Investigation Of The Challenges Encountered By Iraqi Efl Preparatory Students In Using The Four English Language Skills

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Article Info	Abstract
	The present study is apragmatic attempt for investigating the challengesencountered by Iraqi sixth preparatory students in using the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). The reason behind choosing sixth preparatory students as a sample of the study is that they are the most advanced students among the preparatory stages. Generally, Iraqi sixth preparatory students suffer a great deal from English language curricula and that is negatively reflected throughout their examinations scores. This negative implication is related to the fact that their linguistic competence is very poor at reading, writing, speaking and listening levels on which the English textbook for the preparatory stages is based. The present study aims at investigating the difficulties that Iraqi sixth preparatory students may face in writing compositions, reading passages, speaking and pronouncing certain problematic vocabularies, and listening to some audio conversations. The research also aims at suggesting some possible solutions to the students in learning the four language skills mentioned. The study is hoped to be of special importance to the Iraqi sixth preparatory stage students for improving their language skills in term of reading, writing, speaking and listening since their curricula is based on these four language-teaching skills. Moreover, the study is pedagogically hoped to be of special importance to the textbook and curricula designers to include language materials that fit the level of the learners and lead to linguistic progress in term of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The study is based on a diagnostic test to measure the difficulties of the learners at the four language skills learning. This diagnostic test is essentially classified into productive and recognitive parts. The productive part is designed to measure the students' ability in writing short requested compositions, reading certain given passages from their Student Textbook, and responding orally to certain short given (written) conversations. Whereas the recognitive part is designed to measure the students' ability in comprehending short read passages, i.e., the students are requested to tick the correct options, complete certain required options, or to choose the proper choice that best matches the item(s) employed in the passage. The researchers have relied on statistical methods for analyzing the study sample responses for accurate results and a proper hypotheses testing. The research ends up with some important recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

1. Introduction

It is worth mentioning that preparing a lesson by a teacher prior to giving a lecture is an effective and important method to achieve a successful academic or scientific value. Concerning English language teaching, teachers are expected to identify the gaps or the areas of weakness among the learners so that they can overcome these gaps by preparing flexible materials (lessons) that could fit their competence when giving the lecture. These gaps might mark the students' ability of reading, writing, speaking, and/or listening. Hence, the present paper comes as an attempt to shed light on the most common difficulties, which may encounter the Iraqi sixth preparatory students in learning English language in terms of language skills, and to propose a set of recommendations to the teachers of English language when giving lectures for a better academic performance.

Research Methodology
Problem of the Study
Most of the Iraqi sixth preparatory school students suffer a great deal from learning the English language due to their lack of one or more of language learning skills, which cripple their ability to acquire successful learning.

Some of the reasons behind Iraqi students' difficulties in learning English language might be attributed to difference in the mother tongue in general, or due to the unplanned continuous change in the English curricula, which prevents the students from tracking and learning some English aspects. Based on what has been just mentioned, the problem of the study is based on finding the answer to the following questions:

1. What is the extent of difficulties the Iraqi sixth preparatory students have in learning the English language?
2. What is the most difficult language learning skill the students suffer from when learning the English language?
3. What is the most optimal solution suggested to overcome the potential difficulties which may encounter most of Iraqi sixth preparatory students in learning the English language?

Significance of the Study

The present research is hoped to be of a special significance to Iraqi EFL learners at sixth preparatory grades, as well as to the teachers of English language throughout highlighting the most common difficulties the learners may encounter in learning the target language and, thus, setting the most proper remedies to the difficulties found. Moreover, the study is hoped to be of significance to curricula designers to employ proper syllabuses that can help in improving the learning level of the Iraqi EFL learners at sixth preparatory grades.

Hypotheses of the Study

The present study is based on the following hypotheses:

1. Most of Iraqi EFL sixth preparatory students' listening skills are better than their reading ones.
2. Most of Iraqi EFL sixth preparatory students' writing skills are better than their speaking ones.

Objectives of the Study

The current research aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. Investigating the most common difficulties that Iraqi EFL preparatory students may encounter at their sixth stages in learning English language.
2. Suggesting appropriate solutions that might help resolve the challenges found.

