

The Impact of Contemplative Teaching on Fostering Iraqi (High) School Students Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Speaking Fluency

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Received: April 1, 2023

Accepted: May 4, 2023

Online Published: May 22, 2023

doi: 10.5539/elt.v16n6p82

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v16n6p82>

Abstract

This study investigates how contemplative education and teaching backs up Iraqi EFL learners to become more willing to speak in class. After data analysis and interpretation of the performance of 72 young Iraqi students in two language schools in Iraq, the researchers found how recruited participants responded to contemplative teaching strategies in their speaking class and developed a higher willingness to interact with their teacher and their cohort. Based on the results, those students who received instruction through contemplative teaching did better than students who received the traditional speech program. Moreover, those students who had more communication skills proved to be more fluent than those who had less. Based on the results and the discussion of pre-test and post-test results, the willingness of students to communicate in questionnaires, analysis of student behavior and the classroom behavior of teachers, the researchers concluded that the reflective teaching strategies and techniques used in this study have a positive impact on student's desire to communicate and speak fluent intermediate level language skills.

Keywords: contemplative teaching (CT), transformative education and learning, willingness to communicate (WTC), speaking fluency (SF), intermediate EFL Learners

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Lack of interest, positive attitude, deep thinking, contemplation, and attentive practice are the shortcomings of the traditional approaches practiced in the Iraqi EFL context, which have demotivated students and made them passive learners, especially in speaking, in recent decades. The reason for speech passivity is the neutral or negative attitude that inhibit learners to open the channel of communication in speaking contexts. Students have little space for showing their willingness and enthusiasm to speak and teachers follow a prefabricated and preplanned program which does not trigger speaking eagerness in the mind and heart of the learners. Traditional teaching is teacher-centered, which over-emphasizes the role of the teacher and the students are only listeners. In this approach, the teacher is an authority who fulfills his/her responsibilities while teaching. There is still room for a large number of research to improve the speaking skills, and their results will help us solve the problems and create a better atmosphere for students to improve their readiness. to speak and communicate.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to have theoretical and practical significance in applied linguistics, EFL and ESL instruction in particular. It is important to understand the impact of contemplative teaching (CT) on problem solving exercises and ESL/ESL riddles as well as students' English language skill development. This is a serious attempt to inform Iraqi EFL teachers about CT principles. The pedagogical implications of the study will help Iraqi students overcome or at least reduce the difficulties they face in speaking and communicating in English in and out of the classroom. The study also encourages researchers to apply this approach to other Iraqi students to investigate its positive and/or negative effects. In addition, the results of the study will help EFL instructors to influence the Iraqi

Ministry of Education to consider the importance of introducing information technology and to provide teachers with preliminary and additional training in the field of communication teaching. Reflection is a natural human response that, when brought into academic practice, offers practitioners a new relationship with their ego, friends, and the world. It offers an epistemology based on science, wisdom, and a vision of the interconnectedness of all things. This type of thinking ability can lead to an education that transforms the student. Through contemplative practices, students learn to respect the individuality of others but tolerate the distance that characterizes so much of our lives.

1.3 Review of the Related Literature

Morgan (2015) identifies five main influences that influenced the development of contemplative education: Buddhism and Hindu philosophy; transpersonal psychology; Research on meditation in medicine, sports and business; yoga in the west; and neuroscience and meditation research. Morgan acknowledges that contemplative education is a complex field with many aspects that make it difficult to define. He explores the relationship between contemplative education and transformative education. Wilson (2014) notes that the Mindfulness Research Guide listed 420 mindfulness research articles in 2010 (p. 2). Hart (2008) provided a summary of the related study in his seminal article. This research is focused on how meditation affects the brain. Studies show that contemplation affects the thickness of the cerebral cortex over time. Condensation occurs on the right in the prefrontal cortex of the cerebral hemisphere, which is involved in maintaining attention and regulating memory (Lazar et al., 2005). Hart also mentions a study by Davidson (2004), indicating that meditation affects the part of the brain responsible for empathy. However, more research is needed on the impact of contemplative education in the classroom settings.

