



Graduate School of Education

**An Investigation into Libyan EFL Novice Secondary School  
Teachers' Current Knowledge and Practice of Speaking  
Assessment: A Socio-cultural Perspective**

**Submitted by Taaziz Khaled A Grada to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

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## **Abstract**

*This study sought to further understanding of EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment and how their knowledge informs their speaking assessment practices in classrooms. Based on a socio-cultural perspective, the present study aimed at investigating EFL novice teachers' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in a Libyan secondary school context. The study is based on the interpretive paradigm and adopted social constructionism as a philosophical stance. Quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were employed in two sequential phases.*

*The findings of this study indicated that EFL novice teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment is complex and that was reflected in the different ways these teachers interpreted the concept of speaking assessment and in the ways they expressed their beliefs and values regarding how speaking assessment needs to be or is implemented in the classroom settings. Three main issues regarding teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment emerged from the data. The first issue is that these teachers, although showing some variability in their knowledge and practice, seem to base their assessment practice on a view of spoken language being more about linguistic content than communicative effect. Secondly, that they mostly seem to afford more importance to summative assessment than to formative assessment. Thirdly, they have a view of assessment that focuses on the content to be assessed rather than on the process of assessment. The findings also indicated that while teachers refer to contextual factors that influence how they implement their knowledge into practice, their understanding of the notion of assessment seems to have more influence on their implementation of speaking assessment as process than that of the context. That is, their current understandings of the notion of spoken language seem to contribute to their current practice of speaking assessment. Also of significance are the participants' views of the role of context. The results showed that although contexts are similar in some aspects, especially those related to institutional factors, teachers' views show the uniqueness of the context, especially in the light of the unanticipated social, political and institutional changes.*

*The implications of this study suggest that these EFL novice teachers' current knowledge of language and of assessment goes beyond factual knowledge to their perceptions of language and their understandings of the purpose of assessment. They also suggest that context plays a role on their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. Thus, this study provides further understanding that what these teachers know and how they use their knowledge in practice arises from a complex interweaving of context and individual understandings.*

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## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this thesis to my beloved husband, my children, my parents and my parents-in-law  
who all hope to see me a PhD holder*

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# Chapter One: Introduction

---

## 1.1 Introduction

Speaking is one of the essential language skills that serves as a natural means of communication between members of a community (Byren, 1980). It represents the oral interaction through which humans express their thoughts, concerns and feelings. Speaking is the first skill humans learn in the earliest stages of their life through their oral interaction with other individuals in the environment around them. As such interaction is an important feature that makes a speaking skill an essential component in the learning of any language.

As a productive skill, speaking seems intuitively the most important of all the four language skills as it can distinctly show the correct use or the language errors that a language learner makes (Khamkhien, 2010). In addition, its significance is underpinned by the fact that people who know a language are called the 'speakers' of that language (Ur, 1996). Thus, the teaching and learning of speaking can be considered an important skill on the premise that the ability to speak proficiently is the benchmark to know the language. Functions of speaking in human interaction have been classified into three main areas: interactional functions of speaking, which help to establish and maintain social interactions; transactional functions, which involve the exchange of information; and performance function, which serves to transmit information to an audience i.e., it focuses on both message and audience (Richards, 2008). Each of these speech activities has a distinct form that represents the communicative process that takes place in a conversation, dialogue or speech. This requires language teachers who teach the speaking skill to take into consideration these three areas of speaking functions. Teaching speaking as an interaction is perhaps more difficult than teaching the other two functions as it is 'a very complex and subtle phenomenon that takes place under the control of unspoken rules' (Richards, 2008, p. 29). In order to teach such a function, language teachers are recommended to use naturalistic dialogues, which imply opening and closing conversations, making small talk and reacting to what others say. Providing a response to a conversational partner is also considered important in the teaching of interactional skill (ibid, 2008). This indicates the importance of considering the teaching of speaking as an essential language skill in language classrooms and that was clearly evident with the advent

of the communicative language teaching approach which highlights the importance of interactive skills in language teaching.

The assessment of spoken language is also considered one of the most important issues in the research of language testing since the recognition of the central role that speaking ability plays in language teaching in the light of communicative language testing in the 1980s (Kim, 2003). The developing interest in the assessment of speaking goes back to 1913 when Cambridge ESOL (English of Speakers of Other Languages) became involved in the assessment of speaking skills and launched its first language examination, Certificate of Proficiency English (CPE) (Taylor, 2011). Speaking was characterised as a skill in its own right with a separate oral paper when the CPE test was introduced in 1913 (ibid, 2011). The elaborate history of speaking assessment during the 1930s and the Second World War showed that there was an intimate connection between the development of speaking tests and military/political language needs (Fulcher, 2003). In addition, Fulcher traced the history of speaking assessment in educational contexts in the period of the late 1970s and 1980s, providing an overview of approaches to speaking assessment provided by FSI (Foreign Service Institute) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) with a particular focus on their implications for rating scales and assessment criteria. The early history of speaking testing gave more emphasis to the development of rating scales and issues of reliability.

Since the first application of oral language proficiency tests by Cambridge ESOL in 1913, the assessment community has engaged in ongoing debates about important issues in speaking assessment (Galaczi, 2010), with numerous studies focusing on speaking in language testing research. The trend has largely focused on the investigation into psychometric approaches to speaking assessment. These studies were mainly concerned with issues related to the validity and reliability of speaking assessment with regard to the development and the use of rating scales (e.g., Fulcher, 1996b; Fulcher et al., 2011; Upshur & Turner, 1995, 1999). Some studies examined the reliability of raters' judgement (e.g., Chalhoub-Deville & Wigglesworth, 2005; Winke, Gass & Myford, 2012), while others examined the principles of speaking assessment that are related to speaking constructs (e.g., Bosker et al., 2012; Brown, 2003), and to speaking tasks (e.g., Fulcher, 1996; Fulcher & Reiter, 2003; Lumley &

O'Sullivan, 2005). These studies provided insights into the essence of speaking assessment, emphasising the significance of validity of speaking assessment in relation to the identification of speaking constructs, the use of speaking tasks, and the design of rating scales. They highlighted the importance of speaking assessment and the role it plays in demonstrating the development of test takers' oral language performance.

Within ESL (English as a Second Language)/EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, there has recently been an increasing interest in research on speaking assessment (e.g., Chang, 2006; Muñoz, Dary, Crespo, Gaviria, Lopera, & Palacio, 2003). Such an interest coincides with the curriculum reform of English language teaching and its orientation towards the adoption of communicative language teaching in different contexts. To cope with this reform, the speaking skill has become the focus of educational research in terms of its pedagogic significance in language assessment. Muñoz et al. (2003) underscored the significance of speaking assessment, emphasising the assumption that oral language assessment needs to reflect not only instructional objectives and practices, but also the real-life situations in which learners perform the language. Poonpon's (2010) study called for the integration of speaking tests in EFL classrooms at Thai universities. In his study on teaching speaking and oral testing in the Thai context, Khamkhien (2010) considered speaking the most important of all language skills, as it can clearly show learners' ability to master the language effectively. Based on this conceptualisation, Khamkhien (ibid) stressed the importance of considering speaking test formats as they show the students' communicative learning outcomes. Sakale (2012) pointed out the need for EFL research to reconsider the speaking skill and the way it is addressed in classroom settings.

In the context of the current study the English language is used as a foreign language; it is learned in classrooms and is not widely used outside classrooms. However, due to the increasing use of English as a global language in educational and economic fields, the teaching and learning of speaking skill has recently become extremely important in the Libyan context. The growing interest in the teaching of speaking is due to the increasing demand for speakers to perform English efficiently in order to facilitate a channel of communication within local and international marketing. That interest coincided with a



change in Libyan foreign policy that aimed to re-establish a friendly relationship with the west during the 1990s. To meet these demands, a great many language centers have been established in the private sector since the early 2000s. These centers teach the English language for all levels and for general and/or academic purposes, and are assessed on whether they provide good programmes for the teaching of speaking. That is, the main aim for learners who register in these centers is to master the English language proficiently.

Within the Libyan educational system, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has recently reviewed its ELT (English Language Teaching) policies that are mainly related to the status of English language teaching in a primary school level and to the English language curriculum reform. The MOE issued a resolution in 2006 for replacing general secondary school education with specialised secondary school education to include many disciplines, among which is the teaching of English as a major discipline in the division of languages in secondary schools (The National Report for Libyan Education, 2008). As a consequence of this change, a reformed curriculum: English for Libya was introduced in all specialisations in secondary schools. Within the division of languages, secondary school students specialised in English language were introduced to a communicative-oriented English syllabus that entails the teaching of the four language skills. In this new curriculum, language skills are introduced in units which include lessons about listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as other skills. To cope with this rich content, many teachers were appointed to teach the four language skills. Within this change in the ELT policy, the teaching of speaking has become an essential school subject and speaking teachers are expected to use a variety of communicative activities introduced in the syllabus in order to help their students practise speaking in the classroom. That makes the teaching and learning of speaking an important objective in a specialised secondary school context.

Thus, I believe that EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment can be considered a critical area to investigate as it has the potential to show how such knowledge informs the teachers' practice of speaking assessment in the classroom. In the present study, the aim is to explore EFL novice teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment: to find out what

teachers know about speaking assessment and how their knowledge informs their assessment practice. This investigation is conducted within a socio-cultural perspective, with the aim of understanding teachers' speaking assessment practices in the classroom, and teachers' views of the role of the context in their current knowledge and practices of speaking assessment in the classroom.

The socio-cultural implication for teacher knowledge of language assessment has recently been seen as an important orientation in the research of classroom-based assessment and teacher-based assessment. The interest in examining teachers' perception of classroom-based assessment stems from the orientation towards the social turn of language assessment (McNamara, 2001). Based on the broader conceptualisation of teacher knowledge within a socio-cultural perspective, I believe there is a need to further understand teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment. The understanding of teachers' practices of speaking assessment within a psychometric view is essential in that it provides us with information concerning the validity and reliability of their assessment. However, I would argue that more research needs to be conducted on language teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment and their speaking assessment practices in the classroom context. I believe that is important in the light of the increasing recognition of the role of the teacher in the assessment process which is viewed as an important issue in classroom-based assessment research. This may provide us with an understanding about how teachers implement their knowledge into practice.

## **1.2 Rationale of the study**

While speaking assessment research has focused on the psychometric approaches to speaking assessment, focusing mostly on issues of validity and reliability related to speaking test formats and to raters' bias in their assessment practices, limited research has been conducted on teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in the classroom context. There is a clear need for this, especially in EFL contexts where previous research shows that EFL teachers lack good knowledge of speaking assessment (e.g., Chang 2006; Muñoz et al., 2003; Poonpon 2010). In my context, Libya, there has been a change in the policy of the English language teaching. As mentioned above, the English language became a major subject in a specialised secondary school context in that students can specialise in the

learning of English language, and then they can pursue their studies in higher education. Such a radical change in the educational policy was associated with the reform in the English language curriculum. The curriculum is designed to present each language skill as a school subject. Now, teachers are required to teach speaking lessons as a school subject in the classroom. That makes the teaching and the assessment of speaking a fundamental component in secondary school classroom specialised in English language. However, EFL teachers in general and novice teachers in particular have been struggling to cope with the rich English content, which resulted in low standards of pupil achievements (Alhmali, 2007, Orafi & Borg, 2009). With respect to the new ELT syllabus, levels of graduates' competence was described as a real problem as most of the new teachers are not trained to use the new secondary course book (Alhmali, 2007). This placed a big challenge on the Libyan EFL secondary school teachers, particularly the novices, in that they need to change not only their teaching methods but also their assessment processes. This is because before the curriculum reform, the teaching of English in general secondary schools was mainly based on a traditional grammar-translation method (ibid). EFL teachers planned their lessons, concentrating on the grammatical rules and new vocabulary. Much emphasis was given to the teaching of grammar, and a little was given to the teaching of the other four language skills, especially speaking, which is almost neglected in EFL classes in secondary education. In addition, the policy of English language assessment is still based on these traditional methods of teaching that were dominant in secondary school classrooms, and classroom practices continued to be shaped by discrete item examinations that focus on the memorisation of grammar and vocabulary (Orafi & Borg, 2009). As a consequence, students went to higher education lacking the communicative skills to use English language in their academic studies, especially those whose majors of study are medicine, engineering, or TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). This dilemma inspired my interest to investigate the Libyan EFL novice teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment and how they carry out their assessment practices in the classroom.

My own experience as a student and then a teacher in Libya is another part of the rationale that raised my awareness of the problematic nature of speaking assessment. As an

undergraduate student, I questioned how my language performance was actually assessed, and thought about the criteria lecturers used to assess my English language competence. This was particularly the case because the assessment was based on the marking system, and lecturers did not provide any comments that illustrated the grades. In my first year of undergraduate study, I received a low mark in oral practice, one of the modules, and I wanted to know why. I felt that lecturers should be basing their assessment on clear criteria. This made me reflect on the issue of teacher knowledge of language assessment. Later, my role as an EFL teacher conducting language assessment in the classroom increased my concerns about language assessment in general and speaking assessment in particular.

As an EFL secondary school teacher I viewed assessment as a method of testing students' language performance through pencil and paper tests that I prepared by myself. I based my assessment on a marking system whereby students' language performance was measured by such tests and students' level of language competency was associated with the mark they received in the test. My language learning experience when I was in secondary school seemed to have an influence on my beliefs and understanding of assessment. The English language teaching was based on grammar translation methods in which the learning of grammatical rules was the main concern. This impacted on my assessment practices and the tests I prepared included a reading passage to test students' reading comprehension and other questions that tested students' ability to use the grammatical rules appropriately.

After 4 years of teaching in a secondary school context, I did an MA in Applied Linguistics and moved into higher education to be a lecturer at the Faculty of Languages. In the meantime, I was teaching English language for general and specific purposes in a private English language centre as a part-time teacher. This centre provided Cambridge exams: KET, PET and FCE exams under the supervision of a Cambridge University representative. I was appointed as a local oral examiner for KET and PET exams. I had training sessions about the application of the rating scales and about the assessment criteria. In addition, I was trained in how to be an interlocutor and an assessor. This experience increased my understanding of speaking assessment in terms of analytic and holistic rating scales and the reliability of assessment in inter-raters' and intra-rater's levels. I realised that I knew little about the principles and the mechanisms of how to assess students' oral language performance

appropriately. One reason may be that English language was taught as a school subject in the secondary school and the assessment of oral language performance was not a main concern. In addition I had not studied testing and assessment as a module in the undergraduate programme. As a result, my experience as an oral examiner for Cambridge University inspired me to deepen my understanding of Libyan EFL teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in the classroom.

On beginning my doctoral studies I wrote a proposal about EFL secondary school teachers' perception and practices of oral language assessment. During discussions with my supervisors about my aims and the rationale behind the study, I realised that speaking assessment and teacher knowledge are two broad areas of research that are based on many different theoretical standpoints. These informative discussions helped me to expand my horizons about speaking assessment and teacher knowledge, and my preliminary readings about these two broad areas of study led me to raise tentative questions regarding teachers' knowledge about oral language assessment; their perception of the importance of speaking assessment in a secondary school context; the extent to which their general understanding of language assessment influenced their knowledge of speaking assessment, the mechanism by which they carry out speaking assessment in the classroom, and their perception of the difficulties they face in the assessment of speaking in the classroom.

I was particularly interested in this study because Libyan EFL teachers' knowledge and perception of speaking assessment remained unexplored; any studies that have been conducted in Libyan EFL secondary school contexts have mainly focused on either students' perception of language learning (e.g., Alhemali, 2007) or on teachers' views and implementations of the reformed curriculum (Orafi & Borg, 2009; Shihiba, 2011). Therefore, this study will be innovative in exploring teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in an EFL secondary school context.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

This study aims to investigate the complexity of novice EFL teachers' knowledge with reference to the practice of speaking assessment in an EFL secondary school context,

attempting to explore how their current knowledge informs their assessment practice. In addition, it seeks to investigate teachers' views of the role context on their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. Libyan EFL novice teachers who have experience of teaching speaking in specialised secondary schools will participate in this study. For the purpose of the study, a novice teacher is defined as a teacher with less than four years of language teaching experience. In addition, terms such as knowledge and perception are frequently used in the current study. Knowledge is referred to as teachers' content knowledge of speaking assessment in terms of what teachers know about speaking assessment and what they know about what they assess (more details see Section 3.2.1). Richard's (1994) conceptualisation of perception is adopted for the current study in that teachers' perception is referred to as a way to express particular opinion as a consequence of realising concepts that may not be obvious to others.

The aim is to investigate the following:

1. Teachers' general perception of language assessment;
2. Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment;
3. Teachers' practices of speaking assessment in the classroom;
4. Teachers' views of the role context on their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in the classroom.

This study is important in that it attempts to provide further understanding about the complexity of teachers' knowledge in the light of the increasing recognition of the role of the teacher in the assessment process which is viewed as an important issue in classroom-based assessment research. It may also help to identify the contextual factors that novice teachers perceive to have an impact on their implementation of assessment in the classroom. Therefore, the present study may provide a conceptualisation of the understanding of teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment within a socio-cultural perspective.

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

Research in language assessment has recognised the importance of investigating teachers' beliefs and practices of language assessment in the classroom contexts (Leung & Mohan, 2004). Interest in exploring language teachers' decision-making about assessment and their

attitudes towards assessment policies has increased. This interest is aligned with the recognition of the importance of teacher classroom-based assessment. Studies in ESL/EFL classroom-based assessment have focused on teachers' beliefs of classroom-based assessment (e.g., Davison, 2004; Rogers, Cheng & Hu, 2007) and teachers' practices of classroom-based assessment (e.g., Felvey & Cheng, 2000). Teachers' beliefs and practices of formative language assessment are also areas of interest that have been investigated in the research of classroom-based assessment (e.g., Chan, 2008; Wach, 2012). Some of these studies indicate that teachers' beliefs of language assessment play an important role in their implementation of assessment in the classroom, while other studies suggest that there is a gap between teachers' beliefs and practices of language assessment. Overall, they have all highlighted the importance of considering teachers' perception and beliefs of language assessment in classroom settings.

Recognising the significance of the teachers' role in the application of classroom assessment, Shohamy, Inbar-Louri and Poehner (2008) contend that the understanding of teachers' perceptions and practices in assessment is vital. The significance of the present study is that it intends to contribute to the existing research in this area.

The present study is particularly significant in two main aspects. Firstly, it investigates teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment within a socio-cultural perspective. With its focus on EFL novice teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment, this study is underpinned by the socio-cultural understanding of knowledge and views knowledge as an evolving process emerging from the interaction between the individual and the social world. However, the aim of the research is to investigate teachers' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in classroom settings. Thus, the term knowledge is situated within the experiential frame and the aim is to examine what teachers know about speaking assessment and how they use this knowledge. There is limited research in teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment in ESL and EFL contexts. As mentioned above, most of the research in this area has been concerned with the validity and reliability of teachers' assessment practices. To my knowledge, Chang's (2006) study is the only investigation of EFL teachers' beliefs of oral language assessment based on socio-cultural theory. Other studies have investigated teachers' knowledge and views of language assessment within a

socio-cultural perspective, but have not addressed teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment (e.g., Troudi, Coombe & Al-Hamly, 2009; Xu & Liu, 2009).

The second significant aspect of the present study is that it uses different methods of data collection, namely questionnaire, semi-structured interview, observation, and stimulated recall interview. These methods were considered appropriate for investigating teachers' understanding and knowledge about speaking assessment, their practices of speaking assessment in the classroom and the influence of the context on their knowledge and practices. Other studies investigating EFL teachers' perception of oral language assessment (Bengqing, 2009; Muñoz, et al, 2003) employed questionnaires, phone interviews and focus groups in their investigation. In this way, the present study aims to contribute to existing knowledge in the wider context of research in language assessment literacy and the TESOL domain.

### **1.5 Outline of the study**

This thesis has seven chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter Two presents contextual background information about Libya, the Libyan education system, the status of English as a foreign language in Libya, EFL teacher education, and information about the secondary school context. Chapter Three offers a review of related literature in which I present the theoretical framework underpinning the study and review studies in the field of language classroom-based assessment, teacher knowledge of assessment and speaking assessment. Chapter Four outlines the research methodology and describes my philosophical stance, research procedure and the process of data analysis. Chapter Five presents the findings of data analysis in two parts: firstly the quantitative data followed by the qualitative-based findings. Chapter Six provides a discussion of the themes emerged in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of analysis, and theoretical implications of this study. Finally, in Chapter Seven I put forward implications and recommendations resulting from the study as well as my own personal reflection.



# Chapter Two: The context of study

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## **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the Libyan context, starting with a brief account of background information on the contextual profile of Libya, the educational system and the status of English as a foreign language in Libya. Relevant information about the secondary school context and in particular EFL teachers in secondary schools will be presented. Then, I will give a background about the English language curriculum in specialised secondary schools in the Division of Languages, and that will be followed by the objectives of the reformed curriculum in the teaching of speaking. Finally, I will explain the policy of English language assessment in specialised secondary education.

## **2.1 Background information**

This section provides contextual background about Libya, presenting in brief the economic and historical aspects. This will provide the reader with a clear picture about the phenomenon under study in its wider context.

### **2.1.1. Libya: Contextual background**

Libya is situated in North Africa on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and is bordered on the east by Egypt; on the south by Sudan, Chad and Niger and on the west by Tunisia and Algeria (see figure 2.1) According to a 2013 census, the total population is listed as 6,002,347million (Country Profile, 2013). Libya is a multiethnic country with Arabs and Amazegh (97%) and the other 3% includes Greeks, Turkish, Tunisians, Egyptians and Italians (ibid, 2013). Islam is the main religion of the country and Arabic is the official language. Economically, oil is the main source of income and Libya depends heavily upon revenues from the oil sector, which contribute about 95% of export earnings, 80% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and 99% of government income (Country Profile, 2013).



Figure 2.1: A map of Libya (source: CIA World Factbook)

Libya has witnessed diverse changes in the political scene since the middle of the last century. Libya first declared its independence on December 24, 1951. At that time, Libya was called ‘The Libyan Kingdom’ and was proclaimed a constitutional and a hereditary monarchy under King Idris (Country Profile, 2013). On September 1<sup>st</sup> 1969, Libya witnessed a military coup led by Muammar Al-Qaddafi which resulted in the downfall of the monarchy. In 1977 the official name of Libya was announced to be the ‘Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya’. Al-Qaddafi’s regime lasted for forty-two years.

In 2011, the Libyan uprising took place in which Libyan youth revolted against the regime following other revolutions that took place in Tunisia and Egypt. In Benghazi, the capital of the revolution, young people came out in protest calling for the end of the Al-Qaddafi regime. They were met with gunfire and many people were brutally killed. Following this, protests broke out in most Libyan cities calling for the same demands. As with the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, the Libyan uprising was a consequence of a build-up of political, economic and social dissatisfaction on the part of Libyan society. Within the political context, Al-Qaddafi regime was practising a policy of exclusion and marginalisation against its opponents. These opponents were called ‘stray dogs’ because they were perceived to have betrayed the so-called Al-Fateh revolution. Many of these opponents were imprisoned, tortured or executed in public squares by those loyal to Al-Qaddafi, and those who were

abroad were assassinated by the Libyan intelligence (Factsheet, 2011). This led to the violation of the concept of civil society in that although all civil organisations were led by loyal supporters of Al-Qaddafi, there was no allowance for ideological pluralism. This lack of ideological multiplicity was clearly reflected in the media which was also controlled by Al-Qaddafi's loyalists.

Another manifestation of the political suppression was the teaching to generations of Libyans how to be loyal, not to their country but to Muammar Al-Qaddafi, achieved through the dissemination of these thoughts in all curricula in the Libyan education system. For example, there was a mandatory subject called 'political awareness' taught in all educational levels, where students were instructed in the so-called 'Third World Theory' that represented Al-Qaddafi's political, social and economic concepts. Students were not allowed to criticise these concepts. In this way, after 1969, Libyan society with all its components was subject to several forms of repression. Another issue related to youth unemployment: in the last 15 years, rapid population growth and the growing number of young people has made it 'impossible for the public sector to provide enough jobs to keep the unemployment rate under control....At the same time, the private sector has not been able to fill the gap given the wider problems business faces in general in Libya' (African economic outlook, 2012, p. 13). These factors were seen as the main contributing factors that led to the Libyan uprising.

This uprising continued for about ten months during which a temporary government was formed under the name of National Transitional Council (NTC). This was the legitimate government that was recognised by the international community. In October 2011, the NTC announced the toppling of Al-Qaddafi's regime. One of its challenges was to take 'steps to promote a peaceful political transition, to normalize economic conditions, and to set out a national reform agenda' (Chami et al., 2012, p.1). One of the aims of the reform agenda was the change all the curricula in the education system, especially those which disseminated the political concepts of the previous regime. Another challenge was the need to focus on 'capacity building, infrastructure renewal, private-sector development, improving education, job creation, and putting in place an effective social safety net, within a framework of transparent and accountable governance'. (ibid, p.1). In 2012, election centers were

established throughout the country to give Libyan people an opportunity to participate in the electoral process. Up to now, the country is still being governed by a transitional government that is planning to rebuild three main aspects that were disabled in Al-Qaddafi's regime, namely, political parties, the constitution and presidential elections.

Despite challenges, this revolutionary change in the Libyan political scene has played an influential role in reconstructing the Libyan people's concept of ideological pluralism, their perceptions of freedom of speech, and their participation in the re-establishment of civil organisations. Concepts such as civil society, political activists, transparency, ideological pluralism, intellectual dialogue and many others are considered new to a society that lived under dictatorship for 42 years. Nowadays, a great many political activists and human rights activists are effectively participating in building a democratic country.

### **2.1.2 The education system in Libya**

To understand its current educational system, a brief history of education in Libya in the period 1551-1951 is provided as it has had numerous impacts on the modern education system. The modern period (1951 to the present day) is then described. The development of education in Libya was largely influenced by political changes during the colonial period. Between the seventh and twentieth century, Ottoman Turks, Italian military forces, and the British mandate all made their mark on Libya (Country Profile, 2005). Education in Ottoman times (1551-1911) was oriented towards religion in that educational institutions, which were almost self-contained local communities, taught the Arabic language, Quranic science and Islamic principles (Obeidi, 2001).

During the Italian colonisation (1911- 1943), Libyan citizens fought against the education system and the policy of Italianisation, especially during the early years of occupation (Obeidi, 2001). After the defeat of Italy in 1943, the British and the French took over the country, and the educational system followed the divisions of the British-French administrations: in Fezzan the French-Tunisian curriculum was used; in Cyrenaica the Egyptian curriculum was adopted; and the curriculum chosen in Tripoli was the one employed in Palestine during the British mandate (ibid). In the period 1945-1951 the British

administration established vocational schools separate from religious educational institutions (ibid).

Under the monarchy of King Idris, all Libyans were given the opportunity to be educated. Schools for basic and secondary education were established throughout the country and old Quranic schools that had been closed during the struggle for independence were reopened and new ones established, lending a heavy religious cast to Libyan education (Country Profile, 2005). Total school enrollment rose from 34,000 in the year of independence in 1951, to nearly 150,000 in 1962. However, the educational system faced a number of obstacles such as a limited curriculum and lack of qualified teachers, especially Libyan teachers (Country Profile, 2005).

In the modern era, following the 1969 military coup, many revolutionary changes were made not only at the political level, but also within the educational system. All the names of ministries and administrations were changed and the Ministry of Education was renamed The General People's Committee for Education (GPCE) and is now considered the highest executive power in Libya with regard to education. It is composed of two levels: the first level is the central administration, where educational policies and projects are executed; the second level relates to local administrative sub-divisions, which work on the implementation of educational policies discussed by administrators, inspectors and supervisors.

Under the slogan 'education for all', Libyan law requires citizens to register their children, males and females, in basic education, which includes primary (6 years), preparatory (3 years) and secondary (3 years) education. In addition, education is free in all levels from primary to under graduate studies for Libyan and foreigners alike. There are five educational stages in Libya. The first stage is *kindergarten* in which children are enrolled for two years (aged 4 to 5). The second level is *basic education*, which consists of 6 years of primary school and 3 years of preparatory school. Students are awarded the Basic Education Certificate after successful completion of 9 years of Basic Education (Country Profile, 2005). After finishing compulsory education, students go to secondary level (*intermediate education*) which extends for three to four years, including specialised secondary schools (economics, biology, arts and media, social sciences and engineering), technical and vocational training centers

and institutes (Country Profile, 2005). Students who successfully pass the final examination are awarded the Secondary Education Certificate (Country Profile, 2010). After completing secondary education, students move to the *higher education* stage. There are two main sections in this level: university education (lasting 4 to 7 years) and higher vocational and technical education (lasting 3 to 5 years) (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2010). *Post-graduate study* is the final and advanced stage of education, which includes Masters (MA or Msc) degree, PhD (Doctorate) degree, and high diploma in many different areas of specialisation.

### **2.1.3 The status of English as a foreign language in Libya**

The teaching of English in Libya goes back to the mid 1940s, following the end of the Second World War. When the British began to administer the northern part of the country, they organised intensive English language courses for people who were interested in learning the language (Hashim, 1997). In the mid 50s and the following decades, the status of English teaching witnessed a period of development and improvement in a number of pedagogical areas: English language curriculum, pedagogy and assessment techniques (ibid, 1997). From the mid 1950s to the late 1970s, a great many English syllabi were designed in order to improve the whole process of teaching English in Libyan schools and universities, and to respond to the Libyan learners' linguistic and cultural needs (Suayah, 1994).

During the mid 1980s, the status of English language was negatively influenced by the country's foreign policy relations. In the 1980s Britain and the US severed their diplomatic relationships with Libya as a result of a number of events: the killing of the British policewoman, Yvonne Fletcher, on April 17<sup>th</sup> 1984; the US economic sanctions on Libya in 1986; and above all, the Lockerbie bombing when Pan Am Flight 103 exploded over Lockerbie, killing the 259 people on board. In 1992 the UN Security Council accused Libya of supporting state terrorism and called for an air sanction and banned weapon sales to it unless suspects of the Lockerbie bombing were submitted to the U.S. (Country Profile, 2005). As a consequence, Libya sought to eliminate Western influence, and that was reflected in education policy when GPCE declared the withdrawal of English language from the school

curriculum in all the educational levels. This lasted for six years, between 1986 and 1992 (Country Profile, 2005).

During the last decade of the past century, Libya changed its foreign policy, aiming to re-establish a friendly relationship with the West. The Libyan government announced plans to attract foreign investment, especially in its oil and gas production, and sought financing of critical infrastructure improvements in its national highways, railroads, telecommunications networks, and irrigation systems (Country Profile, 2005). In response to this openness to the world, the learning of English has become an essential requirement for both educational and economic prospects. In 1992, GPCE decided to reinstate English language as a school subject in secondary schools (Elmabruk, 2008). English continues to be an essential requirement for communication, not only in education but also in marketing. In response to such requirements, GPCE reviewed its ELT policy; in addition to introducing a new English syllabus for secondary schools, since 2006/7 English has been taught again from primary year 5 (age 10)(Elmabruk, 2008).

Recently, private language centers have been established all over the country, especially in Tripoli and Benghazi in order to meet the demand for English for academic purposes (EAP) and English for specific purposes (ESP). For example, The British Council is one of the prominent language centers that offer the teaching of English language for all levels and for different purposes, including workshops for English language teacher training. In addition, oil companies have private language centers for their employees in order to develop their English language skills.

Nowadays English is widely used, especially by the young Libyan generation, due to the increasing use of technology. In addition, the English language has become a means of communication in the use of weblogs and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. These socio-cultural artefacts have emphasized the need for Libyans to learn English in order to cope with globalisation.

#### **2.1.3.1 EFL teacher education in Libya**

The training of teachers to teach EFL in Libya has a 60-year old history, when the first Teacher Training College for preparing EFL teachers was founded in the capital, Tripoli. The graduates of this college were appointed to teach English in secondary schools. More recently, after 1969, the number of such colleges increased. EFL teaching training became one of the departments of Faculties of Education, which were established in Libyan universities in different cities and towns, the main ones being Al-Fateh University (now called Tripoli University) in Tripoli, and Gar Younis University (now called Benghazi University) in Benghazi. In addition to the Faculty of Education, Tripoli University further established the Faculty of Languages, where students can specialise either in Arabic or foreign languages such as English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, and Hebrew. Unlike the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Languages does not provide students in the English Department with courses on methods of teaching or educational psychology. Furthermore, students do not engage in a teaching practicum or observational visits in schools, as do their counterparts in the Faculty of Education (Elhenshiri, 2004). As a result, the graduates of the Faculty of Languages have good linguistic skills, but less knowledge of methodology or methods of teaching. It is the aim of the Faculty of Education to prepare students to specialise in the teaching of English as a foreign language in secondary classrooms (Elhenshiri, 2004). However, a great number of graduates of the Faculty of Languages have been appointed to teach in secondary schools due to the rapid increase in the number of these schools throughout the country and the shortage of EFL teachers.

Within the pedagogical policy of the English Department in the Faculty of Education, EFL student teachers study for four years, during which they are taught several modules that are divided into three main categories. Two of these are theoretical and applied linguistics ***specialisation courses***, which include phonetics, morphology, English literature, literary criticism, translation, language acquisition, teaching methods, oral practice, grammatical structure, creative writing, and socio-linguistics. The other category is concerned with ***core teaching courses*** that are taught in the Arabic language, such as fundamentals of education, introduction to psychology, developmental psychology, assessment and evaluation, curricula, and teaching training. In addition, students are taught core intellectual courses, including Arabic language and literature, and Islamic studies (Elhinshiri, 2004). The



educational policy for the distribution of these courses within the four years of study is mainly based on a general outline prepared by Department of English-Faculty of Education (1993), stating the objectives of the teacher training programme each year:

By the end of the first year, EFL student teachers should acquire language competence and performance, which enable them to:

- 1) Have accurate and sufficient knowledge of how to use the grammatical structure of English language, especially what is taught in basic and secondary education.
- 2) Differentiate between the semantic and the syntactic structure of the sentence, and be able to produce short connected passages in well-structured written English.
- 3) Read with a fair degree of fluency and learn vocabulary of approximately 1000 words.
- 4) Consult and derive information from a monolingual dictionary.

The main aim of the second academic year is that student teachers have the ability to acquire the speaking skill efficiently. In more advanced stages, trainee teachers are expected to have good knowledge about the general principles and practices of teaching English as a foreign language, in addition to a good grasp of major linguistic theories and their applications in foreign language teaching. During the fourth year, students start teaching practice in schools (as cited in Elhenshiri, 2004, pp. 48-9).

## **2.2 The Libyan secondary school context**

### **2.2.1 Specialised secondary school education**

Unlike basic education, secondary education has undergone several alterations since the 1980s in terms of structure, years of study, disciplines and curricula. During secondary school education students study for three years; in the first year they study multiple subjects related to art and science. In the other two years, students can select to either study art or science. In both disciplines, students were required to study English language. However, as I have mentioned above, between 1986 and 1992 English teaching was withdrawn from secondary education, as was the case with the other educational levels, due to the tension between Al-Qaddafi's government and the West.

In 1992 GPCE decided to reinstate English in secondary school education, using English language curricula that were taught in preparatory schools prior to its removal. These curricula were mainly oriented towards Grammar-Translation methods in that teachers focused on the teaching of vocabulary and grammar. These curricula were changed in the year 2000 when the GPCE reconsidered the need to orient English language teaching methodology towards a communicative approach. Therefore, new English language materials, including subject books and workbooks, were introduced to secondary school students.

A resolution of the GPCE (No. 165) was issued in 2006 to replace general secondary school education with specialised secondary school education to include many disciplines, among which the teaching of English formed a major discipline in the division of languages in secondary schools (National report for Libyan education, 2008). Based on this resolution, specialised secondary education has been organised to include the following disciplines:

- a) Division of basic sciences: (mathematics and physics)
- b) Division of engineering sciences: (sciences of engineering and construction)
- c) Life sciences: (chemistry and biology)
- d) Social sciences: (social sciences and humanities)
- e) Division of languages: (Arabic, English, French, Swahili, and Hausa languages)
- f) Division of economic sciences: (the study of administration, accounting, economics and banking sciences)

(National report for Libyan education, 2008)

As a consequence of this change, a reformed curriculum - ***English for Libya*** - was introduced according to specialisations in secondary schools. Within the Division of Languages, secondary school students specialising in English language are introduced to a communicative-oriented English syllabus that entails the teaching of the four language skills.

That is, students study listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, lab work and pronunciation as main school subjects. Three years of English language study as a specialisation is a preparation for students to pursue their studies at English language departments in universities and higher institutes.

### **2.2.2 The context of EFL teachers in secondary schools**

This reform of secondary education structure together with the new curriculum require qualified teachers. In response, in 2003 the Libyan education authorities organised a summer training course for EFL teachers in association with Garnet Publishing. The educational authority adopted the policy of holding many different specialised courses for graduates of higher education institutes, aiming to provide them with sound knowledge of how to teach the new curriculum. EFL teachers were trained for eight months, after which teachers who passed these training courses were appointed to teach in specialised secondary schools. These courses were considered an initial step, after which training programmes were conducted and developed in higher teacher training institutes, where more sophisticated teaching methods needed for the specialised secondary school curriculum were provided (National report for Libyan education, 2004). However, studies conducted in a specialised secondary school context have shown that Libyan EFL teachers in general and novices in particular have been struggling to teach a curriculum with rich English content, and this has resulted in low standards of pupil achievements (Alhmali, 2007; Orafi, & Borg, 2009; Shihiba, 2011). These studies considered the shortage of in-service teacher training programmes to be a potential factor that negatively impacted teachers' ability to teach the new curriculum.

As mentioned above, levels of graduates' competence were considered as a critical problem as most of the new teachers are not sufficiently qualified to teach this new secondary course book (Alhmali, 2007). The matter has become even more difficult for those teachers who teach English not only as a school subject, as was the case in general secondary schools, but as a major. In other words, within the new policy of teaching English and new curriculum, EFL teachers are required to teach as school subjects the four language skills, namely

listening, reading comprehension, creative writing and oral practice, in addition to English literature, phonetics and pronunciation. This requires teachers to go beyond the teaching methods used in general secondary schools, and to be competent and qualified in using more developed techniques for teaching the new syllabus. This has led to a gap between the innovation of the new curriculum and the professional development of EFL secondary school teachers to teach it effectively. There was clear evidence to support this claim in Shihiba's (2011) findings, which showed that EFL secondary school teachers were struggling not only to shift their conceptualisations and instructional approaches to the essence of a communicative approach on which the curriculum is based but also to deliver the content of these text books properly.

The dominant use of traditional methods for the teaching of English in the Libyan secondary school context was considered another factor that influenced EFL secondary school teachers' implementation of the new curriculum. The previous English language curriculum was oriented towards traditional approaches which promote Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual methods, according to which teachers are seen as the main suppliers of information while students act more as passive recipients. Research in the Libyan secondary school context has shown that EFL teachers mainly rely on these traditional methods. For example, Orafi and Borg's (2009) study investigated three teachers' implementation of a new communicative English language curriculum in Libyan secondary schools. The analysis of the findings obtained by observation and follow-up interviews highlighted considerable differences between the intentions of the curriculum and the instructional approaches used by the participants. Their study showed that the manner in which teachers delivered the curriculum reflected 'their views of what was feasible in the light of their understanding of themselves as teachers, of their students, and of the demands of the system more generally, particularly in relation to assessment' (p. 243).

Shihiba (2011) investigated Libyan EFL secondary school teachers' conceptions of the communicative learner-centred approach (CLCA) in relation to their implementation of an English language curriculum innovation. The findings showed that although the majority of the participants were positive about the notion of implementing CLCA, the current

conditions and realities in the context of study seemed to create barriers that hindered the teachers from implementing the curriculum objectives properly. The findings showed that these barriers were related to individual, contextual and cultural considerations.

These studies provided me with insights into Libyan EFL secondary school teachers in that they addressed, from different perspectives, issues related to teachers' conceptualisations, beliefs and values related to a communicatively-oriented English language curriculum and its implementation.

### **2.3 English language curriculum in specialised secondary school in the Division of Languages**

Within the English language curriculum reform in Libyan secondary schools, the main objective was the orientation towards communicative language teaching (CLT). Unlike the previous curriculum, which was mainly based on traditional methods such as grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods, the reformed curriculum is built on student-centred learning and it develops students' ability to communicate authentically in English. The new curriculum is designed for implementation where English is a support subject for other disciplines as well as for English as a major discipline. However, I will focus more on the curriculum designed for the English discipline.

The reformed curriculum was designed, under the supervision of PCGE, by Phillips, Tankard, Phillips, Lucantoni and Tankard (2008) and was published by Garnet, UK. The curriculum includes a number of materials, namely subject book, skills book (A&B), workbook, teacher's handbook (A&B) and cassettes. The students are provided with subject books, skills books and workbooks, each of which has a specific learning aim. The main purpose of the subject book is to present information and related vocabulary through reading texts, and the aim of these texts is 'to impart knowledge about the subject concerned and present associated vocabulary rather than teach or practice reading' (Phillips et al, 2008, p.1). The subject book contains information about a particular area in each level of study: year 1 (Language and Communication), year 2 (Language and Culture), and year 3 (Language and Society) (as cited by Phillips et al., 2008). Within the skills book, teachers need to engage students in practising

the four language skills, both discretely, through the study of sub-skills, and, towards the end of the course, in an integrated fashion (see Appendices 1A, B and C). The main function of the workbook is to promote students' skills of writing through the learning of grammar points and vocabulary. In addition, there are pair and role-play activities designed to consolidate students' communication in the classroom (Phillips et al., *ibid*).

Students specialising in English language have six English classes each day, and the duration of each class is forty-five minutes. The school inspectors and teacher-coordinators are responsible for making time-tables which the teachers need to follow when teaching the language skills. Therefore, there are writing teachers, speaking teachers, grammar teachers and reading teachers.

#### **2.4 The objectives of the reformed curriculum in the teaching of speaking**

As mentioned above, the aim of the reformed curriculum is to teach English communicatively. Since speaking is the main medium of communication, the curriculum presents this language skill as an essential lesson in each unit in the skills books (A&B) in the three stages of secondary education. Speaking lessons are designed in a way that promotes student-centeredness in that students are encouraged to communicate and do the activities in the classroom, using English. In 2014, the Centre of Educational Curricula and Educational Research in MOE presented a document that outlines the objectives of teaching English in the Division of Languages in specialised secondary schools (see Appendix 2). The document lists two general objectives for the teaching of speaking; the first of these emphasizes the need to extend students' ability to:

- A) speak fluently in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes and audiences;
- B) describe events, past routines and past abilities;
- C) use talk to express and share feelings, ideas and opinions;
- D) describe shapes and objects, and give directions;
- E) narrate past actions or events in detail.

The second objective is to provide students with opportunities to speak with clarity and use intonation when reading and reciting texts (as cited in The Centre of Educational Curricula and Educational Research profile, 2014, p.193).

The teaching of speaking is allocated three classes per week for each of the three stages. Within these classes, teachers need to engage students in a variety of speaking activities that are presented in the skills books. Within Secondary 1 English specialisation, the aim of teaching speaking is to develop their understanding of communication and to increase the students' range of active vocabulary. In addition, it aims to provide students with opportunities to be frequently engaged in pair work, group work and individual speaking to the rest of the class (Phillips et al., 2008). Similar objectives are identified for secondary 2 and 3 English specialisations, with a higher level of communicative activities, through which students further develop their speaking skills.

## **2.5 The policy of English language assessment in specialised secondary school education**

The assessment process in the Libyan education system is managed by MOE through the Center of Educational Curricula and Educational Research, which issues documents about the policy of assessment and the criteria for assessing students' learning achievements. For the assessment of English language in the Division of Languages in specialised secondary schools, MOE issues an annual official document outlining the criteria instructions for the teachers to follow. As can be seen in the document (see Appendix 3), the assessment is mainly based on the marking system in that teachers are required to use grades in the evaluation process.

There are two terms in each academic year. Within each term, teachers need to assess students' language performance through formal tests and students' participation (Libyan Ministry of Education annual document, 2014); that is, in each term teachers need to base their language assessment on pencil and paper tests, which include two mid-term exams and a final term exam for each language skill, namely reading, writing, listening and lab work,

speaking, speaking and pronunciation (see Appendices 4 A&B). In addition, they need to assign grades to the students' participation, which includes written work (workbook and notebook), oral work, reading and comprehension (see Appendix 3).

Research in the Libyan EFL secondary school context has shown that there is a mismatch between the objectives of the reformed curriculum and the assessment policy (Alhmali, 2007; Orafi & Borg, 2009; Shihiba, 2011). In his doctoral study Shihiba (2011) points out that there is a mismatch between the content of English language examinations and the main objective of introducing the curriculum innovation. The participants in this study criticised the content of large scale examinations in that the main focus is on the students' rote memorisation of grammatical rules and little attention is paid to the their communicative language skills. Another issue raised in the findings of this study is the rigid system of assessment, in that all examinations and assessment criteria in Libya are externally designed by the Examination Administration. In this regard, Shihiba (ibid) suggests that this rigid system of assessment discourages the teachers' from adopting the role of facilitator and the students from developing their independence.

Orafi and Borg (2009) point out that the broad scope of the new English curriculum in Libyan secondary schools was 'an obvious departure from its predecessor, where functional language use, listening and speaking had not been addressed' (p. 245). In other words, unlike the previous curriculum, the new curriculum provides activities that are interactive, asking students to do pair and group work, the aim being to offer opportunities to speak the target language (Orafi & Borg, ibid). However, the findings of their study show that, despite a new communicative curriculum, classroom practices continue to be shaped by discrete item examinations that focus on the memorisation of grammar and vocabulary.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have provided background information about the Libyan educational system and the status of the English language in education. Following that, I have added details about the Libyan EFL secondary school context, as well as information about the teachers, the objectives of the curriculum in the teaching of speaking in specialised secondary schools, and



the policy of English language assessment. Implicit in all this is the need to address the issue of the Libyan EFL novice teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in specialised secondary schools. In the next chapter I will present a review of the literature together with the theoretical framework which underpins the current study.

# Chapter Three: Literature review

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## **3.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to consider and review the literature that addresses the central topic of this research: teachers' knowledge of assessment of English oral language. It presents the theoretical framework of two key concepts on which the current study is based: speaking assessment and teachers' knowledge. In the first part I briefly review theoretical constructs that underpin language testing, including a theoretical framework of language competence and the concepts of speaking assessment. The literature on speaking assessment tasks and rating scales is presented, and this part ends with a summary of psychometric-based studies on speaking assessment. Secondly, I review the concept of teacher knowledge in three sub-sections, arguing that more research in teacher knowledge needs to be undertaken in a naturalistic setting in order to explore not only what teachers say about what they know, but also how they use this knowledge in practice. Section 3.3 presents research in teacher knowledge in which five sub-sections are addressed: perspectives on the concept of knowledge (3.3.1), the theoretical understanding of teacher knowledge (3.3.2), teacher content knowledge (3.3.3), research in L2 teacher knowledge (3.3.4), and novice teacher knowledge and practice (3.3.5). Section 3.4 reviews research in teacher knowledge of language assessment. Section 3.5 presents a review of previous studies on EFL teachers' perception of speaking assessment in the classroom context.

## **3.1 Theoretical constructs in language testing**

This section explains the theoretical constructs in language testing. In order to gain more understanding, I firstly present a theoretical framework about language competence, in which I review communicative language ability models presented by pioneers in language testing research; this provides insights into the understanding of speaking assessment.

Secondly, I review research about speaking assessment in terms of constructs, tasks and rating scales.

### **3.1.1 Theoretical framework of language competence**

The theoretical framework of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and the communicative language ability model presented by Bachman (1990) are considered the most influential models in language testing research (Fulcher & Davison, 2007). These models provided conceptual frameworks about language knowledge and language use which have implications in describing the essential constructs in language testing. These theoretical models addressed knowledge, skills and abilities. Canale and Swain's (1980) theoretical framework distinguished between communicative competence and communicative performance and included three main competencies: grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence is the knowledge of grammar, lexis, morphology, syntax, semantics and phonology; sociolinguistic knowledge is the knowledge of the socio-cultural rules of language use and rules of discourse; and strategic competence is the knowledge of how to address and overcome obstacles to communication. Canale and Swain believed that such a theoretical analysis of communicative competence is fundamental in that it allows more valid and reliable measurement of second language communication. Communicative performance, on the other hand, presents a demonstration of knowledge in actual language performance. Canale's (1983) adaptation of this model generated significant changes in the definition of sociolinguistic competence, in which the rules of discourse have been considered a new category of discourse competence, which is defined as 'the ability to produce a unified spoken or written text in different genres using cohesion in form and coherence in meaning' (Canale, 1983, as cited in Fulcher & Davison, 2007, p. 41). In addition, Canale expanded the definition of strategic competence to include strategies that reinforce 'the effectiveness of communication' (ibid). Bachman's (1990) model of communicative language ability (CLA) also provided implications for second language test developers to articulate the theoretical rationale for their tests. In his model (see Figure 3.4), Bachman (ibid) presented three main components: language competence (knowledge of language);

strategic competence ('the mental capacity for implementing the components of language competence in contextualised communicative language use') (p. 84); and psychophysiological mechanisms, which refer to 'the neurological and psychological processes involved in the actual execution of language as a physical phenomenon' (p.84).

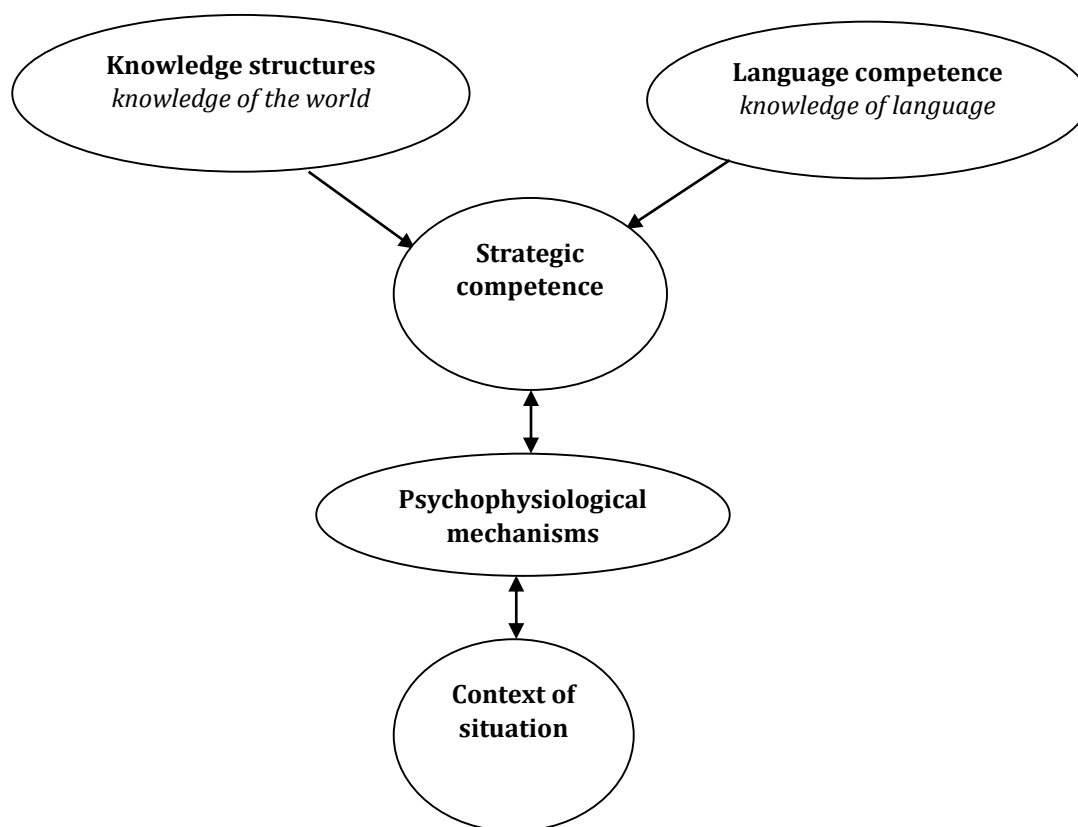


Figure 3.1: Communicative competence of communicative language ability in communicative language use (Bachman, 1990, p. 85)

For Fulcher and Davison (2007), these models play an important role in constructing a theoretical basis for establishing a conceptual framework for the definition of constructs in language testing and language assessment in the sense that they assist us to recognise the importance of 'relat[ing] the meaning of specific test performance to language competence

and ability for language use' (p. 51). For example, Fulcher and Davison stated that Canale and Swain's model is relevant to language testing for several reasons:

*Firstly, the distinction between communicative competence and actual performance means that tests should contain tasks that require actual performance as well as tasks or item types that measure knowledge. These types of tasks would allow test takers to demonstrate their knowledge in action. This is a theoretical rationale for the view that pencil and paper tests of knowledge alone cannot directly indicate whether a language learner can actually speak or write in a communicative situation. Secondly, as communicative competence was viewed as knowledge, discrete point tests were seen as useful for some purposes....Thirdly, the model, especially if it were 'fine grained', could be used to develop criteria for the evaluation of language performance, at different levels of proficiency (p. 39).*

This could be read that defining the construct in any given test is essential. For assessing speaking, it is important to know what constitutes speaking ability and, in order to achieve that, speaking needs to be viewed as a construct (Fulcher, 2003a). However, identifying the constructs in oral language performance is a controversial issue in the assessment of speaking. O'Sullivan, Weir and Saville (2002) raised the issue of the construct of spoken language ability, claiming that the validity of the match between the intended and the actual test-taker language is relatively neglected. Section 3.1.3 will discuss the issue of defining constructs in speaking assessment with reference to the purpose of speaking tests in different assessment settings.

### **3.1.2 Conceptualising speaking: Theoretical perspectives**

This section provides a theoretical overview about speaking, highlighting the importance of considering the nature of speaking and what speaking means. The review of the theoretical understanding of speaking is important in that it helped me to gain an understanding of speaking assessment components that serve as a theoretical basis on which I investigate teacher content knowledge of speaking assessment and their speaking assessment practices in the classroom.

Speaking tests need to take into account that many speaking events involve interaction (Luoma, 2004). This requires teachers to examine students' ability to perform the target

language as a social medium of communication, to express their thoughts, and to clearly present their needs in various social settings (Chuang, 2009). This implies that the assessment of the students' oral language performance is ultimately based on the examination of their communicative language abilities in terms of various critical elements. These elements are 'cognitive knowledge of the second language, knowledge of how to overcome communication difficulties, knowledge of how to organise and plan a task, topical knowledge and learners' affective reactions' (Gan, 2012, pp. 45-46). Bachman (1990) proposed a framework describing communicative language ability as 'both knowledge of language and the capacity for implementing that knowledge in communicative language use' (p. 107). Within his framework, Bachman considered competence and the capacity of implementing that competence in an appropriate and contextualised communicative language use to be two essential components of communicative language ability. Bachman's model considered the social consequences of test interpretation. In his discussion of the nature of the construct of speaking ability, Douglas (1997) argued that 'speech production and comprehension are systematically integrated, that language knowledge is multicomponential, and that strategic ability is central to the interpretation of context in the test assessment of speaking ability...' (Douglas, 1997, abstract). Based on a conceptualisation that speech production is a most complex process, Douglas presented a speech production model that is an amalgam of work by Levelt (1989), De Bot (1992), and Chapelle and Douglas (1993). It consisted of five language processors, two knowledge stores, and a strategic component as shown in the figure below:

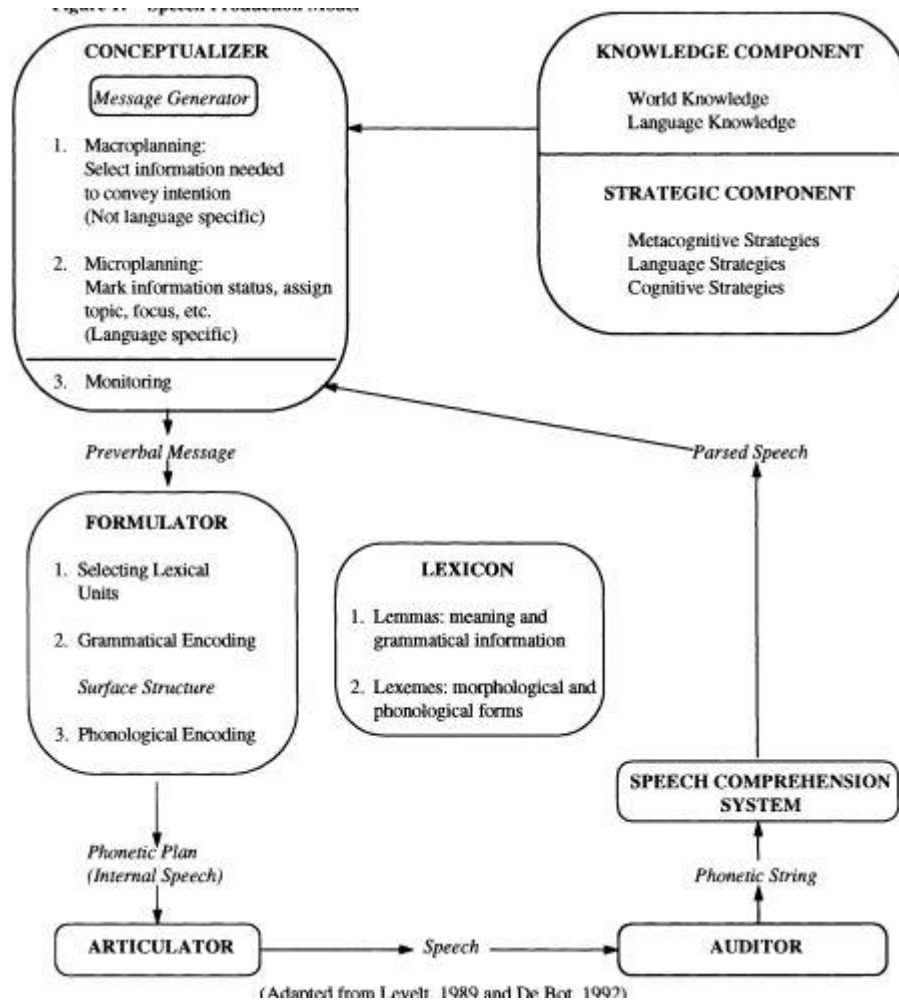


Figure 3.2: A speech production model (Douglas, 1997, p. 4)

Douglas' speech production model presented the complex process through which the elements of speech are produced during interaction. That was displayed in five language processes in which Douglas attempted to show how knowledge and strategic components evolved out of the oral interaction between the articulator and the auditor. Bachman's framework and Douglas' model provided clear and detailed insights into communicative competence in that they rigorously addressed the multiple levels of interaction that take place in a dialogue. In addition, their work served as a basis for designing speaking test formats conducted in many different contexts and for many purposes. Indeed the understanding of the abstract levels of the communicative components is essential to identify the elements of language to be tested in a given speaking test. However, I would argue that teacher knowledge of oral language assessment is of equal importance to the

design of oral language test. That is, in order to investigate whether these tests are implemented effectively, we need to gain an understanding of what teachers know about speaking assessment and whether their knowledge is represented in their assessment practices.

The nature of spoken discourse has received a great deal of attention in the fields of conversational analysis and discourse analysis, and throughout the study of linguistics, especially in the examination of the differences between spoken discourse and written discourse (Richards, 2008). Richards (2008) provided three classifications of functions of speaking in human interaction: a) interactional functions of speaking, which help to establish and maintain social interactions; b) transactional functions, which are used for the exchange of information, and c) performance functions, which serves to transmit information to an audience, i.e. it focuses on both message and audience (Richards, 2008). Richards' classifications of functions of speaking is underpinned by the socio-cultural perspective in that language use in real-world situations is viewed as fundamental to learning (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). This reflects the importance of interaction in the understanding of second language acquisition (SLA) within a socio-cultural perspective. Although, the study of SLA is not the main concern of this study, I believe it is important to understand knowledge of language in interaction within a socio-cultural theory. Within a SCT, language is considered as an essential socially-constructed meaningful artifact of a society (ibid). This raises the recognition of the interaction in the learning of language in that 'when learners appropriate mediational means, such as language, made available as they interact in socially meaningful activities, these learners can gain control over their own mental activity and can begin to function independently' (ibid, p.39).

As can be seen above, theoretical conceptualisations of the essence of speaking highlight the importance of considering the nature of speaking and what speaking means and how individuals perform the language in a given discourse. In a surface structure, speaking could be viewed as an interactive process through which meanings are socially constructed. This is clearly represented in Florez's (1999) description of speaking when he states 'its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants



themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment and, the purpose of speaking' (p.1). In this sense, Florez (ibid) conceptualised speaking as an interactive process that is contextually-based. The issue of interaction is implicitly addressed in McNamara's (2001) reconceptualisation of the social character of language testing, arguing that 'understandings of the construct of language proficiency have been challenged on the grounds of a variety of more socially oriented conceptions of language use' (McNamara, 2001, p.333-334). McNamara reconsidered the importance of the social dimension in language test constructs in that these constructs need to be relevant in the testing contexts, pointing out that constructs are understood as encompassing social values and meanings. In an earlier study, McNamara (1997) addressed the issue of the relationship between competence and performance in language testing, questioning the assumption that performance as a direct outcome of competence. From his perspective, this '...ignores the complex social construction of test performance, most obviously in interactive tests such as direct tests of speaking' (McNamara, 2001, p. 337). Richard and McNamara are, among other researchers, supporters of the notion of considering the social dimension in articulating interaction in speaking.

Fulcher (2003) went beyond the issue of interaction to address a critical question: 'what constitutes speaking ability?' (p. 18), suggesting that the understanding of speaking as a concept entails the defining of its constructs (ibid). Fulcher argued that in order to define speaking as a construct, it is essential to understand what a construct is (for more details see Section 3.1.1.1). I believe that the understanding of the elements of speaking assessment will provide a theoretical basis through which I can investigate the teachers' content knowledge of speaking assessment.

In the following sections, the literature on speaking assessment constructs, tasks and rating scales is reviewed. This is done in order to provide insights into the mechanism of speaking tests, and thus to help investigate teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment (the aim of the present study). I would argue that the investigation into EFL teachers' content knowledge of the elements of speaking is important in that it helps us to understand the rationale behind their speaking assessment practices in a given context.

### 3.1.3 Defining constructs in speaking assessment

A clear explanation of the construct being assessed in a given task-based assessment or in a performance assessment is essential. As O'Sullivan et al (2002) claimed, 'In considering the issue of validity of a performance test of speaking, we need a framework that describes the relationship between the construct being measured, the tasks used to operationalise that construct and the assessment of the performances that are used to make inferences to that underlying ability' (p.34). Fulcher (2003a) argued in a similar vein that 'the constructs we use in testing assessment should be those which are *useful* for the testing purpose' (p.19). An analysis of the construct can then provide test developers with a thorough understanding of what it means to be able to speak a language and thus to design tasks and rating criteria scales (Luoma, 2004). From the theoretical perspective, however, there is no a clear-cut definition of speaking as a construct due to the diversity of purposes of the speaking test. As Fulcher (2003) stated, 'No operational construct definition can ever capture the richness of what happens in a process as complex as human communication, even if the speaking test is mediated by tape and computer' (p. 19). This may be due to the diversity not only in the purposes of speaking tests, but also in the interpretations of the definition of the construct, who provides these interpretations, how they rationalise such interpretations, and in what assessment context. I believe all these factors have the potential to deepen our understanding and defining of the concept of the speaking construct. For example, test developers, educational researchers, and classroom teachers (native or non-native speakers), whether they practise assessment in ESL or EFL contexts, may have different interpretations and perceptions of what constitutes speaking and how it should be assessed.

Therefore, defining the construct of speaking not only helps test developers, but it also enables language teachers to be more skillful at manipulating speaking tasks and to identify the language ability to be assessed, which can best meet their methodological teaching of speaking skill. In other words, defining speaking constructs can serve as a corner stone upon which speaking tasks and rating scale can be designed. This entails the necessity of addressing speaking constructs when investigating teacher knowledge of speaking assessment. An analysis of constructs of speaking that needs to be considered when selecting a speaking task or designing rating criteria is presented below.

### **3.1.3.1 Linguistic constructs**

#### ***The sound of speech (Pronunciation)***

The sound of speech or pronunciation is one of the main characteristics of spoken language and is viewed as the departure point of any oral interaction since the effectiveness of any communication process is linked to mastery of the sound system (Sakale, 2012). Schmitt (2002) defined pronunciation as 'a term used to capture all aspects of how we employ speech sound for communication' (as cited in Roohani, 2013, p. 88). Pronunciation comprises aspects or segments such as individual sounds, intonation, stress and voice quality. As pronunciation is considered a speaking sub-skill, these elements should be taken into account when speaking assessment is carried out. However, Luoma claims that the sound of speech is a 'thorny issue' for language assessment (p.10) since pronunciation is usually judged depending on a native speaker standard of pronunciation which in turn may result in inaccurate assessment on the part of the examiner. Rubin (2012) argues in a similar vein that 'pronunciation rating is susceptible to error' (p. 14) in that assessment of pronunciation reflects, to a large extent, the examiner's expectation-driven construction of how well the test-taker speaks. By this he refers to whether the native speaker (NS) as an examiner is familiar with the sound system of the NNSs when they speak a foreign language. Thus, clear criteria need to be identified in order to achieve a valid assessment of pronunciation.

#### ***Vocabulary***

The range of lexicon is another linguistic factor in the assessment of speaking skill. Pearson, Hiebert and Kamil (2007) defined vocabulary as the words of a language and word is defined as 'a unit of language, consisting of one or more spoken sounds or their written representation, that function as a principal carrier of meaning' (p.284). Within this principal function, the assessment of vocabulary in oral language performance is essential (Iwashita, Brown, McNamara & O'hagan, 2008). Researchers in speaking assessment have considered the relative weight of individual features of oral language performance, and vocabulary is one of the recurrent linguistic features that is examined in different levels of language proficiency (Iwashita et al, *ibid*).

Luoma (2004) stated that descriptions of vocabulary are placed in most rating criteria for speaking as they reveal the speaker's richness of lexicon (p.16). Although rating scales vary in terms of the criteria by which vocabulary is assessed at different language levels, two main aspects are considered principal while assessing spoken performance, namely the number of words produced and the range of words, which Iwashita et al. (Iwashita et al., 2008) referred to in their investigation of the nature of spoken proficiency in an ESL context as 'token' and 'type' respectively. Thus, the assessment of vocabulary as speaking construct is important in terms of the amount, variation and appropriateness of vocabulary used.

### ***Accuracy and fluency***

Accuracy and fluency have been viewed as essential constructs in rating scales constructed for the assessment of speaking. In language testing, these two constructs are considered separate aspects of oral ability (Fulcher, 1996). Fulcher refers to the 'basic polarity' identified by Brumfit (1984) which represents accuracy and fluency as different aspects in the continuum. While accuracy, at one end of the continuum, entails the knowledge of grammar and lexicon, fluency, at the other end, emphasises the communicative orientation. Complexity has been added as a third component to form a triad with the other two constructs and these are viewed as the three principal professional dimensions (Skehan, 1989 as cited in Housen & Kuiken, 2009), and have been recognised as major variables that are used as performance descriptors in speaking and written assessment of language learners (Housen & Kuiken, 2009; Pallotti, 2009). Pallotti (2009) scrutinised a number of issues involved in the definition and operationalisation of complexity, accuracy and fluency constructs in terms of what they measure and why.

Pallotti (2009) described accuracy as 'the simplest and most internally coherent construct, referring to the degree of conformity to certain norms' (p.592). This may indicate that accuracy is a clearly-defined construct in that it essentially represents the linguistic aspects such as the appropriate use of grammatical structure and lexicon at different levels of oral proficiency. Within the assessment of speaking, the assessment of spoken grammar is one of the important issues addressed in the definition of accuracy as a construct in oral language performance (Goh, 2009; Luoma, 2004). As noted by Luoma (2004) '...the grammar that is

evaluated in assessing speaking should be specifically related to the grammar of speech' (p.12). The increasing recognition of considering grammar of speech in the assessment of speaking seems to coincide with the re-conceptualisation of spoken grammar in English language teaching. As argued by Leech (2000), new ways of conceptualising spoken grammar are needed in order to replace the traditional reliance on grammatical models oriented towards written language. Luoma (2004) identifies a number of grammatical aspects that characterise spoken grammar such as *spoken idea units* and *grammar in planned and unplanned speech*. In addition she provides a clear description of their operationalisation and their functional aspects in different assessment settings. In language teaching context, Goh (2009) raised the importance of considering teachers' understandings of the differences between spoken and written grammar. Goh's (2009) study addressed the issue of spoken grammar that is derived from 'a corpus of British spoken English' (p. 303), arguing its appropriateness for all language learners. Goh associated between spoken grammar and the use of communicative aspects of language, arguing that the learning of spoken grammar enhances learners' communicative language skills. Her study suggested the importance of developing teachers' propositional and experiential knowledge of the teaching of spoken grammar, pointing out that 'it is (...) important that teachers' knowledge about spoken grammar is not limited only to recognition of its forms and categories. (...)teachers should also explore ways in which the knowledge can be applied to teaching learners how to use the spoken language more effectively to express their communicative needs and to understand what is said by people they interact with' (pp. 310-311).

Compared to accuracy, fluency is viewed as a controversial issue in terms of its definition as a construct and the measure by which this construct is assessed. When evaluating accuracy, language teachers try to find out whether students are capable of constructing sentences of language that follow acceptable rules of usage (Fulcher, 2003). Fulcher (ibid) described the concept of fluency as much more fluid than this, and, therefore, some speech phenomena need to be established in order to better provide a clear picture about speakers' fluency or disfluency of speech at a certain level and in a certain context. Fulcher (1996) questioned the concept of fluency in terms of the lack of clear definition that defines what fluency actually means. This may reflect the various perceptions of fluency as reflections of speech planning

and thinking processes and a hesitation phenomenon (Freed, 1995). This is clearly evident in the description of fluency in rating scales in which many different criteria are used for the assessment of fluency. The definition of the concept of fluency has been seen as problematic over the history of testing, as stated by Fulcher (1996):

*In the history of testing, the development of a fluency rating scale has been plagued by a lack of operational specificity since the very earliest Foreign Service Institute (FSI) component oral rating scales. In the FSI component scale for fluency, the scale constructors relied on vague concepts such as 'slow and uneven speech' at band 2, and 'hesitant and jerky speech' at band 3. At band 4 'groping for words' and 'evenness' are said to result in rephrasing, while by bands 5 and 6 speech is said to be 'smooth' (p.210).*

Skehan (2009) argued that fluency needs to be rethought if it is to be measured effectively. This entails the re-conceptualisation of the issue of validity of the measurement *per se*; it is necessary to reconsider whether the measure adequately represents its underlying construct (Pallotti, 2009). Based on this perspective, Pallotti (2009) described fluency as a 'multidimensional construct, in which sub-dimensions can be recognised, such as breakdown fluency, repair fluency, speed fluency (...) Once it is established which of these sub-dimensions is at issue, it is in principle relatively transparent what is being measured' (pp. 591-592). This again highlights the issue of validity which mainly requires a clear definition of the construct that is intended to be assessed.