Limits of the Study

Basically, the present research is limited to:

1. Analyzing the four language learning skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
2. It is also limited to Iraqi EFL learners at sixth preparatory stages selected from two different preparatory schools at Diwaniyah province: Al-Zaytoon Preparatory School and Ghamas Preparatory School for Boys. The reason behind choosing boys only is that the researchers attempted to narrow the scope of the study by avoiding the gender differences factor.

Language Skills

Due to the evolution of life, its complexity, and the absence of the majority of generations on the originality of the language, the researchers' perception of teaching and learning of language has developed. Therefore, researchers dedicate a considerable effort by highlighting the nature of language, its significance in life, and the need of the learner to the language. Because language is a means of communication, and communication is an interactive process between two parties in order to achieve partnership and friction, the study of linguistic skills emerged to achieve the hopes of the human desire. According to Nell (1988), skill means the ability to perform the organized and integrated performance of complex motor work, accurately and easily, while adapting to the changing conditions surrounding the work. It is the ease, speed and accuracy in the performance of work after learning with an economy of effort.

To communicate in about language abilities, we should initially pass on the hypothesis of correspondence and its fundamental components: the sender, the recipient, the message, the methods, and so forth. The methods is the language, its words, and structures bearing the significance, which is the objective in such manner, since correspondence is just between the sender and the beneficiary, as the principle parties. The sender is just a speaker or an essayist, and the beneficiary (recipient) is just an audience or peruser. In this way, the language comprises of four aptitudes: tuning in and talking when discourse is immediate, and perusing and composing (Krashen, 1993, p. 85).

In order to become a competent interactant, one needs to be proficient in each of the four language skills. These four learner skills provide opportunities to create contexts in which language can be used to exchange real information, evidence of their ability to demonstrate learning and, most importantly, trust. Listening and reading are skills received because learners do not need to produce language, they receive and understand it. These skills are sometimes known as 'negative skills' (Graff, 1982, p.82). Productive skills are to speak and write because learners apply these skills in need of language production. These two latter skills can be termed as 'active skills'. These features are taken into a consideration by the researchers in formulating the practical part of the study to measure the weaknesses and strengths of the study sample in term of learning English language(Al Khanaifsawy, 2017).

Listening Skill

It is worth mentioning that the skill of listening is a receptive language skill that most of learners find very difficult in language learning, because they often feel under unnecessary pressure to understand every word. The listener has to get oriented to the listening portion and be all ears and hasto be attentive.

The skill of listening is the first language skill that should be given great attention, as its importance lies in the fact that the human being is more a listener in the different circumstances of his life than he is a speaker. In addition, language begins with hearingprimarily. Hopper (2005) points out that the child hears first and speaks second, and then he reads and writes at the same time. It is also noticeable that man hears and speaks more than he reads and writes. Therefore, the neglect of listening skills leads to lack of mastery of good speech and good reading.

Throughout the daily participations, the researchers have noticed that their students have difficulty in responding to their teachers due to their incomplete perception to what has been posed. Moreover, throughout playing some audio types in classroom, the students are expected to attentively listen to the native speakers of English when reading certain passages. Then, they are asked to kindly state what they have grasped from the speaker in their mother tongue. Unfortunately, they are unable to do so due to their poor listening skill, which needs improvement, and hence this research comes to fill the gap.

Reading Skill

Reading skill refers to the capacity to comprehend composed content. It is fitting to build up this ability at early time of tutoring. At the point when understudies grasp or comprehend composed content, and join their comprehension with earlier information, they can play out the accompanying three perusing understanding abilities. (Fawson and., 1999, p. 22):

1. Literal comprehension: identifying simple facts presented in written text.
2. Evaluative comprehension: Making judgments about the written text's content.
3. Inferential comprehension: Connecting the text to other written passages and situations.

The improvement of these reading comprehension skills is vital to EFL learners language development and a sheer volume of studies has demonstrated a link between competency in reading and overall attainment in school (literacy attainment and other outcomes). According to a program for International Student Assessment (PISA), 'reading for pleasure is more important for children's educational success than their family's socioeconomic status.' (OECD, 2002). Besides, there are some other key benefits of engaging EFL learners in reading from the early age. This is so because the development of reading is a key to future success both in school and in life. By supporting EFL learners to read in their leisure time at every age, parents can help to ensure that the learners are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in later life (Scribner and Coles, 1981, p.121-122).