A class is like a society and in this small social system, individuals cannot achieve their goals without the help and support of others. Their interdependence and interaction enable them to achieve success. The researchers prove to be one of the supporters of the contemplative teaching movement, considering the phenomenon of the revolution of thinking in the mainstream of language teaching culture worldwide. The reality is that contemplative education not only uses mindfulness in the classroom, but also adapts many mindfulness practices, namely meditation and compassion. Several American and international colleges and universities now offer courses, programs, and even degrees in contemplative education. The University of Virginia Center for Contemplative Science or the University of Michigan are two clear-cut examples. Needles to add that Simon Fraser in Canada has an undergraduate program called Thoughtful Inquiry. The researchers in this study relies on contemplative teaching (CT), which emphasizes a human approach to students, and teachers should emphasize compassion, honesty, and awareness (Byrnes, 2012). Contemplative learning, as noted by Brown (1998), "begins with direct knowledge and experience of oneself" (p. 42).

Cognitive adaptation, involves an adaptive reaction that leads to an emotional response that may be disturbing for both students and teachers. This would create negative stress, and leads to various emotional reactions from anxiety to anger, hopelessness, and helplessness, or in cases where students respond positively, growth and succeed (Heffernan and Bosetti, 2020). In cases where the suppression of negative emotions is allowed to continue, it can help the expressive labor experienced by students and staff, which in no way has a transformative effect in a positive sense, can lead to further stress, anxiety and feelings of helplessness (Rickett and Morris, 2020). There is a direct link between stress and vulnerability, so it is relatively easy to see how virtual classrooms in the higher education sector represent the broadest parameters of survival and how emotional intelligence processes can have a tangible effect in certain learning and teaching contexts (Zubin and Kevät, 1977; Kastberg et al., 2020). The stronger the emotions, the more complex their management process becomes (Ward et al., 2020).

A large number of applied linguists, TESL/FL experts, language instructors, and educators have done different types of research based on the basic needs of the English language learners in order to pave the ground for better learning. In this respect, teaching is considered as an extensive dynamic topic of discussion in EFL/SL contexts for which contemplation and deep thinking are prerequisite. Group dynamics theory involves unity and homogeneity, group established norms, leadership type, and ultimately group size. Now let's deal with each component separately. Group cohesion is essential to the development of group dynamics. Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998) asserted and affirmed that mental rational bonds emanate from conceived resemblance and then related approval. When the members of a group of people identify their common interests, they create closer bonds and as a result they accept each other easier. Such positive feelings play inspiring part in their success and encourage them to keenly partake in team activities (Clément, 1994, Senior, 1997 and Hinger, 2006). Interrelation not only uplifts one's concert and incentive level, but also extends the life of the team.

The concept of community in our culture mostly means a group of people who walk together in the woods and

spend time outside. In churches to classrooms, we preach and teach, argue and argue, argue and declare, advise and advise, and generally act in such a way that everything original and wild is forced to hide. There has been much research on contemplative education in other countries, but there is little evidence of practical research on these approaches in Iraq. Undoubtedly, it is necessary to study the effect of this educational approach on the development of both receptive (reading and listening) and productive (speaking and writing) language skills. In this study, the researchers applied contemplative teaching method to find out how this approach could help Iraqi EFL learners, to improve their desire to communicate and thus improve their speaking fluency and ability.

1.4 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The researchers investigated the following questions and formulated null-hypotheses:

Q1. Does reflective practice teaching have a reliable impact on the development of Iraqi high school students' English language proficiency?

Q2. Does reflective practice teaching have a reliable impact on the development of Iraqi high school students' English proficiency?

H01. Teaching contemplative practice has no reliable effect on the development of Iraqi high school students' English language proficiency.

H02. Teaching contemplative practice has no reliable effect on the development of Iraqi high school students' English language skills.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Seventy-two (72) intermediate 2nd grader Iraqi high school students from two different classes were recruited to partake in this study. To form a uniform sample of partakers, the investigator used the TOEFL PBT with a larger sample of 107 students, and then selected 72 candidates as final nominees for the study. Participants were female Iraqi EFL students between the ages of 14 and 17. They were then divided into experimental and control groups randomly. Students in two groups received two teaching methods. Class A, received contemplative teaching practice, and Class B, as the control group, received conventional speaking program. Their language background was similar, having studied English in Iraqi schools for almost 10 years.

2.2 Instruments and Assessment Tools

The questioner used the following tools:

2.2.1 TOEFL PBT

Before assigning any treatment, researchers availed from the grammar as well as vocabulary sections to ensure that all students were homogeneous.

2.2.2 Pretest English (PET) Speaking Test

The purpose of the Cambridge Pre-Test of English (PET) (including Speaking) was to collect data on both participants' speaking skills (SF) and communication skills. Two expert raters measured the learners' use of vocabulary parts, grammatical variety and precision, communication features and ability to cope with the topics of speaking based on the prefabricated rubrics provided by the ESOL.