### **3.1.3.2 Communicative constructs**

Researchers with a special interest in the social aspect of speech and in the mechanisms by which communicative components are perceived and constructed in a given discourse context have highlighted the importance of developing the notion of interactional competence (Bygate, 1987; Fulcher, 2003; Galaczi, 2010; May, 2011; Kramersch, 1986; McNamara, 1996; Weir, 1993; 2005). The construct of interactional competence in second language speaking assessment was first raised by Kramersch (1986), who argued that existing proficiency tests at that time focused on the grammar and lexicon while the dynamic process of communication was relatively ignored (as cited in May, 2011). Bygate (1987) described interaction as 'the skill of using knowledge and basic motor-perception skills to achieve

communication' (p.6) and it mainly involves 'making decision about communication, such as: what to say, how to say it, and whether to develop it, in accordance with one's intentions, while maintaining the desired relations with others' (p.6). This conceptualisation of interaction could be linked to the constructs of the competencies in Bachman's model of (CLA), since such competencies ultimately focus on the capacity for implementing language competence constructs in contextual-based communicative language in use. Therefore, strategic, discourse and socio-cultural competencies form the basis for considering 'a new competence that focuses on how individuals interact as speakers and listeners to construct meaning in what has been called 'talk-in-interaction' (Fulcher & Davison, 2007, p.44).

Weir (1993) highlighted the importance of identifying features that characterise speaking as interaction in order to gain insights into the elements to be tested within an interactional framework in a certain speaking test context. He proposed a framework of spoken language interaction that helps test developers to construct features of spoken interaction in the design of their tests:

*A three-part framework is proposed, covering: the operations (activities/skills) that are involved in spoken interaction such as informational routines, e.g. telling a story, and improvisational skills that might be called into play when the performance of these routines breaks down, e.g. requesting clarification...; the conditions under which the tasks are performed, e.g. time constraints, the number of people involved and their familiarity with each other(...); and the quality of output, the expected levels of performance in terms of various relevant criteria, e.g. accuracy, fluency or intelligibility (Weir, 1993, p.30).*

According to Weir, the purpose of developing such a framework is to help assessment developers to design speaking tests that are intended in the first place to assess the construct of spoken language interaction in terms of the above-mentioned three parts. To my mind, Weir's framework provides theoretical insights into the features that best define the construct of interaction in a spoken language. Furthermore, it genuinely illuminates the realm of interaction and its congruity with elements that need to be assessed in a speaking task. This framework, which was based on Bygate's argument on speaking as interaction,

provides valuable insights into the understanding of what it means to assess spoken interaction, especially in a foreign language context.

Within the increasing recognition of the co-construction of conversational discourse, McNamara (1997) questioned the existing psychometric orientation of speaking tests that assign communicative competence to a single individual. Fulcher and Davison (2007) refer to the complexity of testing interaction in speaking assessment in that talk is co-constructed by participants in a conversational discourse and, as such, responsibility for talk cannot be assigned to a single participant, but to the context-bound joint construction that is formed in communications. From their perspective, this co-construction makes the assessment of interactional competence challenging for language testing. Fulcher (2010) and May (2011) argued in a similar vein that the implications of assessing interactional competence in speaking assessment is an area of concern. This is because the co-construction of the interaction by the participants, especially in paired speaking tests, has been found to have the potential to elicit a range of interactional competences such as management of interaction, turn taking, and initiating and ending topics (May, 2011). The fundamental interdependence of the two participants in paired speaking tests which derives from the interaction they produce has led to the re-conceptualisation of awarding shared scores for interactional competence (Galaczi, 2010).

The examination of English language teachers' perceptions and understanding of defining speaking constructs has recently been viewed as an important issue in language testing research. For instance, Muñoz, et al's (2003) study investigated EFL teachers' understanding of oral assessment in the Colombian context. One of the research questions related to the speaking assessment constructs that the participants considered important in oral language assessment. The findings of their study showed that the participants seemed to follow the traditional view of oral assessment in that they paid attention to accuracy. However, there was also a tendency to assess language from a communicative perspective.

Kormos and Denes (2004) examined native and non-native speaking teachers' perceptions in the assessment of fluency of second language learners' speech performance. The aim of the study was to explore the linguistic and temporal variables that have the potential to



predict native and non-native speaking teachers' perceptions of fluency. Tape-recorded speech samples were collected from 16 Hungarian EFL learners, who were divided into two proficiency groups. 3 non-native speaking teachers from Hungary and 3 native speaking teachers from the UK, Scotland and the US took part in the study. The participating teachers assessed the speech performances on a semantic differential scale that ranged from one to five, where one corresponded to the least fluent and five to the most fluent speech. With regard to the participating teachers' assessment of fluency, the findings revealed that there was a set of variables that were good predictors of fluency scores both for native and non-native speaking assessors: speech rate, the mean length of runs, phonation-time ratio and space.

In their study on raters' judgement of English language speaking proficiency, Chalhoub-Ceville and Wigglesworth (2005) examined whether there was a shared perception of speaking proficiency among ESL teachers from different English speaking countries, namely UK (30), USA (29), Australia (30), and Canada (35). The data were obtained from test takers' recorded speech samples of their performances on different tasks: making an argument, picture-based narration, and presentation. The native ESL teachers were asked to rate 36 recorded speech samples. Based on quantitative analysis, the findings revealed that there were statistical differences among the groups in their ratings of test takers' oral performances for each of the three tasks.

Through online discussions, Goh (2009) investigated English language teachers' views about spoken grammar. Using Timmis's (2005) argument that a grammar of speech based on British English would be relevant to the UK context, Goh's study aimed at investigating whether teachers outside the UK would also find spoken grammar useful for their learners. English language teachers from China and Singapore participated in a discussion that was part of a taught postgraduate course and focused on the usefulness of British spoken grammar norms and the potential value of spoken grammar knowledge for language learners. The findings of the study showed a broad consensus of opinion that spoken grammar knowledge is useful for raising awareness about spoken and written language, yet the two groups had different attitudes towards native speaker norms. Goh (ibid) believed

that such similarities and differences could be attributed to the teachers' socio-linguistic concerns, their perception of learner needs and their individual conceptualisation of grammar.

Zhang and Elder's (2011) study addressed the question of whether perception and judgement by non-native English speaking (NNES) teachers correspond to those held by native English speaking (NES) teachers or whether they draw on different definitions of speaking constructs. Their study examined teachers' interpretations of oral English proficiency as elicited by the national College English Test-Spoken English Test (CET-SET) in a Chinese context. Data for the study were obtained from two sources: unguided holistic rating given by 19 NES and 20 NNES teachers to CET-SET samples from 30 test-takers, and written comments to explain the rationales of the ratings. The findings of their study showed that there were quantitative and qualitative differences in the raters' comments: the two groups had different orientations regarding the defining of speaking assessment constructs and this was attributed to their divergent language experiences in different settings. Such findings echoed Fulcher's (2003a) suggestion that careful attention needs to be paid to contextual factors and the impact they have on the developing of the construct definition and to investigate whether such a definition is derived from the purpose of the test *per se*. This may indicate that EFL teachers need to have good knowledge and perception of how to pick and mix (Fulcher, *ibid*) in order to make a construct, or in other words, how to make their selection of certain contextual factors congruent with the purpose of the test on the one hand and teaching objectives and learning needs on the other.

As can be seen, these studies and many other provided profound insights into the importance of defining certain constructs in speaking assessment. In addressing the issue of speaking construct definition, some of these studies investigated the degree of correspondence of judgement held by native and non-native teachers (e.g., Kormos & Denes, 2004; Zhang & Elder, 2004), and that held by ESL teachers from different contexts (e.g., Chalhoub-Ceville & Wigglesworth, 2005). However, in the current study, I would argue that more investigation needs to be conducted on teacher knowledge of speaking assessment, especially in EFL contexts, in terms of speaking constructs, namely linguistic, communicative and interactive

constructs and how their knowledge about speaking constructs is reflected in their speaking assessment practices.

### **3.1.3.3 Interactive constructs**

Speaking assessment has been viewed as one of the most important issues in the research of language testing since the recognition of the central role that speaking ability plays in language teaching with the advent of communicative language testing (Kim, 2003). Essentially, the interest in speaking assessment had its origin in 1913, when Cambridge ESOL was involved in the assessment of speaking skills and launched its first language examination, Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) (Taylor, 2011), with speaking seen as a skill in its own right with a separate oral paper. This may indicate that the ability to speak English language was recognised as a significant aspect in the mastery of English as a second or a foreign language. As stated by Taylor (2011):

*A century ago, (...) language learners wishing to certificate their command of English as a foreign language faced 'an extremely demanding test of their abilities' (Weir 2003:2), in which the testing of spoken language ability, both directly and indirectly, was integral to assessing their overall their English language proficiency' (p.x)*

Since this time the assessment community has engaged in ongoing debates about important issues in speaking assessment (Galaczi, 2010). Fulcher (2003) traced an elaborate history of speaking assessment in educational contexts in the period of the late 1970s and 1980s, providing a historical overview of approaches to speaking assessment provided by the Foreign Services Institute (FSI) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) with a particular focus on their implications for rating scales and assessment criteria. Fulcher (2003) pointed out that the early history of testing speaking sheds light on the development of rating scales or rubrics.

Speaking assessment started to adopt different forms of tests among which are direct and indirect speaking tests (Galaczi, 2010). The fundamental distinctive feature of such test formats relates to the issue of interaction: a direct speaking test requires the test taker to interact with a live examiner, while an indirect speaking test takes place via a machine such

as a computer or a tape-recorder (ibid). Galaczi (2010) described the nature of interaction in the two test formats:

*The main characteristic of the direct face-to-face channel is that interaction in it is bi or multi-directional and jointly achieved by the participants. It is, (...) 'co-constructed' and reciprocal, with interlocutors accommodating their contributions to the evolving interaction, which is integral to most construct definitions of oral proficiency. Computer/tape-based testing, in contrast, is unidirectional and lacks the element of co-construction, since the test takers are responding to a machine. In a semi-direct speaking test the construct is defined with an emphasis on its cognitive dimension and on production (p. 2).*

As can be seen, reciprocity and co-construction lie at the heart of the interaction process that characterises direct speaking tests. Luoma (1997) investigated the direct and indirect versions of the Finnish National Certificate in Language Proficiency, pointing out that although the indirect test involved more situations and elicited more functions, the direct test was found to be more interactive. Weir (1993) highlighted the importance of adopting direct speaking tests in a foreign language context, claiming that 'the more direct we can make a test and the more we can incorporate contextual and interactional features of real-life activity in our tests, the more confidently we can extrapolate and make statements about what candidates should be able to do in that real life context' (p.31). Weir (2005) referred to the issue of reciprocity, pointing out that 'if we want to test spoken interaction, a valid test must include reciprocity conditions' (p.72). Based on this perspective, Weir (2005) viewed the engagement of language learners in interactive spoken language activities as fundamental and suggests that teachers need to assist their learners to adapt their speech to a certain context and to make decisions under pressure of time. Nevertheless, the use of semi-direct speaking tests in which there is no face-to-face interaction with an interlocutor should not be invalidated, as both types of tests mainly differ in the definition of the construct (Fulcher, 2003a). In a similar vein, Galaczi (2010) argued that the main concern needs to be whether the test is valid for its purpose rather than the type of test *per se*, since each test format offers unique advantages. Galaczi provided examples for the suitability of each test format in different settings; a direct speaking test would be more appropriate in situations where evidence of breadth and depth of language is required, while an indirect or a semi-

direct speaking test would be more effective in cases where evidence of 'snapshots' of language ability is needed, especially for institutional screening purposes.

The increasing recognition of the importance of interaction in direct speaking test formats highlights the importance of paired speaking tests (May, 2011). This is because the individualistic theories of language proficiency on which singleton or face-to-face speaking tests are based have been challenged by the social views of performance (Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2011). These views essentially maintained that 'coherence, meanings and identities are co-constructed by interlocutors, and that the context of an interview is influenced by the presence of an interlocutor' (Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2011, p.171). In her review of direct speaking tests, Galaczi (2010) pointed to the weaknesses of the traditional approach to direct speaking assessment, in which the interaction takes place between the examiner/rater and the test taker. In Galaczi's words 'one of the weaknesses of the singleton format is that the range of tasks and types of interaction is more restricted, with unequal distribution of rights and responsibilities between the examiner and the candidate' (p. 3). In classroom settings, it has been demonstrated that the individual format of speaking assessment has a negative washback on classroom-based speaking assessment in that it maintains the unequal power distribution, with teachers being the main initiator and students relegated to simply answering teachers' questions (Lantolf & Frawley, 1988 as cited in Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2011). The co-construction of discourse and peer-to-peer discussions are the strengthening characteristic features of paired speaking assessment in that test takers have 'the opportunity to display a wider range of interactional competencies, including turn taking, initiating topics and engaging in extended discourse with a partner, rather than with an examiner' (May, 2011, p. 127). As a consequence, paired speaking tests are seen as a 'natural alternative to the singleton test format' (Galaczi, 2010, p. 4) and are now widely used in high-stakes testing and classroom assessment contexts (May, 2011). Thus, interactive elements such as turn taking can be seen as one of the essential constructs that identify test takers' ability of interaction in a speaking test.

### **3.1.4 Defining speaking tasks**

While a definition of speaking constructs is essential for speaking assessment, a further fundamental component is the test task itself. As Chapelle (1998) stated, 'both construct definitions and tasks should be considered together in defining L2 ability because the two interact in communication' (as cited in Kim, 2009, p. 2). A test task could be seen as the vehicle of assessment by which a sample can be elicited and, thus, scored (Kim, 2009), and, based on this theoretical conceptualisation, research in speaking assessment has investigated the pragmatic functioning of a wide range of speaking tasks in terms of their appropriateness and effectiveness for eliciting samples of language performance in different settings (Bygate, 1987; Underhill, 1987; Weir, 1993). For example, Bygate (1987) made a distinction between two distinct but related types of informational talk: expository and evaluative. The former involves factual information such as description, narration, instruction and comparison, whereas the latter involves reasoning such as explanation, justification, prediction and decision. Luoma (2004) supported Bygate's conceptualisation of the diversity of speaking tasks, pointing out that 'it is useful to test the types of talk separately, as they may give different information about the learners' skills (p.32). Bygate's concept of the distinction of categories and their operationalisation in speaking tasks formed a basis for developing and elaborating task classifications. However, this concept does not explicitly recognise the essence of interactional competence which lies at the heart of conversational discourse. Bachman and Palmer (1996) viewed interactiveness as one of the most important components that contribute to the test qualities. From their perspective, interactiveness can be characterised 'in terms of the ways in which the test taker's areas of language knowledge, metacognitive strategies, topical knowledge, and effective schemata are engaged by the test task' (p. 25).

Within the recognition that 'quality and quantity of interaction played a key role in language acquisition, and that task type primarily governs the nature of classroom interaction' (Fulcher & Reiter, 2003, p.322), the investigation into task difficulty in speaking tests is seen as an important issue in language testing (Fulcher & Reiter, 2003; McNamara, 1998; Pollitt, 1991). The issue of task difficulty has been mainly addressed in terms of making inferences from the test takers' oral language performance at different language levels. In this regard, Pollitt (1991) suggested that performance tests may be constructed of a sequence of tasks

with increasing difficulty, comparing it with the high jump in athletics. Weir's (1993) performance conditions provided a classification of the categories in terms of certain conditions that identify task difficulty. Examples of these conditions are processing under normal time constraints and degree of reciprocity. These conditions reflect the difficulty in speaking tasks, especially within the degree of interactiveness assigned in the task. Another approach to task difficulty is the classification of tasks in terms of one-way and two-way tasks. Swain (2001) argued that multi-way tasks can be conducted to make inferences from more complex constructs. These early studies about task classifications and task difficulty primarily focus on psycholinguistic categories such as accuracy, fluency and the complexity of knowledge base of the language and its influence on the degree of difficulty of the task. However, the conceptualisation of task difficulty in speaking assessment has recently gone beyond such categories to include test takers' L1 cultural contexts as a category. In this regard, Fulcher and Reiter (2003) argued that task difficulty in speaking tests cannot be merely defined in terms of 'parameters like task condition, person ability and rater severity' (p. 330). Instead, they came to recognise that the concept of task difficulty needs to be linked to the cultural and social demands made by the task. They suggested a new approach to task difficulty which entails the investigation into pragmatic task features within the cultural expectations of speakers in communicative situations.

The use of multiple tasks in speaking assessment has recently been the focus of many studies conducted in ESL/EFL contexts (Galaczi, 2010; Muñoz & Álvarez, 2010; Poonpon, 2010). The use of multiple tasks is said to have many advantages; among these advantages are their potential contribution to the reliability and validity of speaking assessment. For example, Muñoz and Álvarez (2010) considered that the use of multiple tasks allows for more reliability in the assessment process and gives students opportunities to show more of their knowledge base. Galaczi (2010) talked of the potential contribution of the use of multiple speaking tasks to the validation of speaking assessment in that variation of task allows for a wide range of language to be elicited and provides broader evidence of the underlying abilities to be assessed. Indeed, a variety of tasks has the potential to provide a valid and reliable speaking assessment; however, attention also needs to be paid to whether the tasks genuinely elicit the language required to assess test takers' oral language performance. As

Luoma (2004) claimed, 'the choice of tasks for the main part of the test (description, narrative, topic-based discussion, etc.,) depends on the kind of information that is needed from the scores' (p.36). Fulcher (2003a) also suggested that 'tasks need to be designed or selected for the use that will strengthen the inferences that [instructors] make from scores to constructs' (p.50). This implies that the appropriateness of the task plays a profound role in achieving validity in speaking assessment. O'Sullivan et al (2002) raised the issue of test task validity in terms of the congruity between the test taker's actual performance on a given task and the test designer's expectations based on his/her definition of the construct(s) that form the task. They strongly argued for the importance of the match between the intended content and the actual content, without which they consider the investigation of the construct validity would be 'built on sand' (p.46). From their perspective, the defining of the construct is 'underpinned by establishing the nature of the actual performance elicited by test tasks, i.e. the true content of tasks' (p.46). O'Sullivan Weir and Saville's argument is supported by Kim (2009), who highlighted the importance of validating a given speaking test before inferring examinees' language ability from the test results. That is, tests developers and users need to 'make sure what the test aims to measure (e.g., various language components, performance on tasks) and whether a test actually measures what it intends to measure' (p. 2).

Within the EFL context, many studies addressed speaking tasks in terms of their use and appropriateness in a given setting. Kim (2003) examined the types of speaking assessment tasks used by EFL secondary school teachers in the Korean context. Data were collected from 10 EFL secondary school teachers through the use of an open-ended questionnaire and interviews. The aim of the study was to identify the types of speaking assessment tasks employed by the participants, and the mechanism by which those assessments were administered. In addition, it examined teachers' perceptions of the practical constraints in Korean EFL classrooms that have the potential to affect the assessment of speaking. The findings of the study indicated that the teachers in this study used several types of non-authentic speaking assessment tasks. The study also indicated that the participants were not equipped with a sufficient theory of communicative speaking assessment. Within the practical constraints, the study showed that large classes, time-consuming and excessive



work, lack of training in conducting speaking assessment, and lack of efficient assessment instruments were perceived to have an impact on teachers' uses of speaking assessment tasks. In addition to these constraints, the participants perceived that speaking assessment tasks were suggested for ESL contexts and did not meet Korean EFL language learners' needs.

Drawing on the communicative-orientation reformed curriculum in Thai universities, Poonpon (2010) argued that EFL teachers need not only to develop their teaching skills, but also to use appropriate methods of assessment that effectively assess students' communicative language ability. The rationale behind the study was to encourage Thai EFL teachers to use oral language assessment in their English classes. Poonpon investigated how speaking tests were integrated in an EFL classroom at a Thai university and what teachers can learn from the use of different tasks in the assessment of speaking. Two types of tasks were used in the tests: monologic and dialogic speaking tasks. The study included 45 undergraduate students whose major was Information Science, enrolled in an English course at a Thai university. Two questionnaires were developed to elicit students' views about the integration of speaking tests. The first questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the course and the other at the end. The data derived from quantitative analysis served as a source of information through which teachers gained an understanding about the students' views regarding the integration of monologic and dialogic speaking tasks in speaking assessment and were able to identify the appropriateness of difficulty of the test tasks.

These studies and many others that are conducted in EFL contexts highlighted the importance of considering teachers' implementation of speaking tasks in terms of variability and level of task difficulty. However, they did not directly investigate teachers' knowledge of speaking tasks and how this knowledge may influence their implementation of speaking tasks in oral language assessment, one of the aims of the current study. In addition, these studies used a survey and interviews as a main tool of inquiry. However, I believe that observation needs to be used as a tool of data collection through which the researcher can gain a better understanding about not only what teacher say they do, but also what they

actually don in the classroom. I believe that would provide a further understanding of teachers' knowledge and practices of speaking assessment.

### **3.1.5 Rating scales**

In the discussion of speaking constructs and tasks, there has been a considerable focus on the importance of defining these components in the light of speaking assessment. It has also been discussed how these definitions have the potential to contribute to EFL teachers' knowledge and perception of the practice of oral language assessment. Of equal importance are the rating scales through which EFL teachers can make inferences from students' language abilities. A rating scale is a way of measuring the quality of the output that results from the spoken language tasks in a specific assessment context (Underhill, 1987; Weir, 1993). It is also a tool by which EFL teachers can gain a clear picture about students' performance in terms of different skills within a sample of language that needs to be assessed (McNamara, 1996). The choice or design of a rating scale depends on the purpose of the assessment and it has the potential to define the speaking ability to be assessed. In order to elicit the construct of speaking ability for a certain assessment setting, it is essential to consider the scoring rubric which provides the test users with the actual aims of the assessment (Kim, 2006).

The two main types of rating scales - holistic and analytic - identify the overall approach to assessment of a particular task. While holistic rating captures an overall impression of the speaker's performance, analytic scoring assesses the speaker's performance on a variety of categories, such as delivery, organisation, content and language (Chuang, 2009). The differences in the use and the objectives of holistic and analytic rating scales reflect the advantages and disadvantages of each type. Holistic rating scales have the main advantage of being very rapid (Hughes, 2003). In addition, they are more practical for decision-making since the assessors only have to produce one score (Chuang, 2009), and make scoring easier in that there is less to read and remember than in a complex grid with many criteria (Luoma, 2004). However, that may lead to a disadvantage of lacking reliability in the scores obtained from such a type of scale. With regard to analytic scales, the time factor is considered a main disadvantage in that they take longer practice of scoring, yet they provide more reliable

scoring (Chuang, 2009; Hughes, 2003). Another disadvantage of the analytic scale is that raters may find it difficult and confusing to concentrate on different aspects in a sample of language to be assessed and to evaluate them simultaneously. Moreover, the focus on discrete elements of the performance may divert a rater's attention from its overall effect (Hughes, 2003; Davies et al, 1999; Kim, 2005).

The two major current approaches to the design and development of rating scales for speaking tests are the measurement-driven approach and the performance data-driven approach (Fulcher et al, 2011). The measurement-driven approach is criticised for its 'descriptive inadequacy' (ibid, p.8) in that scales derived from this approach are not 'sensitive to the communicative context or the interactional complexities of language use' (p.8). This feature is clearly evident in scales derived from the performance data-driven approach in that the essence of this approach is 'to provide richer descriptions that offer sounder inferences from score meaning to performance in specified domains' (p. 5). As a consequence, scales based on performance data-driven rating are considered appropriate for teachers to interpret speaking test scores, allowing practical feedback to the test takers either in paired or individual speaking tasks (Chou, 2013).

One of the most important issues in the designing or adopting of rating scales is their suitability and appropriateness in a certain assessment context; rating scales need to be developed to account for social, linguistic and contextual factors in order to match the principles of performance-based language assessment. From the socio-cultural perspective, Hudson (2005, p.205) pointed out that the development of rating scales in ESL/EFL is motivated by a perceived need to '...promote language assessment that recognizes the need to expand beyond a tradition that has focused on language primarily as a decontextualized cognitive skill or ability. Language takes place in a social context as a social act, and this frequently needs to be recognized in language assessment'. For example, the notion of native speakerism has been viewed as a standard on which many rating scales are constructed. A number of published rating scales are designed on the basis of native-speaker standards, such as those of the FSI and ACTFL, as well as the Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR) (as cited in Fulcher, 2003a). According to many researchers, the concept of

designing rating scales based on the standard of 'native-like' language ability has been questioned. For instance, Perren (1968) criticised the FSI scale because it was noted that the term 'educated native speaker' was the starting point for the design of the scale (Fulcher, 2003a). This was challenged by Davies (1991) who pointed out that the term 'native speaker' in rating scales was not sufficiently defined in order to make it useful in a testing situation. Another definitional challenge is the difficulty of defining the form of Standard English of the native speakers because of the variability of their language proficiency (Davies, 2003). Thus, it is recognised that basing the rating scales on the standards of native speakers is not appropriate in the assessment of ESL/EFL test takers' speaking skill (McNamara, 1996).

Many studies in EFL contexts consider the issue of rating scales in terms of suitability and validity (Iwashita, 2008; Nakatsuhara, 2007; Pan & Pan, 2011; Poonpon, 2010). These studies and others argued for the importance of considering socio-cultural aspects in the development of the rating scales. Nakatsuhara's (2007) study aimed at developing an 'assessor-oriented' (p. 85) speaking rating scale for Japanese EFL upper secondary school teachers to use in the assessment of speaking in the classroom, a context for which no standard scale existed. Nakatsuhara based the development of the rating scale on four stages: 1) review of the speaking rating scales, 2) the examination of the course of study, 3) drafting a rating scale, and 4) pilot testing. To investigate the effectiveness of the developed rating scale, Nakatsuhara attempted to examine two aspects: the match between speaking ratings and the rating scale, and the meaningfulness of each category's function in the analytic scale. Nakatsuhara used the scale in a group oral test in which 42 Japanese upper-secondary school students took part. Groups of three to four students were asked to interact while being assessed. Two raters were involved in the study. The findings indicated that reliability was achieved in the raters' use of the rating scales.

Poonpon (2010a) argued that the use of published rating scales may raise problems because they are often so broad that they cannot provide a valid assessment of the students' language abilities during a course. Based on this argument, Poonpon's study aims to expand the Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-based test (TOEFL iBT)'s integrated speaking rating scale in order to include 'more fine-grained distinctions' (p.69) in order to capture

students' improvement. The scale was expanded from four score levels to seven. The findings revealed that the modification and the expansion in the rating scale supported the TOEFL iBT's aim to strengthen the link between the test and the test preparation of participants in the classroom setting. Such findings enhance Nakatsuhara's argument that 'there is no magic rating scale that can be relevant to all tests in all contexts' (p. 83). Therefore, language teachers need to examine 'the suitability of the given rating scale to the quality of language samples actually elicited in each testing situation' (Nakatsuhara, 2007, p. 84).

### 3.2 Summary of psychometric-based studies into speaking assessment

The assessment of speaking has been one of the main issues explored in a great many studies in the research of language testing as has been discussed in the previous section. In addition, the main concern of most of these studies has been to investigate elements of speaking from the psychometric perspective of assessment in that the main focus was on the measurement of speaking constructs and validity and reliability issues. In the tables below, I summarise the studies in four categories related to speaking constructs (table 3.1), speaking tasks (table 3.2), rating scales and raters (table 3.3), and validity of oral language testing (table 3.4).

| <i>Study</i>                               | <i>Aim</i>   |
|--|--|
| Bachman & Savignon, 1986                   | Critiquing the ACTFL Oral Interview  |
| Brown, 2003                                | Investigating interviewer variation and the co-construction of speaking proficiency  |
| Iwashita, Brown, McNamara, & O'hagan, 2008 | Investigating the nature of speaking proficiency in English as a second language, and looking into the relationship between detailed features of spoken language produced by test takers and holistic scores awarded by raters to these performances |
| Iwashita, 2010                             | Investigating the four traits of oral proficiency (syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy, lexical diversity & fluency) of learners of English and Japanese as foreign languages   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Jin & Mak, 2012                                | Investigating the relationship between distinguishing features of L2 Chinese spoken performance and the scores awarded by the raters to the performances using a holistic scoring |
| Bosker, Pinget, Quene, Sanders & de Jong, 2012 | Presenting a report on four experiments investigating the contributions of three fluency aspects (pauses, speed & repairs) in the assessment language proficiency.                |

**Table 3.1: Studies on speaking constructs**

| <i>Study</i>                      | <i>Aim</i>   |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Bachman, Lynch, & Mason, 1995     | Discussing the design and the development of a foreign language (Spanish) test battery in terms of variability in tasks and rater judgements in a performance test of foreign language speaking. |
| Fulcher, 1996                     | Investigating the use of tasks in speaking tests in terms of design and use.   |
| Iwashita, McNamara & Elder, 2001  | Investigating the association of different task characteristics and performance conditions with different levels of fluency, complexity or accuracy in test-takers' performances                 |
| Elder, Iwashita, & McNamara, 2002 | Investigating the influence of performance conditions on test-takers' perceptions of task difficulty in a speaking test  |
| Fulcher & Reiter, 2003            | Reviewing assumptions of underlying approaches to research into speaking task difficulty and questioning the perspective that test scores vary with task conditions.                             |
| Lumley & O'Sullivan, 2005         | Exploring the influence of the task topic, gender of the test-taker and the audience on task performance in a tape-mediated assessment of speaking   |

**Table 3.2: Studies on speaking tasks**

| <i>Study</i>           | <i>Aim</i>   |
|------------------------|--|
| Clark, 1988            | Reporting the findings of a validation study of the semi-direct Chinese speaking test.   |
| Wigglesworth, 1993     | Exploring the inter-and intra-reliability of direct and semi-direct speaking tests through the use of multifaceted Rasch techniques.                           |
| Chalhoub-Deville, 1995 | Deriving criteria underlying second language learners' oral language ability scores through three oral tests: an oral interview, a narration and a read-aloud. |
| Upshur & Turner, 1995  | Discussing issues of validity and reliability of rating scales   |

|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Fulcher, 1996b                        | Discussing a fluency rating scale and proposing a qualitative and quantitative approach for producing a thick description in rating scale construction                             |
| Upshur & Turner, 1999                 | Investigating systematic effects in the rating of second-language speaking ability   |
| Kim, 2004                             | Investigating raters' subjectivity in oral language test   |
| Chalhoub-Deville & Wigglesworth, 2005 | Investigating the shared perception of speaking proficiency among raters from Australia, Canada, UK and USA.   |
| Fulcher, Davidson & Kemp, 2011        | Discussing the two approaches employed for the design and the development of rating scales for testing speaking: the measurement approach and the performance data-driven approach |
| Jin, Mak, & Zhou, 2011                | Investigating confidence scoring of speaking performance   |
| Winke, Gass & Myford, 2012            | Investigating raters' background as a potential source of bias in rating speaking performance  |

**Table 3.3: Studies on rating scales and raters**

| <i>Study</i>                      | <i>Aim</i>   |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Shohamy, 1994                     | Reporting the findings of a study that examined the validity of two oral tests: direct and semi-direct speaking tests  |
| Bachman, 1988                     | Examining validity of oral interview ratings   |
| Powers, Schedl & Leung, 1999      | Investigating the validity of test score inferences derived from the revised Test of Spoken English (TSE)  |
| Swain, 2001                       | Examining the aspect of interaction in small groups within a socio-cultural theory of mind   |
| O'Sullivan, Weir & Saville, 2002  | Addressing the issue of validating the match between intended and actual test-taker language with regard to a blueprint of language functions representing the construct of speaking, and designing an observation checklist for priori and posterior analysis of speaking task output |
| Kim, 2010                         | Investigating the validity of speaking placement tests in terms of valid measurement of speaking constructs, and the validity of the tasks and the raters' judgement   |
| Frost, Elder & Wigglesworth, 2012 | Investigating the validity of an integrated listening-speaking task  |

### **Table 3.4: Studies on validation of oral language testing**

These studies and many others have mainly addressed issues related to the content of speaking testing in terms of its constructs (table 3.1) and asks (table 3.2), and to the development of rating scales (table 3.3) and their validation in the measurement of test takers' oral language performance (table 3.4). In addition, most of these studies have used quantitative data as evidence for the measurement of speaking constructs and the validation of speaking tasks and rating scales. Many of these studies focused on test takers' oral language performance (examinees) and the raters' interpretation of test-takers' oral language performance in speaking tests in academic contexts such as in speaking assessment conducted in TOEFL and IELTS exams, and other formats of speaking tests. Overall, these studies have provided us with insightful background that solidifies our understanding of the principles and mechanisms of speaking assessment. However, none of these studies were conducted on classroom-based contexts, nor did they investigate teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in the classroom context. I believe that more research needs to be conducted on language teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment and their speaking assessment practices in the classroom context. This is important in the light of the increasing recognition of the role of the teacher in the assessment process which is viewed as an important issue in classroom-based assessment research (see section 3.3.1).

### **3.3 Teacher knowledge**

The present study aims to investigate what teachers know about speaking assessment and how they use this knowledge in practice, and seeks to understand the influence of the context on teachers' knowledge and practice. In order to articulate my understanding about what it means to know, it is necessary to understand how research in teachers' knowledge has perceived concepts of knowledge based on researchers' different understandings. This section reviews the theoretical background to the various understandings of teacher knowledge in its broadest context.



### **3.3.1 Perspectives on the concept of knowledge**

In its broad context, knowledge is viewed as an essential component for human survival and a fundamental aspect for decision making about daily life and creating change in both humans and the context where they live (Barker, 2013). This indicates the high importance of understanding knowledge as a concept in human life. In order to understand what the statement 'I know' indicates, we need to define 'knowledge' as a term. Within theoretical and philosophical perspectives, the term 'knowledge' is conceptualised in relation to other cognitive concepts such as 'beliefs'. For example, Pajares (1992) contended that 'distinguishing knowledge from belief is a daunting undertaking' (p. 309). In his conceptualisation of beliefs held by teachers, Pajares attempted to distinguish knowledge of domain from feelings about domain, claiming that 'a distinction is similar to that between self-concept and self-esteem, between knowledge of self and feelings of self-worth' (p. 309). In their conceptualisation of generic knowledge, Nisbett and Ross (1980) referred to knowledge and knowing which is evaluative in nature. For Nisbett and Ross (ibid), generic knowledge is 'a structure composed of a cognitive component, systematically organised, and a belief component, possessing elements of evaluation and judgement' (cited in Pajares, 1992, p. 310). In line with this, Ernst (1989) viewed knowledge as a cognitive outcome of thought. Knowledge has also been viewed as a comprehensive concept. For example, Alexander, Schaller and Hare (1991) described knowledge as 'all that a person knows or believes to be true, whether or not it is verified as true in some sort of objective or external way' (p.317 as cited in Verloop et al. 2001, p. 446). Alexander et al's (1991) general description of the concept of knowledge was adopted by Verloop et al (2001) in their conceptualisation of teacher knowledge, which they view as 'overarching' and 'inclusive' (p.446). Thus, these perspectives considered the concept of knowledge as a cognitive outcome. However, they did not place emphasis on the role that the social and cultural context plays in the development of knowledge. The role of social and cultural context in knowledge development is one of the main issues genuinely addressed in Vygotsky's theory.

Within Vygotsky's theory, the principal conceptualisation of knowledge is that it is socially constructed in that 'higher level human cognition in the individual has its origin in social life' (Johnson, 2009, p.1). From the sociocultural standpoint, 'humans are understood to utilize

existing cultural artifacts and to create new ones that allow them to regulate their biological and behavioral activity' (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 197). That is, human mental functioning is to be perceived as mediated cognition that is a consequence of the individual's interaction with cultural artefacts they encounter in the social environment, and it is this that I primarily draw on in my understanding of knowledge.

For Vygotsky, the interdependence of the cultural and individual processes of knowledge were addressed through the examination of social sources of individual development, semiotic mediation in human development (signs, symbols, language), and genetic analysis (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Within social sources of individual development, Vygotsky argued that the process of knowledge construction appeared in two planes: the social and psychological planes. First, it takes place in the social (inter-mental) plane, where the interaction is between the individual and the social world; then it takes place within the individual psychological (intra-mental) plane.

Psychological mediation and cultural tools are socio-cultural concepts that emerged in Vygotskian theory as a reaction to the notion of the overly individualistic process of knowledge construction. For Vygotsky, individuals construct their knowledge through the use of cultural tools (language, works of art, literacy, numeracy, etc.). These cultural tools 'serve as a buffer between the person and the environment and act to mediate the relationship between the individual and the social- material world' (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 199). Based on this process, the individuals' mental and psychological functioning is constructed and developed through the interdependence of the individual and the social world via the use of the cultural tools that are shaped in cultural, institutional and historical settings (Wertsch, 1994). While Vygotsky demonstrated human mediation in knowledge construction, it was also evident that he perceived knowing and learning as essential processes in acquiring capacities and cognitive skills that assist the individual to participate in the social world (Glassman, 2001).

Vygotsky's other ultimate contribution to the understanding of knowledge was to see historical conditions as essential in examining the construction of knowledge (Vygotsky,

1978). In this regard he highlighted the need to focus on the processes by which knowledge is constructed rather than its product, arguing that:

*To study something historically means to study it in the process of change; that is the dialectical method's basic demand. To encompass in research the process of a given thing's development in all its phases and changes- from birth to death- fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, (...) (pp 64-65).*

The examination of historical conditions gives rise to the principles of sociocultural theory in that historical settings in a given social world are constantly changing and result in change in cultural and institutional settings as well as opportunities for learning. For Vygotsky, this enhances the conceptualisation that knowledge is socially and culturally situated, and there is 'no universal schema that adequately represents the dynamic relationship between external and internal aspects of development' (John-Steiner & Soubberman, 1978 as cited in John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 194).

Within the educational perspective, knowledge is viewed as propositional and experiential (e.g., Poikela, 2006). Propositional knowledge (or codified knowledge) is referred to as 'public knowledge and is often given a formal status by its inclusion in educational programmes' (Barker, 2013, .16). That is, it involves theories and models that are learned during education (Poikela, 2006). Experiential knowledge, on the other hand, is referred to as a relational knowledge on the premise that the fundamental element of experiential knowledge is 'knowledge through relationship encountering humans and other elements' (Burnard, 1987 as cited in Poikela, 2006). That is, the social context is seen as an important dimension of experiential knowledge in that knowledge is embedded in the social connections between individuals rather than is owned by individuals (Burnard, *ibid*). Within socio-cultural theory, propositional and experiential knowledge are created within the social and cultural context through the use of social and cultural artefacts.

The present study, with its focus on EFL novice teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment, is underpinned by the socio-cultural understanding of knowledge and views knowledge as an evolving process emerging from the interaction between the individual and the social world. However, the aim of the research is to investigate teachers' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in classroom settings. Thus, the term knowledge is situated

within the experiential frame and the aim is to examine what teachers know about speaking assessment and how they use this knowledge.

### **3.3.2 Towards the understanding of teacher knowledge: Theoretical framework**

The investigation into teacher knowledge in terms of 'what' teachers know about what they do in the classroom has become a core interest in mainstream educational research since the mid-1970s (Carter, 1990; Freeman, 2002). Cognitive theory is a theoretical framework that has long served as a conceptual framework on which research into teacher knowledge based its examination of teacher content knowledge. Research in teacher cognition demonstrates that teacher knowledge is an important element that has the potential to provide insights into teachers' innate ability to make images and interpretations about what they are teaching, who they are teaching and the context in which teaching takes place. For example, Carter (1990) conceptualised teacher knowledge as the total knowledge that a teacher has at his or her disposal at a particular moment, which, by definition, underlies his or her actions (as cited in Verloop et al., 2001). In their study of teacher knowledge, Verloop, Dariel and Meijer (2001) point out that the label 'teacher knowledge' needs to be used as an 'overarching, inclusive concept, summarizing a large variety of cognitions', and 'components of knowledge, beliefs, conceptions and intuitions are inextricably intertwined' in the mind of the teachers (p.446). Verloop et al.'s definition of teacher knowledge reflects the importance of conceptualising knowledge as a monitor that guides teachers' actions in the teaching process. Their perspective echoed Elbaz's (1983) conceptualisation of teacher knowledge, which highlights the importance of considering teacher knowledge. For Elbaz (ibid) 'the single factor which seems to have the greatest power to carry forward our understanding of the teachers' role is the idea of teachers' knowledge' (p.11). This indicates that teacher knowledge, as a cognitive concept, is viewed as an essential aspect in the examination of what teachers know and whether it is reflected in their teaching practices.

The question 'what teachers know' (Carter, 1990, p. 292) is considered as one of the main issues in teacher knowledge research. The emergence of substantial research on teachers' knowledge led to a paradigm shift in addressing teacher knowledge within a cognitive perspective:

*The emphasis on cognition in teaching was stimulated, in large measures, by the growing concern for cognition and context in the social sciences and by the appearance in the late 1960s of qualitative or interpretive studies of classroom teaching (...). As the study of cognition became more widely acceptable in the social and behavioral sciences, educational researchers turned to the study of teachers' cognitive processes and thinking (Carter, 1990, p. 295).*

Within the domain of the cognitive perspective, teacher knowledge is addressed through the investigation of teachers' decision-making, practical knowledge, and their pedagogical content knowledge. The study of teachers' decision-making is typically grounded in a psychological framework in that the focus is on understanding cognitive processes or ways teachers use in thinking about teaching (ibid). Research on practical and personal knowledge, on the other hand, is undertaken in classroom settings in an aim to investigate the influence of classroom contexts on teachers' thoughts and actions. The latter is based on phenomenology as a methodological framework through which researchers use qualitative and interpretive research methods (e.g., Elbaz, 1983, Connelly & Clandinin, 1985). This research demonstrates that 'teachers' knowledge is not abstract and propositional. Nor can it be formalized into a set of specific skills or present answers to specific problems. Rather it is experiential, procedural, situational, and particularistic' (Carter, 1990, p.307). That is, teacher knowledge is seen as experiential in that it is generated as a consequence of teachers' teaching experiences (Fenstermacher, 1994).

The concepts of practical knowledge and personal practical knowledge figure prominently in the work of Elbaz (1983, 1991) and Connelly and Clandinin (1985, 1990). Through a case study of a high school English teacher (Sarah) in a Canadian context, Elbaz (1983) examined teachers' practical knowledge in teaching, attempting to explore the importance of the teacher's view as an agent, with an active and autonomous role shaped by the teacher's classroom experience. Elbaz (ibid) contended that 'this knowledge [practical knowledge] encompasses firsthand experience of student's learning styles, interests, needs, strengths and difficulties, and a repertoire of instructional techniques and classroom management skill' (p.5). She classified the content of practical knowledge into five broad categories: (a) self, (b) the milieu, (c) subject matter knowledge, (d) knowledge of curriculum, and (e)

knowledge of instruction. In addition, she identified the means by which teachers hold and use their knowledge as situational, theoretical, personal, social, and experiential. Her framework was mainly based on investigating what Sarah knows about her work, and how her understanding could be captured and understood. In her study, Elbaz indicated that what the teacher knows is not propositions or theory, but rather her knowledge is experientially-driven in that it comprises her understanding of instructional tasks, conflict resolutions, and plans in relation to instructional performances. Elbaz's framework of study provided a comprehensive understanding of teachers' knowledge in practice, highlighting the significant role teachers' beliefs and values play in informing their experience.

Along a similar line of research, Connelly and Clandinin (1985) studied personal practical knowledge, shedding more light on notions of personal philosophies, narrative inquiry, and metaphors, all of which mirror teachers' actions in classroom settings. That is to say, personal philosophies including beliefs and values evolve from experience, while narratives establish these values and beliefs within a particular context of classroom setting:

*We see personal practical knowledge as in the person's past experience, in the person's present mind and body and in the person's future plans and actions. It is knowledge that reflects individual's prior knowledge and acknowledges the nature of that teacher's knowledge. It is kind of knowledge...that is constructed and reconstructed as we live out our stories and retell and relive them through process of reflection (Clandinin, 1992, p.125).*

Image is another notion that is considered by Clandinin (1986) in that she conceptualised images as the 'coalescence of a person's personal private and professional experience' (p. 166). Fenstermacher (1994) exemplified Clandinin's notion of images held by teachers, stating that: 'One image [is] of the school as a second home for students, leading the teacher to think that she is a kind of custodial parent to her students, in charge of a classroom that is a home-like environment' (p. 10). For Connelly and Clandinin, these notions comprise personal practical knowledge, acknowledging that the context plays an important role in shaping teachers' personal practical knowledge.

In his examination of practical knowledge, Schön (1987) based his investigation on Dewey's notion of pragmatism in that he referred to practical knowledge as knowledge in action. He

distinguished between technical rationality and knowledge that teachers acquire from their own experiences, arguing that more emphasis needs to be placed on how teachers' knowledge arises in the context of action and the consequences of this knowledge for practices rather than on the description of knowledge via story or narratives (Fenstermacher, 1994). Although the pioneer work of Elbaz and Connelly and Clandinin differ from that of Schön's in terms of approaches and methods, they all seek an understanding of knowledge as a concept that arises out of action and experience (Fenstermacher, 1994).

As can be seen, within the broad field of research on teacher knowledge, the emphasis has long been on understanding teachers' knowledge of teaching within cognitive and socio-cognitive theoretical frameworks in that the focus is on teachers' thinking, decision making and their knowledge in action. This research provides a profound theoretical basis for studies that have investigated teacher knowledge, including those conducted in the TEFL and TESOL fields of study (see section 3.3.4). It has helped capture the complexities of what teachers know and believe (Johnson, 2006). Further examination of teacher cognition has raised the importance of considering prior knowledge of teaching or prior experience, the context within which the teachers work, and the interpretation of the activities they are engaged in, as these all have the potential to influence how teachers construct their knowledge in their professional education (Freeman, 2002; Johnson, 2006). The principal concept of knowledge within the socio-cultural perspective, as seen above, is that knowledge is socially constructed through the interaction of the individual with his/her social world. This socio-cultural perspective has been adopted as a theoretical framework based on which research in teacher knowledge investigates the complexity and dynamicity of the process of constructing teachers' knowledge in the light of social, contextual and historical factors. As Johnson (2009) put it, 'teachers' knowledge and beliefs are constructed through and by the normative ways of thinking, talking, and acting that have been historically and culturally embedded in the communities of practice in which they participate (as both learners and teachers)' (p.17). This suggests that teachers' knowledge is shaped through a complex process of interaction between teachers as individuals and the socio-cultural context, starting at an early stage as students in the classrooms, then in teacher education

programmes where they receive their professional development, and later in the schools where they work (ibid). However, although the present study does not attempt to investigate the process of EFL teachers' knowledge construction of assessment, through careful examination of the current state of these teachers' knowledge and practice, it aims to generate a better understanding of EFL novice teachers' understanding of speaking assessment.

The re-conceptualisation of teacher knowledge within complex, socially, culturally, and historically situated contexts shows an 'epistemological gap between how L2 teacher educators have traditionally prepared L2 teachers to do their work and how L2 teachers actually learn to teach and carry out their work' (Johnson, 2006, p. 239). Johnson argued that in order to redress this epistemological gap, we need to take into account the challenges that have the potential to reorient the mechanism by which L2 teachers are prepared. Among these challenges are theory/practice versus praxis, the legitimacy of teachers' ways of knowing, redrawing the boundaries of professional development, and "located" L2 teacher education. When addressing these challenges, Johnson highlighted the importance of reconsidering the concepts and principles constructed for leading L2 teacher education programmes in order to account for legitimising teacher knowledge. She suggested 'praxis' (p. 240) as a construct which provides an opportunity for teachers to capture how theories and practice inform one another instead of giving more attention to the learning of second language acquisition (SLA) theories. In addition, she highlighted the importance of positioning 'teachers as knowers and to position their ways of knowing that lead to praxis alongside the disciplinary knowledge that has dominated the traditional knowledge base of L2 teacher education' (p.243).

Although Johnson's arguments were typically framed in L2 teacher knowledge base and ways of learning to do their work, they effectively show the importance of considering teacher knowledge in terms of its interconnectedness with the social world where teachers carry out their work. Therefore research on teacher knowledge needs to be undertaken in a naturalistic setting in order to explore not only what teachers say about what they know but how they use this knowledge. By saying that, I am not claiming that the cognitive perspective is an ineffective theoretical framework for the understanding of teacher knowledge;



however, my understanding of knowledge is underpinned by a socio-cultural perspective in that the present study sees knowledge as dynamic and socially constructed. The aim of my research is to investigate what teachers know about speaking assessment and how they use this knowledge. Thus, it aims to examine teachers' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in the classroom context.

### **3.3.3 Teacher content knowledge**

It is recognised that teacher knowledge covers not only what is known but how that knowledge is put into practice. Content knowledge has been defined as the knowledge of subject matter and its organising structures (Wilson, Shulman & Richert, 1987) and knowledge of pedagogy. That is, teacher content knowledge is a general term that includes subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge which is that amalgam of both content and pedagogy (Shulman, 1987). In describing pedagogical knowledge, Cochran (1991, abstract) pointed out that 'what teachers know about teaching, such as pre-instructional strategies, the use of concrete examples and manipulatives, formative testing, use of questions, design of curriculum and assignments, and assessment of student performance comprised pedagogical knowledge'. Cochran's description provided comprehensive elements that comprise content knowledge. One of these elements is knowledge of assessment of students, which could be perceived to be an important aspect in the understanding of what teachers know about assessment.

In her review of teacher knowledge, Carter (1990) raised the issue of teachers' content knowledge. She based her argument on the premise that more attention was given to the investigation into the *characteristics* of what teachers know. For example, 'their knowledge is complex, idiosyncratic, rich, holistic, personal' (ibid, p. 307), and on *topics* about which they think '(e.g., they know about routines, students, images, curriculum)' (p.307). However, less attention was given to 'substance of that knowledge, to what teachers actually know or need to know about classrooms, content and pedagogy and how that knowledge is organized' (p.307). The pioneer work of Lee Shulman (1986, 1987) provided useful insights into the major categories of teacher knowledge: knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, content,

students, educational contexts, curriculum, and knowledge of content and pedagogy. By classifying these categories, Shulman and his colleagues highlighted the profound role of content knowledge and situated content-based knowledge in the larger frame of professional knowledge for teaching, but not specific to a particular subject area. They believed that research and policy communities need to give more attention to the content of knowledge in terms of subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge. As such their work aimed to provide a conceptual framework in which a set of analytic distinctions of the content-intensive nature of knowledge of teaching is highlighted. At the same time, however, Shulman and his colleagues made it explicit that the general categories were essential and that the focus on content dimensions of teacher knowledge was not meant to undervalue the importance of pedagogical understanding and skill, pointing out that 'mere content knowledge is likely to be as useless pedagogically as content free skill' (Shulman, 1986, p. 8). Turner-Bisset (1999) developed a model of knowledge bases, using Shulman's 'Categories of Knowledge Bases' (1986, 1987) and Dunne & Harvard's 'Dimensions of Teaching' (1990) in the analysis of the interview and observation data collected from postgraduate primary teachers in training. Turner-Bisset's model provided more elaborate categories than Shulman's original list of categories of knowledge. She considered subject matter knowledge in terms of three aspects, namely substantive knowledge, syntactical knowledge and beliefs about the subject. She argued that beliefs about the subject is 'as much an aspect of subject matter knowledge as substantive and syntactic knowledge (p.44). In addition, curriculum knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge/ models of teaching, knowledge of learners (both cognitively and empirically), knowledge of self, knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of educational end, and pedagogical content knowledge are the categories developed in Turner-Bisset' model. These models and many others provided a thorough understanding of content knowledge, in particular, that it is related to subject matter knowledge (SMK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK).

Research in teacher content knowledge has provided promising results in the investigation into teacher subject matter knowledge (SMK) (e.g., Leinhardt & Smith, 1985; Shulman, 1986). Based on the cognitive perspective, teaching is seen as a cognitive skill that emerges from two main areas of knowledge, namely lesson structure and subject matter (Leinhardt

& Smith, 1985). Leinhardt and Smith (ibid) highlighted the importance of considering these areas of knowledge in the understanding of mathematics teacher content knowledge. For Leinhardt and Smith, SMK includes 'conceptual understanding, algorithmic operations, the connection between different algorithmic procedures, the subset of number system being drawn upon, understanding of class of student errors, and curriculum presentation' (p. 247). Within teacher knowledge base, Shulman (1986) described SMK as the general conceptual understanding of a subject area that a teacher obtains through the completion of the coursework.

Kennedy (1991) argued that more attention needs to be given to subject matter knowledge specificity in that the focus needs to be on how teachers' knowledge needs to differ from the kind of knowledge others have of these subjects. She considered three components of subject matter knowledge as key aspects to identify teachers' knowledge of subject areas they are teaching, namely the content of the subject, organisation and structure of the content and methods of inquiry. In this respect, she argued:

*Teachers are not historians, but rather teachers of history; not scientists but rather teachers of science(....)To distinguish the particular kind or form of knowledge teachers need, (...) We need to determine whether teachers need to know the same aspects of subject matter that these other practitioners know, or whether they need to know more, or less. And we need (...) to determine how, if at all, a teacher's knowledge of a subject should differ from that of others who use the subject in their work (p.6).*

Kennedy's subject matter component provides clear and detailed categories that comprise the components of SMK. Teachers' knowledge of SMK in terms of the content of the area, the organisation of the structure and the content and methods could be viewed as essential in that they would enable teachers to address the subject area effectively.

Teachers' knowledge of content in their fields and its transformation into forms accessible to students is another important area in teacher knowledge research (e.g., Cochran, 1991; Shulman, 1986). This is characterised as pedagogical content knowledge. In Shulman's view (1986), pedagogical content knowledge is a form of practical knowledge that is used by teachers to guide their actions in highly contextualised classroom settings. For Shulman, this

form of practical knowledge entails, among other pedagogical aspects, the following: (a) knowledge of how to structure and represent academic content for direct teaching to students; and (b) knowledge of conceptions and micro-conceptions and difficulties students encounter when learning a particular content. Pedagogical content knowledge is seen as the distinctive feature for understanding the teachers' knowledge of instruction, as it 'represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction' (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). In line with this, Wilson *et al.* (1987) referred to pedagogical content knowledge as 'a new type of subject matter knowledge that is enriched and enhanced by other types of knowledge - knowledge of the learner, knowledge of the curriculum, knowledge of the context, knowledge of pedagogy' (p.114). Shulman considered such an amalgam of content and pedagogy as an essential category of teacher knowledge through which teachers are able to use different useful ways in representing and formulating the subject in order to make it accessible to the students. Following Shulman's conceptualisation of PCK, many researchers have elaborated the concept of PCK. For example, Cochran (1991) conceptualised the amalgam of content and pedagogy as a transformational process, pointing out that:

*Transformation occurs as the teacher critically reflects on and interprets the subject matter; finds multiple ways to represent the information as analogies, metaphors, examples, problems, demonstrations, and classroom activities; adapts the material to students' abilities, gender, prior knowledge, and misconceptions; and finally tailors the material to those specific students to whom the information will be taught (pp5-6).*

Based on a constructivist perspective, Cochran (1991) extended the boundaries of PCK identified by Shulman to consider knowledge of environmental context as an essential component. For Cochran, PCK is 'using the understandings of subject matter concepts, learning processes, and strategies for teaching the specific content of a discipline in a way that enables students to construct their own knowledge effectively in a given context' (p.11). In their model of PCK designed for teacher training programmes, Cochran (*ibid*) considered four areas of knowledge: content (subject area) knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of students (e.g., backgrounds, motivation and their prior subject area

knowledge), and knowledge of the environment context (e.g., knowledge of school context, the social context of the community, and parental concerns). In their analysis of the perspectives on the concept of PCK addressed in teacher knowledge research, Van Driel, Verloop and De Vos (1998) pointed out that two components of PCK seemed to be viewed as fundamental, namely knowledge of representations and teaching strategies of a particular content area and knowledge of specific conceptions and learning difficulties with regard to a particular content area (cited in Verloop et al., 2001). Thus, PCK with its components is essential in that it characterises teacher knowledge as professional (Ball, Thames & Phelps, 2008).

As motioned above, Shulman's work provided a general theoretical framework of the concept of teacher content knowledge in which he attempted to set analytic categorisations of knowledge needed for teaching a subject area. In addition, he sought to identify the ways in which content knowledge for teaching is distinct from the disciplinary content knowledge (Ball et al., 2008). Within language teacher knowledge research, Shulman's categorisations of teacher content knowledge mainly focused on teaching aspects and it has long served as a theoretical foundation for research on language teachers' pedagogical and professional knowledge in instructional domains, while little attention has been given to teachers' content knowledge of language assessment. What I mean by this is that there has been no focus on what teachers know about language assessment. I believe this issue has become increasingly important, especially in light of the recognition of language teacher classroom based assessment as an important trend in language classroom-based assessment research. Nonetheless, although Shulman's work focused mainly on teacher content knowledge of teaching, it did assist me to gain a deep understanding of the general framework of teacher content knowledge that would potentially enable me to carry out my investigation into teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment: what teachers know about speaking assessment.

### **3.3.4 Research in language (ESL/EFL) teacher knowledge**

The pioneer work of Shulman and his associates inspired several researchers to investigate teachers' content knowledge either in the mainstream of education research or TESOL

research. In order to gain a thorough understanding of language teacher content knowledge, I will review research studies that address language teacher knowledge, especially that conducted in ESL/EFL contexts. Although these studies address ESL/EFL teachers' knowledge of instruction, I believe this will help me to see what areas of teacher knowledge have been examined and how it is conceptualised in contexts that are similar to the context of the present study.

Language teachers' knowledge of subject matter and its impact on their instructional decisions has been one of the main issues that are addressed in language teacher knowledge research (e.g., Andrews, 1997; Borg, 1999, 2001; Gatlinton, 1999; Meijer, Verloop & Beijaard, 1999, 2001). Gatlinton (1999) examined seven ESL experienced teachers' pedagogical knowledge in the Canadian context. Through the use of observation and stimulated recall interviews, the study aimed to investigate whether it is possible to access the patterns of knowledge about teaching and learning that teachers used in their teaching practices. The findings revealed that teachers referred to 20 categories of pedagogical knowledge that they said they have in their minds during the teaching process. Eight categories of these were found to be more frequently mentioned than others: language management, knowledge of students, facilitating the instructional flow, monitoring and reviewing students' progress, identifying the content of teaching, making decisions, beliefs and values and attitudes. Although these elements of knowledge could have been classified as sub-categories under other domains of knowledge such as knowledge of students, knowledge of curriculum and knowledge of assessment, Gatlinton categorised them under pedagogical knowledge. This might be interpreted as providing a clear picture of the holistic image teachers held about these elements while they teach, and that in turn it has the potential to show how teachers' thoughts, beliefs, values and thinking about pedagogy are reflected in their teaching practice.

Language teachers' knowledge of grammar teaching and its effects on their instructional practices is among other subject areas that received attention in the research of language teacher knowledge. Borg (1999) conducted a case study to investigate teachers' cognition in grammar teaching and its impact on their classroom practices. Teachers' cognition in Borg's study is conceptualised as a source of beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, theories and

assumptions that teachers hold about all aspects of their work. Johnston and Goettsch (2000) examined four ESL experienced teachers' knowledge of grammar teaching by addressing their knowledge base. Drawing on Shulman's (1987) categories of knowledge, Johnston and Goettsch (ibid) investigated three elements of knowledge: content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of students. The findings obtained from observation and interviews indicated that these categories of knowledge are integrated and intertwined in a complex process that is reflected in teachers' thinking and actions.

In addition to grammar, research in language teacher cognition has investigated teachers' knowledge of the teaching of reading, writing and speaking (e.g., Meijer et al., 1999; 2001, Cumming, 2001, 2003). Meijer et al.'s (1999) study sought to understand teachers' practical knowledge in relation to the teaching of reading comprehension. Their study attempted to define teachers' practical knowledge by means of shared knowledge. The findings of the study showed that teachers' practical knowledge is complex and diverse and that three categories of knowledge were found to be related to teachers' practical knowledge of reading comprehension instruction, namely subject matter knowledge, knowledge of students, and knowledge of students' learning and understanding. Cumming (2003) reported a study on ESL/EFL experienced writing instructors' conceptualisations of teaching. Cumming's study was designed to document and analyse highly experienced teachers' practical knowledge of the teaching of written compositions. Drawing on Connelly and Clandinin's theoretical conceptualisations of practical knowledge, Cumming investigated what teachers say they do by examining their philosophies of teaching. Cumming's study sought to understand the commonalities and differences that might emerge in teachers' conceptualisations in terms of the context where teachers work and the purpose for which writing is taught (academic settings or immigrant settlement programmes). Cumming conducted in-depth interviews with 48 instructors from six countries: New Zealand, Australia, the province of Ontario - Canada (ESL contexts), Hong Kong, Thailand, Japan, and the province of Quebec -Canada (EFL contexts). The findings of the study indicated that purposes for teaching writing, rather than the context, appeared to have contributed to teachers' different conceptualisations of the teaching of writing.

Chen and Goh (2014) examined EFL teachers' knowledge about oral English teaching in the Chinese context. Within a cognitive framework, Chen and Goh conceptualise the term knowledge as a separate notion from belief in that it is defined as 'teachers' evidential and factual understanding of themselves as teachers, teaching and learning oral English, and their students' needs and characteristics' (p. 82). In this study an instrument was developed to investigate whether Chinese self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching differs in relation to their professional profiles. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this study in which questionnaire data was collected from 527 teachers in 56 universities, and interviews were conducted with 30 teachers. Two factors were used to assess teachers' self-perceived knowledge, namely pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of students' oral English characteristics (KOS). The findings of this study mainly focus on the relationships between teachers' knowledge of oral English teaching and their experiences. The findings of the survey revealed that there are no significant differences between such relationships. That is, different years of teaching did not seem to shape teachers' self-perceived pedagogical content knowledge of oral English teaching and their knowledge of students' oral English characteristics. Teachers' experiences were examined in terms of the impact of teacher training programmes, the impact of teaching overseas experiences, and teachers' learning experiences on their knowledge. The findings of the study indicate that, among these factors, teachers' learning experiences seem to have an impact on teacher knowledge. That is, 'teachers who were satisfied or moderately satisfied with their learning reported significantly higher PCK and KOS than those who were not satisfied' (p. 92). They contend that such lack of a significant relationship could be better understood through the examination of the teaching context.

Abdelhafez (2014) investigated the areas that constituted the professional practical knowledge of Egyptian EFL experienced teachers and how their knowledge informed their practice. Drawing on the cognitive perspective, the study examined what EFL teachers know, believe or think about aspects in their work. It also sought to understand teachers' reasoning that underpins their knowledge, and how their classroom decision making is influenced by their knowledge. In Abdelhafez's study, teacher knowledge is conceptualised from the cognitive perspective in that he adopted Borg's (2003) definition of teacher knowledge as



'active, thinking decision makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs' (p. 292). Through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods (questionnaire, semi-structured interview, observation and stimulated recall interviews), data were collected from 236 preparatory and secondary school teachers in 38 schools. The findings of the quantitative data revealed the participants' views of six areas of teacher knowledge: subject matter knowledge, pedagogy, students, classroom learning environment, curriculum and self. In addition, knowledge of L2 culture and L2 history were examined as two issues related to EFL teachers' knowledge of the subject area. The findings of the semi-structured interviews showed that the participants provided various reasons for justifying the need to be proficient in English language in terms of culture and origin. The findings of the stimulated recall interview indicated that teachers' knowledge of subject matter influenced their teaching practice. Based on these findings, Abdelhafez argues that the views expressed by the participants are the product of their individual consciousness that is shaped by their various experiences. That is, what teachers know about subject matter, curriculum and other elements is shaped by their personal, professional and institutional understanding.

These studies and many others have provided an informative picture of the mosaic of language teachers' content knowledge in that they addressed teachers' thinking and conceptualisations of specific areas of language teaching. They adopted a cognitive perspective as a theoretical framework in their understanding of what teachers know about language teaching and what categories of knowledge they hold about language instruction. Some of these studies (e.g., Adulhafez, 2014; Chen & Goh, 2014; Cumming, 2003) considered the factors that have the potential to impact on teachers' content knowledge, such as prior experience, teaching context, and teaching experience. As could be seen, these studies placed emphasis on the cognitive aspects in relation to what teachers know in that they focused on teachers' individual beliefs and thinking. Indeed the understanding of teachers' individual thinking is useful in that it shows the innate ability of teachers in conceptualising the subject areas, the curriculum, the student, self, etc. However, I believe that it is important to investigate teachers' content knowledge within the context where teachers work. That is, it

is not sufficient to investigate the purely individualistic nature of teachers' thinking and decision making. Rather, we need to further investigate the relationship between this and the social world where teachers work. Within a socio-cultural perspective, I support the belief that research on teacher knowledge needs to be undertaken in a naturalistic setting in order to explore what teachers know and how they use this knowledge.

Language teachers' experiential knowledge is another area of language teacher knowledge research in which the focus is on examining teachers' conceptual development and their ways of knowing. Studies on language teacher experiential knowledge and their knowledge construction have adopted different theoretical frameworks. Some studies adopted cognitive and socio-cognitive perspectives (e.g., Kubanyiova, 2006) in the investigation into the relationship between teacher knowledge and practice. Kubanyiova's study and many others address the issue of mismatch between teacher knowledge and practice, relating that to individual factors such as motivation. On the other hand, other studies adopted a socio-cultural theoretical framework in the understanding of teacher experiential knowledge in order to examine teachers' knowledge in the light of socio-cultural context (e.g., Golombek, 1998; Golombek & Johnson, 2004). I believe that the review of Kubanyiova's study is relevant to the present study because it demonstrates a different view to my study regarding the understanding of teachers' use of the knowledge they have. This deepens my understanding about how teacher knowledge is conceptualised from a different theoretical perspective.

Based on a socio-cognitive perspective, Kubanyiova (2006) conducted a longitudinal mixed methods study in which she intended to explore the influence of a 20-hour experiential in-service teacher development course with knowledge base, drawing on L2 teacher motivation theory, group dynamics and educational psychology. A questionnaire, interviews, classroom observations and regular course feedback were methods used to collect data from eight EFL teachers in the Slovakian context. The findings of the study indicated that the teachers' professional development did not result in any significant changes in their teaching practices, and at times 'the process of change did not even begin' (p. 11). Drawing mainly on the findings obtained by the qualitative data, Kubanyiova (ibid) discussed a number of related issues that seem to have resulted in the lack of change in teaching practices. These issues are 'wrong' type of teacher motivation, absence of reflective teaching culture, and

unsupportive system. Kubanyiova (ibid) pointed out that 'the extent to which teachers respond to innovative practice may not entirely depend on individual psychological factors' (p.11), but also on other contextual factors such as the micro-politics of the school environment, that appeared to negatively impact on teachers' efforts to adopt practices that represent their beliefs. Based on such findings, Kubanyiova questioned Freeman's (2002) reconceptualisations of the socio-cultural implications on teacher knowledge base in which he inquired about how schools as socio-cultural contexts mediate what and how teachers learn, arguing that 'inquiry into how they [socio-cultural environments] *hinder* what and how teachers learn is equally important' (ibid, p.11).

Kubanyiova's study, which is empirically based, provided clear evidence of the importance of motivation as a significant factor in developing teacher knowledge, maintaining that 'aspects underlying motivation to pursue a teaching career and further professional development which are shaped by broader macro-contextual influences deserve careful scrutiny as they may be predictive of the kind of change an in-service TD programme can bring about in EFL contexts' (p.11). Golombek's (1998) study aimed to examine the characteristics of the personal practical knowledge of two ESL teachers and how this knowledge informed their practice. Golombek (ibid) argued that, since L2 teachers' knowledge is, in part, 'experiential and constructed by themselves as they respond to the contexts of their classrooms' (p.447), this requires the reconceptualisation of the notion of knowledge in that it involves L2 teachers' 'ways of knowing and how they use their knowledge in the language classroom' (p.447). Based on Clandinin and Connelly's (1987) conceptualisation of teachers' personal practical knowledge, Golombek (ibid) viewed L2 teachers' ways of knowing as a dialectical, situated and complex process in which 'teachers' knowledge interacts with and is reshaped by the reconstruction of their experiences through stories' (p. 448). She highlighted the importance of narrative inquiry as a research methodology in the understanding of L2 teachers' personal practical knowledge, pointing out that 'through the stories they tell, teachers can learn not only what they know but also what the moral and affective consequences of their practices are' (p.449). Data were collected from interviews, observations, and stimulated recall interviews. The findings indicated that reflection and dialogue helped the participants to articulate their personal

practical knowledge through 'the narrative reconstruction of their experiences as learners, teachers, and participants in a teacher education programme' (p.459). By articulation, Golombek explained that it is a process through which teachers clarify tensions in their professional discourse. The findings also indicated that teachers' personal practical knowledge informed their practice in terms of two aspects: firstly, it filters experience in that teachers reconstruct and respond to the demands of a teaching situation; secondly, it gives physical form to practice. Golombek described teachers' sense-making process as dynamic in that 'teachers' practice at any point represented a non-linear configuration of their lived experience as teachers, students, and people, in which competing goals, emotions, and values influenced the process of the classroom strategies that resulted from the teachers' knowing' (p. 459). Golombek's study demonstrated that teachers' personal practical knowledge informs their practice, and this knowledge is mediated by their experiences that are reconstructed in response to the exigencies of the teaching context, and since teachers use this knowledge as a response to a particular context, each context reshapes that knowledge.

