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Are you fluent in L3?

Speaking challenges and classroom practice in Lebanon

By

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Dedication

To my charming husband, John,

  for being supportive, encouraging, patient and lovable.

To my beautiful angels, Lucas and Christina,

  You are the spark of my life and my drive to thrive.

To my mother Yvonne and my mother in law Leila,

  for believing in me and persuading me to achieve my full potential.

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Are you fluent in L3?

Speaking challenges and classroom practice in Lebanon

Leila Dagher

ABSTRACT

This study reports on teaching and practicing spoken English in French-medium schools in Lebanon. Specifically, it investigates the challenges encountered by students in French-medium schools when speaking English that is taught as a second foreign language. A qualitative exploratory design was adopted; data were collected by administering questionnaires to 6 teachers and 328 students and conducting classroom observations at a purposive sample of five private schools in the Mount Lebanon area. Qualitative data analysis and descriptive statistics were conducted; and results showed that students in French-medium schools lack skills in expressing themselves in the English language, in general, due to teachers' given little attention to speaking skills and neglecting the fluency component of spoken English. Students mainly code-switched, using French and/or Arabic, to make up for their poor language proficiency in terms of formulaic expressions, vocabulary and structures. These challenges are amplified by the Lebanese curriculum's structure and requirements, the teaching of each language skill separately, teacher-centered classrooms and the lack of relevant and authentic material to engage students in the learning process. Further recommendations are suggested for developing speaking skills inside and outside the classroom.

Keywords: English language, Speaking skills, Speaking fluency, French-medium schools, Lebanese curriculum.

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List of Abbreviations

CBI   Content-Based Instruction

CLT   Communicative Language Teaching

ESL   English as a Second Language

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

IRB   Institutional Review Board

KG1   Kindergarten 1

L1   First Language or native language

L2   Second language

L3   Third language

TPR   Total Physical Response

Chapter one

Introduction

When referring to someone knowledgeable of a foreign language, it is assumed that this person can speak the language. This makes speaking the most important language skill when learning a second or a foreign language (Lazarton, 2001) that enables learners to communicate inside and outside the classroom. Yet, it is the most challenging skill to master since speaking represents the summit of the iceberg in which the speaker integrates the knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation that were previously acquired (Bygate, 1987), along with the choice of words, sentences and their organization to form a coherent speech.

Therefore, many language learners may find themselves incompetent while conversing using a second/foreign language (Zhang, 2009). Researchers have always been investigating the factors and challenges that students face when learning an additional language, especially the English language since it is considered the "lingua franca" of the world (Mckay, 2002). It is also regarded as the dominant language of commerce (Graddol, 2006) and the main formal tool for communication in the digital world (Khan, 2011). Therefore, being able to speak English fluently is deemed of salient importance in the lives of many people, which requires that the English language is taught effectively for communication purposes.

1.1 Research context

In the Lebanese multilingual context, individuals employ two or more languages in their daily-life activities and learn three languages from early childhood, despite the

fact that Arabic is a diglossic language, colloquial and standard Arabic (Al-Batal, 1995). This exposure to diverse languages started during the French colonization (1920-1943) when schools and educational institutions were founded by missionaries. During the French mandate, both French and Arabic were the official Lebanese languages (Jarrar, Mikati & Massialas, 1998), and English began to be spoken in society as a result of increased globalization (Shaaban & Gaith, 2002).

The change to trilingualism was reinforced by the reform of the national Lebanese curriculum in 1994 after the civil war and the introduction of the Taif agreement to best fit the Lebanese societal diversity. The purpose was to reconstruct the Lebanese identity through a unified educational curriculum (Shaaban,1997). In addition, people who were traditionally French-educated required the introduction of the English language without giving up the French language (Shaaban, 2013). Therefore, the English language was introduced on the grounds of its importance internationally, regionally and locally. It is regarded by the Lebanese society as the language of high education, business, science and technology while French as the language of cultural activities (Akl, 2007).

As a result, the Lebanese curriculum emphasized teaching either French or English as a first foreign language (L2) and a medium of instruction while the other as a second foreign language (L3) in both public and private schools. The Arabic language (L1) which is the Lebanese mother tongue and their symbol of identity (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999; Jamali, Sidani, & Safieddine, 2005) is taught as a subject language for five or six sessions per week and as medium for teaching social studies for two sessions a week (Ministry of Education, 2006; Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997). L2, whether is it French or English, is taught

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as a subject language for seven sessions per week. It is also employed to teach mathematics and sciences, each for seven sessions a week. Both L1 and L2 are used from kindergarten until graduation, while L3 is introduced in Grade 7 and it is taught for two sessions a week.

Private schools are free to choose one of the two second languages, either French or English, to be taught as medium of instruction. According to an analysis of the Lebanese educational sector (see Soueid, Ghanem, Hariri,Yamout & Nehme, 2014; Farran & Chahine, 2014), 51% of the schools use French as a medium of instruction, 26% use English while 23% use both English and French as second languages of instruction. That means that almost half of the Lebanese students learn English as a third language and learn English for two hours per week starting Grade 7. Private schools also have the choice of choosing any instructional material, including textbooks for any subject if they meet with the Lebanese curriculum principles and educational objectives (Shaaban, 2013). In addition, students are required to pass the Lebanese official exams to get enrolled at universities. Yet, the French Baccalaureate, another form of official exams that was introduced during the French mandate, remains optional.

1.2 Rationale

Many Lebanese French-educated students are being exposed to English for few hours per week at schools with few opportunities to practice the language outside the classroom. Yet, English is used as a medium of instruction at many universities in Lebanon. American affiliated universities such as the American university of Beirut (AUB), the Lebanese American university (LAU), Balamand University or Notre Dame university

(NDU) and many others teach all subjects in English. Many others such as the Lebanese university, which includes the largest number of Lebanese students, have many English departments in several majors. Yet, one of the Lebanese students' concerns at an American affiliated university was to be able to express themselves in English (Bahous, Bacha & Nabhani, 2011b). Since the English language is their medium of instruction, students will suffer in other subjects if they didn't master the language.

In addition, whether students are taught English as a medium of instruction or as a foreign language, each for twelve years at school, many students find themselves conditioned to take remedial English courses to be enrolled at the university (Nasser & Goff-Kfouri, 2008). Yet, at the university level, English language courses do not take into consideration the students' background, especially when it is related to the course content (Bahous et al, 2011b).

Therefore, French and Arabic educated students must be well-prepared to face new challenges at university. Being able to speak the English language at ease is one of those challenges. Furthermore, some teachers and students believe that practicing speaking fluency requires repeating known material, which is sometimes viewed as a waste of time and can be replaced by new information (Yang, 2014). This neglect seems to be prevalent for middle and high school grades (Rasinki, Padak, Mckeon, Wilfong, Friedauer & Heim, 2005). Yet, it only takes 2 to 3 years to develop the social or the conversational aspect of the language in case of increased exposure (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

1.3 Research questions

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What are the challenges faced by Lebanese students when speaking English as a second foreign language?
- What are the common classroom practices related to speaking skills in French-medium schools?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate English speaking skills' instruction and the challenges faced by Grade 12 students enrolled in Lebanese French medium schools when speaking English as L3. The research questions will be investigated from both the students and the teachers' perspectives regarding students' challenges and the common classroom practice in teaching speaking skills. The latter includes the choice of teaching methodology, type of speaking activities, material used, teachers' feedback, speaking strategies in case of communication breakdown, as well as speaking assessment.

1.4 Definition of terms

Speaking fluency is perceived as an individual's ability to talk long stretches of speech with few pauses and without hesitations. A fluent speaker can use the language in a wide range of contexts and in a creative way, using sentences in a coherent and reasoned way (Fillmore, 2014; Yang, 2014).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to the context where English is being taught in the classroom, but it is not used for communication purposes in the society (Paulston, 1992)

1.5 Thesis outline

The first chapter introduced the main topic of this study that discusses English speaking skills. It focused on the Lebanese context where English is taught as a third language in French-medium schools, while it is not generally spoken in the society. The research questions were stated with the purpose of identifying speaking skills' classroom practices and students' speaking challenges in French-medium schools.

The second chapter reviewed the literature enumerating topics related to teaching and practicing speaking skills that promote the development of competent speakers. Common speaking challenges and strategies to avoid communication breakdown were identified, along with many factors that affect language acquisition such as learner-centered classrooms.

The third chapter presented the methodology, namely the research design, the sample and the participants. It detailed the administration of the three instruments used and it explained the data collection procedure. Credibility, trustworthiness and ethics were ensured throughout this study.

The fourth chapter reports on the results collected from each research instrument. It also summarizes the common findings that resulted from the triangulation method.

The fifth chapter discussed the results in regard to the two research questions. It presented the common practices related to English speaking skills in French-medium schools and reported on the speaking challenges encountered by Lebanese students.

The sixth chapter concluded the study, enumerated its limitations and listed recommendations for practicing speaking skills inside and outside the classroom. All references are cited using the APA style, followed by the three instruments used for data collection in Appendices A, B and C.

Chapter two

Literature review

Speaking is one of the most challenging skills to teach and to learn. It occurs in real time with little time to review what has been said. It is different from written language because writers can edit and revise their script many times before publishing it. They can even ask someone else to review it (Nunan, 2015). This chapter reviews the literature related to speaking skills' classroom instruction. It also describes the teaching approaches adopted by the Lebanese curriculum for English language learning in general and for speaking skills in particular. Common challenges faced by speakers of a foreign language are specified in addition to classrooms' environment that facilitates language learning.

