advantages on the students such as employing more than one sense as well as addressing the students' different learning styles through variety of the activities, techniques and multi-media. This enhanced the students' learning strategies, developed their comprehension, improved their performance, created an on-going interactive environment which increased their motivation and interest in learning. The virtual tools also offered continuous feedback which reflected in students' progress in learning if the answers were right or modifying them if they were wrong. Furthermore, the tools included several stimuli and responses that supported learning and interaction. This finding agrees with what the study pointed out in the literature review.

The findings agreed with the findings of almost all the previous studies such as Lan (2015), Aljadili (2014), Silva (2012), and Varli (2009) that revealed the effectiveness of virtual learning on the improvement in students' skills in general and that the virtual worlds offer unique learning opportunities and support ESL/EFL teachers by providing several invaluable tools in online language education.

The findings were also in agreement with those of previous studies in different school subjects such as Donkor (2013) in supporting the development of emotional intelligence, Lampi (2013) in training the students the computer networking skills, Ronnie (2011) in enhancing and supporting assessment for teaching mathematics, and finally Youn (2007) in increasing the clinical skills knowledge. All of the previous studies showed the superiority of virtual learning and its effectiveness in teaching various subjects. At the same time the results agreed with the studies concerned with teachers, either pre-service or in-service like; Fanning (2011) with in-service teachers.

Third: Interpretation of results related to the second hypothesis

The researcher investigated the second hypothesis which seeks to identify whether there are statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the performance level in conversational skills for experimental group before and after the experiment.

The findings revealed that the "T" computed value was higher than "T" tabulated in all conversational skills and the total scores. This meant that there were

differences of statistical significance in the general performance between the pre and post application in favor of the post application. This was attributed to the effectiveness of the virtual learning environment tools with all their advantages which can be summarized as follows : they are used to represent teacher and students. That leads to user immersion into the subject of the lesson. They support the teacher and students with a collection of resources such as: electronic documents, forums, videos, PowerPoint presentations, and links to Web sites.

Those environments are simulations where instead of being an outside viewer the students are part of the simulation, allowing them to explore, discover, and create goals of their own within the simulation. A virtual environment with a high degree of interactivity is substantially better than one without interactivity.

According to " η^2 " values, it was observed that the effect size of using the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) was very large on the students' total performance including all the conversational skills (speaking fluency, speaking rate , articulation, pronunciation, volume, accuracy, asking questions). This indicated the practical significant of the implementation of the Virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) and the increase of the experimental group students' performance level was attributed to the use of virtual learning tools.

5.3. Conclusion

Based on the findings, derived from the results of this empirical study, the following conclusions were reached:

1. Virtual learning tools had superiority over the traditional method in teaching English conversational skills.
2. Virtual learning tools provided students with a better learning environment through variety of multi-media resources which enhanced self-learning strategies and reflected on their performance of English language.
3. Virtual learning tools stimulated students towards an independent practice of English language instead of direct instruction.
4. Virtual learning tools were very effective in motivating shy students towards participation and interaction.

5. The virtual learning tools provided students with enjoyment, pleasure, enthusiasm and variation which were significant enough to affect the students' performance positively.

The virtual tools show that virtual learning environment is useful, powerful and realizable.

Teaching English with virtual learning tools increases the teaching capacity, broadens the teaching of “space”; to go beyond the classroom walls and extends the teaching of “time”; to overcome class limited time. This allows teachers to easily teach and students to happily learn.

To conclude, the researcher is convinced that virtual learning environment tools could be a good solution to the crowded classes, language learning difficulties provided that it had been planned, designed, implemented and evaluated in the proper way. The researcher is also certain that the application of virtual learning environment tools requires shared efforts on behalf of the Ministry of Education, decision makers, school head teachers, teachers, students and the local community.

5.4. Pedagogical Implications

Teachers should be aware of the importance of the virtual learning environment tools (VLETs) in developing students' conversation skills as the traditional method in teaching conversation is less effective.

The virtual learning environment tools must be used in the teaching process as they increase the students' motivation to learn through the different techniques and tasks. Using computers and internet enables students to reduce their anxiety towards learning in general and speaking in particular.

Virtual learning environment tools provide students with immediate feedback from the teacher and different types of reinforcement directly and indirectly.

5.5. Recommendations

In the light of the results reviewed throughout this study, the researcher finds it is important to give some recommendations to develop students' conversation skills for the curriculum designers and decision makers, school administrations and supervisors, and teachers.

- As technology has developed, the incorporation of this medium into the instruction process becomes necessary. Modern technical ways should be followed for effective learning and teaching of the second language.
- VLE material should be based on learning theories.
- There should be a shift toward constructive learning, in which the opportunity is given to learners to construct their own meaning from the information presented during the online sessions. The use of learning objects to promote flexibility and reuse of online materials to meet the needs of individual learners should become common.
- Online learning materials should be designed in small coherent segments, so that they can be redesigned for different learners and different contexts.
- Learning material must account different learning styles.
- VLE should provide these features: delivery and management of teaching material content, access control, administration, time-tabling facilities, assessment, communication on various levels .
- Student-centered learning activities should be encouraged.
- In order to fulfill student centeredness requirement, VLE must include the teaching material in the form of online demonstrations, interactive simulations or remotely controlled labs. It is desirable that teaching material would have all three attributes of “good practice” teaching material: primary (exposition of concepts), secondary (application of concepts to solve the task) and tertiary (dialogue and assessment).
- Student's activity should be tracked and assessed. Formative assessment is preferred in VLEs.
- English language teachers should encourage teachers to use virtual learning environment tools VLETs in teaching English language skills: listening, reading, conversation, and writing.
- English language teachers should encourage their students to use technology in developing the language skills.

- Educational institutions should modernize their technical instruction capabilities by using new equipments and laboratories for supporting the teaching process.
- Teachers need to be trained on how to develop and present conversation skills for their students. The environment is also very important.
- Curriculum designers must consider the nature of the virtual learning environment tools VLETs and provide the curriculum with models of good techniques and activities to participate orally through the virtual learning environment tools.
- Teachers should encourage shy students to participate orally by using different activities through the virtual learning environment tools.

5.6. Recommendation for further studies

The traditional way in teaching English doesn't create the needed effective learning in conversation skills. The educational process still needs a lot of researches that touch all parts of the educational system such as; the strategies, the teacher, the students, the curriculum, the administration and the local community. The researcher suggests the following ideas and titles for further studies.

- The Effectiveness of using virtual learning environment tools on teaching problem solving.
- The Effectiveness of using virtual learning environment tools on developing oral proficiency among sixth graders.
- The Effectiveness of using virtual learning environment tools on developing lower- higher order thinking skills.

Conclusion

The study does make contributions to the conversation teaching carried out by primary school teacher from a considerable number of aspects. First it causes the teacher to increase activities, such as question and answer to help students understand the conversations, without translating it into Arabic. Second, it also causes the teacher to practice more pronunciation, especially intonation and rhythm for students to improve their oral skills and less structures. Third, it causes the

teacher to use a greater variety of techniques to present vocabulary, so as to make the learned material livelier to attract students' attention and to increase retention.

The findings of this study suggest that it is worth using virtual tools for second language learning purposes. Virtual tools can be beneficial mostly for interaction, negotiation and communicative competence. More research should be conducted with tools that combine the attractiveness of a game with the learning techniques used in education. Educators should see those games as the learning environments of future generations. And the real challenge is not just to bring any technology at school, but rather change the school's mentality regarding the way of learning.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX (A): Tools Of The Study

APPENDIX (A.1):
The Final List Of Conversational Skills (6th Grade)

1- SPEAKING RATE

Description: Speaks neither so rapidly (e.g., words per minute) nor so slowly as to disrupt partner comprehension and/or response.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

1 = Speaking pace makes utterances consistently difficult to comprehend, or disruptive to normal response and flow of partner response.

2 = Speaking pace makes utterances occasionally difficult to comprehend, or disruptive to normal response and flow of partner response.

3 = Speaking pace is, only a small number of instances, difficult to comprehend, or disruptive to normal response and flow of partner response.

4 = Speaking pace is occasionally varied, and never seems to impair partner comprehension or response.

5 = Speaking pace is varied compatibly with articulation and vocal variety so as to facilitate partner comprehension and response.

2-SPEAKING FLUENCY

Description: Displays speech disturbances or dysfluencies such as stutters, omissions, repetitions or noticeable pause fillers (e.g., um, uh, er, ah, okay, like, you know, I mean, etc.).

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

1 = Displays almost constant use of dysfluencies in manner that is disruptive to the partner responses, and/or receives partner negative sanction (e.g., frowns, statements of inappropriateness, furrowed brow, etc.).

2 = Displays frequent use of dysfluencies in manner that is disruptive to the partner responses, and/or receives partner negative sanction (e.g., frowns, statements of inappropriateness, furrowed brow, etc.).

3 = Displays occasional use of dysfluencies in manner that is disruptive to the partner responses, and/or receives partner negative sanction (e.g., frowns, statements of inappropriateness, furrowed brow, etc.).

4 = Displays few dysfluencies, and those used do not appear to be disruptive to partner.

5 = Displays no noticeable dysfluencies.

3- VOCAL CONFIDENCE

Description: Displays paralinguistic firmness, calmness/forcefulness, and steadiness of expression.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

1 = Vocalizations are almost constantly nervous, shaky, breaking in pitch, and/or equivocal in tone or volume.

2 = Vocalizations are frequently nervous, shaky, breaking in pitch, and/or equivocal in tone or volume.

3 = Vocalizations are occasionally nervous, shaky, breaking in pitch, and/or equivocal in tone or volume.

4 = Vocalizations are generally calm and/or forceful, firm, composed.

5 = Vocalizations are consistently calm and/or forceful, firm, composed, assertive.

4- ARTICULATION

Description: Pronounces words such that they are understandable to the partner.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

1 = Speaks with frequent errors, slurs, and/or incomprehensible utterances, resulting in frequent partner clarification gestures or statements.

2 = Speaks with occasional errors, slurs, and/or incomprehensible utterances, resulting in occasional partner clarification gestures or statements.

3 = Speaks with only a small number of errors, slurs, and/or incomprehensible utterances, resulting in no noticeable partner clarification gestures or statements.

4 = Speaks with no noticeable errors, slurs, and/or incomprehensible utterances, and no noticeable partner clarification gestures or statements.

5 = Speaks with clearly comprehensible utterances, but not with excessive “clip” or stilted pronunciation.

5- VOCAL VARIETY

Description: Varies pitch, tone, and range of verbal utterances while speaking

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

1 = Speaks in an extremely monotonous manner without variation.

2 = Speaks in a fairly monotonous manner with minimal variation.

3 = Speaks in a somewhat monotonous manner with occasional variation. 4 = Speaks with modulated and varied tonalities.