Based on a socio-cultural perspective, Golombek and Johnson (2004) investigated how narrative inquiry serves as a culturally developed tool that mediates teachers' professional development. They adopted Vygotsky's (1978) conceptualisation of development in terms of an internalisation process. The notion of internalisation is characterised by the progressive movement from the external, socially mediated and interpersonal levels of activities to internal and intrapersonal levels of activities controlled by the individual teachers. This indicates that teachers' conceptual development is constructed through a dialogic process of self and activity rather than the replacement of pre-existing skills (Valsineer & Van der Veer, 2002). Golombek and Johnson (ibid) analysed narratives written by three ESL/EFL teachers set in three different instructional contexts: university-level freshman composition, elementary-level science and secondary-level language arts. Their analysis focused on four issues: (a) what the internal activity of teacher development, or transformation, looks like; (b) how certain artefacts serve as tools for mediating teacher development; (c) what initiates and then guides teachers' development; and (d) how these transformative processes help teachers change their modes of engagement in the teaching practices. The findings of their study indicated that teacher development is socially situated

and socially mediated. It was also found that narrative inquiry served as a meditational space which enabled teachers to draw upon various resources that helped them to reconceptualise and reinternalise their new understandings of themselves and their teaching practices. Golombek and Johnson (ibid) pointed out that this space is where teachers' development was mediated by 'the intersections of experiential and 'expert' knowledge' (p. 324). They highlighted the importance of the transformative progress in which teachers use expert knowledge, suggesting that 'although teachers use expert knowledge to understand and name their practice, they still must work through the transformative process in a personally meaningful way that enables them to change their teaching activity' (p. 324).

The studies above show how teacher knowledge is viewed differently according to different theoretical perspectives. Studies based on a cognitive perspective argue that teachers' thinking, images, and decision making are constructed individually in the mind of the teacher and that factors such as motivation play a fundamental role in developing teachers' knowledge, while the context is the place where teachers do the activities. Studies based on a socio-cultural framework see teacher knowledge as an outcome of construction that emerges out of the interaction of the teacher with the context in which he/she works. Thus, teachers' knowledge is not an individual attribute but rather a complex and dynamic process within which the current state of their knowledge and practice is but a snap shot.

The studies above helped me to see the mosaic of different understandings and perspectives of language teacher knowledge in terms of their content knowledge, their knowledge characteristics and their knowledge construction. As mentioned above, whereas these studies are informative in teasing out aspects of language teacher knowledge in the domain of teachers' teaching practices, less attention has been paid to teachers' content knowledge of speaking assessment. I would argue that further investigations need to be conducted on what teachers know specifically about speaking assessment, how this knowledge informs their speaking practices in the classroom and what teachers' views are regarding the role of context in their current knowledge and practice.

### 3.3.5 Novice teachers' knowledge and practice

This section provides a review of research in the field of mainstream education and ESL/EFL contexts that address novice teachers' knowledge and classroom practice, as well as the pedagogical difficulties they encounter during the first year(s) of teaching. Since the current study aims to investigate EFL *novice* teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment, it is important to gain an understanding about how novice teachers' knowledge and practice of language teaching and assessment is investigated and conceptualised in teacher knowledge research. I argue that the investigation into novice teachers of speaking assessment has the potential to provide us with a deeper understanding of how teachers with a little experience conceptualise their understanding of assessment through their interaction with the social world. I argue that more research is needed in a naturalistic setting.

Studies on novice teachers raise a plethora of issues that are mainly concerned with learning to teach and classroom knowledge (e.g., Almarza, 1996; Gatbonton, 2008). These studies demonstrate that the first year of teaching has a significant influence on novice teachers' future careers. Furthermore, the first year of teaching is considered an intersection, where their prior experience and the knowledge they gained from teaching training programmes meet with current knowledge they gain from real teaching practice.

Almarza's (1996) longitudinal study of the process of learning to teach foreign languages sought to investigate student foreign language teachers' knowledge growth. The focus of the study was to explore a number of issues that characterise the process of learning to teach from the perspective of student teachers, shedding light on the content and origin of student teachers' knowledge and tracing the changes during the beginning of the teacher education course and its relationship to the teaching practice. The study was based on the theoretical frameworks of teachers' thinking and socialisation. Data were collected through a range of qualitative techniques: semi-structured interviews, journals, classroom observations and stimulated recall procedures. The findings identified four main themes: (a) student teachers' pre-training knowledge (origin and content); (b) teacher education or transfer to the concept of teaching method; (c) the relationship between knowledge and teaching; and (d)

pre-training and post-training knowledge. Within these themes, Almarza (ibid) pointed out that the origins of student teachers' knowledge, which implies their language learning experiences, and content, which includes subject-specific knowledge and knowledge about learning and teaching particular subjects, play an influential role in informing student teachers' conceptions of language, and language teaching and learning, as they entered the pre-service programme. Almarza's study supports my understanding of knowledge as dynamic rather than an innate attribute. In addition it provides insights into the use of ethnographic methods such as semi-structured interviews, observations and stimulated recall interviews in the investigation into teachers' content knowledge. However, the current study is different in that it investigates novice teachers' current knowledge rather than the origin of their knowledge.

Tsang's (2004) case study carried out in a Chinese context investigated how the personal practical knowledge of three pre-service non-native ESL teachers impacted their interactive decision making. Based on case study methodology, Tsang sought to gain an experiential understanding of the phenomenon under study through the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts. The findings of the study shed light on personal practical knowledge with reference to interactive decisions and teachers' other decision making processes.

Gatbonton's (2008) study investigated ESL novice teachers' pedagogical knowledge based on their reports of what they were thinking while teaching. In addition, Gatbonton made a comparison between novice teachers' categories of pedagogical knowledge with those found for experienced ESL teachers in her earlier study (1999). The main concern of the study was to explore what categories of pedagogical content knowledge the participants internalised after they completed a teaching training programme. The novice and experienced teachers' pedagogical knowledge was examined in terms of three dominant categories: language management, i.e. how to handle language input and student output, procedural issues, and handling student reactions and attitudes. Data were collected during a four-week course taught by four novice teachers who had no or very little teaching experience (0 to less than 2 years). Based on qualitative and quantitative analyses, the findings indicated that there were novice-expert similarities and differences with reference to pedagogical knowledge. Gatbonton (ibid) pointed out that, despite a few years of training and little teaching

experience, novice teachers seem to have the ability to acquire the larger categories of pedagogical knowledge that can underpin teaching practices. The study mainly addressed novice teachers' pedagogical knowledge through the examination of teaching practices in the classroom. Thus, Gatbonton's (ibid) study focused on whether teaching experience plays a role in constructing novice teachers' pedagogical knowledge.

While Tsang and Gatbonton's studies provide insights into novice teachers' personal practical knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in ESL contexts, the present study provides further understanding of novice teachers' current knowledge and practice in an EFL context. Both studies are underpinned by the cognitive perspective in the understanding of teachers' knowledge and practice of teaching. Tsang's study investigates novice teachers' decision making processes and Gatbonton's study examines practices in the development of teacher knowledge. The current study takes a different theoretical perspective in the understanding of knowledge. Despite differences in the context of study and the theoretical framework, these studies helped me to gain an understanding about the essence of novice language teachers' experiential knowledge in classroom settings.

More recently, Kang and Cheng (2013) investigated, through an in-depth case study, an EFL novice middle school teacher's cognition development during the process of learning to teach in the workplace. In their study the term 'teacher cognition' is used to involve 'all the psychological constructs of teaching which teachers use as a frame of reference to understand the language teaching context and to guide their classroom behaviors' (p. 171). Interviews and observations were used as methods of data collection to examine the relationship between the teacher's classroom practices and cognition development. Kang and Cheng's study is insightful in that it provided me with an understanding about novice teacher knowledge in an EFL context which is similar to the context of the current study. However, while their study is concerned with novice teachers' learning to teach, the aim of the present study is to examine novice EFL teachers' current knowledge in action.

These studies and many others have provided useful insights into novice teachers' knowledge of teaching in the early stages of the teaching process. However, fewer studies have been conducted on novice teachers' knowledge and practices of language assessment.



Those that I am aware of are by Graham (2005) and Maclellan (2004). These are the most relevant to the topic of this research (teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment) and will therefore be reviewed in depth in the following section.

### **3.4 Teacher knowledge of language assessment**

Teachers' knowledge of language assessment has recently been seen as a fundamental issue in language assessment research (e.g., McNamara, 2001; Xu & Liu, 2009). The interest in investigating teachers' knowledge and practice of language assessment is linked to the growing interest in research on classroom-based teacher assessment (e.g., Rea-Dickens, 2004). This is due to the recognition of the socially derived nature of language use and of 'testing as an institutional practice' (McNamara, 2001, p. 333). The socio-cultural turn in language learning stresses the need to reconceptualise assessment practices in the classroom so that it shifts towards classroom-based assessment which entails the use of alternative assessment and formative assessment (discussed in section 3.5). In the context of second language assessment, Leung (2005) argued for a view of teacher assessment that 'is intrinsically tied to a built-in requirement for expanding professional knowledge, responsive pedagogy, and reflexive practice' (p.869). A great many studies have been carried out aiming to understand teachers' knowledge and beliefs of language assessment. Teachers' beliefs about language assessment and their assessment practices are among the most prominent issues that have been addressed in language assessment research. In these studies, concepts of beliefs and knowledge are used interchangeably.

Cheng, Rogers and Hu's (2004) study involved a comparative analysis of the assessment practices used by university instructors in three different ESL/EFL contexts: Canada, Hong Kong and Beijing. Through a survey questionnaire in which 267 ESL/EFL instructors participated, the findings of the study revealed a complexity of assessment practices in ESL/EFL courses at the tertiary level with regard to assessment purposes, methods and procedures. In addition, the study revealed that instructors reported using varied assessment practices both within and across different contexts. Cheng *et al.* (ibid) interpreted such variation as deriving from the teaching experiences of the instructors, their knowledge of assessment, the needs and the level of the students, the teaching and learning

environment, and the impact of external testing on teaching and learning. In addition to these external factors, the researchers came to realise that teachers' beliefs and attitudes about language assessment were an additional factor.

In their study of ESL/EFL teachers' beliefs about assessment and evaluation, Rogers, Cheng and Hu (2007) conducted a survey questionnaire with 95 instructors in Canada, 44 in Hong Kong, and 124 in Beijing at the tertiary level. They administered a questionnaire including five sections. While the first three sections were related to the assessment practices in terms of purposes, methods and procedures, the fourth section included questions about teachers' beliefs about the value of assessment and evaluation; it explored 'the beliefs of the ESL/EFL instructors in relation to their beliefs about enhancing instruction and student learning; beliefs about item formats, classroom assessment procedures, and time to prepare assessment; beliefs about standardized testing; and beliefs about instructors' understanding of and preparation for assessment and evaluation' (p.43). The fifth section included biographic questions. The findings of the study revealed that teachers' beliefs in the three contexts were 'somewhat mixed, uncertain, and, at times, contradictory' (p. 52). That is, the participants expressed positive beliefs towards the importance of assessment for instruction and for developing learning. However, their beliefs about how they conducted assessment, and their understanding of and preparation for assessment were somewhat related to their actual assessment practices.

Muñoz, Palacio, and Escobar (2012) investigated EFL teachers' beliefs about language assessment in general, and about the assessment systems used at a language centre of a private university in a Colombian context, and whether teachers' beliefs match their assessment practices. Employing a survey, interviews and a written report of experiences, Muñoz *et al.* (ibid) examined teachers' conceptions using Brown's (2003) four major conceptions of assessment purposes, namely accountability of schools, improvement of teaching and learning, certification of student learning, and irrelevance to the work of teachers and students' learning. The findings of the study revealed that there is a gap between teachers' beliefs and their practices; while teachers held a belief that assessment for learning and improvement is essential, there was a tendency towards the use of summative assessment procedures in the classroom.

These studies and many others have provided insights into teachers' beliefs concerning language assessment and have raised the importance of investigating the beliefs and values teachers hold and whether there is a match between beliefs and assessment practices. Their investigations were mainly based on surveys; they did not address explicitly teachers' views and perception through in-depth interviews, nor did they conduct observation to investigate the rationale behind their assessment practices. Within the social turn of language assessment, McNamara (2001) held that any research on teacher assessment needs to be undertaken in a classroom setting in order to gain a thorough understanding of the lived experiences of teachers. This is especially important in identifying the gap between the mismatch between teacher knowledge and their assessment practices (Xu & Liu, 2009). An examination of teacher knowledge of language assessment within the contextual domains clearly shows that 'teachers' knowledge is not a static end product, but a highly complex, dynamic, and ongoing process' (Xu & Liu, 2009, p.508). The dynamicity and complexity arise, on the one hand, from the interaction of teachers' pre-existing beliefs about assessment and assessment principles and the rules imposed on them, and, on the other hand, from the conflict between their roles as a facilitator of language learning and as an assessor for reporting achievement (Rea-Dickens, 2004; Stiggins, 1999).

Davison (2004) highlighted the significance of the educational and cultural contexts and the role they play in shaping teachers' assessment beliefs, attitudes and practices. He conducted a comparative study of the assessment beliefs, attitudes and practices of English language secondary school teachers in two different cultural and educational EFL/ESL contexts: Hong Kong and Melbourne. In comparing the educational systems in both contexts, Davison claimed that little research has been conducted on how EFL/ESL teachers make assessment decisions, although, unlike EFL teachers, ESL teachers are exposed to a well-established criterion-referenced assessment system. The findings of the study showed that educational and cultural contexts contributed effectively to the variability in teachers' assessment. In the Australian context, although teachers used the published criteria, their assessment showed a conflict between 'the legalistic frame work' and their 'professional judgement' (ibid, p.313). In the context of Hong Kong, however, teachers relied on 'norm-referencing and impressionistic' assessment, as they lacked published assessment criteria. This led to 'much

more debate over which underlying criteria shaped their assessment judgement' (p.319). This indicates that teachers' knowledge of language assessment as represented in their perceptions, beliefs, values and images may not be reflected in their assessment practices, even though teachers use an established criterion system, as was the case in the Australian context. This is evident in Davison's emerging framework that describes teacher assessment beliefs, attitudes and practices:

*Teachers' assessment orientations - classified along a cline from assessor as technician, to interpreter of the law, to principled yet pragmatic professional, to arbiter of 'community' values, to assessor as God- can be mapped according to their discourse positioning towards different aspects of assessment: task, process, product, 'validity/reliability' and assessor needs, including for support and/or training. The framework also provides a mechanism to describe more systematically the effects on teachers of different sorts of assessment approaches, including norm, construct and criterion referenced, and the interaction of these frameworks with their professional knowledge (p.324).*

Although Davison's study did not explicitly address ESL teachers' knowledge of language assessment, it does provide valuable insights into the factors that have the potential to contribute to such knowledge through an investigation into teachers' beliefs and attitudes. Another important issue raised in the study is that teachers turn to implicit knowledge and beliefs of their own, especially when conflicts emerge between their personal assessment and published criteria.

Xu and Liu's (2009) study investigated teachers' language assessment knowledge and practice. They conducted a narrative inquiry to examine a college EFL teacher's assessment knowledge and practice in the Chinese context, using three sources of data collection, namely formal semi-structured interviews; personal communication with Betty, the participant, before and after the interviews, and the participant's records of her teaching evaluation sheets, teaching and assessment plans; and notes she made about her assessment practices. The findings of the study showed that Betty's assessment knowledge was constructed by herself and with her colleagues and students. Their findings echoed Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) strands of narrative inquiry in that the teacher's assessment knowledge and practice are constructed in the light of the three structural conditions: temporality, sociality, and

place. Although Xu and Liu's study mainly addressed teacher's knowledge construction of assessment, it is insightful in that it provides an understanding about the role of context (place) in shaping an EFL teacher's knowledge and practice of assessment.

The recognition of the significance of the contextual milieu as an essential socio-cultural domain was also highlighted in studies conducted in other EFL contexts. In their study of EFL teachers' views of English language assessment, Troudi, Coombe and Al-Hamly (2009) addressed EFL teachers' assessment philosophies and their roles in student assessment in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait. Based on the findings from the open-ended questionnaire collected from 21 expatriate EFL teachers, the study showed that teachers' views and orientations were shaped by their knowledge of their students and by the educational and cultural contexts. Another significant finding is that the teachers reported that they had little voice and were marginalised within a top-down managerial approach to assessment. However, despite having so little voice in decisions on assessment procedures, the participants recognised the importance of the role of classroom-based teacher assessment and its main function as the assessment for learning. Drawing on the findings of the study, Troudi and his colleagues suggested that teachers' knowledge and views about assessment need to be effectively taken into account and teachers need to be provided with professional development opportunities. In a similar vein, Saad, Sardareh and Ambarwati (2013) addressed teachers' beliefs and views of language assessment. Their study examined Iranian EFL secondary school teachers' assessment beliefs and roles. From their perspective, 'teachers' beliefs become conformist when teachers are aware of the views of the authorities to whom students and schools are accountable' (p.693). They used an open-ended-questionnaire as the main tool of data collection. The findings showed that the participants have varied beliefs about assessment, namely beliefs about fairness in assessment, feedback, pedagogical beliefs, and societal beliefs. In addition, the study indicated that there is a gap between teachers' beliefs and their assessment practices. As a consequence, they highlighted the importance of understanding teachers' conceptualisation and philosophies about assessment, since they play an important role in developing or hindering classroom-based assessment practices. In addition, teachers' lack of agency in making decisions about

assessment procedures is another important issue that the researchers considered as a consequence of top-down managerial approaches to assessment.

These studies provided a clear understanding about the importance of considering the context in investigating teacher knowledge of language assessment. This is because research in teacher assessment practices highlights the existence of a gap between teachers' beliefs of language assessment and how such knowledge is perceived and represented in assessment practice (Al-Shara'h, Abu Nabaah & Khazouz, 2011; Rogers, Cheng & Hu, 2007). This has informed the current study in that it seeks to investigate teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment and it aims to understand what impact the context has on teachers' current knowledge and practice. By examining the context, I am not intending to investigate how teachers construct their knowledge, but the impact of the context on what teachers know about speaking assessment and on their speaking assessment practices. However, these studies only used open-ended questionnaire as a tool of inquiry in their investigation into the role of context in shaping teachers' views, beliefs and philosophies. They did not consider teachers' knowledge in action. Thus, I believe that the current study provides a further understanding about the role of context in that it uses semi-structured interviews and observation in order to better understand how teachers view the context where they implement speaking assessment.

As can be seen, the studies above have addressed the issue of language teacher knowledge of assessment with regard to experienced teachers. However, none of these studies were conducted on EFL novice teachers' knowledge of assessment in classroom settings. As mentioned in Section 5.2.3, the two studies I am aware of are by Graham (2005) and Maclellan (2004). These two studies were not conducted in language assessment settings, but rather in general educational contexts. However, they are useful in that they provide insights into novice teachers' understandings of assessment in classroom settings.

In the UK context, Maclellan (2004) conducted a study on novice teachers' knowledge of assessment. The assumption underpinning this study is that there is a relationship between knowledge of the substantive structure of the subject and effective teaching. Based on this assumption, Maclellan assumed that knowledge of assessment will inform teachers'

practices. She based her assumption on the understanding that learning has been viewed as non-linear or 'de-contextualised' (ibid, p.526). This in turn indicates that the implementation of assessment must include a plethora of tasks and procedures (Maclellan, ibid). Maclellan's (ibid) study investigated the extent to which novice teachers are able to provide pedagogical reasoning about their assessment practices. Two key categories were studied in order to investigate teacher knowledge of assessment: knowledge of principles and knowledge of methods. The knowledge of novice teachers' assessment principles was investigated in terms of a number of subcategories: *clarity of purpose, the basis for comparison (norm-referenced or criterion referenced assessment), modes of assessment (formative/summative), fairness, source of assessment (self, peer, or teacher)*. The overall findings indicated that all the participants referred, to some extent, to the purpose and mode of assessment. In addition, Maclellan analysed the participants' knowledge of assessment methods in terms of four subcategories: *tests, open ended writing, the creation of artefacts or performance, and oral work*. Within these subcategories, the findings showed that the participants generally revealed little explicit knowledge of assessment methods, yet there was evidence of some variation in their knowledge in a number of scripts. Maclellan stated that 'this lack of essential knowledge pessimistically suggests that novice teachers are ill equipped to competently assess pupils in their charge' (p.530). Based on the findings of her study, she also pointed out that novice teachers construct their knowledge of assessment through building 'situation models of assessment practice through consciously invoking cognitive, strategic behaviour to remember, make sense of, or reconfigure, new information' (ibid, p. 533). Although Maclellan's study is different from the current study in terms of context, the phenomenon under study and methods of data collection, it could be insightful and therefore, inform my study in one way or another. One insight is that it addresses teachers' content knowledge of assessment principles and methods in that it focuses on what teachers know about assessment and how that informs their practice. However, her study did not address teachers' views on the role of context in their current knowledge and practices, one of the aims of the current study. In addition, Maclellan's study addressed novice teachers' pedagogical reasoning of assessment at primary level, while the present study addresses novice EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment in an EFL secondary school context.

Thus, I believe this study will provide further understanding about what novice teachers know about assessment.

The second study on teachers' knowledge of assessment, carried out by Graham (2005), researched pre-service teachers' changing knowledge about classroom-based assessment and assessment-driven planning. The study investigated ways teacher candidates reconstructed or changed their theories while studying assessment within the context of the University of Georgia Network of English Teachers and Students (UGA-NETS) in the US. The study aimed to explore five main areas: (a) teachers candidates' prior beliefs about classroom-based assessment; (b) their conscious changes or adaptations in beliefs and practices surrounding assessment; (c) perceived influences on their changes/adaptations; (d) their abilities to plan and assess specific units or lessons, and (e) their unresolved concerns and questions about goals and assessment for student learning. Data were collected from 38 secondary English teacher candidates through observation and discussions of planning and assessment texts. The findings of the study were represented in a way that showed the teacher candidates' changing knowledge as well as growing awareness and perception of how to implement assessment practices that enhance student learning and professional teacher' making decisions. In this regard, Graham (*ibid*) pointed out that teacher candidates showed the ability to describe how they had changed across one or two semesters (*ibid*). From the researcher's perspective, this reflected novice teachers' awareness of the need to reconsider the goals they established for student learning and to reconsider whether the assessment they planned provided authentic evidence of learning.

Graham's (*ibid*) study demonstrated the significance of teacher networks and teacher education programmes where pre-service/novice teachers have a great opportunity to share a professional dialogue with more experienced teachers and teacher mentors and to discuss issues about grading, evaluating and assessing students. According to Graham, such a shared professional dialogue 'requires novice teachers to articulate to themselves and others what they are teaching, why they are teaching it, and how they will know kids are "getting it." This is the heart of career-long learning and reflection about how to "prove" to stakeholders what students know and are able to do' (p.619). To this end, Graham's study provided valuable insights into the significance of understanding novice teachers' knowledge of assessment



theories and practices through a shared professional dialogue with more experienced teachers in teacher educational programmes.

The two studies above provided a basic understanding of novice teachers' knowledge of assessment. Overall, these studies promoted the understanding of novice teachers' cognitive abilities in the development of their knowledge. In addition, they addressed teachers' individual interpretations of the pedagogy and assessment practices, highlighting the importance of considering the assessment practices as an indication of the development of novice teachers' knowledge. However, these studies did not address teachers' views of the role of context in their current knowledge and practices either in teaching or assessment, although that is a key part of the construct of the present study. In addition, as mentioned above, they were conducted in general educational settings. Thus, I believe that a conduct of study on novice teachers' knowledge of assessment in EFL classroom settings will provide further insights into language teacher knowledge assessment research.

### **3.4.1 EFL teachers' perception of classroom-based assessment**

This section reviews research-based studies on ESL/EFL teachers' perception of classroom-based assessment, starting with research in formative assessment in L2 classrooms. This helps me to gain a good understanding of how research has addressed issues related to teachers' conceptualisation of language assessment, their roles as assessors and their agency in language assessment. Based on this review, the current study will provide a further understanding of how speaking assessment is conceptualised and practised in classroom settings by teachers with a few years of teaching experience. As can be seen in the studies reviewed above and the studies reviewed in this section, participants in most of these studies are either experienced teachers or teachers with varying amounts of teaching experience. In addition, the current research is conducted in a context where mandated assessment practices are changing and very different from the teachers' own experiences as students.

The growing interest in the 'social character of language assessment' (McNnamara, 2001, p.333) has inspired interest in examining language teachers' knowledge and practices of

classroom-based assessment. McNamara pointed out that ‘an awareness of language as a social activity, of the socially derived nature of our notions of language, and of institutional practice, is causing language testers to look critically at their practices and the assumptions that underpin them’ (p.334). McNamara’s call for taking the social character of language assessment into consideration has raised the importance of understanding teachers’ classroom-based assessment. Leung and Mohan (2004) emphasised the importance of teacher classroom-based assessment in terms of the integration of assessment into teaching and learning processes and, more importantly, ‘the highly localised co-constructed nature of this type of assessment’ (p. 335). While critically examining teacher classroom-based assessment from the point of view of standardised assessment, Leung and Mohan (2004) argued that, in order to gain a thorough understanding of how formative assessment is actually carried out in the classroom, it is necessary to investigate the ‘formative teacher for learning assessment issues in their own right’ (p. 337). In English language testing settings, teacher classroom-based assessment has received a great deal of attention (e.g., Davison, 2004; Davison & Leung, 2009; Fulcher & Davison, 2007) and research indicates that English language teachers’ different beliefs and values about language assessment are reflected in their different opinions and conceptualisations of classroom-based assessment.

Both quantitative and qualitative studies have been conducted to investigate issues related to teachers’ knowledge and beliefs of classroom-based assessment in many different ESL/EFL contexts. Surveys have been employed by many studies (e.g., Chan, 2008; Felvey & Cheng, 2000; Rogers et al, 2004, 2007; Wach, 2012); for example, Falvey and Cheng (2000) examined ESL/EFL secondary school teachers’ classroom assessment practices in Hong Kong, where ESL teachers experienced a paradigm shift in the assessment system, and in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), where EFL teachers have not experienced changes in the examination system. Their survey included items that focused on three aspects: teachers’ demographic information, assessment beliefs and knowledge, and assessment practices. The study reported that teachers in both contexts tended to use more traditional methods of assessment than alternative methods. In another survey study Chan (2008) investigated 520 EFL elementary school teachers’ beliefs and practices of multiple assessments in Taiwan; the findings revealed that EFL teachers had strong beliefs of multiple assessment, believing that

such assessment was more practical than the traditional paper-and-pencil tests. A study conducted by Wach (2012) aimed at investigating 87 school and university EFL teachers' beliefs about the position of assessment in their teaching practices and their roles as assessors. The findings showed that the role of teachers as assessors was considered one of the most challenging roles that teachers perform in contemporary foreign language classrooms, and that EFL teachers need to have considerable awareness, skills and expertise in order to successfully carry out the dual roles of instructor and assessor.

While some studies were based on surveys, many other studies used qualitative inquiry with ethnographic tools of data collection (e.g., Graham, 2005; Hill & McNamara, 2011; Jia, Eslami, & Burlbaw, 2006). In the US context, Jia, Eslami, and Burlbaw (2006) reported on a qualitative inquiry on ESL teachers' perceptions of classroom-based reading assessment and the factors that influence their assessment practices. Data were collected with 6 middle school and 7 elementary school teachers using interviews, classroom observations, and the assessment materials teachers used in the classroom. The findings of the study indicated that ESL teachers in this study perceived classroom-based reading assessment as beneficial and highly-valued. The participants argued against the view of alternative assessment as lacking in validity and reliability, emphasising the usefulness of classroom-based reading assessment in providing teachers with insightful information about students' reading performance.

Hill and McNamara (2011) proposed a framework for researching classroom-based assessment (CBA) processes that was based on an empirical study of two Australian school classrooms where 11 to 13-year old students were studying Indonesian as a foreign language. Their proposal was based on the premise that previous studies focused on validity, reliability, criteria and standards, and the influence of external assessment on classroom practices, whereas little attention was given to the actual processes of classroom-based assessment as a comprehensive whole. The study used ethnographic methods - participant observations and case studies in which three teachers participated. The findings provide insights into teachers' actual processes of classroom-based assessment in relation to four questions about teachers' actual practices (planning assessment, framing assessment, conducting assessment, and using assessment data); their enquires (in advance, in feedback,

and in reporting); theories or standards teachers use in the assessment (teachers' theories and beliefs); and whether the learners share the same understandings (learners' theories and beliefs). Hill and McNamara's study suggested further research on teacher assessment practices within classroom based assessment. I believe the current study could contribute to the existing research about language teacher classroom-based assessment in that it could provide further understanding about teachers' knowledge and practice of assessment in classroom settings.

A further study of teachers' perceptions, beliefs and practices with respect to classroom-based English language assessment was conducted by Estaji (2012). Four stages in assessment were investigated, namely planning, implementation, monitoring, and dissemination. Using a survey and interviews, Estaji aimed at obtaining teachers' ideas, opinions and experiences with regard to their classroom-based assessment. The findings indicated that teachers' beliefs about language learning, their perceptions of learning objectives, and their predictions of the students' language performance all influenced their procedures of assessment planning and their actual assessment practices.

Examining EFL teachers' perceptions of language assessment has recently been one of the main issues addressed in research conducted in the Arab World and Middle East contexts (e.g., Al-Kindy, 2009; Al-Shara'h et al, 2011; Saad et al., 2013; Troudi et al., 2009). This interest seems to derive from the re-conceptualisation and re-examination of educational policies of English language teaching. The orientation towards communicative language teaching and the reform of English language teaching curricula in these contexts have prompted a need to re-examine the mechanism of language assessment in the classroom settings. Since the teacher plays a vital role in the conduct of language assessment in the classroom, research on EFL teachers' 'mental activities' (Freeman, 2002) including perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and understanding has been a main concern in recent studies. Al-Shara'h et al's (2011) study focused on the importance of investigating EFL teachers' perception of communicative language evaluation in the Jordanian context. They rationalise their study on the assumption that teachers' perceptions and understanding are key factors that may help to illuminate teachers' awareness of the gap between their teaching and assessment practices. Two surveys were used in the study, one open-ended and the other

close-ended. The aim of the open-ended questionnaire was to investigate the methods of evaluation the teachers used in the assessment of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The findings obtained from this survey helped to develop the items of the close-ended questionnaire. 76 English language teachers of the upper basic education stage participated in the study: 25 teachers participated in the first survey and 51 in the second. The findings revealed that the participants have positive attitudes towards communicative language evaluation; in addition, the study demonstrated that there were no significant differences with regard to gender, qualifications or experience in the participant teachers' perceptions of communicative language evaluation.

In the Omani context, Al-Kindy (2009) examined EFL experienced Grade 12 teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards continuous assessment (CA). Through questionnaire and observation, the study aimed at investigating teachers' perceptions of their role in the classroom, feedback in the classroom, the usefulness of CA as an assessment tool, and the activities teachers use in the classroom. The results showed that teachers' perceptions of CA were not always positive and that they seemed to be cautious about implementing alternative assessment such as peer and self-assessment in their teaching. Al-Kindy (ibid) believes that the teachers' reservations may derive from doubts they have about the appropriateness of CA in the assessment of their students' outcomes and about their role in the classroom within the new assessment system.

As can be seen, research in EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom-based assessment is a relatively a recent trend in classroom-based assessment. The studies reviewed above are insightful and they helped me design my own study. More importantly, they have indicated the difficulties EFL teachers are experiencing with new approaches to assessment and communicative language teaching. Thus, I believe that a study of EFL novice teachers may provide further insight by indicating whether these difficulties are also experienced by novice teachers in their early years of assessment practices in classroom settings.

### **3.5 Previous studies on EFL teachers' perception of speaking assessment in the classroom**

Within the research on speaking assessment in EFL contexts, interest has been mainly on issues related to the formats of speaking tests to check whether speaking tests represent the objectives of a communicative language approach or still cling to the traditional format. Many studies have examined the appropriateness of speaking assessment tasks and their potential outcomes of language learning development (e.g., Rahimy & Safarpour, 2012; Sinwongsuwat, 2012). Based on preliminary findings from small-scale classroom research, Sinwongsuwat's (2012) study assessed speaking tasks (face-to-face interviews and role-play) conducted for the assessment of Thai EFL learners' speaking skills. Rahimy & Safarpour (2012) investigated the effect of role-play as a classroom activity on Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. The study of speaking rating scales is another focus of many researchers in different EFL contexts (e.g., Mazdayasna, 2012; Nakatsuhara, 2007; Poonpon, 2010). In a longitudinal study, Mazdayasna (2012) studied Iranian EFL learners' oral language performance in oral presentation, examining three major evaluation components of a proposed scale: preparation, organisation and presentation. Based on quantitative data, the study aimed to explore the method by which EFL students' speaking ability could be measured objectively.

Together with research on English language teachers' understanding and practices of speaking assessment, there have been a number of studies on the impact of washback on oral language assessment. Muñoz and Álvarez (2010) study investigated the washback effects of an oral assessment system (OAS) in a Colombian EFL context. The OAS was designed to promote positive washback in the teaching and learning of English language. They referred to washback as the influence of testing on teaching and learning. Surveys for students and teachers, observations and external evaluations were used as methods of data collection. 14 EFL teachers and 110 EFL college students participated in the study. Based on the quantitative data, the findings indicated positive washback in some of the areas investigated. Kim's (2009) and Zhang and Elder's (2011) studies investigated native

English-speaking (NS) and non-native English (NNS) teachers' judgement of students' English oral language performance. Kims' study investigated the behaviours of two groups of teachers (12 Canadian NS teachers and 12 Korean NNS teachers) in oral language assessment in terms of internal consistency, severity, and evaluation criteria. Chou (2013) conducted a study that investigated teachers' interpretation of students' speaking scores through the use of two different types of rating method in a Taiwanese context. Another aim of the study was to investigate how students could benefit from the feedback of the description of the two rating methods: level descriptors and checklist. 15 English language teachers and 300 college students participated in the study. The findings indicated that the rating type seemed to have an impact on teachers' interpretation of students' language performance. Overall, these studies investigated teachers' judgement of students' speaking performance, focusing on the psychometric aspect of assessment, in that the main concerns were on examining consistency in the raters' assessment and the association of the raters' judgement with the validity of the rating scales. However, these studies did not address the issue of teachers' different understandings and interpretations of speaking assessment in the light of the context where they implement speaking assessment.

Within the wide range of speaking assessment in EFL contexts, several challenges have arisen that are mainly related to contextual factors. A number of studies in an EFL context have investigated the mismatch between teachers' beliefs about speaking assessment and their assessment practices in the classroom. Muñoz, et al's (2003) study investigated teachers' understanding of speaking assessment in order to establish speaking assessment criteria for the teachers and the institution. Their study was based on the theoretical framework that underpins authentic assessment. In order to examine the teachers' beliefs, the researchers used a focus group technique with 30 teachers. The questions were related to teachers' understanding of assessment, aspects of speaking assessment, assessment techniques, the rationale behind conducting the assessment and frequency of assessment. The findings of the study reported that most of the teachers lack good knowledge of assessment. This was reflected in their misunderstanding of the difference between the functional aspects of both formative and summative assessment. In addition, their assessment practices were unsystematic and lacked planning. The researchers highlighted

the importance of establishing in-service training courses for language assessment as that would help teachers recognise that assessment is a powerful tool for developing language teaching and learning. In addition they imply that teachers' knowledge of assessment is essential in that such knowledge helps teachers to make sound assessment.

Chang's (2006) study investigated the underlying beliefs of 13 university teachers concerning oral language assessment in EFL classrooms in Taiwanese colleges and universities. Based on a socio-cultural framework, Chang (ibid) believed that oral language assessment needs to be embedded in the teaching and learning cycle, and should not be de-contextualised. Chang's study used Vygotsky's theory to investigate the complex nature of classroom-based oral language assessment. Classroom observation, ethnographic interviews and documentation were used to collect the data for the study, from which four themes emerged:

(1) *Teachers' beliefs regarding language learning*: how teachers see learning taking place is essential to how they construe teaching as an activity as well as to how they construe assessment.

(2) *Orientation and purpose of assessment practices*: how teachers point out assessment aims.

(3) *Decision making rationale*: teachers were asked to provide a rationale or justification for why they made certain decisions about assessment practices.

(4) *Teachers' beliefs and their role in oral language assessment*: teachers' beliefs or conceptualisations of their roles in oral language assessment were often mixed with their beliefs about what a good teacher and a good language classroom meant to them, as well as aspects of language teaching and learning such as grammar, error correction, and language skills.

The findings of the study indicated that the participants believed that students' oral language ability could be better captured through the use of varied oral language assessment. The study also indicated that the participants considered teachers' engagement and motivation to be influential factors in their decision-making regarding assessment practices. Chang's



(ibid) study demonstrated the significance of EFL teachers' beliefs concerning oral language assessment.

Bengqing (2009) conducted a study on how Chinese English teachers perceive spoken language and implement speaking assessment in 10 middle schools in Guangdong. Based on a theoretical framework on oracy in the UK, the study aimed to investigate the teachers' understanding of the concept of oracy in English. In addition, it aimed at exploring teachers' practices of speaking assessment in terms of the types and methods conducted for assessment and how teachers' perception exerts an influence on their assessment practices. Questionnaire survey and telephone interviews were employed to collect the data from 12 teachers. With regard to teachers' perceptions and practices of speaking assessment, the findings revealed that the participants did not assess speaking within an authentic communicative perspective of language use in that the focus was on rote memorisation rather than on the engagement of students in communicative activities. Similar to the findings obtained in Muñoz et al's (2003) study, the participants did not have a sound understanding of formative assessment and their concern was on summative assessment.

The above studies provide insights into EFL teachers' perceptions of and beliefs about speaking assessment in classroom settings. The studies highlighted the importance of considering teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment and different methods have been used to investigate how teachers perceive speaking assessment and how they implement it in the classroom. However, they are limited in several ways. Firstly, these studies focused only on teachers' beliefs about and perceptions of oral language assessment in that they mainly addressed teachers' understandings of classroom-based oral language assessment and whether oral language assessment is embedded in the teaching and learning processes. Secondly, although these studies have illuminated our understanding of teachers' beliefs about and understanding of oral language assessment in the classroom-based context, and any gap between beliefs and assessment practices, they did not address directly the influence of the wider context on teachers' beliefs and practices of speaking assessment. Research on classroom-based assessment has indicated the role of the context in shaping teachers' perception and beliefs of language assessment. Thirdly, these studies were conducted with participants with a minimum of 3 years' teaching experience, i.e. none were novice EFL

teachers. Finally, none of these studies address directly EFL teachers' content knowledge of speaking assessment. Overall, therefore, I believe that further research needs to be conducted on what novice teachers' know about speaking assessment and what influence the context has on teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in the classroom settings. Thus, this will take our understanding forward to see how teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment is reflected in their assessment practices in the light of the context where they work.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter considered a literature on teacher knowledge and speaking assessment and reviewed a number of previous studies on teachers' knowledge of and understandings about speaking assessment. I found that, while certain areas have been well researched and documented, gaps in the research still exist, namely the investigation of what teachers know about speaking assessment, specifically with novice teachers, and how this impacts on their practice. Drawing on the socio-cultural perspective, the current study aims at investigating teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment. In addition, it aims at investigating how their knowledge and practice of speaking assessment is influenced by the context where they work. In the next chapter, I will present the philosophical standpoint, methodology and processes of data analysis employed in the current study.

# Chapter Four: Research methodology

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## 4.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses the philosophical perspective and the methodological approach underpinning the current study. Firstly, the chapter discusses the philosophical stance in terms of ontology and epistemology with a focus on the social constructionist orientation. Secondly, it provides a detailed description of and rationale for the methodological approach, the research design and methods of data collection. Within methods of data collection, the purpose, the rationale and the construction of the tools are discussed. In addition, the sampling strategy and the process of data collection are addressed, followed by a description of the analysis techniques. This chapter will provide a description of the credibility of each data collection tool as well as the ethical dimensions.

With reference to the main aim of the study presented in chapter 1, the present study aims at investigating Libyan EFL novice teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment and their assessment practices in the Libyan secondary school context. It also aims at investigating teachers' views of the role of the context in their current knowledge of speaking assessment and how such knowledge is reflected in their speaking assessment practices.

## 4.1 Philosophical stance underpinning the study

A philosophical stance or theoretical paradigm identifies the theoretical perspective on which the study is based. Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined a paradigm as the 'basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigation' (p.105). This entails the nature of reality (ontology), the ways of knowing (epistemology) and research design (methodology) (Crotty, 1998; Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Dominant ways of thinking about social phenomena have been defined through distinct theoretical positions on which research in general and educational research in particular are constructed (Pring, 2000). The researcher needs to have a thorough understanding of the

deeper meaning of such stances and the extent to which they can be seen as competing philosophical positions. There is often competition due to the major differences between two distinct theoretical stances, positivism and interpretivism, through which particular phenomena are studied (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Each paradigm suits a particular ontology and epistemology, demonstrating the essence of these traditions and the paramount role they play in constructing and reconstructing the argument of the research. Within positivism, ontology is seen as objective reality that is driven by immutable natural laws, and the counterpart epistemology as a duality between an observer and the observed that makes it possible for the observer to stand apart from the observed (Pring, 2000). In contrast, research based on an interpretivist approach has a view of ontology in which 'social reality is regarded as the product of processes by which social actors together negotiate the meanings for actions and situations' (Crotty, 1998, p. 11). Unlike positivists, interpretivists recognise that epistemology is built through social construction of the world and that knowledge mirrors people's particular goals, culture, experience and history (Weber, 2004). This assists researchers to make sense of this situation by constructing connections, meanings and frameworks through which experience is sieved and made intelligible (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In this way, the research findings are created, but not discovered, through the interaction between the researcher and what is researched.

Within the inquiry of the current study, the positivist paradigm appears to be inappropriate for understanding and exploring the participants' perception and perspectives about the phenomenon under study. This is because the nature of my study does not intend to view reality as objective nor does it intend to make hypotheses, seeking general causes and results. Instead, it seeks an understanding of the reality through negotiation of the conceptualisations of speaking assessment held by the participants. Thus, I believe that the interpretive paradigm is the appropriate theoretical lens through which I could explore the social reality via the construction of meaning and knowledge by the participants who take part in the research process. As stated by Schwandt (2000) 'knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it' (as cited in Mertens, 2010, p.16). Therefore, an understanding of 'the multiple social

constructions of meaning and knowledge' (Mertens, *ibid*, p. 16) assists the researcher to scrutinise and interpret such meanings within a certain perspective and in a certain context.

Social constructivism and social constructionism are philosophical stances situated within the interpretive paradigm. They both consider the construction of knowledge within a social perspective but have different epistemological perspectives regarding how knowledge is constructed. Social constructivism is rooted in constructivism, according to which 'each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes' (Young & Collin, 2004, 375). The advocates of social constructivism recognised the influence of social interaction on individual constructions (Vygotsky, 1978), suggesting a view which countered constructivism, in that the construction of knowledge is not purely individualistic; rather, it is the interaction of individual cognition with the social world. Social constructivism and social constructionism are clearly similar but they differ in one aspect. Social constructivism, like constructivism, is based on a dualist epistemology and ontology in that 'it represents an epistemological perspective, concerned with how we know, and by implication how we develop meaning' (Young & Collin, *ibid*, p. 375). Social constructionism focuses on the social world rather than individuals in its view of knowledge construction. That is, it contends that 'knowledge is sustained by social processes and that knowledge and social action go together' (*ibid*, p. 376). Using these conceptualisations of knowledge construction, the current study is based on social constructionism as a philosophical stance in that it views knowledge as socially constructed. I see the present study as being located within social constructionism according to which I aim to develop, through interaction with participants, a fuller understanding of their knowledge and practice of speaking assessment through the multiple perspectives and realities they hold about speaking assessment. Within the social constructionist stance, the multiplicity of realities expressed in the participants' different perspectives, together with my own subjective stance, will enable the construction of a more nuanced understanding of speaking assessment. As noted by Crotty (1998, p. 42):

*All knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality, as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.*

The social constructionist stance allows me as a researcher to explore the multiple realities in teachers' understandings of speaking assessment and how they conceptualise it. This requires me as an interpretive researcher to investigate the phenomenon under study in its natural context in that I need to be in a direct contact with the participants and the context where they work and to establish a close and good relationship with them. Thus, my interaction with the participants through the use of interviews, observation and stimulated recall interviews as well as my contact with them during the administration of the questionnaire allows me to explore the social embeddedness of knowledge in terms of the multiple realities they hold about speaking assessment in the light of the social and cultural context.

#### **4.1.1 Ontological assumptions**

Broadly speaking, ontology is defined as 'the study of being. It is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such' (Crotty, 2009, p.10). It addresses philosophical perspectives about the essence of reality and the being that can be known. Within social enquiry, essential ontological questions consider 'whether or not social reality exists independently of human conceptions and interpretations; whether there is a common, shared, social reality or just multiple context-specific realities; and whether or not social behaviour is governed by 'laws' that can be seen as immutable or generalisable' (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p.11). Within such variety in ontological assumptions, the current study investigates reality from the social constructionist view that is obtained and constructed socially.

The constructivist and social constructionist orientations are explicitly reflected in the mainstream of language teacher knowledge research, particularly that which is based on interpretive modes of inquiry. Studies on language teacher knowledge highlight the importance of understanding teachers' beliefs and values, paying considerable attention to the acknowledgement of their voice. For example, Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver and Thwaitte (2001) investigated the relationship between ESL teachers' classroom practices and the underlying language teaching principles they believed guided such practices. Their study was based on an interpretive framework. Through observation, subsequent interviews and

elicitation procedures, Breen and his colleagues sought to understand how the teachers conceptualised their classroom behaviour from their perspectives as experienced practitioners and what the patterns would be in the links they make between thinking and action (p.474). Almarza's (1996) study on student foreign language teachers' knowledge growth is another example which advocated the importance of exploring teachers' knowledge from the perspective of the teachers. Almarza maintained that issues that characterise knowledge to teach a foreign language need to be uncovered from the perspective of student teachers.

In EFL contexts, Gahin (2001) employed an interpretive framework when studying preparatory school EFL teachers' beliefs about language and language learning in an Egyptian context. Adopting such a framework helped the researcher build a picture of multiple voices, 'dialectally constructing a synthesis of the experience under study' (Gahin, 2001, p. 97). This reflects the importance of acknowledging teachers' voice by considering their perspectives, beliefs and values, as this provides the researcher with a deep understanding of a certain aspect of teacher knowledge that is intended to be explored. In the same context, Abdelhafez (2010) supported the argument, maintaining that teachers need to be involved in any investigation of their knowledge. In his study of the professional practical knowledge of experienced EFL teachers in an Egyptian context, Abdelhafez sought to understand the relationship between the teachers' knowledge and the contextual factors that intervened in their teaching practice. His study was underpinned by a framework which was both interpretive and constructivist, asserting that 'interpretivism provides an opportunity for understanding teacher knowledge and practice from the inside-out' (p.89). According to Abdelhafez, interpretive aspects of knowing are essential in that they reflect the participant's and the investigator's interpretations and understanding of practice and the knowledge underpinning it.

To this end, I believe that the interpretive paradigm is a suitable philosophical stance for investigating EFL novice teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment, in that it allows me to explore multiple realities that are located in teachers' different interpretations and views regarding how the knowledge and meanings they hold about speaking assessment are constructed in a socio-cultural framework. Teachers' knowledge, as a general concept, is

complex, situational and dynamic, and it is better understood through the many different realities that are socially constructed in the context where teachers work. Thus, my philosophical assumptions about reality and ways of knowing about this reality help me to generate improved understanding about the participants' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment and the context of the study.

#### **4.1.2 Epistemological assumptions**

Within the epistemological stance, the current study is based on the pragmatic epistemology in that it used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design in inquiring about the phenomenon under study. Although the current study is based on the interpretivist philosophical stance, particularly within social constructionism, the use of a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is an appropriate choice for a variety of reasons. Firstly, 'both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used appropriately with any research paradigm' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, as cited in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 21). Moreover, this allows for creative research adaptations to particular settings or questions (Patton, 2002). Secondly, an investigation into human reasoning and meanings people construct is complex and flexible in that it is possible to research predetermined questions and test hypotheses about certain aspects of study while being quite open and naturalistic in pursuing other aspects within the same study. Thirdly, 'the extent to which a qualitative approach is inductive or deductive varies along a continuum' (Patton, 2002, p. 253). This epistemological mix provided me, as an interpretive researcher, with the ability to explore multiple realities through the use of a broader range of tools to gain a fuller understanding of assessment knowledge and practice. Thus, the epistemological assumption underpinning the current study is of a pragmatic nature in that it supports the application of both quantitative and qualitative research methods in the same study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). The epistemological mix within which pragmatists ensure 'a suitable 'fit' between the research methods used and the research questions posed' (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p.21) is seen as an appropriate choice for the current study.



## 4.2 Methodology

With regard to methodology, this study uses an explanatory sequential mixed-method design. Creswell, Shope, Plano Clark and Green (2006) identified mixed-method research as both 'a methodology and method' (p. 1). Ivankova, Creswell and Stick (2006) defined this research design as 'a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and "mixing", or integrating both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the research problem' (p. 3). The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection is widely used in mainstream educational and social science research (Creswell, 2009; Ivankova et al., 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003), the main reason being that 'neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient, by themselves, to capture the trends and details of a situation' (Ivankova et al., 2006, p. 3); the use of a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows for 'a more robust analysis, taking advantage of the strengths of each' (ibid, p.3). Thus, a mixed-methods design has a number of advantages: it can lead to richer data, allows researchers to be more confident of their findings, and it stimulates creative ways of collecting data (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007, p.115). Despite these advantages, mixed-methods research design has been criticised by advocates of interpretive qualitative research. For instance, Howe, (2004) based his critique on the premise that 'it [mixed-methods research] largely serves the quantitative community [and] relegates qualitative research to secondary status' (Creswell et al., 2006, p.1). However, Creswell and his colleagues (2006) argued that is not the case in that some researchers from interpretive communities give qualitative research a primary role in mixed-methods research design. For instance, Mason (2006) called for 'qualitatively-driven mixed methods research' (p.9). Creswell et al (2006) supported Mason's belief that mixing methods can extend and enhance 'the logic of qualitative explanations about the social life' (Creswell et al., 2006, p.2). In addition, they suggested that in any study the qualitative phase could be given more weight or priority than the quantitative phase, pointing out:

*The signs of this priority might include: the wording of the title, explicit identification of a guiding worldview, the primary aim in a purpose statement, the use of more space for qualitative than quantitative in the article, or a more in-depth analysis of the qualitative themes than the statistical results (p. 3).*

I believe this justifies the use of mixed-methods as a research design in studies that are based on an interpretive worldview, and Creswell et al. (2006) provided examples of a number of studies in feminist research that are based on this premise. Within L2 teacher research, many researchers have based their studies on a similar viewpoint (e.g., Abdelhafez, 2010; Ahmed, 2011; Alfahadi, 2012). Indeed, in the present study, the qualitative data play a primary role, with the quantitative phase acting largely as a way of adding to and enhancing the qualitative methods.

A great number of designs have been developed within mixed-method research (Creswell, 2014). These include convergent parallel mixed-methods and sequential mixed-methods (ibid). Within the former, the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data at a concurrent time (ibid), while the latter entails conducting 'a qualitative phase of a study and then a separate quantitative phase or vice versa' (Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998, p.46). In more detail, Mertens (2010) described a sequential mixed methods design as one that:

*(...) answers one type of question by collecting and analyzing two types of data. Inferences are based on the analysis of both types of data. A sequential design is one in which the conclusions that are made on the basis of the first strand lead to formulation of questions, data collection, and data analysis for the next strand. The final inferences are based on the results of both strands of the study. In some cases, the second strand/phase of the study is used to...provide further explanation for unexpected findings in the first strand (p.300).*

Within a sequential mixed-method design, Creswell (2014) identifies two types: exploratory and explanatory. In exploratory sequential design, the researcher first starts with the qualitative phase in terms of data collection and data analysis, and then uses the findings to construct the instruments for the quantitative phase. On the other hand, explanatory sequential mixed-methods design entails a quantitative phase, followed by a qualitative phase (Creswell, 2014). The rationale behind the sequence of the explanatory design is that 'the quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provide a general understanding of the

research problem. The qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth' (Ivankova et al., 2006, p.5). With a sequential mixed-methods research design, the researcher can conduct an in-depth exploratory study by using multiple research methods; however, this needs 'lengthy time and feasibility of resources to collect and analyze both types of data' (ibid, p.5).

In applying an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, I considered three issues: priority, implementation and integration (Ivankova et al., 2006). Ivankova and her colleagues noted that they had 'to consider which approach, quantitative or qualitative (or both), had more emphasis in our study design, establish the sequence of the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis; and decide where mixing or integration of the quantitative and qualitative approaches actually occurred in our study' (p. 9). In the present study, I gave priority to qualitative data collection and data analysis. My decision was influenced by the purpose of my study and the research questions, which, based on a social constructionist standpoint, aim to achieve an understanding of the participants' social world and how they construct their views within the context where they work. In this regard, Ivankova *et al.* (2006) pointed out that researchers may give priority to the qualitative data collection and analysis as long as it serves the study goals. Within implementation, Ivankova *et al.* suggested that researchers can follow either sequence, depending on the purpose of the study and the research questions. In the present study, I followed the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis sequence (see Figure 4.1). That is, in the first phase of data collection I conducted a questionnaire, followed by in-depth interviews, observation and stimulated recall interviews in the second phase. Integration of the two phases was achieved through the development of a semi-structured interview guide, based on some of the findings from the first phase, in order to further explore the Libyan EFL novice teachers' knowledge and practices of speaking assessment in a secondary school context through collecting and analysing data in the second phase (ibid).

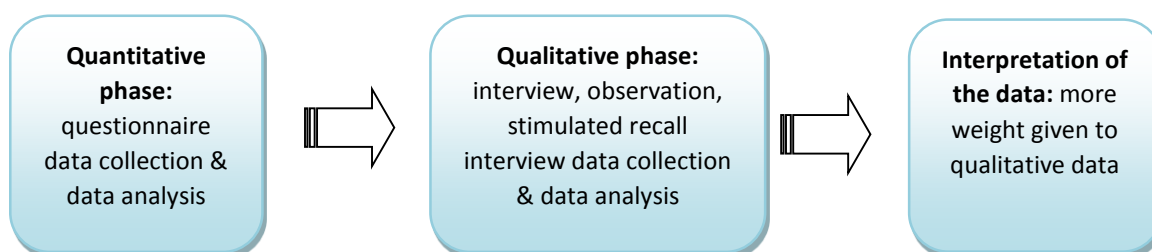


Figure 4.1: Quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis sequence

I am aware that I could have based my study on qualitative research designs such as narrative inquiry and phenomenology. These methodologies allow for in-depth investigation into the participants' stories and their views regarding the research problem. However, I believe that a mixed-methods research design could be seen as a useful methodological approach for investigating teachers' knowledge and practices as this allows for patterns emerging from the quantitative data to be further explored through ethnographic methods such as interviews and observation (Lamb, 2007).

Within the context of the current study, I believe that the use of a mixed-methods methodology is an appropriate choice in the light of unanticipated circumstances the current study experienced. The use of narrative inquiry and phenomenology requires access to the field of study where a researcher can have the opportunity to spend a long time with the participants. However, that was not possible at the time of data collection because of the Libyan uprising that took place in 2011. The schools were closed most of the time and it was unsafe for the teachers to be present at the schools. Despite those exceptional circumstances, my decision to adopt the explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design meant that I could gain a thorough understanding about the phenomenon under study by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods sequentially. This helped me to explore, in interaction with the participants, the multiple realities in their different understandings, perspectives and practices of speaking assessment. I used the questionnaire in order to gain a preliminary impression of what the participants say they know about speaking assessment. Analysis of the questionnaire findings led me to infer that the participants may have answered the questionnaire in a way they thought I wanted. However, these findings provided me with baseline information about the phenomenon under study. The use of in-depth interviews, observation and recall interviews helped me to see the social embeddedness of knowledge and practice in the light of my interaction with the participants.

The current study is guided by the following research questions:

Q1- What is Libyan EFL novice teachers' general perception of language assessment?

Q 2- What do Libyan EFL novice teachers know about speaking assessment?

Q 3- How does Libyan EFL novice teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment inform their practice?

Q 4- What is the role of context in EFL teachers' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment?

As mentioned above, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods were used to answer the same research questions. The following table 4.1 shows the methods used to investigate each research question:

| <b>Research question</b>  | <b>Methods of data collection</b>  |
|---|--|
| Q1- What is Libyan EFL novice teachers' general perception of language assessment?                        | a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews  |
| Q 2- What do Libyan EFL novice teachers know about speaking assessment?                                   | a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews  |
| Q 3- How does Libyan EFL novice teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment inform their practice? | a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, observation, stimulated recall interviews |
| Q 4- What is the role of context in EFL teachers' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment?  | a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, observation, stimulated recall interviews |

Table 4.1: Research methods used for investigating research questions

### **4.3 Data collection methods**

I started investigating the research problem via the administration of a teacher questionnaire as the first phase of data collection. This was followed by the use of multiple qualitative methods as the second phase, namely semi-structured interview, classroom observation, and stimulated recall interview. By using a questionnaire, this study does not attempt to make predictions and generalisations; rather, it allowed me access to a large number of teachers in a relatively quick and simple way, prior to the in-depth qualitative data collection phase. Furthermore participants were given the opportunity to respond to more open ended questions in an attempt to elicit a wider range of views. As such, the aim of the questionnaire was underpinned by two main factors. Firstly, it was to obtain a general

overview of EFL novice teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment. Secondly, since the strategy of data collection is sequential, findings from the questionnaire paved the way for the development of the interview questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In this way, certain aspects of teachers' knowledge and perception of speaking assessment arising from the findings of the questionnaire were further investigated, and certain issues generated by the first investigation were addressed via the participants' views and understandings. As Morse (2003) maintained, by employing more than one method within a research design, the researcher is able to obtain a thorough understanding of human behavior and experience.

As mentioned above, within the interpretive nature of the present study, it is appropriate to use a quantitative method such as a questionnaire as a tool of inquiry. Literature on research paradigms and research methodology has recently revealed that quantitative methods may be used for exploratory purposes with an inductive theoretical drive (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p.193). In line with this, Guba and Lincoln (2005) point out that the use of mixed methodologies 'may make perfectly good sense' (p.200) within each paradigm.

#### **4.3.1 Questionnaire**

As mentioned above, the use of a questionnaire as a first tool of data collections was based on the research design adopted for the current study to be able to gain a preliminary understanding about the phenomenon under study. In addition, there are some contextual reasons pertaining to the use of the questionnaire as the first phase – one of which I mentioned above. Another contextual reason is that studies conducting questionnaires are familiar in Arabic educational research contexts, and Libya is not an exception. Following Maxwell's advice (1998, p. 236), the selection of methods of data collection 'depends not only on your research questions, but on the actual research situation and what will work most effectively in that situation to give you the data you need'. Moreover, the questionnaire facilitated access to the participants, especially those who agreed to take part in the interview. Some Libyan teachers, especially females, may not be familiar with interview and/or observation; therefore the administration of the questionnaire to the participants

provided me with an opportunity to answer the participants' inquiries about such data collection tools.

Having gained access to the field work, I was introduced to the teachers by the school coordinators and administrators so I could give them more information about the purpose of the study, reminding them that they could contact me either by e-mail or mobile if they were interested in taking part in the second phase of data collection. This gave me a chance to establish a relationship with the participants. I received a number of calls from the participants, especially those who were teaching speaking at the time of data collection and were teaching in schools located in secured areas. They showed their interest in my topic and invited me to have an informal meeting with some of them in their free time at school to discuss their concerns and issues about speaking assessment. This gave me an opportunity to gain an understanding about the social world in which the participants work. Another interaction took place when I was permitted by two of the participants to attend their speaking classes, enabling me to gain a close relationship with the teachers through the discussion of issues related to the teaching and the assessment of speaking and their views about the curriculum. Interestingly, I unintentionally sometimes acted as a teacher rather than as a researcher, and that helped me to reflect on my actions as a novice researcher.

#### **4.3.1.1 Design of the questionnaire**

The main constructs of the questionnaire were based on the research questions of the current study. Four constructs were developed, namely teachers' general perception of language assessment principles (section two), teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment (section three), teachers' practices of speaking assessment (section four), and the influence of context on their knowledge and practices (section five).

The questionnaire started with an attached covering letter, which introduced the researcher and informed the participants about the context and purpose of the research. It also assured the participants of confidentiality and anonymity (Punch, 2009), that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they had the right to access to the findings of the questionnaire (BERA, 2004). The questionnaire consisted of 59 items, divided into five sections (see Appendix 5). The first section asked the participants to provide background information

including gender, age, their highest qualification, teaching experience, and workplace (government and/private school). Teachers were also asked about the number of times they carry out speaking assessment during a semester, and whether they use oral language assessment criteria provided by outside resources or develop their own assessment criteria. The final item in this section asked the participants whether they had received any training about language assessment, and whether such training included oral language assessment.

In sections two, three, and four, a Likert scale was employed. This type of scaling is a commonly used technique (Dörnyei, 2003). It provides a range of responses to a given statement (Cohen et al., 2007). In section two, teachers were asked to tick the category which best reflects the degree of agreement/disagreement. A four-point Likert scale constitutes: Strongly Agree=SA, Agree=A, Disagree=D, Strongly Disagree=SD. The aim of using this type of Likert scale is to go beyond a simple yes/no format in order to allow participants more opportunity to express their opinion. Section three, in three parts, asked about teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment. The keys used to identify teachers' knowledge constitute a range such that *1=not good, 2=moderate, 3=good, 4=excellent*. The aim of using these scales is to gain a preliminary understanding of teachers' knowledge about speaking assessment. In section four, teachers were required to show how their knowledge of speaking assessment is reflected in their assessment practice. This was indicated on a five-point Likert scale: *Always=A, Usually=U, Sometimes=S, Rarely=R, Never=N*. The aim of using these scales is to gain an understanding about how teachers' practices of speaking assessment are related to their understandings of language assessment principles.

In section five, a number of open-ended questions were raised to explore the influence of the social and the cultural context on teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. As noted by Patton (2002), the rationale behind gathering responses to open-ended questions was 'to enable the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories' (p. 21). As an interpretive researcher, this enabled me to gather a greater variety of responses from participants. At the end of the questionnaire, the participants were invited to take part in an interview and/or observation (the second phase), and were asked to provide their contact details. Finally, the respondents were thanked in



advance for completing the questionnaire and for their cooperation in the second phase of data collection.

The development of the questionnaire was based on three sources. Firstly, I read extensively the literature on two main areas: speaking assessment and teacher knowledge in a foreign language context. Secondly, I researched questionnaires reported in studies related to language assessment and/or EFL teacher knowledge. In addition, the development of the questionnaire also stemmed from my teaching experiences both as an EFL secondary school teacher in a Libyan school, and later as a lecturer at the Faculty of Arts (the English Language Department) at Tripoli University. Also of importance was the experience I gained while I was an oral assessor for Cambridge exams, namely KET and PET, held in an oil institute in Tripoli. It is also worth mentioning that the design of the questionnaire was informed by previously tested questionnaires and included items from an EFL teacher knowledge questionnaire (Abdelhafez, 2010), EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom-based assessment (Shim, 2009), and the TOEFL Academic Speaking Test (TAST) rater questionnaire (Xi & Mollaun, 2006).

The development of the items in **section two** was guided by the literature on language testing. I attempted to gain a thorough understanding of the theoretical basis of language assessment, and the main principles of language testing (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Fulcher, 2010; Fulcher & Davison, 2007, Hughes, 2003; Shim, 2009). This helped me identify the general principles of language assessment that are conceptualised as important for teachers to consider in their implementation of language assessment, as shown in section two in the questionnaire. These principles include identifying the purpose of language assessment; understanding language assessment elements in terms of constructs, tasks and assessment criteria; clarifying the objectives of assessment; considering the curriculum objectives; considering students' language needs; and using formative and summative assessment. At this stage, I made a list of thirty items that were intended to investigate teachers' perception of the principles of language assessment in terms of the extent of the teachers' agreement with these items as explained below. Then, I selected 20 items to be included in the questionnaire. The selection of the items was based on the aim of understanding teachers' perception of language assessment within a classroom context. The number of items was

reduced to 10, in response to the supervisors' feedback and to the comments I had from piloting the questionnaire. Elements about purpose of assessment, clarity of language constructs, use of tasks, selection of assessment criteria, and the conduct of formative and summative assessment were included, whereas items related to curriculum objectives and students' learning needs were excluded.

The themes relating to the items in **section three (A,B &C)** were derived from the literature review on speaking assessment elements: speaking constructs (e.g., Fulcher, 2003; Luoma, 2004; May, 2011; McNamara, 1997), speaking assessment tasks (e.g., Fulcher, 2003; Fulcher, 1996; Fulcher & Reiter, 2003; Iwashita et al., 2001; Iwashita, 2010; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Luoma, 2004), and speaking categories and rating scales (e.g., Fulcher, 2011; Fulcher, 1996b; Hughes, 2003, Muñoz et al., 2003). The aim of this section is to investigate teachers' content knowledge of speaking assessment.

**Part A** investigates teachers' knowledge of speaking constructs. Fulcher (2003) pointed out that it is important to identify the constructs to be tested in the assessment of speaking. In line with this, Luoma (2004) highlighted the importance of identifying speaking constructs in the assessment of speaking, stating that the construct has the potential to provide 'test developers' with a thorough understanding of what it means to be able to speak a language, as this understanding assists them to design tasks and rating criteria scales. Fulcher (2003) and Luoma (2004) provided detailed explanations of speaking constructs that they considered important in speaking tests: sound of speech (pronunciation), vocabulary, accuracy, fluency, and interaction. Within interaction, they discussed management of interaction in terms of agenda management and turn taking. Based on these classifications of speaking constructs, I selected the main constructs that I considered best represented the speaking skill, namely pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, interaction and communicative skills, as shown in section three/part A.

**Part B** includes items relating to teachers' knowledge of speaking tasks and techniques used in the assessment process. The literature on speaking assessment demonstrates that speaking tasks are fundamental components in speaking tests (e.g., Fulcher, 2003; Muñoz & Álvarez, 2010; Weir, 1993). Speaking tasks are addressed in terms of variability (e.g., Kim,

2009; Muñoz & Álvarez, 2010; Weir, 1993, 2005), level of difficulty (e.g., Fulcher & Reiter, 2003; Poonpon, 2010), and timing (e.g., Weir, 1993). These aspects were taken into consideration when I developed items about teachers' knowledge of speaking tasks, as shown in section three/part B. This part also includes items about assessment mechanisms. Since the current study aims to understand teachers' knowledge of assessment in the classroom context, I investigate teachers' extent of knowledge of student self-assessment, peer assessment and portfolio assessment.

**Part C** includes items relating to the extent of teachers' knowledge of the marking system, taking into account the language categories and criteria as well as the rating scores. Within this part, I intended to gain an understanding of teachers' knowledge of holistic and analytic scores as techniques for assessing students' oral language performance. This was mainly based on Hughes' (2003) description of these two types of rating scales. The literature identified the important role rating scales play in making inferences about students' oral language performances (e.g., Davies et al., 1999; McNamara, 1996, Underhill, 1987). This part also includes a number of speaking categories that were addressed in the literature on rating scales. For instance, Davies et al (1999) referred to a number of categories that they describe as 'commonly used' in speaking assessment: 'pronunciation, intelligibility, fluency, accuracy and appropriateness' (p.7). I made many alterations to the content of this part in response to the feedback I had from the supervisors and to the suggestions I received after piloting the questionnaire. Alterations were made mainly to the terms used in some items in terms of their inappropriateness and lack of clarity. I provided definitions for some terms, e.g. holistic and analytic scores; I also attempted to make the items more focused: two items were removed because they were found to be more related to the participants' knowledge of rating scales, which was not the aim of the present study. These items were: 'I rate my knowledge of *the difference in approach between holistic and analytic scale as...*' and 'I rate my knowledge of *the importance of identifying the purpose of speaking test when using either of rating scales as...*'

The aim of **section four** is to investigate frequencies of speaking assessment practices of language assessment principles as reported by the participants. In order to gain a better understanding, I made a link between teachers' perception of principles of language

assessment (**section two**) and their practices of these principles in speaking assessment (**section four**). Most of the items in section four were related to the items in section two so as to see how teachers' understandings of the general principles of language assessment are reflected in the frequency of their speaking assessment practices. That is, I could see the extent to which teachers' agreement about the principles of language assessment is reflected in the frequency of their speaking assessment practices in relation to identification of the purpose of speaking assessment, identification of the skills to be assessed in students' oral language performance, selection and uses of assessment tasks, clarity of speaking tasks, the development of assessment criteria, the connection between assessment criteria and the aim of the speaking test, and the integration of speaking assessment in the process of teaching and learning. Two elements were added in section four as a response to suggestions received after piloting the questionnaire, namely the time factor, and the use of speaking criteria provided by outside resources.

In **section five**, I developed a number of open-ended questions through which I attempted to explore the influence of context on teachers' knowledge and practices of speaking assessment. The items in this section were derived from the literature review on EFL teachers' perceptions of the contextual factors that have the potential to impact on their assessment knowledge and practices (e.g., Abdulhafez, 2010; Bingqing, 2009; Chang, 2006, Muñoz et al 2003; Troudi, et al., 2009; Xu & Liu, 2009). These studies were insightful and informative in many ways. Firstly, they were conducted in contexts similar to that of the current study: an EFL context. Secondly, they addressed a number of contextual factors that were perceived to have an impact on EFL teachers' knowledge and practice of language assessment (Xu & Liu, 2009), perceptions and practices of oral language assessment (Bingqing, 2009), and their views of language assessment (Troudi, et al., 2009). Since the aim of this study is to investigate teachers' knowledge and practices of assessment in classroom settings, I selected the contextual factors that are related to the institutional context: class size, lack of support from more experienced teachers, school policy with regard to the assessment system, lack of standardised oral language assessment criteria, and teacher training programmes about oral language assessment. This section ended by asking the participants about the mechanisms they use in assessing speaking in classroom settings. The

aim of this question was to gain a fuller understanding about how teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment is represented in their practices and was not guided by my specific questions.

It is inevitable that any selection of items, however well-grounded in the literature, reflects the subjective view of the researcher who selected those items. As an interpretive researcher, I was well aware of this. Although I knew that I could not avoid this subjectivity, indeed it was my own interest and experience in this area that led me to this research topic, I read and consulted widely to avoid limiting the options offered to participants.