2.1 Speaking skills

Four communicative competences describe an effective speaker. These competences are interconnected and the development of one affects the development of the others to overall increase the communicative competence (Lazarton, 2001; Savignon, 2001). The first is "grammatical competence" and it involves phonology, vocabulary, orthography, word and sentence formation. Learners are expected to use the grammatical rules in their expressions, and not to state them. The second is "sociolinguistic or sociocultural competence," and it includes the social rules for interaction, involving politeness strategies, register varying from formal to informal style and the choice of words, and the variety of grammatical forms related to different social contexts (Lazarton, 2001; Savignon, 2001). Speakers should learn different speech functions to accomplish different communication situations such as social or transactional exchanges, and develop

competency in "interactional skills" that enable them to start, maintain and end a conversation, respect turn taking and redirect a certain topic (Bolhke, 2014). "Discourse competence" explains how the elements in a written sentences/texts or words in utterances are linked together to form meaning. Cohesive sentences and coherent texts are also familiar topics that are discussed under the discourse competence (Savignon, 2001). Sentences should be well-structured and long enough to achieve narrative or descriptive types of discourse and develop "extended discourse skills" (Bolhke, 2014). The last competence is "Strategic competence" which requires the use of speaking strategies in unfamiliar communicative situations to avoid communication breakdown.

2.2 Speaking fluency

Whether speaking resembles to native speaker-like language or not, fluent speaking is viewed as "a natural language use" (Brumfit, 1984), in which its performance is related to the flow of the speech, its continuity and smoothness (Koponen & Riggenbach, 2000). Learners might get disappointed when going through a spontaneous conversation for the first time, even though they have a good knowledge of the second or foreign language. To be able to converse fluently, one has to practice speaking with another speaker, which involves understanding the other's message, thinking about what to say, produce the message and examine its effect on the interlocutor and so on (Lazarton, 2001). Moreover, speech can't be produced in a bookish way and pronouncing the full sounds of the words. Fluent speech requires reduced forms (i.e. Vowel reduction, contractions and elisions), minimizing the number of filled and unfilled pauses (Yang, 2014), practicing the stress, rhythm and intonation of the speech (Goodwin, 2001) and employing idioms and slangs (Lazarton, 2001).

Usually, fluency is measured by calculating the number of spoken words per minute to determine speed rate or speed fluency (Wood, 2001; Segalowitz, 2010), and the average pauses between the syllables while speaking to identify breakdown fluency (Segalowitz, 2010); even though it is argued that pauses are a characteristic of a person's speaking style (Macalister, 2014). On another side, fluency in language teaching is determined through a subjective evaluation of the listener, which is known as perceived fluency (Macalister, 2014).

2.3 Designing speaking activities

Many activities allow practicing oral skills such as discussions, speeches, debates, interviews, role plays, conversations, dialogues (Lazarton, 2001), songs, poems, rhymes, simulations, drama scenes, storytelling and many others (Peck, 2001). For instance, during role play activities, students get the chance to use different speech acts for diverse social contexts (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Lazarton, 2001). Another source of input can be technological tools such as audio/visual mass media programs especially in the case of EFL contexts. Students being exposed to TV and Radio news inside and outside the classroom showed a significant improvement in speaking proficiency compared to those who were only exposed to selected utterances extracted from the same sources (Bahrani & Tam, 2011). Technological tools provide authentic language input that can simulate language accuracy and fluency. Authors acknowledge the benefits of listening to news since the vocabulary is redundant and the sentences are well structured, direct and precise, which give them the ability to shape the audience's perception (Stott, 2004).

Speaking skills target three objectives in general: accuracy, fluency or complexity. The purpose of developing accuracy is to organize the form of the speech and empower

the students with a capacity of auto-correction (Macalister, 2014). When targeting speaking complexity, students are supposed to use subordinate and coordinating clauses in their utterances to connect the ideas (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). The purpose of considering fluency, which is the focus of this study, is to facilitate students' self-expression and effective communication (Burden, 2004). Thus, when designing activities that target fluency, teachers should be aware that an already-known language is going to be practiced. Students recognize the content and all the language items. The purpose of fluency activities is to make the students deliver their oral message at a reduced time or to speed up their articulation (Nation, 1997). It is intended to reduce hesitations, filled and unfilled pauses (Macalister, 2014).

Seven conditions should prevail when designing activities for speaking fluency. They should include familiar and motivating topics, repetition of previously known knowledge within an appropriate language level, teaching idiomatic expressions, giving time for students to prepare before speaking, defining time limits and increasing the amount of speaking practice (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 1988, Maurice, 1983, Schneider, 1993). Yet, improvement in fluency was observed for the topic being practiced, and it couldn't be generalized for new topics in classroom settings. This finding was observable when 4/3/2 technique was practiced in the classroom. Students were asked to discuss in pairs the same topic for respectively 4, 3 and 2 minutes. This fluency activity has shown to improve the quality of the speech through minimizing the number of hesitations and pauses, a faster access to lexical and semantic content, in addition to a better organization of the sentences.

Teachers should be aware of the importance of choosing relevant and authentic materials in language instruction. Authentic material such as menus, travel brochures, maps, advertisements and newspapers have proven to engage the students and motivate them to learn the language (Kelly, Kelly, Offner & Vorland, 2002). It also promotes the development of the communicative competence in terms of listening skills, receptive pronunciation and receptive vocabulary, fluency and the interactional competence (Gilmore, 2011). Speaking activities can be chosen from various sources, and teachers don't have to rely on textbooks (Lazarton, 2001).

2.4 Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback is produced on the learner's errors, whether in oral or written productions while learning a second or a foreign language (Sheen & Ellis, 2011). In a second or foreign language setting, students expect and value their teacher's feedback (Rahimi & Sobhani, 2015; Crooks & Chaudron, 2001), especially when there's a lack of exposure to the target language outside the classroom. It gives them the chance to improve their oral skills and prevent them from repeating the same mistake twice (Shamiri & Taghi Farvardin, 2016), while distinguishing what is appropriate and what's not in the target language (Crooks & Chaudron, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2001).

It turned out that recasts are the most prevalent type of corrective feedback used by the teachers at all levels, followed by explicit corrections that are mainly applied for advanced levels (Rahimi & Sobhani, 2015). Recast is defined as "an utterance that rephrases the learner's utterance by changing one or more components (subject, verb, object) while still referring to its central message" (Ellis, 2008, p. 227). It is applied disregarding of students' level of language proficiency or the type of errors produced

(Rahimi & Sobhani, 2015) since there's a lack of time for re-explaining previously-taught material. Teachers assumed that repeating the correct form would remind the students of the lesson, and avoided breaking the flow of the communication in class (Suzuki, 2005).

Surprisingly, it turned out that output-providing types of feedback such as elicitation and clarification requests can increase learners' uptake (i.e. Language development; Rahimi & Sobhani, 2015) when compared to recasts and explicit corrections. That's due to the interaction where the teacher provides prompts for the learner to self-correct. It appeared that recasts were more efficient for pronunciation and lexical errors, but not for grammatical errors. Learners should have developed a grammatical competence that enable them to notice the difference mentioned in the teacher's reformulation (Crooks & Chaudron, 2001).

Previous studies focused on the most frequent type of corrective feedback provided by the teacher or the ones that can mostly lead to language development. Yet, the communicative approach discusses the timing of corrective feedback. When the learning outcome of the task targets accuracy, teachers can interrupt the speakers' speech to correct their mistakes after they have finished speaking; for all the errors' types (pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary). When targeting fluency, teachers will avoid correcting mistakes if the message was comprehensible (Nunan, 2015). It seems that when learners tend to focus on improving the quality of their speech by producing correct forms, their speech becomes slower. In addition, the quantity of the shared information lessens, which affects speaking fluency (Bagheridoust & Mohammadi Kotlar, 2015).

2.5 Speaking skills throughout the Lebanese curriculums

Before the reform of the Lebanese curriculum in 1994, traditional methods such as audiolingualism and grammar translation approaches were adopted for language teaching (Bou Jaoude & Ghaith,2006). Little or no attention was placed on teaching speaking or listening skills using the grammar translation method (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Nunan, 2015). The focus was rather placed on teaching grammatical rules explicitly, writing skills and reading difficult texts. Instruction occurred in the students' native language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Teachers were not supposed to be proficient in speaking the target language (Celce-Murcia, 2001), especially that students learned vocabulary and sentences by translating from their first language to the second or foreign language and vice versa. Learners taught through this approach turned out to be able to read and write, but inefficient in understanding or speaking the language (Nunan, 2015).

Moreover, the audiolingual approach addressed the four language skills in order, starting by listening, speaking, reading then writing. Grammatical rules were taught inductively. Lessons started with dialogues and speaking skills were practiced through repetition and memorization whereas pronunciation was emphasized from the beginning (Celce-Murcia, 2001). The purpose of using controlled activities and materials was to prevent the learners from producing errors. It was assumed that drill and practice constitute the basis for learning since language is a habit formation through the reinforcement of correct answers (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Lazarton, 2001). Therefore, the teacher was expected to be only proficient in structures and vocabulary, without being fluent in the target language (Celce-Murcia, 2001). These two traditional approaches

focused on teaching the skills separately, which lead to students unable to synthesize all the language system to communicate efficiently.