5 = Speaks with frequent variation in tonality, but not excessively 'cartoon-like' or excessively animated fashion.

6- VOLUME

Description: Speaks at audible but not extreme levels; no strain or distraction of attention.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

1 = Speaks at extremely quiet/soft or extremely loud level.

2 = Speaks at very quiet/soft or very loud level.

3 = Speaks at somewhat quiet/soft or somewhat loud level.

4 = Generally speaks at audible and comfortable level.

5 = Consistently speaks at audible, comfortable, and adaptive level.

7- Accuracy

Description: Uses accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to given and different topics.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

1 = Constantly uses not accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.

2 = Very frequently uses not accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.

3 = Frequently uses not accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.

4 = Uses generally accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.

5 = Uses mostly accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.

8- Asking Of Questions

Description: Seeks information about given topics or pictures.

Normative Behavioral Anchors:

- 1 = Never seeks information about given topics or pictures..
- 2 = Rarely seeks information about given topics or pictures.
- 3 = Occasionally seeks information about given topics or pictures.
- 4 = Frequently seeks information about given topics or pictures.
- 5 = Frequently asks questions that seek information about given topics or pictures

APPENDIX (A.2):
Content Analysis of Conversational Skills(sixth grade)
Book 6/B - Units (10-11-12-13)

Domain	Conversational Skills	Analysis 1	Analysis 2
Speaking rate	Speaking pace is varied compatibly with articulation and vocal variety so as to facilitate partner comprehension and response.	20	24
	Total	44	
Speaking Fluency	Displaying no noticeable dysfluencies.	16	20
	Total	36	
Vocal confidence	Displaying paralinguistic firmness, calmness/forcefulness, and steadiness of expression.	20	24
	Total	44	
Articulation	Speaking with clearly comprehensible utterances, but not with excessive “clip” or stilted pronunciation.	16	20
	Total	36	
Vocal Variety	Varying pitch, tone, and range of verbal utterances while speaking.	20	24
	Total	44	
Volume	Speaking at audible but not extreme levels; no strain or distraction of attention.	20	24
	Total	44	
Accuracy	Using appropriate lexical and syntax items related to the selected situations.	20	24
	Total	44	
Asking of questions	Asking questions that are suggestive of insights, involve partner in the conversation, or facilitates conversation	16	20
	Total	36	

APPENDIX (A.3):
Conversational skills rating scale

Student's name:						Observer's name :											
Date :						Class :						Activity: Oral Conversational Test					
Rate how skillfully the student used, or didn't use, the following conversational behaviors in the conversation.																	
1	=	INADEQUATE	(use is awkward, disruptive, or results in a negative impression of conversational skills)														
2	=	FAIR	(occasionally awkward or disruptive, occasionally adequate)														
3	=	ADEQUATE	(sufficient but neither noticeable nor excellent)														
4	=	GOOD	(use was better than adequate but not outstanding)														
5	=	EXCELLENT	(use is smooth, controlled, results in positive impression of conversational skills)														
Circle the single most accurate response for each behavior :																	
1	2	3	4	5	=	(1)	Speaking rate (neither too slow nor too fast)										
1	2	3	4	5	=	(2)	Speaking fluency (pauses, silences,..etc.)										
1	2	3	4	5	=	(3)	Vocal confidence (neither too tense nor overly confident)										
1	2	3	4	5	=	(4)	Articulation (clarity of pronunciation and linguistic expression)										
1	2	3	4	5	=	(5)	Vocal variety (neither overly monotone nor dramatic voice)										
1	2	3	4	5	=	(6)	Volume (neither too loud nor too soft)										
1	2	3	4	5	=	(7)	Accuracy (usage of lexical and syntax items)										
1	2	3	4	5	=	(8)	Asking of questions (related to given topics)										
Comments:																	

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1 = Speaking pace makes utterances consistently difficult to comprehend, or disruptive to normal response and flow of partner response.

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Description: Pronounces words such that they are understandable to the partner.
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5 = Speaks with frequent variation in tonality, but not excessively ‘cartoon-like’ or excessively animated fashion.

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5 = Uses mostly accurate and suitable lexical and syntax items related to the context.

8- Asking Of Questions

Description: Seeks information about given topics or pictures.

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4 = Frequently seeks information about given topics or pictures.

5 = Frequently asks questions that seek information about given topics or pictures.

APPENDIX (A.4):

Written Conversation Test

Name : Class : 6/1 Time: 35 minutes

1- What would you say in the following situations (3 points)

1-Your friend says : " There are no fish or plants in the Dead Sea!"

- a. Great.
- b. Really?
- c. Good idea.

2- Your teacher asks : " Have you ever eaten soap?"

- a. Yes, of course.
- b. Why not.
- c. Yuck, no. I haven't!

3- Your young brother says : " I feel sick."

- a. Oh no!
- b. Fantastic.
- c. That's excellent!

2-Respond according to the picture (3 points)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) He has been sneezing. b) He has been coughing. c) He has been feeling well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) I've never seen the sunrise. b) I've never seen the sunset. c) I've seen the sunset. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) No, I have. b) Yes, I haven't. c) No, I haven't.

3-Match (A) with (B) (4 points)

No.	(A)		(B)
1.	When does it rain ?	()	It was great
2.	What has Jim been doing?	()	The sun.
3.	What makes the water hot?	()	Climbing palm trees.
4.	Did you enjoy your visit to the Dead Sea?	()	When clouds get heavy.

4- Complete the dialogue (3 points)

Jim: What has Bilal been doing since 5 o'clock in the morning?

Linda :

Jim : Where is he now?

Linda :

Jim: What has the doctor told the children ?

Linda : He has told them

He's at the clinic.
to stay in bed
He has been coughing.

5-Correct the mistake (5 points)

1- **When** has Rania never ridden?

Rania has never ridden camels.

2- How **far** has Amy been sneezing?

Amy has been sneezing since yesterday.

3- **What** does rain come from?

It comes from the clouds.

4- Have you ever visited an oasis ?

No, I've **ever** visited an oasis.

5- Why does rain fall?

But clouds get heavy.

6- Complete questions / answers with suitable words (12 points)

1- ever worn a ?

- I have never worn a coat .

2- How long have you been tired?

- I have been tired a week.

3- What your friend in a boat?

- He has sailed.

4- What does water change into?

- It into

5- Whattherise?

- The..... makes it

GOOD LUCK

APPENDIX (A.5):
Oral Conversation Test

Name : Class Time: 17 minutes

Question 1 (3 points)

The teacher gives instructions

Dialogue 1 :

Teacher : What has Ben been doing?

Student :



Student : What has your brother never done?

Teacher :



Teacher : What have Amy and Rania done ?

Student :



Dialogue 2 : (3 points)

Student :

Teacher : Yes, I've seen a wild cat.



Student :

Teacher : No I've never swum in the Dead Sea.



Student :

Teacher : I've put mud on my skin.



Question 2 (3 points)

The teacher gives instructions

What would you say in the following situations.

1- Your friend says he can carry 100 kg.

.....(Express surprise)

2- Your sister ate a raw egg.

.....(Express disgust)

APPENDIX (B): The Tools

APPENDIX (B.1)

Content of the virtual learning environment tools

unit	No. of lessons	Conversational skills	Behavioral objectives		
10	2 lessons in each unit	Speaking rate	Say words of each unit.		
11			Ask or answer questions related to different situations, neither so rapidly nor so slowly following specified timing.		
12			Describe a picture.		
13		Speaking fluency	Say words, sentences or questions related to different situations without pauses or silences.		
			Describe a picture.		
			Vocal confidence	Say words, ask or answer questions, neither too tense nor overly confident, related to different topics.	
				Articulation	Pronounce words clearly while asking, answering questions or describing a picture.
					Vocal variety
			Volume	Say words, sentences or questions, neither too loud nor too soft according to the situation.	
	Accuracy	Use accurate lexical and syntax items according to different situations.			
	Asking questions	Describe a picture.			
		Ask questions related to different situations.			

APPENDIX (B.2):
Voki Teacher's Guide



Voki Classroom

Getting Started Guide

Contents:

I. Registering for Voki Classroom.....	2
II. Upgrading to Voki Classroom	2
III. Getting Started with Voki Classroom.....	3
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Account Management (My Account).....	14

I. Registering for Voki Classroom

If you already have a Voki account, see **Upgrading to Voki Classroom** below. To create a Voki Classroom account, complete the following steps:

Tip: To ensure Voki emails arrive in your inbox, add notifications@voki.com to your safe senders list.

1. Visit www.voki.com and navigate to the Products page (www.voki.com/products.php)
2. Click the Get Voki Classroom button.
3. **Step 1:** Complete the registration form (name, email, password, and birthday) and accept Voki's terms of use. Click Continue.
4. **Step 2:** Choose your Voki Classroom plan. You can choose from the following:
 - a. A single 1-year subscription
 - b. A single 2-year subscription – this option includes a 25% discount on the per-year price.
 - c. Multiple accounts – if you select this option, you will need to provide the names and email addresses for those you wish to purchase an account for. Multiple account discounts are available when purchasing 5 or more accounts.
5. After selecting your plan, you will be directed to the payment page.

Note: the secure payment page is on PayPal. You do not need a PayPal account to complete your purchase.

Note: After signing up for Voki Classroom, you will also receive access to Voki.com.

II. Upgrading to Voki Classroom

If you already have a Voki account, you can easily upgrade to Voki Classroom by following these steps:

1. Log in to your Voki account at www.Voki.com and navigate to www.voki.com/products.php.
2. Click on "Get Voki Classroom"
3. Choose your Voki Classroom plan. You can choose from the following:
 - a. A 1-year subscription
 - b. A 2-year subscription – this option includes a 25% discount on the per-year price.

4. After selecting your plan, you will be directed to the payment page.

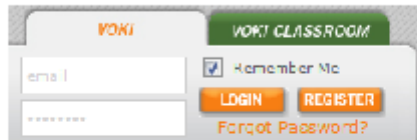
Note: the secure payment page is on PayPal. You do not need a PayPal account to complete your purchase.

III. Getting Started with Voki Classroom

Logging in

After getting a Voki Classroom account, you are ready to log in. Visit <http://www.voki.com/classroom> and enter your email and password.

Note: With a Voki Classroom teacher account, when you log in to Voki, you are automatically logged in to Voki Classroom, and vice versa. After logging in, simply click on the Voki or Voki Classroom tabs (located at the top of each page) to switch between Voki and Voki Classroom.

A screenshot of the Voki Classroom login interface. It features two tabs at the top: 'VOKI' (highlighted in orange) and 'VOKI CLASSROOM' (highlighted in green). Below the tabs is a login form with an 'email' input field, a password field (represented by dots), a 'Remember Me' checkbox, and 'LOGIN' and 'REGISTER' buttons. A 'Forgot Password?' link is also present.