2.2.3 WTC Questionnaire

The questionnaire contains a subtest of 20 items and is designed to measure the attitude and reaction of the student to communication skills, especially speaking skills and fluency. WTC consists of three parts written on two pages asking general questions about EFL learners' personal data such as age, gender, and school they attended. They were also asked about their language learning - the number of years they have studied English, the grade of their last school report, and their knowledge of other foreign languages. The two sections that follow this introduction deal with factors that can influence students' willingness to communicate.

2.2.4 Audio Recording System

The participants' presentations were recorded using a voice recorder attached to the classroom as a second instrument to further examine the participants' vocabulary, grammar and ability to engage with the topic.

2.2.5 Study Planning

This study uses a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effects of group dynamics-oriented teaching on the development of Iraqi EFL students' speaking skills (SF) and communicative competence. Using

quasi-experimental. Researchers divided students into two classes of experimental and control to find out how independent variable in this study affects the dependent variable.

2.3 Procedure

The investigators directed this study with applicants recruited by pursuing contemplative practices in target classrooms. In the first stage, as previously described, the researchers recruited students who will participate in the study. Participants were 107 adult Iraqi learners of English at the intermediate level. To determine the speaking skills (SF) and communication readiness of the students, the interviewer took the speaking part of the PET (Preliminary English Test) designed by the Cambridge ESOL department. Those who made similar presentations were selected as the last participants of the study. Before taking the test, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and they were assured that the results would not affect the course results. Researchers encouraged participants to pose questions and if they were exposed to unclear answers asked for more explanation.

2.4 Test Administration (Pre-test)

The Cambridge (speaking only) Mock Preliminary English Test (PET) was given as a preliminary test to students at the beginning of the semester during the regular course. Participants' speeches will be checked for vocabulary, grammar and ability to deal with the topic. This is for comparison purposes at the end of the semester. After examining the speaking skills (SF) and communication skills of the participants, they are divided into two groups, 35 (CONTROL GROUP) 37 (EXPERIMENTAL GROUP) candidates. Control group received conventional lessons and procedure and used as the criterion to measure the performance difference of the experimental group. We exposed experimental group with the treatment of contemplative exercises.

2.5 Contemplative Teaching Classroom (Experiment)

Based on transformative learning theory and contemplative teaching theory, students change in three ways; namely, psychological, belief and behavioral. Researchers used the techniques to help students step into a different world. Using the catalog, the researchers introduced students to the nature of transformative learning. To set the tone, the teacher connected the classroom with music, decorated the classroom with colorful nature posters, and used water and wooden objects to give the students a sense of nature. In the experimental lessons, they showed a sense of redemption and liberation from physics. They also used music and a long speaking voice to make the minds and souls of the students feel present during the performance. The teacher's role is less important because students take responsibility for learning. Their attitude towards self-learning and willingness to speak for themselves, as they stated in class, was very positive and progressive. The speaking topics were based on Fast Forward by Henkel and Guevara 2018. Researchers exposed learners to a number of contemplative exercises.

2.6 Test Administering (Post-test)

At the end of the semester, the participants received an oral follow-up test, i.e. follow-up test of speaking skills.

3. Results

In this study, the researchers used two statistical tests to approve of the differences between the three approaches used to develop EFL students' writing. The first test is a t test to accept the differences between the results of two pre- and post-tests made by different evaluators, and the second test is a univariate analysis because we have more than three independent variables that affect the dependent variable. To complete these two tests, the assumptions of both tests were all met. The results of an independent sample t test, representing a weak effect size, showed that there was no reliable difference between the average scores of the two groups in the TOEFL test before the treatment. Therefore, it can be concluded that they were at the same level of general language proficiency before treatment.

Table 1. Independent-Samples Test; TOEFL by Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.081	.891	.477	105	.677	2.435	3.81	-2.8	4.88
Equal variances not assumed			.477	105	.677	2.514	3.82	-2.8	4.55