Speaking Skill

Language is a means for communication by which we transmit our thoughts, feelings with other interactants using varying ways that could be linguistic (spoken or written mediums) or paralinguistic (including gestures and facial expressions).In tem of language levels, we should take into account that the level of language input (listening) must be higher than the level of language production (speaking or writing). In English speaking communities, elocution and recitation are main sources to master the sounds, rhythms, and intonation of the English language through simple reproduction in primary schools. The manifestations of the language in games and pair work activities are encouraging source to learn to speak the language. This assists the learners to begin to use the language by presenting them with a certain amount of choice, albeit within a controlled situation. This skill could be improved by understanding para-linguistic attributes such as voice quality, volume and tone, voice modulation, articulation, pronunciation etc. This could also be further elevated with the help of debates and discussions. In order to achieve a good expression (speaking skill improvement) by the learner, the following issues should be considered (Guthrie andWigfield, 2000, p. 36):

1. The learner must have the technicality and the means of speech through the existing conditions that encourage them to speak in the English language under the supervision and follow-up teacher to be attentive to them with interest to correct and improve their mistakes. The appropriate conditions are the establishment of activities in the English language such as plays and other activities that require the involvement of the learners.
2. The subject to be taught for improving the EFL learners' speaking skills should be relevant to their life, expressing their issues, and arousing their interest and desires, excited learners to express and express opinion.

Writing Skill

Writing provides a learner with physical evidence of his achievements with which he can measure his improvement. Writing helps to consolidate the learner's grasp of vocabulary and structure, and complements the other language skills. Moreover, it helps to understand the text and write compositions. It can foster the learner's ability to summarize and to use the language freely. To write flawless language, one should excel in the writing

skills with the help of various methods. Importance should be given to composition and creative writing. One should also focus on coherence and cohesiveness when it comes to writing a language. The skill of writing comes late in the order among the rest of the skills. It comes after the skill of reading, because it is linked to it. There are three crucial linguistic elements that should be carefully considered in writing skills: grammar, punctuation, and spelling (Powling and Pullman, 2004, p.42). These elements are the key in written communication are essential to understanding the text. Errors are likely to lead the recipients to form a negative impression. These three factors should be given a heavy due by English teachers of English, and the Iraqi EFL learners of the sixth preparatory grades need to employ them in their writings, mainly in their writing compositions as most of the learners highly rely on composition writings in their tests to obtain some marks required. The researchers took into account these three basic elements in analyzing the results in the present research practical part.

Practical Analysis

Methodology

The part presents the practical side of the present study. For the purpose of achieving the objectives of the study and verifying its hypotheses, a test has been designed. The present part also aims at describing the whole aspects of the test, namely: the sample of the study, the test objectives, selection of the test items, test validity, the pilot test, the main test, test reliability, and scoring scheme. Additionally, this part develops to analyze the test results to locate areas of difficulties Iraqi EFL preparatory sixth stage learners face in learning English. This objective can be achieved by surveying the testees' performance on each question, implementing statistical procedures to ensure the scientific bases of these results, analyzing subjects' responses for each item to specify its levels of difficulty and discrimination, and to show the frequencies of the study sample's responses concerning the four language learning environment. Finally, the research ends up with testing the validity of the study hypotheses stated in the theoretical part.

Population of the Study

It is worth mentioning that the sample of the study is composed of 100 Iraqi EFL preparatory students chosen randomly from different sections (50 students per a preparatory school involved) .These students are affiliated to two different schools from DiwaniyahprovinceThe reason behind choosing sixth stage is related to the assumption that they are more advanced students compared to the rest of the stages, and they are more exposed to the language four schools to be tested in their English curriculum. The age of the students is ranged between (18) to (19) years. All the students share the same social, economic, and cultural levels as the variation of these levels among the students may affect the test results.

Test Description

The test of the present research is composed of two mainparts (**Part I and Part II**) (See Appendix 1).Part (I)is designed to measure the students' skill of listening at the productive level.Whereas, Part (II) is composed of three sections: **A, B**, and **C**. It aims to measure the students' skills of reading, writing, and listening.