Once logged in to Voki Classroom, you will see the **Students** page. You can easily view other pages/ areas by clicking on the tabs near the top of the page (i.e. **Students**, **Classes**, **Review**).

A screenshot of the Voki Classroom navigation bar. It includes tabs for 'Students', 'Classes', 'Review', 'Support', and 'My Account'. Below the 'Students' tab are three buttons: 'ADD STUDENTS', 'SAVE CHANGES', and 'PRINT FOR CLASS'. A search bar is located to the right of these buttons, with a dropdown menu showing 'Student' and a search icon.

Students

As mentioned, once you are logged in to Voki Classroom, you'll be taken to the **Students** page. Easily navigate Voki Classroom pages by selecting the different tabs near the top of each page.

A screenshot of the Voki Classroom navigation bar on the 'Students' page. The 'Students' tab is highlighted with a dashed border. Below it are three buttons: 'ADD STUDENTS', 'SAVE CHANGES', and 'PRINT FOR CLASS'. The 'Classes' and 'Review' tabs are also visible.

The main features of the Students area are:

1. Add a Student:

To add students to Voki Classroom, click the “Add Students” button:

- a. To add a single student, type the student’s name. You can also assign the student to one or more classes.

Add a student | [Import a list](#)

First Name
Middle Name
Last Name

Class Assignment
(optional)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chemistry 1
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chemistry 2
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organic Chemistry

SAVE & CLOSE

- b. To add multiple students, click “Import a list” which will show you the import window. You may also assign the students in your list to one or more classes.

Tip: Download the sample template, which will help you easily upload your list.

Import a List of Students

Upload your student list (.csv)

For best results, [Use this template.](#)

Class Assignment
Options: Assign these students to 1 or more classes.

Chemistry 1

Chemistry 2

Organic Chemistry

When you are done, click “Save & Close”.

2. **Edit Students:** To edit a student’s name, simply type the name into the First, Middle, or Last Name fields. You can also remove a student from the list by checking the box to the far right and clicking Delete.

Note: Modifying a student’s name will also change their Login, so make sure you provide students with their updated login information.

To modify a student’s password, simply type in the new password and click Save Changes.

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Login</u>	<u>Password</u>
<input type="text" value="Amanda"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="Johnson"/>	<input type="text" value="ajohnson123"/>	<input type="text" value="ajohnson123"/>

3. **Save Changes:** This will save any changes you have made.
4. **Print for Class:** This feature lets you print login instructions for your students.

5

Here, you have two options:

- a. **Print 1 sheet for the entire class:** This will print a list of logins and passwords for all students. **Note:** logins and passwords will be visible to everyone viewing the list.
- b. **Print individual instructions:** This is a more secure option that lets you print individual instructions for each student. After printing these instructions, you can cut out the individual instructions and hand them out.

Print Class Login Information

1. Choose the class

Chemistry1

2. Choose how to print instructions

1 sheet for entire class

Choose this option to print one common sheet for the entire class. **Note:** Students will be able to view each others' login information.

Class Name				
First	Middle	Last	Login	Password

PRINT

Individual instructions

Choose this option to print individual instructions, which you can cut out and give to each student. **Note:** This option is more secure.

Class Name	
Student name Login Password	Student name Login Password
Student name Login Password	Student name Login Password
Student name Login Password	Student name Login Password

PRINT

5. **Search:** You can easily search for students by name, or for all students in a certain class.

Search: ➡ ⌛

Search: ➡ ⌛

6. **Classes:** Click the Globe icon next to a student's name to assign her/ him to one or more classes
7. **Lessons:** Click the Notebook icon to review that student's Voki assignments

8. Sort: You can sort your students by first, middle, and last name by clicking on the column title

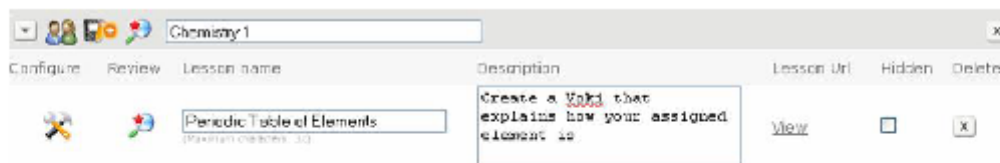


Classes

In the Classes area, you can do the following:



Here is how to add and edit your classes and lessons:

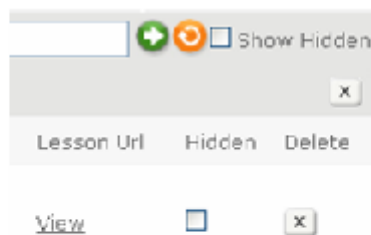



— **Add & Edit Classes:** Click the “Add a Class” button. A new class will appear at the bottom of the list. Now, name your class and click “Save Changes”.

Note: Each new class will automatically include 1 lesson with a default lesson description.

— **Add Lessons:** After adding a class, click the notebook icon (📓) next to the class name. Then, name your lesson and write a description. Your lesson description can be instructions for your students, a description for those viewing the public lesson page, or a combination of both!

— **Hiding a lesson:** If a lesson is hidden, the lesson Web page will not display the lesson’s Vokis you have approved. To view your hidden lessons, check the Show Hidden box. To unhide a lesson, uncheck the box under “Hidden” and click “Save Changes”.



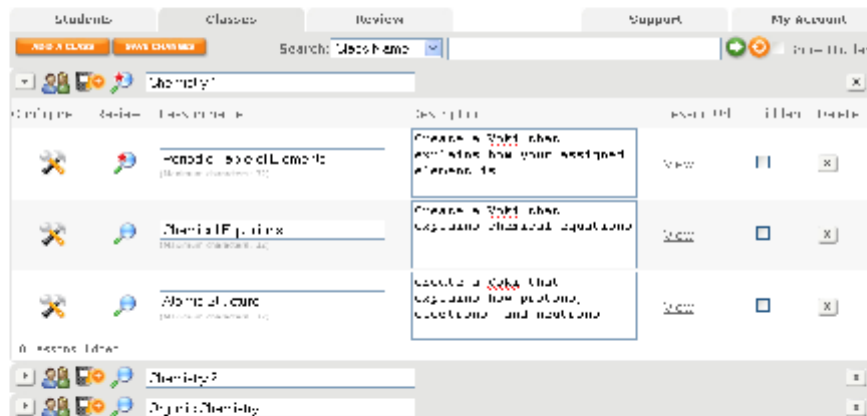
— **Configure a Lesson:** Each lesson comes with a Web page where others can view the Vokis your class has created for that lesson. To configure your lesson, click the configure icon () next to the lesson name. Here, you can do the following:

- select the style/layout of the Lesson page
- configure the security of the Lesson page (i.e. make the Lesson page public or private)
- display your Students' full names (or initials only)
- add an embed button
- add a writing assignment
- make your Students' writing assignments publicly visible on the Lesson page
- set a Lesson deadline

When you are done configuring the lesson, click Save & Close.

— **Lesson Web Page:** To view your lesson's Web page, click the [View](#) link for that lesson.

— **Review:** After your students have started working on their Vokis, click the magnifying glass icon under Review to view and Approve (or Reject) the Vokis created for that lesson. You can also go to the Review section by clicking the Review tab (more on that next).



Reviewing Student Work

The Voki Classroom Review page (shown below) is where you review your Students' work.

Students Classes **Review** Support My Account

Class: Classroom Lesson: All Student: All Show Filter

Show All Cancelled Ready for Review Try Again Approved

bobby Jones
Ready for Review
Get Started

Keny Stevens
Ready for Review
Get Started

John Kelly
Ready for Review
Apr 22 2012 11:08
READY FOR REVIEW

Graham Kraft
Ready for Review
Apr 22 2012 11:09
APPROVED

Doug Fitzgerald
Ready for Review
Apr 20 2012 11:29
Try Again

Amanda Johnson
Ready for Review
Apr 22 2012 11:21
APPROVED

The most direct way to access the Review page is to select the Review tab in Voki Classroom.

However, you can also access the Review page via the Voki Classroom:

- Students page (when the Students tab is selected)
- Classes page (when the Classes tab is selected)

When you are on the Students page, Voki Classroom allows you to review all Lesson assignments for an individual Student by clicking the Review icon.



For example, to review all of Amanda Johnson's Voki assignments from the Students page, you would click the Review icon next to this Student's name.

Review First Name Middle Name Last Name

Amanda Johnson

The Review page automatically displays this Student's work for you to review.



Similarly, when you are on the Classes page, Voki Classroom allows you to review the work for any individual Lesson in a given Class – also by clicking the Review icon.



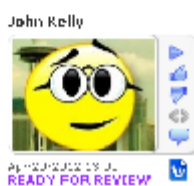
When new Vokis are ready for review, a red star will appear on the Review icon to notify you.



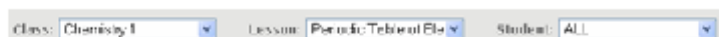
You can click these icons to display the Review page and review your Student's work. For example, assume you want to review all of the work submitted by your Chemistry 1 Class for their Lesson on the Periodic Table of Elements. You would go to the Classes page and click the Review icon next to this Lesson (under your Chemistry 1 Class).



The Review page automatically displays all of the work submitted for this Lesson (by the Students in your Chemistry 1 Class) for you to review.



When you are on the Review page, you can quickly sort assignments by Class, Lesson or by Student.



If you want to sort assigned Lessons by:

- Class, then use the Class: drop down to select a Class
- Lesson, then use the Lesson: drop down to select a Lesson
- Student, then use the Student: drop down to select a Lesson

In addition to sorting assigned Lessons by Class, Lesson, or Student, the Review page also allows you to sort assigned Lessons by Status (i.e. All, Get Started, Ready for Review, Try Again, Approved).

To sort assigned Lessons by status, locate the Show: portion of the Review page.



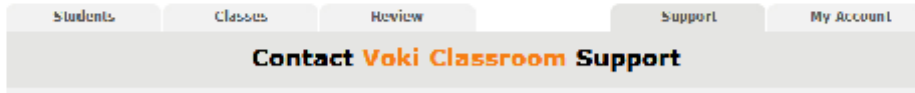
If you want to display all assigned Lessons (regardless of status), click the All link.

Or, you can sort your Lessons by status. If you want to display only Vokis with a:

- Get Started status, click the Get Started link
- Ready for Review status, click the Ready for Review link
- Try Again status, click the Try Again link
- Approved status, click the Approved link

Voki Classroom Support

Your Voki Classroom account comes with email support. You can get support on any aspect of your Voki Classroom account!



To contact the Voki Classroom Support Team, click on Support tab and complete the support form.

Tip: Before contacting support, browse the Voki Classroom support material, which may provide you with an immediate answer to your question(s). The following support material is available from the Support page:

- **Voki Classroom FAQ:** Answers to frequently asked questions about Voki Classroom
- **Teacher's Corner:** Community support
- **Getting Started Guide:** This guide will help you get started
- **User Guide:** This is a comprehensive guide to Voki Classroom
- **Learn:** More about how teachers use Voki

If you have additional, account specific questions, simply complete the Support form and a member of our Support team will be in touch with you as soon as possible.