The reform of the English language curriculum as a foreign language in 1997 in Lebanon defined speaking skills' objectives as the following (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997, p. 203):

"[…] Oral fluency instruction aims at engaging learners in meaningful, referential, and exploratory talk as they express their needs, feelings, and intellectual positions in a relaxed and supportive environment. Instruction is organized according to the proficiency levels of learners as they gradually develop their skills of using formulaic expressions, information routines (describing, comparing, telling stories, and giving instructions), and transactional routines (telephone conversations, interviews, and discussions) to negotiate and construct meaning. The stages of instruction proceed from pre-speaking to speaking and post-speaking activities in order to describe objects in the immediate environment, fill in information gaps, debate controversial issues, and convey intellectual positions, observing the systematics of turn-taking and culturally appropriate behavior"

The Lebanese curriculum was developed to be thematic, content-based with an integration of skills such as study habits, critical thinking and cultural awareness in addition to reading, writing, speaking and listening. It adopted cooperative learning approach for classroom interaction and many techniques from the comprehension-based approach (i.e. Total physical response, silent way, the language experience approach), the humanistic-affective approach (i.e. Suggestopedia, community language learning) and the communicative approach (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997).

The comprehension-based approach rose with the assumption that learning a foreign language is similar to the acquisition of the first language. Listening comprehension skills through listening to meaningful input are emphasized and they are viewed as the basis that enable the development of speaking, reading and writing skills spontaneously. It presupposes that learners should not speak if they don't feel ready to do so, which will positively affect their pronunciation. Acquiring the rules wouldn't help students acquire the language, but only to monitor what they are learning. For this approach, the correction of errors is regarded as counterproductive since the objective is to make the students understand the message and to make themselves understood. If teachers weren't native speakers, appropriate materials such as audio-tapes and video-tapes must be available to provide appropriate input to the learners (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Grounded on this approach, Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method where actions are associated with speech. Learners are required to be physically engaged by responding to the teachers' commands and instructions; similar to the way children acquire the first language. Another technique is the silent way that advocates for students' excessive production of language in the classroom and the silence of the teacher (Richards & Rodgers, 2002).

The affective-Humanistic approach emphasizes the importance of the individuals' feelings since language learning was viewed as a "self-realization experience" (Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 8). The teacher is only a facilitator of the learning process in which learning occurs in pairs or small groups. Communication is emphasized and class atmosphere is given an equal importance as materials and methods. The teacher is expected to be proficient in the target language and the students' native language. That's

because translation can be used heavily in initial stages to help the students feel at ease, until being gradually phased out (Celce-Murcia, 2001). For example, Suggestopedia is a method that draws on the affective humanistic approach. It encourages incorporating many visual and auditory aids in the classroom. In other terms, decorating and arranging the classroom and implementing music can increase memorization in language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2002).

Significantly, language is regarded as a tool for communication in Communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. Communication involves greetings, sharing feeling and opinions, narrating sequences of an event, activities and daily routines (Duff, 2014). This approach does not consist of a set of rules and procedures as it does not focus on teaching the structure of the language. Oral skills were taught as a "contextualized social activity" (Lazarton, 2001, p. 103). Teachers are flexible in choosing the tasks and activities that best suit the learning context and their students' needs. The starting point for designing activities is by looking for situations where the students might use the language outside the classroom, rather than providing them with a list of vocabulary and grammar rules (Nunan, 2015). The four skills are integrated in one activity and their sequence depends on each activity (Richards & Rodgers, 2002). Interaction is reinforced in class through working in pairs or in groups, the major component of cooperative learning approach to language learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). This builds the students' confidence and enhances their oral abilities. Subsequently, learners "activate the language to communicate real meaning" instead of just practicing the language (Harmer, 2007). Thus, they develop their communicative ability in a natural way, using gesture,

making pauses and interruptions, showing emotions and creating relationships. The teacher is expected to be fluent in the target language (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Content Based Instruction (CBI) meets the communicative approach' principles since language is used in a meaningful context in order to communicate information that is not directly related to the language itself. It focuses on learning subject matters using the target language. Similarly, an integrated skill approach can flourish within CBI because the target language is expressed to communicate one topic across all skill areas. That promotes language' coherence and prevents from incorporating isolated excerpts (Richards & Rodgers, 2002). Task-based language teaching is another practical realization of CLT (Nunan, 1999, 2015). Many opportunities are provided to practice the language in a meaningful context that is connected to authentic situations, namely ordering food or giving directions.

2.6 Speaking assessment

Assessing any language skill is essential for monitoring learners' progress in a language classroom. The Lebanese curriculum supports many forms of formal and informal assessments that includes "texts and activities which mirror as closely as possible those which students have been exposed to and/or are likely to meet in their future target situations" (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997, p.205). However, all subjects are included in the official exams at Grade 9 and 12, except for L3. In other words, English language in French-educating schools is part of the internal assessment at the respective school but it is not included in official exams. It is assumed that students place more effort on the target skill if they know it will be rewarded. For instance, the absence of speaking assessment

affected the motivation and engagement in classroom' speaking activities of Saudi Arabia students (Abu Ghararah, 2014).

2.7 Speaking challenges

Speaking becomes more challenging for beginners who are communicating in another language that is not their mother tongue. They show little knowledge of the target language and they find themselves limited by the vocabulary they learned. Some of them experience sweating or shaking while speaking. Others might remain silent for long periods or use body language to articulate what they want to say. Most of the time, they lack confidence especially at the beginning of the new language acquisition (May Melendez, Quijano Zavala & Ferrer Mendez, 2014; Thornbury, 2005).

In the Arab world, students' speaking performance didn't meet the required level of proficiency. It is largely affected by numerous factors such as an inadequate teaching methodology, inappropriate trained teachers, teacher-centered activities, students' attitudes, lack of motivation and initial preparedness (Rahman, 2013). In the same line, Saudi English classes are teacher-centered and many tasks are required in a one session of language instruction. During the few opportunities where students practiced speaking skills, they received poor instruction, insufficient linguistic input, limited time to prepare while some of them used Arabic during pair or group work. Students' speaking performance was unsatisfactory especially that some students read aloud what to say without being able to speak naturally (Bani Younes & Albalawi, 2016).

2.8 Speaking strategies

Speaking strategies are identified as a group of actions and steps (Bolhke, 2014), employed by speakers who "lacked the resources" to communicate efficiently (Hedge, 2000, p.52). Teachers investing time into teaching speaking strategies have found a significant improvement in students 'oral competence (Nakatani, 2005, 2006) and self-confidence when speaking (Melendez, Zavala & Mendez, 2014) in order to avoid communication breakdown. Common speaking strategies include asking for clarification when the interlocutor's speech was not clearly heard or understood (Douglas, 2007). In case of unknown words or structure, beginners almost always asked for assistance from a classmate or the teacher. Both intermediate and advanced speakers used circumlocutions (synonyms or descriptive sentence that replace the unknown words) since they gained confidence by becoming more knowledgeable of the language. In addition, advanced speakers simply used the first language or gestures to express their message (Lopez, 2001). To gain time to think before answering, speakers employ fillers (i.e. Uh, I mean, well) or maintenance cues, also known as hesitations (i.e. Uh-huh, right, yeah, okay, hm; Douglas, 2007; Bygate, 1987).

Making use of speaking strategies does not occur spontaneously and it does not evolve over time (Diaz Larenas, 2011), nor transfer from L1 to L2 (Lopez, 2011). Chilean 8th graders were more aware of speaking strategies than their peers in Grade 12. Even though it was supposed to be the opposite since the latter spent more time learning the language, 8th graders were more motivated towards language learning. They showed more will to express their thoughts, feelings and opinions in English while 12th graders focused their attention on courses that could facilitate their enrollment in higher education (Diaz

Larenas, 2011). Therefore, teaching speaking strategies from an early age will allow their integration until one becomes more flexible and genuine in their language use.

2.9 Language Learning

When learning another language, learners ask for four needs (Macaro, 2003). First, learning a new language is better acquired in context. Students can get the chance to practice vocabulary, grammar and expressions they have learned in real-life situations. The second need is to raise awareness of the social use of the language so that misunderstanding can be prevented and inappropriate social behavior can be avoided. Language personalization is the third need by which students are required to express their feelings and opinions using the new language, so that the information sticks to their memory. The fourth need is to create a positive classroom environment by letting the students produce the language at ease without instant corrections or judgments.

Many other external factors to the learning process can affect the degree of the language acquisition. These factors include the age of the students, their motivation, the number of students in the class, the curriculum's restrictions and the context where the language is being taught. In other terms, in an English Second Language (ESL) context, learners have many opportunities to practice the new language which is not the case for English Foreign Language context (EFL) (Lazarton, 2001).

2.10 Learner-centeredness

To provide learners with opportunities that develop their communicative competence in the classroom, activities must shift from being teacher to learner-centered. Students will no longer be receptive but active participants. They learn many ways to

negotiate meaning by asking for clarification and by trying to make themselves understood using speaking strategies (Nunan, 2015; Lazarton, 2001). These principles are approved by CLT where teachers will no longer transmit the knowledge. Instead, they will give the learners the chance to be engaged in their own learning. In other terms, learners make decisions about what to learn, their preferred ways of learning and assessment (Nunan, 2015). Learners become capable of making choices and reflect on what they learned, what they liked or disliked in the classroom.