#### **4.3.1.2 Validity and reliability of the questionnaire**

The validity of a questionnaire is the extent to which the questionnaire items measure what they are intended to measure (Cohen et al., 2007). This was addressed through three types of validity, namely construct, face and content validity. **Construct validity** was established on the basis that the constructs of the research are considered in terms of their relation to the literature review as explained above. As stated by Cohen *et al.* (ibid), 'to establish construct validity the researcher would need to be assured that his or her *construction* of a particular issue agreed with other constructions of the same underlying issue (...) this can be achieved (...) by rooting the researcher's construction in a wide literature search which teases out the meaning of a particular construct (...) and its constituent elements' (p.138). Following Cohen et al's advice, I based the construction of the questionnaire on the extensive literature about the principles of language testing in general and speaking assessment in particular (e.g. Bygate, 1987; Fulcher, 2003; Hughes, 2003; Louma, 2004; Weir, 1993 and others). These researchers addressed the elements of speaking assessment in terms of speaking constructs and speaking tasks, as well as rating scales and criteria. After my wide-ranging research I selected items that I considered best represent the important elements of oral language assessment. This process helped me to strive for construct validity. The questionnaire includes four main constructs that are presented in four sections: teachers' perceptions of principles of language assessment in terms of the extent of their agreement with a number of statements (section two); teachers' content knowledge of speaking assessment constructs, tasks and rating scores (section three); teachers' speaking

assessment practices (four); and the influence of contextual factors on teachers' knowledge and practices of speaking assessment (section five). **Content validity** implies a content review that needs to be undertaken by experts who can decide whether the scale items represent the concepts of the questionnaire that are intended to be measured. Based on this premise, I had several discussions with the supervisors, as well as with four doctoral students who had previously experienced the development of a questionnaire in their field of study about English language testing in EFL contexts. The content of the questionnaire underwent several changes in a response to these experts' suggestions in that I made many modifications to a number of items including the structure, wording and terms employed. Whereas no selection of items can be said to represent a complete picture since we all have different views of what is important, I do trust that the final section represented a broad range of views and provided a valid instrument with which to explore participants' views. **Face validity** was achieved through content validity, in which the questionnaire was checked by the experts, and through piloting the questionnaire, in the process of which the questionnaire was checked by a group of EFL novice teachers similar to the sample under study. It was also sought by an editorial review in terms of clarity, readability and the ease of administration. However, I must acknowledge the fact that, as an interpretive researcher, I construct my own reality that will lead to prejudices and biases. Thus, I am aware that such biases will have influenced the way I constructed questions or selected specific words (see the section on reflexivity below). As already discussed in the sections above, this is an inevitable outcome of the range of subjective views involved in the creation of the questionnaire.

To check the reliability, the questionnaire was piloted with ten Libyan EFL teachers, most of whom have similar teaching experience to those participating in the actual questionnaire data collection (see section 4.5.1 below). Reliability is not used here to ensure that the 'correct' version of reality was obtained; rather, it was considered important to check that the questions were sufficiently well expressed to enable a consistent understanding by participants of the items in question. Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted to test the reliability (internal consistency) of the questionnaire items (section 2, section 3 & section 4).

This type of reliability test provides a coefficient of inter-item correlations, that is, 'the correlation of each item with the sum of all other items' (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 506). The alpha coefficient reliability was processed by SPSS. Firstly, I transformed the answers to numerical data to allow SPSS software to process the data. Secondly, I checked the reliability of each section at a time (2, 3 &4) in order to examine whether the items within each section were internally consistent.

While checking the reliability, I identified and deleted the items that reduced the rate of Cronbach alpha. To achieve overall reliability, each item was correlated with other items and was calculated at 0.819. I am aware that this is a relatively high Cronbach alpha, since the items of the questionnaire were measured by different scales. One reason for this might be that the participants answered the questions in the way they thought I wanted. Another reason might be that the participants may have perceived the questionnaire as a test of their knowledge rather than an elicitation of a range of knowledge and practices. A further reason could be that the number of participants who piloted the questionnaire was rather small, with the result that variability in the participants' answers may have been restricted. Although I sent the questionnaire to thirty Libyan EFL teachers by e-mail, only eight teachers responded. This low rate of response was due to the uprising the country experienced at the time of piloting the questionnaire, with the result that access to the internet was rather difficult. However, I believe that the constructs of the questionnaire helped me gain a good understanding of teachers' range of knowledge and practice of speaking assessment.

| Reliability Statistics |            |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha       | N of Items |
| .819                   | 49         |

Table 4.2: Reliability test of the questionnaire

#### 4.3.2 Semi-structured interview

The interview is a powerful source of data collection and it has many advantages (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). For example, it provides one-to-one interaction between the researcher and the participants (ibid). Employing an interview in the current study helped the

researcher to better explore the research problem from the teachers' perspectives. Another advantage is that interview allows for clarification if a response is ambiguous or if a question is not clear (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), which is not the case in questionnaires.

The semi-structured interview provided me with opportunities to discuss topics with the participants in more detail; I could use prompts to encourage the participant to elaborate on the original response (Hancock, 1998). Moreover, there is flexibility in introducing the questions in that they may not follow on exactly in the way outlined in the schedule. Other than that, the researcher can ask questions that are not in the guide should other issues related to the study arise (Bryman, 2008), thus providing the participants with a great deal of leeway of how to respond.

#### **4.3.2.1 Design of the interview**

The questions in the semi-structured interview guide were designed to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perception and knowledge through their perspectives and reflections on issues related to speaking assessment and the context in which the assessment is conducted. Some of the questions were based on the findings from the questionnaire, which provided quantitative and qualitative data. As mentioned above, many different scales were used to elicit teachers' responses to the items of the questionnaire, namely the extent of their agreement, the range of their knowledge, and frequency of practices. The findings of the questionnaire revealed that some issues needed to be further investigated in the second phase of data collection. In order to identify these issues, I focused on those items that showed a high percentage of disagreement and those that revealed teachers' limited knowledge with regard to speaking assessment elements. In the process of interpreting the quantitative data, I referred to the issues that need further investigation. For example, the findings obtained from part B revealed the participants' range of knowledge of speaking tasks in terms of variability and their knowledge of assessment techniques. The majority of the respondents claimed to have 'not good' and 'moderate' knowledge of assessment techniques with relation to student self-assessment, and peer and portfolio assessment. In the interview schedule, I raised questions about the participants' knowledge of assessment



techniques, using probes that enabled participants to tell me more about their views on peer and student self-assessment. However, it is worth mentioning that the main difference between the interview guide and the questionnaire is the reduced level of specificity. Since, after analysis of the questionnaire data, I was concerned that respondents may have been giving positive responses because they thought that this was what I wanted, in the interview I asked more general questions. These questions were grouped under the three areas of interest as identified in the research questions. The topic of the third research question was not included as a separate section as it was felt that information about teachers' practice would emerge from the content of the other three sections. The twelve main questions were:

**1. EFL teachers' general perception of language assessment**

- a. 1-Can you tell me about general ideas of language assessment?
- b. 2-How do you choose tasks for assessment?
- c. 3-What are your criteria to assess students' language performance?

**2. EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment**

- a. 4-Can you tell me about speaking assessment at secondary school level?
- b. 5-How do you conduct speaking assessment in the classroom?
- c. 6- Can you tell me about the tasks you use for speaking assessment?
- d. 7-What do you focus when you assess students' oral language performance?
- e. 8- How do you give feedback about students' speaking performance?
- f. 9-What assessment techniques do you use?

**3. The influence of contextual factor on teacher knowledge of speaking assessment**

- a. 10-Can you tell me how you learned about speaking assessment?
- b. 11-How do you describe the context in which speaking assessment is implemented?
- c. 12-The questionnaire findings revealed that speaking is assessed through written exams. How does this affect your speaking assessment practice?
- d. 13-What other contextual factors do you think have an influence on the actual practice of speaking assessment?

Various prompts were used for specific areas, such as the difference between formative and summative assessment. The questionnaire data had shown that 2 out of the 67 participants disagreed about the use of formative language assessment, while 12 of the 67 showed

disagreement about the use of summative assessment, which indicated to me that this was an area to probe further. Another prompt was about the range of tasks used. Here it seemed important as the questionnaire data showed that the percentage of agreement in item 12 (*teachers should use many different tasks*) was low compared with other items. Asking participants about grading and the use of check-lists were other prompts used to further investigate teachers' knowledge of holistic and analytic scores, as the findings from the questionnaire indicated that participants reported to have more knowledge about holistic scoring. The findings obtained from open-ended questions provided a preliminary understanding of some of the contextual factors that appeared to have the potential to influence teachers' knowledge and practice. Unexpectedly, the findings revealed that, in Libyan specialised secondary schools, speaking is mainly assessed through pencil and paper tests, while oral tests were not seen as important. Therefore a specific question about this was included in the interview schedule (see section 4.8.1).

While some questions were informed by the findings of the questionnaire, others were developed in order to further explore teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment and the social aspects that they perceive as potentially contributing to their knowledge of speaking assessment. Specifically, I decided not to use the individual items of linguistic and assessment knowledge that I had used in the questionnaire. This enabled me to see what items were raised by the participants themselves and thereby provide me with a more accurate picture of their knowledge. As mentioned above, a semi-structured interview is characterised by its flexibility in that it allows the researcher to ask questions that are not in the guide, should other issues related to the study arise. Such a distinctive feature helped me as an interpretive researcher to gain a thorough understanding about the phenomenon under study.

### **4.3.3 Non-participant observation**

Patton (1990) suggested that observation can lead to deeper understanding than interviews alone, as it provides insightful knowledge of the context in which events occur, and may help the researcher to explore issues that participants themselves are not aware of, or that they

are unwilling to discuss (Number & Hoepfl, 1997). While the semi-structured interview was conducted to gain an understanding of teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment through the discussion of their beliefs and values, observation helped to explore the extent to which such knowledge is reflected in teachers' practice of assessment process in the classroom; it helped to examine the relationship between what teachers had said in the interviews and what was observed (Mulhall, 2003). As McNamara (2001) suggested, research on teacher assessment needs to be carried out in the classroom context in order to understand the lived experience of teachers.

The distinctive feature of observation as pointed out by Cohen et al. (2007, p. 396) is that 'it offers an investigator the opportunity to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations'. Moreover, observation assists the researcher to further explore the social and cultural factors that have the potential to influence teachers' knowledge and practice in a certain context. The non-participant observation in which 'the researcher is not an "active" part of the setting in which the behaviours and/or interactions are being observed' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p.106) is seen as a suitable data collection tool for this study. The choice of this observation strategy was based on the premise that it is used as a means of gaining more understanding about teachers' practices of speaking assessment in the naturalistic setting and how teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment is represented in their assessment practices. This allows me to see the context where the assessment is conducted.

For observations in this study, I mainly used a video camera and field notes to collect data. Videotape helped me to explore how teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment was embodied and represented in their assessment practices in the classroom. It was also an essential part of the stimulated recall interviews, as explained in the relevant section below. In addition, it has the advantage of allowing those involved to revisit the recorded episodes, and reflect on them during the analysis process (Pirie, 1996). Writing field notes was an essential part of the observation process in that it helped me to record important events about the participants' actions in the classroom and the context in which the assessment took place.

#### **4.3.3.1 Design of observation schedule**

Semi-structured observation was conducted in the current study. The observation schedule included an introductory section in which the name of the school, the teacher, date, duration of the class, year of study, the number of the students, and the assessment type were recorded (see Appendix 8). The observation categories were kept very broadly based recording: the context, the process, the tasks used and how these were implemented, assessment techniques and any other emerging issues. By using semi-structured observation, I was aware that overly specific categories in the observation schedule could influence my judgement in that I might only focus on certain issues pre-identified in these categories. Therefore, based on the interpretive nature of the current research, I attempted not to be restricted to these categories and followed Mason's (2003) advice, attempting to have a sense of selectivity and perspective. That is, I was mainly interested in what actually happened in the classroom. Of course, my own preconceptions from the literature and my experience served as a filter for interpreting what I observed and recorded. As with all decisions about research design, the resulting observations were no more than my best attempt to render an accurate record of the teachers' practice. As mentioned above, field notes were made during the observation. As Brodsky (2008) suggested, field notes were also useful in any qualitative study in that they help the researcher to 'record in-depth descriptive details of people (including themselves), places, things, and events, as well as reflections on data, and the process of the research' (Brodsky, *ibid*, 342). These allowed me to include any other issues that seemed relevant during the period of observation.

#### **4.3.4 Stimulated recall interview**

The stimulated recall interview is conducted widely in studies on teacher knowledge and action (e.g., Almarza, 1996; Meijer, Verloop & Beijaard, 2002). In Meijer *et al.*'s (2002) study, it is used as an instrument in which 'teachers explicate what they are thinking in response to a videotape of the lesson they have just given' (p.408). The videotape is a useful tool in that it helps the teachers to recall their interactive thinking at the time of teaching practice and to stimulate teachers to 'relive' their teaching practice (*ibid*, p.410). As such, stimulated

recall interview is an effective tool in the study of teacher knowledge for it can be conducted to 'make much of teachers' "tacit" thinking explicit and elicit cognitions underlying their observable action' (ibid, p. 410). In the current study, the stimulated recall interview was a useful and appropriate tool of data collection in that it assisted me to elicit teachers' interpretations of the observed incidents in order to understand why teachers acted in certain ways and what knowledge informed their practice. After each observed session, the participants were engaged in recall interviews, in which they could interpret and reflect on their assessment practices. I used questions generated from the field notes and video/audio tapes in that I asked teachers to select the episodes and watch them so that they could reflect on the rationale behind their practices. However, in spite of the fact that recall interviews may not show the entire knowledge involved in a given recorded incident, they can provide information about the areas of knowledge used by teachers. Thus, this helped me to see multiple realities through the eyes of the participants, achieved through the different perspectives and interpretations they hold about speaking assessment.

#### **4.4 Research context:**

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the current study is conducted in a Libyan secondary school context. Within this section, I will present research site (4.4.1) and research participants (4.4.2).

##### **4.4.1 Research site**

The schools were selected according to certain criteria. As my study is based on investigating EFL *novice* teachers' knowledge and practice of *speaking* assessment, I intended to select schools where English language is taught as a specialisation, i.e. English language skills are taught as school subjects, and I could therefore have the opportunity to meet teachers who teach speaking as a school subject. All the schools where I conducted interviews and observations were in Tripoli and Tajoora, a suburb of Tripoli, and numbered seven in total. Schools in Tripoli include a large number of teachers who come from different parts of the country and, more importantly, have a variety of years of teaching experience. This diversity helped me to select novice teachers whose experience of teaching speaking ranges from one to three years.

#### 4.4.2 Research participants

To select participants for the questionnaire purposive sampling was employed (Bryman, 2008). Samples were selected according to their relatedness to the understanding of a social phenomenon (ibid). The rationale behind using such a sampling strategy was two-fold. Firstly, the questionnaire was used for the purpose of gaining baseline data about teacher knowledge of speaking assessment, but not for making generalisations from its findings. Secondly, since the focus of the study is on EFL *novice* teachers, the participants from whom I intended to collect data needed to have 3 years or less teaching experience. Some biographical information about the participants is presented below.

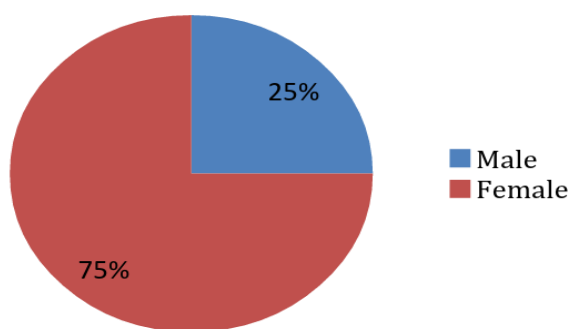


Figure 4.2: Gender (n=76)

#### ***Gender***

As Figure 4.2 shows, the number of female teachers exceeded the number of male teachers. It indicated that on average, each year more female teachers graduate from language teaching departments than males. This may indicate that female teachers are more interested in teaching English as a foreign language than male teachers.

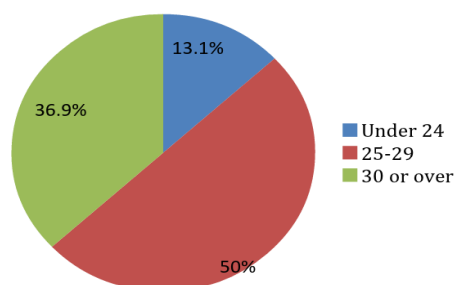


Figure 4.3: Age (n=76)

### **Age**

Figure 4.3 illustrates that 50% of the teachers were aged between 25 and 29. The younger group of teachers, 24 and under represents only 13% of the whole sample, with those of 30 or over representing about 37%.

The data collected in the first phase helped me to select the participants for the second phase. Firstly, I contacted the participants who expressed interest in participating further. These numbered 16 in total, with 10 teaching in Tripoli, 1 in Tajoora, 2 in Yeferen and 3 in Jadoo. However, I only selected those teachers who were teaching speaking at the time of the data collection: 10 teachers, with 9 teaching in central Tripoli and 1 in a school in Tajoora. Names were replaced with pseudonyms and the following table provides background information about the 10 participants who took part in the second phase of data collection: semi-structured interview (SSI), observation (O), stimulated recall interview (SRI).

| <b>Pseudonyms</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Years of teaching experience</b> | <b>Teaching class</b> | <b>School subjects</b> | <b>Location of school</b> | <b>Participation in the data collection activity</b> |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Mona              | Female        | 3 years                             | year three            | speaking & grammar     | Tripoli                   | (SSI, O, SRI)  |
| Fareeda           | female        | 3 years                             | year three            | speaking & writing     | Tripoli                   | (SSI, O, SRI)  |
| Rawan             | Female        | 2 years                             | year (two & three)    | speaking & writing     | Tripoli                   | (SSI, O, SRI)  |
| Amira             | Female        | 1 year                              | year two              | Speaking               | Tripoli                   | (SSI)  |

|        |        |         |                       |                    |         |       |
|--------|--------|---------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------|-------|
| Lamya  | Female | 3 years | year three            | speaking & reading | Tripoli | (SSI) |
| Alia   | Female | 3 years | year one & two        | speaking & grammar | Tajoora | (SSI) |
| Asmaa  | Female | 2 years | year two & three      | speaking & lab     | Tripoli | (SSI) |
| Suhila | Female | 3 years | year one, two & three | speaking & writing | Tripoli | (SSI) |
| Iman   | Female | 2 years | year three            | speaking & writing | Tripoli | (SSI) |
| Hana   | Female | 3 years | year two              | speaking & Lab     | Tripoli | (SSI) |

Table 4.3: Background information about the participants (phase two)

#### 4.5 Research procedures

Data was collected sequentially in two phases. The administration of the questionnaire took place between December 2010 and January 2011. In February 2011, I came back to the UK and analysed the questionnaire data. In May 2012, I started collecting the data for the second phase. I was at the research site for 16 weeks: eight weeks for each data collection phase. In the second phase of data collection, I spent 690 minutes conducting the semi-structured interviews, 405 minutes on observations, and 630 minutes on the stimulated recall interviews. The table below provides an outline of the data collection procedure:

##### Phase one:

| December   | January  |
|--|--|
| Week one: (4-8 Dec.2011)<br>Getting access to the field work and obtaining a list of schools that teach English language as specialisation provided by the English language inspection administration in Tripoli | Week five: (1-5 Jan 2012)<br>Visiting three schools in Yefern, a city in the South West of Tripoli, and handed the questionnaires to the participants directly. Collecting the copies of the questionnaire.    |
| Week two: (11-15 Dec.2011)<br>Visiting five schools in Tripoli, and administering the questionnaire either by hand to the participants directly or through school administrations                                | Week six: (8-12 Jan 2012)<br>Visiting four schools in Jadoo, a city in the South West of Tripoli, and handing out the questionnaires to the participants directly. Collecting the copies of the questionnaire. |
| Week three: (18-22 Dec. 2011)  | Week seven: ( 15-19 Jan 2012)<br>Visiting other six schools in Tripoli.  |



|  |  |
|--|--|
| Visiting the other five schools in Tripoli and following the same procedure as above   | Handing out the questionnaires to the participants directly.                                       |
| Week four: (25-29 Dec. 2011)<br>Visiting six schools in Tajoora, a suburb of Tripoli<br>Distributing the questionnaires through school administrations.<br>Collecting the copies from schools located in Tajoora | Week eight (22-26 Jan 2012)<br>Collecting the questionnaire copies from schools located in Tripoli |

Table 4.4: Time scale for data collection (phase one)

**Phase two:**

| <b>May</b>  | <b>June</b>  |
|---|--|
| Week one: (6-10 May, 2012)<br>Arranging access to schools where the participants were selected for the interviews and observation.<br>Arranging meetings with teachers to set up observations               | Week five: (2-7 Jun. 2012)<br>Conducting semi-structured interviews with Lamya, Hana and Alia<br>Conducting observation and follow up interview with Rawan |
| Week two: (13-17 May, 2012)<br>Conducting trial observations in two secondary schools in Tripoli<br>Conducting observation and stimulated recall interviews with Mona and Freeda                            | Week six: (9-14 Jun. 2012)<br>Conducting observation and follow-up interviews with Mona and Fareeda  |
| Week three: (20-24 May, 2012)<br>Conducting semi-structured interviews with Asmaa, Amira and Iman in three different schools in Tripoli<br>Conducting observation and stimulated recall interview with Mona | Week seven: (16-21 Jun. 2012)<br>Conducting observation and stimulated recall interviews with Mona<br>Conducting a semi-structured interview with Suhila   |
| Week four: (27-31)<br>Conducting observation with Mona and Fareeda in two different schools<br>conducting stimulated recall interviews after observed sessions  | Week eight: (23-28 Jun. 2012)<br>Conducting semi-structured interviews with Mona, Fareeda and Rawan  |

Table 4.5: Time scale for data collection (phase two)

**4.5.1 Piloting**

***Piloting the questionnaire***

Piloting is an essential process in the development of a questionnaire, in which the wording plays an important role (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). According to Cohen *et al.* (2007, p.341), ‘A pilot has several functions, principally to increase the reliability, validity and practicality of the

questionnaire'. The questionnaire was piloted with the assistance of ten EFL teachers, eight of whom have experience of English teaching ranging from one to three years. Six teachers have a BA (Bachelor of Arts) degree in the English language teaching; two teachers have a BA degree in the English language and translation, and the other two teachers are studying a PhD in education in the UK, specialising in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Following Oppenheim's (1992) advice, I provided the teachers with a separate sheet with questions asking for their comments while piloting the questionnaire items (see Appendix 6). Teachers were specifically asked to comment on the wording, the clarity of meaning, redundancy, the overall appearance of the questionnaire, the clarity of instructions, appropriateness of the covering letter, and the length of time required to complete the questionnaire. In addition, they were asked to provide suggestions about whether other items needed to be added.

Although the questionnaire was piloted by only ten participants, it provided me with a considerable amount of feedback. Firstly, the language used in the questionnaire instructions was considered too complex and needed to be clarified. In addition, the wording in some items was ambiguous and also needed clarification. Secondly, some items were seen as leading questions while others were considered redundant, which could have an effect on the respondents' view. Thirdly, one of the open-ended questions was thought to be more appropriate for the second phase of data collection: the interview. Finally, one of the respondents commented on the length of the questionnaire. As a response to this feedback, I reconsidered the items in terms of wording and content, using less formal language and replacing some phrases for the purpose of clarification, and, at the same time, reconsidering all the items in the Likert scale, deleting three and adding others. To gain more constructive feedback, I discussed the revised questionnaire with the thesis supervisors who suggested some changes such as the use of less formal language in the questionnaire instructions and the avoidance of items requiring multiple answers, as this can be confusing. In addition, some suggestions related to the wording of the key answers used in the Likert scale and to the need for clarification of some items in order to be more focused.

### ***Piloting the semi-structured interview and observation schedule***

Before I conducted the interviews, I had trial interviews with two Libyan EFL teachers who were teaching in Libyan schools in the UK. They suggested some backup questions and a need to clearly explain some terms such as *criteria*, *implementation*, *formative* and *summative*. With regard to the observation, I had trial observations with two Libyan EFL secondary school teachers in my hometown. I asked a research fellow who recently completed a PhD in TESOL to join me in the observation in order to validate the appropriateness of the observation schedule. Some changes were suggested in terms of the organisation, and the need to reduce the items in the *main concerns* columns. This trial was particularly useful in that I could gain a clear picture of the actual context in terms of the layout of the classroom, which helped me with placing the video-camera in an appropriate position when the actual observation took place.

#### **4.5.2 Data collection process**

##### ***The first phase of data collection***

Before entering the field of study, I obtained an approval form from the Ministry of Education (MOE), stating that the researcher is eligible to have access to secondary schools and meet teachers for the purpose of administering the questionnaire. Then, I had a meeting with the inspectors who are in charge of the English language branch in secondary schools in order to obtain a list of the name of these schools. When visiting the schools, I met the head teachers and provided them with information about the purpose of the questionnaire. I asked them to distribute questionnaires to EFL teachers whose teaching experience varies from 1 to 3 years, and to inform the teachers that their participation was entirely voluntary. On many occasions, I was introduced to the teachers, and handed the questionnaire directly to them, explaining its aim and purpose.

110 copies were distributed among 29 secondary schools in Tripoli and its suburbs, namely Tajoora, Yeferen and Jadoo, during December 2011 and January 2012. 83 copies of the questionnaire were returned. However, seven of these copies were excluded from the analysis because they were completed by teachers whose teaching experience exceeded 7 years. 76 copies were therefore included in the analysis. The administering of the questionnaire took place in the academic year 2011- 2012. That academic year started in

January 2011, which was an exception, as the country witnessed an uprising from the period February 17<sup>th</sup> to October 20<sup>th</sup> 2011. As a consequence, teachers commenced their work at the beginning of December in order to prepare teaching plans and to attend teaching workshops organised by MOE. That unanticipated event had an impact on the procedure of administering the questionnaire in that I faced difficulty in travelling among schools in different cities because of unsettled security. Some participants who were interested in taking part in the second phase of data collection contacted me by mobile, stating that research on EFL teachers' knowledge about language assessment is worth considering, especially the assessment of the speaking skill.

### ***The second phase of data collection***

The process of data collection in the first phase facilitated the data collection process in the second phase in terms of entering the field and having access to the secondary schools. The distribution of the questionnaires in person provided me with an opportunity to create a sense of contact with the participants as I mentioned above. Firstly, I made arrangements with the participants regarding an agreed time for the interviews and observations. The participants who agreed to be observed provided me with their speaking test timetable and then I could arrange my own timetable for both trial and actual observations. I followed the same procedure for arranging appointments for semi-structured interviews by contacting the participants via mobile phone.

All the interviews were recorded using a voice digital recorder, and the duration ranged between one hour and one hour and thirty minutes. Nine of the interviews took place in the participants' workplaces either before or after the teaching sessions. One of the interviews was conducted in the participant's house. With regard to observation, I observed nine sessions, and each session took forty-five minutes class time. All of the observed teachers were teaching the same year of study - the third year. While I observed the first participant in 5 sessions, and the second participant in 3 sessions, the third participant allowed me just one session. The first two participants agreed to be video-recorded; however, the third participant did not allow me to use a video camera, so I used the voice digital recorder instead.

While using the video camera, I mainly focused on the teachers in that I set the camera close enough to capture teachers' actions and utterances while they were carrying out the assessment. In one session I used an audio recorder and put it on the teacher's desk where the participant was sitting in order to gain a clear recording. In addition, I wrote down notes in all observed sessions in order to capture other important incidents that might not have been captured by video-taping. I used the observation sheet as a guide to help me focus more on certain issues related to the current research questions. As a non-participant observer, I stayed at the back of the classroom in order not to be obtrusive and to avoid eye contact with anyone in the classroom (Pirie, 1996).

After each session, stimulated recall interviews were conducted in order to gain more understanding about the teachers' rationale for their speaking assessment practices in the classroom. This was obtained through their interpretations of, beliefs about and reflections on some assessment practices that took place in the classroom. All these interviews were audio-recorded and the duration ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. Those who had allowed video-recording watched some of the episodes, while the third participant listened to the audio-tape, attempting to reflect on their actions and expressing their beliefs and values about what and how they practised speaking assessment. In addition, I raised some questions prompted by the field notes.

#### **4.6 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is considered an essential concept in interpretive research because it helps researchers describe the essence of qualitative terms outside of the criteria that are typically applied in positivist-oriented research (Given & Saumure, 2008). While validity, reliability and objectivity are criteria used for evaluating the quality of quantitative research, an alternative term is used to evaluate interpretive research, namely trustworthiness. To achieve trustworthiness, four criteria need to be considered: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Given and Saumure (2008) defined trustworthiness 'as ways in which qualitative researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability are evident in their research' (p. 896).

#### 4.6.1 Credibility

Jensen (2008) defined credibility as 'the methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants' expressions and the researcher's interpretations of them' (pp. 139-140). Researchers need to ensure that their interpretation of the data accurately represents the realities constructed by the participants (Given & Saumure, 2008). In the current study, I followed a number of methodological procedures suggested by Jensen (2008) in order to increase credibility. These are *time, triangulation, member checking, and colleagues*.

By time, I refer to prolonged engagement in the field of my study. I spent four months in the field - two months each on the two phases of data collection. Although the first phase was mainly for administering the questionnaires to the teachers, I was able to gain an understanding of the context where the participants work. During the administration of the questionnaires, I had contact with the participants, especially those who showed interest in my research. For example, two participants invited me to enter their classrooms while they were teaching speaking. This experience helped me to see myself as a researcher doing observation in the classroom. In addition, I had several discussions with the participants, either in arranged meetings or via the telephone, exchanging ideas about the teaching and assessment of speaking. Outside the classroom, I maintained contact via social networking such as Facebook with those participants who had agreed to be interviewed and observed in the second phase of data collection. This contact took place while I was in the UK, analysing the questionnaire data. In the second phase of data collection, I spent two months in the field. The first week was spent arranging with the participants about the time for interviews and observations. Prior to observation, I attended a number of sessions in the classes I intended to observe in order to avoid any sense of anxiety my presence might cause on the part of the students. This helped me to gain an in-depth understanding of the social world where the teachers practise speaking assessment, and to reflect on my position as a researcher, but not as a teacher who had been part of that social world several years ago. I tried my best to be a part of my participants' social life and to create a less hierarchal relationship (Flick, 2011). This helped me to explore the multiple realities about the phenomenon under study.

With reference to triangulation, I used multiple sources of data, namely questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, observation and stimulated recall interviews. In addition, I used multiple data-gathering techniques such as audio recordings, video recordings and field notes. The use of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection helped me to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Member checking was another procedure employed to increase credibility. I transcribed the interviews and then translated the Arabic version into English. The translated transcripts and copies of the original Arabic versions were sent to the translator in order to check the match between the two versions. I then sent the participants the written transcripts by e-mail so that they could verify their responses and identify any potential misunderstanding. This helped me to check the accuracy of the transcripts and this in turn helped me understand things from the participants' perspectives, attempting to be accurate in reporting descriptive and interpretive accounts of the data. However, I need to acknowledge my own construction of reality of the participants' understandings and experiences that is generated through interaction with them. This clearly has the potential to influence my interpretations of the participants' multiple realities (see the section on reflexivity below). This is entirely in keeping with the constructivist view of reality in which meanings are negotiated within social interaction.

During the process of data analysis, I had several discussions with my colleagues who were doing doctoral studies in TESOL. These discussions related to the initial steps of coding the data, iteration in the data analysis, and emergent themes. In addition, I had several meetings with my supervisors in which we discussed in detail the analysis process and the findings of the research. They provided me with feedback that constructively critiqued the data analysis findings. All of this helped me to see the data from different perspectives and to gain a holistic picture of the phenomenon under study.

#### **4.6.2 Dependability**

Dependability is achieved through providing extensive detail about the procedure and the research instruments in such a way that future researchers would be able to collect data in similar conditions (Given & Saumure, 2008). This in-depth reporting allows the reader to

evaluate the extent to which proper research practices have been followed so that she/he can develop a nuanced understanding of the methods and their effectiveness (Shenton, 2004). In the current study, I addressed the issue of dependability by describing clearly my research design and the instruments of data collection. Firstly, I provided a theoretical background about the methodological stance underpinning the current study, and presented a detailed outline of each instrument and the rationale behind using it. Secondly, I talked about the research procedure in which the data were collected in two sequential phases. Thirdly, I attempted to reflect on the process of data collection and data analysis in order to judge the effectiveness of the process of the research undertaken, as suggested by Shenton (2004).

#### **4.6.3 Confirmability**

With reference to confirmability, the researcher needs to provide evidence that his/her interpretations of participants' perceptions are rooted in the participants' constructions (Jensen, 2008). Data analysis, findings and conclusions can be verified as a typical representation of and grounded in the participants' perceptions (Jensen, *ibid*). Within the current inquiry, I endeavoured to achieve confirmability by focusing on two essential goals of any interpretive research: '(1) to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants and (2) to understand the meanings people give to their experiences' (Jensen, 2008, p.113). Following Jensen's (2008) advice, I endeavoured to make the research process as transparent as possible through providing a clear description of how the data were collected and analysed, offering examples of the coding process for both the manual and the NVivo coding (4.8).

#### **4.6.4 Transferability**

Transferability as a term is equivalent to generalisability, in that the latter refers to 'situations where research findings can be applied across the widest possible contexts' (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 896). However, according to the nature of interpretive research, the findings of qualitative inquiry are pertinent to a small number of participants in a particular environment. This makes it a less easy task to demonstrate that such findings can



be replicated in other contexts and to other populations (Shenton, 2004). In essence, although transferability involves the need to be aware of and to describe the scope of one's qualitative study so that its applicability to different contexts can be readily discerned, it does not imply that a study is not deemed unworthy if it cannot be applied to broader contexts. Rather, a study's worthiness is identified by how well researchers and readers can determine how the findings might be applied to alternative contexts (Given & Saumure, 2008).

To increase transferability, Jensen (2008) suggested that interpretive researchers need to focus on two key considerations: how closely the participants are linked to the context being studied, and the contextual boundaries of the findings. To account for the first consideration, I attempted to select the participants in a way that would be consistent with the research design, as that would enhance 'the potential that readers can assess the degree of transferability to their given context' (Jensen, 2008, p. 887). I selected the participants purposively in that the average experience of all the participants ranged from one to three years and they were all Libyan. In addition, all those participants who were interviewed and observed were teaching speaking as a school subject at the time of data collection. With regard to the second consideration, I provided a full picture of the context of the study (see Chapter 2) in that I presented background information about the social, educational and the political contexts where the participants work.

#### **4.7 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is an essential process that the researcher needs to conduct during the stages of the research (Creswell, 2007; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). The significance of reflexivity is derived from the understanding that researchers are part of the social world they study (Ahern, 1999). This indicates that researchers as individuals have their own conceptualisations and biases that are constructed within the influence of 'cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics' (Creswell, 2007, p.179) and those influences are reflected in how researchers write their own interpretation of the research (ibid). Therefore,

researchers are encouraged to be reflexive in their account of the research process as 'reflexivity shows the practical nature of our representations of reality and multiplicity of competing versions of reality' (Brewer, 2000, as cited in Gibbs, 2007, p. 92).

Bearing that in mind, I need to have, as Mauthner and Doucet (2003) suggested, self-awareness and self-consciousness to capture the views through which I view the social world I am researching. Such awareness is particularly important to identify the subjectivity and predispositions that I bring when analysing the data and making my own interpretations. Based on this perspective, I was aware that my educational background about assessment is based on the positivist paradigm. As an EFL learner and EFL teacher, I experienced the traditional forms of assessment that are mainly based on paper and pencil tests. In spite of the fact that my views of language assessment have changed as I have experienced the assessment of English language in different institutional contexts, I am conscious that some of my perspectives appear to reflect ontological and epistemological underpinnings of my previous predispositions. This consciousness seems to play an influential role in generating my interpretations about teachers' knowledge and understanding of speaking assessment and how such knowledge is reflected in their assessment practices in the classroom.

As an interpretive researcher, I embrace the social embeddedness of knowledge construction and argue the strength of the knowledge and experience that I bring to the research. However, this also requires me to reflect on the methods of data collection used in the current study. While reflecting on the use and the construction of the questionnaire, I was aware that attempting to measure the validity and reliability challenged how the notion of reality is perceived in interpretive research and that it might be seen as a positivist perspective that seeks one true reality. Thus, I found it important to reflect on the validity and reliability processes based on the premise that the aim of the current study is to explore different views to gain a fuller understanding of speaking assessment knowledge and practice. Although I attempted to address the validity of the questionnaire, I have to acknowledge that my prejudices and biases might have influenced the way I constructed certain items. This may have resulted in the use of specific words rather than others and the use of leading questions. Likewise, I found it necessary to reflect on the Cronbach alpha result obtained from the pilot study. I acknowledge that the score is rather high, and the reason

might be that the participants may have perceived the questionnaire as a test of their knowledge rather than an investigation of their understandings and practices as mentioned above. This may indicate the social embeddedness of knowledge construction in that knowledge is not an absolute but is constructed by the participants through their interaction with the social and cultural context.

Thus, while reflecting on my interaction with participants, I found that it was necessary to acknowledge my role as an interpretive researcher in that I have my own background, knowledge and prejudices to construct reality in certain ways but not others (Walshman, 2006). This may be derived from the co-construction of the reality I hold as a researcher and that held by the participants. With this in mind, I attempted to be aware of the perceived personal and methodological impact on the analytic process (Frost, Nolas, Brooks-Gordon, Holt, Mehdizaden & Shinebourne, 2010). In order to ensure trustworthiness, I made interpretations of how the participants make sense of their experience and attempted to minimise the impact of my own assumptions. Furthermore, I was aware that what some teachers told me might be what they thought I wanted to hear rather than what they really believed. Furthermore, they might have understood what I wanted differently from me. I attempted to reflect on the tools used for collecting data and on the context where the data were collected. For example, the use of audio tapes and video camera might have influenced how teachers responded or acted in interviews and observations respectively. More importantly, the difficulties and tension the country was experiencing at the time of data collection may have influenced teachers' perspectives about speaking assessment. Bearing all that in mind, I attempted to put the participants at their ease in that I tried to ask questions and introduce probes that encouraged them to speak freely and confidently, and to avoid responding in a way that showed agreement or disagreement. However, I acknowledge that their perspectives and actions may have been influenced by my role as a researcher and the way they perceived the relationship between us. This reflected the social embeddedness of knowledge construction.

During the data analysis process, Mauthner and Doucet (2003) advised that it is important to reflect on the epistemological and ontological conceptions of the subjects and subjectivities that bear on the analytic processes. I was aware that the participants as

individuals have unique beliefs and values about language assessment in general and speaking assessment in particular and that I as a researcher and the participants (the researched) may share some of those beliefs and values, and that may lead to biases and predispositions. Thus, I acknowledge such biases will have influenced the way I described and interpreted the participants' perspectives regarding speaking assessment. However, I would argue that this co-construction of knowledge and understanding is a strength of my research design. I do not attempt to eliminate bias but rather to recognise the individual subjectivities that helped to build my understanding of these teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment.

Therefore, being reflexive helped me to identify my previous theoretical predispositions and their potential influence on the way I collected data and how I analysed and interpreted the findings. In addition, it helped me to gain an understanding of the participants' knowledge and practices of speaking assessment within a social and cultural context.

## **4.8 Data analysis**

### **4.8.1 Questionnaire data analysis**

#### ***Close-ended questions data analysis***

The analysis of close-ended questions was based on descriptive statistics. The raw data obtained was entered manually into Excel. The statistical techniques used in the analysis of the Likert scale items are frequency and percentage (see the tables in Chapter 5).

#### ***Open-ended questions data analysis***

Open-ended questions were analysed qualitatively in the first cycle of analysis (deductive phase). Firstly, I gave each copy of the questionnaire a number (e.g. Q1, Q2, Q3...). Secondly, I opened a file for the open-ended questions (Section five in the questionnaire). This section included two questions (58 & 59). Question 58 included 6 sub-sections, asking the participants to tick the factors which they believe influence their knowledge and practices of speaking assessment and to provide an explanation. These factors were the following:

1. *Class size*

2. *Curriculum objectives*
3. *Lack of support from more experienced teachers*
4. *Prescribed rules by school policy or educational system about what assessment criteria to use*
5. *Lack of standardised oral language assessment criteria*
6. *Lack of teacher training for learning how to make oral language assessment*

Question 59 asked the participants to write about their speaking assessment practices in the classroom. Then, I copied the answers in MS Word and grouped them under each factor. Here are examples of the data obtained from the two questions:

Class size  
 Q 68: Classes are loaded with students, so the teacher is unable to use speaking tasks for assessment.  
 Q18: The class size as well as the distribution of the seats are not so helpful to make speaking assessment.  
 Q65: Class size is a big issue for me. It is not helpful to an oral test for 50 students in one day. I have to divide them into sessions, sometimes three and that means spending more time and effort in assessing than in teaching new lessons which will be forward accumulated. After all, oral language assessment does not require much time to prepare but it requires patience and long hours to evaluate students especially if they are studying English as specialisation in secondary schools.  
 Q55: sometimes when I carry out speaking assessment for a big number of students in the class, I cannot finish on time.

Figure 4.4: A sample of open-ended question responses (question 58)

How do you carry out speaking assessment?  
 Q8: In order to assess their oral language performance, I use the speaking tasks that are in the skill book. My assessment is mainly based on their use of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.  
 Q1- My assessment is based on examining students' ability to use a wide range of vocabulary, and to pronounce words, phrases and statements correctly.  
 18- I base my assessment of speaking on written tests.  
 Q33- I have to use written tests for the assessment of speaking.

Figure 4.5: A sample of open-ended question responses (question 59)

While I was writing, I also made notes and memos about certain aspects raised in the participants' reasonings and perspectives. Thirdly, I printed out a hardcopy and started reading all the responses within each contextual factor in order to gain an understanding of

the different issues raised. The next stage involved coding following two steps, first cycle and second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2011).

In the first cycle, I did line by line reading in order to identify the initial codes. I assigned codes to the data chunks. This involved highlighting words, phrases, and sentences, and assigning labels to them. It is worth mentioning that I started with deductive coding in that some codes were pre-identified from the list of contextual factors assigned in question 58 in the questionnaire, such as *class size*, *curriculum objectives*, etc. Here is an example of initial coding of the participants' responses about 'class size':

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>Q 68: Classes are loaded with students, so the teacher is unable to use speaking tasks for assessment.</p> <p>Q18: The class size as well as the distribution of the seats are not so helpful to make speaking assessment.</p> <p>Q65: Class size is a big issue for me. It is not helpful to an oral test for 50 students in one day.</p> <p>I have to divide them into sessions, sometimes three</p> <p>and that means spending more time and effort in assessing than in teaching new lessons which will be forward accumulated. After all, oral language assessment does not require much time to prepare but it requires patience and long hours to evaluate students especially if they are studying English as specialisation in secondary schools.</p> <p>Q55: sometimes when I carry out speaking assessment for a big number of students in the class, I cannot finish on time.</p> | <p>A large number of students</p> <p>Difficulty in implementing speaking atskts</p> <p>Class size</p> <p>Seat arrangement</p> <p>Difficulty in implementing speaking assessment/ a large number of students</p> <p>Time factor</p> <p>mechanism of implementing assessment</p> <p>time factor</p> <p>preparing speaking test</p> <p>time factor</p> <p>difficulty in implementing a large number of students</p> <p>time factor</p> |
|--|---|

Then, I carried out inductive coding as new codes emerged from the data. This preliminary analysis provided me with an understanding of the participants' reports about their speaking assessment practices and the contextual factors that perceive to have the potential to influence their knowledge and practices. In addition, it helped me to develop questions for

the semi-structured interview schedule. The following is the preliminary list of emerging codes:

- The imposition of written tests in the assessment of speaking
- Lack of voice
- Students’ attitudes towards oral language tests

I further analysed the findings from the open-ended questions when I commenced the analysis of the qualitative data obtained in the second phase of data collection through the use of the Software package (NVivo). Firstly, I opened a file in the software and imported the findings. Secondly, I keyed in the categories and the codes I analysed manually in a hierarchical function by creating parent nodes and child nodes. Then, I started reading line by line and dragged the utterances and assigned them to the codes in the node bar. Within the iterative nature of the qualitative analysis, new codes emerged, and some codes merged together. One of the advantages of using the software is that these functions can be accomplished easily (Miles & Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). These data were reported in Section 5.2.4, which presents the data about the impact of contextual factors on teachers’ knowledge of speaking assessment.

#### **4.8.2 Data analysis of semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations and stimulated recall interviews**

The findings from the semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations and stimulated recall interviews were analysed qualitatively, using my research questions as a guide. In the sub-sections below, I will present in detail the processes employed and the table below presents a summary of the complete qualitative analysis process including open-ended questions in the questionnaire:

| TOOL                               | COLLECTION  | INITIAL ANALYSIS   | 1 <sup>ST</sup> CYCLE                                | 2 <sup>ND</sup> CYCLE                         |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Questionnaire 2 questions: 58 & 59 | End of questionnaire.<br><br>Some predetermined items | Content analysis<br>><br>Coding > import to other qualitative data | Imported into NVivo<br><br>Created ‘nodes as you go’ | Reread data<br><br>Returned to initial coding |

|             |  |   |  |  |
|-------------|--|---|--|--|
| SSI         | Individual interviews with semi structured schedule<br>Audio recorded<br>Transcribed | Reading and re-reading<br><br>Some initial coding   | Merged data sets<br><br>Started creating code hierarchy                                | Sorted and recoded data<br><br>Used constant comparative method              |
| SRI         | Interview with recording of lesson<br><br>Audio recorded<br>Transcribed              | Reading and re-reading<br><br>Some initial coding   | Merged some codes and created tree relationship.                                       | Looked for relationships<br><br>Identified key concepts                      |
| Observation | Video recorded (except one audio) & Observation schedule                             | Watching and re-watching.<br><br>Transcribed episodes.<br><br>Wrote memos.<br><br>Entered new and existing codes. | Grouped code families based on research questions.<br><br>REPORTED IN FINDINGS CHAPTER | Analysed key concepts into sub themes<br><br>DISCUSSED IN DISCUSSION CHAPTER |

Table 4.6: Summary of qualitative data analysis (the second phase: 1st cycle & 2nd cycle)

#### 4.8.2.1 Data preparation process

The interviews were conducted with 10 participants, four of whom preferred to use English while the others preferred to speak Arabic. The interviews were transcribed, starting with the interviews that were in English, then those in Arabic. Later, I translated the transcripts from Arabic into English. The Arabic and the English versions were sent to a professional translator who suggested a few changes in the structure of some sentences. For the purpose of validation, I e-mailed the transcribed interviews to the participants in order to confirm whether the transcripts conveyed their perspectives clearly, especially the translated ones. The participants were pleased with the interview transcripts.

With regard to observation, three teachers from different schools were observed while conducting speaking assessment (the oral phase). I asked the participants if I could attend some teaching classes before the assessment was conducted so that they could introduce me to the students and thereby avoid any anxiety students might have experienced if I had observed them being tested without any advance notice. Another reason was that the



teachers and the students in the context of the current study are not accustomed to the observation concepts and processes. I attended one class with each teacher before the observation process took place.

Eight out of nine sessions were video-recorded while only one was audio-recorded; field notes were also taken according to the elements included in the observation schedule. I organised the data obtained in the observation in that I transferred all the video-recorded episodes to my computer and assigned a label to each video. In addition, I transcribed the audio recorded session and wrote up the field notes. The writing of field notes helped me identify some codes as an initial step for analysis. The multiple reading of the field notes and watching the observed episodes helped me to highlight issues in the recall interviews and in the coming observed sessions. The following is an example of my field notes in which I highlighted initial codes about the teacher's use of peer assessment (see Figure 4.6 in the following section):

Field note taken 31, May, 2012 (the second observed session in Fareeda's classroom)

The teacher has got her own laptop on her desk at the left corner. The students' seats were in a U shape. Some of the students were using their own laptops. There is a desk in the middle of the classroom where two students work as technicians. They were operating the projector and helped the other students to present their slides on the board. In addition, there was a student who was holding a digital camera and videoing the students while giving their presentations.

Peer assessment was used in that the teacher asked the students to give a feedback about some oral language performances. That was done orally. It took the form of a discussion after the presentation was carried out. She asked the students to comment on the presentations in terms of vocabulary used, coherence, and clarity of the ideas.

She praised the students after giving the presentations.

Figure 4.6: Field note sample

The recall interviews were conducted on the day when the observations took place. Firstly, I imported the episodes from the digital camera into my portable computer where the participant could watch the episodes. With regard to the audio-recorded session, I mainly relied on taking the notes and raising some questions about certain practices and decision-making. However, I did play the audio-recording in order to stimulate the participant's

reflection on some assessment aspects. In the recall interviews, the participants reflected on the rationale behind using certain assessment practices; on their mechanisms of speaking assessment in terms of the process, the tasks, the assessment categories and the criteria by which students were assessed; and on the influence of some of the contextual factors on their attitudes and practices.

#### 4.8.2.2 Data analysis process

As can be seen in Table 4.6, the qualitative data was analysed in two cycles. A deductive approach was used to analyse the data in the first cycle in that I labeled initial codes that arose from the questions and observation schedule. Then, I did inductive analysis as a second cycle of analysis in which conceptual themes emerged. The two cycles are explained below.

##### *First cycle of analysis – deductive analysis*

In the deductive phase of analysis I took three of my four data sets: semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall interviews and the open-ended responses from the questionnaire. Initially, I started analysing the data manually, following the same process as in the analysis of open-ended responses mentioned above. During the process of transcribing the semi-structured interview and recall interview data (see appendices 9 & 11), I also engaged in writing notes and memos about certain issues raised in the participants' responses. I read through each transcript several times and labelled words, phrases and whole sentences that referred to any of the items of language and speaking assessment that I had included in my design of the questionnaire and interview schedules. I added to these any other items that related to the knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. An example of this early coding can be seen in figure 4.7

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>it is important to assess the students' ability of performing the language in all skills; grammar, writing, especially their spelling, even reading. You know some students cannot read properly. It is also important to focus on pronunciation when they read a text and when they speak Intonation is another assessment</p> | <p>writing, grammar<br/>spelling, reading<br/>proper reading</p> <p>focus on pronunciation,<br/>intonation as an assessment category</p> |
|--|--|

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>category that needs to be considered. I need to assess the students' ability to distinguish between a statement, a question and an exclamatory sentence while doing reading. The stress is very important as well in that it shows the students' ability to distinguish between a verb and a noun such as the word 'present'- the stress changes the pronunciation and the meaning of the word. What else? As i told you the grammar. Through the assessment of grammar, the teacher can examine the students' ability to construct correct and meaningful sentences. In writing, i focus on the use of punctuation.</p> | <p>statement and questions, exclamatory sentences</p> <p>Stress</p> <p>the meaning of the word</p> <p>pronunciation</p> <p>the assessment of grammar<br/>the construct of the meaningful sentences</p> <p>writing, the use of punctuation</p> |
|---|---|

Figure 4.7: A sample of initial coding of interview data

I followed the same process throughout the analysis of all the transcripts. The second step of coding involved grouping the codes in categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Initially, I did this manually and discussed with the supervisors the preliminary list of categories and sub-categories derived from the coding process of the three sets of data. They advised me to use the software package (NVivo) as it has many advantages, especially with regard to data display and organisation. A further data analysis was conducted electronically.

### The process of coding using NVivo

The electronic analysis of the data involved several steps. **Firstly**, I created a file in NVivo for each data set (SSI & SRI transcripts and open-ended responses) and then imported them into these files. **Secondly**, I followed the process of 'making nodes as you go' (see Appendix 10). While some of the nodes were pre-identified according to the questionnaire and interview questions, many others emerged from the participants' responses. Within this process, I gave each node (code) a name and generally avoided using the Nvivo codes. The process of multiple reading carried out before using NVivo helped me generate some codes. It is worth noting that one of the advantages of using NVivo is that, even if some data are coded into

very small segments, ‘the immediate and larger contexts of any coded segment are each available with a click of the mouse’ (Bazeley, 2013, p.144). **Thirdly**, I started to develop a coding system by creating node hierarchy i.e., *parent nodes* and *child nodes*. Within this stage of data analysis, data management took place, in which ‘a category at a higher level describes the contents, in general terms, of the items below it. (...) Each layer in the hierarchy contains more specific types or subgroups of the item above, and may be ‘parent’ to more specific items below’ (ibid, p.179).

During this stage, refining of the codes took place, in which I reviewed the list of codes and examined the codes that reflected my research questions. One of the strategies adopted for refining the codes was to merge codes that had a common meaning into a single code. Then, I further examined the relationship between the substantive categories (Punch, 2009). Designing and managing the map tree codes in the NVivo Software helped me to see the sub-categories within the main category under which they were coded and across other categories. The following is an example of the NVivo coding:

| Name   | Sources | References |
|--|---------|------------|
| teacher's perception of written tests                                    | 9       | 16         |
| teachers' perception of the assessment of students' language performance | 5       | 6          |
| teachers' perception of the assessment of linguistic skills              | 6       | 15         |
| the assessment of writing  | 3       | 3          |
| the assessment of speaking   | 1       | 1          |
| the assessment of reading  | 2       | 2          |
| the assessment of listening  | 1       | 1          |
| the assessment of grammar  | 6       | 7          |
| teacher's perception of the assessment of the communicative language     | 2       | 3          |
| interaction  | 1       | 1          |
| teacher's perception of summative language assessment                    | 5       | 6          |
| revision   | 2       | 2          |
| not a standard for students' progress                                    | 1       | 1          |
| motivational factor  | 2       | 2          |
| a mean of gaining marks  | 1       | 1          |
| teachers' perception of formative language assessment                    | 8       | 14         |
| using more assessment tasks  | 1       | 1          |
| the use of wrming-up questions   | 2       | 2          |
| showing students' language progress                                      | 2       | 2          |
| reliable assessment  | 1       | 1          |
| raising students' awareness  | 1       | 1          |

Figure 4.8: Sample of coding in NVivo.

With regard to observation data, I started the analysis by watching each video many times, using the replay function, in order to capture a clear picture of what was happening during the assessment process. This helped me to identify initial codes in relation to the three participants' assessment practices in the classroom (Mona, Fareeda & Rawan). While watching the episodes, I looked for these teachers' different actions and noted codes (Pirie, 1996). Although my focus was mainly on the teachers' assessment practices and their actions in the classroom, I also wrote notes on the students' actions in the assessment process as that may have relevance to the teachers' mechanisms of assessment. Secondly, I transcribed episodes in which teachers gave many comments on students' oral language performance during the assessment as well as the episodes that were linked with field notes and those that teachers reflected on in the stimulated recall interviews. While transcribing, I wrote memos, outlining any possible relationship between the emergent categories in the observation and those which were identified in the semi-structured interviews. I also wrote up the recorded details about the observed sessions and the field notes. Here is an example of initial coding of field note:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Peer assessment was used in that the teacher asked the students to give a feedback about some oral language performances</p> <p>That was done orally. It took the form of a discussion after the presentation was carried out</p> <p>She asked the students to comment on the presentations</p> <p>in terms of vocabulary used, coherence, and clarity of the ideas.</p> | <p>The use of peer assessment<br/>Providing feedback as a method of peer assessment</p> <p>The focus on language performance</p> <p>The mechanism by which peer assessment is conducted</p> <p>Students' commented on other the student's presentation (the use of peer assessment)</p> <p>Teacher's focus on linguistic skills (vocabulary &amp; language content)</p> |
|---|---|

Figure 4.9: A sample of initial coding of analysing field note

Thirdly, I opened up a file in NVivo to import the transcribed episodes, including the transcribed audio-recorded session and the field notes. Finally, I commenced the data management by coding the data either using existing nodes or new nodes related to assessment practices. The following is a sample of codes recorded in the NVivo:

|   |    |    |
|---|----|----|
| teachers' narratives of the practice of speaking assessment | 1  | 1  |
| the practice of speaking assessment tasks                   | 11 | 42 |
| the practice of pair work in speaking tests                 | 8  | 21 |
| teacher's tool for doing the assessment                     | 7  | 11 |
| teacher's practice of speaking assessment score             | 11 | 15 |
| teacher's method of speaking assessment                     | 6  | 9  |
| rubrics   | 1  | 1  |

Figure 4.10 a sample NVivo coding for participants' speaking assessment practices

The process of coding was similar to that followed in the coding of the other three data sets – SSI, SRI and open-ended responses. More codes were identified, especially those assigned to the three teachers' assessment practices in relation to the use of speaking tasks. This in turn allowed me to examine and explore more categories related to the teachers' practices of speaking assessment and to see the relationship between teachers' knowledge and practices of speaking assessment on the one hand, and the influence of the context on the other hand. The following is a sample of more codes recorded in NVivo:

|   |    |    |
|---|----|----|
| teachers' narratives of the practice of speaking assessment | 1  | 1  |
| the practice of speaking assessment tasks                   | 11 | 42 |
| writing conversation  | 1  | 1  |
| the use of cards  | 2  | 2  |
| teachers' assessment of presentation                        | 8  | 16 |
| summarising a tv programme                                  | 2  | 3  |
| role play   | 5  | 10 |
| re-telling stories  | 1  | 1  |
| practice  | 3  | 3  |
| making up conversation                                      | 1  | 1  |
| lesson explanation  | 1  | 1  |
| doing exercises   | 1  | 2  |
| discussion  | 3  | 6  |
| describing the picture                                      | 2  | 3  |
| debate  | 1  | 1  |
| acting a dialogue   | 2  | 3  |

Figure 4.11: A sample of more codes identified from the findings obtained in observation

The second step of coding involved grouping the codes in categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994) based on my four research questions. I opened files for each category and then I copied and pasted, recording the source of the transcripts. Within this stage, I used a constant comparative method in order to find similar meanings between the codes and group them under one category (see Figure 4.12 below). As can be seen, this is a list of initial codes that reflect the key themes used in the four research questions: teachers' general perceptions of

language assessment, teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment, teachers' practice of speaking assessment; and the role of context.

|  |    |    |
|--|----|----|
| contextual factors                                       | 14 | 72 |
| teachers' practice of speaking assessment                | 1  | 1  |
| teacher's awareness of the importance of speaking ass    | 11 | 21 |
| teacher's knowledge of curriculum objective for the teac | 8  | 17 |
| teachers' knowleldge of speaking assessment              | 1  | 1  |
| teachers' perception of the assessment of students' lan  | 5  | 6  |
| teacher's perception of written tests                    | 9  | 16 |
| teacher's suggestions for the low level                  | 3  | 4  |

Figure 4.12: initial codes of the key themes used in the four questions in the Nvivo

Figure 4.13 below gives the final list of codes and code families arrived at following the first cycle of analysis. This structure has been used in the presentation of these findings in the next chapter:

|  |
|--|
| RQ1 General perception of language assessment                |
| The assessment of language performance                       |
| Linguistic skills  |
| Grammar  |
| Vocabulary   |
| Pronunciation  |
| Communicative skills   |
| Interaction  |
| Different forms of assessment                                |
| Teachers' perception of formative language assessment        |
| Teachers' perception of peer assessment                      |
| Teachers' perception of student self-assessment              |
| Teachers' perception of summative assessment                 |
| RQ2 Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment               |
| Teachers' awareness of the importance of speaking assessment |

Linguistic aspects

Communicative aspects

Social aspects

Pedagogical aspects

Teachers' knowledge of the curriculum objectives for the teaching of speaking

Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment constructs

Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment tasks

Teachers' sources of speaking tasks

Teachers' knowledge about the use of different speaking tasks

Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment criteria

RQ3 Teachers' speaking assessment practices

Speaking assessment based on oral tests

Speaking assessment based on paper and pencil tests

Grading system

RQ4 Teachers' views on the impact of contextual factors on their knowledge and practice of speaking assessment

Teachers' views on the impact of contextual factors on their knowledge of speaking assessment

Institutional context

Lack of support by more experienced teachers

Lack of teacher training activities

Political context

Teachers' views on the impact of contextual factors on their practice of speaking assessment

The use of the written tests in the assessment of speaking

Lack of managerial (institutional) follow-up

Lack of standardised oral language assessment

Undervaluing of speaking classes



|   |
|---|
| Poor teaching and low level of students' language of competency |
| Ill-equipped classrooms   |
| Time barrier and curriculum length                              |
| Class size  |
| Workload and low income   |

Figure 4.13: The final list of codes and code families arrived at in the first cycle of analysis.

### ***Second cycle of analysis – inductive analysis***

The second stage of analysis involved recoding of the data into conceptual themes. In this stage, inductive analysis was conducted in that I went back to my initial readings of the transcripts and the early codes. Then, with my greater knowledge of my data, I sorted and relabeled these early codes. To do so, I used a constant comparative method in order to find similar meanings between categories and group them under an emergent theme (Flick, 2009). For further refining, examination of the relationship between the substantive categories was employed (Punch, 2009). Here I drew on my in-depth knowledge of my data to reflect on what these teachers had told me about their knowledge and practice to look for underlying patterns and inconsistencies that might lead me to a greater understanding of these teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. This helped me to find relationships, such as teachers' understandings of formative assessment and their understandings of summative assessment, their knowledge of speaking assessment and attitudes towards speaking assessment tasks, teachers' knowledge and their assessment practices, and the participants' views about the role of context in their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. During this cycle of analysis, three main ideas about these teachers' knowledge and practice emerged. These themes arose from the following:

- a) The way these teachers seemed to prioritise linguistic skills over communicative language skills,
- b) The way these teachers seemed to prioritise summative assessment over formative assessment,

- c) The way these teachers' practices of speaking assessment seemed to be based more on their understandings of speaking as a language skill (content) rather than on their understandings of assessment (process).

In order to explore these three themes, all the data that had been coded under each emergent theme were examined and sub-codes were developed that helped explain the themes (see Figure 4.14 below):

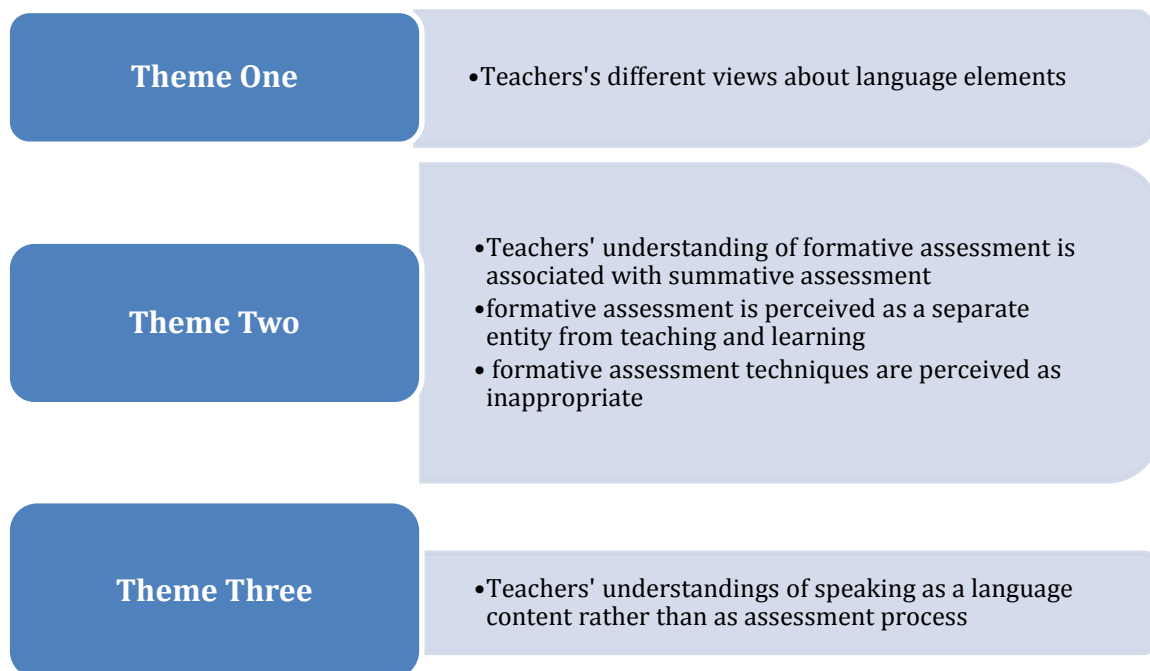


Figure 4.14: Themes and sub-codes developed to explain the themes

The qualitative data helped me to gain a nuanced understanding about the participants' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment, indicating that the complexity of their knowledge arises from a complex interweaving of context and their individual understanding. They further indicate the value of social constructionism in the understanding of teacher knowledge of language assessment as it shows the mosaic of these teachers' content knowledge of assessment.

#### **4.9 Ethical considerations**

Ethics in educational research is viewed as one of the significant issues that researchers should take into account from the outset of the research because their studies entail contact with people as research participants (Creswell, 2009). Researchers need to respect participants by ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality, and to protect them from any potential harm while they are involved in the study (Creswell, *ibid*). The current study carefully considered the ethical issues prior to and during data collection.

Prior to embarking on data collection, I obtained a certificate of ethical research approval form signed by the chair of the school's ethics committee at the University of Exeter (see Appendix 12). In the form, I explained in detail the aim of my research and the methods of data collection I intended to use; I also confirmed that I would respect the research site and the participants, highlighting the importance of ensuring the participants' anonymity, confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any time of the data collection process.

During the stage of data collection, two ethical considerations were taken into account: gaining access to the research site and obtaining consent forms from the participants. With regard to access, I followed certain procedures. Following Flick's (2009) advice, I made a request to the Libyan embassy in the UK to provide me with a formal letter, indicating that I am a Libyan PhD student and planning to collect data in Libyan secondary schools (see Appendix 13). I then went to the inspection administration in Tripoli in order to obtain a list of schools where English is taught as specialisation. When visiting schools, I first met the administrative staff in each school and introduced myself as a PhD student. I provided them with detailed information about the aim of my study, the methods of data collection, and the intended participants.

I had contacts with the participants in two sequential periods. Within the first phase of data collection, I conducted a questionnaire. In the design of the questionnaire, I took into consideration Cohen *et al*'s (2007) advice that 'the questionnaire will always be an intrusion into the life of the respondent, be it in terms of time taken to complete the instrument, the level of threat or sensitivity of the questions, or the possible invasion of privacy' (p.317). Following the ethical principles of data collection, I included in the cover sheet all the information that the participants needed to know about the study and the process of data

collection. I provided them with information about the aim of the questionnaire and they were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any time (BERA, 2004). In addition, participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and their identity anonymous. It is also worth mentioning that the participants were informed of their right to have access to the findings of the questionnaire, and would be able to discuss them with the researcher (Dörnyei, 2003). In the second phase of data collection, I contacted the participants who had shown interest in participating in the interviews and observations in order to arrange meetings. In the first meeting, I gave each participant two hard copies of the consent forms in which they were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and that all the data obtained in interviews and observation would be used for the research study which may include publications. The participants signed the forms, retained one copy and returned the other copy to me (see Appendix 14).

Data storage is another essential ethical issue in a research study (Dörnyei, 2003). In my study, I used questionnaire hardcopies, audio and video recordings, and field notes. In order to protect data and ensure the participants' confidentiality, I saved the questionnaire hardcopies in a secure place. In addition, I saved all the recordings in my personal computer, and in an external hard drive.

For anonymity and confidentiality issues, I gave each copy of the questionnaire a number and I used pseudonyms in the data generated from the interviews and observations (Dörnyei, 2003). In addition, I sent the participants the semi-structured interview transcripts in order to confirm that the transcripts represented their actual dialogue.

#### **4.10 Limitations of study**

This research study, as any educational research, has limitations and does not claim perfection. While a study is being undertaken, limitations may emerge due to flaws in research design, or due to unanticipated problems, some of which relate to timing of data collection and sample size. In this section I will point out concerns that I believe have exerted unfavourable influences on the current research.

## ***Research design***

While adopting a methodological mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, I was aware that I could have employed other methodological stances through which I might have gained a better understanding about the phenomenon under study. However, I believe that the questionnaire as an initial instrument of data collection was an appropriate choice in the light of the social and cultural context where the study was being conducted. Libyan EFL secondary school teachers are not familiar with research culture, especially the ethnographic tools of data collection, such as interviews and observation. Therefore, the administration of the questionnaire in the first phase of data collection helped me to gain access to the participants and explain the nature of interviews and observations and the rationale behind conducting them.

While I was analysing the open ended-questions in the questionnaire, the findings showed that speaking is assessed by pencil and paper tests in large scale exams. In addition, the findings from the semi-structured interviews showed that the participants related their use of written tests in the assessment of speaking to the top-down managerial approaches. Based on such findings, I believe that I could have conducted interviews with inspectors and decision makers in the educational administrative systems in order to capture a fuller picture of the contextual factors that might have influenced teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. However, I did not do that for two main reasons. Firstly, investigating the conceptualisation of speaking assessment from the inspectors' and decision makers' perspectives would take extra time. This in turn, would affect the study time scale. Another important reason is that it would have been difficult to arrange contacts with the decision makers at the time of data collection because of the uprising the country was witnessing at that time, as I mentioned in the context chapter.

Due to the reliance on written tests in the assessment of speaking, most of the participants who were teaching year one and year two did not use oral language tests either for formative or summative assessment. This narrowed the opportunity of observing teachers who teach in those classes. Therefore, I could only observe three participants who were teaching year three, one of whom allowed me to observe only one session.

Despite the small number of participants that took part in the semi-structured interviews and observation, the aim of my study was not to make generalisable findings, but rather to gain a nuanced understanding of the participants' knowledge and practices of speaking assessment and how such knowledge is constructed in the light of the context where they work. Therefore, transferring the findings beyond this group of Libyan EFL novice participants needs to be considered with care.

### ***Timing of data collection***

The time scale for the data collection was influenced by the 2011 Libyan uprising. The first phase was supposed to take place in May-June 2011, while the second phase was planned to be conducted in December 2011 and January 2012. However, I was not able to do the data collection within the planned time scale, because in February 2011 the Libyan people rose up against the Gaddafi regime. The uprising took place between February and October 2011, during which the country was bombed by the Gaddafi militias. In October 2011, the Transitional Council announced the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime. Due to these unanticipated circumstances, the academic year 2011-2012 was an exceptional one in that it started in January 2012 instead of October 2011. All these events led to my late entry into the field of study. Therefore, I conducted the first phase in December 2011 and January 2012, and the second phase in May and June, 2012.

During the process of administering the questionnaires, I faced difficulties in travelling to other towns near Tripoli because of the unsettled state and the lack of security in most parts of the country. I sometimes visited schools and could not meet teachers because the schools were located in unsecured areas. Despite these challenges, I was able to carry out the two phases of data collection and to capture a clear picture of the phenomenon under study.

### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a detailed account of the methodology employed for this study, beginning with a presentation of the philosophical stance that informs my research design. I then provided the methodological stance and the methods used. Following an outline of the research procedure and the processes of data analysis (quantitative and qualitative data), I

ended with the possible limitations of the study. The next chapter will present the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data in two separate parts.