Test Objectives

A language test is a means of assessing the students' performance through "the elicitation of certain behaviour from which one can make inferences about certain characteristics of an individual" (Bachman and Palmer 1996, p.20).The test adopted here is a diagnostic one which is intended to show how Iraqi EFL preparatory sixth stage students can deal with the four language skills in attempt to master the English language. Moreover, the test tries to specify the obstacles that the learners encounter and to specify their sources of errors to suggest remedial recommendations depending on the results of the test.

Selection of the Test Items

Concerning the elicitation and the inclusion of the test items, they are all authentic and taken from Student Book and Activity Book of English for Iraq. The items have been chosen in a way to cover all the language four levels (writing, reading, speaking, and listening).

As for 'writing' test, the researchers have chosen a well-known paragraph-writing lesson that the students are very familiar with taken from their Activity Book. They were requested to write about '**Cigarette advertising should be illegal'**. This part of productive test aims at measuring the main difficulties the study sample may encounter with the choice of their own words in appropriate context, the structure of the sentences used, spelling, and punctuation as well.

For 'reading" test, the researchers have chosen some paragraphs taken from textbook passages in the Student'sBook. The study sample issupposed to read in a clear voice for measuring their level of pronunciation (stress, intonation, and pronunciation).

The "speaking' test is designed in a way to measure the difficulties of the study sample verbally. They students were requested to take turns in the test with their colleagues and/or sometimes with the researchers to measure their spoken level and mark up the most prominent defects they have while speaking, such as pronunciation, their vocabulary utilization.

Concerning 'listening' skill measurement, the researchers have chosen short oral passages that the study sample were requested to listen carefully and do as required by following various selection methods ,e.g., choosing the

correct options, ticking the proper answer, and/or compete the blank with suitable answer that fit the context of the short passage given.

It is worth mentioning that the whole test has been submitted to a number of teachers with MA and PhD degrees as jury members to decide the appropriateness and the difficulty level of the items chosen. The test items were moderate in difficulty level. Some of the test items have been modified, whereas some others have been removed due to their difficulty, and thus might not reflect the credibility of the results reached.A good test is designed in a way that it should not include an item that is very easy for all the subjects to answer or very difficult that none of them can answer. Hence, the very easy/difficult item(s) should be excluded and to select the items of average difficulty should be selected (Lzard 2005, p.25).

Test Validity

Heaton (1988, p.162) points out that 'test validity' indicates the degree to which the test actually measures what is supposed to measure, and nothing else. Moreover, test validity is the extent to which inferences, conclusions, and decisions made based on test scores are appropriate and meaningful (ibid).Test validity is of three sorts: **content validity**, **face validity, and construction validity**. Content validity is a non-statistical type of validity, which involves "the systematic examination of the test content to determine whether it is a representative sample of the behaviour domain to be measured" (Crocker and Algina, 1986, p.114). It depends on a theoretical basis for assuming if a test is assessing all domain of a criterion.

A test has content validity built into it by careful selection of which items to include. Items are chosen so that they can comply with the test specification, which is drawn up through a thorough examination of the subject domain (ibid). To ensure content validity, the test in this study is carefully constructed to give chance for covering up the four language skills of language learning. Validity is also ensured by the fact that the sample are familiar with the items selected or the questions submitted(Blundell et al 1996). For example, the population of the study are familiar with conducting tests concerning the four language skills as they used to it almost every month since their intermediate stages.

The Pilot Study

The significance of the pilot test is that it reveals the necessary time required for the main test (Comrie, 1976). Furthermore, it discloses the effects in individual items, which are not noticed when writing the test .In order to determine the effectiveness of the data collecting techniques, the appropriateness of the situations, and exploring any problems that may interfere with the proper administration of the data collecting tool, a pilot test was conducted in April 2019 involving twenty sixth preparatory stage students selected randomly from two different preparatory schools located at two different areas of Diwaniyah. These study sample members are excluded from the main test. The results of this study have been found to confirm the effectiveness of the techniques and the appropriateness of the test items. In addition, it shows that the time limit of sixty minutes is sufficient to allow all the students to finish the task. Moreover, the results of this study reveal the importance of explaining some vocabularies in Arabic, which the subjects may not be familiar with to ensure satisfactory performance in the main test during its final administration. All the results obtained from the pilot test have been incorporated into the final version of the test.