Voki Classroom Feedback

The Voki Classroom team is always eager to receive your feedback! Your feedback helps us improve. If you have non-account-specific and non-urgent feedback, such as:

- An **idea** for a new feature in Voki Classroom
- A general **question** about Voki Classroom
- A general **problem** or issue you'd like to share
- **Praise**, or a story you'd like share with the community

...then feel free to share it with us, using the community Feedback tab. Simply click on the Feedback tab, located on the right of the screen. You will see the following form, which you can complete and share with us.

A screenshot of the "Share an idea" form. The form has a title "Share an idea" and four tabs: "Idea" (selected), "Question", "Problem", and "Praise". Below the tabs is a text area labeled "Describe your idea". Below that is a text area labeled "Sum it up with a short title". Below that is a text area labeled "Add more details" with a dropdown arrow and "(Optional)" next to it. At the bottom left is a blue "Continue" button. At the bottom right is the "get satisfaction" logo. Below the form is a link "Post privately (?)". On the right side of the form, there is a section titled "Popular ideas from the community" with three items: "underwater talking" (2 people like this idea), "Full Editing Rights as the Teacher" (1 person likes this idea), and "the brown guy" (1 person likes this idea). Each item has a yellow "Me too!" button. At the bottom of this section is a link "See and rate more ideas »".

Please note: If you have an account-specific question, or if you require a response from the Voki Classroom team, please use the Support page to contact us. The Feedback tab is meant to help you provide more general feedback about Voki and Voki Classroom.

Did you know? Many of our product improvement for Voki and Voki Classroom come directly from users like you!

Account Management (My Account)

Managing your Voki Classroom account, and viewing your account information is very easy. Here are the most common tasks you can do in the My Account page:

Personal Information (?)		Personal Settings	
Profile Picture:		Email Address (2):	a@b.com
Salutation:	Mr. Edit	Password (2):	***** Edit
First Name:	Aaron Edit	Account Settings	
Last Name:	Bonnard Edit	Account expiration:	2017-06-30 Edit
		Student Accounts:	11 of 200 Add More
		Classes:	4 of 10 Add More
		Account ID:	10241
		Customer Since:	2012-03-30
		Invoices:	3 1162 4 1131

Personal Information:

- **Profile Picture:** To do this, click on the area where your picture appears, and upload a new one. Remember, this picture will appear on your lesson page, and on your students' login page.
- **Salutation:** Enter your salutation, as you would like it to be seen by your students, and by those viewing your class lesson pages.
- **Name:** If, for any reason, you need to change the name of the account holder, simply click Edit next to your name and type in a new name.

Personal Settings:

- **Email Address:** You can edit the email address associated with your Voki Classroom account. **Note:** This change will apply to both Voki and Voki Classroom.
- **Password:** You can edit your Voki Classroom password as well. **Note:** This change will apply to both Voki and Voki Classroom.

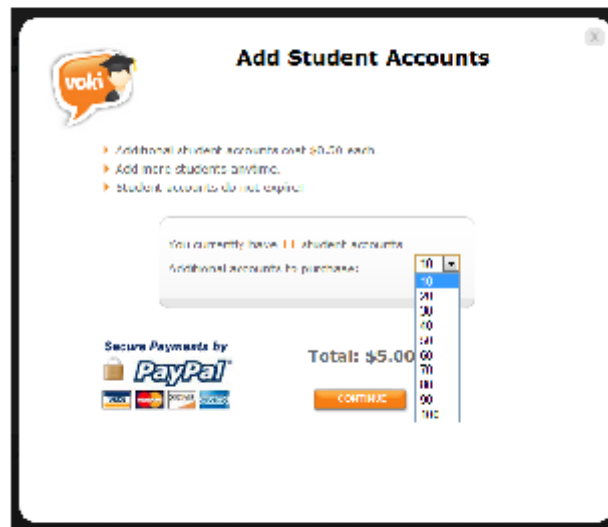
Account Settings:

- **Account Expiration:** This field shows you when your Voki Classroom subscription expires.
- **Extend link:** To extend your account, simply click [Extend](#), choose your subscription type (1-Year or 2-Year), and continue to the payment page.
- **Account ID:** This field will show you your Voki Classroom account ID, in case you ever need it.
- **Customer Since:** This field will show you the date at which your subscription began.
- **Student Accounts & Classes:** These fields show you how many Student records you have defined (of the available limit) and how many Classes you have created (of the available limit). Below, we discuss how to purchase additional Student accounts and Classes.
- **Invoices:** Click on the invoice number to access a record of past payments.

Adding More Student Accounts and Classes:

As mentioned above, your Voki Classroom account includes up to 5 Classes and up to 100 Student accounts. We have found that these limits are sufficient for the vast majority of teachers. If you do need to manage additional Students, or additional Classes, you can easily add more.

To add more Student accounts or Classes, simply click [Add More](#) next to the Student or Class limit you wish to increase. You will then need to select the number of Student accounts or Classes you wish to purchase (see image below). The total price will update automatically. Finally, click Continue, and complete your purchase. Your Student account / Class limits will now be increased.



How long do the additional Student Accounts and Classes last in my account? Forever. Once you have purchased additional Student accounts or Classes, they are now a permanent addition to your account. In other words, your additions will not expire when your subscription expires, and you will not need to re-purchase them when extending your account!

A note about sharing accounts: As you may know, each Voki Classroom account is intended to be used by one (1) teacher. Although some teachers may choose to share their account with another teacher, we do not encourage this, as the account features work best for a single user. To make Voki Classroom more affordable for use by multiple teachers, we have included additional multiple-account discounts (an additional 10% discount for 5 to 9 accounts, and a 15% discount for 10 or more accounts). Also, it is more economical to purchase a separate account than to purchase the extra Classes and Student accounts needed by most teachers.

Need more help?

If you need more detailed instructions, you can read the complete **Voki Classroom User's Guide**.

Remember, Voki Classroom includes unlimited email support. If you need additional help, simply login in to your Voki Classroom account and click the "Support" tab.

APPENDIX (B.3):

Lingt classroom/ Teacher's Guide

What is the Lingt editor?

The Lingt editor is an online-assignment creation tool that allows educators to create exercises that incorporate voice, images, video, and text. Using the editor, teachers can craft assignments that can assess and train students' speaking proficiency in a consistent and individually-intensive way. In addition, Lingt Classroom provides a simple and intuitive interface to manage assignments, keep track of student submissions, and provide feedback on an individual response level.

Overview

Use Lingt by creating assignments and assigning them to classes. This is called 'publishing' an assignment. A copy of every assignment that you create will be placed in your personal "Archive" so that you can later edit and reassign it how you see fit. Only assignments that you have assigned to classes can be viewed by your students, so simply "Save" an assignment to work on or assign it to a class later. To give you maximum flexibility, every assignment is independent - you can edit any assignment at any time without affecting the other versions. This mean you can assign an assignment to multiple classes, making slight edits to each class's copy, while keeping the original untouched in your Archive.

Foreign language exercises that can be made with the Lingt editor

We designed the Lingt editor to be flexible enough to allow teachers to be as creative as they like in creating assignments, but also to easily accomodate the most common language-learning exercises.

- **Dialogs:** Follow your voice recordings with voice prompts to simulate dialogs that you invent yourself or that you take from your textbook.
- **Pronunciation:** Record your pronunciation of key vocabulary or phrases and prompt students to repeat what they hear. Encourage them to listen to their recording and compare with your own.
- **Dictation:** Record your voice and prompt students to type what they hear.

- **Video commentary:** Have students react to a video in real-time to approximate real immersion.
- **Translation:** Prompt students to translate to or from the foreign language. Use any combination of text and voice to have students speak their translations or type out a translation to your inserted text.
- **Reading:** Insert a short story or primary source and prompt students to read it.
- **Culture exercises:** Use maps, menus, signs, or other primary sources in the foreign language and prompt students to interpret and give their opinion. Insert videos to introduce students to songs, commercials, or TV shows from a foreign country.
- **Visual interaction:** Present images and videos to students and prompt them to interpret or describe what they see and hear.

Creating a class

To create a new class, simply click the "create class" button at the top of your home page. If you teach more than one language, you will be prompted to enter the language taught in that classroom. You must create a class to hold assignments that you want your students to access.

Creating a new assignment

To create a new assignment, simply click the "create assignment" button at the top of your home page. Always start a new assignment by clicking "Title" and giving it a name.

Building an assignment: inputs and prompts

The Lingt editor is divided into two sets of buttons along the top of the page: four input buttons on the left and two prompt buttons on the right. Think of the four buttons on the left as yours: use them to build an assignment out of images, video, text, and voice. Think of the two prompt buttons on the right as the students': use them to designate spots in the assignment where you expect your students to either type or speak a response. Click the buttons to insert an input or prompt at the end of the assignment. Alternatively, drag the button down into the assignment to insert it

anywhere. After an input or prompt has been inserted, you can click the gray "x" on the right to remove it. For dialogs, you can press the "< >" button to unpair two voice bubbles.

Saving or assigning an assignment

When you have finished building your assignment, you have the option to either assign or save it by clicking the buttons sitting just below the completed assignment. If you choose to assign, you will be prompted for a due date and to select the classes to which you want to assign (you can pick many, if you'd like). You will also be given the option to share your assignment with other teachers using Lingt. See the "Sharing assignments" section below for more details.

After you set a date and submit, the assignment will be immediately available for students to complete. A copy of the assignment will be placed in both the class and your Archive - you can edit either one without affecting the other.

Alternatively, you can save your assignment if you'd like to work on it more at a later time or delay making it accessible to your students. In this case, a copy will only be placed in your Archive.

As a shortcut to assign an archived assignment to a class quickly, you can simply drag the assignment on top of a class on your home page.

Sharing your assignments

Lingt allows teachers to share and exchange assignments. When saving an assignment, check the "Share?" checkbox and fill in the summary information to allow other teachers to make a copy of your work. To stop sharing, simply edit the assignment, uncheck the "Share?" box, and save.

If another teacher likes your work and chooses to use your assignment with their own class, they receive an exact copy to which they can make changes to fit their own curriculum or teaching style. Any changes he or she makes will not affect your copy.

To use other teacher's assignments in your own classroom, go to the "Community" page and search by language, skill level, or key words. Click on the

assignments' title to review them and click the "add to assignments" button to place a copy in your own Archive. You can then edit or assign the assignment from there.