# Chapter Five: Data analysis (phase 1 & 2)

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## 5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a description and analysis of the data obtained sequentially in two phases. Within the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was administered to seventy-six EFL novice teachers in the Libyan secondary school context. Within the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation and stimulated recall interviews were conducted. In addition, it presents the findings obtained by open-ended questions that were administered to the participants in the questionnaire. While the questionnaire helped to gain a general understanding about the context, the second phase of data collection assisted both to further investigate some findings obtained through the questionnaire and to explore in-depth some aspects and issues related to EFL novice teachers' current knowledge and practices of speaking assessment and the context in which the participants conduct speaking assessment. The qualitative data are presented in two cycles. 1<sup>st</sup> cycle presents a description and analysis of categories obtained mainly from deductive coding (Section 5.2). 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle presents the more conceptual themes obtained mainly from inductive coding (see Section 6.1 in the following chapter).

## 5.1 Phase one: Questionnaire data analysis

A descriptive statistical analysis was applied to the data collected from the questionnaire. Raw data was entered manually into Excel in order to obtain frequency and percentage. The analysis of the questionnaire items is briefly presented in three main sections: background information about the participants; teachers' general perception of language assessment principles and how this perception is reflected in their practice of speaking assessment; EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment, including constructs, tasks and techniques, and criteria. For more details see Appendix 15.

### 5.1.1 Analysis of background information

#### *Highest qualifications*



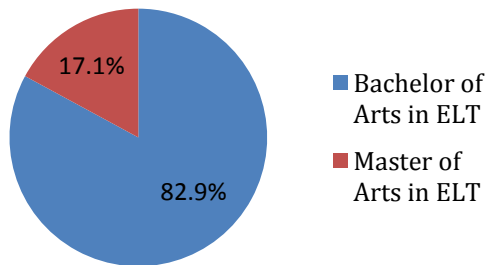


Figure 5.1: Teachers' qualifications (n=76)

Figure 5.1 shows that the vast majority of the respondents have the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in ELT (English language teaching), whereas only 13 (17%) of the teachers have Master of Arts (MA) degree in ELT. This may indicate that BA is an essential degree for a secondary school teacher to have in order to be eligible to teach in a secondary school, while an MA is optional.

### ***Teaching experience***

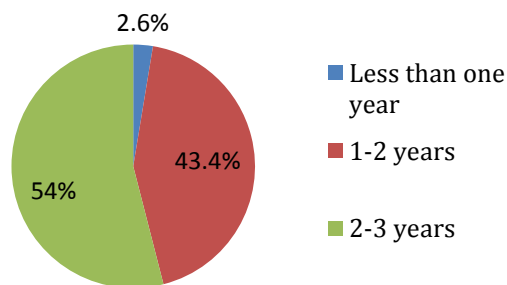
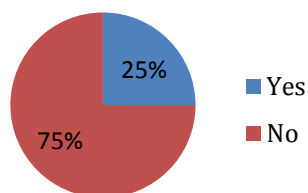


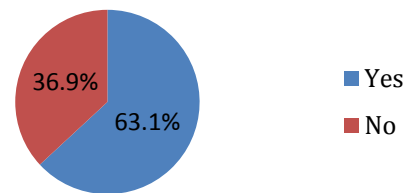
Figure 5.2: Teaching experience (n=76)

Since the sampling procedure used for the questionnaire is purposive, the questionnaire was administered to EFL teachers who have 3 years or less of teaching experience. Figure 5.2 shows that 41 (54%) of the respondents have 2-3 years of teaching experience and 33 (43%) have teaching experience ranging between one and two years. Only 2 participants have less than one year of teaching English; this small number is likely to be a consequence of the political change that the country witnessed in 2011.

## ***Access to in-service training programmes***



*Figure 5.3: Access to training programmes about language assessment*



*Figure 5.4: Access to training programmes about speaking assessment*

English language has been taught as a major in specialised secondary schools for only about eight years. As I mentioned in the context chapter, a new curriculum was designed in order to cover the teaching of each language skill communicatively. This reform in EFL teaching materials essentially requires the training of teachers in how to use communicative language teaching techniques and how to carry out language assessment in the classroom. Surprisingly, the findings indicate that only 19 (25%) of respondents have received training in language assessment. With regard to speaking assessment, 12 out of 19 teachers received training in this area (see Figure 5.4). This may initially indicate that teachers' knowledge about language assessment in general and oral language assessment in particular is affected by the lack of teacher training.

### **5.1.2 EFL teachers' perception of language assessment**

#### **5.1.2.1 General perception of language assessment**

This section analyses how EFL novice teachers perceive language assessment in terms of a number of principles that they may take into account (see section two in the questionnaire). Table 5.1 below shows the frequency and percentages of the responses with reference to

each item, a procedure that was followed for analysing close-ended items in the questionnaire.

*A = strongly agree B = agree C = disagree D = strongly disagree n = 76*

| <b>Item</b> | <i>Teachers should...</i>   | <b>A</b>                  | <b>B</b>                  | <b>C</b>    | <b>D</b>  |
|-------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 9           | ...specify the purpose of assessments when they assess students' language performance.                        | <b>51.3%</b><br><b>39</b> | 47.4%<br>36               | 0%<br>0     | 1.3%<br>1 |
| 10          | ...clearly identify the language skills to be assessed when they design language assessment.                  | <b>50%</b><br><b>38</b>   | 48.7%<br>37               | 1.3%<br>1   | 0%<br>0   |
| 11          | ...choose assessment tasks which help to get information about students' ability to use language effectively. | <b>59.2%</b><br><b>45</b> | 36.9%<br>28               | 3.9%<br>3   | 0%<br>0   |
| 12          | ...use many different language assessment tasks.  | <b>44.7%</b><br><b>34</b> | 39.5%<br>30               | 10.5%<br>8  | 5.3%<br>4 |
| 13          | ...clearly explain to the students how to do language assessment tasks.                                       | <b>40.8%</b><br><b>31</b> | <b>40.8%</b><br><b>31</b> | 15.8%<br>12 | 2.6%<br>2 |
| 14          | ...consider assessment criteria used when they design language assessment.                                    | 36.8%<br>28               | <b>57.9%</b><br><b>44</b> | 5.3%<br>4   | 0%<br>0   |
| 15          | ...connect the selection of assessment criteria with the aim of language assessment.                          | 32.9%<br>25               | <b>60.5%</b><br><b>46</b> | 5.3%<br>4   | 1.3%<br>1 |
| 16          | ...use formative language assessment.   | 40.8%<br>31               | <b>56.6%</b><br><b>43</b> | 1.3%<br>1   | 1.3%<br>1 |

|    |   |                           |                           |           |           |
|----|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 17 | ...make language assessment part of language teaching and learning. | <b>51.3%</b><br><b>39</b> | 46.1%<br>35               | 0%<br>0   | 2.6%<br>2 |
| 18 | ...use summative language assessment.                               | 35.5%<br>27               | <b>48.7%</b><br><b>37</b> | 7.9%<br>6 | 7.9%<br>6 |

Table 5.1: EFL teachers' perception of language assessment

As can be seen in the table above, teachers were asked about the extent of their agreement to language assessment principles related to the clarity of assessment procedures, the use of tasks in language assessment, the establishment of criteria in language assessment, and the use of formative and summative language assessment. In general, the respondents said they believe that these language assessment principles should be taken into account when assessing students' language performance. Reflecting on the high rate of agreement with most of the items in the table above, it must be recognised that these teachers may have wanted to show me what they thought I want to see. Such findings seem to say the least given teachers' rate of agreement with these elements. Further investigation is carried out in the second phase of data collection in which interviews, observation and recall interviews were conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding about teachers' general understandings of language assessment principles and how they perceive them.

### 5.1.2.2 Practice of speaking assessment

As mentioned in the questionnaire design, I made a connection between section two (EFL teachers' general perceptions of language assessment) and section four (frequency of practising speaking assessment processes). The aim was to investigate how teachers' general perception of language assessment is reflected in the frequency of practising certain speaking principles. As such, my interpretation of the findings obtained from analysing this section is based on examining the relationship between specific items in these two sections.

*Key: A=Always (100%) U=Usually (80%) S=Sometimes (50%) R=Rarely (20%) N=Never (0%)  
n=76*

| item | Statements  | A                         | U                         | S                         | R           | N           |
|------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 48   | I firstly identify the purpose of assessment when I assess students' oral language performance                                  | 28.9%<br>22               | <b>38.2%</b><br><b>29</b> | 26.3%<br>20               | 5.3%<br>4   | 1.3%<br>1   |
| 49   | I identify the skills to be assessed when I design language speaking  | <b>34.2%</b><br><b>26</b> | 25%<br>19                 | <b>34.2%</b><br><b>26</b> | 6.6%<br>5   | 0%<br>0     |
| 50   | I select assessment tasks that help to get information about the students' ability to use oral language performance effectively | <b>40.8%</b><br><b>31</b> | 35.6%<br>27               | 19.7%<br>15               | 3.9%<br>3   | 0%<br>0     |
| 51   | I use different speaking assessment tasks in a speaking test  | 19.7%<br>15               | <b>39.5%</b><br><b>30</b> | 19.7%<br>15               | 17.2%<br>13 | 3.9%<br>3   |
| 52   | I process speaking assessment tasks within a given limited time   | <b>36.8%</b><br><b>28</b> | 27.7%<br>21               | 22.4%<br>17               | 10.5%<br>8  | 2.6%<br>2   |
| 53   | I clearly explain to the students how to do speaking assessment tasks   | <b>28.9%</b><br><b>22</b> | 27.6%<br>21               | 15.8%<br>12               | 15.8%<br>12 | 11.9%<br>9  |
| 54   | I develop my own assessment criteria when I design speaking assessment  | <b>34.2%</b><br><b>26</b> | 27.6%<br>21               | 30.4%<br>23               | 3.9%<br>3   | 3.9%<br>3   |
| 55   | I use speaking assessment criteria provided by outside resources  | 14.5%<br>11               | 26.3%<br>20               | <b>35.5%</b><br><b>27</b> | 6.6%<br>5   | 17.1%<br>13 |
| 56   | I connect the selection of assessment criteria to the aim of speaking assessment  | 27.6%<br>21               | <b>51.3%</b><br><b>39</b> | 14.5%<br>11               | 5.3%<br>4   | 1.3%<br>1   |
| 57   | I make speaking assessment a part of language teaching and learning process.  | 38.1%<br>29               | <b>39.5%</b><br><b>30</b> | 13.2%<br>10               | 6.6%<br>5   | 2.6%<br>2   |

Table 5.2.A: EFL teachers' practice of speaking assessment

The findings reported in Table 5.2.A indicate that these teachers reported that their assessment practices did relate to their stated principles as indicated in Table 5.1 in many elements. (For more details, see appendix 15).

The responses given by these teachers may indicate that their understandings of language assessment principles are reflected in their speaking assessment practices. The rate of frequency in assessment practices as reported in teachers' answers may give an indication that these teachers are familiar with oral language assessment in that they based their speaking assessment on oral language assessment. However, the very closeness of the relationship between what they say they know and what they say they do seems unexpected in the field of education practice and may rather reflect a concern on the part of these teachers to give the answers that I, as a researcher, expected. Given the climate in the education system and wider political context, it is possible that these teachers saw my questioning as a test of their knowledge and practice rather than a search for information.

Therefore, while these findings provided preliminary understanding of what teachers say they do in speaking assessment, further investigations was conducted through interview and observation in order to explore in more depth their practices in the classroom settings.

### 5.1.3 Knowledge of speaking assessment

This section reports EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment in terms of three main aspects: constructs, techniques and tasks, and criteria. The items presented below stem from the literature review as explained above.

#### 5.1.3.1 Knowledge of speaking assessment constructs

*Key: 1=not good    2= moderate    3=good    4=excellent*

*n=76*

| <b>Items</b> | <i>When I design speaking assessment, my knowledge of considering .....is...</i> | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
|--------------|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|              |  |          |          |          |          |

|    |  |             |             |                           |             |
|----|--|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| 19 | ...aspects of intonation, stress, and pronunciation  | 2.6%<br>2   | 28.9%<br>22 | <b>39.6%</b><br><b>30</b> | 28.9%<br>22 |
| 20 | ...accuracy  | 13.2%<br>10 | 21.1%<br>16 | <b>36.8%</b><br><b>28</b> | 28.9%<br>22 |
| 21 | ...fluency   | 2.6%<br>2   | 22.4%<br>17 | <b>50%</b><br><b>38</b>   | 25%<br>19   |
| 22 | ...students' interactive skills                      | 1.3%<br>1   | 23.7%<br>18 | <b>47.4%</b><br><b>36</b> | 27.6%<br>21 |
| 23 | Students' ability to take turns in a pair/group work | 3.9%<br>3   | 21.1%<br>16 | <b>42.1%</b><br><b>32</b> | 32.9%<br>25 |

Table 5.3: EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment constructs

The overall findings in Table 5.3 show that respondents rate their knowledge of speaking assessment constructs as 'good', with some varying degrees in relation to some items. On the surface, the tendency of reporting their knowledge as 'good' may be interpreted that they have a considerable awareness of these speaking constructs while preparing speaking tests or doing assessment. However, it could be also interpreted that the respondents may have thought that this section tests their knowledge rather than elicits their understandings of speaking constructs. My reflection on this is that if these questionnaire items had been introduced in a different way, the participants may have responded differently. Yet, these findings provided me with a preliminary understanding through which I could further explore teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment in the second phase of inquiry.

### 5.1.3.2 Knowledge of speaking assessment techniques and tasks

| Items | <i>I rate my knowledge of.....as...</i>   | 1                         | 2           | 3                         | 4           |
|-------|---|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| 24    | ...using <b>a student self-assessment technique</b> , when students are being orally assessed | <b>31.6%</b><br><b>24</b> | 23.6%<br>18 | <b>31.6%</b><br><b>24</b> | 13.2%<br>10 |

|           |   |             |             |                           |                           |
|-----------|---|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>25</b> | ...using <i>a peer assessment technique</i> , when students are being orally assessed                           | 25%<br>19   | 23.7%<br>18 | <b>32.9%</b><br><b>25</b> | 18.4%<br>14               |
| <b>26</b> | ...using <i>a portfolio assessment technique</i> , when students are being orally assessed                      | 26.3%<br>20 | 25%<br>19   | <b>32.9%</b><br><b>25</b> | 15.8%<br>12               |
| <b>27</b> | ...using summative assessment in assessing speaking ability   | 10.5%<br>8  | 35.5%<br>27 | <b>38.2%</b><br><b>29</b> | 15.8%<br>12               |
| <b>28</b> | ...using different speaking assessment tasks  | 6.6%<br>5   | 13.2%<br>10 | <b>46%</b><br><b>35</b>   | 34.2%<br>26               |
| <b>29</b> | ...time factor when choosing speaking tasks   | 2.6%<br>2   | 11.8%<br>9  | 38.2%<br>29               | <b>47.4%</b><br><b>36</b> |
| <b>30</b> | ...setting speaking assessment tasks in an appropriate level of difficulty                                      | 6.6%<br>5   | 13.2%<br>10 | <b>44.7%</b> <b>34</b>    | 35.5%<br>27               |
| <b>31</b> | ...using oral presentation tasks in speaking assessment   | 5.3%<br>4   | 19.7%<br>15 | <b>42.1%</b><br><b>32</b> | 32.9%<br>25               |
| <b>32</b> | ...using learner-learner joint discussion and decision making tasks   | 9.2%<br>7   | 28.9%<br>22 | <b>39.5%</b><br><b>30</b> | 22.4%<br>17               |
| <b>33</b> | ...using role-play tasks in speaking assessment   | 2.6%<br>2   | 25%<br>19   | <b>43.5%</b><br><b>33</b> | 28.9%<br>22               |
| <b>34</b> | ...using interview tasks in speaking assessment   | 6.6%<br>5   | 21%<br>16   | <b>48.7%</b><br><b>37</b> | 23.7%<br>18               |
| <b>35</b> | ...using visual stimuli tasks such as pictures to provide a topic of conversation to students in speaking tests | 5.3%<br>4   | 19.7%<br>15 | 31.6%<br>24               | <b>43.4%</b><br><b>33</b> |



|           |  |             |           |                           |             |
|-----------|--|-------------|-----------|---------------------------|-------------|
| <b>36</b> | ...using re-telling story or text from aural stimuli as a speaking task in speaking assessment             | 14.5%<br>11 | 21%<br>16 | <b>34.2%</b><br><b>26</b> | 30.3%<br>23 |
| <b>37</b> | ...using re-telling story from written stimulus as a speaking test when students are being orally assessed | 4%<br>3     | 21%<br>16 | <b>55.3%</b><br><b>42</b> | 19.7%<br>15 |

Table 5.4: Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment techniques and tasks

Table 5.4 shows that the respondents generally considered their knowledge of speaking techniques and tasks as 'good'. Nonetheless, the findings reveal a noticeable variation in their knowledge with reference to some items. Within this section, it has been noted that teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment tasks varies in different degrees. Such variability may indicate that these teachers have different views and understandings of speaking tasks. Accordingly, more investigation needs to be carried out in order to further explore their knowledge of speaking tasks (see 5.2.2.4).

**5.1.3.3 Knowledge of assessment categories and assessment criteria used in speaking tests**

In order to gain an understanding about teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment categories, the informants were asked (in a background information section) to report on the frequency of carrying out speaking assessment during a term, and to provide information about the sources of the language assessment criteria they used.

***The frequency of speaking assessment in a term***

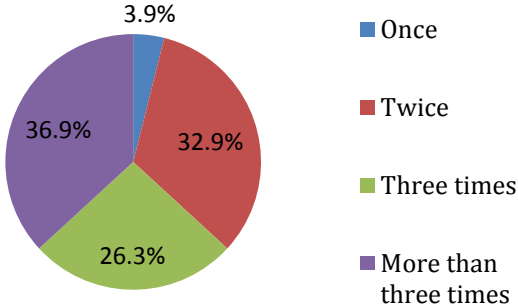


Figure 5.5: Times of carrying out speaking assessment during a term (n=76)

**Sources of language assessment criteria**

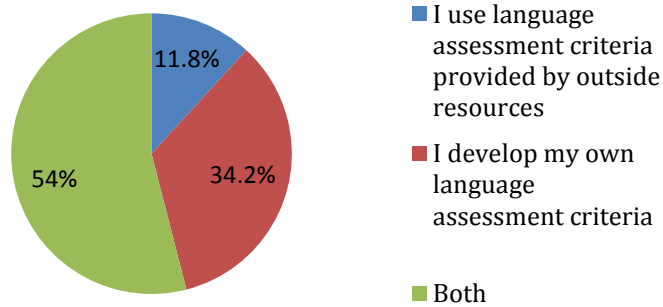


Figure 5.6: Sources of language assessment criteria (n=76)

Table 5.5 presents the extent of EFL teachers’ reported knowledge of speaking assessment categories and assessment criteria.

| Items     | <i>I rate my knowledge of.....as...</i>   | 1    | 2     | 3            | 4     |
|-----------|---|------|-------|--------------|-------|
| <b>38</b> | ...developing assessment criteria used in a speaking test                       | 6.6% | 28.9% | <b>48.7%</b> | 15.8% |
|           |   | 5    | 22    | <b>37</b>    | 12    |
| <b>39</b> | ...categories used in speaking assessment                                       | 6.6% | 17.1% | <b>57.9%</b> | 18.4% |
|           |   | 5    | 13    | <b>44</b>    | 14    |
| <b>40</b> | ...considering <b>accuracy</b> as a category of speaking assessment             | 4%   | 28.9% | <b>44.7%</b> | 22.4% |
|           |   | 3    | 22    | <b>34</b>    | 17    |
| <b>41</b> | ...considering <b>fluency</b> as a category of speaking assessment              | 5.3% | 21%   | <b>50%</b>   | 23.7% |
|           |   | 4    | 16    | <b>38</b>    | 18    |
| <b>42</b> | ...considering <b>communicative skills</b> as a category of speaking assessment | 5.3% | 22.4% | <b>44.7%</b> | 27.6% |
|           |   | 4    | 17    | <b>34</b>    | 21    |

|           |   |             |             |                           |             |
|-----------|---|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| <b>43</b> | ...considering <i>range of vocabulary use</i> as a category of speaking assessment            | 2.6%<br>2   | 15.8%<br>12 | <b>55.3%</b><br><b>42</b> | 26.3%<br>20 |
| <b>44</b> | ...considering <i>pronunciation</i> as a category of speaking assessment                      | 2.6%<br>2   | 21%<br>16   | <b>39.5%</b><br><b>30</b> | 36.9%<br>28 |
| <b>45</b> | ...considering the use of <i>appropriate expressions</i> as a category of speaking assessment | 13.2%<br>10 | 22.4%<br>17 | <b>38.2%</b><br><b>29</b> | 26.2%<br>20 |
| <b>46</b> | ...using <i>an analytic score</i> for each category in a speaking test                        | 18.5%<br>14 | 26.2%<br>20 | <b>34.3%</b><br><b>26</b> | 21%<br>16   |
| <b>47</b> | ...using <i>a holistic score</i> in a speaking test   | 10.5%<br>8  | 21%<br>16   | <b>43.5%</b><br><b>33</b> | 25%<br>19   |

Table 5.5: teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment categories and assessment criteria

Section 5.1.3 shows the variability in teachers' knowledge of speaking constructs, tasks, and criteria. As can be seen in the tables above that while most respondents reported that their knowledge is 'good', there are a few elements where the respondents reported that their knowledge is 'not good' such as the use of student-self assessment, peer assessment and the use of analytic scores. These elements were further investigated on the second phase of data collection.

To sum up, The findings of the self-report questionnaire provide a preliminary understanding about the participants' general perception of language assessment, their knowledge of speaking assessment, and their speaking assessment practices. The findings reveal that there are considerable variations in the participants' responses to the items related to teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment and those related to speaking assessment practices. Interestingly, the participants' reports about their knowledge of speaking assessment, especially in relation to speaking tasks and speaking criteria, indicate that, despite variations in responses, the participants seem to base their assessment of students' speaking performance on *oral assessment*. This is also reflected in their

responses to the questionnaire items related to speaking assessment practices, in which the participants reported relatively high frequencies of the use of speaking assessment tasks and assessment criteria. As mentioned above, this may imply that the participants may have perceived the questionnaire to be a test of their knowledge rather than an investigation into understandings of their knowledge. Another indication might be that the participants provided me with answers that they thought I wanted. Admittedly, I am aware that my prejudices and personal understandings might have influenced the way I designed the elements of the questionnaire. Thus, this may have influenced the way the participants responded to some items of the questionnaire (for more details see reflexivity section in the previous chapter).

Findings from the questionnaire contributed to the design of the semi-structured interviews in that they helped to form a number of exploratory questions concerning the teachers' general perception of language assessment and their knowledge of speaking assessment in the light of the social and cultural context. Given that the respondents tended to agree with most items and reported that their knowledge is considerably good in most items of the questionnaire, I decided that more open questions in the interview guide would give a better indication of their knowledge.

The analogy of 'the tip of the iceberg' can be used to describe the findings of the questionnaire, in that while the findings provided a general understanding of the phenomenon under study, they merely hinted at the issues that needed to be further investigated in the second phase. The questionnaire helped me to gain a preliminary understanding of the teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in a context that was witnessing an unanticipated uprising and bloody war between the people and the government at the time of data collection.

## **5.2 Phase two: Semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, recall interviews and open ended questions data analysis (1<sup>st</sup> cycle)**

The deductive analysis of the qualitative data presents the reported knowledge and practice of these teachers. The findings are presented in four sections according to the research questions. Section one displays the findings with regard to EFL Libyan novice teachers'

general perception of language assessment, while Section two presents teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment. In Section three I present the findings with regard to teachers' practices of speaking assessment in the classroom, while Section four presents the findings regarding the contextual issues and factors which, in the view of the participants, impact on their knowledge and practices of speaking assessment in the classroom. I use abbreviations for presenting extracts from the transcripts; **SSI** for semi-structured interviews, **SRI** for stimulated recall interviews, and **Q** for questionnaire response (open ended questions). While presenting the qualitative data, I occasionally refer to the quantitative data in order to make interpretations of the participants' conceptualisation of assessment.

### **5.2.1 General perception of language assessment**

Research question 1 considers teachers' perception of language assessment in general. Whereas the findings of the questionnaire provide insights into teachers' general perception of language assessment *principles* (see 5.1.2). To gain a deeper understanding, the qualitative data were analysed under the three main themes explored in the semi-structured interview. These themes will be presented below: teachers' perception of the assessment of language performance, their perception of formative language assessment and their perception of summative language assessment.

#### **5.2.1.1 The assessment of language performance**

The assessment of students' language performance is one of the categories through which the interviewed teachers expressed their perceived conceptions in terms of their understandings of what is important to be assessed. In response to the question 'What is important to you when you assess students' English language performance?', the participants mainly mentioned linguistic skills and communicative skills. Within the assessment of linguistic skills, three sub-categories presented: the assessment of grammar, the assessment of vocabulary, and the assessment of pronunciation. The assessment of communicative skills was discussed only in terms of students' interaction (see Figure 5.7).

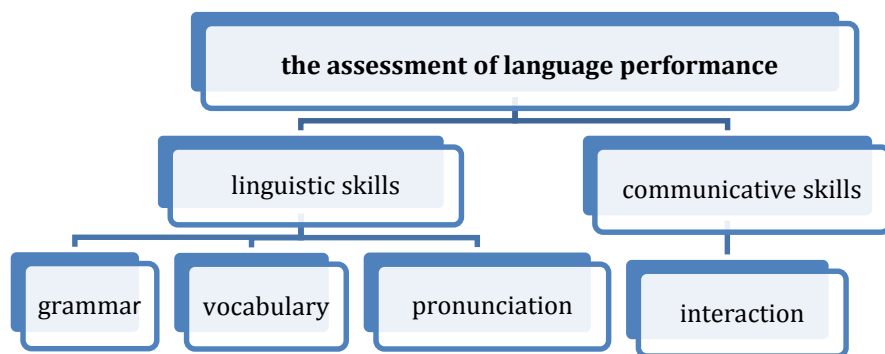


Figure 5.7: The assessment of language performance

### 5.2.1.1.1 The assessment of linguistic skills

The assessment of linguistic skills was found to be one of the most important categories. The findings indicate that participants held different views and perspectives with regard to what linguistic aspects need to be taken into account. Three out of ten participants spoke of the skills as equally important: each linguistic skill should be given considerable attention as that would assist the teacher to pinpoint the areas of weaknesses in the students' language performance. Suhila, who is teaching writing and speaking, commented:

*...I can't say one linguistic skill is more important than the other one(...).I see pronunciation is important; comprehension is important; grammar is important. So when I assess a student's language performance, I need to focus on all linguistic skills, but not to focus on one skill and neglect the other (SSI).*

Similarly, Mona, who is teaching speaking and grammar pointed out:

*...each skill has its own mechanism of assessment (...) pronunciation is very important while students are orally assessed. Grammar is also another important component that should be assessed in terms of students' ability to use the grammatical rules meaningfully and properly. The assessment of punctuation, spelling and cohesion are important to take into account when the writing skill is evaluated (SSI).*

The above excerpts show that Suhila and Mona claimed to consider the assessment of linguistic skills as a cornerstone on which a teacher can base his/her assessment of students' language performance. This was also expressed in the other participants' comments. However, although each participant seems to have a different perspective about what needs to be assessed in students' language performance, these perspectives were mainly centred

round the mechanical aspects of the language, namely, **grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation**.

### ***The assessment of grammar***

The findings indicate that grammar is considered one of the main linguistic skills in the assessment of students' language performance, and students' ability to construct correct grammatical sentences is seen as a key indicator of their ability. All of the participants talked about grammar. For instance, Alia, a grammar and speaking teacher, said:

*Through the assessment of grammar, I can examine the students' ability to write a sentence in a correct structure, and their ability to produce grammatical and meaningful utterances when they speak English language (SSI).*

The rationale behind the need to assess grammar was related to the students' lack of ability to produce correct grammatical utterances, especially those who have been studying in year three in a secondary school: the year of graduation from the secondary school level. Iman, who teaches speaking and writing, criticised students' use of tenses:

*They (...) find it difficult to differentiate between tenses, although they are on the third year (...) Students on the third year still confused between present simple and past simple. When the student talks in the class, I focus on his use of tenses (SSI).*

These teachers' different understandings of the mechanism of assessing grammar appeared to be reflected in the different methods and techniques they adopt for assessment. Some participants continue to use the traditional methods of assessing grammar while others attempt to adopt communicative assessment techniques. Exemplifying a traditional perspective, Suhila finds memorisation of grammatical rules an appropriate way of assessing students' ability in learning grammar. She commented:

*...in the exam, I write this grammatical rule with some gaps and ask the students to fill in these gaps. For example, when I put a question about "if condition", I asked the students: if +past simple tense, blablabla [sic] here the student needs to complete the other part of the grammatical rule'. So I see memorising is an essential process in learning a foreign language (SSI).*

From the above it would appear that Alia, Iman and Suhila put more emphasis on metalinguistic knowledge, perceiving the assessment of grammar as a way to examine students' ability to learn grammatical rules. At the other end of the continuum perspectives emerged which contradicted those supporting the traditional mode of assessment, however, only two participants talked about the importance of assessing students' ability to produce meaningful and appropriate language. Hana, who teaches speaking and Lab, said:

*We just need to improve the way of teaching and assessing grammar in our schools because the main focus is to make students learn grammatical rules. What is the benefit of making students learning grammar and base our assessment on this perspective if they can't use them meaningfully when they speak English language (SSI).*

Similarly, Mona pointed out that grammar needs to be assessed through communicative assessment tasks:

*I believe that the assessment of grammar needs to be made in terms of using communicative tasks that make students use the grammatical rules in a meaningful and proper way.... I found out the students like (...) communicative tasks as they help them better understand the rule (SSI).*

The above excerpts provide us with a further reading of the participants' different understandings and perspectives regarding what they claimed to consider important in language assessment. That was apparent in the ways these teachers talked about the assessment of grammar. While Iman and Suhila highlighted the importance of the assessment of metalinguistic knowledge, Hana and Mona said that grammar needs to be assessed within a communicative perspective.

### ***The assessment of vocabulary***

The assessment of vocabulary seems to be perceived as one of the essential component in the assessment of students' language performance. Most of the participating teachers state that through the assessment of vocabulary they can check students' knowledge of the lexical sets and their meanings. In this regard, Lamya (a reading and speaking teacher) said:

*I assess students' ability to learn as much vocabulary as they can. For me, the ability to use English language should be related to the learning of much vocabulary (SSI).*



Fareeda, a speaking and writing teacher, pointed out that, through the assessment of vocabulary, she can examine students' knowledge of formal and informal language, especially in writing:

*...they should have enough knowledge about vocabulary in order to be able to write compositions, reports and academic essays. I think I need to take into account how students use vocabulary when I correct their pieces of writing (SSI).*

Amira stated that language assessment needs to be mainly based on vocabulary and that the learning of vocabulary assists students to practise the language appropriately:

*I think vocabulary is more important to be considered in the assessment process than grammar. This is because some students have good knowledge about grammatical structure; however, they can't construct sentences since they don't learn much vocabulary (SSI).*

### ***The assessment of pronunciation***

Within the assessment of pronunciation, two out of ten participants explained that they can evaluate categories such as intonation and stress. Alia talked in detail about the elements she examines when assessing pronunciation, putting more emphasis on intonation and stress:

*I need to assess the students' ability to distinguish between a statement, a question and an exclamatory sentence while doing reading (...). The stress is very important as well in that it shows the students' ability to distinguish between a verb and a noun (...). For example, I can see whether the student knows how to pronounce the word PREsent as a noun and presENT [sic] as a verb and how the stress changes the meaning of the word (SSI).*

Asmaa refers to pronunciation as 'accent'. She commented:

*In the assessment of speaking and reading I need to focus on students' accents and to see if they can pronounce individual sounds correctly (SSI).*

### **5.2.1.1.2 The assessment of communicative language skills**

In their response to the question 'what is important to you when you assess students' English language performance?', only three participants talked about the importance of addressing students' communicative language skills. Mona and Hana, as mentioned earlier, alluded to

the need to assess communication and students' ability to use language appropriately, especially in the assessment of grammar. However, only Rawan, who teaches writing and speaking, explicitly pointed out:

*I think the most important thing in assessing the students' language performance is the communication and how the students interact with the teacher (...).the teacher needs to find out whether the student has the ability to interact and make discussions with the teacher, using the language properly (SSI).*

It could be inferred from the findings above that while most of the participants seem to be more concerned about the assessment of students' knowledge about language, and their ability to learn vocabulary and grammar, only a few participants considered the assessment of communicative skills as an important aspect in English language assessment. This may indicate that most of these teachers prioritise the assessment of linguistic skills over communicative language skills in the assessment of students' language performance.

#### **5.2.1.2 Teachers' perception of formative language assessment**

I investigated teachers' perception and understanding of formative assessment through the questionnaire (see Table 5.1, item 16) and semi-structured interviews. However, as described in the Methodology chapter, I drew on all the qualitative data to answer the research questions. The findings from the interviews indicate that the participants seem to hold views similar to those held by EFL teachers in many different contexts: formative assessment is perceived as important and yet it is associated with the essence of summative assessment (Muñoz et al., 2003; Wach, 2012). These novice teachers highlighted the benefits of formative assessment as mentioned above but their understanding is occasionally confused with summative assessment. Fareeda, Lamya and Mona consider formative assessment important in that it provide them with information about students' language learning, one of the main functions of formative assessment, but their perception of this type of assessment goes further in that they also perceive it as a tool through which students could have good grades. As Lamya said:

*Formative assessment gives teachers the chance to know more about the students' learning process (...). It is also considered a chance for the students gain more marks as they may not do well in the summative assessment (SSI).*

Much in the same vein, Mona explained:

*I feel everyday assessment can show the students' development and progress in language learning. Therefore, I take that into account when I give a score for the midterm or the final exams (SSI).*

As can be inferred from Lamy and Mona's responses, formative assessment seems to be seen from a summative assessment perspective, with both being seen as two sides of the same coin. The term 'assessment' appears to be associated with grading. This perspective was also implicitly expressed in Fareeda's words when she described formative assessment as 'reliable assessment':

*...By making everyday assessment, the teacher can better notice how students' language performance developed, and what areas need to be developed (SSI).*

She also added:

*The method I follow in assessment is that I don't focus so much on the formal exams; however, I very much depend on daily assessment. I make students do much work in the class by using many different activities (SSI).*

Interestingly, the findings show that formative assessment is perceived as something not integrated in the teaching process, but rather as encroaching on time allocated for teaching. Iman, Suhila, and Asmaa are among other participants who admitted their neglect of formative assessment in the classroom. Suhila explicitly stated:

*I am more concerned about summative assessment, as the time does not help me to make any other sorts of assessment*

Although Iman held positive attitudes towards formative assessment by saying that '*through formative assessment, students could be aware of their ability to use the language and know more about their language skills that need to be improved*', she seems to support Suhila's perspective. Her perception seems to be influenced by her context:

*I rarely use such a type of assessment for two main reasons. The first reason is the time factor. I see time as a constraint that hinders me to use formative assessment. The second reason is the curriculum. The curriculum is too long, although it is very good and useful for the students. I have to teach all the units in the book...So I am more concerned about tests and exams (SSI).*

As can be seen, Iman appears to believe that there are two main contextual factors, time pressure and length of the curriculum, that inhibit her from conducting formative assessment. Undeniably, these can be considered influential constraints that may impact on the mechanism of assessment *per se*. However, it seems that Suhila and Iman perceived formative assessment as a separate entity from teaching and learning (Wach, 2012). This perception appears to stem from the context in which traditional assessments that value the concept of good grades dominate.

From another perspective, Hana raised the issue of students' attitudes towards formative assessment. She commented that formative assessment is even more important than summative assessment but, in her view, it does not sufficiently motivate students to take part in the assessment activities because they are more concerned about the graded tasks. She said:

*...the students aren't very interested in such assessments; they need the marks after all. Their main concern isn't how useful the curriculum is but about what scores they gain at the end of the year. So, I keep encouraging the students by telling them if you finish the tasks or the activity, I'll give some more marks (SSI).*

Undeniably, students who are more accustomed to graded tasks, and, thus, are extrinsically motivated, may not have the enthusiasm to carry out tasks that are not graded. Hana's understanding of the nature of formative assessment appears to result from the context in which she is conducting the assessment. From her perspective, promotion of students' engagement in tasks for formative assessment could be solved by giving a small percentage of overall marks to this type of assessment.

#### **5.2.1.2.1 Teachers' perception of peer assessment**

The data from the questionnaire showed the variability in respondents' rate of knowledge of peer assessment. This provided me with a preliminary understanding through which I could further investigate the teachers' understandings of peer assessment in the semi-structured interview, the findings of which suggest that peer assessment is perceived, by most of the participating teachers, as an inappropriate tool of assessment in a secondary school context. Reflecting on the participants' understandings of formative assessment as seen above, I

could infer that their perception of formative assessment seem to function as a critical filter through which feasibility and appropriateness of peer and student self-assessment techniques are viewed. Asmaa identified two factors as potential challenges for incorporating peer assessment into the classroom, namely age and affective disposition. This opinion is similar to that held by EFL teachers in other contexts (e.g., Peng, 2010). She associated age with affective disposition in that some students would dislike the idea of peer assessment as the assessors are also their competitors. This is an illustrative excerpt:

*...I don't think that would work in our schools, because students are sensitive to each other and they wouldn't accept such a technique in that her work is assessed by her peer, especially if they are competitors. The reason might be that they are teenagers and in this age it could be unacceptable for them to be assessed by their peers (SSI).*

In line with this, Amira pointed out that peer assessment is not feasible in that '*if students were given the opportunity to assess each other, they wouldn't do the assessment task and wouldn't take the assessment seriously, especially if they work in pairs*' (ISS). From another perspective, peer assessment is seen as important and beneficial by only three participants. Hana highlighted its importance in increasing students' autonomy and awareness and developing their critical thinking:

*...it (peer assessment) makes students depend on themselves. I believe in peer correction, they have to correct each other's mistakes, but at the end they can come back to me. I need them to make effort, try and think and to find where the mistakes are (SSI).*

Similarly, Mona and Fareeda believe that peer assessment is essential and has significant pedagogical value in that it provides students with '*self-confidence*' and promotes a sense of '*responsibility*' toward learning English. This belief echoes that of participants in Peng's (2010) study.

#### **5.2.1.2.2 Teachers' perception of student self-assessment**

The findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews show a continuum of teachers' knowledge and understandings of student self-assessment; while some participants explicitly admitted that they lack knowledge of student self-assessment, others demonstrated their knowledge through narrating their experiences of using it.

Iman is one of the participants who admitted her lack of knowledge: *'I have to say I know nothing about student self-assessment'*. Hana associated the term 'echo correction' with student self-assessment:

*...It makes students aware of their mistakes. In reading classes, for example, I usually make the student stop reading when he makes mistakes in pronunciation, for example, but I don't tell him what the mistake is. I give him time to think and to find out what the mistake is. I'm trying to use what we call 'echo correction' (SSI).*

Mona stated that students' engagement in the assessment of their own language performance enhances their ability to detect their mistakes and to develop correction skills:

*....when students assess their own performances, they become aware of their mistakes and this in turn helps them to learn better and perform better utterances (SSI).*

Like peer assessment, student self-assessment was considered by many of these teachers to be inappropriate. Six out of ten participants said that assessment is the teacher's job, and the students are not able to assess their own language performance. Their perception is based on the premise that *'the students wouldn't confess that they made a mistake in order not to lose marks'* (Asmaa, SSI), and *'Even if they were given a chance to assess their performance, they wouldn't show that they didn't do well in some tasks'* (Amira, SSI).

### **5.2.1.3 Teachers' perception of summative assessment**

Findings obtained from the questionnaire indicate that about 84% of the participants agree that teachers should use summative language assessment (item 18). In the semi-structured interview, I was able to explore in more depth how the participants conceptualised summative assessment; some of the teachers interviewed appear to see it as a procedure through which grades are assigned. From some participants' point of view, the assigning of grades serves as a motivational factor in that *'it makes the students study hard in order to pass the exam'* (Suhila, SSI), and *'encourages students to make extra effort to learn the language'* (Lamya, SSI). Suhila added: *Such assessment is very important...because without summative assessment, students would not make effort to study (SSI)*. This was supported by Hana who commented: *Their [students'] concern is the...scores they gain at the end of the year (SSI)*. This

may support the interpretation that these teachers associate assessment with grades as can be seen in teachers' perception of formative assessment above.

Summative assessment is also perceived as a mandatory procedure, especially by the participants who are teaching secondary school year three students, the year of graduation. Iman, Suhila, and Rawan, for example, hold similar perspectives, pointing out that formal testing techniques used for summative assessment are especially important for third year students, as such tests measure students' language skills and knowledge. Rowan explicitly said that the assessment process conducted for third year students is mainly for administrative rather than pedagogical purposes. As such, she said that the main concern for teachers is to prepare students for the end of year examinations as these come from the Ministry of Education:

*The final exam is prepared by experts in the Ministry of Education as this is the year of graduation from the secondary school level. For this reason, I think that all teachers who teach year three focus on formal tests and exams, and don't give much care to the tasks and activities in the text books (SSI).*

From the excerpts above, It can be inferred from teachers' understandings that there seems to be a tendency towards the promotion of summative assessment over formative assessment in the assessment of students' language performance.

On the surface, the findings indicate that these Libyan EFL novice secondary school teachers' understanding of assessment appears to be based on internal factors such as individual beliefs and the extent of their knowledge of assessment. Nonetheless, a careful examination of their understandings suggests that those inner beliefs and thinking about assessment seem to be informed by socio-cultural artefacts such as the importance afforded to external exams; their current understanding of the assessment process in terms of its nature and its function appears to be shaped by the context in which the assessment is carried out.

### **5.2.2 Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment**

While the previous section looked into the teachers' general perception and understandings of *language assessment*, this section sheds light on their knowledge of *speaking assessment* in

a secondary school context. While the questionnaire provided a preliminary understanding about what teachers say they know about speaking assessment in terms of three main aspects, namely constructs, tasks and categories, the data gained by the qualitative methods provided more detailed information in terms of reported knowledge of speaking assessment, and of the reformed curriculum objectives with regard to speaking assessment. Five main categories and five sub-categories are presented below.

### **5.2.2.1 Teachers' knowledge of the importance of speaking assessment**

The findings of the semi-structured interview show that the participants in this study clearly understand the importance of assessing speaking, but vary with regard to what they consider important. Their perspectives address three main areas, namely *linguistic and communicative aspects, social and cultural aspects, and pedagogical aspects*.

#### **5.2.2.1.1 Linguistic and communicative aspects**

The findings from the semi-structured interviews show that seven participants consider speaking assessment essential, as it provides them with a clearer picture about their students' linguistic performance. Lamya, Alia, Suhila, Iman and Amira consider speaking assessment the lens through which students' linguistic skills can be examined, especially those skills related to grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. As Lamya and Suhila said respectively:

*Through the assessment of students' oral language performance, I can know whether they perform correct grammatical sentences, whether they pronounce correctly and whether they use a considerable amount of vocabulary (SSI).*

*I think that grammar is very important because there are some students who speak and make a lot of grammatical mistakes. Therefore, it is considered as a main category (SSI).*

In much the same vein, Alia emphasised the importance of speaking assessment:

*IT IS VERY IMPORTANT [the participant highlighted]. (...) the assessment of speaking is very important, especially for secondary school students who are*



*specialised in English language. When the students do speaking in the class, I can see if they are good at grammar, and if they are good at using vocabulary and pronunciation (SSI).*

Amira placed emphasis on grammar and vocabulary, pointing out that:

*...vocabulary and grammar are very important categories that must be taken into account when the students are being orally assessed. However, I do not focus much on pronunciation. I do not think it is important in speaking assessment (SSI).*

In the excerpts above, the way Lamya, Suhila Alia and Amira expressed their knowledge of the importance of speaking assessment seem to reflect their general perception of language assessment. They associated the importance of speaking assessment with the mechanical elements of language, i.e. grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. However, two participants view the assessment of speaking as necessary as it provides insights into students' ability to communicate appropriately when using the language. Mona highlighted the importance of speaking assessment as revealing students' ability to communicate authentically:

*...the assessment of speaking is very important, because I can see whether students have confidence to present their work in English. (...) I can see the extent to which students can communicate fluently and confidently in different situations in everyday life such as in hospital, cafe or in the bus station, especially when they go abroad (SSI).*

In addition to fluency and confidence, Mona considered appropriateness another essential communicative skill that could be examined through students' oral language performance:

*...speaking assessment should be conducted in order to test what students learnt in speaking classes. For example, there are also some lessons in speaking that focus on the use of formal and informal language; how to distinguish to talk with a friend and with an academic person at university. The way the curriculum presents these objectives raised students' awareness of the importance of learning to speak in a real life (SSI).*

While highlighting the importance of speaking assessment, Hana raised the issue of students' anxiety about speaking in the classroom, which may be a consequence of giving more

attention to the assessment of the students' ability to accurately use grammatical structures and to read aloud, rather than the assessment of their ability to master the language in a communicative way. She commented on the need to apply speaking assessment in a communicative and authentic manner:

*Our students can be good at grammar and reading, especially when they read loudly, but they hesitate when they speak, and when to communicate, so speaking assessment is really significant (SSI).*

#### **5.2.2.1.2 Social aspects**

Another category which is indicated in the findings from the semi-structured interviews relates to the participants' views on the importance of speaking assessment from the social aspects. Five participants stated that the assessment of speaking needs to be taken into account in order to cope with the increasing social demands for the learning of English for various educational, cultural and economic purposes, especially as English is taught as a major in Libyan secondary schools. As Rawan commented:

*After graduation, these students may apply for jobs in foreign and international companies. One of the main requirements to get a job in such companies is to speak English well. In the interview, for example, I think they'll be assessed in terms of their ability to speak English language good or not (SSI).*

In line with this, Amira pointed out:

*English is an international language and becomes one of the demands to get a better job in this country. This has been clear evidence as we can see a dramatic increase in the number of English language training centres that become available in every town in the country (SSI).*

Clearly both teachers recognise the high importance of speaking assessment; their positive attitudes appear to stem from their awareness of new social and the cultural trends related to the need to learn to speak in English: the strengthening position of English as a language for interactional communication, which serves as a gateway to socio-economic and educational opportunities. From another perspective, Mona highlighted the importance of speaking assessment within a socio-cultural perspective since it is one of the curriculum objectives:

*...speaking lessons introduced in the curriculum give the students chances to learn about many communicative aspects that they can make use of when they study abroad, for example. (...) students can practise interviews for getting a job in a foreign work place. This supports the need for speaking assessment in our secondary schools (SSI).*

### **5.2.2.1.3 Pedagogical aspects**

According to the interview data, some of these teachers highlighted the importance of speaking assessment from two different but related perspectives. Within the first perspective, three participants argued that there should be speaking assessment in a secondary school context because speaking is taught as a school subject to students who specialise in English language. Fareeda stated:

*A secondary school student specialised in English language must be assessed in speaking as he or she has been studying speaking as a school subject for three years (SSI).*

Iman supported Fareeda's point of view:

*I think it is important for one main reason is that students have been studying English as a major, and they have been learning all the language skills separately. Speaking is taught as a school subject and there are two speaking lessons in each unit (SSI).*

Asmaa justified the assessment of speaking assessment at secondary school level in that students are awarded a secondary school certificate in English language:

*...speaking is taught as one of the main subjects. Therefore, when students have a secondary school certificate specialised in English, their oral language skills is supposed to be assessed (SSI).*

The other perspective is based on the premise that students' oral language skills should be assessed in order to examine their ability to master English at a higher level of education. As Rawan, Alia and Mona point out, secondary school students specialising in English would normally continue their study at tertiary level in local English language departments. As Rawan stated:

*At university, these students are going to study English language in more*

*depth in that they may specialise in translation, theoretical linguistics or applied linguistics. This requires us as teachers to evaluate their language skills, especially speaking (SSI).*

Mona supported Rawan's point of view:

*When they go to a higher level of education, students should be able to express their opinions and ideas fluently. They also should have the ability to communicate with academic people; they should have the confidence to present their work in English (SSI).*

The excerpts above provide insights into different understandings and perspectives these teachers held about the significance of conducting speaking assessment in secondary classrooms. At one end of the continuum, speaking assessment is seen as important in terms of examining students' linguistic skills, whereas at the other end teachers commented on the need to assess students' oral proficiency, particularly their communicative skills. Within the continuum, the participants raise other concerns that appear to be pertinent to pedagogical, social and cultural factors.

#### **5.2.2.2 Teachers' knowledge of the curriculum objectives for the teaching of speaking**

In Libya a reformed English language curriculum was designed for specialised secondary schools and was based on communicative principles (see Chapter 2). It introduces all the language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing, as subjects to be taught to secondary school students who are specialising in English language, aiming at presenting a significant shift in teaching and assessment paradigms. With regard to speaking lessons, textbooks include many different communicative activities and tasks designed to foster students' engagement and participation through the use of pair and group work, role-play, presentations and other communicative tasks (Philips et al, 2008: see appendices 16,17A &18). As such, the new orientation towards the communicative language teaching 'demanded of teachers' major adjustments to their thinking and practices' (Orafi & Borg, p. 243). Interestingly, the data from the semi-structured interviews show diversity in teachers' knowledge of the main objectives stated by the reformed curriculum with regard to the teaching of speaking. Only, three participants stated that the main objective is the

development of students' communicative language skills. Mona clearly explained the main objective as follows:

*According to the curriculum objectives, the aim of teaching speaking is to make the students be able to use English language appropriately in a real life. (...) the aim is to make students speak good English. As such, speaking lessons address a variety of authentic situations through which students can learn how to speak in many different situations (SSI).*

Similarly, as Asmaa claimed:

*The aim is to enable the students to communicate in everyday life. They should be very good at using the language orally in many different situations in an authentic life (SSI).*

Asmaa comments on the essence of communicativeness as an essential aspect on which the reformed curriculum is based, using a number of speaking activities in the textbook as examples:

*...they should know how to express their ideas when they agree or disagree with others; they can make suggestions; they can ask questions if they have queries about something; they should know how to narrate events, how to initiate a conversation with someone they do not know (SSI).*

In addition to communicativeness as a principal aspect, Hana implicitly referred to formative assessment as another important principle of the reformed curriculum.

*The main idea of the skill books is to encourage students to take an actual part in the learning process. This is because they aren't just people sitting on chairs and looking at the teacher. They have to think, communicate, and to participate in the teaching process, they are part of the teaching process. In the teacher's book, teachers are required to give the students a chance to reflect on their oral language performance (SSI).*

As can be inferred from the excerpts above, Mona, Asmaa and Hana appear to see the curriculum as a good source for developing students' speaking skills in that, from their perspectives, the curriculum helps students to 'be able to use English language appropriately in a real life', 'to initiate a conversation with someone they do not know' and 'to think, communicate, and to participate in the teaching process'.

Other participants seem to associate the objectives of the curriculum with the development

of students' metalinguistic knowledge in that they view the aim of the curriculum is to promote students' ability to learn grammar and vocabulary. For instance, Rawan said that the aim is to make students 'efficient' at mastering language. She related the use of 'efficient language' to 'good knowledge about grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation'. This is an illustrative excerpt by Rawan:

*If we consider the curriculum objectives, we find the student must be efficient at using the language and have good knowledge about grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation. The students should have the basics of how to use English language properly (SSI).*

Rawan's perspective is supported by other participants who have similar views. As the findings show elsewhere that speaking assessment is perceived to examine students' ability to construct grammatical utterances and learn amount of vocabulary. It could be speculated that such differences in the participants' understandings of the curriculum objectives may indicate that their notion of understanding language assessment plays a role in shaping teachers' perspectives about what they consider as principal aspects of this curriculum. Another layer of interpretation is that it may be important to reflect on the extent to which the language of curriculum reform may have the potential to shape the participants' knowledge. As could be seen from the excerpts above, Mona, and Hana, at least, seem to be fairly consistent in what they consider important. This may raise the issue of internalisation in that some of these teachers may have internalised the curriculum implications. Thus, that may have become part of their personal practical knowledge. This is well-expressed by Mona:

*By getting to know more about the oral tasks in the book, I've found that speaking needs to be taught in a communicative environment by using pair and group work activities. Speaking tasks in the skill book expanded my understanding about what and how I should teach speaking (SSI).*

### **5.2.2.3 Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment constructs**

Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment constructs or characteristics was also investigated through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The findings provide

further insights into the participants' knowledge regarding the definition of speaking assessment constructs, and their knowledge of accuracy, fluency and personality factors (e.g. confidence) as constructs. Most of the participating teachers seem to perceive as a rationale behind conducting a certain assessment task. Hana and Suhila, for example, alluded to the necessity of defining the speaking constructs to be assessed in a certain speaking test. They adopted the aims and the instructions introduced in speaking lessons as a guide to elicit and identify speaking constructs they want to focus on while conducting the assessment task. As Hana said:

*The teacher must relate the tasks to the subject. For example, I'm going to make assessment about how students can pronounce /o/ or /u/ sounds today, so I'll select the task that is relate to the subject. So we need to link between the focus of the speaking lesson and the task used for assessment (SSI).*

In a similar vein, Suhila stated:

*All speaking tasks introduced in the book clearly explain their main objectives of learning skills (...) I consider these objectives a guide on which I base my assessment. For instance, there is a task in the book about how to describe a picture. When I use such a task, I focus on the students' ability to use present progressive tense (SSI).*

In the questionnaire, the participants were asked to rate their knowledge of a set of speaking constructs: accuracy, pronunciation, fluency, communication strategies (interactive skills), and discourse competence (turn-taking) (see 5.1.3.1). The findings suggest that the majority of the participants rated their knowledge as 'good' but with varying percentages. The findings obtained by semi-structured interviews indicate that these teachers' knowledge of accuracy assessment is reflected in their different perspectives. This suggests that their knowledge has developed in different ways given that they highlight the importance of one linguistic feature and undervalue the other. Two participants said that the assessment of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are of equal importance and all essential. This was clearly expressed by Alia:

*I need to examine students' ability to construct correct sentences; their ability to pronounce the words correctly, and their ability to use vocabulary appropriately (SSI).*

Like Alia, Lamy referred to grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation as main constructs in

speaking assessment, explaining the criteria on which they are assessed:

*The main thing is that I focus on their ability to perform correct grammatical utterances, their pronunciation in terms of individual sounds, their intonation to see whether they can distinguish between a statement and a question, and on their ability to use a range of vocabulary (SSI).*

Alia and Lamya's knowledge of speaking assessment as suggested here, matches with their perceptions of language assessment in that their main concerns are about the assessment of the linguistic skills.

Other participants give priorities to some linguistic skills and consider them to be the most important construct. For example, the assessment of grammar appears to be the most salient linguistic feature that most of the participants consider when they conduct speaking assessment. As Suhila said:

*I think grammar is very important because there are some students who speak and make lots of grammatical mistakes (SSI).*

In much the same vein, Iman pointed out 'I basically focus on grammatical structure, I especially focus on their use of tenses'. Fareeda also views grammar as a main category when conducting speaking assessment:

*Within a retelling story task, I'm more concerned about the use of grammar, especially the tenses. For example, I examine how students can use the past tenses to narrate a story happened in the past (SSI).*

While some participants view grammar as the most salient assessment feature, Hana is the only participant who considers pronunciation a significant component in the assessment of speaking:

*I focus on pronunciation. Pronunciation, stress, intonation are very important elements in assessing speaking. The use of high pitch, low pitch is also important (SSI).*



Cohesion is another feature mentioned by three participants as important in the assessment of speaking. In a stimulated recall interview, Mona referred to cohesion as the ability of students to carry out the assessment task in an organised way:

*Generally, I based my assessment on the cohesion of the ideas and the way they presented by the students. I always tell them that whatever the task is, they need to be organised in their performance (SRI).*

As can be seen from the excerpts, Alia, Lamy, Fareeda, Hana and Mona's knowledge of accuracy as a speaking assessment construct seems to be impressionistic and this is reflected in their different interpretations of the linguistic features in terms of the degree of their importance in speaking assessment. These findings are similar to those obtained in Muñoz et al's (2003) study, in which the participants held impressionistic beliefs about speaking assessment constructs. Fluency is another speaking assessment construct that was addressed by the participants. When being asked about speaking constructs they focus on in the assessment of their students' speaking performance, only three participants mentioned fluency as an important construct. While the assessment of fluency entails the examination of features such as hesitation, repetition, false starts, self-correction, reselecting lexical items, and restructuring sentences (Fulcher, webinar, 2012), the findings indicate that, except for hesitation, none of these features were mentioned by the participants. It could be speculated that such features are not within the scope of assessment in the Libyan secondary school context or may be just another indication of how these teachers prioritise linguistic knowledge over skills more associated with communication such as fluency. Another reason may be that the idea of practising speaking assessment in the classroom is still new to these Libyan EFL secondary school teachers, especially in a context where pencil and paper exams have been the dominant method of language assessment, as the findings showed below.

Hana is the only participant who mentioned the need to examine students' hesitation while speaking; she related hesitation to the students' ability to produce complex structures and to use appropriate vocabulary:

*Fluency is an important thing to be assessed in speaking, and it should be assessed in terms of hesitation and talking without stopping. While speaking, a student sometimes feels worried and hesitant. She might be unable to*

*produce long sentences, or she might be looking for a right word, so it depends on her ability to speak the language fluently (SSI).*

Interestingly, the findings indicate that the term 'fluency' is intertwined with a personality factor: *confidence*. As Mona said:

*...students should be able to express their opinions and ideas fluently. They also should have (...) the confidence to present their work in English (SSI).*

Asmaa is another participant who made this link, although her main focus was on students' confidence. She commented:

*Self-confidence is an important category. It shows the students' ability to communicate using English language fluently. Sometimes students have a considerable amount of vocabulary; however, they feel shy and lack confidence to speak in front of others. I see students' confidence to speak as a sign of fluency (SSI).*

From the excerpts above, it could be seen that Hana, Mona and Asmaa have different, but related, views about fluency as a speaking construct. They referred to 'hesitation', 'expressing opinions' and 'confidence' as indications of fluency. These views are reflected in other comments made by these teachers in their interviews.

In addition to accuracy and fluency, another factor raised by the participants as a speaking assessment construct was students' ability to sustain interest. These teachers made a link between their focuses on these constructs and the use of speaking tasks. For example, Rawan associated students' confidence with students' ability to make presentations:

*When they [students] give presentations, the main thing I focus on is the students' confidence in terms of the way they speak and the ability to present their topics in a communicative way (SRI).*

While Rawan considers 'confidence' a main construct for the assessment of presentations, Mona and Fareeda see it as important in any speaking assessment. As Mona stated:

*...there are some elements common in all speaking assessment tasks such as communicative skills, students' pronunciation, and student's confidence (SSI).*

In a stimulated recall interview, she added:

*Personality is also an important element in assessment. Students should appear confident when they speak (SRI).*

These teachers illustrate their knowledge of speaking assessment constructs by giving examples from their own classroom practice in that they referred to different aspects related to students' language abilities such as students' confidence, students' pronunciations, students' ability to communicate, and students' ability to produce long sentences. This may reflect their different beliefs and values they hold about what constitutes speaking assessment and what features need to be considered.

#### **5.2.2.4 Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment tasks**

One of the main issues investigated in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews was teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment tasks. While the findings of the questionnaire provided insights into what teachers say they know about types of speaking tasks, the findings of the interviews provided a broader indication of their knowledge of speaking assessment tasks.

In the questionnaire the participants were asked to rate their knowledge of conducting speaking assessment tasks in terms of variation, timing, level of difficulty and different speaking assessment tasks (see 5.1.3.2). When analysing the data from the semi-structured interviews, two main categories were identified, namely *teachers' sources of speaking tasks*, and *teachers' knowledge about the use of different speaking tasks*.

##### **5.2.2.4.1 Teachers' sources of speaking tasks**

The findings of the semi-structured interviews indicate that the textbook appears to be the main source of teachers' knowledge about speaking tasks. As Asmaa said '*I assess students' oral language performance by using the tasks that are in the skill book (...) I need to stick to what is in the book.*' This was supported by Amira, who justified that as an institutional policy in that teachers are required to use the tasks that are in the curriculum:

*I have to be restricted to what is in the course or the skill books. This is because I'm teaching in a secondary school level in that the teacher should assess students on what they've had in their lessons (SSI).*

According to Fareeda and Mona, English language teaching websites and links are useful resources for gaining more knowledge about speaking assessment tasks. While talking about

the resources for her speaking assessment tasks, Fareeda alluded to the challenges she encounters in the assessment of speaking and to her insufficient knowledge about speaking tasks, especially the lack of teacher education in this area:

*We didn't have any courses about language assessment when I was an undergraduate student. Recently I've started to use the internet and searched in the websites about the communicative methods of teaching and the mechanism by which I can use the task for assessments (SSI).*

Mona uses resources such as the 'internet' to search for speaking assessment speaking tasks:

*I very much depend on the internet (...) I frequently search links about teaching speaking and how can a teacher make their students practise speaking in the classroom....I print out the tasks that are appropriate for the students' level. I ask them to do that in groups (SSI).*

#### **5.2.2.4.2 Teachers' knowledge about the use of different speaking tasks**

A further issue raised in the questionnaire relates to teachers' knowledge about different speaking tasks. The findings reveal that 80.3% of the participants rate their knowledge as 'good' and 'excellent'. Interestingly, however, the findings of the semi-structured interview show that the participants appear to focus on certain types of speaking tasks. When answering the question 'can you tell me about tasks you used for speaking assessment?', most of the participants referred to one or two types of tasks. For example, Hana and Iman acknowledged that they lack knowledge of speaking assessment tasks. Hana said:

*Some topics need different tasks, while others not. Some tasks are used with pair work and others with group work, so it depends on the subject. To be honest, I don't have much experience about speaking assessment tasks (SSI).*

Iman is another participant who seems to focus on one speaking task: 'making a discussion is the main assessment task I use in the classroom'. Lamya uses mainly the task of 'acting out a dialogue':

*Speaking lessons include dialogues, I ask the students to memorise the dialogue in order to perform it the next day. In that day, each pair of students is required to perform the dialogue in front of the class (SSI).*

She indirectly made a link between the teaching and the assessment objectives of using the task of 'acting out dialogue'. Lamya appears to set assessment objectives for the use of such

a task in that the students are required to memorise the dialogues in speaking lessons and act them out in pairs in the classroom. Fareeda seems to promote the importance of using different tasks, especially when she associates the tasks with students' language level of competency. Fareeda alluded to the time factor as a constraint in attempting to use 'communicative' speaking assessment tasks. In order to overcome the problem, she suggested that students can prepare tasks in advance:

*I try to use a variety of assessment tasks...that go with students' different language competencies. Some students are really good while others are weak (...) Because the time of the class isn't enough for doing the whole task, I ask the students to prepare the task at home so that they can do it the next day (SSI).*

Like Fareeda, Suhila alluded to time factor in that she associates between the dominant use of the traditional methods of teaching and the low level of students' language competency (see Section 5.2.4.2.4). Interestingly, however, the analysis of data obtained from observation and stimulated recall interviews indicates that teachers' understanding of the notion of assessment seem to play a significant role in their assessment implementation. This is apparent in the views of some teachers in that they seem to associate time allocated for a speaking task with student talking time (STT). This will be discussed in more detail in 5.2.3. I believe that teachers' understanding of the instructional framework of the speaking tasks is the main factor contributing to the mechanism by which these tasks are implemented, either in teaching or in assessment. For example, Mona's understanding of speaking tasks seems to be clearly reflected in her implementations of speaking assessment as will be seen in 5.2.3. In this regard, Mona talked about the tasks in the reformed curriculum which she uses to assess oral language performance:

*I use tasks that assess individuals, in pairs or groups. I can give an example, for individual assessment, I asked students to listen to a radio programme at home, then they came the next day and each student was asked to report what they listened to. Role play, solving a problem, making up a dialogue about a certain situation, and describing a picture tasks are very often used in the assessment of pair or group work (SSI).*

### 5.2.2.5 Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment criteria

The findings from the semi-structured interviews show that the participants hold many different perspectives about what criteria need to be taken into account in the assessment of speaking constructs. In the assessment of grammar, for example, some participants point to the use of appropriate tenses and the construct of a grammatically correct utterance as criteria. Alia and Lamya commented respectively:

*First of all, I focus on grammatical structure. If the students practising a dialogue using their own words, but their structure of the sentence is incorrect, they won't get good marks (SSI).*

*The main thing is that I focus on their ability to perform correct grammatical utterances... (SSI).*

Vocabulary is another construct that Alia and Lamya consider but their perspectives appear to be different: while Alia considered the assessment of vocabulary in terms of its appropriateness in a certain context and its correct pronunciation, Lamya seems to be more concerned about the 'students' ability to use a wide range of vocabulary'. In Alia's words:

*...vocabulary shouldn't be assessed in terms of the amount, but on how to use and how to pronounce it. Some students have a limited amount of vocabulary, but their pronunciation is good and they know how to use vocabulary appropriately in a context (SSI).*

Pronunciation includes stress and intonation and Alia seems to base her criteria on 'whether students can distinguish between a statement and an exclamatory sentence'; Lamya focused on 'their pronunciation in terms of individual sounds, their intonation to see whether they can distinguish between a statement and a question'. Hana, on the other hand, found it important to examine students' ability to practise 'high pitch and low pitch'

In addition to the criteria employed for the assessment of accuracy, some criteria appear to be considered for the assessment of the students' ability to communicate and to carry out the tasks authentically, although Mona is the only participant to do this. She mentioned three criteria, namely authenticity and content, as well as the students' ability to avoid memorisation. With regard to this last criterion, Mona commented '*Speaking is communication so students must have the ability to communicate...not just to memorise the*

*language (SSI)*. Mona seems attempt to orient students' beliefs about speaking assessment away from the conception that memorisation is the way to pass exams towards a more communicative-based assessment. She also considers authenticity important: '*this is the objective of the curriculum. It aims to make students carry out the task authentically*'. She further explained:

*When they do speaking tasks such as a role play, students need to show that as if they were in a real life. The more students come up with new ideas (...) and make the conversation look as if in a real life, the more marks I give them (SSI).*

With regard to content, Mona seems to pay attention to task completion, examining how well students are able to carry out the task successfully and how well they are able to show the intended content of the task:

*...there was a speaking task in year two book, asking students to talk about how to make a rocket (...). Students liked the idea, and made up a rocket by using a cardboard. They brought the parts of the rocket they made and started to talk about them (...). They tried to use new vocabulary related to the task. They also could communicate with the audience very well. I encourage them to speak and tell them that I wouldn't be so much concerned about the grammatical mistakes as long as they could convey the message clearly and thing they intended to say is understood (SSI).*

Some participants referred to 'confidence' as another criterion specifically assigned for the assessment of presentations. Fareeda views criteria such as clarity of voice and eye contact as important aspects through which she examines students' ability to show confidence (see 5.2.3.1). She attempts to widen her understanding of assessment criteria through the use of certain speaking tasks, although she mentions elsewhere that the main aspect for speaking assessment is that students make efforts to speak in the classroom, thereby suggesting that she pays more attention to personality factors than to linguistic performance, stating that these criteria may have the potential to raise students' motivation to be more involved in speaking tasks. This was evident in one of the observed sessions, in which her comments mainly focused on how well students were able to show confidence while doing presentations.

As illustrated in the excerpts above, these Libyan EFL novice secondary school teachers seem to have different views of the criteria by which speaking constructs are assessed. It seems that their general understanding of language assessment influences their understanding of speaking assessment criteria. The findings in sections (5.2.1.1.1 & 5.2.2.1.1) indicate that most of the participants seem to prioritise the assessment of linguistic skills over communicative language skills. Such tendency seems to be reflected in their perspectives of speaking assessment criteria in that most of the participants promote the importance of metalinguistic knowledge.

### **5.2.3 Speaking assessment practices**

Four data instruments, namely questionnaire, non-participant observations, semi-structured and stimulated recall interviews, were conducted in order to answer the third research question: 'How does Libyan EFL novice teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment inform their practice?' The questionnaire provided data from closed questions in which the participants reported the frequency of their practices (see Section 5.1.2.2 above). The data obtained by observation, SSI and SRI were analysed according to four main categories: speaking assessments practices based on oral tests, speaking assessment practices based on written tests, teachers' views towards the use of oral/written tests in speaking assessment and their influences on their speaking assessment practices, and the grading system.

As mentioned in the Chapter 4, I observed three teachers: Mona, Fareeda, and Rawan in the process of teaching speaking to third year secondary school students (a year of graduation). Each of the participants was teaching in a different school in Tripoli. Based on the interview data presented above, it could be inferred that these teachers seem to have different knowledge and perception about assessment in terms of speaking constructs, speaking tasks and assessment criteria. In a semi-structured interview, Mona stated that the assessment of communicative skills is an essential aspect in the assessment of speaking and she supported the notion of the use of oral tests. She talked about many different speaking tasks that she believed to be important in the implementation of speaking assessment in classroom settings (see Section 5.2.2.4.2 above). Fareeda seems to highlight the importance of both



linguistic and communicative skills in speaking assessment. However, she stated that the context is a hindering factor in the implementation of speaking tasks in the classroom. Unlike, Mona and Fareeda, Rawan seems to have a different attitudes towards language assessment. She seems to prioritise the assessment of metalinguistic knowledge, although on one occasion she mentioned the need to consider communication as an important factor in language assessment. It may be that she is more concerned about the use of written tests in the assessment of speaking, as the findings indicated below.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I observed nine sessions in total. While I observed Mona in 5 sessions, and Fareeda in 3 sessions, Rawan allowed me to attend just one session. Mona and Fareeda agreed to be video-recorded; however, Rawan did not allow me to use a video camera, so I used the digital voice recorder instead.

### **5.2.3.1 Speaking assessment based on oral tests**

Sections 5.2.2.4 and 5.2.2.5 above present the semi-structured interview data about teachers' knowledge about speaking assessment tasks and criteria. As indicated in these findings, Mona, Fareeda and Rawan referred to different types of speaking tasks. Mona reported that she used speaking tasks such as role play, presentations, summarising radio programmes, and acting out dialogues, highlighting the importance of pair and group work. Fareeda reported using tasks such as *'relating a story, relating a newspaper stories, telephoning and presentation'* (SSI). Rawan said that she mainly used 'oral discussion' (SSI). Only three types of speaking tasks were observed in the nine observations: oral presentation, role play and reporting a summary about a TV programme (see Appendices 16A & 16B). While oral presentation was observed to be conducted by the three participants, role play and reporting a summary programme were observed to be implemented only by Mona. The classrooms were ill-equipped in that they lacked audio and visual aids except for the whiteboard. However, each of the three participants seemed to have their unique understandings of and rationale for adopting a certain mechanism while implementing this task and selecting the assessment criteria.