Making learners aware of their own learning styles and strategies is an important key factor to facilitate the learning process of a new language. A learning style is internal since it defines the preferred and natural way every student goes about learning, that enable him/her to process new information (Nunan, 2015). This preference is somehow resistant to change, and independent from the first language, level of education and ethnicity (Willing, 1989). It seems that the common strategies used to acquire a language are memorizing, predicting, inferencing (Nunan, 2015), practicing, revising and repeating at home (Gallagher-Brett, 2007). Willing (1989) found a distinction between the learning strategies used by effective and less effective learners. Those who viewed the language as a tool for communication and used it outside the classroom were the good learners. They showed interest and motivation to learn the language. More specifically, they used the target language for watching television in English, listening to native speakers and conversing in class. Less effective learners tended to rely more on the teacher's correction of mistakes, their choice of topic of the discussion in class and they relied on textbooks.

This self-awareness of learning styles guides the learners to become more responsible for their own learning. It also helps them better acquire the new language and

encourages them to participate and to communicate which builds their self-confidence (Nunan, 2015). The role of the teacher is to involve them into metacognitive tasks throughout the classroom activities. In other words, learners should be asked to identify their preferred learning strategies and make choices in identifying the tasks they want to work on. Alike, teachers should be aware of their own learning styles because they tend to be biased in choosing the learning tasks that best suited them as language learners. By doing so, they will encourage students to use a variety of strategies. However, it must be noted that no strategy is superior to another. It is motivation, independent learning and positive attitude towards the target language and the learning process that makes good learners (Nunan, 2015). Above all, creating a positive environment for classroom communication remains the key for success in language learning. Interaction among students, in pairs or groups, fosters language learning (Ghaith, 2003). With less instant-corrections, learners will build their confidence to produce the language automatically and be pushed out of their comfort zone (Nunan, 2015; Hedge, 2000).

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter shed the light on the importance of equating the practice of speaking skills to that of the three other language instruction skills. More specifically, fluency in speaking should be targeted to facilitate the flow of the conversation by reducing filled and unfilled pauses, practicing the pronunciation of the reduced forms of the words and incorporating multi-word phenomena such as idioms and collocations. Several activities and technological tools that target speaking skills were described, in addition to essential criteria that are required to develop fluency. Teachers should ensure that authentic and relevant input is adequately provided to the learners. Equally important, instant

corrections of learners' oral mistakes should be avoided to enhance speakers' self-confidence. Language learners' factors that facilitate language learning were also detailed.

The Lebanese curriculum for the English language is thematic, content-based and skill-integrated. It adopts cooperative learning for classroom interaction. The curriculum's approach meets the objectives of the communicative approach and emphasizes the practice of speaking skills. In the Lebanese context, research showed that the teachers' undervalued work conditions and the curriculum restrictions are affecting students' proficiencies in the three languages (Bahous et al, 2011b).

The third chapter described the methodology that was adopted for data collection to investigate speaking challenges encountered by French-educated students, who are taught English as a third language. The research design, the participants, the procedure and the triangulation of the instruments were detailed to highlight the credibility and consistency of this study.

Chapter three
Methodology

The third chapter details the procedure of conducting an exploratory study in five private schools in Lebanon. It verifies the choice of the qualitative design, describes the recruitment of the participants and the development of the three instruments. Triangulation was used in this study to guarantee credibility and consistency. The process of data collection was ethically conducted, following the guidelines of the IRB.

3.1 Research Design

Due to the lack of literature regarding the practice of English speaking skills in French medium schools in Lebanon, this exploratory study aims to gain insight into the challenges and the factors affecting the students' speaking performance in carrying short conversations in English.

This study is qualitative in nature seeing that it intends to detail classroom practices related to the quality of spoken English in French-medium schools. It is equally tailored to take into account students and teachers' personal learning and teaching experiences respectively. The purpose of this study conforms to the principles of qualitative research since it constructs a broader picture of the quality of a certain activity that is going on in a particular setting (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). This research effort is far from being correlational, causal-comparative or experimental as it is mainly taking into account individuals' perspectives and classroom observations. It does not aim to define a particular factor that is affecting students' speaking performance nor to examine an effect

of a certain interference in the classroom, but to rather explore the actual practice of classroom instructions in general (Merriam, 2009).

3.2 Sampling

Several French-medium schools in the Mount-Lebanon area were contacted through emails and letters. Four schools refused to participate in the study claiming that Grade 12 students are pressured to finish the curriculum and don't have enough time to fill the questionnaires during the third semester of the school-year. Three other schools didn't reply to either emails or letters. Overall, this study was conducted in five private schools, from middle to high socio-economic level, located in the Mount Lebanon area. This sampling process is considered convenient since it is based on the schools' willingness to participate in this study. In addition, aspects such as the schools' location was convenient for me, the researcher, since I am a resident of Mount-Lebanon area, knowing that four observation sessions are proposed in each school (Fraenkel et al, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

3.3 Participants

The participants of this study are 6 teachers from secondary classes, and 328 secondary students enrolled in French medium schools. Male and female students, aged between 17 and 19, attend one of the four sections of Grade 12: General sciences, life sciences, humanities and economics. A purposive sampling technique was adopted since most criteria have been predetermined for recruiting the participants (Fraenkel et al, 2012). Purposive sampling usually goes along with qualitative research where the researcher defines specific criteria to include the participants. The latter are mainly knowledgeable of the study topic in order to get in-depth information (Cohen, Manion &

Morrison, 2000). Selected criteria for this study dictate that selected Grade 12 students should be Arabic native speakers (i.e., exposed to Arabic from birth), enrolled in French medium schools since KG1. Since code-switching occurs frequently in the Lebanese trilingual context, this study included all students who use any other language along with Arabic to communicate at home, and excluded those who exclusively employ English at home. These criteria avoid misleading information, especially when it comes to exploring students' English-speaking challenges.

3.4 Procedure and instruments

After receiving the IRB approval to conduct this study, meetings were held at the five schools with either the schools' directors or the principals for a final approval. Subsequently, a consent form was sent to the parents to document their approval of their children's participation in this study, especially that many students are still under the age of 18 while at Grade 12. Questionnaires were administered to collect data from a large number of students and teachers, along with investigating many variables related to the classroom instruction and speaking challenges (Fraenkel et al, 2012).

Designing the questionnaire required including many variables to acquire a broad picture of the practice of speaking skills in classrooms. Variables such as the type of speaking activities, their objectives, the material used and teachers' oral corrective feedback are essential to answer the first research question related to classroom instruction. Variables such as speaking strategies and speaking challenges are mandatory to define the second research question which is about the common students' speaking challenges. These variables are discussed in the literature review chapter and their interpretation leads to answer the two main research questions.

There was no ready-made questionnaire in the literature that is holistic and comprehensive of all the prescribed variables. As a result, a study-specific questionnaire was designed following guidelines in the literature and previously published questionnaires (Afshar & Asakereh, 2016; Tuan & Mai, 2015) that mainly targeted one or two variables each (e.g. Speaking challenges and their possible factors)

The questionnaire was organized in a way that each variable was explored via one question that included a mix of multiple-choice options. One of the benefits of multiple choice questions is to ensure that participants fill the questionnaire in a short time, by providing accurate and complete information (Merriam, 2009). These options were rated through Likert scale so that participants can specify their attitude towards and their extent of agreement to the statement. In addition, one open-ended format was added at the end of each question to provide participants an opportunity to expand on the rigid multiple-choice options. For instance, the question is "I think speaking skills' objectives target" verifies the variable "speaking objectives". It is given three multiple-choice options (i.e. speaking accuracy, speaking fluency and speaking complexity) that each is rated through Likert scale, followed by an open-ended question "Others, please specify".

Students and teachers' questionnaires are quite similar in terms of the questions, the multiple-choice statements and the open-ended question. The wording differed between the two questionnaires mainly in the use of pronouns (e.g. My teacher encourages me" vs "I encourage my students to") to best fit the audience. Moreover, demographic information differed. Students were asked to fill in their age, gender, the language used for communication at home, the schools in which they were enrolled since KG1 and their

28

Grade 12 section. Teachers were asked to fill in their age, gender, their years of experience and their educational level.

The two questionnaires were piloted. Then, they were sent to students and teachers to collect their perspectives (see Appendix A & B). Piloting these instruments led to rewording of the technical term "inductive teaching" that was replaced by a simpler explanation that is "grammatical rules and patterns are deduced by the students".

For triangulation purposes, classroom observations provided additional knowledge related to the practice of speaking skills in context; information that might be taken for granted by the participants (Cohen et al, 2000). Naturalistic observations occurred. This means that students were observed in their natural setting with no attempt to intervene with their learning experience. By doing so, accurate information result from exploring what is really going on in French-medium classrooms (Fraenkel et al, 2012). Eleven observations were conducted in five schools, each for 50 minutes within a period of two months. I, as a researcher, acted as a non-participant observer. I sat at the back of the class so that my presence does not distract students from classroom participation. Checklists were filled out during the English session, at the time of occurrence of any activity that correspond to the variables under investigation.