Managing your assignments

You can manage all of your assigned and saved assignments from your home page. Hover the cursor over an assignment to see the management options available. Using these options, you can delete assignments, change due dates, view student submissions, and assign archived assignments. Keep in mind that assigned assignments have limited editing functionality: you will be able to rerecord or retype existing prompts, but unable to add new ones (this is necessary for us to consistently sync student responses with your assignment). If you must make more substantial edits, remove the assignment from your class, edit your archived version, and reassign it.

Assignments that are past their due date will appear faded and gray. The number in parentheses in front of the assignment title is the number of students that have submitted responses.

Viewing responses and submitting feedback

From your [home page](#), click the title of an assignment in the published assignment section on the left to access a page detailing student submissions to that assignment. Depending on your grading style, you can choose to view responses organized by individual student or displayed inline within the actual assignment. Click a student's name under "responses by student" to view all of their submissions and to reveal the option to send feedback to that student. You can leave text or voice feedback to each student's individual responses by clicking the small icons next to their responses displayed in the "Responses by student" section.

You can leave feedback for as few or as many of their responses as you'd like, just make sure to click the "send feedback" link before moving on to another student. After sending feedback, a small mail icon will appear next to that student's name to remind you that you have already reviewed and commented on their submission.

FAQ

What do my students and I need to use Lingt?

Since Lingt is an entirely online service, our technical requirements are very easy to meet. In fact, you and most of your students probably already meet them:

- Windows 7/XP/Vista or Mac OS X
- Flash 9 or above. (upgrade [here](#))
- Lingt works best in Internet Explorer 7+, Firefox 2+, and Safari 3.1+, but other browsers may work as well. We currently do not support Internet Explorer 6. [This is why.](#)
- A microphone. This can be external or built-in to your computer.
- Students need email accounts to receive feedback
- If you have internet filtering or a firewall in place you may need to make modifications. Specifically, RTMP communication over port 443 to audio.lingt.com is required to play and record audio.

If your browser doesn't meet the requirements, you will be notified on your home page with suggestions on how to upgrade.

How should I use Lingt?

The Lingt editor is intended to be used to create media-rich and interactive assignments that complement your chosen textbook, curriculum, and method of teaching. You may choose to craft all of your assignments with Lingt or use the editor more sparingly to supplement your usual reading and writing assignments or provide special focus on spoken proficiency. Lingt can also be used to facilitate oral exams or diagnostics at a fraction of the time it would usually take to do so.

Depending on your schedule and teaching style, students can complete your assignments at home or during classtime in a computer lab.

Can I use Lingt with my language/curriculum/textbook/preferred method of teaching?

Yes. Lingt's editor is independent of any single language, content source, or teaching methodology. Any language can be typed into an assignment (provided that you have software that already allows you to type in your language) and any voice recorded. You should use Lingt to complement your teaching style.

Why isn't something displaying or working like it should?

Probably because your computer doesn't meet one of our technical recommendations. Check your home page for upgrade notifications. It is also possible that you have discovered a bug. If you meet all the technical requirements and still have trouble, email us at info@lingtlanguage.com, and we'll get on top of it as quickly as possible.

How does the limit on published assignments work?

If you have a Free or Premium account, you have a limit on the number of assignments you can publish per year. Deleted assignments contribute to the published assignment count if they received more than two student responses. You can see how many assignments you have left on your homepage. To raise your limit, upgrade your account by going [here](#).

Why can't I record my voice?

Assuming that you have allowed Flash access to your microphone when Lingt prompted you (impossible to miss), a hardware or operating system problem may be preventing you from recording your voice. Click "Microphone" in the top-right corner of the Lingt editor to try choosing another microphone. If this doesn't fix your problem, consult your operating system or audio driver documentation to make sure your hardware and operating system are configured correctly.

Important Note about USB microphones:

Some USB microphones have certain incompatibilities with Flash. If you have a USB microphone and it isn't working, try changing your operating system's default microphone to your USB mic. In Mac OS X you can do this under the input section

in Sound Preferences, and in Windows you can do this under the sound control panel. Contact us if you continue to have issues.

How do my students take my assignments?

All of your assigned assignments can be accessed and completed at lingtlanguage.com/your-user-name. So, you can find **your** assignments at lingtlanguage.com/. Just direct your students to this URL when you are ready for them to complete your assignment.

My schools blocks YouTube. What can I do?

Unfortunately, many school networks choose to block YouTube for very understandable reasons. Accordingly, you won't be able to view embedded YouTube videos on school computers unless you submit a request to your district's IT department to unblock our site. We are working hard to incorporate TeacherTube (which will not be blocked) videos soon. Of course, your embedded videos can still be viewed on students' home computers. So, unless you plan on using Lingt at school, you shouldn't have anything to worry about.

Is this going to add more work to my already busy schedule?

The Lingt editor is meant to encourage creation of innovative and engaging assignments that bring something new to the classroom. Accordingly, you may need to spend some time initially building quality assignments that will benefit your students. However, once published, any assignment can be reused as many times as you'd like. By sharing your assignments and using other teachers' work, you can contribute to building a body of quality foreign language content that will save everyone time.

Grading spoken exercises may seem daunting, but we encourage teachers to employ whatever methods they have used in the past to manage their grading time. For example, you might assign a lengthy speaking assignment for students to benefit from the exercise, but choose to only grade one section. It's entirely up to you.

In other ways, Lingt can save you a tremendous amount of time. For example, using Lingt to administer oral examinations or diagnostics dramatically reduces the time you have to spend testing students.

What if I'm having trouble hearing or recording sounds at school?

Often this is a problem teachers will need the help of technical staff to solve. Some schools have firewalls or other types of restrictions that slow or block Lingt's audio data. To ensure the best performance, make sure your school network has access to audio.lingt.com for RTMP communication (over tcp port 443). If you access the web through a proxy, you'll need to make sure you can communicate RTMP (instead of HTTP or HTTPS). Feel free to contact us if you're in need of other details.

Can I delete student response?

You can delete published assignments and classes, but we don't yet offer a way for educators to delete individual students accounts. Sorry for the limitation.

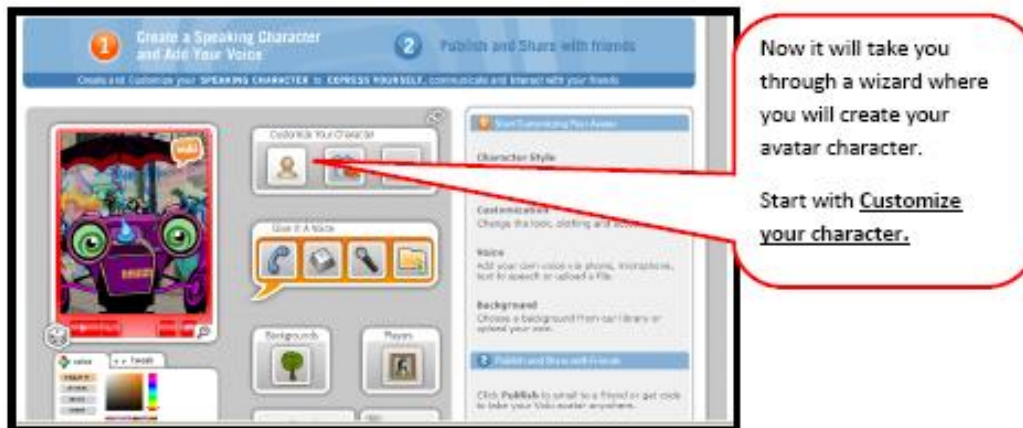
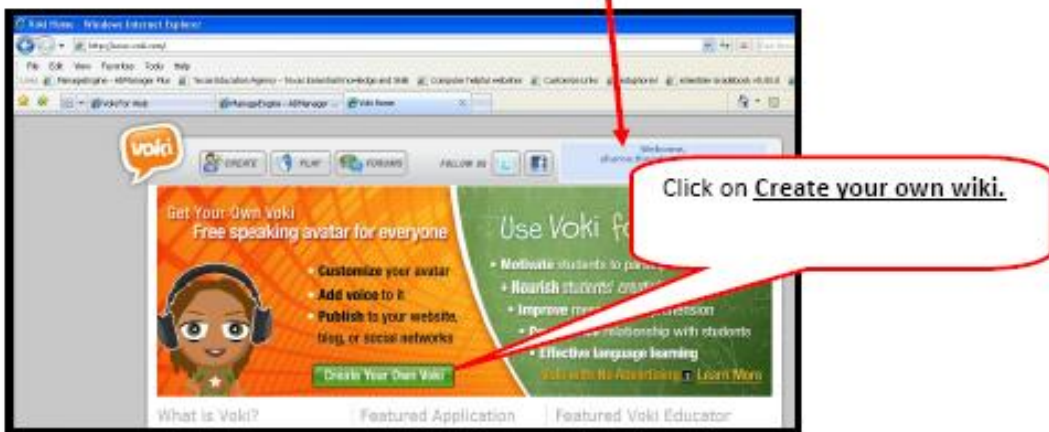
APPENDIX (B.4): Voki Student's Guide

Create a Voki Avatar Talking Character

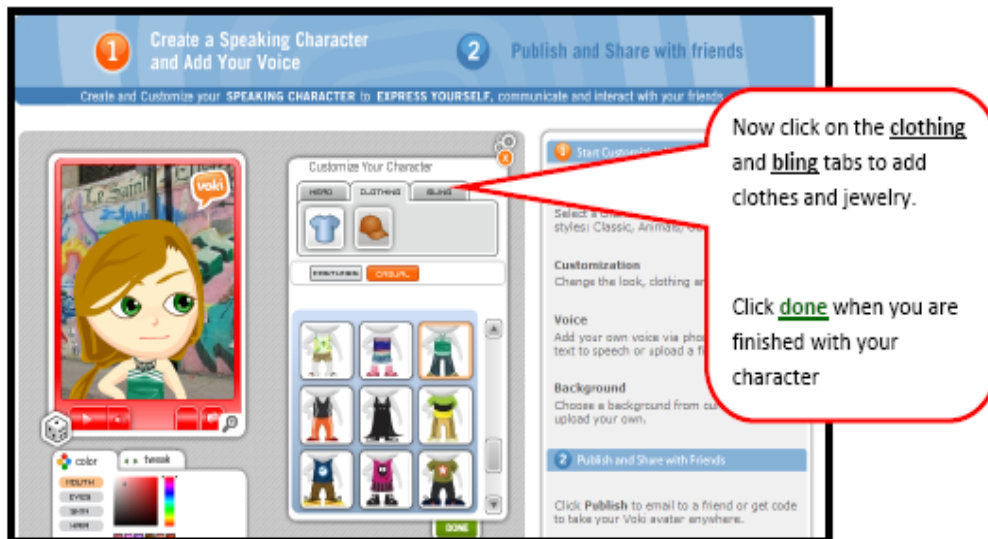
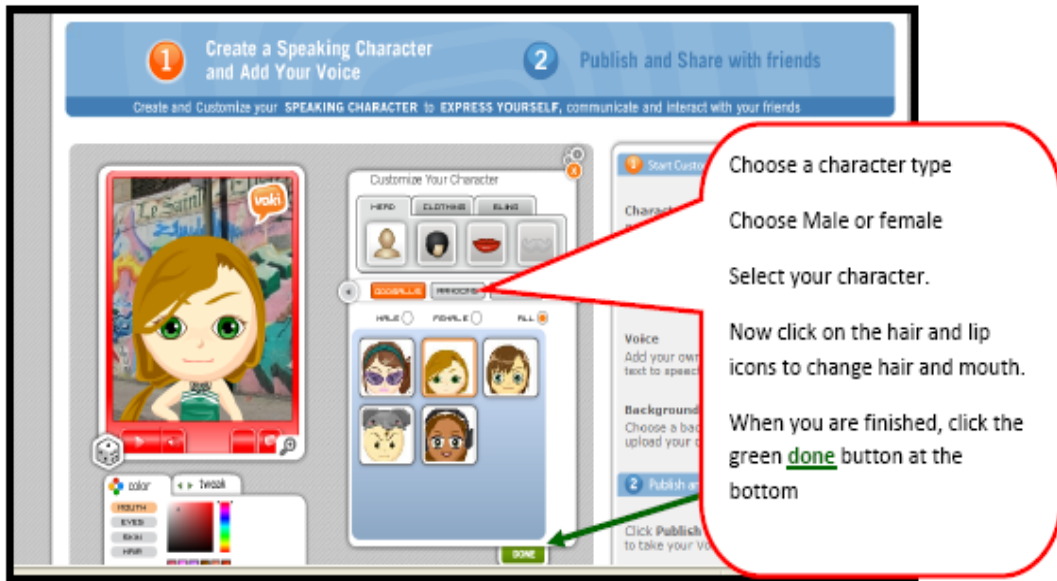
Navigate to <http://www.voki.com>