عنوان المخطط

سلسلة 1

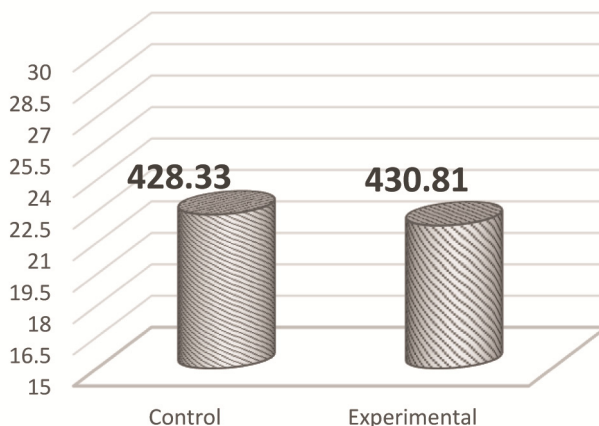


Figure 1. Means on TOEFL by two groups of participants

To prove the null hypothesis, the application of contemplative teaching class compared to traditional EFL class using ANCOVA with two assumptions; i.e., linear relationship between covariate (pre-test) and post-test; and homogeneity of regression angles. The results presented in Table 2 indicated that the relationship between the covariate and the posttest was not linear was rejected.

Table 2. ANCOVA Test of Linear Relationship between Covariate and Dependent Variables

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
(Combined)	45253.276	17	3771.106	10.35	.000
Between Groups	43030.531	1	43030.531	101.22	.000
Linearity	2222.745	11	202.068	.669	.761
Deviation from Linearity					
Within Groups	15702.663	105	301.974		
Total	60955.938	64			

Researchers devised regression slope analysis and they found no reliable relationship between the variables. As shown in Table 3; $F(1, 106) = 1.12, p = .271, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .032$ shows low effect-size); consequently, the homogeneity is low.

Table 3. Between Subjects effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	66.328	1	66.328	.44	.337	.016
Pre-WTC	41060.988	72	41060.988	201.13	.000	.696
Group * Pre-WTC	230.912	1	230.912	1.12	.271	.042
Error	10493.855	0	172.030			
Total	884625.000	72				

The postulation of equality of variances was also met ($F(1, 63) = .660, p = .502$) (Table 4) below.

Table 4. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.660	1	105	.502

As represented in Table 5, the mean of EXP GR (M = 118.27, SE = 2.32) was higher than the mean of CON GR (M = 97.18, SE = 2.29) during the communication readiness post-test (WTC). Results of a one-way ANCOVA (F (1, 105) = 65.62, p = .000, partial η² = .512, high effect size) indicated that the EXP significantly outperformed CON in posttest. Thus, the first null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 5. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects; Post-test of willingness to communicate

Source	Type III Squares	Sum of df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta
Pre-WTC	39831.2	1	39831.2	229.11	.000	.66	
Group	6800.6	1	6800.6	79.22	.000	.48	
Error	11724.7	0	172.980				
Total	863105.0	72					



Figure 2. Means on post-test of willingness to communicate by groups

To reject the second H₀, the researchers used a one-way ANCOVA to compare the means of the EXP and CON on the posttest of speech fluency (SA), while controlling for possible effects of the pretest. Table 6 shows (F (1, 105) = 137.22, p = 0.000) indicated that the statistical assumption that the relationship between the SF covariate and the posttest was not linear was rejected. In other words; there was a linear relationship between SF pretest and posttest.

Table 6. ANCOVA Test of Linear Relationship between Pretest and Post-test of Speaking Fluency

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)	1711.11	18	117.11	9.11	.000
	Linearity	1516.05	1	1516.22	137.22	.000
	Deviation from Linearity	189.45	17	14.17	1.21	.355
Within Groups		510.77	87	11.18		
Total		2410.12	72			

As indicated by F ($F(1, 107) = 10.45, p = 0.000$) (Table 7) the homogeneity is rejected. There was no fear of an assumption violation since the index is not large enough; i.e. $33/32=1.02$, was less than 1.5.

Table 7. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

F	df1	df2	Sig.
10.45	1	107	.000

As shown in Figure 3, the mean of the experimental group ($M = 24.92, SE = 0.28$) was higher than that of the control group ($M = 19.13, SE = 0.27$) on the SF posttest after controlling for the potential effect.