Administration of the Main Test

The main test was carried out on 24th – 25th of February for the academic year 2018-2019. The main test was divided into two sittings. The study sample were given an hour time to answer written test concerning 'writing paragraph' and 'Reading short passages selected'. Moreover, the sample of the study were given another hour for the other part of the test, which includes 'Speaking in turns with the peers' and the 'Listening comprehension test'. In addition, the sample were assured that the aim behind the test is for research purposes and have nothing to do with their marks.

Before starting to carry out the task, the subjects were kindly requested to respond seriously to all the parts of the test. Thesamplewas given certain instructions on how to answer the questions in English and Arabic, as recommended by Olshtain and Cohen (1983, p.32) who believe that the respondents' native language should be used to make them fully understand what they are required to do. Moreover, Olshtain and Cohen believe that giving instructions in the target language may bias the subjects towards using certain expressions, the matter that surely affects the results of the study. Additionally, the testees were encouraged not to hesitate about asking for any clarification or explanation they might need during their performance. In order to save time and effort, they were asked to write their responses on the papers of the test. To avoid any embarrassment, they were asked not to mention their names on the test sheet. The researchers have done the process of marking the whole test following the score scheme presented in the upcoming section.

Scoring Scheme

An important means of achieving objectivity and reliability is through the manipulation of a definite scoring schemeEbel (1972). Thus, each test paper is scored out of 100. Scores are equally distributed over the test parts (**Part I and Part II**: sections **A,B**, and **C**). Twenty five are assignedto each section and zero mark for the incorrect one and to any part or item that are left blank because that leaves an impression that the student was not successful or able to manage the test part or item(s). **Part I** (Listening comprehension test) was given 25

marks. Five marks for each question.Moreover, zero mark was assigned to the incorrect response or the blank left ones.Whereas, Part II was given 75 scores. Each section was assigned 25 scores and they that score was distributed on the section test items accordingly. The following table illustrates the scoring scheme adopted for the test:

Table 1: Distribution of the Test Scores

No. of Question	Level Targeted	No. of Items	Scores	Rate %
Part I (Listening Skill Measurement)	Recognitive	5	25	25
Part II / Section A (Reading Skill Measurement)	Productive	1	25	25
Part II / Section B (Writing Skill Measurement)	Productive	1	25	25
Part II / Section C (Speaking Skill measurement)	Productive	1	25	25
Total			100	100

Results Analysis
Listening Skill Analysis

After analyzing the oral comprehension test for measuring the 'listening skill' at the recognitive level, it has been found that (65) Iraqi EFL preparatory stages learners passedthe test,whereasonly 35 members failed to attain the pass score in the oral listening comprehension test. The reason behind that failureis actually related to the poor listening competence the students have, whichmight be attributed to the lack of English laboratories in the school for improving the students listening level. Table (2) below illustrates the sample's listening recognitive skill performance with percentages:

Table 2: Students' Listening Skill Performance

Sample Total No.	100	Percentage
Succeeded Sample No.	65	65%
Failed Sample No.	35	35%
Sample's total actual responses	495	99%
No. of Correct Responses	305	61%
No. of incorrect Responses	190	38%
No. of blank items	5	1%

Clearly, table (2) above illustrates that the total number of the students involved in the oral comprehension test is (100), that 65 students have passed the test with a percentage of 65% out of the overall the subjects' total number. Moreover, it shows that 35 students have failed to attain the pass score with a percentage of 35% out of the total participants. The number of the actual responses registered on the test paper was 495, which composes a percentage of 99% out of the overall actual responses. Among the actual responses are 305 correct ones, which compose a percentage of 61% among the total actual responses. Furthermore, the table shows that the number of the incorrect responses reached 190, which in return compose 38% among the overall actual responses. Finally, only five responses were left blank that the researchers have consideredincorrect, because they give the impression that the students were unable to manage the test items. These five responsesactually reached to 5% among the overall students' actual responses.

Reading Skill Analysis

As far as the reading skill test (productivelevel) is concerned, the study sample were given a short piece of passage that they are all familiar with (see Appendix 2).The passage ,which talks about *Ziad Tariq and the Shark*, was taken from the Student's Book in their first academic course. This means that the students were exposed to the passage a lot and were expected to know that passage very well. The students were requested to read the passage with a clear voice, considering grammar, punctuation, and phonological functions such as intonation and stress when necessary.