Note: First, you will need to set up an account if you want to save it and get code to embed your talking avatar in a blog or wiki or send it to someone in an email.

Now you will see a screen like this where it shows you are logged in.



Sharon Thornton- Instructional Technology



Now you are ready to make your Voki Character speak

Important Note:

If students plan to embed these in their Gagle blogs, make sure to tell them not to record personal information.



The screenshot shows the Voki character creation interface. At the top, there are two main steps: 1. Create a Speaking Character and Add Your Voice, and 2. Publish and Share with Friends. Below these steps, there are several sections: 'Customize Your Character' with icons for a person, shirt, and sunglasses; 'Give It A Voice' with icons for a phone, microphone, and MP3 file; 'Background' with a selection of background images; and 'Flaves' with a selection of avatars. Three callout boxes provide instructions: the top one points to the microphone icon and says 'Let's make your character speak. If you want the voice to be your actual voice, click on the microphone and then connect a headset with microphone to your computer.'; the middle one points to the phone icon and says 'You can also type a message and it will read it for you, but it won't have your own voice. Note: You can choose the voice that it will use.'; and the bottom one points to the MP3 icon and says 'You could also upload an MP3 file you already have recorded and exported in Audacity.'

Last option: You can use your phone to record a message for your character to speak.

Click on the green Done button when you are finished adding a message.

You can add backgrounds if you like as well.

Embed your voki message in your blog or wiki.

- How to embed your voki character in your wiki or blog

(Except for Gaggle email- see those directions below)

You can also email this to a friend.

If you are going to embed this to your blog or wiki- **STOP** and open that right now and login. Once you are logged into your site, you can return to these directions:

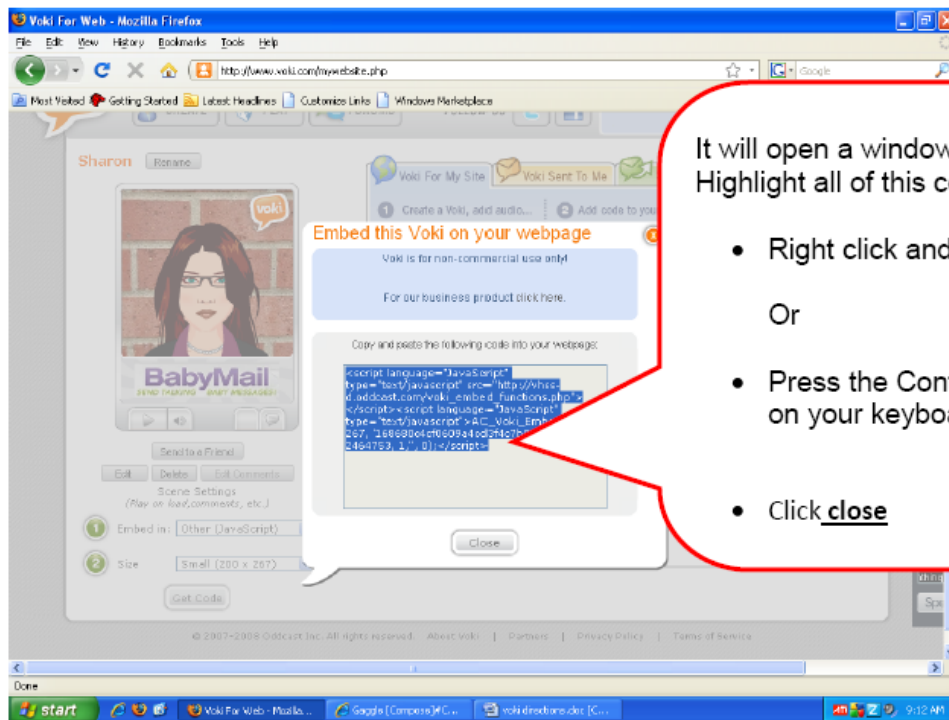
1 Create a Speaking Character and Add Your Voice **2 Publish and Share with friends**

Create and Customize your **SPEAKING CHARACTER** to EXPRESS YOURSELF, communicate and interact with your friends

Click on the Publish link.

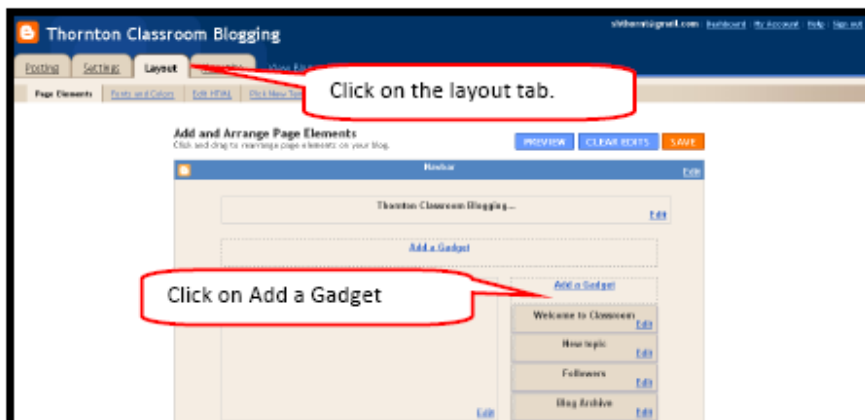
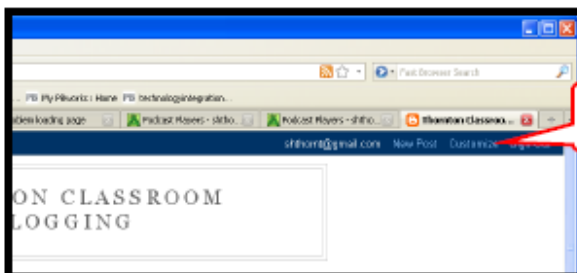
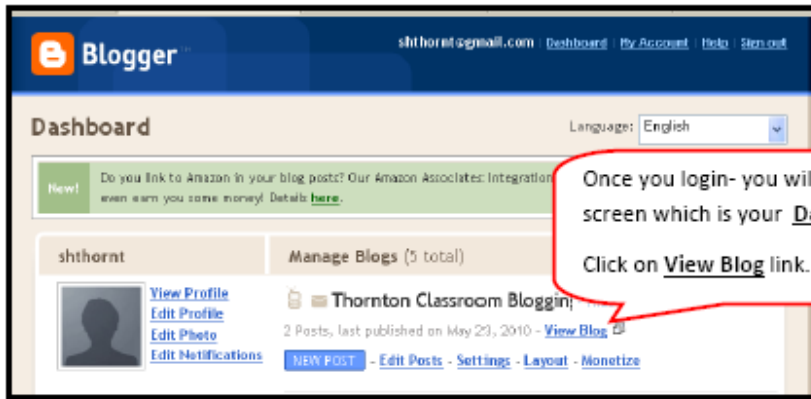
To embed avatar in a blog or wiki:
Click on the drop down arrow next to the Embed in window.

- Choose Other (Java Script)
- Next to size, choose small
- Click on Get Code



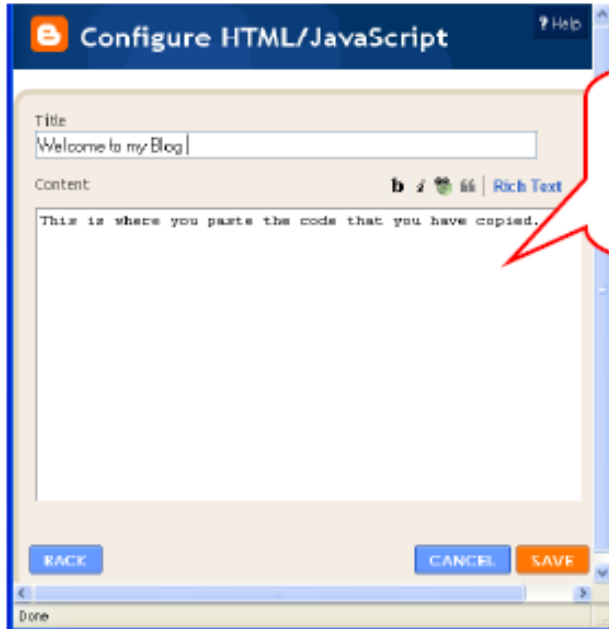
Now switch over to your wiki or blog which should be on the bottom task bar.

For Blogs: Add as a Gadget on the side bar.





In the Add a Gadget window
Scroll down and click on the
plus (+) sign next to
HTML/JavaScript option.