The design of the observation checklist (see Appendix C) covered all the variables of the classroom instruction and speaking challenges that have been targeted in both questionnaires. Examples of these variables comprise the type of speaking activities and the elements that define whether classrooms are teacher or learner-centered. Checklists included multiple choice statements, using simple wording. Statements were stated in a chronological order in which the events in the classroom were assumed to be happening

to facilitate the recordings of the observations. For instance, students' knowledge of the topic at hand and their knowledge of the vocabulary were mentioned in the checklist before teachers' corrective feedback and speaking challenges. The process of collecting and analyzing data was easy since coding (i.e. Labeling the category of information) was defined in advance in the checklist (Fraenkel et al, 2012). Since few options are usually stated in checklists, additional comments were noted next to their corresponding variables. With that, data collected from the three instruments answered the two research questions related to students' speaking challenges and the common classroom practices.

3.5 Credibility, consistency and triangulation

Credibility or trustworthiness are two interchangeable terms that evaluate whether the findings of the study reflect reality. For the sake of enhancing the credibility of this study, triangulation in the use of the instruments and the sources of data was ensured (Merriam, 2009). In other terms, questionnaires were sent to both teachers and students to collect their perspectives. Classrooms were observed to collect contextual information related to the same variables considered in the questionnaires. In addition, questionnaires were piloted to ensure that the content was appropriate and clear for the participants within a consistent form and format, using comprehensible and precise questions and instructions (Fraenkel et al, 2012). Therefore, the findings of this study were found credible and trustworthy since the three instruments evaluated what they were designed for (Merriam, 2009).

Consistency or dependability question "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam, 2009. P.221). In this study, the results obtained from a large scope of data (328 students & 6 teachers) using the three instruments were homogeneous

and were analyzed objectively (Winter, 2000). In other terms, the same results will be produced given the same data (Merriam, 2009) or even if the study was replicated (Fraenkel et al, 2012). This consistency was ensured through the method of triangulation, the use of valid instruments and through objective analysis.

However, the findings of this study can't be generalized to all private French-medium schools in Lebanon, knowing that each school has its own vision, mission and educational policies. Yet, they can be transferred to similar schools, be it public or private, which still rely excessively on textbooks and traditional activities in the classroom (Merriam, 2009).

3.6 Ethical considerations

To ensure ethics throughout the research effort, schools were contacted after receiving the IRB approval. From the onset, the purpose of the study was explained to all the participants. A consent form was sent to all parents to get an approval for their children' participation in the study. Students were informed that they had the right to disengage from the study at any time. Questionnaires were designed in a way to maintain the participants' anonymity since no name was required to be mentioned in any of the instruments. In addition, statements were carefully written to avoid biased answers (Fraenkel et al, 2012). Data were collected and reported without any bias considerations. They were stored securely and confidentially in a way that the participants' information was kept anonymous during and after the study.

3.7 Data analysis

Data were collected from 328 students' questionnaires, 6 teachers' questionnaires and 11 observation checklists. Since qualitative data can be reported through words,

number and/or charts, descriptive analysis was used as a method to analyze questionnaires' answers. The benefits of this method are to simplify the information by using numbers to verify the divergence between students' and teachers' perspectives regarding practicing Spoken English (Fraenkel et al, 2012). Likert scale ratings and open-ended answers were logged into Excel to facilitate manipulating the data and to generate percentages for each statement in the questionnaire. Then, charts were created to better display the findings. For instance, comparison between teachers and students' answers revealed that 83% of the teachers and 82% of the students agreed that speaking fluency is targeted in the classroom.

Checklists' comments were also logged into Excel to facilitate comparing the results in order to find commonalities and differences among practices in the five schools. Information that didn't fit into the categories that were previously identified in the checklist (e.g. teachers' corrective feedback, speaking challenges), were also reported, such as the use of technological tools in the classroom and students' interaction.

As has been stated, exploratory research was adopted for this study to explore the teaching and learning experience in its natural setting in French-medium schools. Five schools constituted the sample of this study, where 328 students and 6 teachers were the main participants. Instruments were designed in a way that enable capturing a broad image of classroom instruction related to speaking skills. Questionnaires were sent to teachers and students to collect their perspectives on the topic and checklists were filled during classroom observations. Since triangulation was used, instruments were piloted, data was collected objectively and ethics were maintained, this study is considered credible and

trustworthy. The next chapter analyzed the results collected from the three instruments

used in order to answer the two research questions.

Chapter four

Findings

This chapter summarizes the analysis results of the data collected from five schools using three instruments: teachers and students' questionnaires and checklists for classroom observations as a non-participant observer. To answer the two research questions, results obtained from each instrument will be detailed for each variable. Then, common points and deviations between the three instruments will be highlighted to better understand the practice of speaking skills in the five schools and the possible speaking challenges.

Out of 334 students, six students were excluded from this study: two of them were previously taught in English medium schools during intermediate classes, while the other four used English exclusively to communicate at home. These conditions can alter the results of the study, especially the section that discusses the challenges students face when speaking English as a third language. Therefore, the total number of participants for the questionnaires became 328 students, along with six teachers from the five schools. Checklists were completed for eleven classrooms' observations in five schools.

4.1 Findings related to the first research question

To answer the first research question "What are the challenges faced by Lebanese students when speaking English as a second foreign language?", results are collected from the following variables: factors affecting speaking practice, speaking challenges, external factors and speaking strategies.

4.2.1 Factors affecting speaking practice
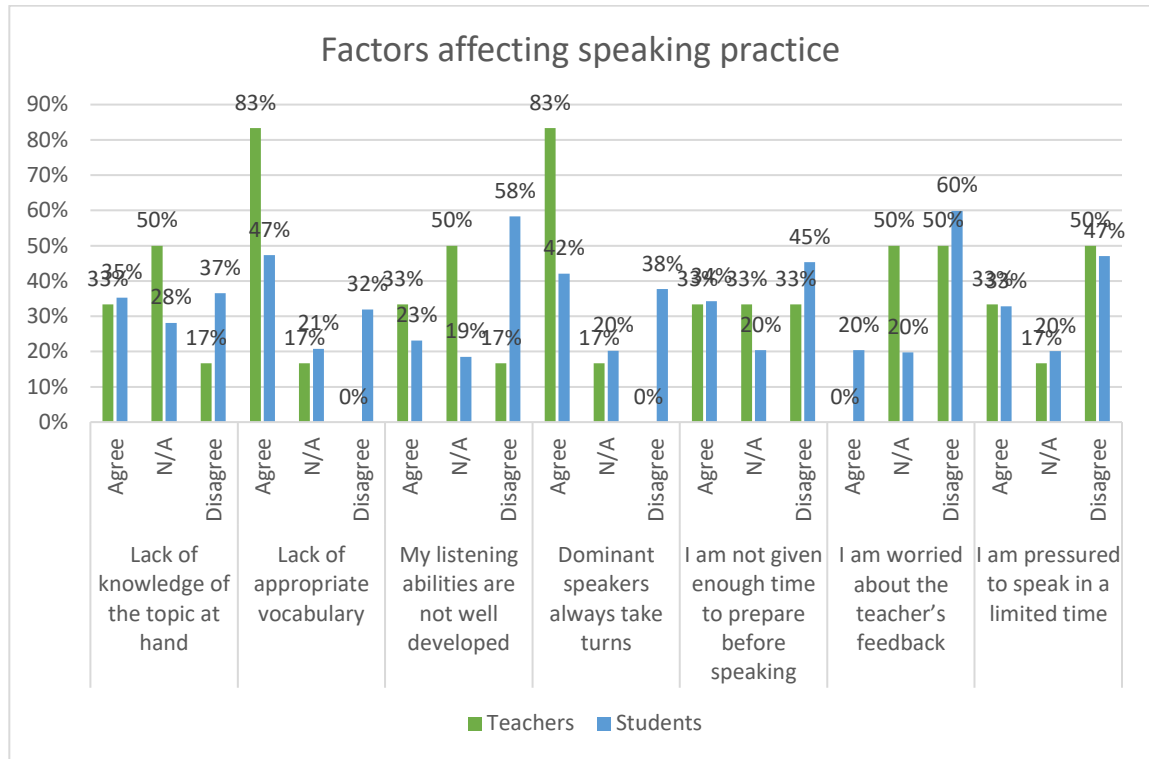
Figure 1: Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to speaking skills' practice.

Teachers' questionnaires

Eighty three percent (83%) of the teachers agreed that the main factor affecting students' participation in speaking activities is their lack of knowledge of the appropriate vocabulary along with the presence of dominant speakers in the classroom who might intimidate other students from speaking. Thirty three percent (33%) of the teachers admit that students are not given enough time to prepare before speaking, feel pressured to speak in a limited time, lack knowledge of the topic at hand and have inadequate listening skills. Yet, none of the teachers found that their feedback might affect the students' participation in speaking activities.

Students' questionnaires

Students' answers match up with those of their teachers. Forty-seven percent (47% of 323) students confessed that they are not knowledgeable of the appropriate vocabulary, while dominant speakers do not give them enough room to participate (42% of 321 students). Students stated that they lack knowledge of the topic discussed (35% of 320), are not given enough time to prepare before speaking (34% of 324), and feel pressured to speak in a limited time (33% of 323). Few of them claim that their listening abilities are not well developed (23% of 324) and that they worry about the teacher's feedback (20% of 324).