The findings from the observations show that the participants' current understandings of what is to be considered in the assessment of students' oral language performance seem to

be reflected in their focus on certain assessment categories and criteria that they consider essential for the assessment. These categories are linguistic skills, content and communicative skills. In addition, feedback provided by the teachers, peer assessment and assessment tools are other assessment practices that were observed in the classroom.

The findings from the observation and recall interviews indicate that the teachers' main concerns in the assessment of speaking seem to be centered round the assessment of students' language performance. Linguistic skills seem to be an important assessment category that Rawan was concerned about when conducting oral language presentation tasks. In a recall interview, Rawan mentioned '*grammar*', '*pronunciation*' and '*language use*' as the main categories she focused on:

*I focused on their language in terms of how they pronounced the words. Another point I focused on was their use of informal language (SRI).*

Mona, on the other hand, seems to be more concerned about communicative language skills in the assessment of students' oral language performance, as observed in the way she commented on some students' oral performances while doing oral tasks in the classroom. In the recall interview, she provided a range of comments on the episodes she watched regarding how and the extent to which students were able to show confidence and engage with the audience while doing their oral presentations. '*Eye contact*' and '*clarity of voice*' were among the criteria on which Mona based their assessment. She referred to eye contact as one of her main concerns in that she examined '*whether students interacted with the audience or kept looking at the posters and ignored their audience*'. In addition, clarity of voice was considered; Mona commented on one of the presenters: '*her voice is a bit quivering and that influenced her interaction with the audience*' (SRI). This was also observed in Fareeda's classroom when she commented on students' eye contact and voice. Here are illustrative comments:

*You need to speak up. Your speech needs to be clear. I know that you are not a native speaker, but you need to improve in this aspect.*

*You look as if you stand in the corner and you talked to yourself; you did not communicate with the audience or make any eye contact. The presentation was too short, yet you did well.*

When she commented on an episode about students doing oral presentation, Fareeda pointed out that:

*They also have problems in the voice speed in that some of them were talking so fast that I could not catch some parts of their presentations. They need to speak clearly; it should not be very high or low voice so that the audience can understand what is the presenter is talking about (SRI).*

'Turn taking', another criterion, was mentioned by Mona as important in assessing communicative skills, especially in oral tasks done by a pair or a group of three students. She focused on 'how a student introduced her partner to carry on the presentations, and how they can take turns' (SRI). When students were doing role play, Mona commented on the dominance and distribution of roles:

*...Farah [S1] was dominant in that she was the only student talking, while another student just said 'hi girls how are you'. The dialogue in general was ok and it is good they make it in a group work. Yet, each student is assessed individually. I will not give her a mark for just saying one or two sentences. Even students work in groups, each one of them must be given equal chance and has their own ideas to talk about (SRI).*

In addition, content was assessed in terms of '**flow of information**'. Fareeda explained that she was concerned about 'whether students gave details about the topic they were presenting or just little information' (SRI). Similarly, Rawan noticed that 'some presentations were very brief and did not include enough information about the topic, while others were too detailed and complex topics' (SRI). '**Organisation**' is another criterion through which the teachers assess students' ability to present their topics coherently. Mona commented on 'the coherence of the ideas and the way they are presented by the students' (SRI). Fareeda suggested areas through which she examines how well students organise their presentations:

*...Some of them did really well in that they gave an introduction about the topic, then provide more details about it. After that they summed up with a conclusion and invited the audience if they had questions. Some didn't give an*

*introduction and started directly with giving details about the topic. Some other presentations lacked conclusion (SRI).*

It could be inferred from the excerpts above that Rawan, Mona and Fareeda's views about assessment seem to reflect their notions of what spoken language is in that they placed more emphasis on the content of language rather than on the assessment process. As can be seen, the participants' different understandings about what needs to be considered as important in the assessment of students' oral language performance seem to be reflected in their assessment practices. It seems clear that language content is perceived to be an essential part in the assessment process and that was illustrated in the way teachers talked about certain language elements. For instance, the three teachers referred to the amount of language: '*I will not give her a mark for just saying one or two sentences*' (Mona, SRI), '*some presentations were very brief and did not include enough information about the topic*' (Fareeda, SRI), and '*whether students gave details about the topic they were presenting or just little information*' (Fareeda, SRI).

With regard to the assessment process, the findings obtained by observation indicate that the participants' implementation of oral language assessment reflected their knowledge of speaking assessment in terms of the process, time management, feedback and the use of assessment techniques and tools. For instance, it could be speculated that Mona's understanding of the use of pair and group work seems to be reflected in her assessment practices as mentioned above. In her class, it was observed that the students presented individually, in pairs or in a group of three. Mona said that this helps to promote students' communicative skills as well as enhancing collaboration between weak and good students:

*I found that the weak students' oral language has improved a lot since they started working in a group. This is because when I used to teach them in year one, weak students used to work together and the good ones used to do the tasks together. There was a big difference between the two groups in terms of language performance, ideas, organisation, communication, confidence, and creativity (SRI).*

In the participants' implementation of oral presentations it was observed that Rawan and Fareeda did not seem to take time planning or management into consideration: some presentations took 3 minutes, some 7 minutes, and others 17 minutes. It was observed that

the participants did not make any comments about timing, or whether the presentations were allocated a specific time. However, in the stimulated recall interview, both teachers reflected on the issue, indicating that they hold similar beliefs that students should not be restricted to a certain time as that is student talking time (STT). In other words, they seem to relate time given for students to speak in the classroom to motivation. Rawan stated:

*I see students who talked for 10 minutes are much better than those who spent 1 or 2 minutes talking. The more students speak, the more I am pleased (SRI).*

Similarly, Fareeda commented:

*I think this should be seen as a positive point. This reflects that a student has the confidence, skill and the ability to talk about a topic for such a long time. The idea is to make students practise speaking using English language. I see long presentations as an indication for students' ability to perform oral language (SRI).*

This may indicate that the current knowledge of assessment of both Rawan and Fareeda is based on their ideas about speaking skills rather than on the assessment as a process, in that their main concerns are about language, rather than how assessment is carried out. Such understandings seem to have influenced their speaking assessment practices in that the time factor seems to be seen as an important factor as it is related to motivation and they seem to judge students by how long they present for.

In one of the observed sessions, Fareeda used peer assessment as way of encouraging shy students to speak and to promote students' autonomy:

*T: I'm very impressed by your presentation, good that you showed confidence while you are presenting. You did really well. Last time you couldn't carry on, today you continued and you gave the presentation. I'm so proud of you.*  
*T: What do you think of Manar's presentation?*  
**Number of students replied on the same time**  
*S 1: it's excellent.*  
*T: excellent? Why do you say it is excellent?*  
*S2: because the pronunciation is clear*  
*S3: the topic is interesting*  
*T: so the topic is interesting, good yeah?*  
*S4: she gave good information about the topic*  
*S5: she's using body language*  
*T: that's good*

In a recall interview, Fareeda was asked about her rationale behind the use of peer assessment in the classroom:

*I found it useful in that it makes students aware of their mistakes. It also provides the students with self-confidence in that are given a chance to be assessors. I sometimes ask a student to assess her partner, especially in a re-telling story task. I am now using it when students are doing oral presentations (SRI).*

It was observed that Rawan asked the students to submit a written report of the topics they presented: her implementation of the assessment process seems to be influenced by her views on the use of written tests in the assessment of speaking in that she said that she assessed oral presentations according to what students write about the topic they are presenting. In a recall interview, Rawan was asked about the rationale behind this assessment technique:

*I ask the students to give me what they have presented in a piece of paper so I can make the assessment later....This is because speaking is assessed in a written form. This is why I do not assess speaking orally (SRI).*

Reflecting on the findings obtained from the observation, it could be reasonable to speculate that these teachers might have implemented speaking assessment differently if they had used different speaking tasks. The conduct of more observations may have provided me with more understanding about how teachers' current knowledge informs their implementations of a variety of speaking tasks and activities. It might also have provided me with more understanding of how these teachers managed the institutional contexts that they claim to have attributed to their speaking assessment practices. However, despite a few observation, I could gain a good understanding about how their implementation of speaking assessment reflects their current knowledge.

### 5.2.3.2 Speaking assessment based on paper and pencil tests

The use of paper and pencil tests for the assessment of speaking is not uncommon in EFL contexts, in that many teachers believe that they assist them in assessing students' level of achievement of the basic language structure and vocabulary (Chang, 2005). The context of the present study is not so different in that all the participating teachers reported that they mainly based their speaking assessment on paper and pencil tests. The findings of the semi-structured interview show that the written tests were imposed by the Ministry of Education in that they should be conducted in both classroom-based and large scale assessment (see section 5.2.4).

In order to get a thorough understanding of teachers' current practices of speaking assessment through paper and pencil tests, the findings obtained from semi-structured interviews were synthesised with documents. Many different assessment tasks were reported to be used in such tests, with the multiple choice question (MCQ) test one of the most frequent models. Rawan, Iman and Asmaa talked about the rationale behind the use of MCQ tests in that they need to prepare their third year students for the final speaking test, which is mainly based on this assessment model (see appendix 4B). According to Asmaa:

*I found myself I need to use this technique in order to prepare students for the final exam in speaking which takes the form of MCQ. The questions need to be designed to make the students deduce the answers according to what they have understood from lessons (SSI).*

In addition to MCQ tests, the teachers mentioned other tasks, such as *writing definitions, matching phrases, filling gaps, re-arranging sentences and true-false statements*. Alia explained:

*I sometimes ask them to give definitions about terms that are in speaking lessons or to match the terms with their definitions. Another task is to select a piece of conversation from the book and is followed by true or false in order to see the students' understanding of the dialogue. I also give them questions related to the rules of speaking such as the use of formal and informal language, giving statements which are followed by multiple choices. Another way is that I can assess the students' ability to differentiate between terms of similar definitions (SSI).*

Rawan was seen to follow the mechanism by which large scale exams test students' oral language performance. Prior to the students' presentations, Rawan explained that there was a number of tasks that students were required to do (see Appendix 19). She started the lesson by writing a list of terms and their definitions (*talk, interview, chat, a speech, a lecture, a gossip, a tutorial, argument, a discussion, seminar*) on the board, and asked students to write them down in their notebooks. She then asked one of the students to read each definition aloud and this was followed by an explanation from the teacher. After explaining all the definitions, she asked the students to find out any differences and similarities between the terms. In a recall interview, Rawan explained the rationale behind the teaching of these terms:

*I need to focus on these terms and definitions because I need to prepare students for the final exams which are prepared by the Ministry of Education. So in mid-term exams, I usually give the definition and ask the students to tell if it is correct or not, or to tell the difference between the two terms. For example, they may be asked to write the difference between a seminar and an argument, or the difference between chat and interview (SRI).*

These tasks require different assessment categories and criteria as reported by the participants. '*Selecting/writing/giving the right answers*' are the most frequent assessment criteria by which all the participating teachers claim they assess paper and pencil tests. That is, students are rewarded grades for selecting or writing the right answer. As Mona said:

*I see if they give the information I need regardless of the grammatical or spelling mistakes. As long as I feel that the student is able to answer the questions correctly, I give them good marks (SSI).*

Grammar, spelling and punctuation are other linguistic elements considered in the assessment of paper and pencil tests. For example, Suhila is concerned about '*spelling and grammar*'; Lamya sees spelling and punctuation as important to consider when students are asked to write a dialogue in that she examines '*if the student can use a full stop, comma or exclamation marks properly in the dialogue*'. Alia, on the other hand, claimed that she considers grammar a salient feature for assessing students' ability to write a well-structured definition:



*Grammar is very important because some students know how to speak well, but when I ask them about the structure of the sentence, they can't analyse it. Since they're specialised in English, they should know about the grammatical rules such as tenses. They also need to know what the auxiliary verbs are and how to use them (SSI).*

Students' ability to memorise a given dialogue and to copy this in the written exam is another way of assessing speaking through written formats: this was illustrated by Suhila, who reported that '*students are asked to write a dialogue for a certain situation. Here the students memorised the dialogues from the book already*'; this was assessed in terms of students' ability to write '*a complete, well-organised and coherent dialogue*'.

From the excerpts above, it can be seen that when speaking about their assessment practice, these teachers spoke more about the language content that was assessed than about the type of assessment used. This is suggested, for instance, by their focuses on 'punctuation', 'spelling', 'grammar', and 'students' ability to memorise'.

### **5.2.3.3 Teachers' views about use of oral/written tests in speaking assessment**

Teachers expressed their views about the use of oral/written tests in the assessment of speaking and this appears to impact on their speaking assessment practices. The semi-structured interview data indicate that, in their views, speaking assessment needs to be assessed through written tests (see Section 5.2.4.2.1 below). Interestingly, however, the findings of the present study show that many views are presented by different teachers regarding speaking assessment in terms of its importance and the way it should be assessed. This is partly reflected in their current understandings of speaking assessment in terms of speaking constructs, tasks and criteria. To articulate my interpretations of this theme, I believe that I need to make a link between what teachers said about the use of written tests and the way these teachers perceive linguistic and communicative language skills on the one hand and their views about speaking tasks in the curriculum on the other. To my mind, this may help to see the interconnectedness between teachers' attitudes towards oral/written tests and their current knowledge of speaking assessment.

The semi-structured interview data indicate that the participants have different views regarding speaking tasks in the curriculum in that while most of the participants described

speaking tasks as 'inappropriate', 'unhelpful', 'useless', only a few participants view tasks as 'beneficial' and 'effective'. Such views appear to impact on teachers' tendencies towards the implementation of oral and written tests in the assessment of speaking. Exemplifying the negative attitude, Asmaa stated that tasks introduced in speaking lessons are unhelpful:

*...most speaking tasks used do not help students to practise the English language in everyday life. I think tasks such as narrating or retelling a story, and giving a presentation aren't really helpful to make students learn how to speak (SSI).*

Asmaa refers to the level of students' language ability as a barrier for implementing such tasks in oral language assessment:

*I don't think it works since 7 or 8 out of 29 students would do well in the oral test while other would absolutely fail the test. This is because the majority of the students don't have the ability and skill to perform meaningful and correct utterances....They may be shy or lack confidence to speak in the class. As such, I find the written exams work better than the oral ones (SSI).*

Asmaa's views on the students' level is supported by other participants: Alia, Suhila, Rawan, Freeda, Lamy, Amira and Hana. On the other hand, unlike the other participants, Mona stated that speaking tasks are both beneficial and informative:

*The way the curriculum presents these tasks raises students' awareness of the importance of learning to speak in a real life. I think the speaking tasks provide students with insights about the foreign culture which is quite important (SSI).*

Mona's positive attitude towards speaking tasks is clearly reflected in her implementation of them in the classroom setting, as was observed in many sessions in the classroom. Unlike other participants, Mona seems to prioritise the use of oral tests over written tests in the assessment of speaking. My reading of these findings is that these teachers seem to conceptualise the way speaking assessment needs to be implemented in the light of the

context where they practise assessment. This is apparent in the findings in that, although the participants blamed the use of written tests in the assessment of speaking as a contextual factor that negatively impacts on their current knowledge of speaking assessment (see Section 5.2.4.2.1), they explicitly state that written tests are appropriate in their context. They associate that with contextual factors such as students' level of language ability, students' attitudes towards oral language assessment, class size, and ill-equipped classrooms. For instance, Rawan referred to students' familiarity with written tests: *'(...) the students do very well in the summative assessment in which written exams and tests are conducted (...) I think written tests are better than oral tests to make our students gain good marks'* **(SSI)**. On the surface, it could be speculated that these contextual factors have the potential to influence teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment. However, it could also be inferred that teachers' understandings of assessment are an important factor that contributes to how these teachers conceptualise the mechanism by which speaking is assessed. The findings suggest that the participants who view speaking assessment as the assessment of students' metalinguistic knowledge prioritise the use of written tests. This view was illustrated by Iman, Asmaa and Suhila, as seen above: they described written tests as an 'effective' and 'good' method in developing students' oral language skills:

*According to educational policy, the assessment of speaking should be conducted through written tests and exams. As such oral language assessment is not given any considerations. I see this policy has a positive side (...). The positive point is that it makes the student learn dialogues, phrases, terms and definition by heart and know how to write them helps in the process of learning how to speak English* **(Suhila: SSI)**.

*The good thing is that it makes the student memorise dialogues and phrases, and practise them in writing help them to learn how to speak English* **(Amira: SSI)**.

As these excerpts suggest, these teachers view rote memorisation as an effective technique through which students can perform language. In addition, their prioritisation of the use of written tests seem to be ingrained in their attitudes towards writing as a language skill in that they alluded to the usefulness of writing in the learning of speaking, especially when

they said *'...know how to write them helps in the process of learning how to speak', '...practise them in writing them to learn how to speak'*. This suggests that these teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment is underpinned by their understandings of language in terms of teaching, learning and assessment objectives.

#### **5.2.3.4 Grading system**

The participating teachers reported that three pencil and paper tests assessing speaking should be conducted each term: two mid-term tests and a final exam. According to Suhila, *'tests and exams in speaking must be written and have the biggest mark of the total score'*. Fareeda provided details about how marks are allocated for these tests: *'in each term, speaking must be given 22 marks; 6 for the first test and 6 for the second test, 10 for the final exam, and 2 for attendance'* (SSI).

It is apparent that the assessment system in the context of the current study is still based on quantitative assessment patterns (Falvey & Cheng, 2000,). This was illustrated by most of the participating teachers when talking about the mechanisms they follow in the assessment process. For example, Mona is among other participants who assess students' language performance by means of marks:

*I give each point a mark, and then I give the biggest mark on how students could convey her ideas, messages, and her principles to the audience. After having considered that in detail, I give the overall mark (SSI).*

The use of numerical score seems to be the main tool for teachers to evaluate students' speaking performance in oral and written tests. As can be seen in comments by Suhila and Rawan that speaking *'must be given biggest mark'* and *'must be given...mark'*, this may indicate that these teachers used the numerical score system for an accountability issue in that they are obliged to assign numbers or marks both in oral or written tests.

The findings in this section show that the participating teachers provide insights into the speaking constructs, categories and criteria in that they seem to have different understandings and perspectives about speaking assessment. Such a variety in these teachers' understandings shows the mosaic in their current knowledge of speaking

assessment and their implementation of it in classroom settings, both those that were observed and those that were commented on.

#### **5.2.4 Teachers’ views on the impact of contextual factors on their knowledge and practice of speaking assessment**

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the role of context in teachers’ knowledge and practice of speaking assessment, qualitative data were collected through open-ended questions, semi-structured/stimulated recall interviews, and non-participant observation.

In the questionnaire, I identified six contextual factors that emerged from the literature (see Section 4.3.1.1). The participants were asked to select the factor(s) that they perceive to be influential. The table below shows the frequency and percentage of the responses.

| <b>Contextual factors</b>  | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Class size   | 66               | 86.8%             |
| Lack of teacher training for learning how to make oral language assessment.                    | 57               | 75%               |
| Prescribed rules by school policy or educational system about what assessment criteria to use. | 46               | 60.5%             |
| Lack of support by more experienced teachers.  | 29               | 38.1%             |
| Lack of standardised oral language assessment.   | 28               | 36.8%             |
| Curriculum objectives  | 25               | 32.9%             |

Table 5.6: The influence of contextual factors on EFL teachers’ knowledge and practice of speaking assessment

The participants were also asked to express their opinions about and attitudes towards the factors they selected. Although only a few participants responded to the open-ended questions, their responses provide insights into the constraints they claim they encounter when conducting speaking assessment. Further data regarding this was collected in the second phase of data collection. The findings from the open-ended questions and semi-structured/recall interviews indicate that the participants seem to attribute their lack of knowledge to a number of contextual factors (5.2.4.1) that they also perceive to have an impact on their assessment practices (5.2.4.2).

#### **5.2.4.1 Teachers' views on the impact of contextual factors on their knowledge of speaking assessment**

The participants referred to institutional and political contexts that they perceive as having an impact on their knowledge of speaking assessment. Within the institutional context, the participants talked about issues related to lack of support from more experienced teachers and lack of training activities, as indicated in responses to open ended questions in the questionnaire (Table 5.6). The following analysis will describe what these teachers said about these aspects.

##### **5.2.4.1.1 Institutional context**

###### **5.2.4.1.1.1 Lack of support by more experienced teachers**

The findings from the questionnaire indicate that 38.1% of the participants consider lack of support from more experienced teachers an influential factor. Although this is a relatively small percentage, some participants raised issues that need to be considered. Qualitative data obtained by the questionnaire indicates that some novice teachers claimed to encounter difficulties when they started teaching English as a discipline to students specialising in English language in secondary schools. They state that their knowledge of speaking assessment needs to be supported by more experienced teachers such as inspectors and coordinating teachers. As one questionnaire respondent stated:

*The teaching of listening, speaking, reading and writing as school subjects is a new experience for us as new teachers. Teachers in Libya depend on their own experience and there is no support from coordinating teachers at schools. New teachers depend on guide teacher book all the time (Q 39).*

In a semi-structured interview, Rawan supported this claim: '*neither the inspector nor the coordinating teacher has provided me with any comments, suggestions or instructions of how to make assessment*'. Inspectors are teachers who have gained long years of experience in teaching and are appointed by the Ministry of Education to arrange visits to teachers while doing teaching and assessment in the classroom. They are assigned to give reports about teachers' practices. However, this inspection is perceived as unsatisfactory by most of the participants in that the inspectors do not exchange the knowledge they gained from teaching experience with the novice teachers they are observing. In this respect, a questionnaire

respondent viewed the inspectors' experience of language teaching and assessment as a powerful source of knowledge that they need to share with novice teachers: *'I can see inspectors as teachers who have had good experience about teaching and assessment. However, they are not supportive, especially in the matter of language assessment (Q 18)*. Similarly, Alia, Asmaa, Iman and Fareeda reported that the inspectors' passiveness is an important factor that contributes to their lack of knowledge about speaking assessment. Alia, for example, commented on the lack of rapport between her and the inspector: *The inspector doesn't discuss with me the matters related to assessment or even tells me if I'm doing it right or wrong*. Alia's comment was supported by Asmaa who explained the teacher/inspector rapport in her school:

*...he [inspector] doesn't give any instructions about speaking assessment. In fact we haven't had any meetings so we could have the chance to say our suggestions or opinions. He just comes to the class without any advance notice. He made his observation asked the students some questions and then writes some notes in the teachers' registration book in the head teachers' office (SSI)*.

The excerpts above suggest that these novice teachers commence teaching and assessment practices without any interaction with their peers who have had considerable experience in teaching. Interestingly, however, the findings indicate that some of these novice teachers seem to build pseudo-concepts about speaking assessment, which they gained through interaction with more experienced teachers who still cling to the traditional methods of language assessment. For example, Rawan said:

*When I started teaching speaking this year, I asked the teachers who have more experience about the teaching of speaking. Some said they teach it as if it was a reading skill in that the students read the dialogue and answer the questions below it. Therefore, I made my own decision that I divided the mark for oral and written tests (SSI)*.

In much the same vein, a questionnaire respondent commented:

*I wanted to carry out speaking tests to assess students' speaking performances, my colleagues who are more experienced in teaching speaking discouraged me from doing that saying 'speaking is tested in written tests, so don't waste your time' (Q 15)*.

#### 5.2.4.1.1.2 Lack of teacher training activities

75% of the participants stated that the lack of teacher training activities has contributed to their insufficient knowledge of speaking assessment. According to the findings, the participating teachers claim to have had no pre-service training in language assessment. Rawan commented on the lack of modules on pedagogic principles and practices of language teaching and assessment at English departments in higher institutes and faculties:

*We do need training programmes. In the undergraduate study, we didn't have any background about teaching methodology or language assessment methods. Most of our subjects were about theoretical linguistics. So what we do in the class is what we learn from our personal experiences (SSI).*

The fact that many of these teachers mention a lack of training and monitoring support for the recent changes to assessment indicates that they have a sense that their knowledge and practice of speaking assessment could be improved.

Amira also claimed the lack of language assessment modules on her undergraduate programme contributed to her poor knowledge about speaking assessment. She said that novice teachers appear to adopt the traditional methods of language teaching and assessment used by their instructors:

*I didn't learn anything about how to make assessment in the classroom when I was a student at university. That is the problem of all Libyan teachers. They need training. How can we expect them to teach speaking and assess it when the teachers themselves were taught in a very traditional way? They need to change their thinking and their beliefs in order to change their classroom practice (SSI).*

Interestingly, Amira alluded to an important issue: the urgent need to initiate a change in the teachers' beliefs and values about language teaching and assessment, which she sees as traditional. This may imply that Amira has awareness of the influence of the traditional methods on the way teachers perceive language assessment in that she made a link between teachers' beliefs and the methods used for teaching and assessment. She refers to teachers' previous learning experiences as an influential factor in shaping teachers' attitudes towards speaking assessment. This perspective is illustrated by Lamya and Suhila, who referred to their previous learning experiences when they talked about rote memorisation. This is an



illustrative excerpt from an interview with Suhila:

*I think that for students to learn a dialogue, they do not only need to understand the language but also to memorise the dialogue. Understanding in itself is not enough. This what we actually were required to do when we studying at university in that we were asked to learn the sheets by heart, and we were tested on those sheets (Shila: SSI).*

*Based on my learning experience when I was a student, I think rote memorisation is a good technique that makes the students learn the language utterances correctly and that helped them to gain good marks in the test (Lamya: SSI).*

It seems clear from the excerpts above that Lamya and Suhila's current knowledge of the assessment process reflects their notions of spoken language. When offering opinions on types of assessment, they drew on their own memories of assessment.

While Rawan and Amira raised the issue of lack of language assessment courses in language institutes and faculties, Hana sees Libyan teachers' lack of knowledge of speaking assessment as resulting from the lack of in-service training programmes and workshops:

*Our teachers need to be regularly trained during the academic year. What about workshops? Why doesn't the Ministry of Education support the teachers and provide them with workshops that can be given by experienced native speaker teachers? Our teachers need to be exposed to the internet and EFL teacher magazines (SSI).*

Lamya is another participant who highlighted the importance of training programmes, although she stated that teachers' lack of knowledge of assessment is due to their poor English language proficiency.

*The main problem in the teaching English language is speaking. This may be because the teachers in this country lack the skill to speak English properly. So, I think that most of the English language teachers in Libya need English language courses, especially in speaking (SSI).*

Alia also sees her inadequate knowledge as a consequence of lack ongoing teacher training programmes:

*I know that it is logical to use the oral tests to assess speaking, but the problem is how to do it. I think this is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to offer teachers workshops and training programmes about language assessment (SSI).*

#### **5.2.4.1.2 Political context**

In contrast to the responses given in the questionnaire, the semi-structured interviews imply that the participating teachers as individuals in their society perceive themselves to be lacking any agency, and this, from their perspective, impacted their knowledge of speaking assessment. Two participants talked about the state of marginalisation, claiming to be recipients of external resolutions imposed on them. Amira said *'All the Libyans know that all decisions are made by Gaddafi and his loyalists while other Libyan people do not have voice at all!'* (SSI). In addition, she alluded to the lack of teachers' empowerment in selecting the mechanism used for speaking assessment: *'If I was given a chance to say whether speaking assessment should be written or oral, I would definitely say it should be assessed and tested orally'* (SSI). Fareeda also considered the imposition of written tests a top-down policy: *'I'm not happy with the policy saying that speaking should be assessed in written forms. However, we have to follow the rules as it's said 'making decisions is for the strong'* (SSI). It also seems that not only were the opinions, attitudes and beliefs of the teachers marginalised, but also those of the inspectors. According to Mona:

*I had a discussion with the inspector about this matter, and I suggested that final exam could be divided into written and oral tests so that student could have the chance to be tested orally in speaking. However, he said that was a decision made by the ministry and we can't change it (SSI).*

Alia, Hana, and Lamya attributed their inability to gain sufficient knowledge about speaking assessment to the socio-political context, which they described as dictator-based. In this regard, Alia claimed:

*(...) all decisions were announced in Gaddafi speeches in which he came up with individual resolutions that must be applied on the ground, and lots of these decisions are related to educational system. We as teachers must follow what we are told, we don't have opportunities to discuss any issues and that's the case for all the Libyans. I think this has influenced*

*our abilities to develop our skills of teaching in general and assessment in particular (SSI).*

And Hana stated:

*'We didn't get used to have dialogue culture through which we could express our thoughts and reflect on issues, especially that is related to the political concerns. In my opinion this has a negative impact on my knowledge of assessment' (SSI).*

In addition to marginalisation, blackout policy is viewed by five participants as another strategy that the previous political regime adopted in order to achieve certain outcomes and, from their perspectives, this appears to have had a far-reaching impact on their conceptualisation of teaching and assessment. For example, Fareeda is one of the participants who explicitly blamed the former political regime for the dissemination of that policy:

*I think Gaddafi's regime had a hand in making teachers lack knowledge of language teaching and assessment methods. All the educational policies were based on the systematic policies which aimed at ignorance and lack of awareness. There was no development, no knowledge, and our voices are not heard even in or out of schools (SSI).*

In a similar vein, Amira pointed out:

*I believe the education sector in the former regime was total chaos. New resolutions used to be announced by ministry of education now and then without taking into account whether there might be any potential drawbacks (...) All these resolutions were made without any prior study. I think all that chaos was deliberately orchestrated by the former political regime (SSI).*

Interestingly, these participants' opinions about the political context were not offered in responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. This might be because the questions in the questionnaire were designed in a way that did not allow the participants to mention other contextual factors. While I raised a number of contextual factors that stemmed from literature, I did not think of the political context as being a potential influential factor. This may be because I, personally, come from a context where political issues should not be addressed or criticised. However, in the semi-structured interviews, I decided

that more open questions would give more opportunities for the participants to talk about the contextual factors that they may perceive as influencing their knowledge and practice. Due to the unanticipated changes in the political context of the present study, some of the participants seem to view this as an influential factor. This may raise the importance of considering teachers' views of the contexts where they work.

#### **5.2.4.2 Teachers' views on the impact of contextual factors on their speaking assessment practices**

The qualitative data indicate that other contextual factors were reported to have an influence on the participating teachers' speaking assessment practices, namely the use of written tests, lack of managerial (institutional) follow-up, ill-equipped classrooms, time barrier and curriculum length, and class size. These will be presented in the following sub-sections.

##### **5.2.4.2.1 The use of the written tests in the assessment of speaking**

The participating teachers reported in the semi-structured interviews that they were obliged to conduct written tests in order to implement decisions imposed by the Ministry of Education, thus making written tests the main tool used for the assessment of students' speaking performance. As Suhila pointed out:

*Within the educational policy, mid-term tests and final exams in speaking must be written and they have the biggest mark of the total score, but just very few marks given to students' participation in the classroom (SSI).*

Seven participants claimed that this policy is one of the most influential factors that contributed to their lack of knowledge and therefore affected their practice. According to Amira:

*As a teacher of speaking I have to prepare a written test to assess students' speaking performance, so why do I need to look for oral tasks or techniques that show how to assess speaking? (SSI).*

Amira clearly blamed the policy as it results in a lack of motivation to develop her knowledge and skills about speaking assessment. This demotivation seems to be reflected in her practice, in that she said that she mainly employs written tests. Fareeda also expressed her

concerns about the use of written tests, highlighting the issue of marginalisation and lack of voice on the part of the teachers. She pointed out:

*In my first year of teaching, I was really interested in teaching speaking and using assessment tasks that require pair and group works. However, I was informed by the inspector that I need to prepare written tests in order to assess speaking! Unfortunately, we have to follow the rules (SSI).*

Interestingly, however, the findings indicate that although the participants blamed educational policies regarding the imposition of written tests in the assessment of speaking, most of the participants viewed this policy as appropriate and practical (see Section 5.2.3.3). Suhila, Iman, Lamya, Amira, Freeda, Asmaa and Rawan explicitly referred to the advantages of the use of written tests in the assessment of speaking. Suhila said that *'this policy has a positive side'* (SSI). Although Fareeda and Amira expressed their concerns about the negative impact this policy has on their knowledge, they seem to see the positive side of it. Amira supports Suhila's attitude towards the use of written tests:

*The good thing is that it makes the student memorise dialogues and phrases, and practise them in writing helps students to learn how to speak English language (Amira: SSI)*

Fareeda believes this policy is practical:

*In terms of time, I think oral language tests are time consuming in a sense that teachers need to assess students' individually, while in written test all the students will assessed at the same time (SSI).*

These findings may indicate that, although the teachers blame this policy, they implicitly seem to prioritise the use of written tests over oral language tests in the assessment of speaking. Reflecting on the participants' attitudes towards the written tests, I believe that these teachers referred predominantly to contextual factors that they perceive as impacting on their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment.

#### **5.2.4.2.2 Lack of managerial (institutional) follow-up**

A further issue is the lack of managerial follow-up, which they consider as a contextual factor that has impacts on their assessment practices in numerous ways, including lack of standardised oral language assessment, undervaluing of speaking classes and poor teaching

quality. These impacts are discussed below and illustrated with excerpts of the participants' views.

- ***Lack of standardised oral language assessment***

Lack of standardised oral language assessment was raised in the questionnaire with 28 (36.8%) of the participants considering this a major factor affecting their knowledge and practice. It could be speculated that the majority of the participants seem to consider written tests to be the standardised form of oral language assessment that they need to conduct. According to the findings from the semi-structured interviews, this is seen as a manifestation of managerial negligence, impacting primarily on novice teachers, who need to base their practices on clear pedagogical principles. As Mona admitted:

*When I started teaching speaking, I was so confused and I was always asking myself 'how speaking could be taught and assessed?' (...) there is no clear plan of how to make speaking assessment, what do I need and don't need to focus on? I tried to use many strategies. The administrative staff doesn't know what is going on into the classroom (SSI).*

Alia expressed her lack of confidence when conducting speaking assessment due to the lack of standardised criteria, pointing out:

*I'm doing it myself. I'm not sure whether the methods I'm using are right or wrong. For me the assessment is just think, guess and apply (SSI).*

In the opinion of Mona and Alia school administrations build a barrier between them and the teachers in that they do not seem to be fully alert to the challenges teachers encounter while implementing speaking assessment. The reliance on written tests may mean that school administrations do not take this issue into consideration.

- ***Undervaluing of speaking classes***

Further evidence of lack of managerial follow up can be found in the undervaluing of speaking classes. Three out of ten participants seem to exploit speaking classes in order to teach writing instead. According to Rawan:

*I'm teaching speaking and writing so I sometimes take time from speaking classes in order to teach them writing. Writing lessons require much time in order to do the tasks (SSI).*

This impacts on these teachers' assessment practices in that they lack sufficient time for speaking tasks in the classroom. This may be a consequence of a number of interrelated factors, some of which are contextual, such as managerial negligence and the dominance of pencil and paper tests, and others perceptual, such as teachers' attitudes. All these factors seem to be perceived to have a direct impact on these teachers' speaking assessment practices in the classroom, as is apparent in Rawan's belief that writing should be given priority over speaking.

- ***Poor teaching and low level of students' language of competency***

Four out of ten participants reported that secondary school administrations do not take into consideration the need to develop the quality of teaching. In this respect, these participants made a link between poor quality of teaching and learning outcomes on the one hand, and their speaking assessment practices on the other. According to Fareeda:

*When I started teaching year three, I'm supposed to prepare students for practising speaking at a higher educational level, but I found myself teaching the basics that are supposed to be taught in year one and year two because most of the students are weak at many aspects of the language . This means school administration doesn't follow up what's going on inside the classrooms. They don't check if the learning objectives are achieved or not (SSI).*

Alia also alluded to the poor teaching quality, highlighting teachers' lack of language skills:

*I think the administration needs to make observation and check how teaching is carried out in the classrooms. This affects me as a teacher when I do speaking assessment when the students are so weak because they weren't taught properly in previous years (SSI).*

These teachers seem to attribute unsatisfactory learning outcomes to the poor quality of teaching. Suhila, Fareeda, Amira and Lamy all consider students' low level of language competencies a hindering factor in applying oral tests for the assessment of speaking. In their

opinion, the issue of poor teaching quality originates in primary and preparatory levels, where students fail to learn English effectively and properly. As a consequence, most of the students who are registered in what is called the 'English Language Division' at secondary school level are below the required level regarding the curriculum objectives. These issues have negative impacts on their practices, as claimed by Amira:

*Some of them [student] can't even recognise between capital and small letters, although they've started learning English since year five in primary schools (...) The students faced a big problem, especially in learning how to speak English (SSI).*

In addition to the issue of poor teaching quality, Suhila and Fareeda criticised the criteria on which students are registered in the 'English Language Division' in secondary schools, claiming that they are not based on students' interests and motivations to learn the language, but on the marks they gained in the preparatory school reports. As Suhila explained:

*Students are registered to study English language in secondary schools because their highest marks in a preparatory level were in English language. I think this is an unsuccessful policy because students had a highest mark in English language doesn't necessarily mean that students have learnt the basics about grammar, reading, and writing (SSI).*

#### **5.2.4.2.3 Ill-equipped classrooms**

Four out of ten participants claimed that the lack of technical equipment in the classroom affects their speaking assessment practices. Devices such as audio-recorder and television sets are considered beneficial in some speaking assessment tasks. As Lamya said:

*TV sets are very important. The teacher can bring real materials that enable the students to watch real events and situations. This would help the teacher to use a variety of speaking assessment tasks (SSI).*

This view was supported by Hana:

*The teacher can use the audio-recorder by making a student listen to a story (...) and ask him to retell the story. Video-tapes are important as well. The teacher can make students watch some events and ask students to make discussions or to give reports about certain events. On earth, such things are not available in our classrooms (SSI).*

The shortage of technical facilities was clearly noticed in the classrooms where the observations were conducted, where frequently the only facility available is the white board.



In one of the observed sessions, the students were giving presentations and were bringing their own laptops and data display screens, with the result that considerable time was consumed by the teacher and the students in setting-up these devices. As Fareeda commented:

*...we don't have visual aids to teach language skills, especially speaking. For example, when the students did a presentation task, some of my students prepared the presentation slides and wanted to use a data show. I hate to say that the school lacks such technical facilities, so I found it really hard to get one. What is worse, there are no plugs in the class to plug in the device as they all don't work (SSI).*

Libyan secondary school classrooms also lack network access. Iman stated: *'I wish we could have computer labs and are linked to the internet. The teacher can ask the students to search for a topic and read it and then we can make a discussion about what they have read (SSI).* Fareeda, on the other believed language laboratories are essential technical tools for the assessment of students' aural and oral performances; she pointed out that *'the availability of language labs in our schools would make much difference as that would help teachers who teach lab work, pronunciation and speaking to use audio tapes in assessing students' listening and speaking performance (SSI).* Apart from technical facilities, Rawan alluded to the lack of supporting teaching and learning materials that help in the assessment process:

*We don't use visual aids very often. This is because the school doesn't provide stationery. The teachers depend so much on writing on the board....For example the teacher could use posters, pictures, charts, or small pieces of paper in the assessment of students in pairs or groups. However, such materials aren't available in our classroom (SSI).*

#### **5.2.4.2.4 Time barrier and curriculum length**

Time barrier and curriculum length also appear to be seen as other contextual factors that have an impact on participating teachers' practices of speaking assessment in the classroom. Most of the participants claimed that the number of the sessions allocated for speaking is not sufficient to cover all the speaking lessons in the skills book. In this respect, Iman commented:

*It is a matter of the limited time and the long curriculum. Speaking tasks entail using pair and group works, making discussions, giving an opportunity*

*for the student to talk for a couple of minutes or so... I can't use these tasks to assess students' speaking performance. If I used these tasks, I would also find it difficult to complete the curriculum (SSI).*

When asked about speaking tasks that require pair and group work, some participants admitted that they omit these tasks because of time pressure. Rawan pointed out that *'time isn't even enough to practise the tasks in the book. I sometimes skip some tasks that need much work in order to save time to teach the whole lesson' (SSI)*, while Iman commented:

*I skip them and I don't do them because of the lack of time. I used the group work only two times in this term. It was really good experience and the students liked it. However, I'm more concerned about finishing the curriculum, while the students are assessed through the written tests only (SSI).*

Suhila alluded to the time factor in the way she associated the dominant use of traditional methods of teaching with the low level of students' language competency:

*The tasks are designed in a way that makes the students do the task and the teacher's role is just as a guide. They are also designed for intermediate level in that students are supposed to have a solid background about the basics of English language. However, because a great number of the students aren't up to the required level, teachers don't follow the instructions given for conducting the tasks. Rather, they find themselves use the traditional methods of teaching in that they explain the whole lesson while students just receive information. Accordingly, the students are asked to memorise what are in the lessons in order to be tested on. Another constraint is that conducting such tasks require much time while the duration of the class is only 45 minutes (SSI).*

Suhila mentioned a number of contextual factors related to the dominance of traditional methods of English language teaching and time constraints that she perceived as exerting an influence on teachers' assessment practices.

#### **5.2.4.2.5 Class size**

The questionnaire indicate that 66 (86.6%) of the participants stated that the number of the students in the classrooms affects their speaking assessment practices. Data from the open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews confirmed this finding, with most of the participants commenting on the difficulties they encounter while conducting some speaking tasks. As one questionnaire respondent commented, *'the number of the students has an*

*influence in terms of many factors. Firstly, the time of the class is not enough to give each student to speak in the class. Secondly, I cannot use assessment tasks that require much time (Q 47). Another pointed out:*

*Class size is a big issue for me. It's not helpful to do an oral test for 50 students in one day. I have to divide them into sessions, sometimes three and that means spending more time and effort in assessing than in teaching new lessons which will be forward accumulated. (Q 65)*

In the semi-structured interviews, Asmaa suggested that a class of thirty five students is challenging in the sense that it is '*difficult to use speaking assessment tasks that require a group work*'; '*When I assess 15 students is much more convenient than when I assess 25*' (SSI). Lamya provided the example of a presentation as one of the tasks that cannot be conducted in large classes:

*Some assessment tasks such as oral presentation can't be used in a class of 60 students. When I taught this class, I found the use of a written test was an appropriate option as I didn't have enough time to assess the students orally (SSI).*

The issue of class size was also seen as a problem in that it prevents these teachers from organising seating in a way that meets the requirements of some speaking tasks. For example, a questionnaire respondent commented '*the class size restricted me to distribute seats to make them more appropriate for a certain speaking task*' (Q 18).

#### **5.2.4.2.6 Workload and low income**

The semi-structured interviews elicited data relating to the issues of low income and workload as crucial factors that these teachers reported having an impact on their speaking assessment practices. In this regard, Fareeda commented '*(...) income is considered an important factor (...). What do you expect from a teacher teaching 16 hours a week and earning low income?*' Suhila also speaks of the low salaries that Libyan teachers in government sectors earn: '*they [salaries] are considered as a source of depression for teachers in a sense that they make teachers lose the motives to do their best in the classroom*'.

Lamya and Hana raised the matter of long hours of teaching as another issue, mentioning the decision by the Ministry of Education to reduce the number of primary and secondary school

teachers, while keeping a few teachers who were assigned 18 hours of instruction instead of 10 hours per week. Due to their reduced number, teachers were required to teach different language skills at different levels, as explained by Hana:

*In the year before last, the Ministry of Education issued a decision stating that there would be cut down in the number of teachers. Therefore, each teacher started to teach 16 or 18 classes per week. One teacher was teaching speaking, reading and grammar for year one and year two (SSI).*

Hana accused the Ministry of Education of making a very poor decision:

*That was a very bad decision in a sense that the teachers lost concentration and energy because they were teaching different topics to different levels. So teachers use the traditional methods of teaching and paper and pencil tests to make life easy for them since the use of communicative methods of teaching and assessment need a lot of preparation (SSI).*

Lamya also commented on the negative impacts the decision had on teachers' attitudes and practices of assessment.

*Another problem is that the teacher is required to teach different skills for the same class. I think this has a negative impact on the teachers' ability to teach each skill effectively and properly (...). The teacher can't focus on two skills at the same time in terms of using different language activities in teaching and assessing students' language performance (SSI).*

Rawan considered that her speaking assessment practices would be more developed if she were assigned to teach only speaking:

*...the teacher needs to teach one skill such as speaking so that he or she can do better, teach better, prepare the tasks better, and assess better. Now I am teaching grammar, writing and speaking, so I feel that I could do better, if I was teaching speaking only (SSI).*

From the findings above, it is clear that these teachers blame sources outside of themselves for the difficulty they experience with speaking assessment in classroom settings. That is, they see the context as playing an influential role in their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. This may lead us to speculate that these teachers filter speaking assessment practices according to what they perceive to be feasible and appropriate in their context.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented quantitative and qualitative analysis of the findings based on the research questions of the current study. The findings show that the participants' current knowledge of speaking assessment seems to be varied in terms of the beliefs and values they hold about the principles of speaking assessment and the mechanism by which these principles are addressed. The findings also indicate that the participants view context a contributing factor in their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. These findings will be discussed and interpreted in the following chapter.

# Chapter Six: Discussion

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## **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter firstly discusses the major themes that emerged in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of analysis (Section 6.1). Secondly, the chapter presents the theoretical implications of the present study, in which I will discuss the complexity of novice EFL teachers' knowledge with reference to the practice of oral language assessment in classroom settings (Section 6.2). Following this, I discuss how the present study contributes to knowledge in the field of teachers' knowledge of language assessment and knowledge in the research of speaking assessment.

## **6.1 The discussion of the emergent themes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle**

This section identifies and discusses three emergent themes that may contribute to our understanding of teachers' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in classroom settings. These themes relate to the way teachers seem to prioritise linguistic skills over communicative language skills, and summative assessment over formative assessment; they also relate to the way these teachers' practices of speaking assessment seem to be based more on their understandings of speaking as a language skill (content) rather than on their understandings of assessment (process). In the discussion of these themes, I sometimes refer to teachers' views on the role the context plays in their current knowledge of speaking assessment. Under each emergent theme, I illustrate my interpretation by providing a description of teachers' understandings of speaking assessment and what they said about it. It is worth mentioning that my interpretation of the participants' understandings about speaking assessment is informed by social constructionism in that I attempt to understand the phenomenon under study through the participants' multiple perspectives and interpretations of speaking assessment. In order to gain a deeper understanding of their interpretations, I attempt to be reflexive, bearing in mind that there is no one true interpretation and that such interpretations do not seek validation. In addition, I attempt to take a socio-cultural stance in the understanding of teachers' perspectives and interpretations of the phenomenon under study.

### 6.1.1 Prioritising linguistic skills over communicative language skills

Drawing on the analysis of the findings in the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, most of the participants in the present study seem to place more emphasis on linguistic skills in the assessment of students' oral language performance in that they perceive it as important to assess students' metalinguistic knowledge. The majority referred to language elements such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation as important. This was clearly evident in the way the participants expressed their concerns about these language elements. For instance, perspectives such as '*I found it important to focus on grammar*' (**Iman, SSI**), '*I think grammar is very important*' (**Suhila, SSI**), '*...vocabulary and grammar are important categories*' (**Amira, SSI**) are frequently expressed. Although these teachers refer to the importance of grammar and vocabulary, their perspectives showed different degrees of importance attached to these elements. It could be inferred from Iman and Amira's perspectives that they actually considered grammar an important element in their speaking assessment practices. Suhila, on the other hand, expressed her beliefs about the importance of the assessment of grammar. Alia explicitly identified the criteria through which she assessed students' oral language performance: '*I can see if they are good at grammar,... good at using vocabulary and pronunciation*' (**SSI**). Fareeda is another participant who highlights the importance of assessing students' metalinguistic knowledge: '*...they [students] should have enough knowledge about vocabulary*' (**SSI**). Another indication showing teachers' prioritisation of the assessment of linguistic elements is the mechanism they said they use in the assessment of these language skills. In this regard, Alia claimed an association between the assessment of students' oral language performance with '*their ability to produce grammatical and meaningful utterance when they speak English language*'. Iman puts emphasis on the students' use of tenses when they speak. Like Iman, Suhila expressed her concerns about '*grammatical mistakes*' that students make while they do speaking activities.

These findings are consistent with the results of many studies conducted in EFL contexts (e.g., Cohen & Fass, 2001; Muñoz et al. 2003; Shohamy et al., 2008; Wach, 2012), in that the participants in my research appear to view students' language-analytic ability as an important measure of their learning outcome, and knowledge of grammar and vocabulary appears to be perceived as the main indicator of learners' achievements (Shohamy et al.,

2008). This is clearly reflected in some participants' understanding of language assessment in that they perceive rote memorisation of grammatical rules and the construction of correct sentences to be important aspects in the assessment of students' language performance. On the other hand, these findings are in contrast to those of Muñoz et al. (2003), which indicate that teachers' justifications for considering grammar as a main component in the assessment of students' linguistic skills derive from their view that grammar is a tool to facilitate language learning. Vocabulary assessment also seems to be perceived as important. Most of the participants seem to support Luoma's (2004) notion of the assessment of vocabulary that highlights the importance of considering the 'speaker's richness of lexicon' (p.16) and Iwashita et al's (2008) perspective regarding language learners' appropriate use of vocabulary.

However, the diverse ways in which the participants in this study express their current understandings and interpretations of what it is important to consider in language assessment, as indicated in the previous chapter, highlight the need to recognise the social constructionist realities that are reflected in the teachers' different perspectives and the ways they interpret their implementations of assessment within their contexts. That is, despite their focuses on the linguistic skills, these teachers viewed language elements from different perspectives. For instance, words such 'meaningful', 'appropriate' and 'good' are used by some of the participants to describe the importance of these elements. The way they use these words suggests that these teachers hold impressionistic views about these language elements and this was clearly evident in the findings. Alia, as cited above, referred to '*grammatical and meaningful utterances*', apparently viewing the learning of grammatical structures as a benchmark that helps students produce 'meaningful' utterances. Lamya finds it '*important*' to learn a considerable amount of vocabulary, Alia is concerned about the '*good*' use of vocabulary, and Suhila sees memorising grammatical rules as '*essential*'. Hana and Mona are the only participants who used the words '*meaningful*' and '*proper way*' to refer to the importance of assessing grammar in a communicative way.

These findings suggest that seeking to understand teachers' perception of language assessment results in a mosaic of teacher knowledge that brings together the pieces of their current knowledge to shape a colourful picture of what is perceived to be important in



assessment. In other words, this mosaic of teachers' understandings reveals that these teachers hold different beliefs and values about assessment and such beliefs seem to play a role in their conceptualisations of what is important to be considered in speaking assessment. These findings can be seen to add further weight to the growing body of literature which recognises the importance of considering the complexity of teacher knowledge of assessment in classroom settings.

While most of the participants seem to prioritise the assessment of linguistic skills, very few participants emphasised the assessment of communicative language skills. For instance, Mona is the only participant who frequently highlights the importance of considering communicative skills in the assessment of students' language performance and this was clearly reflected in her experiential knowledge of speaking assessment in the classroom setting. Looking at the findings of the present study, it could be speculated that the tendency towards the assessment of linguistic skills seems to be linked to the dominant use of pencil and paper tests, which may influence these teachers' current knowledge about speaking assessment. Another layer of interpretation might be that these teachers, especially those who prioritise the assessment of linguistic skills, perceive the linguistic skills to be more important for their students, who are learning English as a foreign language. Reflecting on these findings, I believe that these teachers might have provided further interpretations about the ways they view language assessment if I had asked them about what they meant by 'meaningful' and 'proper way'. However, their interpretations of different issues related to speaking assessment tasks, constructs and assessment categories helped me gain a good understanding about how they conceptualise speaking assessment.

### **6.1.2 Prioritising summative assessment over formative assessment**

Formative language assessment is considered an important aspect in language learning contexts as it assists teachers to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the students' language performance and provides information about students' learning during the term (Black & Wiliam, 1998). The qualitative findings in the previous chapter indicate that the participants seem to hold views similar to those held by EFL teachers in many different contexts: that the participants perceive assessment as a procedure through which grades are

assigned to students' language performance (Muñoz et al., 2003; Wach, 2012). This is another important theme that emerged from the findings: that all the participants, intentionally or unintentionally, seem to prioritise summative assessment over formative assessment. Such a priority is implied in the ways these teachers expressed their current understandings of these forms of assessment.

According to the findings the participants' understandings of formative assessment can be classified under three perspectives. The first perspective sees formative assessment as important but views it through the principles of summative assessment. The second perspective views formative assessment as encroaching on the time of teaching. The third perspective views formative assessment techniques such as student self-assessment and peer assessment as *'inappropriate'*. It is important to mention that these perspectives do not classify the teachers into groups, but rather delineate the diversity in their interpretations.

Mona, Fareeda and Lamyia show positive attitudes towards formative assessment in that they mentioned a number of advantages: *'[it] can show students' development and progress in language learning'* (**Mona: SSI**), *'Formative assessment gives teachers the chance to know more about the students' learning process'* (**Lamyia: SSI**), and *'the teacher can better notice how students' language performance developed, and what areas need to be developed'* (**Fareeda: SSI**). Yet they hold a belief that this type of assessment can serve *'reliable assessment'*, as Fareeda described, it in that it helps them to give scores about students' language performance. That was explicitly illustrated in Lamyia's comment:

*Formative assessment....is also considered a chance for the students gain more marks as they may not do well in the summative assessment (SSI).*

This indicates that these teachers seem to perceive formative assessment from a summative assessment perspective, with both being seen as two sides of the same coin in that they associate *'everyday assessment'* with *'giving a score'*. This is illustrated in the comment from Alia:

*To make all participate, I choose the student to answer the question so that I give him a mark for participation. I make assessment about students' participation in the class during the semester as a formative assessment (SSI).*

These results do not support those of Chang (2006) in that my participants did not report that they used formative assessment to provide feedback to students, or to inform instruction. On the other hand, my participants indicated that they used assessment mainly to generate marks. Such a view reflects that held by participants in other studies by Muñoz et al. (2003) and Wach (2012), in which teachers seemed to perceive assessment as a procedure through which grades are assigned to students.

One of the participants referred to the students' attitudes towards formative assessment as a contextual factor, pointing out that *'the students aren't very interested in such assessments; they need the marks after all'* (**Hana: SSI**). Students' attitudes could be seen as an important factor that might have an influence on how teachers perceive formative assessment in an environment where *'gaining scores'* is the most important achievement. While Hana alluded to students' attitudes as a contextual factor, Lamya, Suhila and Alia considered *'giving grades'* a motivational factor for encouraging students to speak in the classroom. As can be seen in the excerpts, Lamya considered it a chance for students to gain more marks, and Alia considered giving marks an incentive for students to participate. In this respect these teachers' justifications for the importance of summative assessment seem to strikingly resemble those provided by some participants in the study by Muñoz et al (2003). It is interesting that one of these teachers, Amira, refers back to her own experience of being assessed as a student when discussing her perception of summative assessment:

*When I was an undergraduate student, we were only assessed two times during the academic year: a mid-year exam and a final exam. These are considered as summative exams in which we were tested individually: one-to-one. In the final year, however, the lecturer used to put marks on the class participation- this encouraged us as students to take part in the discussions.*

Although Amira is the only participant who referred to her previous learning experiences regarding the dominance of summative assessment, it may be that previous learning experiences play a role in Amira's current understandings of assessment. From another perspective, formative assessment seems to be seen as something not integrated in the teaching process. For instance, Iman, Suhila, Amira, Asmaa, and Rawan raised issues of the length of curriculum and time pressure: *'I rarely use such a type of assessment for two main*

reasons. *The first reason is the time factor....The second reason is the curriculum....is too long'* **(Iman: SSI)**, *'time is not enough for doing daily assessment'* **(Suhila: SSI)**, *'If I do this type of assessment, I can't manage to teach all curriculum'* **(Asmaa: SSI)**. On the surface, these participants believe that these two main contextual factors inhibit them from conducting formative assessment. Undeniably, these can be considered influential constraints that may impact on the mechanism of assessment *per se*. However, it seems that these participants understand formative assessment as a separate entity from teaching and learning. Iman and Suhila implicitly alluded to this by saying that they were more concerned about summative assessment. Here again Suhila supports Hana's perspective with regard to students' attitudes towards formative assessment, stating that *'such assessment [summative assessment] is very important in that it makes the students study hard in order to pass the exam. Without such assessments students would not make effort to study'* **(SSI)**. These findings seem to support those obtained in Wach's (2012) study, in which the participants perceived teaching and assessment to be separate entities. Interestingly, however, there are other perspectives that clearly view formative assessment as *'inappropriate'* and *'unreliable'*. The participants holding such a perspective seem to perceive the use of peer assessment and student-self assessment as unreliable, which may suggest that they view assessment as giving grades. A further reading of these perspectives suggests that these participants seem to connect their understanding of formative assessment with the context where speaking assessment is implemented in that they raised the issue of student attitudes and grades; as Asmaa stated: *'I don't think that would work in our schools, because students are sensitive to each other and they wouldn't accept such a technique in that her work is assessed by her peer'*. She also added *'the students wouldn't confess that they made a mistake in order not to lose marks'*.

It seems clear that these participants perceive formative assessment as something that has negative rather than positive outcomes in that they referred to it as time-consuming and unpopular with some students. Here it may be useful to make a link between these teachers' views about formative assessment and the perception that gaining grades is the main concern for students. Some participants attributed their prioritisation of summative assessment to external factors: Rawan referred to teachers' concerns about preparing

students for large scale examinations prepared by experts in the Ministry of Education, especially those who teach year three, the year of graduation from secondary schools:

*The final exam is prepared by experts in the Ministry of Education as this is the year of graduation from the secondary school level. For this reason, I think that all teachers who teach year three focus on formal tests and exams (SSI).*

From the perspectives above, it seems clear that these teachers perceive summative assessment to be the only effective method for assessing students' language performance. On the surface, this perception may be linked to the issue of accountability in that these teachers seem to be more concerned about assessment from an administrative rather than from a pedagogical point of view, as expressed by Rawan above. However, we should not reject teachers' individual understandings and the way they perceive assessment, as this may reflect their tendencies in relation to what they currently know about assessment. These findings suggest that these teachers' current knowledge seems to be complex and fluid, supporting Borg's (2006) argument regarding '(...) complex interactions among teachers' cognitions and situational factors both inside the classrooms and in the wider institutional and social context' (p. 107).

### **6.1.3 Teachers' practices of speaking assessment based on their understandings of speaking as a language skill (content) rather than on their understandings of assessment (process)**

Another theme that emerged from the findings is related to the participants' speaking assessment practices. Interestingly, the findings indicate that the teachers' conceptualisation of speaking skills and what spoken language is seem to shape, to a considerable degree, how they interpret the purposes and strategies of assessment while implementing speaking assessment. As seen in the themes discussed above, the participants have different understandings of what is to be considered important in the assessment of speaking, and this seems to shape their attitudes towards the use of written tests in the assessment of speaking (see Section 5.2.3.3). Such understandings are clearly reflected in their current knowledge of speaking assessment in that the participants based their understandings on speaking as a language skill rather than on the assessment as a process. In expressing their

conceptualisations and knowledge of speaking assessment, the participants mainly considered language elements to be important aspects in speaking assessment. This could be inferred from the way participants talked about speaking assessment and the way they linked 'assessment' with 'language': *'I think assessment should be based on vocabulary and grammar'* (Amira: SSI), *'through the assessment of students' oral language performance, I can know whether they perform correct grammatical sentences,(...).'* (Lamyia: SSI), *'when the students do speaking in the class, I can see if they are good at grammar,(...).'* (Alia: SSI). Thus, the current understandings of speaking assessment of these participants seem to be different from those held by participants in other studies (e.g., Chang, 2006): while the participants in Chang's study viewed speaking assessment as a process through which they could enhance students' learning ability, the participants in my research gave more emphasis to language content in the assessment of speaking. Bearing in mind the contextual factors, it could be speculated that the idea of practising speaking assessment in the classroom is still new to Libyan EFL secondary school teachers, especially in a context where the pencil and paper exam is the predominant method of language assessment, as the findings indicate. When talking about these tests, the participants reported that they prepare a set of questions, as indicated in Section 5.2.3.2. This may contribute to their current knowledge of the process of assessment in that assessment is perceived to require answering a set of questions on a piece of paper. Here it may be useful to make a link between teachers' understanding of assessment as a concept and their attitudes towards the use of written tests in the assessment of speaking.

According to the findings, these participants hold different attitudes towards the use of written tests, and some of these attitudes seem to be generated from the context where assessment is implemented. Some participants related their prioritisation of written tests to contextual factors such as class size, students' attitudes, and the imposition of educational policies. For instance, Iman, among other participants, explicitly expressed her prioritisation of written tests in the assessment of speaking and this, in turn, seems to influence her current practice with regard to speaking tasks in the classroom: she points out that her students are required *'to prepare their own conversation and write it on a piece of paper, but they don't need to practise the conversation orally in the class. I just assess what they have written'*. On

the other hand, Mona, among very few participants, showed her prioritisation of oral tests in speaking assessment, referring to her previous experiences when she started teaching the curriculum and to the students' positive attitudes towards the use of communicative oral tasks in the assessment of speaking:

*The first year of teaching (...), I used to ask each two students to read the dialogue loudly from the book while the other students were listening (...) I felt this method was quite boring because I felt that students were bored and did not show any sense of interest. Then, I tried another assessment mechanism. I suggested certain topics and wrote them on the board and asked students in pairs to make up a short dialogue. (...) students started to interact and showed a sense of communication (SSI).*

As can be seen, Iman and Mona appear to have different priorities regarding the use of written/oral tests in the assessment of speaking. This may be considered a factor that contributes to their current understanding of assessment. Iman seems to conceptualise assessment through the evaluation of students' language performance, as was evident when she said 'I just assess what they have written', as well as in the way she frequently refers to the importance of assessing language elements such as grammar and vocabulary, as the findings elsewhere indicate. However, Mona seems to perceive assessment of speaking as both content and a process.

The only assessment strategy mentioned by the participants is 'rote memorisation', which most view as a good strategy for assessing students' language competence. Suhila is one of the participants who frequently talked about its importance:

*I ask them to revise certain lessons that were explained previously and ask them some questions, focusing on students' ability to speak and memorise certain points in those lessons. I see memorising certain points in speaking lessons such as dialogues, fixed expressions and definitions are very important. This is because students are learning a foreign language so I keep telling them once you understand the dialogue, for example, they should memorise it (SSI).*

Lamya, Alia, Asmaa and Iman also perceive rote memorisation as an effective method of speaking assessment. Alia said:

*I usually ask the students to study two lessons and memorise the pieces of conversation in those lessons. In the day of the assessment, I ask two or three of the students to practise the dialogue in front of the class. I also ask them to memorise some definitions for certain terms. I still find this as a way of practising the speaking (SSI).*

In the excerpt above, Alia indicates that, although she used pair and group work as an assessment process, she placed emphasis on rote memorisation as an assessment strategy. Mona, on the other hand, is the only participant who talked about pair and group work as an assessment strategy for assessing students' oral language performance, claiming that the use of this strategy helps weak students to develop their linguistic and communicative language skills, as was observed in her speaking assessment practices.

The way in which these participants placed more focus on the content of the assessment than the process of its implementation suggests a limited understanding of the purposes of assessment. Thus their implementation of the process may be more influenced by this narrow understanding than by the contextual factors they mentioned such as class size, ill-equipped classes, time factor, workload and low income. Undeniably, such factors may have the potential to exert an influence on their assessment practices. However, their focus on the content rather than the process of assessment leads us to believe that it may not be straightforward to make claims about the influence of the context on their assessment practices. That is, their current understandings of spoken language seem to contribute to their current practice of speaking assessment.

The findings of the present study provide further understanding of EFL novice teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment. In particular, they clearly illustrate the complexity of teacher knowledge reflected in the diverse ways these teachers express their understandings of speaking assessment. The literature shows that investigation into EFL teachers' perception of language assessment and their perceptions of themselves as



assessors helps to understand the reality of assessment practices in the classroom (Al-shara'h, Abu Nabaah, & Khazouz, 2011; Estaji, 2012; Rea-Dickens, 2004; Rogers, Cheng & Hu, 2007; Shohamy, Inbar-Lourie & Poehner, 2008). The present study shows that understanding teachers' perception of language assessment enables us to gain further insight into teachers' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment.

## **6.2 Theoretical implications of the study**

The main purpose of this study was to gain further understanding of EFL novice teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment and the extent to which such knowledge informs their practice of speaking assessment in secondary school classroom settings. In my understanding of human knowledge I adopted a socio-cultural perspective, which views knowledge as socially constructed. In Chapter 3, I argued that the literature on speaking assessment has been mainly based on the investigation of psychometric approaches to speaking assessment in that the focus was on the validity and reliability of speaking assessment carried out by raters and teachers while using speaking tasks and rating scales. These investigations were based on the cognitive theoretical perspective in the understanding and examining of teachers' implementation of speaking assessment.

In order to broaden my understanding of the theoretical framework of knowledge, I reviewed the Vygotskian perspective, which sees knowledge as socially constructed; human mental functioning is perceived as mediated cognition that is a consequence of the individuals' interactions with cultural artefacts they encounter in the social environment. It focuses on the interdependence of the individual and the social world in human learning. In this study, I based my understanding of teachers' knowledge on socio-cultural implications of teacher knowledge, examining teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment in classroom settings.

The principal conceptualisation of teacher knowledge within the socio-cultural standpoint is that language teachers' knowledge is not a simple process in which knowledge transfers from outside in; nor is it purely cognitive in that knowledge takes place only in the individualistic domain. It is rather a complex and dynamic process that emerges out of the interaction of the teacher with the context in which he/she works. Based on this perspective,

the present study was undertaken in a naturalistic setting in order to explore not only what teachers say about what they know but how they use this knowledge. The use of in-depth interviews and observation helped me to gain a nuanced understanding about the context and what impacts teachers believe it has on their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. As stated by McNamara (2001), any research on teacher assessment needs to be undertaken in a classroom setting in order to gain a thorough understanding of the lived experiences of teachers. As indicated in the themes discussed above, the participants' knowledge of speaking assessment seems to be complex in that their understandings of language and assessment seem to influence how they spoke about and used their knowledge in practice. In addition, the participants seem to view the context as an influential factor that plays a role in their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in classroom settings. These will be discussed further below.

### **6.2.1 Complexity of novice EFL teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment**

The findings of this study provide further understandings about the complexity of teacher knowledge of assessment. Such complexity was seen in the different ways these teachers interpreted the concept of speaking assessment and in the ways they expressed their beliefs and values regarding how speaking assessment needs to be or is implemented in the classroom settings. They further indicate the value of social constructionism in the understanding of teacher knowledge of language assessment as it shows the mosaic of teachers' content knowledge of assessment. Previous studies in novice teacher knowledge of assessment addressed the extent of the participants' ability to provide pedagogical reasoning about their assessment practices (e.g., Maclellan, 2004). While the findings in Maclellan's study revealed participants' limited knowledge of assessment methods, the findings of this study indicate the variability in novice teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment. For instance, while exploring teachers' current knowledge of the importance of speaking assessment and their understanding of the curriculum objectives, it was clear from the findings that these teachers show varying degrees of understandings regarding the reformed curriculum's main objectives and principles of the assessment of speaking. This variation is also reflected in their knowledge of speaking assessment constructs, tasks and speaking criteria, ranging from those who focus on the assessment of

the linguistic aspects of speaking to those who view the assessment of speaking from a communicative standpoint. Another indication of variability is the mosaic of their knowledge of formative and summative assessment. However, as indicated above, despite variability in teachers' knowledge and practice, the findings indicate that these teachers seem to base their assessment practice on their views of spoken language being more about linguistic content rather than communicative effect. In addition, these teachers mostly seem to afford more importance to summative assessment than to formative assessment in that they give priority to the official assessment tasks over any form of assessment that might support their teaching. They also have a view of assessment that seems to focus on the content to be assessed rather than on the process of assessment.

These findings may lead us to the need to understand the issue of *variability* in teachers' knowledge and the way they *prioritise* one assessment aspect over the other. In order to gain a deeper understanding, I believe I need to connect between the issue of variability and prioritisation on the one hand, and these teachers' views of the role of context on their knowledge and practice on the other. On the surface, it could be interpreted that the variability in teachers' knowledge may reflect their individual understanding of how language needs to be assessed while their prioritisation of certain assessment aspects seems, to some extent, informed by a number of institutional factors that teachers perceive to influence their knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. For instance, students' attitudes were seen as one of the institutional factors that influences the way some of these teachers prioritise summative assessment over formative assessment. Another institutional factor that participants perceived to have an influence on their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment was the imposition of written tests in the assessment of speaking. It could be speculated that such an assessment policy seems to have influenced the ways teachers prioritise the assessment of linguistic skills and the ways they promote the use of summative assessment. The participants reported that the summative assessment of students' speaking skill should be based on paper-and-pencil tests in that they need to conduct two written tests during the term and a final test at the end of the term. The findings indicate that the main concern of most of the teachers was to prepare the students for the large scale school exams which take place at the end of the academic year. The written tests

for speaking that were provided by some of the participants seem to be very similar in content and format to those designed by the MOE for the summative assessment (see 5.2.3.2). This is similar to Riazi and Razavipour's (2011) study, which indicated that the participants' construction of tests followed the same pattern of the final examination and never deviated from the summative centralised exams (see section 5.2.3.2). Furthermore, the same influence was observed in the teacher's use of speaking tasks in the classroom (see Section 5.2.3.1). These findings are consistent with those obtained in Orafi and Borg's (2009) study, in which a number of Libyan EFL teachers talked about the content of the exams designed for summative assessment, where the focus was on grammar and reading while listening, speaking and writing were neglected. The way participants justified their implementation of these tasks in speaking assessment seems to resonate with the findings obtained in Orafi and Borg's study, in which the three Libyan secondary school teachers 'were filtering the content and pedagogy of the new curriculum according to what they felt was feasible and desirable in their context' (p. 250).

However, a deep reading of the ways these teachers expressed their prioritisation of certain assessment aspects and the way they implement speaking assessment leads us to infer that these seem to be influenced by their understanding of the notion of spoken language rather than by the contextual factors, an issue discussed in Section 6.1. This was clearly reflected in the participants' current knowledge and practices of speaking assessment in the classroom in that they were more concerned about the language content than the assessment process. The findings provide clear instances of the participants' understandings of metalinguistic knowledge of language, the use of rote memorisation, their perception of formative and summative assessment, and their views of the use of written tests in the assessment of speaking. To sum up, taken together, these findings can be seen to generate a better understanding of what EFL novice teachers know about speaking assessment and how such knowledge informs their assessment practices in classroom settings. They suggest that novice teachers' knowledge of language and of assessment goes beyond factual knowledge to their perceptions of language and their understandings of the purpose of assessment. They further indicate that teacher knowledge is a complex notion, within which their current state of knowledge and practice is but a snapshot.