After collecting the data for analysis, the researchers have found that the majority of students have failed to conduct a proper reading test.Most of the study sample members were unable to pronounce many words properly, ignore the functions of punctuation, and neglect the rules of grammar in the passage

Concerning the phonological aspect , most of the students confused the /p/ with /b/ in words like 'push', 'reporters', 'pray' , and ' hospital'. This is failure is attributed to their lack of reading practices that should be

given a heavy due by the students and the teachers.Moreover, the students' negligence to reading skill might be related to the fact that the final ministerial test do not activate or include reading test.Thus, the students resort to the language skills that grant him/her some success.

Regarding the phonological level, the students pronouncecertain sounds that they should be silent in some words such as (calm) which were pronounced as /kalm/ instead of / ka:m/ , and know /kno/ instead of /no/. The researchers have also noticed that the students read the letter (e) at the end of some words that should be phonologically silent. Forexample, they pronounced the word (came) as /keime/.As far as the tone role is concerned, the researchers have found that none of the students had read the passage considering the role of the intonation or/and stress. They ignored the fact that stress of intonation add some function or prominence to the words pronounced. For instance, stressing the pronunciation of a word could be either given that word a specific importance in the sentence meaning as a whole, and placing stress can also change the word part of speech from a verb to noun and vice versa.

Concerning the punctuation considerations, the sample of the study failed to consider the punctuations while reading. For instance, the readers are supposed to fully stop when they recognize '.' .Therefore, the '.' is called 'full stop'. Instead of fully stopping in certain sentences, the students right passed to the next sentence. This gives an impression that the students have a competence deficiency concerning the punctuation functions.

The study sample were also noticed committing grammatical issueswhile reading the passage. For example, they pronounce certain words that end with (-ed), like (pushed) as /id/. Table no. (3) below best demonstrates the study samples' productive level in reading skill test with a percentage:

Table No. (3) Students' Reading Skill Performance

Sample Total No.		100	Percentage
Succeeded Sample No.		55	55%
Failed Sample No.		45	45%
Total Sample No. with Phonological Issues	Pronunciation	78	78%
	Intonation		
	Stress		
Punctuation Issues	72		72%
Grammatical Issues	61		61%

Obviously, Table (3) illustrates that the overall study sample members involved in the study are 100.The number of the succeeded students is (55) with a percentage of (55%) among the overall study sample participated in the test.Whereas, (44) study sample members failed in the test which compose (44%) out of the overall study informants.Furthermore, the table demonstrates the students' difficulties encountered while reading the passage. These difficulties were phonological (pronunciation, intonation, and stress) with a percentage of (78%) out of the total responses of the study sample. It actually forms the largest difficulty uncounted by the study sample. As far as the punctuation difficulties are concerned, the researchers have registered 72 violations like full stop or/and colon. These violations form 72% out of the overall students' performance concerning reading skill measurement. Last but not least, the study sample faced difficulties in considering the grammatical rules by ignoring reading the verbs in their past forms. For example, the sample mispronounce the prefixes (-ed) added to the verb for forming past, or reading some verbs as bare ones neglecting the that some verbs are transferred into past irregularly and that transformation causes a change in pronunciation. For example, treating the verb (swam) as (swim) while reading forms a grammatical deviation.

Based on statistical analyses, the students' performance atthe listening productive level (65%), as shown earlier in table no. (2), is higher than theirs at the reading productive level (55%), as shown in table no. (3) above. Hence, the first hypothesis of the study that reads: **Most of Iraqi EFL sixth preparatory students' listening skills are better than their reading ones** has been validated and proved.

Speaking Skill Analysis

The researchers have heavily relied on the Student's Book and Activity Book in formulating the tests of the study. Although, some modifications have been made to match the research results requirements.

The sample of the study were requested to do conversation in pairs by determining well-known topic a week prior to the test. The topic was to converse about health problems, which incorporates the body parts in the conversation as the topic found in the Activity Book, page 2, lesson 1, exercise B. This exercise had been choice because the students were very familiar with the exercise of health problems and the body parts at the beginning of their Student's Book.