Classroom observations

During my observations of the practice of speaking activities, two teachers out of six were pressuring all students to participate and refraining dominant speakers from instantly answering by calling on students according to a list of their names. In the other six observed sessions, it was obvious that the same students are always replying and engaging in discussions. In addition, students who didn't participate in classroom activities spent the time sleeping, doing small talks or studying for another subject during the English session. It appeared that students who always participate in class are those who have strong personalities or knowledgeable about the topic through extra readings or watching videos. Therefore, they were not worried about the teacher's feedback whether to correct their mistakes or to argue with their ideas.

Two teachers out of six gave students three minutes to prepare before speaking. Those teachers gave their students prompts and incited them to elaborate and find arguments that support their opinions. The rest of the teachers asked the question and

expected the answers instantly. In addition, they were pressuring their students to speak quickly. They interrupted their speech, restated the main idea of their interrupted sentences and called on another student to answer.

Students lacked knowledge of the topics being discussed in class since it was about soldiers' experiences at war, colors to paint the house and the history of America and the red Indians, as discussed earlier in the material used for speaking activities. Students lacked knowledge of the vocabulary being introduced the first session of the lesson plan. Teachers defined the words while reading texts or during brainstorming activities. Only one teacher introduced vocabulary before reading.

Observing listening abilities in a classroom was limited to students' understandings of the teachers' instructions and responding to questions related to audio-visual material. Some students understood the instructions easily, while others were asking their peers or their teacher for assistance.

Common points

Classroom observations and teachers and students' questionnaires' results showed that students lack the appropriate vocabulary related to the topic at hand and that they are not worried about the teachers' feedback to refrain from speaking. In addition, there was an agreement that dominant speakers control the discussions in the classroom. However, classroom observations showed that students' and teachers' perspectives were not in harmony when it came to the following three statements: students' lack of knowledge of the topic at hand, the limited time they were given to prepare speaking and the pressure to speak quickly while speaking.

4.2.2 Speaking challenges
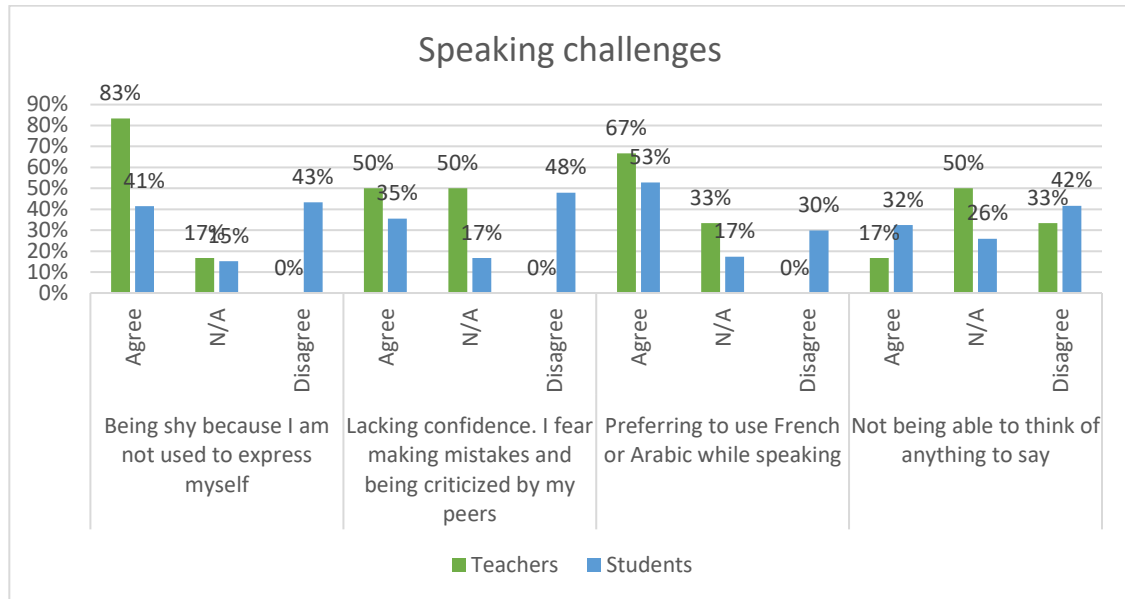
Figure 2: Comparison of the students and teachers' answers related to speaking challenges.

Teachers' questionnaires

According to 83% of the teachers, the most challenge faced by students is their shyness since they are not used to expressing themselves. It is followed by the students' preference to use another language while speaking such as French or Arabic (approved by 67% of the teachers) and their lack of confidence because they fear making mistakes and being criticized by their peers, as confirmed by 50% of the teachers. Only 17% of the teachers admitted that their students can't think of anything to say.

Students' questionnaires

From their perspectives, 53% of 324 students preferred to use another language while speaking as the first challenge to speak the English language. 41% of 323 students confirmed that they are not used to express themselves while 35% of 324 students lack

confidence and fear making mistakes and being criticized by their peers. Only 32% of 324 students can't think of anything to say.

Classroom observations

During my observations, it was noticeable that students often code-switched when speaking English, not to mention that some of them preferred to use another language while speaking, code-switched to few English words. It was also observed that all students of one school preferred to use one language (either French or Arabic) over another while code-switching.

When teachers asked a question to one particular student, some of them delegated the task to another by saying "x will answer, not me" in a comic way to avoid answering. By doing so, teachers avoided embarrassing them and moved to another student.

Irrespective of the school, the student who is speaking can normally be intimidated by his/her classmates, who do not refrain from correcting their peers' mistakes instantly, especially lexical and phonological mistakes, while adding ironic statements or intonation.

Common points

Students' preference to express themselves in a language that is different from English was confirmed by almost half of the students, the majority of the teachers and observations. Since dominant speakers took turns in many classrooms, observations confirmed the teachers' perspectives regarding students' unfamiliarity with expressing their ideas. In addition, there was an agreement regarding peers' criticism, which can inhibit some students from speaking; that was only approved by 35% of the students.

4.2.3 Speaking strategies
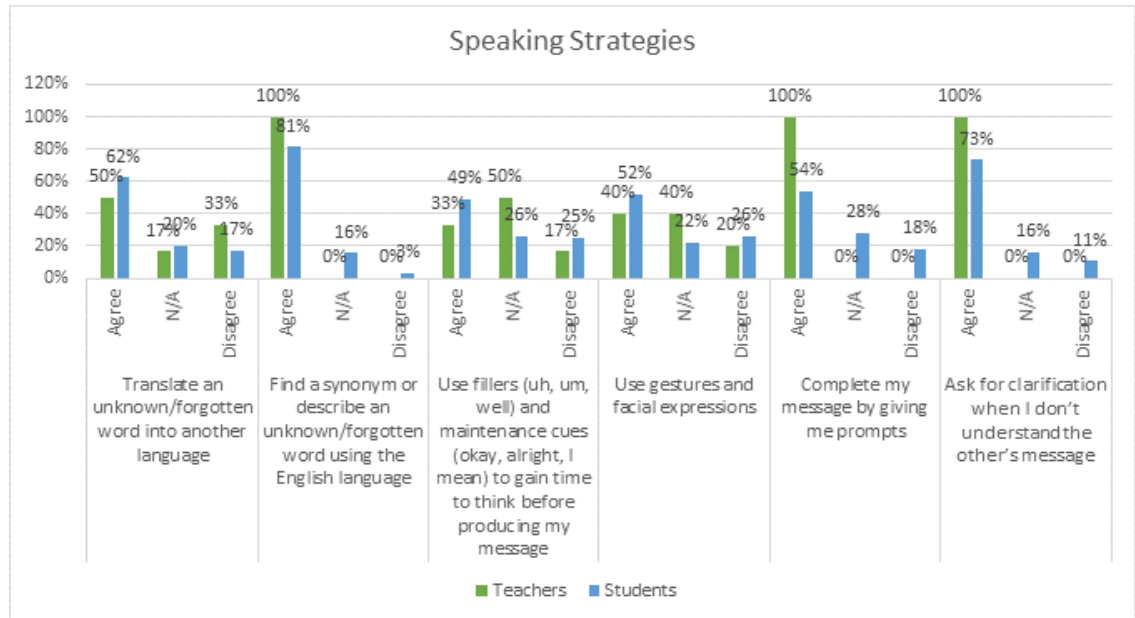
Figure 3: Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to speaking strategies

Teachers' questionnaires

When students found themselves unable to transmit their oral message, all teachers highly encouraged them to find a synonym or describe what they want to say using the English language, gave them prompts to elicit their answers or asked them for clarification. Half of the teachers supported translating the English unknown words into another language, while the other half prohibited code-switching completely. Using gestures was only approved by 40% of the teachers while only 33% of them supported using fillers and maintenance cues while speaking.

Students' questionnaires

According to students, finding a synonym or describing the unknown word using the English language was among the most common speaking strategies used by students (81% of 320). It was followed by asking for clarification (73% of 319 students) and

translating into another language (62% of 319 students). In addition, giving prompts (54% of 313 students), using gestures (52% of 319 students) and using fillers (49% of 320 students) were also encouraged by teachers to help the students complete their message in case of communication breakdown.

Classroom observations

When students couldn't find adequate words, classroom observations revealed that four out of six teachers gave them prompts to find the unknown word's synonym, or to describe it using the English language. Teachers asked the students questions or simply stated many replacement options for the missing word until the student chose one of them. These findings are homogenous among students' and teachers' answers derived from the questionnaire.