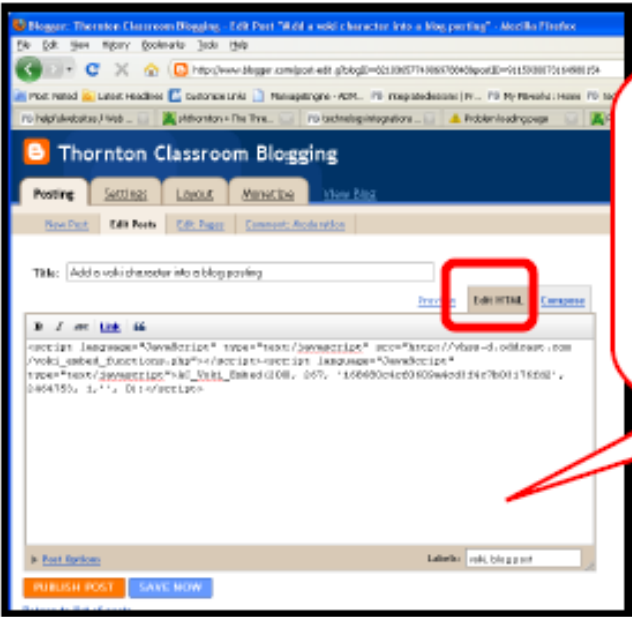


Type a title for your gadget.
Paste the code.
Click Save.

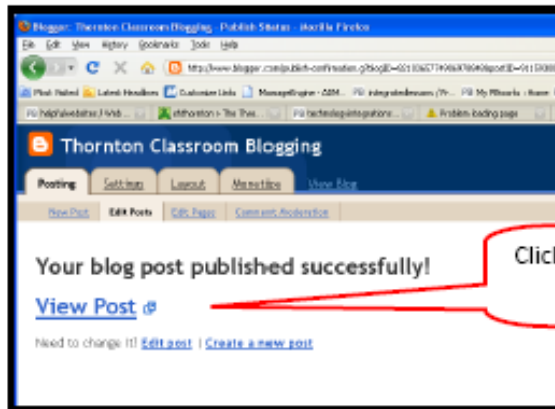
This is what it will look like.



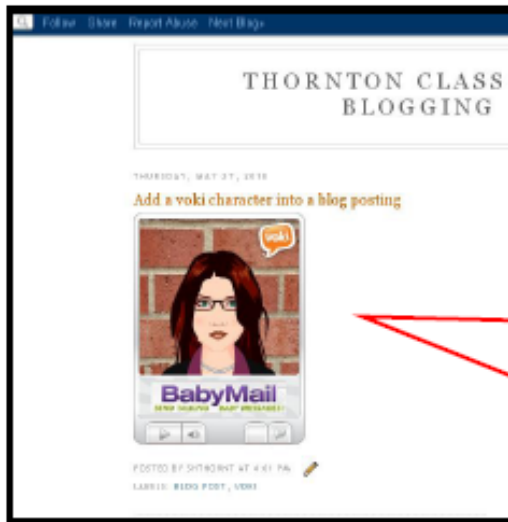
Embed a Voki character into an actual blog post.



Add a new blog post.
Type a title for your voki post.
Click on the Edit HTML tab
Paste the code.
Click Publish Post

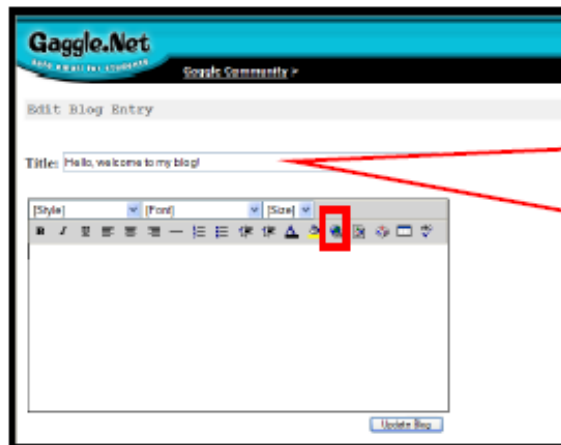


Click on View Post



Here is what your character looks like inside of a blog post.
Note: Each new post will show up at the top so this post will not always be viewable.

- **How Students add a link to their Voki Character into their Gaggle Blog**

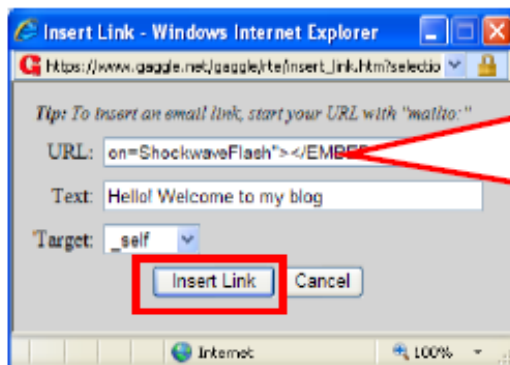


Click to add a new Blog Entry

Type a title for your blog entry (which is going to be your voki.)

Title your entry. Now click on the globe in the toolbar.

Go back to Page 4 to see how to copy your voki's website that is provided once you publish it.

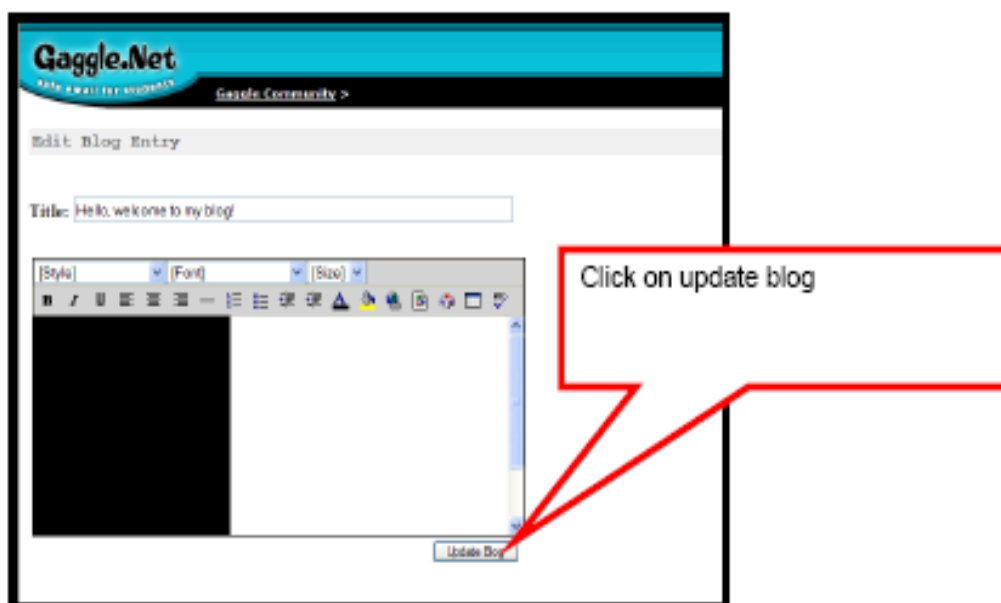


Paste this blog website provided in the url window as shown to the left.

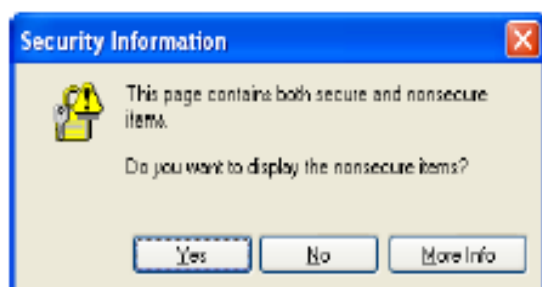
- How?
 - Press the Control and V Keys on your keyboard.

Type a message

Click on the Insert link.



Say Yes at the next window.



APPENDIX (B.5): Lingt Classroom Student's Guide

Start-Up Sheet: Lingt Language



What is it? Lingt Language is a resource that is used for teachers to create online assignments. Teachers can use voice narration, mp3 files, images, text and videos to create assignments. Students can respond orally or in writing.

How might you use it? Teachers can create assignments that students can respond to multiple voice narrations to simulate a conversation, or respond to mp3 files, texts, images or videos that could pertain to culture or unit topics.

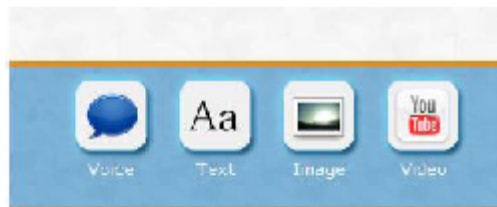
Getting Started: Go to www.lingtlanguage.com to create an account. A class can also be created so that the teacher can upload their assignments to each specific class.

Student Accounts: Students do not need to create a student account as long as the teacher shares all assignments and the students have an email address.

How to use it? Click on "create assignment". There are 6 icons at the top. The 4 on the left are for the teacher to input information and the 2 on the right are for students to respond.

Teacher Icons:

- **Voice Icon:** With the voice icon you can upload mp3 files or create a voice narration. After clicking on the icon a bubble will come up. When there are circles rotating inside of the bubble you can click on the bubble to upload an mp3 file. If you wish to record a narration wait until the circles stop rotating and begin recording. To stop recording click on the bubble. A "x" will appear in the upper right hand corner of the bubble.



- **Text Icon:** Click on the text icon and a text box will appear. You can make the font larger, smaller, bold, or italicized. You can also insert links to a website by highlighting on the text that you would like to be the link. Then click on the link icon that is associated with the text box and then add the desired website that you would like the text to be linked to.
- **Image Icon:** Click on the image icon to upload an image file that is saved to your computer or flashdrive.
- **Video Icon:** Click on the video image and copy & paste the URL of a [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com) video.

Student Response Icons:



- Voice Response Icon: Click on the voice response icon. If you have a voice narration, the voice response icon will go next to it to simulate a conversation. Students will then be able to click on it to record their voice response.

- Written Response Icon: Click on the written response icon. The response box will come up for students to write on.