After conducting the speaking productive test, the researchers found some violations and difficulties in the students' speaking skill. Some of these skills are represented throughout wrong vocabulary chosen, wrong grammatical structures, issues in pronunciations, and incapability of utilizing new vocabulariesin the conversation from the students' own. In other words, none of the students was found having the ability to bring words about the body parts of health issues out of their academic curriculum. Moreover, the students failed to use the proper word in the appropriate context. For example, one of the informant said 'My back is tired' to literally mean 'My back hurts'. This literal language-to-language conversion had caused a confusion to the informants or the study sample to choose the proper word in the context. Table (4) below summarizes statically the students' success status and their productive performance of speaking skill with the difficulties:

Table No. (4) Students' Speaking Skill Performance

Total No. of the sample	100	percentage
No. of the succeeded sample	40	40%
Number of the failed sample	60	60%
Grammatical Violations	70	70%
Phonological Difficulties	13	13%
Vocabulary Selection Issues	17	17%

Table (4) indicates that the total number passing the speaking test is (40), which is (40%) out of the overall participants number involved in the test. This is clearly a low success rate compared to the rest of the three language skills as shown by their statistical analyses. This mean that (60) Iraqi EFL 6th grade preparatory students have failed to attain the success score after assessing their productive performance by the researchers. Their difficulties were distributed among grammatical violations (70%), phonological difficulties (13%), and the wrong selection of vocabularies if the students own (17%). This gives a clear vision that the students are not exposed to face-to-face interactions using English language.

Writing Skill Analysis

It is worthy to mention that most of the Iraqi EFL 6th preparatory students heavily rely on the writing skills for obtaining as high success score as possible. One of their reliance is directed to writing paragraphs as it normally given 30 marks in their ministerial test. Therefore, the researchers have expected that the students' performance in the writing skill test should reach itspeak. Because the students are subject to writing various paragraphs about different selected topics at their sixth stage, the researchers made use of one of the paragraph writings. Moreover, the topic chosen is well known and almost clear to the students, which is **Cigarette advertisingshould beillegal** .The test is assigned (25 marks) distributed over the students' spelling, punctuation , vocabulary selection, and grammar in spite of the fact that grammar and punctuation are deprioritized in the final ministerial test.

After collecting and analyzing the data, it has been found that the number of the students passing the writing skill test was 57. Whereas, the students who failed to reach the pass score were 43. The most frequent difficulties encountered the study sample were related to spelling and grammatical parts. Moreover, some other difficulties registered were relevant to the wrong choice of vocabulary in the in specific context. Table (5) below best clarifies the students' productive writing skill level:

Table No. (5) Students' Writing Skill Performance

Total No. of the sample	100	Percentage
No. of the succeeded sample	55	55%
Number of the failed sample	35	35%
Punctuation	21	21%
Spelling	52	52%
Grammatical Violations	12	12%

Clearly, the number of the succeeded subjects is 55, which is (55%).This means that the students' performance in the writing skill test is higher than theirs at the speaking skill level, which has reached 40|%. This approves and validates the second hypothesis, which reads that **Most of Iraqi EFL sixth preparatory students' writing skills are better than their speaking ones**.

 Conclusions

In the light of previous analyses of the four language skills and testing the hypotheses of the study, the following results were reached:

1. Iraqi EFL sixth preparatory stages heavily rely on writing compared to the rest of the language skills. This is related to the fact that 'listening and reading' are not essentially employed in the ministerial examinations.
2. Most of Iraqi EFL sixth preparatory students do not prioritize punctuations while reading. They are not aware of the functions that punctuation can perform and its impact on meaning.

3. Most of Iraqi EFL sixth preparatory students face difficulties in pronunciation. In addition, they have no idea what the phoneme can do to the meaning when changed.
4. Iraqi EFL sixth preparatory stages heavily rely on ticking the proper answer in the listening comprehension test than issuing or writing down the correct answer. This is attributed to their poor writing performance.

Recommendations

In the light of previous findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Activating the role of English laboratories in schools to improve the pronunciation of students.
2. Dedicating extra efforts by the teachers of English language to conduct classroom conversations in pairs at least once a week.
3. Giving home assignments to the students about certain curricula related subjects requesting the students to write about using their own vocabularies.
4. Developing the four language skills of the students can be done by involving the teachers in extensive educational courses.

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