Only two teachers out of six encouraged students to code-switch when they couldn't find the right words, followed by their explicit statement of the English word and its synonym. Yet, many students code-switched even if it was not approved by the teacher. None of the teachers encouraged gestures or facial expressions to compensate for a missing word. Only one teacher encouraged the use of gestures or facial expressions during oral presentations.

When students' message was not clear, five teachers out of six asked the students many questions to clarify their point of view. They even reformulated the answer of the student to make it clearer for other students. None of the students were encouraged to use fillers or maintenance cues to gain time before speaking. On the contrary, teachers saw that as a hesitation indicator.

Common points

Findings from the three instruments confirmed the speaking strategies encouraged by teachers. Almost all teachers encouraged their students to find English synonyms for the unknown words, while few teachers supported code-switching and using gestures to compensate. In case of an unclear message, all teachers encouraged students to explain themselves by giving them prompts. In addition, teachers did not encourage using fillers to gain time before speaking as shown in the teachers' questionnaires and observations.

4.2.4 External Factors
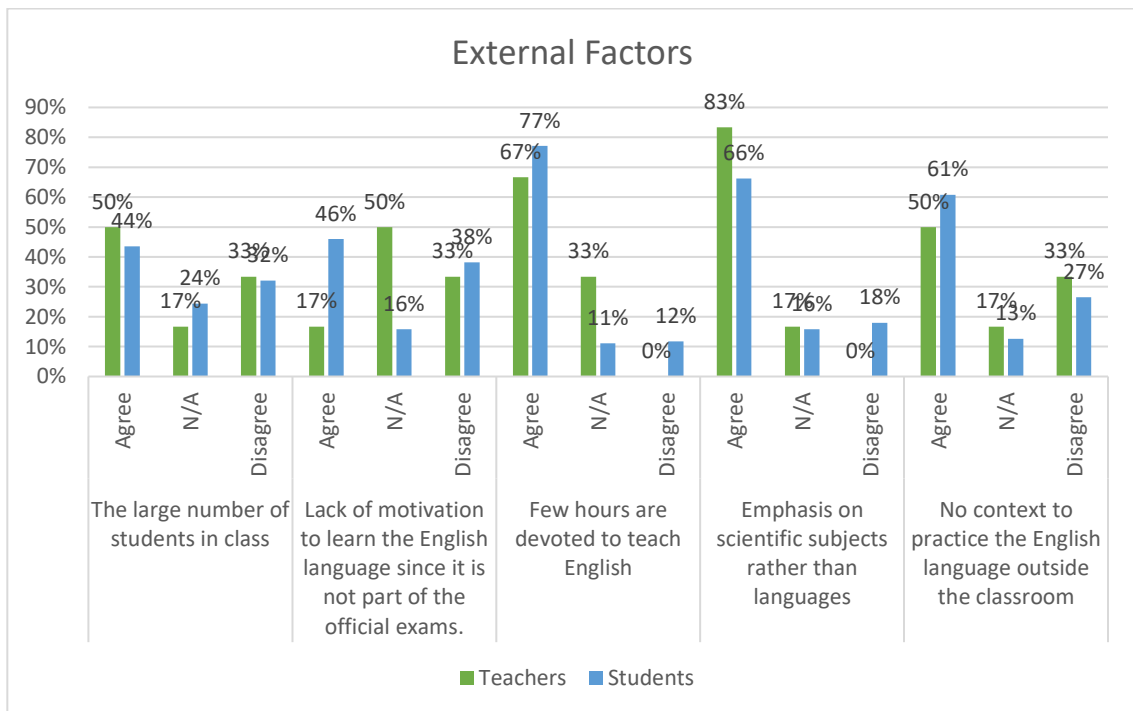
Figure 4: Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to external factors

Teachers and students' questionnaires

Placing emphasis on scientific subjects rather than languages (83% of the teachers, 66% of 323 students) and devoting few hours to teach English (67% of the teachers and

77% of 323 students) are the two main reasons that might affect students' motivation to learn a third language. The third reason was the lack of opportunities to practice the language outside the classroom (50% of the teachers and 61% of 324 students). The large number of students in class can also have an impact on the learning experience as highlighted by 50% of the teachers and 44% of 324 students. However, only 17% of the teachers confirmed that the absence of official exams does not affect the students' motivation to learn the language, while 46% of 322 students agreed with this statement.

Classroom observations

While observing different sections of Grade 12 from five French-system schools, the highest number of students in any class was thirty-five students, while the least was ten. Yet, all students from the five schools were only assigned two hours per week to learn the English language. Students who were enrolled in French baccalaureate along with the Lebanese Baccalaureate program were aware that their speaking skills are being assessed through an individual oral presentation. Forty six percent (46%) of teachers concurred that speaking skills were not being assessed for those students who are only enrolled in the Lebanese Baccalaureate.

Common points

Results from the three instruments converged regarding the external factors that affect language learning. These factors were linked to the foreign context in Lebanon where English is being taught (i.e. no context to practice the language outside the classroom), the curriculum's restrictions (i.e. emphasis on scientific subjects, few hours to teach English) and schools' policies (i.e. absence of speaking skills' assessment, the large number of students in class).

4.2 Findings related to the second research question

To answer the second research question "What are the common classroom practices related to speaking skills in French-medium schools?", results are obtained from the following variables: teaching approach, type of speaking activities, speaking objectives, material used, teachers' corrective feedback, learner-centeredness elements in the classroom, homework and speaking assessment.

4.1.1 Teaching approach
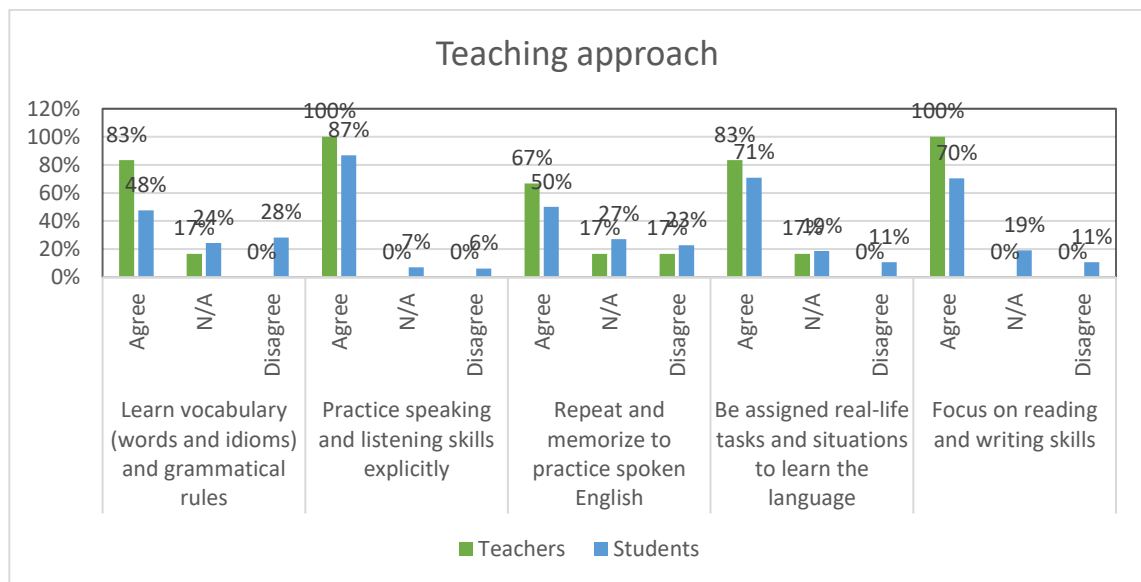
Figure 5: *Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to the teaching approach*

Teachers' questionnaires

Results from the questionnaires reveal that all teachers admit that "practicing listening and speaking skills explicitly" along with "focusing on reading and writing skills" are invaluable to improve students' English speaking performance. Eighty-three percent (83%) found that assigning real life tasks and learning vocabulary and grammatical rules

is advantageous while 67% agreed on the importance of repeating and memorizing spoken English.

Students' questionnaires

From their perspectives, 87% of 324 students assert that practicing speaking and listening skills explicitly is the most desirable way to improve their spoken English. They also approve being assigned real-life tasks and situations to learn the language (71% of 322), along with a focus on reading and writing skills (70% of 321). Their opinions diverged regarding "repeating and memorizing spoken English" (50% of 324 students agreed) and "learning vocabulary and grammatical rules" (48% of 326 students agreed). These results were homogenous among students following the Lebanese or the French Baccalaureate, and among any of the Grade 12 sections (i.e. Life sciences, General sciences, economics or humanities).

Classroom observations

Based on checklists' comments, seven sessions were observed in four schools out of five where students constantly used their textbooks in class. They practiced a lot of reading texts, followed by vocabulary, grammar and writing activities. The order of teaching the language skills differed from one classroom to another. For instance, students started by looking at a visual (picture, short comics or dialogue), they brainstormed ideas, read a text, learned new vocabulary, answered comprehension questions, practiced grammatical rules, and learned writing conventions. Yet, the actual writing practice was assigned as a homework. Others got introduced to the new vocabulary before reading or while reading the text. In summary, language skills were taught separately where each

activity focused on one skill only. One teacher out of five introduced a new topic through a listening passage instead of a text, followed by comprehensive questions, grammar and vocabulary activities.