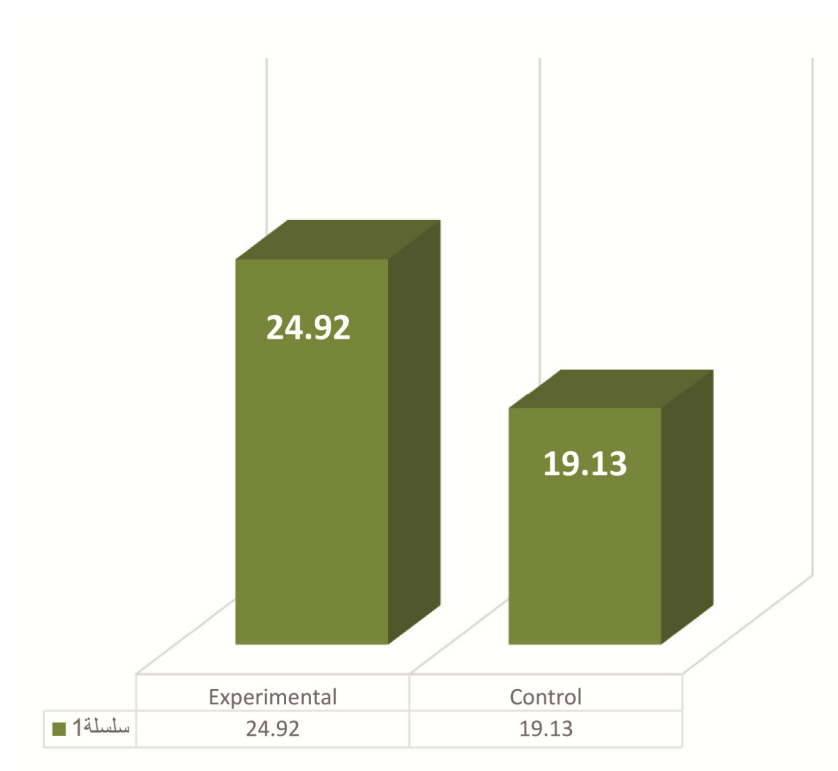


Figure 3. Means on post-test of Speaking Fluency by groups by pretest

4. Discussion

The outcomes of this study show a reliable transformation in participants' willingness to communicate and consequently their speaking skills between the two groups of EFL students after engaging in classroom reflections. Based on the results obtained, those students who received instruction through contemplative teaching did better than students who received the traditional speech program. Moreover, those students who had more communication skills proved to be more fluent than those who had less.

Researches succeeded in proving that contemplative learning and teaching lead to intangible, mental and interactive changes in participants' personality, which in sequence inspires them to talk. Researchers also found reliable difference between the average scores of the groups in the post-test on willingness to communicate and speaking skills especially fluency. By interpreting the model of WTC and analysis of participant's performance, researchers concluded that the contemplative teaching activities and practices play positive role in improving learner's fluency in intermediate EFL level.

The students performed well and actively and successfully used the knowledge gained from the lesson and also from previous studies in constructive learning. Asking participants' opinion, researchers figured out that they all had positive attitude towards the practice of contemplative teaching activities. This is supported by the numerical values obtained in data analysis signifying the fact that they availed from the haven created by researchers via the practice of contemplative teaching. Researchers also showed that, via factor analysis, that the instrumentation was dependable. By practicing contemplative teaching, the researchers figured out such a method can reliably affect

Iraqi EFL intermediate learners, to become more expansive and outgoing who have avid desire to interact with their cohort and peer.

5. Conclusion and Findings

The investigator directed this research project mainly to answer the question whether reflective teaching would help Iraqi EFL students to develop and promote speaking skills and communicative desire in their L2 learning. Analyzing the results obtained with these instruments, the researchers found that contemplative teaching combined with regular speaking programs would actually have a significant impact on Iraqi EFL learners' L2 ability and communicative readiness. In relation to its effect on oral fluency, the results were interpreted to indicate that reflective teaching (CT) would improve Iraqi EFL learner' outlooks, leading to a better choice to interact with their peers. In these changes, students will discover that they are a small part of a whole system, i.e. reflective learning would not pose as much of a threat as any new language learning method, as it always did. for both EFL and ESL students. Participants in this study were more open to communication and less silent when they acted as group members in a reflective curriculum because they were introduced to a new world of reflection, retrospection and introspection. whatever they do in their real lives, not just in classrooms.

As the research findings indicate, contemplative teaching helped Iraqi EFL students reach this level of development, making them stronger EFL students who found opportunities for more reflection, introspection, retrospective thinking, and their metacognitive strategies. Therefore, regarding its effect on EFL speaking fluency, it can be concluded that CT improved communicative readiness and initiated speaking in the EXP GR, who found themselves free from routine stress and inhibition. In this study, CT also helped participants in the EXP GR to perform considerably better than participants in the CON GR on the English language proficiency post-test. In addition, the researchers assumed that along with the psychological and behavioral changes resulting from CT, which led to readiness, participants in EXP GR gauged their speaking. This revision may have led to better outcomes in the post-test than participants who were taught using a conventional L2 teaching method. Lastly, researchers recognized that practicing contemplative teaching in the classroom would suffer due to the limitations of traditional teaching practices in Iraq.

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