### **6.2.2 Novice EFL teachers' views of the role of context in their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment**

As discussed at the end of Chapter 5, a number of contextual factors were identified. The participants in this study seem to perceive these contextual factors as playing an influential role in their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in that they seem to believe that these factors contribute to their poor knowledge of speaking assessment. The findings indicate that professional development activities were criticised as being inadequate, with the teachers expressing their dissatisfaction with their professional development: some described their knowledge as '*static*' and '*underdeveloped*'. This confirms the findings of Shihiba's (2011) and Orafi and Borg's (2009) studies that took place in the Libyan secondary school context, where participants reported that they did not receive sufficient training to implement the reformed curriculum, nor did they receive any teacher training or practice modules during their university education. Likewise, Elabbar (2013) found the lack of sufficient teacher training to be one of the constraints encountered by Libyan EFL university teachers. Such interesting findings indicate that the lack of teacher training programmes was not only perceived to have influences on teachers' understandings and implementations of teaching methods, as was indicated in Shihiba's (2011) and Orafi and Borg's (2009) studies, but also was perceived to have an influence on knowledge of assessment as reported by the participants of this study. Such an issue was noted in other EFL contexts; for example, Yang's (2008) study found that insufficient teacher education resulted in the little use of classroom assessment tasks by the teachers. However, the present study did not investigate the influence of this contextual factor on teachers' knowledge and implementation. Rather, it examined teachers' views on the role of context and I believe this is important in that it provides further understanding about the influence of context from teachers' perspectives.

In addition, some of the participants reported that they work in an environment lacking any means of social and intellectual interaction through which novice and experienced teachers could build up a dialogical channel, gaining mutual understanding and exchanging beliefs and knowledge related to pedagogical issues about language assessment (see 5.2.4.1.1). This may be linked to lack of support from more experienced teachers (see 5.2.4.1.2), and lack of

managerial (institutional) follow-up (5.2.4.2.2). These novice teachers consider it important to engage in discussion of their beliefs and knowledge of speaking assessment with more experienced teachers such as teacher educators and teacher inspectors. This echoes Yang's (2008) claim that 'experienced teachers could demonstrate to inexperienced teachers how to carry out multiple assessment procedures in the classroom in order to enhance novice teachers' perceived assessment competency' (p.108). The participants in my research support Graham's (2005) study and would have liked the opportunity to share a professional dialogue with more experienced teachers, and to discuss issues about grading, evaluating and assessing students.

However, it could be speculated from the findings of the present study that, however similar the contexts are in some aspects, especially those related to institutional factors mentioned above, teachers' views show the uniqueness of the context in the light of the social, political and institutional factors. For instance, contrary to Troudi et al's study (2009), in which the participants' views about top-down managerial policies were related to the institutional factors, the participants in this study viewed top-down managerial approaches to education in the light of the political intervention. As indicated in the previous chapter, some participants referred to two main socio-political issues that they consider to have had an implicit impact on their current knowledge of speaking assessment: marginalisation and blackout policy. They perceive themselves as recipients implementing policies that are imposed on them. As for the present study, I did not anticipate that the participants would raise the issue of political intervention as an influential factor in their current knowledge of speaking assessment. This is because I have a concept as a Libyan citizen that criticising politics or politicians is a red line that all Libyans should not cross. However, following the Libyan uprising that took place on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2011 and the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, Libyan people seem to have been liberated from the state of fear and political suppression that hindered them from expressing their thoughts, orientations and concerns. I believe that such findings illustrate the importance of understanding how teachers perceive the context in the light of unanticipated social, political and institutional changes.

Bringing together how these teachers prioritise given assessment aspects as discussed in Section 6.1 and their views of the role of context, it is reasonable to speculate that these

participants seem to forge a link between their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment and institutional and political contexts. That is, they seem to interpret their understandings of speaking assessment and what they know about it in the light of the context where they work. This may lead us to say that these teachers have an awareness of their frameworks of knowledge and that these are impacted by the context where they work. In other words, these teachers seem to contextualise their understandings within a social framework. However, it could be also inferred that these teachers may predominantly blame these contextual factors as external to themselves. As interpreted in Section 6.1, these teachers' understanding of the notion of assessment seem to have more influence on their speaking assessment practices than that of the contextual factors that are identified above. Yet, as discussed in the previous section, the context seems to have an influence on how these teachers prioritise the assessment of linguistic over communicative skills, and the use of formative assessment over summative assessment. Thus, although there might not be a straightforward relationship between the influence of context and teachers' assessment practices, I believe that the understanding of teachers' views of the impact of context on their current knowledge and practice is important in that it shows how teachers perceive context. Through these views, we can see the image of context as drawn by the teachers themselves. I believe, this takes our understanding forward in that we can further explore contextual factors that these teachers consider influential in a certain context that might not be necessarily seen as influential in other contexts. Drawing on my understanding of teacher knowledge with a socio-cultural perspective, I can deduce that the findings of this study showed a combined influence of the teachers' current understanding of speaking assessment and their views of the role of context with reference to their speaking assessment practices. This helped me to see these EFL novice teachers' current knowledge as complex and dynamic.

### **6.3 Contribution to knowledge**

The adoption of the socio-cultural perspective as a theoretical framework and social constructionism as a research paradigm makes a useful contribution to theorising teachers' current knowledge and the practice of speaking assessment within mainstream educational research. That is, it helps to generate a better understanding about the mosaic of teachers'

knowledge of assessment in a snapshot of time. The use of multiple methods was particularly helpful in gaining a nuanced understanding of novice EFL teachers' current knowledge of the significance of speaking assessment and in providing insights into *what* teachers know and *how* such knowledge is reflected in their assessment practices in classroom settings.

This findings of this study added further weight to the literature on teachers' understandings of assessment in classroom settings in that they provide useful insights into EFL teachers' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment and how their knowledge informs their assessment practices. In particular, they clearly illustrate the complexity of teacher knowledge that is reflected in the different ways these teachers interpret their understandings of speaking assessment, and that their knowledge informs their assessment practice. They also provide a useful counterbalance to the tendency of much of the literature on speaking assessment which gives more emphasis to the principles and mechanisms of speaking assessment and the measurement of speaking constructs and the validation of speaking tasks and rating scales.

The study has also made an important contribution to an understanding of the ways teachers interpret their notions of assessment, providing further insights into how teachers prioritise the assessment of linguistic over the communicative skills, and the use of summative assessment over the formative assessment in their implementation of speaking assessment. The ways these teachers expressed their prioritisation show us the mosaic of their understanding that can put together the pieces of their current knowledge to shape a colourful picture of what is perceived to be important in speaking assessment. This takes our understanding forward: that these novice teachers' current knowledge of language and of assessment goes beyond factual knowledge to their perceptions of language and their understandings of the purpose of assessment. Thus, this study further illustrates that their understandings of language and assessment seem to influence how they spoke about and used their knowledge in practice.

Another contribution of this study has been its attempt to provide further understandings of the impact of context on teachers' current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. It indicates that while teachers refer to contextual factors that influence how they implement



their knowledge into practice, the way in which these participants placed more focus on the content of the assessment than the process of its implementation may indicate a limited understanding of the purposes of assessment. Thus, their implementation of the process may be more influenced by this narrow understanding than by the contextual factors.

Interestingly, the context of this study is unique in that the country witnessed a revolutionary political change during the period of the study. With the Arab Spring, Libya has recently experienced radical change, especially in its attempt to build a democratic regime. This unanticipated change in the Libyan situation has enabled me to highlight the importance of considering teachers' views of the role of context. Through these views, we can see the image of context as drawn by the teachers themselves. The present study provides further understanding that, although the contexts are similar in some aspects, especially those related to institutional factors, teachers' views show the uniqueness of the context, especially in the light of the unanticipated social, political and institutional changes. As indicated in the findings of this study, the context seems to have an impact on how these teachers spoke about and used their knowledge in practice. Thus, this study provides further understanding that what these teachers know and how they use their knowledge in practice arises from a complex interweaving of context and individual understandings.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the discussion of the findings and the theoretical implications of the present study. In addition, it has presented how this study contributes to knowledge. In the next chapter, I will present conclusions, pedagogical implications based on the findings, suggestions for further research and my personal reflections on my journey during my PhD study.

# Chapter Seven: Conclusion and self-reflection

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## 7.1 Conclusion

The previous chapter discussed the findings presented in Chapter 5 and, in this final chapter, these findings will be viewed in the light of the implications they have for participants in the context, the wider field of speaking assessment, and research in general. To briefly summarise, the findings of this study indicate that what these teachers know and how they use their knowledge in practice arises from a complex interweaving of context and individual understandings. Based on these findings, the study has suggested that the understanding of teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment within a socio-cultural perspective is significant in that it helps to understand how teachers express and use their knowledge with relation to the micro context where they work and to the macro context where they interact as individuals with the social world. Within these contexts, issues such as teachers' voice, their roles and the dialogic aspects of their interaction may play a considerable role in the understanding how teachers conceptualise and enact their knowledge of speaking assessment.

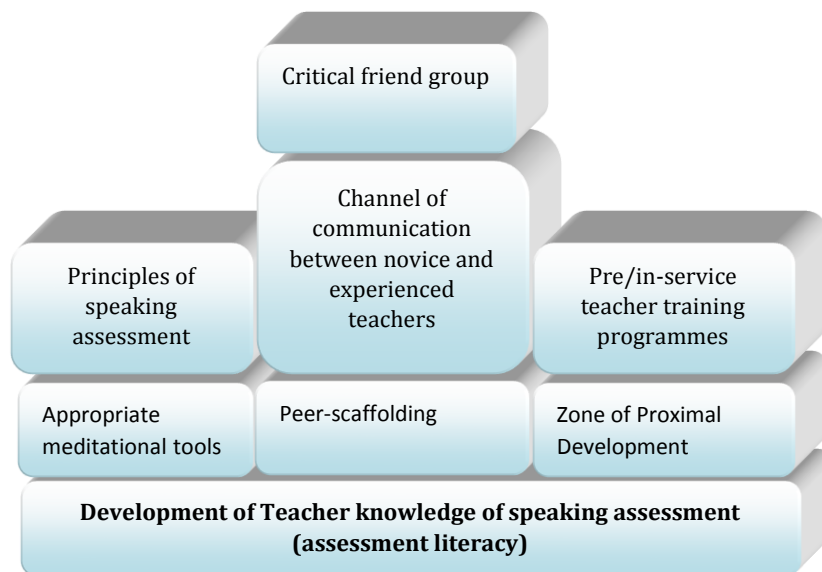
In the following sections I present the pedagogical implications of the current study and make suggestions with regard to further research into teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment in the classroom. Finally, I will conclude the thesis with my personal reflection on my journey of PhD study.

## 7.2 Pedagogical implications

Drawing on the findings, the discussion and the theoretical implications, I would suggest that there is a need to consider the contextual factors that have the potential to shape teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment and their implementation of it in the classroom. This suggestion is congruent with those suggested by other researchers in many different studies (e.g., Davison, 2004; Scarino, 2013; Xu & Liu, 2009). The findings of the current study clearly indicate that novice teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment exists within their interaction with wider contexts: institutional, social and political. The participants

mentioned a number of different issues such as top-down policies, marginalisation, centrality and administrative negligence. These issues and many others were perceived to be the most influential factors impact by these novice teachers' knowledge and practice of language assessment in general and speaking assessment in particular. While enacting knowledge about any concepts, principles or mechanisms requires a suitable environment which supports a proper learning process or scaffolding in which novice teachers are able to expand their horizons and gain better understanding, the participants of the current study seem to enact their knowledge about speaking assessment in the absence of such an environment. Instead, their knowledge seemed to be handicapped by the above-mentioned issues and many others.

Based on these findings, I have presented a model through which I have attempted to suggest pedagogical implications for EFL novice teachers in the Libyan context and other similar contexts. Its aim is to highlight the importance of considering the development of EFL novice teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment in particular and language assessment in general, adopting activities that take account of social and cultural context. The model demonstrates that teacher knowledge needs to be supported in two processes: the first process requires the policy makers to build a basis on which to act, and the second process is the cognitive development which requires solid bricks of social, cultural and institutional support. See Figure 7.1 below:



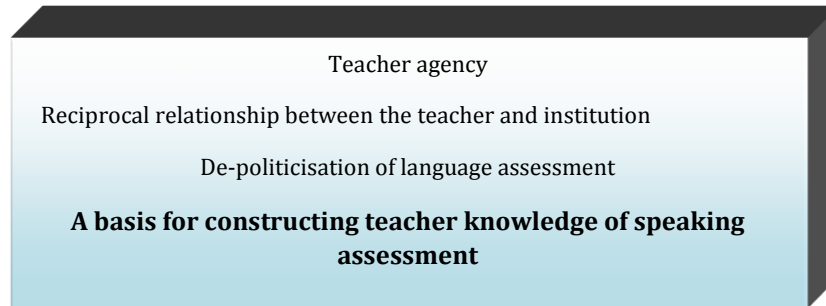


Figure 7.1: A socio-cultural-based model for supporting novice EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment

### **7.2.1 Establishing a basis for supporting teacher knowledge of speaking assessment**

Findings from the present study have indicated that teachers' perceived lack of agency in language assessment is one of influential contextual factors impacting on teachers' practice of speaking assessment. I would suggest that there should be a change in the relationship between the teachers and the decision makers in the institutional and in the political contexts. As suggested in the figure above, three main aspects need to be considered for establishing such a basis: teacher agency, reciprocal relationships between the teachers and the decision makers in the institutions where they work, and the 'de-politicisation' of language assessment. There is an urgent need for administrative support within the school context and this could be achieved through changes in policy and a move away from the hierarchal and power-laden relations which currently exist towards the re-establishment of dialogical relations based on reflection and mutual discussion. In this regard, Xu and Liu (2009) recommend that 'educational administrators, school leaders, and middle managers need to make joint efforts to minimise the negative effects of hierarchal relationships and encourage professional dialogue in which negotiation of meaning and corporation take place within the community' (p.510). Teachers are one of the main components in the classroom and they need to be effectively involved in the decisions related to assessment policies. Another important factor to consider is the need for change in the power relations between

politicians in the political system and decision makers in the educational system with regard to who makes decision for educational policies including assessment.

### **7.2.2 Development of teachers' language assessment literacy**

Based on the elements of socio-cultural theory, I suggest that teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment could be developed through three of these elements, namely zone of proximal development, the use of appropriate mediational tools, and peer scaffolding. Within ZPD, novice teachers need to be offered pre-service and ongoing in-service teacher training programmes through which they can gain a good understanding about the principles of language assessment. Johnson (2009) considers ZPD an important socio-cultural construct to trace teacher learning. Ultimately, ZPD is characterised by identifying the actual development of the learner and the next level of potential development where the individual works in collaboration with others, with a more expert person, or with cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978). The process is the transformation from object-regulation, in which the individuals seek help from cultural artefacts in their context, or other-regulation, in which the individuals seek help from peers or more expert people, to self-regulation, in which the individuals take control over both cognition and activity (Johnson & Golombek, 2003). I believe this socio-cultural construct should be an essential component in teacher development of language assessment literacy. In this regard, many researchers consider professional development essential in enhancing teachers' knowledge and understanding of language assessment (e.g., Muñoz, et al. 2003; Scarino, 2013; Shohamy, 2008; Xu & Liu, 2009). For instance, Xu & Liu (2009) recommend the use of practicum or workshops to support pre-service and in-service teachers to look into their prior experience of language assessment and reconstruct their personal practical knowledge. Similarly, I would suggest that teacher training programmes need to pay more attention to how teachers practice and develop their knowledge of speaking assessment through their collaboration with more experienced teachers who are professionals in language assessment.

The use of appropriate resources is another fundamental aspect in the development of novice teachers of speaking assessment. As Shohamy *et al.* (ibid) suggest, professional development needs to provide teachers with resources and materials that familiarise them

with 'theoretically-driven principles...for creating assessment procedures that are appropriate for classroom assessment' (p. 26). That is, teachers need to be exposed to the principles of language assessment and the effective methods of implementing it in the classroom and they need to be provided with resources that enhance their knowledge of formative and summative language assessment, and of their role as assessors in the classroom. Within speaking assessment, they need to have a nuanced understanding of speaking assessment constructs, speaking tasks and the rating scales used for students' oral language performance.

Findings from the study show that the novice teachers in this study seem to work individually in that they do not exchange their thoughts and experiences with their peers in schools where they work and this impacts on their knowledge of speaking assessment. In this regard, Shohamy et al (ibid) suggest that 'it is especially important to provide teachers with opportunities to engage in dialogue and reflection these [assessment] principles to their own instructional contexts' (p.26). Based on Shohamy *et al's* suggestion, I would recommend peer scaffolding as another important aspect in the process of the development of teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment. By peer scaffolding, I mean that novice teachers can engage in dialogue with more experienced teachers through formal or informal meetings where they can raise issues related to speaking assessment. Such a channel of communication would help novice teachers to reflect on their speaking assessment practices in the classroom. I believe that a critical friends groups (CFG) would also be an effective technique in establishing a peer scaffolding environment in the institutional contexts where teachers work. Johnson (2009) consider CFG a unique framework that 'creates the potential for sustained dialogic mediation among teachers and provides assisted performance' (p.95). This technique may be effective in the supporting of teachers' knowledge and understanding of language assessment in general and speaking assessment in particular.

### **7.3 Further research**

The present study indicates that the understanding of teacher knowledge of speaking assessment from the socio-cultural perspective is an important trend in the research of language assessment. It provides a clear understanding about how these EFL novice teachers

perceive the role of context in their current knowledge and practice of speaking assessment. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, observation and stimulated recall interviews, the study shows the complexity of novice EFL teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment and how their knowledge informs their assessment practice in the light of context where they work. Further studies can be carried out to investigate how novice EFL teachers construct their knowledge of speaking assessment and how the political and the institutional contexts contribute to the improvement of teachers' knowledge of language assessment in the classroom. In addition, more studies can be conducted on teachers' role in the institutional context with regard to the design of large scale speaking tests and its influence on their speaking assessment practices, and the relationship between the teachers and the decision makers in both institutional and political contexts. These issues can be further investigated to explore teachers' construction of knowledge of speaking assessment through their interaction with these contexts.

In terms of a methodological stance, it may also be effective to use narrative enquiry as a research methodology to investigate how teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment is socially constructed. This form of inquiry may help to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers' individual beliefs interact with the social world.

The participants of this study were EFL novice teachers; in order to gain more understanding about whether teachers' experience is another contextual factor, it would be interesting to include both novice and experienced teachers in one study to investigate the role experience plays in constructing teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment.

#### **7.4 Personal Reflection on my research journey**

I view my journey of PhD study as a new path that an explorer needs to discover. My journey started when I studied for the Masters of Science in Educational Research (MSc), when I asked myself what exactly I needed to learn, how I would build up the knowledge required for Masters level and for my PhD study, and whether I would be able to expand my perception and knowledge to cope with the variety of topics that are addressed in the four modules of the MSc. As a novice or 'student' researcher, I started with a vague vision,

attempting to position myself, with all those above-mentioned queries in mind. However, I was confident that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

I came from my home country with a proposal that I intended to investigate in my doctoral study. My concern about teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment evolved out my experience as an EFL teacher teaching in many different educational sectors. However, as a novice researcher I had not had a solid background about how to approach the study and from where I should start. The study of the four modules in the MSc expanded my horizons about the art of research. By the end of my MSc study, I felt these modules had assisted me to enter the world of doctoral research.

When I started my study of EFL novice teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment, I realised that language testing is a huge area of research, most of which is based on the western context. I must confess that the investigation into language assessment was a challenge for me because I come from a context where traditional methods of language assessment are used. In addition, issues of validity and reliability of language testing are not taken into consideration. By investigating the principles and methods of speaking assessment, I have found that research shows considerable interest in teachers' practices of speaking assessment and whether their assessment is valid in terms of the proper use of the speaking constructs, speaking tasks and rating scales. However, I felt I needed to understand what teachers know about speaking assessment and how such knowledge is used in practice. In addition, I believed that I needed to understand how teachers implement their speaking assessment in the classroom, and how their practices are influenced by their knowledge.

I have realised that my background of positivist research influenced my understanding of addressing the issue of teachers' knowledge. Initially, I had a conception that the use of quantitative methods of data collection such as a questionnaire would provide me with a nuanced understanding about teacher knowledge since I had a belief that percentages and frequencies would show me how much knowledge these teachers reported they have and the extent of which their knowledge is reflected in their assessment practice. However, as I started to learn more about the interpretive paradigms, I felt that my view of the value of the questionnaire changed, especially when I conducted interviews and observation. By using



these methods, I started to realise that I could further see the multiplicity of realities generated in the participants' different perspectives together with my own subjective stance. I could see the participants' different interpretations regarding their priorities in the implementation of speaking assessment. For instance, teachers' different understandings of the use of rote memorisation in the assessment of speaking led me to reflect on my positivist research background, realising that the understandings of teacher knowledge goes beyond the identification of frequencies and percentages to recognise the importance of how these teachers view speaking assessment. Thus, this made me reconceptualise my view of the value of the questionnaire, reconsidering the importance of the use of ethnographic tools in the investigation into multiple realities in the participants' different perspectives. By saying that, I am not intending to undervalue of the questionnaire as a tool of data collection. Rather, I reflect on how my understanding as an interpretive researcher developed during the process of research.

The process of data collection is another important part of the journey of my study. As a novice researcher, I felt that the process of data collection represented the corner stone of the study. While reading about the research methods that I would employ in my study, I began to feel that I was a 'real' researcher because what I was preparing was for my own project. It was an interesting experience for me to collect data for the first time, but also challenging. Two main features helped me face this challenge. Firstly, the context of study was familiar to some extent, as I had worked in the secondary school context. Secondly, piloting interviews and observation before conducting the actual data collection helped me to reflect on my performance as a novice interviewer and observer. However, I encountered another unanticipated challenge during the time of data collection. The Libyan uprising that took place in February 2011 had an impact on the time scale allocated for the data collection, as well as the procedure in that I encountered difficulties in travelling between cities to administer questionnaires in the first phase of data collection, and later to conduct interviews and observation.

The current study could have made a greater contribution to the understanding of teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment by adopting narrative inquiry as a research design, as this may have provided me with a deeper understanding of the complexity and dynamicity

of novice teachers' knowledge within their interaction with the mediational artefacts available to them and the societal context. In addition, conducting more observations would have provided me with a more thorough understanding of how novice teachers managed the institutional context. As mentioned above, this study was conducted in exceptional circumstances; this hindered my access to many schools that were located in areas that were unsafe. The country was witnessing considerable unsettlement and lack of safety because of the massive distribution of weapons among the civilians and the militias alike. Despite these challenges, I was able to collect the data that answered my queries about the context of study. In addition, the change in the Libyan political scene seems to have liberated Libyan people from the state of suppression they experienced in the previous political regime with the result that some of the participants expressed their beliefs and views about how their current knowledge of speaking assessment was perceived to be influenced by the political context. If the political change had not taken place, the participants would not have talked so freely about the socio-political context.

Qualitative data analysis is another fundamental stage in the doctoral journey. Although I have read a great deal about many different techniques of data analysis, I find the process daunting. Before embarking on the qualitative data collection I asked myself questions such as, 'How am I going to analyse my data?' 'What procedures do I need to use, inductive, deductive or both?' I had several discussions with my supervisors, who provided informative comments and advice, which helped me improve my skills of analysis; they told me about their own experiences of data analysis and gave me the confidence to do it.

Overall, I feel I do have the spirit of being a PhD student. All the stages of the research have been a great experience, through which I have not only developed the skills and abilities of being a researcher, but also gained knowledge about how to discuss my thoughts and perspectives with colleagues in academic and non-academic contexts. For example, when I presented papers at local and international conferences, I gained access to a research community where I could discuss my research with other researchers and intellectuals and this, in turn, helped me develop my skills further.

The PhD journey has widened my horizons about the essence of research and illuminated the academic path that needs to be followed. The experience of studying for a PhD has shown me the value of research and the value of being a researcher: although my PhD journey has arrived at its end point, I consider it a departure point for my future academic life as a researcher.

## Appendix 1A: A sample of skill book content (Y 1

|        | PAGE            | TOPIC                  | LESSON       | DETAILS   |
|--------|-----------------|------------------------|--------------|---|
| UNIT 1 | 6               | The skill of reading   | SK1.1        | Transferring information                                |
|        | 8               | The skill of speaking  | SK1.2–1.3    | Conversation - greeting and giving personal information |
|        | 10              | The skill of writing   | SK1.4–1.6    | Writing about experiences                               |
|        | 12              | Lab work 1             | LP1.1        | Greeting and giving personal information                |
|        | 13              | Lab work 2             | LP1.2        | The sounds of English                                   |
|        | 14              | Listening development  | LP1.3        | Cave paintings  |
|        | 15              | The skill of listening | LP1.4        | Identifying words and phrases in speech                 |
|        | 16              | Pronunciation 1        | LP1.5        | /p/ and /b/   |
| 16     | Pronunciation 2 | LP1.6                  | /i/ and /i:/ |   |
| UNIT 2 | 18              | The skill of reading   | SK2.1        | Understanding timetables                                |
|        | 20              | The skill of speaking  | SK2.2–2.3    | Conversation - everyday English                         |
|        | 22              | The skill of writing   | SK2.4–2.6    | Different types of texts                                |
|        | 24              | Lab work 1             | LP2.1        | Formal and informal partings                            |
|        | 25              | Lab work 2             | LP2.2        | /t/ and /d/; /æ/ and /a:/                               |
|        | 26              | Listening development  | LP2.3        | Formal and informal letters                             |
|        | 27              | The skill of listening | LP2.4        | Identifying key information                             |
|        | 28              | Pronunciation 1        | LP2.5        | /t/ and /d/   |
| 28     | Pronunciation 2 | LP2.6                  | /æ/ and /a:/ |   |
| UNIT 3 | 30              | The skill of reading   | SK3.1        | Understanding a first person narrative                  |
|        | 32              | The skill of speaking  | SK3.2–3.3    | Conversation - telling a story                          |
|        | 34              | The skill of writing   | SK3.4–3.6    | Telling a story   |
|        | 36              | Lab work 1             | LP3.1        | Telling a story   |
|        | 37              | Lab work 2             | LP3.2        | /k/ and /g/; /e/ and /ɜ:/                               |
|        | 38              | Listening development  | LP3.3        | Formal and informal partings                            |
|        | 39              | The skill of listening | LP3.4        | Understanding a first person narrative                  |
|        | 40              | Pronunciation 1        | LP3.5        | /k/ and /g/   |
| 40     | Pronunciation 2 | LP3.6                  | /e/ and /ɜ:/ |   |
| UNIT 4 | 42              | The skill of reading   | SK4.1        | Understanding a popular science article                 |
|        | 44              | The skill of speaking  | SK4.2–4.3    | Intonation  |
|        | 46              | The skill of writing   | SK4.4–4.6    | Writing a biography and autobiography                   |
|        | 48              | Lab work 1             | LP4.1        | Agreeing and disagreeing                                |
|        | 49              | Lab work 2             | LP4.2        | /tʃ/ and /dʒ/; /ʊ/ and /u:/                             |
|        | 50              | Listening development  | LP4.3        | Picture language  |
|        | 51              | The skill of listening | LP4.4        | Weights and measures                                    |
|        | 52              | Pronunciation 1        | LP4.5        | /tʃ/ and /dʒ/   |
| 52     | Pronunciation 2 | LP4.6                  | /ʊ/ and /u:/ |   |
| UNIT 5 | 54              | The skill of reading   | SK5.1        | Scanning for information in a guide                     |
|        | 56              | The skill of speaking  | SK5.2–5.3    | Conversation - performing a short dialogue              |
|        | 58              | The skill of writing   | SK5.4–5.6    | British and Canadian English                            |
|        | 60              | Lab work 1             | LP5.1        | Offering  |
|        | 61              | Lab work 2             | LP5.2        | /f/ and /v/; /ð/ and /ʒ:/                               |
|        | 62              | Listening development  | LP5.3        | Talking about hobbies                                   |
|        | 63              | The skill of listening | LP5.4        | Identifying key information                             |
|        | 64              | Pronunciation 1        | LP5.5        | /f/ and /v/   |
| 64     | Pronunciation 2 | LP5.6                  | /ð/ and /ʒ:/ |   |
| UNIT 6 | 66              | The skill of reading   | SK6.1        | Understanding a newspaper article                       |
|        | 68              | The skill of speaking  | SK6.2–6.3    | Conversation - recounting an accident                   |
|        | 70              | The skill of writing   | SK6.4–6.6    | Organizing information about an accident                |
|        | 72              | Lab work 1             | LP6.1        | Showing surprise, pleasure, shock                       |
|        | 73              | Lab work 2             | LP6.2        | /ʌ/ and /ə/; /ð/ and /θ/                                |
|        | 74              | Listening development  | LP6.3        | Photography   |
|        | 75              | The skill of listening | LP6.4        | Understanding a narrative                               |
|        | 75              | Pronunciation 1        | LP6.5        | /ð/ and /θ/   |
| 76     | Pronunciation 2 | LP6.6                  | /ʌ/ and /ə/  |   |

## Appendix 1B: A sample of skill book content (Y2)

|                | PAGE | TOPIC                  | LESSON      | DETAILS   |
|----------------|------|------------------------|-------------|---|
| <b>UNIT 7</b>  | 78   | The skill of reading   | SK7.1       | Predicting from reading   |
|                | 80   | The skill of speaking  | SK7.2–7.3   | At the bank, talking about money  |
|                | 82   | The skill of writing   | SK7.4–7.6   | Advertising slogans, leaflets and commercials                                       |
|                | 84   | Listening development  | LP7.1       | English-speaking areas – The Caribbean  |
|                | 85   | The skill of listening | LP7.2       | Understanding information   |
|                | 86   | Pronunciation 1        | LP7.3       | Linking   |
|                | 86   | Pronunciation 2        | LP7.4       | Liaison – final ‘r’ (1)   |
|                | 87   | Lab work 1             | LP7.5       | Functions – asking for services   |
|                | 88   | Lab work 2             | LP7.6       | Spoken language – liaison – final ‘r’ (2)   |
| <b>UNIT 8</b>  | 90   | The skill of reading   | SK8.1       | Predicting from headlines   |
|                | 92   | The skill of speaking  | SK8.2–8.3   | Keeping a conversation going  |
|                | 94   | The skill of writing   | SK8.4–8.6   | Making a report, writing a news article   |
|                | 96   | Listening development  | LP8.1       | Literature – Edgar Allan Poe  |
|                | 97   | The skill of listening | LP8.2       | Understanding radio news  |
|                | 98   | Pronunciation 1        | LP8.3       | Suppressed plosives   |
|                | 98   | Pronunciation 2        | LP8.4       | Liaison – intrusive ‘r’   |
|                | 99   | Lab work 1             | LP8.5       | Functions – narrating   |
|                | 100  | Lab work 2             | LP8.6       | Spoken language – liaison – suppressed plosives and intrusive ‘r’                   |
| <b>UNIT 9</b>  | 102  | The skill of reading   | SK9.1       | Talking about the past  |
|                | 104  | The skill of speaking  | SK9.2–9.3   | Talking about the distant past and your past  |
|                | 106  | The skill of writing   | SK9.4–9.6   | Reminiscences   |
|                | 108  | Listening development  | LP9.1       | <i>Roget’s Thesaurus</i>  |
|                | 109  | The skill of listening | LP9.2       | Discriminating between single events and past habits                                |
|                | 110  | Pronunciation 1        | LP9.3       | Assimilation  |
|                | 110  | Pronunciation 2        | LP9.4       | Intrusive /w/ and /j/   |
|                | 111  | Lab work 1             | LP9.5       | Functions – narrating   |
|                | 112  | Lab work 2             | LP9.6       | Spoken language – assimilation and intrusive /w/ and /j/                            |
| <b>UNIT 10</b> | 114  | The skill of reading   | SK10.1      | Reason and result   |
|                | 116  | The skill of speaking  | SK10.2–10.3 | Explaining what happened and why  |
|                | 118  | The skill of writing   | SK10.4–10.6 | Causes and effects  |
|                | 120  | Listening development  | LP10.1      | Collocation   |
|                | 121  | The skill of listening | LP10.2      | Discriminating between cause and effect   |
|                | 122  | Pronunciation 1        | LP10.3      | Silent letters  |
|                | 122  | Pronunciation 2        | LP10.4      | Sound 1 + sound 2 = sound 3   |
|                | 123  | Lab work 1             | LP10.5      | Functions – asking for reasons and results  |
|                | 124  | Lab work 2             | LP10.6      | Spoken language – silent letters  |
| <b>UNIT 11</b> | 126  | The skill of reading   | SK11.1      | Distinguishing facts from hopes, fears and wishes                                   |
|                | 128  | The skill of speaking  | SK11.2–11.3 | Talking about the future, making, accepting and refusing invitations                |
|                | 130  | The skill of writing   | SK11.4–11.6 | Describing problems, making wishes for the future, putting forward a plan of action |
|                | 132  | Listening development  | LP11.1      | English-speaking areas – South-East Asia  |
|                | 133  | The skill of listening | LP11.2      | Talking about the future  |
|                | 134  | Pronunciation 1        | LP11.3      | Word stress   |
|                | 134  | Pronunciation 2        | LP11.4      | Stress and liaison  |
|                | 135  | Lab work 1             | LP11.5      | Functions – talking about the future  |
|                | 136  | Lab work 2             | LP11.6      | Spoken language – word stress and liaison   |
| <b>UNIT 12</b> | 138  | The skill of reading   | SK12.1      | Review  |
|                | 140  | The skill of speaking  | SK12.2–12.3 | Review  |
|                | 142  | The skill of writing   | SK12.4–12.6 | Review  |
|                | 144  | Listening development  | LP12.1      | Literature – Edward Lear  |
|                | 145  | The skill of listening | LP12.2      | Review  |
|                | 146  | Pronunciation 1        | LP12.3      | Review – weak forms   |
|                | 146  | Pronunciation 2        | LP12.4      | Review – intrusive sounds   |
|                | 147  | Lab work 1             | LP12.5      | Review – functions  |
|                | 148  | Lab work 2             | LP12.6      | Review – spoken language  |

## Appendix 1C: A sample of skill book content (Y 3)

| PAGE           | TOPIC      | LESSON                 | DETAILS   |  |
|----------------|------------|------------------------|---|--|
| <b>UNIT 7</b>  | 78         | The skill of reading   | SK7.1   | Topic sentences and lexical cohesion                                     |
|                | 80         | The skill of speaking  | SK7.2–7.3   | Relating a newspaper story   |
|                | 82         | The skill of writing   | SK7.4–7.6   | Paragraph development – defining, exemplifying, topic sentences          |
|                | 84         | Listening development  | LP7.1   | Special-purpose language – business English                              |
|                | 85         | The skill of listening | LP7.2   | Revision   |
|                | 86         | Pronunciation 1        | LP7.3   | Revision (1)   |
|                | 86         | Pronunciation 2        | LP7.4   | Revision (2)   |
|                | 87         | Lab work 1             | LP7.5   | Functions – revision – reporting functions                               |
| 88             | Lab work 2 | LP7.6                  | Spoken language – articulation and diphthongs                   |  |
| <b>UNIT 8</b>  | 90         | The skill of reading   | SK8.1   | Reading and reacting (1)   |
|                | 92         | The skill of speaking  | SK8.2–8.3   | Starting conversations   |
|                | 94         | The skill of writing   | SK8.4–8.6   | Paragraph development – classifying and exemplifying                     |
|                | 96         | Listening development  | LP8.1   | Special-purpose language – travel and tourism                            |
|                | 97         | The skill of listening | LP8.2   | Understanding a lecture  |
|                | 98         | Pronunciation 1        | LP8.3   | Sight / sound relationships – consonants                                 |
|                | 98         | Pronunciation 2        | LP8.4   | Intonation patterns – falling tone                                       |
|                | 99         | Lab work 1             | LP8.5   | Functions – congratulating and commiserating                             |
| 100            | Lab work 2 | LP8.6                  | Spoken language – consonants and falling intonation             |  |
| <b>UNIT 9</b>  | 102        | The skill of reading   | SK9.1   | Reading and reacting (2)   |
|                | 104        | The skill of speaking  | SK9.2–9.3   | Everyday English – giving and receiving feedback on performance          |
|                | 106        | The skill of writing   | SK9.4–9.6   | Paragraph development – comparing and contrasting                        |
|                | 108        | Listening development  | LP9.1   | Special-purpose language – immigrant English                             |
|                | 109        | The skill of listening | LP9.2   | Personal development   |
|                | 110        | Pronunciation 1        | LP9.3   | Single vowels  |
|                | 110        | Pronunciation 2        | LP9.4   | The first rising tone  |
|                | 111        | Lab work 1             | LP9.5   | Functions – praising and criticizing constructively                      |
| 112            | Lab work 2 | LP9.6                  | Spoken language – sounds of single vowels and first rising tone |  |
| <b>UNIT 10</b> | 114        | The skill of reading   | SK10.1  | Understanding extra information  |
|                | 116        | The skill of speaking  | SK10.2–10.3   | Everyday English – persuading and dissuading                             |
|                | 118        | The skill of writing   | SK10.4–10.6   | Paragraph development – cause and effect                                 |
|                | 120        | Listening development  | LP10.1  | Cause and effect – the environment                                       |
|                | 121        | The skill of listening | LP10.2  | Revision   |
|                | 122        | Pronunciation 1        | LP10.3  | Sounds of two vowels   |
|                | 122        | Pronunciation 2        | LP10.4  | The second rising tone   |
|                | 123        | Lab work 1             | LP10.5  | Functions – persuading and dissuading                                    |
| 124            | Lab work 2 | LP10.6                 | Spoken language – sounds of two vowels and second rising tone   |  |
| <b>UNIT 11</b> | 126        | The skill of reading   | SK11.1  | Understanding a scientific report (1)                                    |
|                | 128        | The skill of speaking  | SK11.2–11.3   | Using pre-organizers; giving a presentation                              |
|                | 130        | The skill of writing   | SK11.4–11.6   | Paragraph development – collecting information, paragraphs with headings |
|                | 132        | Listening development  | LP11.1  | Special-purpose language – academic English                              |
|                | 133        | The skill of listening | LP11.2  | Understanding a scientific report (2)                                    |
|                | 134        | Pronunciation 1        | LP11.3  | Revision   |
|                | 134        | Pronunciation 2        | LP11.4  | Falling – rising tone  |
|                | 135        | Lab work 1             | LP11.5  | Functions – praising and criticizing constructively                      |
| 136            | Lab work 2 | LP11.6                 | Spoken language – sounds of single vowels and first rising tone |  |
| <b>UNIT 12</b> | 138        | The skill of reading   | SK12.1  | Review   |
|                | 140        | The skill of speaking  | SK12.2–12.3   | Review   |
|                | 142        | The skill of writing   | SK12.4–12.6   | Review – vocabulary and skills revision                                  |
|                | 144        | Listening development  | LP12.1  | Linguistic variations  |
|                | 145        | The skill of listening | LP12.2  | Review   |
|                | 146        | Pronunciation 1        | LP12.3  | Review   |
|                | 146        | Pronunciation 2        | LP12.4  | Review   |
|                | 147        | Lab work 1             | LP12.5  | Functions – review   |
| 148            | Lab work 2 | LP12.6                 | Spoken language – review  |  |

## Appendix 2: The objective of teaching speaking as outlined in the MOE annual document

تقسيم المقررات الدراسية لمرحلة التعليم الثانوي  
للعام الدراسي 1434 - 1435 هـ. / 2013 - 2014 م

| السنة : الثالثة   | شعبة اللغات (تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية)   |
|---|---|
| الوعاء الزمني : (3) حصص في الأسبوع (نظري)   | المادة : المحادثة   |
| تأليف<br>Terry Phillips, Fiona Tankard, Anna Phillips, Peter Lucantoni<br>Alan Tankard, Carol Tabor and Lucy Norris | الكتاب المنفذ:<br>English for Libya<br>Secondary (3) English Specialization<br>Language and Society (Skills Book A and B) |

### General Objectives

- 1) Students will extend their abilities to :
  - a- Speak fluently in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes and audiences.
  - b- Describe events, past routines and past abilities.
  - c- Use talk to express and share feelings, ideas and opinions.
  - d- Describe shapes and objects, and give directions.
  - e- Narrate past actions or events in detail.
- 2) Give a chance to students to speak with clarity and use intonation when reading and reciting texts.

### Appendix 3: The marking system as outlined in the MOE annual document

توزيع درجات شهادته إتمام مرحلة التعليم الثانوي

لمادتي (المحادثة Speaking) و (الكتابة Writing)

(تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية) بشعبة اللغات

للعام الدراسي 1434-1435 هـ / 2013-2014 م

الوعاء الزمني: (3) حصص أسبوعياً لكل مادة (نظري فقط).

| النهاية الكبرى | الدور الثاني | امتحان نهاية العام | مجموع درجات الفترتين | مجموع درجات الفترة | درجات أعمال الفترة              |                     |                     |
|----------------|--------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                |              |                    |                      |                    | متوسط درجة الاختبارات التحريرية | الأنشطة اليومية (*) | امتحان نهاية الفترة |
| 120            | 72           | 72                 | 48                   | 24                 | 8                               | 8                   | 8                   |

\* توزيع درجة الأنشطة اليومية كالتالي:

| المجموع | نشاط الفصل | الشفوي | القراءة والفهم | التحريري |     |
|---------|------------|--------|----------------|----------|-----|
|         |            |        |                | W.W      | N.B |
| Total   | C.A        | O.W    | R.C            | W.B      | N.B |
| 8       | 1          | 1      | 2              | 2        | 2   |

C.A = Class Activity

O.W = Oral Work

R.C = Reading and Comprehension

W.W = Written Work

W.B = WORK BOOK

N.B = NOTE BOOK

ملاحظات:

- 1- يجرى أكثر من تطبيق في كل فترة ثم يؤخذ المتوسط .
- 2- تحسب الدرجة النهائية للطالب من مجموع الدرجات المتحصل عليها في الفترتين الأولى والثانية وامتحان نهاية العام .
- 3- يشترط نجاح الطالب التقدم لامتحان نهاية العام والحصول على:
  - أ- 40 % من الدرجة المقررة لامتحان نهاية العام .
  - ب- 50 % من الدرجة المقررة للمادة.

مركز المناهج التعليمية والبحوث التربوية



Appendix 4A: A sample of written test prepared by a teacher for assessing speaking

28.5.2012

# FREE LIBYA

24<sup>th</sup> December Secondary School  
English Specialization 2 Second Semester  
[Speaking] Mid-Exam

Answer the questions:

Q1. Reorder the Conversation

A — No damage done to the shopping, and I'm all right, no thanks to you!

B — It's entirely my fault. Is anything broken?

A — Hey! Are you blind or something?

B — I do apologize. please let me carry your bags.

A — I am really sorry, I wasn't thinking. Here, let me help you.

B — Are you ok?

A — Why weren't you looking where you were going?

B — you should watch where you're going!

Q2 Rearrange the letters to make words and phrases :

1. cluod veah \_\_\_\_\_
2. fi ynlo \_\_\_\_\_
3. tgreer \_\_\_\_\_
4. Leopep ileerbe \_\_\_\_\_
5. ehyt ysa \_\_\_\_\_
6. roccanigd ot het rusty \_\_\_\_\_

Q3 Classify the expressions to Strong sympathy

(S) and more neutral (N)

1. Never mind ( )
2. What a shame / pity ( )
3. You / the poor thing ( )
4. Bad luck ( )
5. Oh, that's too bad ( )
6. I am very sorry to hear that ( )

**Appendix 4B: A sample of large scale speaking test prepared by MOE**

**وزارة التربية والتعليم**  
**مكتب امتحانات الجبل الأخضر**  
**امتحان مادة المحادثة للصف الرابع شعبة اللغة الانجليزية**  
*Conversation Exam*

**Q 1 . Complete the questions about leisure activities use words from the box :**

Any - do - ever - going - in - into - much - or - part - spend

- 1 . What do you ..... your spare time ?
- 2 . What kind of music are you interested .....
- 3 . Do you get out ..... in the evenings ?
- 4 . Are you ..... extreme sports ?
- 5 . Do you take ..... In any team sports ?
- 6 . Do you ..... go to the theater ?
- 7 . Do you like ..... to the cinema .
- 8 . Would you rather go to a film ..... a concert ?
- 10 . How do you ..... the weekends ?

\*\*\*\*\*

**Q 2 . Tick the correct advice for starting a conversation with someone you don't know .**

- 1 . Ask them their ages (      ) .
- 2 . Ask them their names (      ) .
- 3 . Ask them what religion they are (      ) .
- 4 . Ask if they know anyone at the party , dinner .....
- 5 . Ask about their interest and hobbies (      ) .
- 6 . Use question tags (      ) .
- 7 . Yawn and look at your watch (      ) .
- 8 . Use expressions like " Really " " How interesting " (      ) .
- 9 . Talk about the weather , food , area and so on (      ) .

**Q 3 . Match the beginnings and endings of these statements about leisure activities .**

- 1 . Romantic comedies are not ( a ) out of stamp collecting .
- 2 . I am not ( b ) at windsurfing .
- 3 . I am no good ( c ) in tennis .
- 4 . I prefer watching sport ( d ) into opera .
- 5 . I ' d rather go to a museum ( e ) my scene .
- 6 . I've lost interest ( f ) of weight training .
- 7 . I used to do a lot ( g ) than an art gallery .
- 8 . I've grown ( h ) to playing it .
- 9 . I don't really ( i ) understand .

| <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> | <i>5</i> | <i>6</i> | <i>7</i> | <i>8</i> | <i>9</i> |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |

**Q4 . Find the odd one out then write it in the space .**

- 1 . ring / call / phone / give a call / call round .....
- 2 . Call back / phone back / recall / get back to .....
- 3 . talking tone / ringing tone / dialing tone / engaged tone .....
- 4 . hold on / hang on / keep on / wait .....

\*\*\*\*\*

**Q 5 . Complete these sentences with expression about banking .**

- 1 . Every month I carefully ..... When the bank sends it .
- 2 . I ..... a new current ..... last week .
- 3 . I have to ..... 6.5 % ..... on the loan .
- 4 . Yesterday I ..... a ..... and forgot to sign it .

**Q 6 . Complete this conversation about a Party . choose the correct letter from .**

A ..... H in the box .  
Jill : Hello , who are you ?  
Mike: 1 .....  
Jill : And I'm Jill . where are you from , mike ?  
Mike : 2 .....  
Jill : Me too . And are you married ?  
Mike: 3 .....  
Jill : Do you have any children ?  
Mike: 4 .....  
Jill : Really ? How old are they ?  
Mike: 5 .....  
Jill : And where's your wife now ? at home with children ?  
Mike: 6 .....  
a . I am from London .  
b . Are you Dolores Mitchell .  
C . Oh , hi . I'm Mike .  
d . No , she is here , actually ..... that's her .  
e . Yes , we have two a boy and a girl .  
f . Yes , yes I am .  
g . Oh , sorry .  
h . The girl is three , and the boy is just a baby .  
\*\*\*\*\*

**Q 7 . Rearrange these words to make answer phone messages :**

1 . before / could / six / you / call / me / back ?  
.....  
2 . later / I'll / again / try .  
.....  
3 . I / about / work / need / to / you / talk / to .  
.....  
4 . are / I / to / just / you / called / how / see .  
.....  
5 . Next / I / to / dinner / wanted / to / if / you'd / like / to / come / fues day /  
know .  
.....

**Q 8 . Match each phrase with a dramatic verb .**

- |                  |                            |           |
|------------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| 1 . run fast     | <input type="checkbox"/> a | appal .   |
| 2 . Call loudly  | <input type="checkbox"/> b | dash .    |
| 3 . Say angrily  | <input type="checkbox"/> c | dread .   |
| 4 . rise quickly | <input type="checkbox"/> d | fume .    |
| 5 . Cry hard     | <input type="checkbox"/> e | plead .   |
| 6 . ask strongly | <input type="checkbox"/> f | plummet . |
| 7 . be afraid of | <input type="checkbox"/> g | soar .    |
| 8 . Fall quickly | <input type="checkbox"/> h | terrify . |
| 9 . Make afraid  | <input type="checkbox"/> i | weep .    |
| 10 . upset badly | <input type="checkbox"/> j | Scream .  |

\*\*\*\*\*

**Q 9 . Rearrange the words to sentences about relation ships .**

- 1 . My / a / with / relationship / mum / I / good / have / got .  
.....
- 2 . really / with / folks / on / my / get / well / I / .  
.....
- 3 . and / don't / on / parents / very / my / get / I / well .  
.....
- 4 . argue / all / time / I / with / my / the / dad / .  
.....
- 5 . and / are / friends / mum / best / my / I / .  
.....

**Q 10 . When we tell people about news paper articles we use certain phrases .  
complete from the box .**

- 1 . It ..... in the paper that .
- 2 . I ..... in the paper recently that .
- 3 . they ..... // // // // .
- 4 . Have you ..... the latest about .
- 5 . Did you ..... that .

4



وزارة التربية والتعليم  
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الإجابة النموذجية لامتحان مادة الحادة للصف الرابع شعبة اللغة الانجليزية

Modal Answers

Q 1. 1. do 2. in 3. much 4. into 5. Part 6. ever 7. going  
8. or 9. any 10. spend .

Q 2. 1. ( × ) 2. ( / ) 3. ( × ) 4. ( × ) 5. ( / )  
6. ( / ) 7. ( × ) 8. ( / ) 9. ( / ) .

Q 3.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| e | d | b | h | g | c | f | a | i |

Q 4. 1. Call round 2. recall 3. talking tone 4. keep on

Q 5. 1. Check my statement  
2. opened - account .  
3. Pay - interest .  
4. wrote out - cheque .

Q 6. 1. C 2. a 3. F 4. e 5. h 6. d

Q 7. Could you call me back before six ?

2. I'll try again later .

3. I need to talk to you about work .

4. I just called you to see how you are .

5. I wanted to know if you'd like to come to next Tues day .

Q 8. 1. b 2. j 3. d 4. g 5. i 6. e 7. c 8. f 9. H 10. a

Q 9. I have got a good relationship with my mum .

2. I really get on well with my folks .

3. My parents and I don't get on very well.

4. I argue with my dad all the time .

5. My mum and I are best friends .

Q 10. 1. Says 2. read 3. say 4. heard 5. Know

Q 11. .

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| e | c | a | f | b | d |



Q . 12 . 1 . Worse 2 . going 3 . Much 4 . higher 5 . get  
7 . Will 8 . Move 9 . am

Q 13 . 1 . I think  
2 . What exactly do you mean by .  
3 . I can't agree 4 . I think that

5 . I am afraid I disagree

6 . I agree 7 . let's ask

8 . What do you think

Q 14 .

1 . ( T ) 2 . ( F ) 3 . ( F ) 4 . ( T ) .

5 . ( F ) 6 . ( T )

Q 15 :

1 . nice to meet you too .

2 . thanks , and you ?

3 . it is – I like this weather .

4 . it was , I don't like hot weather .

5 . do you know it .

**Notice** : in this Conversation the student may answer in different ways .  
It depends on his ability .

Q . 12 . 1 . Worse 2 . going 3 . Much 4 . higher 5 . get  
7 . Will 8 . Move 9 . am

Q 13 . 1 . I think  
2 . What exactly do you mean by .  
3 . I can't agree 4 . I think that

5 . I am afraid I disagree

6 . I agree 7 . let's ask

8 . What do you think

Q 14 .

1 . ( T ) 2 . ( F ) 3 . ( F ) 4 . ( T ) .

5 . ( F ) 6 . ( T )

Q 15 :

1 . nice to meet you too .

2 . thanks , and you ?

3 . it is – I like this weather .

4 . it was , I don't like hot weather .

5 . do you know it .

**Notice** : in this Conversation the student may answer in different ways .  
It depends on his ability .

## Appendix 5

### Questionnaire

#### EFL teacher knowledge of speaking assessment

Dear teachers

My name is Taaziz Grada. I am a doctoral student from Libya studying at the University of Exeter in the UK. My study aims to find out what novice Libyan EFL teachers know and do about oral language assessment in Libyan secondary schools. Because you teach English as a foreign language and assess students' language performances, I am inviting you to kindly participate in this study by responding to this questionnaire. Completing the questionnaire should take approximately thirty minutes. Your participation will be of a great value and will help me conduct the research.

The aims of the study are:

- To find out what novice EFL teachers know about the process of oral language assessment.
- To find out the extent to which their knowledge of speaking assessment inform their practice.
- To find out what role social and cultural factors play in shaping their knowledge of speaking assessment.

I would like to provide you with the following assurance:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary.
- Your personal details will be strictly confidential and will be used for the purpose of the research only.
- You can gain access to the findings of the research if you are interested.
- Any reference to your responses in the questionnaire will be anonymous-your name or the name of your school will not be used anywhere in the research.

I would be grateful if you could answer **all** the items in the questionnaire. Thank you in advance for your time and co-operation.

**Section one: background information**

1. What is your gender?

Male ( ) Female ( )

2. What is your age?

Under 24 ( ) 25- 29 ( ) 30 or over ( )

3. What is your highest qualification?

.....

4. How long have you been teaching?

One year or less ( ) 1-2 years ( ) 2-3 years ( )

5. Do you teach in a government school or a private school?

Government school ( ) private school ( ) both ( )

6. How many times do you carry out oral language assessment during a semester?

Once ( ) twice ( ) three times ( ) more than three times ( )

7. Do you use language assessment criteria provided by outside sources and/or develop your own criteria when you assess students' speaking performances?

a. I use language assessment criteria provided by outside resources ( )

b. I develop my own language assessment criteria ( )

c. Both ( )

*Language assessment criteria: they are standards whereby assessment categories are judged. For example, if vocabulary is selected as a category to assess students' oral language performance, a set of criteria is used to indicate how well a student can use vocabulary.*

8. Have you had training programme about language assessment?

Yes ( )                      No ( )

If yes, did this include oral language assessment?

Yes ( )                      No ( )

**Section two: EFL teachers' general perceptions of language assessment**

Please tick the category which you think best reflects your general perceptions of language assessment.

*Key: SA = strongly agree    A = agree    D = disagree    SD = strongly disagree*

| Item | Teachers should...  | SA | A | D | SD |
|------|---|----|---|---|----|
| 9    | ...specify the purpose of assessment when they assess students' language performance.                         |    |   |   |    |
| 10   | ...clearly identify the language skills to be assessed when they design language assessment.                  |    |   |   |    |
| 11   | ...choose assessment tasks which help to get information about students' ability to use language effectively. |    |   |   |    |
| 12   | ...use many different language assessment tasks.  |    |   |   |    |
| 13   | ...clearly explain to the students how to do language assessment tasks.                                       |    |   |   |    |
| 14   | ...consider assessment criteria used when they design language assessment.                                    |    |   |   |    |
| 15   | ...connect the selection of assessment criteria with the aim of language assessment.                          |    |   |   |    |
| 16   | ...use formative language assessment.   |    |   |   |    |

|    |   |  |  |  |  |
|----|---|--|--|--|--|
| 17 | ...make language assessment part of language teaching and learning. |  |  |  |  |
| 18 | ...use summative language assessment.                               |  |  |  |  |

|  |
|--|
| <i>Language assessment tasks: Activities or techniques used to assess students' language performance.</i>  |
| <i>Formative assessment: this type of assessment is used by teachers during classroom activity. It helps teachers to identify their students' understanding and the extent to which they and their students have met the goals prescribed in the curriculum.</i> |
| <i>Summative assessment: assessment given at the end of a prescribed period of teaching. Such an assessment takes place at the end of a semester or an academic year.</i>  |

### **Section three: Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment**

This section is divided into three parts. Please describe the degree of your awareness by placing a tick under a category which best reflects your knowledge of oral language assessment.

**Key: 1= not good 2= moderate 3= good 4= excellent.**

#### **Part A: knowledge of speaking assessment constructs (speaking skills)**

| No. | <i>When I design speaking assessment, my knowledge of considering.....is...</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19  | ...aspects of intonation, stress, and pronunciation                             |   |   |   |   |
| 20  | ...accuracy   |   |   |   |   |
| 21  | ...fluency  |   |   |   |   |
| 22  | ...students' interactive skills   |   |   |   |   |
| 23  | ...students' ability to take turns in a pair/group work                         |   |   |   |   |

**Part B: knowledge of speaking assessment techniques and tasks**

| Item | <i>I rate my knowledge of.....as...</i>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|------|--|---|---|---|---|
| 24   | ...using <b>a student self assessment technique</b> , when students are being orally assessed                      |   |   |   |   |
| 25   | ...using <b>a peer assessment technique</b> , when students are being orally assessed                              |   |   |   |   |
| 26   | ...using <b>a portfolio assessment technique</b> , when students are being orally assessed                         |   |   |   |   |
| 27   | ...using summative assessment in assessing speaking ability  |   |   |   |   |
| 28   | ...using different speaking assessment tasks   |   |   |   |   |
| 29   | ...time factor when choosing or designing speaking tasks   |   |   |   |   |
| 30   | ...setting speaking assessment tasks in an appropriate level of difficulty   |   |   |   |   |
| 31   | ...using oral presentation tasks in speaking assessment  |   |   |   |   |
| 32   | ...using learner-learner joint discussion and decision making tasks  |   |   |   |   |
| 33   | ...using role-play tasks in speaking assessment  |   |   |   |   |
| 34   | ...using interview tasks in speaking assessment  |   |   |   |   |
| 35   | ...using visual stimuli tasks such as pictures to provide a topic of conversation to the students in speaking test |   |   |   |   |
| 36   | ...using re-telling story or text from aural stimuli as a speaking task in speaking assessment                     |   |   |   |   |
| 37   | ...using re-telling story from written stimulus as a speaking task when students are being orally assessed         |   |   |   |   |

*'Student' self assessment technique: it is a type of assessment technique in which students are assessing themselves as a learning strategy. Teachers give a chance to students to monitor their progress and identify their problems in the learning.*

*Peer assessment technique: it is a type of assessment technique in which a student assesses other students' work.*

*Portfolio assessment technique: it is a type of assessment technique in which teachers and/or students collect a portfolio of work to show the progress made over a period of time. It provides the continuous and ongoing measurement of students' growth needed for formative evaluation and for planning teaching strategies.*

**Part C: knowledge of assessment criteria used in speaking tests**

| Item | <i>I rate my knowledge of.....as...</i>   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 38   | ...developing assessment criteria used in a speaking test                                     |   |   |   |   |
| 39   | ...categories used in speaking assessment   |   |   |   |   |
| 40   | ...considering <b>accuracy</b> as a category of speaking assessment                           |   |   |   |   |
| 41   | ...considering <b>fluency</b> as a category of speaking assessment.                           |   |   |   |   |
| 42   | ...considering <b>communicative skills</b> as a category of speaking assessment               |   |   |   |   |
| 43   | ...considering <b>range of vocabulary use</b> as a category of speaking assessment            |   |   |   |   |
| 44   | ...considering <b>pronunciation</b> as a category of speaking assessment                      |   |   |   |   |
| 45   | ...considering the use of <b>appropriate expressions</b> as a category of speaking assessment |   |   |   |   |
| 46   | ...using an <b>analytic score</b> for each category in a speaking test                        |   |   |   |   |
| 47   | ...using <b>a holistic score</b> in a speaking test   |   |   |   |   |



*An analytic score: a mark given to each category in assessment criteria. For example, the teacher gives a separate mark to grammar, fluency, pronunciation, etc... while s/he assessing speaking skill.*

*A holistic score: a total mark given to the students' overall language performance.*

**Section four: this section describes how teachers' knowledge of oral language assessment informs their practice.**

For each statement please tick the box which best represents your frequency of practising these processes in speaking assessment.

*Key: A = always (100%); U= usually (75%); S = sometimes (50%); R = rarely (25%); N = never (0%).*

| No. | Statement  | A | U | S | R | N |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 48  | I firstly identify the purpose of assessment when I assess students' oral language performance.                                |   |   |   |   |   |
| 49  | I identify the skills to be assessed when I design speaking assessment.  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 50  | I select or design assessment tasks that help to get information about the students' ability to use oral language effectively. |   |   |   |   |   |
| 51  | I use different speaking assessment tasks in a speaking test.  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 52  | I process speaking assessment tasks within a given limited time.   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 53  | I clearly explain to the students how to do speaking assessment tasks.   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 54  | I develop my own assessment criteria when I design speaking assessment.  |   |   |   |   |   |

|    |   |  |  |  |  |  |
|----|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| 55 | I use speaking assessment criteria provided by outside resources.                 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 56 | I connect the selection of assessment criteria to the aim of speaking assessment. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 57 | I make speaking assessment a part of language teaching and learning process.      |  |  |  |  |  |

**Section five: this section describes the influence of context on teachers' knowledge of oral language assessment.**

58. Which of these following factors do you think has an influence on your decision making when you design speaking assessment? Please tick all the boxes that are relevant to you and explain why in the space provided below each item.

1. class size   
.....  
.....
2. Curriculum objectives.   
.....  
.....
3. Lack of support by more experienced teachers.   
.....  
.....
4. Prescribed rules by school policy or educational system about what assessment criteria to use.   
.....  
.....

5. Lack of standardised oral language assessment criteria.

.....  
.....

6. Lack of teacher training for learning how to make oral language assessment.

.....  
.....

59. How do *you* carry out speaking assessment? Please explain your answer in the space provided.

.....  
.....  
.....

***Thank you for your co-operation***

For the purpose of data collection, I would be very grateful if you could help in the next stage of the study and take part in an interview and classroom observation. Topics are expected to be addressed arising from the findings of the questionnaire. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time during your participation. Any information you provide will be used merely for the purpose of the research, and will be strictly confidential.

If you are happy to participate in an interview, observation or both please tick the box and give me your contact details below.

|   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| I would like to take part in the interview.             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I would like to take part in the classroom observation. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| I would like to take part in both. |  |
|------------------------------------|--|

Name:.....

Telephone/Mobile number:.....

Email:.....

Should you require more information or wish to receive a summary of questionnaire findings, I will be pleased to answer your queries by e-mail or contact numbers which are provided below.

Finally, I would like to thank you in advance for completing the questionnaire and participating in interviews and/or classroom observations.

Best regards

Taaziz Grada

E-mail address:

[tazizk\\_haled@hotmail.com](mailto:tazizk_haled@hotmail.com)

[tg230@exeter.ac.uk/](mailto:tg230@exeter.ac.uk/)

Tel. No. ....

Mob. No. ....

## Appendix 6

### A questionnaire pilot form

Section one:

A) While piloting the items of the questionnaire, I would be grateful to ask you mark the items...

...whose wording you do not like. If so, can you suggest an improvement?

...whose meaning is 100 percent clear; again, suggestions are welcome.

...that you consider unnecessary.

...that are too difficult for the respondent to reply to

B) Can you think of anything else that might be worth asking about?

Section 2:

Your comments and feedback on the following:

The overall appearance of the questionnaire

The clarity of the instructions

The appropriateness of the cover letter

The length of time necessary to complete the questionnaire.

## Appendix 7

### Semi-structure interview guide

#### Areas of enquiry:

- A) EFL teachers' general perception of language assessment
- B) EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment
- C) The influence of contextual factor on teachers' knowledge and practice of speaking assessment

#### **A) EFL teachers' general perception of language assessment**

1-Can you tell me about general ideas of language assessment?

#### *Probes:*

- *What is important to you?*
- *Formative assessment? when?*
- *Summative assessment? When? Why?*

2-How do you choose tasks for assessment?

#### *Probe:*

- *Range of tasks?*

3-What are your criteria to assess students' language performance?

#### **B) EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment**

4-Can you tell me about speaking assessment in a secondary school level?

#### *Probes:*

- *How important?*
- *The curriculum objectives?*

5-How do you conduct speaking assessment in the classroom?

#### *Probes:*

- *Oral?*
- *Written? Why?*

6- Can you tell me about the tasks you use for speaking assessment?

*Probes:*

- *Pair/group work tasks?*
- *Range of tasks?*

7-What do you focus when you assess their oral language performance?

*Probes:*

- *Assessment categories?*
- *Assessment criteria?*

8- How do you give feedback about students' speaking performance?

*Probes:*

- *Grades?*
- *Checking list?*

9-What assessment techniques do you use?

*Probes:*

- *Peer assessment/ student self assessment?*

### **C) The influence of contextual factor on teacher knowledge of speaking assessment**

10-Can you tell me how did you learn about speaking assessment?

- *Resources for gaining knowledge about speaking assessment?*

11-How do you describe the context in which speaking assessment is implemented?

*Probes:*

- *School environment?*
- *Educational policies?*

12-The questionnaire findings revealed that speaking is assessed through written exams. How does this affect your speaking assessment practice?

13-What other contextual factors do you think have an influence on the actual practice of speaking assessment?

## Appendix 8

### Semi-structured observation schedule

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>School:</b> .....                | <b>Class:</b> .....                      |
| <b>Teacher:</b> .....               | <b>The number of the students:</b> ..... |
| <b>Date:</b> .....                  | <b>Assessment type:</b> .....            |
| <b>Duration of the class:</b> ..... |  |

| <b>Speaking assessment practices planned to be observed</b> | <b>Main concerns</b>   | <b>Field notes</b> | <b>Initial analytical analysis</b> |
|---|--|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Assessment context  | The classroom layout   |                    |                                    |
| Mechanism of speaking assessment in the classroom           | Formative/ summative<br>Timing<br>( <i>others to be observed</i> ) |                    |                                    |
| Speaking assessment tasks                                   |  |                    |                                    |
| The way speaking assessment tasks implemented               | Communicative/traditional methods                                  |                    |                                    |



|                                     |   |  |  |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|
|                                     |   |  |  |
| Assessment techniques               | Teacher's feedback<br>Students-self assessment<br>Peer assessment<br>( <i>others to be observed</i> ) |  |  |
| Other unanticipated emerging issues |   |  |  |

## Appendix 9

### Semi-structured interview transcript

**Researcher:** Before we start, can you tell me about your teaching experience and what language skills are you teaching now?

**Teacher:** yes, I have been teaching English for three years now, and I graduated in 2007. I have been teaching in this secondary school. I have been teaching speaking and grammar for year two and year three. The teaching of English specialisation reminded me of what I had at the college. I'm really interested in the teaching of speaking.

**Researcher:** That's good. Now, I would like to start with looking into your general ideas about language assessment. What is important to you?

**Teacher:** Well, each skill has its own mechanism of assessment. For me oral language assessment is very important as it shows students' pronunciation and communication while speaking English. Grammar is also another important component that should be assessed in terms of students' ability to use the grammatical rules meaningfully and properly. The assessment of writing is also important especially for students whose major is English.

**Rsearcher:** How do you choose tasks for assessment?

**Teacher:** I usually choose tasks that make students communicate in the class. I find tasks that include pair and group work very useful in that students are given a chance to discuss their ideas, identities, and above all to practise the language in a communicative way. In the assessment of grammar, for example, I don't use the tasks in the book since students have a copy of the guide book which contains all the clues. I very often search websites and links that help in the learning of English as a foreign language. I print out the tasks that are appropriate for the students' level. I ask them to do that in groups. For example, when using a task in which students do matching, I give each group a set of small pieces of papers and ask them to do the task. I found out the students like such communicative tasks as they help them better understand the rule and give them an opportunity to speak English with each other. While students are doing the task, I try to walk among the groups to see how the task

is carried out. I sometimes ask each group to make a set of sentences in present perfect, then I let the groups exchange those sentences. I sometimes recommend some links for the students to search. I also download some tasks in my wall in the facebook and ask students to do. I feel students are motivated and have positive attitudes towards learning language when they do tasks that are communicative in nature.

Unfortunately, the prevailing concept among teachers is that students should learn the grammatical rules and should know the structure of the rule. For example, the teacher starts the lesson with writing on the white board auxiliary verbs such as verb to be, verb to have and verb to do. As such the main focus is the teaching of grammar. Consequently, students are assessed on this basis. I totally disagree with that because students became as a machine that gives information about the structure of the rule, but they do not know how to use rules when they come to speak English language. What they need in a real life is to communicate with a language not to memorise its rules.

**Researcher:** That is really good. How do you make your assessment?

**Teacher:** I avoid assessing students in the first month of the academic study. At the very beginning of the academic year, I need students to get used to my way of teaching. I need to tell them about the mechanism of assessment. I also need to know each student in terms of her ability to absorb the information, to interact with classroom discussion, and her ability to perform meaningful and correct utterances. Having taken all these points into account, I start to make my assessment. I usually ask them some questions or make some warming up questions at the beginning of each class to check whether students have understood the previous lesson and whether they have studied it at home.

**Researcher:** what about summative assessment?

**Teacher:** The summative assessment is important in that make students study what they have taken so far. I consider it as a revision for students to study the units they have studied for a period of time.

**Researcher:** Good. Now I would like to talk about your ideas and practices of speaking assessment. Can you tell me about your experience of teaching speaking?

**Teacher:** I have been teaching speaking for three years now. I have been teaching the same two classes for three years now. I started with them when they were in year one, then year two and now they are in year three. When I started teaching speaking, I was so confused and I was always asking myself 'how speaking could be taught?' The first year of teaching was really boring. In the assessment, I used to ask each two students to read the dialogue loudly from the book while the other students were listening. Then I tried another way. I asked students to practise the dialogue in the class. I asked a pair of students to practise it in front of the class. I felt this method was quite boring because I found students memorised the dialogue and came to class and said it without showing any sense of communication. As a consequence, I felt that students were bored and did not show any sense of interest. Then, I tried another assessment mechanism. I suggested certain topics and wrote them on the board and asked students in pairs to make up a short dialogue. By using such a task, students started to interact and showed a sense of communication. By getting to know more about the oral tasks in the book, I have found that students are more interested in the assessment tasks that make them create, prepare, work and act as groups. I remembered that there was a speaking task in year two book, asking students to talk about how to make a rocket. That was in the previous academic year. Students liked the idea, and made up a rocket by using a cardboard. In the day of assessment, they brought the parts of the rocket they made and started to talk about them. They did a great job. They tried to use new vocabulary related to the task. They also could communicate with the audience very well. I very often encourage them to speak and tell them that I would not be so much concerned about the grammatical mistakes as long as they could convey the message clearly.

The idea I like in the skills book that all the language skills in each unit complement each other. Each unit includes reading, speaking, writing, and listening skills as well as lab work and pronunciation. All these are presented as lessons in each unit. There is no a grammar lesson, however, a teacher can elicit the grammatical rule used in each lesson. For example, if the focus of the unit of a present perfect tense, all the tasks in the unit focus on the use of the present perfect. Since I am teaching grammar and speaking as two school subjects, I need to remind students that the main concern of the speaking tasks is the use of a present perfect tense, for example. Another example, when I explained the use of if conditions, I told them

that i need you to use it when you do the speaking tasks which asked students to practise if condition in communicative situations. The same thing for the use of reported speech, passive voice and so on.