Tips:

- ✓ All student responses have a picture of girl in it with either a pencil or bubble to show the difference between a written response and voice response.
- ✓ To delete something click on the "x" all the way on the far right side of the uploaded item.
- ✓ Click save on the bottom of each assignment. To assign to a class click assign to class and select the desired class.
- ✓ Each time you use a new computer you must configure the microphone. It is located at the top of the assignment and shows you where to click.
- ✓ You must have Flash 9 or higher



Example:

- <http://lingtlanguage.com/editor/942431942279057>

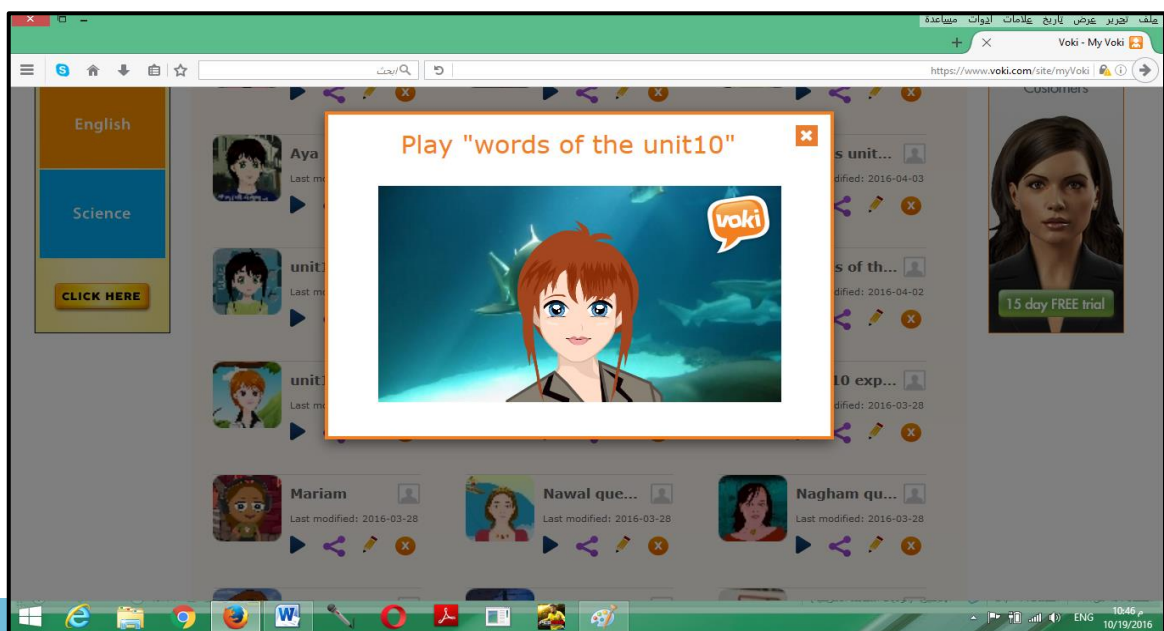
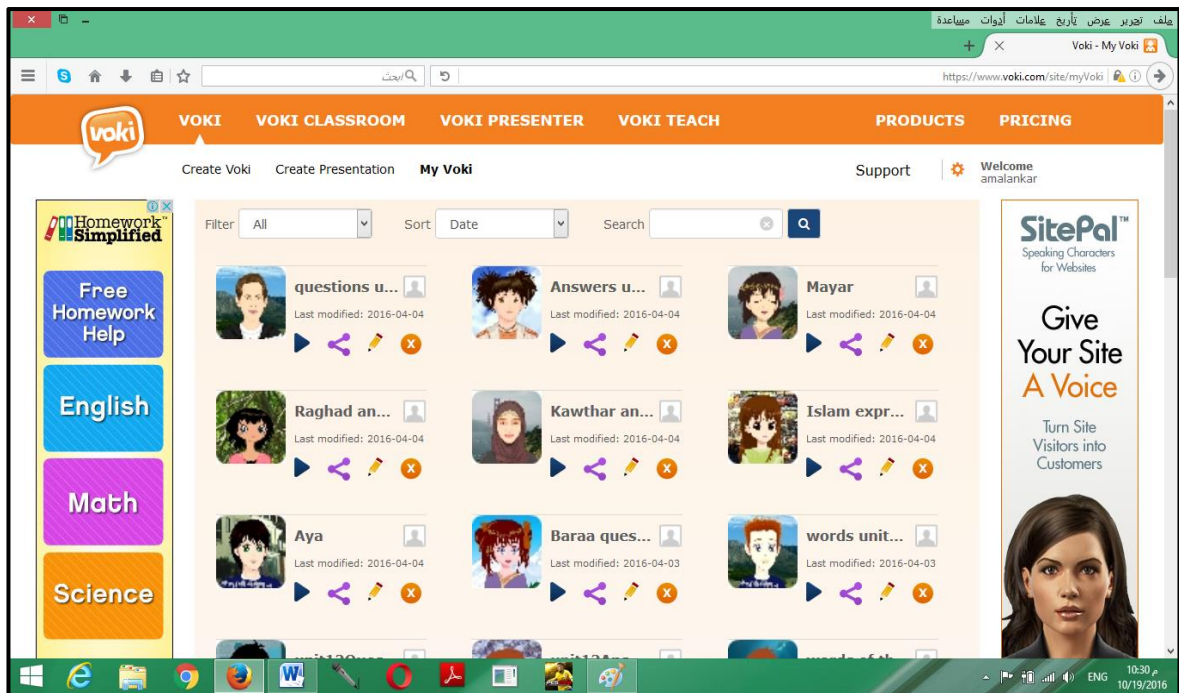
APPENDIX (B.6): The Tools' Activities

Screen shots of VLETs

(a) Webpages showing the Voki activities.

(b) Virtual classroom where an instructor and students communicate and interact with each other through live voice.

A.Voki activities.



B. Lingtlanguage Classroom

The screenshot shows the Lingt Classroom home page in a web browser. The page features the Lingt Classroom logo, navigation links for Home, Share, and Help, and the user's name Mrs. alankar. A yellow banner prompts the user to upgrade their account. Below this, there are buttons for 'create assignment' and 'create class'. The main content area displays 'Grade six / 2' with a list of assignments: 'Articulation Practice (1)', 'Speaking fluency (1)', and 'Answering questions (3)', all due on 30 Apr 16. An 'Archive' section is also visible, indicating no assignments are currently in the archive. The browser's address bar shows 'lingtlanguage.com/home/' and the system tray at the bottom indicates the date as 10/19/2016.

The screenshot shows the 'Create Assignment' editor in the Lingt Classroom. The page title is 'Describing a picture'. The main content area contains three identical pairs of icons: a blue speech bubble on the left and a lightbulb icon inside a speech bubble on the right. The browser's address bar shows 'lingtlanguage.com/editor/2401945979626483'. The system tray at the bottom indicates the date as 12/21/2016.


ملف تحرير عرض تاريخ علامات أدوات مساعدة


...Lingt | Mrs. alankar | Spea

linglanguage.com/viewresponses/2401945979485574/

Responses in order

Speaking fluency






1

Hide responses

lana



Feedback

07:33 م
12/21/2016

ملف تحرير عرض تاريخ علامات أدوات مساعدة

...Lingt | Mrs. alankar | Artic

linglanguage.com/viewresponses/2401945979470071/

Responses in order

Articulation Practice

Say the following words:

Dead Sea - salty - mud - gazelle - jerboa

ever - never - spring - oasis - palm trees


rock - man - skin - desert - anywhere

below sea level.

1

Hide responses

Lana



Feedback

07:35 م
12/21/2016

APPENDIX (C):

Letter Of Permission And Approval

State of Palestine
Ministry of Education & Higher Education
General Directorate of Educational planning



دولة فلسطين
وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي
الإدارة العامة للتخطيط التربوي

الرقم: و.ت.ع. مذكرة داخلية (٤٨١)

التاريخ: 2016/02/09

الموافق: 30 ربيع آخر، 1437 هـ

السيد/ مدير التربية والتعليم - خان يونس المحترم

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،،،

الموضوع / تسهيل مهمة بحث

نهديكم أطيب التحيات، ونتمنى لكم موفور الصحة والعافية، وبخصوص الموضوع أعلاه،

يرجى تسهيل مهمة الباحثة/ أمل إبراهيم سثيمان الأنقر والتي تجري بحثاً بعنوان :

" فاعلية استخدام أدوات البيئة التعليمية الافتراضية على تطوير مهارات المحادثة لدى طلبة

الصف السادس الأساسي في محافظة غزة الجنوبية *

وذلك استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير في كلية التربية الجامعة الإسلامية بغزة تخصص

مناهج وطرق تدريس، في تطبيق أدوات البحث على عينة من طلبة الصف السادس الأساسي بمديريتكم الموقرة،

وذلك حسب الأصول.

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام،،،

أ. رشيد محمد أبو جحجوح
نائب مدير عام التخطيط التربوي



- نسخة:
- السيد/ وكيل وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي
 - السيد/ وكيل الوزارة لمساعد للشؤون العلمية
 - السيد/ وكيل الوزارة لمساعد للشؤون التعليم العالي
 - للكل
- المحترم
المحترم
المحترم

Abou Al-Fatih

Gaza: (08-2641295 - 2641297) Fax:(08-2641292)

غزة: (08-2641295 - 2641297) فاكس: (08-2641292)

Email: info@mohe.ps

APPENDIX (D):

Letter Of University Permission

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



الجامعة الإسلامية - غزة
The Islamic University - Gaza

هاتف داخلي ١١٥٠

مكتب نائب الرئيس للبحث العلمي والدراسات العليا

الرقم.....ج.س.ع/٢٥/٢٠١٦

Date٢٠١٦/٠٢/٠٩ التاريخ

حفظه الله

الأخ الدكتور/ وكيل وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،

الموضوع/ تسهيل مهمة طالبة ماجستير

تهديكم شئون البحث العلمي والدراسات العليا أعطر تحياتها، وترجو من سيادتكم بمساعدة الطالبة/ أمل إبراهيم سليمان الانقر، برقم جامعي ٢٢٠١٢٠٢١٩ المسجلة في برنامج الماجستير بكلية التربية تخصص مناهج وطرق تدريس وذلك بهدف تطبيق أدوات دراستها والحصول على المعلومات التي تساعد في إعدادها والتي بعنوان:

فاعلية استخدام أدوات البيئة التعليمية الافتراضية على تطوير مهارات المحادثة لدى طلبة الصف السادس الأساسي في محافظة غزة الجنوبية
The Effectiveness of Using Virtual Learning Environment Tools on Developing Sixth Graders' English Conversational Skills in Southern Gaza Governorate

والله ولي التوفيق،،،

نائب الرئيس لشئون البحث العلمي والدراسات العليا

أ.د. عبدالرؤوف على المناعمة

صورة إلى:-

اللف ❖

APPENDIX (E):
Referee Committee

The list includes names of the referees who refereed conversational skills, oral and written tests, criteria for the virtual learning tool (1= conversational skills) (2= the oral, written tests) (3= the criteria for the program) (4= the virtual learning tools).

No	Name	Institution	Degree	1	2	3	4
1	Prof. Mohamed Asqool	The Islamic University	PHD				X
2	Dr. Majdy Aqel	The Islamic University	PHD			X	X
3	Dr. Sadeq Firwana	The Islamic University	PHD	X	X	X	
4	Dr. Ibrahim Al Astal	The Islamic University	PHD		X		X
5	Dr.Mahmoud Al Rantisi	The Islamic University	PHD			X	X
6	Dr.Mohamed Abu Shoqeer	The Islamic University	PHD			X	X
7	Dr. Mohammed Atiya	Al-Aqsa University	PHD	X	X		
8	Mr. Hussain Abu El Khair	Ministry of Education	BA	X	X		
9	Mr. Ahmed El Farra	Ministry of Education	BA			X	X
10	Mr. Kamal Abu Shamlah	Ministry of Education	MA	X	X		
11	Mr. Ayman El Aklouk	Ministry of Education	BA			X	X
12	Mrs. Rola El Farra	Ministry of Education	BA	X	X		
13	Mrs. Tahani Rabea	Ministry of Education	MA	X	X		