**Researcher:** That is good. So you see the curriculum is useful. Can you tell me more about the objectives of the curriculum with regard to the teaching of speaking?

**Teacher:** According to the curriculum objectives, the aim of teaching speaking is to make the students be able to use English language appropriately in a real life. In other words, the aim is to make students speak good English. As such, speaking lessons address a variety of authentic situations through which students can learn how to speak in many different situations. I will give a good example, there is a speaking lesson that shows how students can communicate with foreign students when they go to study abroad and how to make friends in the welcome week of the academic year. The lesson provides the students with some useful tips about how to break the ice with foreign people, how to start the conversation with them and what to avoid asking about. There are also some lessons that focus on the use of formal and informal language; how to distinguish to talk with a friend and with an academic person at university. The way the curriculum presents these objectives raised students' awareness of the importance of learning to speak in a real life. I think it provides students with insights about the foreign culture which is quite important.

**Researcher:** That sounds encouraging. According to these objectives, what level do students should be up to when they go to a higher academic level?

**Teacher:** Well, it has to be at least in upper intermediate level. In fact, there are a considerable number of students are excellent in speaking. They have a huge amount of vocabulary. When they go to a higher level, students should be able to express their opinions and ideas fluently. They also should have the ability to communicate with academic people; they should have the confidence to present their work in English. In addition to that, they can communicate fluently and confidently in different situation in everyday life such as in hospital, cafe or in the bus station.

**Researcher:** you mentioned earlier that you assess speaking both orally and in written exams. First of all, can you tell me about how do you design your oral test?

**Teacher:** As you may know that speaking must be tested in a written form. However, I made my own decision in that I divide the mark for both written and oral assessment.

**Researcher:** Can you tell me more about that?

**Teacher:** Well, I firstly select the units in which students will be tested. It varies in that I use some tasks that require individual assessment such as reporting a radio programme. Within this task, I ask the students to listen to a radio programme at home and come the next day to report it in the class. I also use tasks that require a group work such as getting to know foreign students at university, making telephone calls. In such tasks I ask the groups to prepare their work and then come and act it in the class so I need to see the scene. My assessment is based on some basic points. First of all, I focus on how confidence they are. They must appear self-confident when they do the task, and the way they stand in front of the class. Secondly, I need to see the extent to which the student can engage with the audience and whether she is able to convey her message clearly. In case of a group work, I mainly focus on whether the students communicate with each other in a natural way or they just memorise the dialogue. I need to see a science that has authenticity. In addition to that, I focus on their pronunciation.

In a written test, the questions are very often about writing definitions of some terms, matching phrases (formal and informal), and filling the gaps in short dialogues.

I am personally not convinced of assessing speaking on a piece of paper. It is nonsense to assess students' speaking performance on a piece of paper.

**Researcher:** I see what you mean. In oral assessment, what else do you focus on?

**Teacher:** I also focus on students' reaction to the questions asked by the audience. I find this very important point to be assessed. I usually pay students' attention to this point, advising them that while speaking or presenting something, they do not only need to present their work to others, but also they need to focus, be engaged with the audience and be ready for

the questions. Some students get confused when they are asked a question by their peers. If I find the student being assessed is able to communicate with the audience and answer their queries about the topic, this gives an indication that the student understands what she is talking about. However, I find the student cannot understand the audience's questions and is not able to answer them, I don't give her a good mark even if she doesn't make any linguistic mistakes. This gives me an indication that the student is memorising the topic or a dialogue. In fact, I see memorising as a negative point to learn how to speak. Speaking is communication so students must have the ability to communicate with people, not just memorise the language. I always advise my students to avoid memorisation, or writing what they are going to say in a piece of paper and read it out while being assessed. What they can do just to write some points or bulletins to organise their ideas and to remind them what they are going to say.

**Researcher:** what questions are included in the written exams?

**Teacher:** I usually use a variety of questions. For example, I ask students to write definitions for some terms or words; students are given jumbled sentences in order to rearrange them; students are given a question like 'what words go before these statements to make events; a question in which students are required to underline the correct answer. Students are given conversational phrases and are asked about their functions. They are also given a number of words and are asked to find out the odd word. The questions are mainly taken from the exercises that are in the skill book.

**Researcher:** What do you assess in the written tests?

**Teacher:** I see if they give the information I need regardless of the grammatical or spelling mistakes. As long as I feel that the student is able to answer the questions correctly, I give them good marks. Unless she makes fatal mistakes in grammar or spelling, I consider it good work.

**Researcher:** You talked earlier about many different speaking tasks, are these tasks in the curriculum?

**Teacher:** As I mentioned earlier, I used a variety of assessment tasks that are all in the skill book. I use tasks that assess individuals, in pairs or groups. Role play, solving a problem, making up a dialogue about a certain situation, and describing a picture tasks are very often used in the assessment of pair or group work. In case we have extra time in the class, I suggest certain topics and ask them to make up a story, or bring them a picture not from the book and ask them to discuss in pairs or groups. Lately, I asked students to prepare presentations about any topic they are interested in. They are also free to decide whether to present individually, in pairs or in a group as it is a new experience for them. Another reason is that I give a weak student a chance to work in a group so they may help her to foster better ideas, and better organise them. I find a group work very beneficial in that it encourages communication and generating better ideas. I try to make different groups in that each student works in a different group each time. I also make the group contain good and weak students because I noticed that the good students help the weak ones and sometimes correct their mistakes such as in pronunciation.

**Researcher:** while assessing students' orally do you use a tape or a video recorder?

**Teacher:** no, I do not.

**Researcher:** How do you assess them? Do you make you assessment while or after doing the task?

**Teacher:** I used to take notes when I started teaching the groups in their year one. I used to assess them while they were doing the task. By the time I get to know each student's level very well especially this year, therefore, I very often keep watching and listening to students' while doing the task. Later when I go back home, I can still remember mistakes made by each students, especially in everyday assessment. However, in the summative assessments, I take notes and comments for each student in order to remind me later when I give the score. In my opinion, the summative assessment does not always reflect students' linguistic level as the formative assessment does. I feel the everyday assessment can show the students' development and progress in speaking, so I take that into account when I give a score for the midterm or the final exams.



**Researcher:** You said that you used a variety of assessment tasks which is good. My question is that do you use different assessment categories for each task or you keep using the same ones for each task?

**Teacher:** Well, there are some categories are common in all assessment tasks such as communicative skills, students' pronunciation, and self-confidence. However, I take into account learning objectives of each assessment task as explained in the skill book. For example in the assessment of the presentation, I focused on the way students organised it in terms of giving introduction, body and conclusion and whether the ideas were clear and coherent. I also focused on the way the presenter engaged with audience and how she could manage to ask their questions. When having reported a radio programme, I focused on how students could give good information about the programme, their use of reported speech, their use of certain phrases that are supposed to be used. As I told you I consider the learning objectives of the task that is used in the assessment.

**Researcher:** What do you think of peer assessment and student self-assessment, do you use them?

**Teacher:** I usually make the assessment. However, I use a peer assessment. I teach two groups, so when I make assessment for one group, I ask some of good students from the other group to come to the class and act as a committee. They had their seats in front of the class, while students being assess were doing their oral performance. The committee wrote down their notes and gave marks. At the end of the class, I asked the committee about how they made their assessment and gave me a good explanation about the good and bad points in the students' performance. For example they commented that some utterances were not clear, the idea was not so clear, or the student has some mistakes in pronunciation and such. This was really good as it raised students' awareness of their oral mistakes. It was a good experience. I think students have the ability to assess each other. But to be honest, I do not use these assessment techniques very often.

**Researcher:** Why?

**Teacher:** They aren't common assessment techniques, the teacher is the main assessor in the classroom, although they are really good to be used but we as teachers aren't familiar with them.

**Researcher:** Can you tell me about your scoring technique?

**Teacher:** I use an analytic scoring technique. I assess each category I mentioned to you earlier separately. I give each a category a mark, then I give the biggest mark on how students could convey her ideas, messages, and her principles to the audience. After having considered that in detail, I give the overall mark.

**Researcher:** So you mainly depend on the marking system in your assessment?

**Teacher:** Definitely, that is the system is used for the assessment of students' language performances. The MOE issues documents every year and this document provides the division of marks and the total of marks teachers need to have for each language skill. So, teachers are given information about how to distribute marks for the tests in each term.

**Researcher:** Now I would like you to tell me about how do you know about speaking assessment? Have you had any training programmes or any workshops about language assessment?

**Teacher:** About how to teach but not about how to assess. I had a training programme about three years ago about how to teach this curriculum. It was a 6 week training programme, and it was given by British professionals. It was really beneficial and informative in that they provided us with a variety of communicative tasks that can be used to teach the skills in the curriculum. Last year I had an intensive course in the British Council. We had good information about the communicative methods of teaching English language.

**Researcher:** within these programmes have you been trained of how to teach speaking?

**Teacher:** to some extent. The training about how to teach the curriculum was very useful. In the last week of the programme, we were asked to prepare any lesson and to explain it using the communicative methods. It was really good. I learned from it a lot. It developed my skill and ability to teach a foreign language in a communicative way. It made me avoid using the

traditional methods that my teachers used to conduct when I was a student. Unfortunately, up to the present time, some teachers still follow the traditional methods in teaching and assessing English language.

**Researcher:** Do you have such training programmes frequently?

**Teacher:** Unfortunately, it was once, and since that time we have not had any. However, there are some workshops that are run by the British Council frequently. They are useful and refreshing. The problem with such workshops is that many sessions held in one time. For example, there was a session about how to teach speaking, at the same time there was a session how to teach grammar. The teacher couldn't have the chance to attend both sessions.

**Researcher:** That sounds good. Is this available for all the teachers to attend?

**Teacher:** Yes, we are usually informed by the administrative staff at school that there would be workshop held in the British Council.

**Researcher:** Can you tell me about other resources that may help you to know more about speaking assessment?

**Teacher:** My sole resource is the internet. I very often do searching in Google. I very much depend on the internet. There are hundreds of links and websites that provide insights into the communicative methods of language teaching and language learning. I frequently search links about teaching speaking and how can a teacher make their students practise speaking in the classroom.

**Researcher:** you mentioned earlier that you do not focus much on a written exam. How do written tests and exams n have influence on the students?

**Teacher:** students do not show any interest in written tests. They feel bored since they know that they are going to memorise definitions or to do some matching. What they are really interested in is the oral language assessment. I feel that they make great efforts while being orally assessed. As such they always ask for feedback when they are orally assessed. They keen to know about their mistakes in order to improve their oral language skills.

**Researcher:** What other contextual factors do you think have an influence on the actual practice of speaking assessment?

**Teacher:** the only problem is the length of the curriculum. Two classes a week for speaking are not enough. I need at least three classes so that I could give more chances for students to practise speaking. I sometimes have two tasks in the lesson that students need to do and there is not enough time. In order to deal with this problem, I ask the students to prepare the two tasks at home, then I select randomly those who do one task and those who do the other task. That is the student is working on both tasks but she is going to be assessed on either of them.

## Appendix 10: Coding in the NVivo

**Nodes**

- teacher's awareness of the importance of speaking assessment
  - higher education
  - speaking assessment is compensation for written assessment
  - linguistic ability
  - trust
  - english is a worldwide language
  - medium of communication
  - sociocultural
  - language is speaking
  - school subject
- teacher's perception of written tests
  - teacher's practice of written test in speaking
  - written tests (assessment criteria)
  - disagreement with policy
  - negative impact on the students' learning
  - students are victims
  - nonsense
  - against curriculum objectives
  - appropriate
  - practical
  - credibility
  - inappropriate assessment categories
- teacher's knowledge of curriculum objective for the teaching of speaking
- teachers' perception of the assessment of students' language performance
  - teacher's perception of the assessment of the community
  - teachers' perception of the assessment of linguistic skills
    - the assessment of grammar
    - the assessment of writing
    - the assessment of speaking

**References**

teacher's awareness of the importance of speaking assessment

[Internals\interviews\Ahlam \(Asmaa\)](#) - \$ 1 reference coded [5.10% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 5.10% Coverage

it is quite important to assess speaking at this stage for a simple reason is that these students have been studying English as a specialisation for three years. Within those years of study, speaking is taught as one of the main subjects. Therefore, when students have a secondary school certificate specialised in English, they are supposed to speak good English. for me to know a foreign language means one can speak that language very well. Therefore, i think the assessment of speaking is quite essential at a secondary school stage as it shows the extent to which students are able to practise what they learn in English language.

[Internals\interviews\Amal \(Amira\)](#) - \$ 2 references coded [2.99% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.87% Coverage

In my point of view i have to assess their speaking performance orally. Because this is speaking skill and it should be tested orally. In addition, there are other skills that can be assessed by using written tests such as reading, grammar, and writing.

Reference 2 - 1.12% Coverage

exactly, so the student does more practice and gain more marks. The students should have good marks in speaking as they know how to use grammar well.

[Internals\interviews\Hanan \(Muna\)](#) - \$ 2 references coded [8.29% Coverage]

**Nodes**

- biographical background
- teacher's suggestions for the low level
  - entry test
  - conducting interviews
  - alteration in the assessment policy
  - teacher's approach to support the weak student
- teacher's awareness of the importance of speaking assessment
- teacher's perception of written tests
- teacher's knowledge of curriculum objective for the teaching of speaking
  - learning objectives (communicative)
  - learning objectives (functional)
  - students' language level
  - authenticity
- teachers' perception of the assessment of students' language performance
- teachers' narratives of the practice of speaking assessment
- contextual factors
- teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment

**References**

teacher's knowledge of curriculum objective for the teaching of speaking

[Internals\interviews\Hanan \(rawan\)](#) - \$ 1 reference coded [1.48% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.48% Coverage

if we consider the curriculum objectives, we find the student must be efficient at using the language and have good knowledge about grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation. Within the curriculum objectives, the students should have the basics of how to use English language properly.

[Internals\interviews\Hyam \(Hana\)](#) - \$ 1 reference coded [2.10% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.10% Coverage

i think it should be assessed. This because they have been learning English in primary, preparatory and now in a secondary school, so they are in a level that their speaking performance should be assessed. In this stage, the students should be good at accuracy and fluency. They must be fluent when they produce meaningful sentences, construct correct sentences and must be good at pronunciation.

[Internals\interviews\Lameah \(Lamyah\)](#) - \$ 1 reference coded [6.04% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 6.04% Coverage

according to the curriculum objectives, the students should have the ability to use the language effectively. When the students are going to study in English language departments at

## **Appendix 11: Stimulated recall interview transcript**

**Rsearcher:** how did you feel the assessment went?

### **General queries**

**Teacher:** well, I have been teaching speaking to this group since they were in year one. I have neen teaching them for three years. I used to teach them speaking and grammar in year one; speaking and reading in year two; and speaking and grammar this year. I always remind them to use grammatical rules and vocabulary when they do oral tasks. The language skills sequenced in the skill book in a way that make students learn some grammatical rules, words, phrases and expressions so that they can use when they do oral language tasks. I noticed that students have remarkably improved compared when they were in year one. I also noticed that many students used to be shy and lack confidence to speak in front of their peers, especially in front of students whose English is very good as they had a chance to study in English speaking countries. Now they become more confident and have a sense of competition in that all of the students are doing their best to perform good English.

**Researcher:** How did you make them gain confidence and have the motivation to show the best of their oral language performance?

**Teacher:** Well, when I started teaching them in year one, I used to explain the vocabulary and do the exercise, then I used to ask them to do the oral task. In year one, they used to have dialogues. I was asking them to learn the dialogue by heart at home, then they came the next day to perform it in the class. Two students came in front of the class and played the role of the characters in the dialogue. The problem faced the students that they sometimes could not remember a word or a phrase in the dialogue, and that made the students could not carry on the dialogue. I found memorisation is not a good technique for learning how to speak. Then, I suggested that students could keep the idea on which the dialogue is based, and students could use their own words and phrases. I attempted to encourage them to talk by explaining to them that it is ok if they made mistakes in grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation; the most important thing is they could convey the message, and thing they intended to say is understood. Year two was a transitional stage for the students in that they

started to build up their confidence. In this year three, students use oral tasks that reflect authenticity. In some tasks, a student is required to listen to a radio programme, then she comes to the class and report what she listened in front of the class. I sometimes ask them to read their favourite story and then they come to class and retell it.

**Researcher:** so you encouraged them to do the tasks authentically.

**Teacher:** It not me actually. This is the objective of the curriculum. it aims to make students carry out the task authentically.

Generally speaking, I based my assessment on the coherence of the ideas and the way they presented by the students. I always tell them that whatever the task is, they need to be organised in their performance. They need to know what to say when the start doing the task. For example, in giving a report about a radio programme, I assessed how students introduced themselves and the topic they are going to talk about, and how they are going to end up the their talk. I also focus on the use of language in terms of matter of formality; in some situations a formal style is required, while in some others an informal language is needed. Personality is also an important element in assessment. Students should appear confident when they speak.

**Researcher:** How do you know that students have learnt how to speak properly in a certain situation?

**Teacher:** When they do speaking tasks talking about new topics. For example, as you could see today, students did role plays in which they were required to persuade their partners to do something. Within this task, students came up with many different topics such as smoking, healthy food, and watching a football match. The more students come up with new ideas, try different ways to persuade their partners, and make the conversation look as if in a real life, the more marks i give them.

**Researcher:** Are the tasks students did today assessed on a formative or summative basis?

**Teacher:** well, each speaking lesson includes oral language tasks. I make the assessment of these tasks throughout the academic year. Then I give a total mark for each term. The

problem is that speaking must be tested using written exams. At the beginning of this academic year, I had a discussion with the inspector about this matter, and suggested that final exam could be divided into written and oral tests so that student could have the chance to be tested orally in speaking. However, he said that was a resolution from the ministry of education. I have made my own decision and divided the mark for final test of the first term into two parts; one for the written exam and one for the oral test. However, I can't do that with the final exam of the second term because the secondary students all over the country are tested with the same exams issued by the ministry of education.

**Episode one:** what assessment categories (element) the teacher focused on

**Research:** now we are going to watch the tasks the students did today. It was about how to report a radio programme, wasn't it?

**Teacher:** yes, it was.

**Researcher:** Can you tell me about the points you focused on while the student was doing the task?

**Teacher:** look at this student [*the teacher was commenting as she was watching the episode*]. I firstly focused on the way the students standing, and how confident she looked. This student looked a bit hesitant. It was clear that she was confused, although she is doing really well in written tests. Her pronunciation is not that good. Her voice was not loud enough. Some students did that on purpose so I can't hear them clearly and can't recognise their mistakes.

[Teacher's comments on another student] This student is very good. She always comes up with interesting topics. However, she has a problem in her voice in that it looks as if it is shivering. Another problem with her performance that she looked she was memorising the topic- that was very clear, although I keep reminding them to avoid memorising what they are going to say. Within, the requirements of the task, the student needs to make a communication with audience. While the student is talking, the audience may ask a question, or the reporter herself may raise a question. The aim of this task is to make a student talk



about a radio programme she listened to at home. Within this task, the student is required to use phrases such as 'apparently', 'it has been said', 'people said'.

Sometimes two students worked in pairs to do the role play. Two friends were talking a radio programme. They worked together and made up a dialogue in that one is telling the other about a radio programme she listened to the previous day.

**Researcher:** on what basis did you make your assessment?

**Teacher:** as I told you, I focus on pronunciation. I am also concerned about how students can convey messages, ideas that their topic is based on. I need to get the idea from them and make it clear what they are talking about. I also focused on their way of standing and whether they were confident enough to talk in front of their peers. I take all these points into account. In addition to that, I see whether the aim of the task is achieved. In reporting the radio programme, I focused whether students used the reported speech or not. Anyway, after the students do the tasks, I give each student some comment in the following day, explaining to them what areas they need to work more on.

**Researcher:** how do you take notes about their mistakes?

**Teacher:** I have been teaching them for three year so I know each student very well. I just keep watching them, and then when I go back home, I write some comments about each student.

### **Episode two: the matter of timing**

**Researcher:** I noticed that you considered the matter of timing very well. You made all the students did the task in one class. How can you do that?

**Teacher:** There are 24 students in the class. Since the beginning of the academic year, I made it clear to them that when they do speaking; they have to consider that their oral performance should not be so long that takes other students' chance of doing their task. I tell them that they need to take the time into account in that their talking should not be so long in a way it becomes boring, or to be so short that i have nothing to assess. As we can see the group of the students who made a persuading task. The dialogue was boring, and there was

no a sense of creativity in it. There are four students. However, one student was dominant in that she was the only student talking, while another student just said 'hi girls how are you'. The dialogue in general was ok and it is good they make it in a group work. Yet, each student is assessed orally. I will not give her a mark for just saying 'hi girls how are you'. Even students work in groups, each one of them must be given equal chance and has her own ideas to talk about. I don't give marks for the whole group, but I give marks for each student individually.

**Researcher:** I also noticed today that students did a variety of speaking tasks. The students mentioned the units in which the tasks are.

**Teacher:** Yes, that is right. In each unit, there is an oral task which students are required to do orally. For example, the skill of speaking in unit 14 in the skill book is centred on 'persuading and dissuading. Within this unit, the students are given a role play task in which students are required to work in pairs in that one is trying to persuade the other to go to the talk which was about how to stop smoking. I suggested that students didn't need to stick to the idea of smoking and could use different ideas and different topics. The main point was to show me how they could do the action of persuading and dissuading. In unit 21, there is an oral task which asked students to give a summary of a TV or a radio programme they watched or heard to her partner.

**Researcher:** Based on such a variety in tasks. Does your assessment focus differ from task to task or you focus on the same categories for all the assessment tasks?

**Teacher:** well, today students selected their task from unit 13 to 12. I focus on certain categories such as the pronunciation, the use of vocabulary, grammar, confidence, communication, and showing a sense of authenticity.

### **Episode three: making the conversation looks real by using materials.**

**Teacher:** I tell my students that they may bring materials to make the role play more authentic. [*while the teacher was watching the incident, she was giving her comments*] Here the student is trying to persuade her friend to go with her to the stadium and watch a match between Barcelona and Milan. The one who is trying to play the role of the persuader brought

two sports kits and made up tickets. The students started with greetings then they started the role of persuading. Other students did the persuading task about healthy food. The one is playing the role of persuader brought some fruit with her in order to persuade her friend to stop eating unhealthy food and to replace it by the healthy one. Students who talked about smoking brought fake cigarettes and played the role as if they were smoking. The use of such materials while doing a task makes the students' oral performance more communicative and more authentic. It also develops the sense of creativity in students' language performance. This also made them work in a competitive way that each student wants to do her best; wants to be so creative.

**Researcher:** What was your focus when you assessed those who talked about football match?

**Teacher:** Those students did the task very well. Their pronunciation was excellent. They looked very confident while they were doing the task. They showed me a scene as if they were really football fans. Their communicative skills were really remarkable.

**Episode four: when doing the tasks in groups, the teacher planned to mix good students with weak students.**

**Teacher:** I usually try to make good students work with weak students when they do the tasks in groups. When they prepare their work for the task, I noticed that good students helped the weak ones. I found such a strategy works especially in tasks that require a group work. I found that the weak students' oral language has improved a lot since she started working in a group. This is because when I used to teach them in year one, the weak students used to work together and the good ones used to do the tasks together. There was a big difference between the two groups in terms of language performance, ideas, organisation, communication, confidence, and creativity.

As you can see, students were doing the task together. Within this group [*teacher was commenting while sh was watching the incident*], two students are shy while the other two are active and self-confident. While doing the task, I noticed that shy students attempted to get rid of their shyness and to interact with the other two students. They are doing much

better while they do the speaking task in the group. I was really impressed by how they could overcome their shyness and could interact with their peers. Yet there are some students still have difficulties in some areas of language. They make grammatical mistakes; their pronunciation is not clear. They still lack confidence.

**Researcher:** how do you make assessment for shy students?

**Teacher:** I very often attempt to assess them while doing a task in a group. I make the class work in groups. I walk around the groups to take some notes about their oral language performance. When I know that it is the shy student's turn to talk or to do the oral performance in the group, I come close to the group in a way she did not realise i was listening to her.

**Researcher:** I noticed that you asked the students to change their seats?

Teacher: Yeah, I made every two desks attached to each other so that 4 students working together in a group.

### **Episode 5: Assessing students on how they can express their ideas clearly.**

Teacher: I sometimes ask students to select a speaking task from any unit we have already had. I ask students to prepare their task in advance and work in groups. Within this technique, I don't need to know from which unit the students selected their task. Rather, I need to assess how students' oral language performance could reflect and achieve the aims of the task they are doing. In other words, I need to assess whether students could make it clear to me that their oral language performance is centred on the aim of the task. For example, in a persuading task, I need to see students' ability to persuade somebody else. In starting a conversation with someone they do not know, I need to see if the student is able to cut the ice with a stranger.

## Appendix 12: Ethical approval form

**STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL RESEARCH  
DISSERTATION/THESIS**



**Graduate School of Education**

### **Certificate of ethical research approval**

#### **DISSERTATION/THESIS**

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/> and view the School's statement on the GSE student access on-line documents.

**READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER** (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

**Your name:** Taaziz Grada

**Your student no:** 580037338

**Return address for this certificate:** Flat one, 13a St. James Road, EX4 6PY

**Degree/Programme of Study:** 4 year PhD in education

**Project Supervisor(s):** Dr. Susan Riley, Dr. Rosalind Fisher

**Your email address:** tg230@exeter.ac.uk

**Tel:** 07760476377      01392271313

**I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis** (delete whichever is inappropriate) **to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.**

**I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.**

**Signed:** Taaziz Grada ..... **date:** 9.11.2011.....

**NB** For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must **not be included** in your work. It can be kept for your records.

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

# Certificate of ethical research approval

## DISSERTATION/THESIS

**Your student no:**  
580037338

---

**Title of your project:**

An investigation into Libyan EFL secondary school teachers' knowledge and practice of oral language assessment: The perspective of novice teachers.

**Brief description of your research project:**

The study aims to explore the complexity of novice EFL teachers' knowledge of oral language assessment in an EFL secondary school context. That is, it aims to uncover what teachers know about the constructs and methods of oral language assessment, and how such knowledge is perceived within a socio-cultural perspective. In addition, the study seeks to investigate what teachers do when they practise oral language assessment in the classroom and the extent to which their knowledge of oral language assessment is shaped by the context in which oral language assessment is practised.

**Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):**

The participants of this study will be novice Libyan EFL secondary school teachers, males and females, who teach English as a foreign language in a Libyan secondary school context. The ages of the participants ranges from 21 to 30 and over.

**Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:**

- a) **informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents). Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document.** a blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents:

To gain their agreement to take part in the study, the participants will be fully informed about the aim and the purpose of the research. They will also be informed that their participation is entirely voluntary and they have the right to withdraw at any time.

- b) **anonymity and confidentiality**

The participants will be assured that their anonymity is preserved. In the questionnaire, names of the participants will be disassociated from responses during the coding and recording processes. Pseudonyms of the participating teachers will be used in the research and names of the schools will not be mentioned when writing about the procedures and analysis of data collection. Regarding confidentiality, the participating teachers will be assured that their personal details will be strictly confidential, and the data collected will be used merely for the purpose of the research.

**Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:**

---

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee  
updated: April 2011

A questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and classroom (non-participant) observation, followed by stimulated recall interview are the methods to be used to collect data from the participants. Regarding the questionnaire, the participating teachers will be informed that they have the right to complete the questionnaire or not. As for the interview and classroom observation, the researcher intends to use audio and video taping. However, if a participant has the feeling of distress or discomfort because of being audio or video taped, he or she will be informed in advance that they have the right to refuse permission to be audio or video taped. As an alternative, taking notes will be used in the field of study.

**Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):**

The data collected from completed questionnaires, audio-taped interviews and video-taped observations will be stored in a secure place at the researcher's office.

**Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):**

As far as the researcher is concerned there will not be any exceptional factors that may raise ethical issues as the scope of study is teacher knowledge and practice within an educational framework.

---

***This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.***

***N.B.*** You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

---

**This project has been approved for the period:** 01/12/2011 **until:** 01/12/2012

**By** (above mentioned supervisor's signature): S. M. Riley **date:** November 9th 2011

***N.B. To Supervisor:*** Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

**GSE unique approval reference:** D/11/12/12

**Signed:** Sabah D. Al-Hadi **date:** 10/11/2011  
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

## Appendix 13: Libyan embassy approval form

The National Transitional Council  
The Libyan Interim Government  
The Ministry of Higher Education  
and Scientific Research  
The Cultural Affairs Dept. - London



المجلس الوطني الإنتقالي  
الحكومة الليبية الإنتقالية  
وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي  
قسم الشؤون الثقافية - لندن

التاريخ : 18/04/2012  
الرقم الإرشادي : 12-04-107  
رقم الملف : 7099  
رقم قرار الإفاد:  
01/01/2009 : بداية الصرف  
31/12/2012 : نهاية الصرف  
48 : اشهر المنحة

التاريخ : .....

اسم الطالب : تعزيز خالد علي قرادة  
الدرجة العلمية : دكتوراة  
التخصص : لغة انجليزية

الم/خ / مدير إدارة البعثات الدراسية  
بعيد التلية ،،،

الموضوع / دراسة حقلية

تقدمت إلينا المعنية بطلب لموافقكم على إجراء دراسة حقلية في ليبيا وذلك لجمع بعض  
البيانات و المعلومات المتعلقة بدراسته، حسب رسالة الاستاذ المشرف المرفقة.

والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ،،،

د. محمد الباسط قبور  
المستشار الثقافي





## Appendix 14

### Consent form

- I have been fully informed about the aim and the purpose of the study.
- I have been informed that the participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time.
- I have been informed that the information which I will provide will only be used for the purpose of this study, including publications.
- I have been informed that the information which I will give will be kept anonymous, and I have the right not to permit the publication of this information.

#### **I give/ do not give permission to use:**

- Audio recorder in the interviews
- Audio/video-recorders in the observation sessions

#### **Data protection:**

I understand that

...the recordings of (interview/observation) will be securely stored by the researcher.

... the recordings will be transcribed and will be securely stored in a password protected devices.

Date.....

Researcher.....

Participant 's name.....

Participant's signature.....

One copy of this for will be kept by the participant, and the other copy will be kept by the researcher.

Researcher's mobile number:.....

## Appendix 15: Questionnaire findings

### 5.1 Phase one: Questionnaire data analysis

A descriptive statistical analysis was applied to the data collected from the questionnaire. Raw data was entered manually into Excel in order to obtain frequency and percentage. The analysis of the questionnaire items is presented in three main sections: background information about the participants; teachers' general perception of language assessment principles and how this perception is reflected in their practice of speaking assessment; EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment, including constructs, tasks and techniques, and criteria.

#### 5.1.1 Analysis of background information

##### *Highest qualifications*

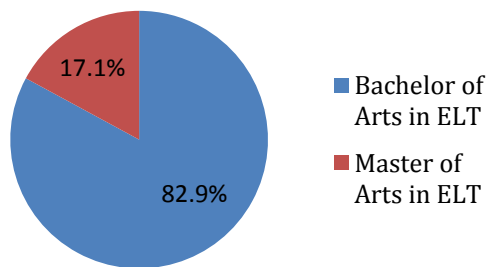


Figure 5.1: Teachers' qualifications (n=76)

Figure 5.1 shows that the vast majority of the respondents have the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in ELT (English language teaching), whereas only 13 (17%) of the teachers have Master of Arts (MA) degree in ELT. This may indicate that BA is an essential degree for a secondary school teacher to have in order to be eligible to teach in a secondary school, while an MA is optional.

### Teaching experience

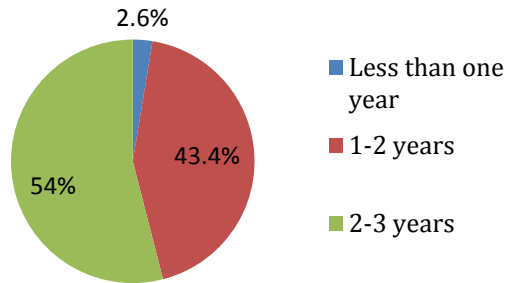


Figure 5.2: Teaching experience (n=76)

Since the sampling procedure used for the questionnaire is purposive, the questionnaire was administered to EFL teachers who have 3 years or less of teaching experience. Figure 5.2 shows that 41 (54%) of the respondents have 2-3 years of teaching experience and 33 (43%) have teaching experience ranging between one and two years. Only 2 participants have less than one year of teaching English; this small number is likely to be a consequence of the political change that the country witnessed in 2011.

### Access to in-service training programmes



Figure 5.4: Access to training programmes about speaking assessment

o training programmes  
essment

English language has been taught as a major in specialised secondary schools for only about eight years. As I mentioned in the context chapter, a new curriculum was designed in order

to cover the teaching of each language skill communicatively. This reform in EFL teaching materials essentially requires the training of teachers in how to use communicative language teaching techniques and how to carry out language assessment in the classroom. Surprisingly, the findings revealed that 57 (75%) of respondents have not received training in language assessment. With regard to speaking assessment, 12 out of 19 teachers received training in this area (see Figure 5.4). This may initially indicate that teachers' knowledge about language assessment in general and oral language assessment in particular is affected by the lack of teacher training.

## 5.1.2 EFL teachers' perception of language assessment

### 5.1.2.1 General perception of language assessment

This section analyses how EFL novice teachers perceive language assessment in terms of a number of principles that they may take into account. The aim was to explore how teachers' perception contributes to their understanding and practising of speaking assessment. Table 5.1 below shows the frequency and percentages of the respondents with reference to each item, a procedure that was followed for analysing close-ended items in the questionnaire.

*A = strongly agree B = agree C = disagree D = strongly disagree n = 76*

| Item | Teachers should...  | A           | B           | C         | D         |
|------|---|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| 9    | ...specify the purpose of assessments when they assess students' language performance.                        | 51.3%<br>39 | 47.4%<br>36 | 0%<br>0   | 1.3%<br>1 |
| 10   | ...clearly identify the language skills to be assessed when they design language assessment.                  | 50%<br>38   | 48.7%<br>37 | 1.3%<br>1 | 0%<br>0   |
| 11   | ...choose assessment tasks which help to get information about students' ability to use language effectively. | 59.2%<br>45 | 36.9%<br>28 | 3.9%<br>3 | 0%<br>0   |

|    |  |                    |                    |             |           |
|----|--|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 12 | ...use many different language assessment tasks.                                     | <b>44.7%</b><br>34 | 39.5%<br>30        | 10.5%<br>8  | 5.3%<br>4 |
| 13 | ...clearly explain to the students how to do language assessment tasks.              | <b>40.8%</b><br>31 | <b>40.8%</b><br>31 | 15.8%<br>12 | 2.6%<br>2 |
| 14 | ...consider assessment criteria used when they design language assessment.           | 36.8%<br>28        | <b>57.9%</b><br>44 | 5.3%<br>4   | 0%<br>0   |
| 15 | ...connect the selection of assessment criteria with the aim of language assessment. | 32.9%<br>25        | <b>60.5%</b><br>46 | 5.3%<br>4   | 1.3%<br>1 |
| 16 | ...use formative language assessment.  | 40.8%<br>31        | <b>56.6%</b><br>43 | 1.3%<br>1   | 1.3%<br>1 |
| 17 | ...make language assessment part of language teaching and learning.                  | <b>51.3%</b><br>39 | 46.1%<br>35        | 0%<br>0     | 2.6%<br>2 |
| 18 | ...use summative language assessment.  | 35.5%<br>27        | <b>48.7%</b><br>37 | 7.9%<br>6   | 7.9%<br>6 |

Table 5.1: EFL teachers' perception of language assessment

As can be seen in the table above, teachers were asked about the extent of their agreement to language assessment principles related to the clarity of assessment procedures, the use of tasks in language assessment, the establishment of criteria in language assessment, and the use of formative and summative language assessment. In general, the respondents reported that these language assessment principles should be taken into account when assessing students' language performance. This is evident in items 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, and 17, which indicate that the majority of the participants claimed teachers should adhere to these language assessment principles.

Reflecting on the high rate of agreement with most of the items in the table above, it must be recognised that these teachers may have wanted to show me what they thought I want to

see. Such findings seem to say the least given teachers' rate of agreement with these elements. Further investigation is carried out in the second phase of data collection in which interviews, observation and recall interviews were conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding about teachers' general understandings of language assessment principles and how they perceive them.

### 5.1.2.2 Practice of speaking assessment

As mentioned in the questionnaire design, I made a connection between section two and section four. The aim was to investigate how teachers' general perception of language assessment is reflected in the frequency of practising certain principles in speaking assessment. As such, my interpretation of the findings obtained from analysing this section is based on examining the relationship between specific items in these two sections. That is, the correlation is checked based on the association between the participants' extent of their agreement with language principles in Table 5.1 and their frequency of their reported speaking assessment practices in Table 5.2.A. The respondents' reported practices of speaking assessment ranged from always to never (see Table 5.2.A below).

*Key: A=Always (100%) U=Usually (80%) S=Sometimes (50%) R=Rarely (20%) N=Never (0%)*  
*n=76*

| item | Statements  | A                         | U                         | S                         | R         | N         |
|------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 48   | I firstly identify the purpose of assessment when I assess students' oral language performance                                  | 28.9%<br>22               | <b>38.2%</b><br><b>29</b> | 26.3%<br>20               | 5.3%<br>4 | 1.3%<br>1 |
| 49   | I identify the skills to be assessed when I design language speaking  | <b>34.2%</b><br><b>26</b> | 25%<br>19                 | <b>34.2%</b><br><b>26</b> | 6.6%<br>5 | 0%<br>0   |
| 50   | I select assessment tasks that help to get information about the students' ability to use oral language performance effectively | <b>40.8%</b><br><b>31</b> | 35.6%<br>27               | 19.7%<br>15               | 3.9%<br>3 | 0%<br>0   |

|           |  |                           |                           |                           |             |             |
|-----------|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>51</b> | I use different speaking assessment tasks in a speaking test                     | 19.7%<br>15               | <b>39.5%</b><br><b>30</b> | 19.7%<br>15               | 17.2%<br>13 | 3.9%<br>3   |
| <b>52</b> | I process speaking assessment tasks within a given limited time                  | <b>36.8%</b><br><b>28</b> | 27.7%<br>21               | 22.4%<br>17               | 10.5%<br>8  | 2.6%<br>2   |
| <b>53</b> | I clearly explain to the students how to do speaking assessment tasks            | <b>28.9%</b><br><b>22</b> | 27.6%<br>21               | 15.8%<br>12               | 15.8%<br>12 | 11.9%<br>9  |
| <b>54</b> | I develop my own assessment criteria when I design speaking assessment           | <b>34.2%</b><br><b>26</b> | 27.6%<br>21               | 30.4%<br>23               | 3.9%<br>3   | 3.9%<br>3   |
| <b>55</b> | I use speaking assessment criteria provided by outside resources                 | 14.5%<br>11               | 26.3%<br>20               | <b>35.5%</b><br><b>27</b> | 6.6%<br>5   | 17.1%<br>13 |
| <b>56</b> | I connect the selection of assessment criteria to the aim of speaking assessment | 27.6%<br>21               | <b>51.3%</b><br><b>39</b> | 14.5%<br>11               | 5.3%<br>4   | 1.3%<br>1   |
| <b>57</b> | I make speaking assessment a part of language teaching and learning process.     | 38.1%<br>29               | <b>39.5%</b><br><b>30</b> | 13.2%<br>10               | 6.6%<br>5   | 2.6%<br>2   |

Table 5.2.A: EFL teachers' practice of speaking assessment

The findings obtained from Table 5.2.A revealed that the participants' frequency of speaking assessment practices were found to be related to their extent of agreement with language assessment principles in relation to many items. Table 5.2.B shows the related items.

|         |         |
|---------|---------|
| Item 48 | Item 9  |
| Item49  | Item 10 |
| Item50  | Item 11 |
| Item 51 | Item 12 |
| Item 53 | Item 13 |

|            |            |
|------------|------------|
| Item 54/55 | Item 14    |
| Item 56    | Item 15    |
| Item 57    | Item 16/17 |

Table 5.2.B: related items in Table5.1 and Table 5.2.A

As can be seen in the table above, item 48 (*I firstly identify the purpose of assessment when I assess students' oral language performance*) is correlated to item 9 (*teachers should specify the purpose of assessments when they assess students' language performance*). The findings indicate a close relationship between the rate of respondents' agreement with item 9 (98%) and the frequency of their practice of this assessment principle which ranges between *always* and *sometimes*. Likewise, the findings obtained from the correlated items: 49 (*I identify the skills to be assessed when I design language speaking*) and 10 (*teachers should clearly identify the language skills to be assessed when they design language assessment*) show close relationship between the rate of respondents' agreement and their practice of this assessment principle.

Another close relationship was found between item 50 (*I select assessment tasks that help to get information about the students' ability to use oral language performance effectively*) and item 11 (*teachers should choose assessment tasks which help to get information about students' ability to use language effectively*). In item 50, 73 (96%) of the participants ranged their frequency of assessment practices from *always* and *sometimes* with the majority of responses goes to *always* (100%). This was correlated with the percentage of the participants (99%) who considered the importance of considering the selection of tasks in the assessment of students' language performance (item 11).

Similarly, the findings obtained from items 51 and 53 were found, to some extent, to be correlated to that obtained from items 12 and 13 respectively. In item 51 (*I use different speaking assessment tasks in a speaking test*), 79% of the respondents ranged their assessment practice from *always* to *sometimes*, while 21% of the respondents ranged their practice between *rarely* and *never*. This was correlated to the findings obtained from item 12 (*teachers should use many different language assessment tasks*) in which 84% of the respondents show agreement and 15% show disagreement.



Likewise, in item 53 (*I clearly explain to the students how to do speaking assessment tasks*), 72% of the respondents ranged their practice between always and sometimes, and 28% reported that they rarely/never practise this principle in speaking assessment. This was correlated to the findings obtained from item 13 (*Teachers should clearly explain to the students how to do speaking assessment tasks* in which 82% of the respondent show agreement and 19% showed disagreement.

Another relationship was checked between items: 57 (*I make speaking assessment a part of language teaching and learning process*) and 17(*teachers should make language assessment part of language teaching and learning*). The findings revealed that about 69 (91%) of the participants very often make speaking assessment a part of language teaching and learning (item 57) and that was correspond to their answers to item 17 in which 74 (97%) of the participants show agreement with the importance of making language assessment a part of language teaching and learning.

Items 52 (*I process speaking assessment tasks within a given limited time*), 54 (*I develop my own assessment criteria when I design speaking assessment*) and 55 (*I use speaking assessment criteria provided by outside resources*) will be further discussed with reference to teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment tasks and criteria (see 5.1.3.3).

The responses given by these teachers may indicate that their understandings of language assessment principles are reflected in their speaking assessment practices. The rate of frequency in assessment practices as reported in teachers' answers may give an indication that these teachers are familiar with oral language assessment in that they based their speaking assessment on oral language assessment. However, the very closeness of the relationship between what they say they know and what they say they do seems unexpected in the field of education practice and may rather reflect a concern on the part of these teachers to give the answers that I, as a researcher, expected. Given the climate in the education system and wider political context, it is possible that these teachers saw my questioning as a test of their knowledge and practice rather than a search for information.

Therefore, while these findings provided preliminary understanding of what teachers say they do in speaking assessment, further investigations was conducted through interview and observation in order to explore in more depth their practices in the classroom settings.

### 5.1.3 Knowledge of speaking assessment

This section investigates EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment in terms of three main aspects: constructs, techniques and tasks, and criteria. The items presented below stem from the literature review as explained above.

#### 5.1.3.1 Knowledge of speaking assessment constructs

Key: 1=*not good* 2=*moderate* 3=*good* 4=*excellent*

n=76

| Items | <i>When I design speaking assessment, my knowledge of considering .....is...</i> | 1           | 2           | 3                         | 4           |
|-------|--|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| 19    | ...aspects of intonation, stress, and pronunciation                              | 2.6%<br>2   | 28.9%<br>22 | <b>39.6%</b><br><b>30</b> | 28.9%<br>22 |
| 20    | ...accuracy  | 13.2%<br>10 | 21.1%<br>16 | <b>36.8%</b><br><b>28</b> | 28.9%<br>22 |
| 21    | ...fluency   | 2.6%<br>2   | 22.4%<br>17 | <b>50%</b><br><b>38</b>   | 25%<br>19   |
| 22    | ...students' interactive skills  | 1.3%<br>1   | 23.7%<br>18 | <b>47.4%</b><br><b>36</b> | 27.6%<br>21 |
| 23    | Students' ability to take turns in a pair/group work                             | 3.9%<br>3   | 21.1%<br>16 | <b>42.1%</b><br><b>32</b> | 32.9%<br>25 |

Table 5.3: EFL teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment constructs

The overall findings in Table 5.3 show that respondents rate their knowledge of speaking assessment constructs as 'good'. However, it was noted that there is variation in relation to items 19, 21, and 22, where percentages range from 'moderate' to 'excellent'. The item on which 10 (13.2%) of the respondents reported to have 'not good' knowledge is 20 (*accuracy*).

On the surface, the tendency of reporting their knowledge as ‘good’ may be interpreted that they have a considerable awareness of these speaking constructs while preparing speaking tests or doing assessment. However, it could be also interpreted that the respondents may have thought that this section tests their knowledge rather than elicits their understandings of speaking constructs. My reflection on this is that if these questionnaire items had been introduced in a different way, the participants may have responded differently. Yet, these findings provided me with a preliminary understanding through which I could further explore teachers’ knowledge of speaking assessment in the second phase of inquiry.

### 5.1.3.2 Knowledge of speaking assessment techniques and tasks

| Items | <i>I rate my knowledge of.....as...</i>   | 1           | 2           | 3           | 4           |
|-------|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 24    | ...using <b>a student self assessment technique</b> , when students are being orally assessed | 31.6%<br>24 | 23.6%<br>18 | 31.6%<br>24 | 13.2%<br>10 |
| 25    | ...using <b>a peer assessment technique</b> , when students are being orally assessed         | 25%<br>19   | 23.7%<br>18 | 32.9%<br>25 | 18.4%<br>14 |
| 26    | ...using <b>a portfolio assessment technique</b> , when students are being orally assessed    | 26.3%<br>20 | 25%<br>19   | 32.9%<br>25 | 15.8%<br>12 |
| 27    | ...using summative assessment in assessing speaking ability                                   | 10.5%<br>8  | 35.5%<br>27 | 38.2%<br>29 | 15.8%<br>12 |
| 28    | ...using different speaking assessment tasks  | 6.6%<br>5   | 13.2%<br>10 | 46%<br>35   | 34.2%<br>26 |
| 29    | ...time factor when choosing speaking tasks   | 2.6%<br>2   | 11.8%<br>9  | 38.2%<br>29 | 47.4%<br>36 |
| 30    | ...setting speaking assessment tasks in an appropriate level of difficulty                    | 6.6%<br>5   | 13.2%<br>10 | 44.7%<br>34 | 35.5%<br>27 |

|           |   |             |             |                           |                           |
|-----------|---|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>31</b> | ...using oral presentation tasks in speaking assessment   | 5.3%<br>4   | 19.7%<br>15 | <b>42.1%</b><br><b>32</b> | 32.9%<br>25               |
| <b>32</b> | ...using learner-learner joint discussion and decision making tasks   | 9.2%<br>7   | 28.9%<br>22 | <b>39.5%</b><br><b>30</b> | 22.4%<br>17               |
| <b>33</b> | ...using role-play tasks in speaking assessment   | 2.6%<br>2   | 25%<br>19   | <b>43.5%</b><br><b>33</b> | 28.9%<br>22               |
| <b>34</b> | ...using interview tasks in speaking assessment   | 6.6%<br>5   | 21%<br>16   | <b>48.7%</b><br><b>37</b> | 23.7%<br>18               |
| <b>35</b> | ...using visual stimuli tasks such as pictures to provide a topic of conversation to students in speaking tests | 5.3%<br>4   | 19.7%<br>15 | 31.6%<br>24               | <b>43.4%</b><br><b>33</b> |
| <b>36</b> | ...using re-telling story or text from aural stimuli as a speaking task in speaking assessment                  | 14.5%<br>11 | 21%<br>16   | <b>34.2%</b><br><b>26</b> | 30.3%<br>23               |
| <b>37</b> | ...using re-telling story from written stimulus as a speaking test when students are being orally assessed      | 4%<br>3     | 21%<br>16   | <b>55.3%</b><br><b>42</b> | 19.7%<br>15               |

Table 5.4: Teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment techniques and tasks

Table 5.4 shows that the respondents generally consider their knowledge of speaking techniques and tasks as 'good'. Nonetheless, the findings reveal a noticeable variation in their knowledge with reference to some items. Item 29(*time factor when choosing speaking tasks*) was found to present the highest rate of teachers' knowledge: an indication that they take into account the importance of time management not only in teaching, but also in assessment processes. This rate of respondents who reported that they have good knowledge of time factor corresponds to the rate of respondents who claimed to very often process speaking assessment tasks within a given limited time (item 52, Table 5.2.A).

Items 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37 show the extent of the teachers' reported knowledge of speaking assessment tasks. The item on which the informants reported having 'excellent' knowledge is 35: teachers' knowledge of 'visual stimuli tasks' may stem from their familiarity with the practice of such activities in speaking classes. One of the curriculum objectives is to make students practise speaking through the description of pictures. Similarly, the participants' good knowledge of using oral presentation tasks (item 31), and using the re-telling of stories from written texts (item 37) may reflect teachers' actual use of such tasks in speaking assessment. The items in which a considerable number of participants' knowledge ranges from 'not good' to 'moderate' are 32 and 36.

With regard to the participants' knowledge of the techniques by which they can assess students' oral language performance (item 24: *student self-assessment*; 25: *peer assessment*; 26: *portfolio assessment*), it was found that responses varied considerably from 'not good' to 'excellent'. However, the majority of responses claimed to have 'not good' and 'moderate' knowledge. Within this section, it has been noted that teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment tasks varies in different degrees. Such variability may indicate that these teachers have different views and understandings of speaking tasks. Accordingly, more investigation needs to be carried out in order to further explore their knowledge of speaking tasks (see 5.2.2.4).

### **5.1.3.3 Knowledge of assessment categories and assessment criteria used in speaking tests**

In order to gain an understanding about teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment categories, the informants were asked (in a background information section) to report on the frequency of carrying out speaking assessment during a term, and to provide information about the sources of the language assessment criteria they used.

#### ***The frequency of speaking assessment in a term***

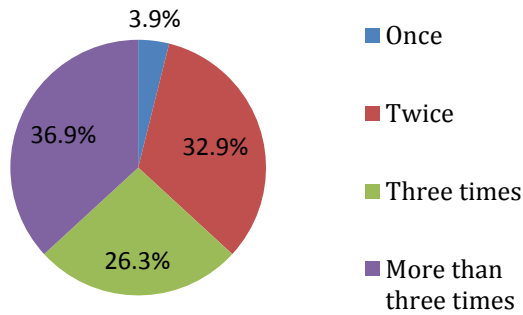


Figure 5.5: Times of carrying out speaking assessment during a term (n=76)

The findings show that the times of carrying out speaking assessment in a term vary; 26.3% of participants carry out speaking assessment three times a semester while about 37% do so more frequently. Very few teachers claim to conduct speaking assessment only once in a semester. This variation seems to reflect the extent of teachers' awareness of the importance of conducting speaking assessment in the classroom. Another indication might be the influence of contextual factors such as class size and school policy on the frequency of speaking assessment.

### ***Sources of language assessment criteria***

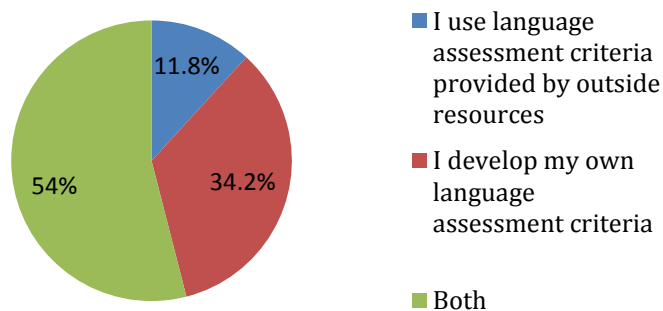


Figure 5.6: Sources of language assessment criteria (n=76)

Figure 5.6 shows that more than 50 % of teachers reported that they both develop their own language assessment criteria and use criteria provided by outside resources. 34.2% of

respondents say that they develop their own language assessment criteria. Less than 12% of teachers use language assessment criteria provided by outside resources. However, these disparate percentages may indicate that teachers have different orientations in selecting and identifying the criteria by which they assess their students' language performance.

Table 5.5 presents the extent of EFL teachers' reported knowledge of speaking assessment categories and assessment criteria.

| Items | <i>I rate my knowledge of.....as...</i>   | 1           | 2           | 3                         | 4           |
|-------|---|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| 38    | ...developing assessment criteria used in a speaking test                                     | 6.6%<br>5   | 28.9%<br>22 | <b>48.7%</b><br><b>37</b> | 15.8%<br>12 |
| 39    | ...categories used in speaking assessment   | 6.6%<br>5   | 17.1%<br>13 | <b>57.9%</b><br><b>44</b> | 18.4%<br>14 |
| 40    | ...considering <i>accuracy</i> as a category of speaking assessment                           | 4%<br>3     | 28.9%<br>22 | <b>44.7%</b><br><b>34</b> | 22.4%<br>17 |
| 41    | ...considering <i>fluency</i> as a category of speaking assessment                            | 5.3%<br>4   | 21%<br>16   | <b>50%</b><br><b>38</b>   | 23.7%<br>18 |
| 42    | ...considering <i>communicative skills</i> as a category of speaking assessment               | 5.3%<br>4   | 22.4%<br>17 | <b>44.7%</b><br><b>34</b> | 27.6%<br>21 |
| 43    | ...considering <i>range of vocabulary use</i> as a category of speaking assessment            | 2.6%<br>2   | 15.8%<br>12 | <b>55.3%</b><br><b>42</b> | 26.3%<br>20 |
| 44    | ...considering <i>pronunciation</i> as a category of speaking assessment                      | 2.6%<br>2   | 21%<br>16   | <b>39.5%</b><br><b>30</b> | 36.9%<br>28 |
| 45    | ...considering the use of <i>appropriate expressions</i> as a category of speaking assessment | 13.2%<br>10 | 22.4%<br>17 | <b>38.2%</b><br><b>29</b> | 26.2%<br>20 |

|           |  |       |       |              |     |
|-----------|--|-------|-------|--------------|-----|
| <b>46</b> | ...using <i>an analytic score</i> for each category in a speaking test | 18.5% | 26.2% | <b>34.3%</b> | 21% |
|           |  | 14    | 20    | <b>26</b>    | 16  |
| <b>47</b> | ...using <i>a holistic score</i> in a speaking test                    | 10.5% | 21%   | <b>43.5%</b> | 25% |
|           |  | 8     | 16    | <b>33</b>    | 19  |

Table 5.5: teachers' knowledge of speaking assessment categories and assessment criteria

With regard to teachers' awareness of developing speaking assessment criteria the responses reflect the variability in the participants' knowledge. Although 37 (48.7%) consider their knowledge good, a considerable number of the teachers claimed their knowledge to be either 'not good' or 'moderate'. With item 39, however, a great number of the participants reported that their knowledge of categories applied as assessment criteria in a speaking test ranges between 'good' and 'excellent'.

Items 40, 41, 42, 43, and 44 present the participants' knowledge of speaking assessment categories. These items are considered in terms of low knowledge, which includes 'not good' and 'moderate', and high knowledge, which includes 'good' and 'excellent'. Based on these two subdivisions, a great number of the participants reported having high knowledge of these categories in varying degrees. The item in which most of the participants showed high knowledge is 43. The participants' familiarity with vocabulary as one category of speaking assessment is unsurprising as vocabulary taught as a school subject to students who specialise in English language in secondary schools. On the other hand, the use of appropriate expressions as a category of speaking assessment (item 45) seems to be the least known by the informants. With regard to a scoring technique, the participants appear to have more knowledge about holistic scores than analytic scores (items 45 and 46). Contextual factors such as class size may have an influence on teachers' perceptions of using analytic scores while assessing their students' oral performance.

It was noted that the variability in teachers' knowledge of developing speaking assessment criteria is reflected in their frequency of developing their own assessment criteria in actual speaking tests (item 54: *I develop my own assessment criteria when I design speaking assessment*. Table 5.2.A). A great number of the participants classify their frequency of



developing speaking assessment criteria as 'always', 'usually', or 'sometimes'. Similarly, the connection of speaking assessment criteria (item 56: *I connect the selection of assessment criteria to the aim of speaking assessment*) was found to be frequently based on the objective of the speaking.

## Appendix 16: Oral presentation activity in skill book (year 3)

### The skill of speaking 2

#### SK11.3: Giving a presentation

- A** Make a list of occasions when you might have to give a presentation or make a speech.
- B** How would you feel if your teacher asked you to give a presentation to the rest of your class?
- C** What advice would you give to someone who had to give a presentation or make a speech? Make a list.
- D** There are three parts to a good presentation: an introduction, a body and a conclusion. There is also time for questions during, or at the end of, the presentation. Study the notes.

Use the introduction to ...

- welcome your audience
- introduce your subject
- explain the structure of your presentation
- tell your audience when to ask questions

Use the body to ...

- present all of your information
- give examples to support what you're saying

Use the conclusion to ...

- summarize the content of the presentation
- thank your audience for listening
- invite questions

- E** Decide if these phrases fit in the introduction (I) or the conclusion (C).
1. \_\_\_ There will be time to answer questions at the end.
  2. \_\_\_ Please interrupt me if you have any questions.
  3. \_\_\_ To sum up / recap ...
  4. \_\_\_ Now, are there any questions?
  5. \_\_\_ Let me remind you of the main points ...
  6. \_\_\_ The subject of my presentation is ...
  7. \_\_\_ I'm going to begin by ...
  8. \_\_\_ Thank you for listening.
  9. \_\_\_ I'd like to briefly summarize what we've looked at.
  10. \_\_\_ I'm going to talk about ...
  11. \_\_\_ To conclude ...
  12. \_\_\_ Good (morning), everyone.

- F** The body of your presentation needs to be well-structured and signposted so that your listeners can follow it with ease. Look at the list of functions.

1. Match each one with an example of signposting language.

2. Think of another example for each function.

- \_\_\_ Introducing your subject
- \_\_\_ Giving an overview
- \_\_\_ Finishing a section
- \_\_\_ Beginning a new section
- \_\_\_ Analyzing a point
- \_\_\_ Providing examples
- \_\_\_ Introducing visuals
- \_\_\_ Paraphrasing
- \_\_\_ Summarizing and concluding
- \_\_\_ Inviting people to ask questions

- a) In other words, ...
- b) Does anyone have any questions or comments?
- c) As you can see from this chart, ...
- d) The next topic / area I'd like to look at is ...
- e) That's all I have to say about ...
- f) An illustration of this is ...
- g) Let's summarize briefly what we've looked at ...
- h) I'd like to begin / start by ... then ...
- i) Today, I'm going to talk about ...
- j) Let's think about this in more detail ...

- G** You are now going to prepare a presentation about a sport that you play or a hobby that you have.

1. Think about what you are going to say. Make some notes.
2. Organize your notes.
3. Prepare an introduction and a conclusion.
4. Practise your presentation with a partner. Give each other feedback and make any necessary improvements.
5. Give your presentation in front of the class.

## Appendix 17A: Role play activity in skill book (year 3)

### The skill of speaking 1

#### SK10.2: Everyday English – persuading and dissuading



#### Conversation 1

A: You've been working all morning.

① \_\_\_\_\_

B: ② \_\_\_\_\_ I've got this essay to complete for tomorrow.

A: ③ \_\_\_\_\_ It's not good for you to spend too much time on the computer.

B: OK. ④ \_\_\_\_\_ Let's have a drink.

#### Conversation 2

C: I'm going to the teaching conference in Tripoli next month.

D: That sounds really interesting.

C: ⑤ \_\_\_\_\_ It will be great to go with a friend.

D: ⑥ \_\_\_\_\_ I can't take two days off work.

C: ⑦ \_\_\_\_\_ I'm sure it will be useful.

D: ⑧ \_\_\_\_\_

#### Conversation 3

E: I really need that report today. I have to prepare for a meeting.

F: ⑨ \_\_\_\_\_ I'm waiting for some figures from Tom.

E: Would it be possible to phone him and ask him to send them over?

F: ⑩ \_\_\_\_\_ He'll be in his office today.

E: ⑪ \_\_\_\_\_

F: ⑫ \_\_\_\_\_ Don't worry.

**A** When you try to persuade someone to do something, you need a range of expressions, to show the other person that you are willing to compromise.

1. Reorder the words to make sentences.

- come / must / with / you / me .
- bit / a / that's / difficult .

c) you / why / break / a / have / don't ?

d) least / you / try / at / should .

e) not / I'm / sure .

f) stop / drink / couldn't / just / a / you / for ?

g) it's / afraid / impossible / I'm .

h) then / do / you'll / it ?

i) think / it / I'll / about / well .

j) think / should / I / so .

k) I / yes / will .

l) into / you've / it / talked / me .

2. Use the sentences from Exercise A to complete the conversations.

**B** Read the text again. How do the speakers try to make their arguments stronger?

**C** Work in pairs.

1. Read the first conversation in pairs. Practise both roles. Cover the conversation and try to recreate it from memory.

2. Repeat with each conversation.

**D** Role-play the situations in pairs, using expressions for persuading and dissuading, and reasons. Try to reach a compromise that makes both of you happy.

1. Your best friend has been working hard. You think he / she needs a holiday. Try to persuade him / her to go away with you.

2. Your teacher has given you a lot of homework to complete at the weekend. Try to persuade him / her to give you an extension. Remember to be polite!

3. Your friend wants to buy a motorbike. You think they are dangerous. Try to dissuade him from buying it.

4. You want to borrow your sister's computer to do some research. She's playing a game. Try to persuade her to lend you her computer.

5. You are a teacher. One of your students isn't doing as well as you'd hoped. Try to persuade him / her to do study more.

**E** Work with another pair. Perform your conversations for the other pair. Give each other feedback.

## Appendix 17 B: persuading (episodes 1&2)

### Episode 1: Going to a football match

S1: hi Wafaa, how are you today?

S2: well, ok, and you?

S1: fine, thanks. I'm so excited, you know. As you know me I'm mad about Barcelona football team. I heard they are playing against Real Madrid on June, 13th. I'd REALLY like to go and see the footballers playing on the football pitch. It must be SO COOL. It will be even more exciting if you could go with me.

S2: what? Go with you. No way!. Watching a football match is not my cup of tea. I am not sure if I'm going to like it. You need me to stay there for a couple of hours?

S1: come on. I'm sure you like it believe me. By the way, the football club will hold a BIG party for the Barcelona football team. And the fans can take photos with the team. Please let us go and enjoy it, please.

S2: ALRIGHT, I'll go with you then.

S1: yappy, you know what? I've just brought two Barcelona football kits, so you may have one and we can wear them on the day.

S2: oh, thanks. You know what? I've got to go now. See you later

S1: ok. Bye. See you later. Take care.

### Episode 2: Sports centre

S1: hi Meerh, how are u?

S2: fine thanks. And you?

S1: [fine. After sitting on chairs] Can we order two cups of cappuccino?

S 4: [The person of the advertisement talked to them]: hi there. Can I take a few of minutes of your time please?

Both SS 1 & 2: well, that is ok, yes?

S4: I would like to tell you about a new sports center which is going to open nearby.

S1: oh, that is good.

S4: oh yeah. It is equibid [equipped][mispronunciation between p and b] with very modern sportis [mispronunciation in the last syllable] machines. Err and it going to be open all the week days except for Friday. And eh, it is affordable, I mean it is not very expensive

S1: that sound interesting. Has it got anything [mispronunciation between t and th] for children?

S4: oh yes, it does. It has an area for young children to play with soft balls. These are the leaflets where you can find all the information you need to know. It is called Musrata sports centre. I am sure you like it. it is nice to visit. And you can come in for free for the first week of opening. And it also have a car park there. We look for to see you there. Thank you bye.

S1: oh, that is brilliant tank [mispronunciation between th and t] you. it seems a good center. In fact, I was looking for a sports centre. The one i used to go it is far from which i live. And you know the traffic. It usually takes me about an hour to get there.

S2: really. Ok, let's arrange for a time to go together.

S1: Let me first call Alia. She has been looking for a place where her children can play. Here the student used the mobile phone. The phone was ringing.

S3: hello, Omima speaking.

S1: hi Alia. How are u?

S3: I am fine thanks. And you?

S1: I am very well too. Thanks. I'd like to tell you about a new sports centre, it is going to be open nearby the cafe. it has an area for children to play in. Would you like to join Amira and i to go and see what it is like. The leaflet shows that it has lots of activities to do.

S3: ok let me see, and i will call you back. It sounds a good idea. Thank you for letting me know. See you later bye

S1: bye.

## Appendix 18: Summarising a TV programme activity in skill book (year Three)

### The skill of speaking 1

#### SK21.2: Summarizing a radio programme

**A** Discuss the questions.

1. What sort of things do you like to do ...
  - a) at the weekend?
  - b) during your school holiday?
2. How can you find out about events which are being held in your local area?

**B** The texts are summaries of two parts of a radio programme. Work in pairs.

1. Student A read Text 1. Student B read Text 2. Make a list of events in your text.
2. Cover the text. Tell each other about the events in your part of the summary.
3. Ask questions to check what you heard.

**C** Read the dialogue.

1. Underline the phrases Mohammed uses to introduce information about the programme.
2. Circle the phrases that Tarek uses to ask for information.
3. What tenses do Mohammed and Tarek use to talk about the information?
4. Read the dialogue with your partner.

**D** You are going to summarize a programme. Work in pairs.

1. Think of a TV or radio programme you heard / watched that your partner didn't.
2. Tell your partner about the programme. Use some of the phrases you read in the dialogue.
3. Listen to your partner's summary of a programme. Interrupt or ask questions where necessary.

**"What's On?" is a weekly review of events in the Milton area, which this week featured four events.**

The first was an art exhibition at Milton University, opening on the 10<sup>th</sup> at 7.30. On show for the next ten days from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. is work from university students, Milton Amateur Artists Association, local schoolchildren and the winners of the 'Design a New Town Square' competition. Secondly, the Milton Book Festival also opens on the 10<sup>th</sup> at Milton Manor. Book lovers can see all kinds of books and meet writers, including Geoffrey Bowman, the politician turned bestselling author.

**2** 'What's On?' went on to give details of a vintage motorcycle rally near Milbury Common at the weekend, which features a parade through the town centre on Friday night and various competitions, including a prize draw with the chance to win an old bike for restoration. The final report is about the pop concert at Highbury Hill Farm this weekend, featuring both local musicians and big names like Free Flight, Norman Vale and Fever.

**Mohammed:** Did you hear *What's On?* last night?

**Tarek:** No, I missed it. I was writing an essay – as usual!

**Mohammed:** They were talking about the pop concert at the weekend.

**Tarek:** Oh, yeah? What were they saying?

**Mohammed:** Well, not that much really. It was just a short report. They did say that it would be at Highbury Hill Farm. Oh, and apparently some local bands are playing – Maydance and some others.

**Tarek:** Really? Actually, I'd quite like to go, if it stops raining! What else was on?

**Mohammed:** They mentioned that art exhibition here, you know, the one that Hassan's got a picture in. They said that the winners of that competition would be on show, too.

**Tarek:** We'd better go to that and show some support, then. When is it on again?

**Mohammed:** I think they said it starts at 7.30 tomorrow. Oh, and did you know there is a vintage motorcycle rally at the weekend?

**Tarek:** No. That sounds good.

**Mohammed:** I thought that would interest you! It's at Milbury Common. Oh, and they mentioned the fact that there would be a draw to win a vintage bike.

**Tarek:** Right. That does it. Never mind the pop concert. I'm going to go to that!

**Mohammed:** Oh, I almost forgot, there's a book festival, too. There was quite a good report on it, actually.

**Tarek:** Mohammed, the last thing I need at the moment is to look at more books!

## Appendix 19: Speaking task activity

### The skill of speaking 2

#### SK18.3: Taking part in a discussion

**A** Look at the words in the box. Discuss the questions.

1. How are they similar?
2. How are they different?

a talk an interview a row a chat  
a seminar a speech a lecture a gossip  
a tutorial an argument a discussion

**B** Read Ahmed's letter.

1. What problems does he have?
2. What advice would you give him?

*Dear Sally  
I'm starting university next week and I'll have to go to seminars and tutorials. I'm really worried because I'm not very good at expressing myself. Everyone else seems to know what they want to say, and they have no trouble getting the attention of other people. Even when I do say something, no one seems to listen or understand what I'm trying to say. Please help me!  
Ahmed*

**C** Look at these expressions from a discussion. When would you use them?

1. I'm with you there *to agree with someone*
2. In my opinion, ...
3. Could you explain that?
4. I'm sorry, I don't agree.
5. If I could just come in here, ...
6. I'm afraid I disagree.
7. You're right.
8. What exactly do you mean by ...?
9. I'm sorry, I'm not with you.
10. I don't know what you mean.

11. I don't understand.
12. Let's ask (Ali).
13. I agree.
14. Could I just say ...?
15. Sorry to interrupt, but ...
16. What do you think?
17. Do you agree?
18. I can't agree.
19. That's a good point.
20. If you ask me, ...
21. I think (that) ...
22. I see what you mean.

**D** Complete the dialogue with the expressions from the list.

- A: ① \_\_\_\_\_ that teachers will soon be obsolete.
- B: ② \_\_\_\_\_ 'obsolete'?
- A: I mean that they will be old-fashioned, no longer necessary, out of date.
- B: ③ \_\_\_\_\_, I mean, how would we learn things? Look at languages, for example.
- A: ④ \_\_\_\_\_, but we can learn everything we need from computers.
- B: ⑤ \_\_\_\_\_, young children can't use computers.
- A: OK, ⑥ \_\_\_\_\_ that very young children need teachers, but people of our age don't.
- B: Well, ⑦ \_\_\_\_\_ our teacher! Mr Smith?
- ⑧ \_\_\_\_\_? Are teachers becoming obsolete?

**E** Work in groups of four.

- Discuss the subjects below. Use as many of the expressions from the list as possible.
1. Everyone in the world should speak English.
  2. You can learn better without a teacher.
  3. Education should be compulsory until the age of eighteen.
  4. People don't need to learn how to study.
  5. Exams are a waste of time.

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