At one school out of five, where four sessions were observed, classroom activities focused on speaking and listening skills explicitly, along with creative and critical thinking. Students were asked to watch audio-visual materials, answer questions, discuss ideas in pairs and report their findings in form of impromptu speech. They were also asked to reflect on quotes and debate controversial topics about education and technology and the current political regimes. The last session included individual assessments of speaking skills. None of the observed sessions included real-life tasks to practice speaking skills, nor repeating or memorizing spoken English during class time, as opposed to what have been reported in the questionnaires.

Common points

Results showed that reading and writing skills along with learning vocabulary and grammar are among the most practiced skills in the classroom. Even though the three observed sessions included practicing speaking and listening skills explicitly, these skills were only applied by one teacher out of six. Yet, results from both questionnaires do not coincide with classroom observations regarding practicing speaking skills through repetition and memorization, and assigning real-life tasks to learn the language. Perhaps the statement that included "real-life tasks" in the questionnaire was confused with the real-life topics that have been discussed in class and being related to the students' lives. For example, while discussing the choice of colors in painting different rooms at home, a teacher asked personal questions about the students' preferences.

4.1.2 Speaking Activities
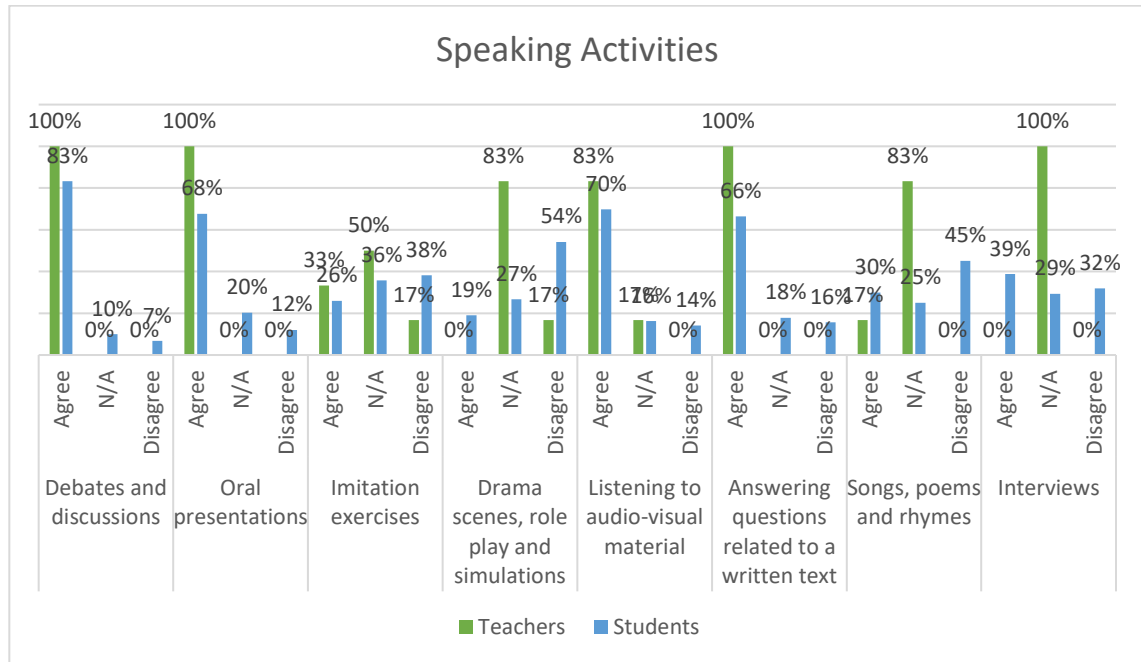
Figure 6: Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to speaking Activities

Teachers' questionnaires

All teachers emphasized the application of the following types of speaking activities: debates and discussions, oral presentations and answering questions related to a written text. Listening to audio-visual material got approved by 83% of the teachers, while only 33% included imitation exercises, and 17% use songs, poems and rhymes. Yet, all teachers highlighted that neither drama, role play, simulations or interviews are part of their teaching practice.

Students' questionnaires

Students' answers came to terms with those of their corresponding teachers. 83% of 328 students declared that debates and discussions were among the most used speaking activities employed in the classroom, followed by listening to audio-visual material (70%

of 327), oral presentations (68% of 325) and answering questions related to a written text (66% of 325). Percentages drop instantly to show the agreement between the teacher and students' answers since poems and rhymes are only approved by 30% of 328 students, and imitation exercises by 26% of 324 students. Yet, 39% of 320 students stated that interviews are part of the classroom activities, and 19% of 325 students mentioned drama scenes, role play and simulations, even though none of the teachers confirmed it.

Classroom observations

Six out of eleven observed sessions included reading a text and one session included listening to an audio passage; the teacher followed up by comprehension questions and grammar and vocabulary activities. Three sessions included listening to an audio-visual material where two of them were followed by Q&A, discussions in pairs and a debate. Another session was about watching a 40-minutes video. The last two sessions comprised oral presentations and an individual assessment of speaking skills.

It should be noted that one teacher out of six implemented debates, oral presentations, Q&A and discussions following an audio-visual material. The four other teachers focused on Q&A and discussions following a written text and an audio passage retrieved from the students' textbooks. None of the observed sessions included imitation activities, drama activities, role play, simulations, songs, poems or rhymes.

Common points

Obviously, the most common type of speaking activities is responding to questions related to written texts retrieved from textbooks. Even though results regarding

listening to audio-visual material from the three instruments were also in accordance, implementing audio-visual material didn't happen as frequently as texts.

Results from questionnaires regarding debates and oral presentations do not conform with those of classroom observations. Out of eleven sessions, only two sessions included oral presentations and debates. In addition, the latter were implemented by the same teacher who focused on practicing speaking and listening skills explicitly.

The results from the three instruments infer that none of interviews, role play, drama, imitation exercises and songs are part of the classroom instruction.

4.1.3 Material
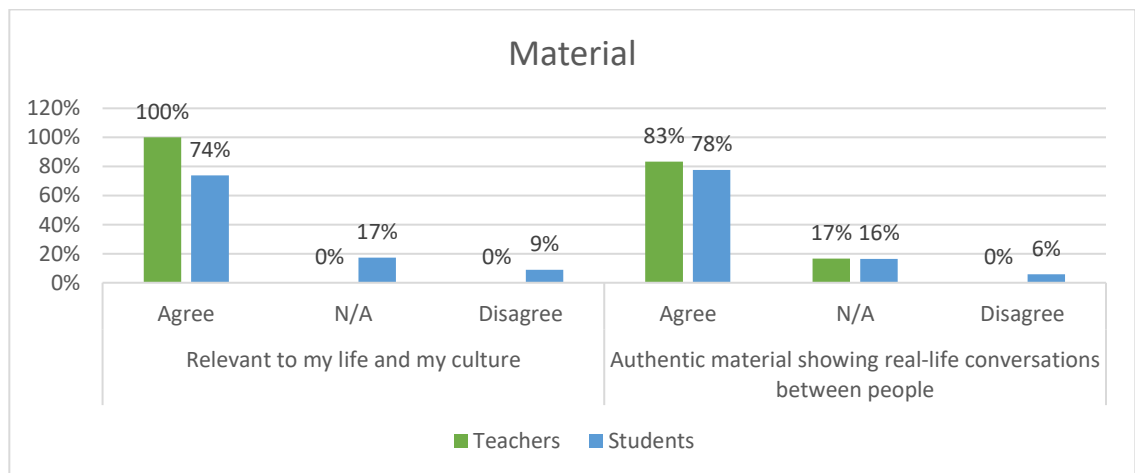
Figure 7: Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to the teaching material

Teachers and students' questionnaires

All teachers asserted that the material employed to teach speaking skills is relevant to the students' life and culture, to which 74% of 325 students agreed. 83% of the teachers and 78% of 323 students agreed that the material is authentic.

Classroom observations

Based on my observations, five out of six teachers were confined to the pre-defined topics in the English books. These topics were about the experience of an injured former American soldier, the choice of colors in painting different rooms in the house, the history of America, the holocaust of the red Indians, the invention of the trails, and the mail and the rugby game. Whether the introduction of these topics was through an audio-visual, a picture, a text or a listening passage, these topics were not representative of Grade 12 Lebanese students' culture and their everyday lives and matters.

During the observed sessions of the one teacher who implemented audio-visual materials from the internet, various topics were discussed such as the impact of technology on the individuals' lives, the importance of college, the issue of standardized tests, the pros and cons of different political regimes such as democratic, dictatorship, and communism and the power of words. These topics were chosen based on the students' interest, since they are relevant to their lives, needs and their culture. Students had many ideas to share and some students had already read books about some of the topics, which enriched the classroom discussion. All the videos that were retrieved from the internet were authentic since they were conveying real conversations between people, showing monologue's public speech and documentaries posted on you tube and TV channels.

Regarding authenticity, some of the material used in the textbooks were authentic, retrieved directly from journals and magazines. Some other texts were written for teaching purposes which affect their level of authenticity. It was obvious that the listening passage that came along with the textbook was recorded to fit the lesson plan since people were

talking at a very slow rate, with no fillers or pauses. Students felt the awkwardness of the conversation and imitated the fake laugh produced by the two speakers.

Common points

Classroom observations showed that the material is not always relevant to students' lives, nor was it authentic in all cases. Yet, both teachers and students agreed to the opposite in the questionnaire. That is because some teachers were able to relate the content of the topics to the students' lives and experiences through questions in the classroom, but that didn't seem to attract the participation of all students.

4.1.4 Speaking objectives
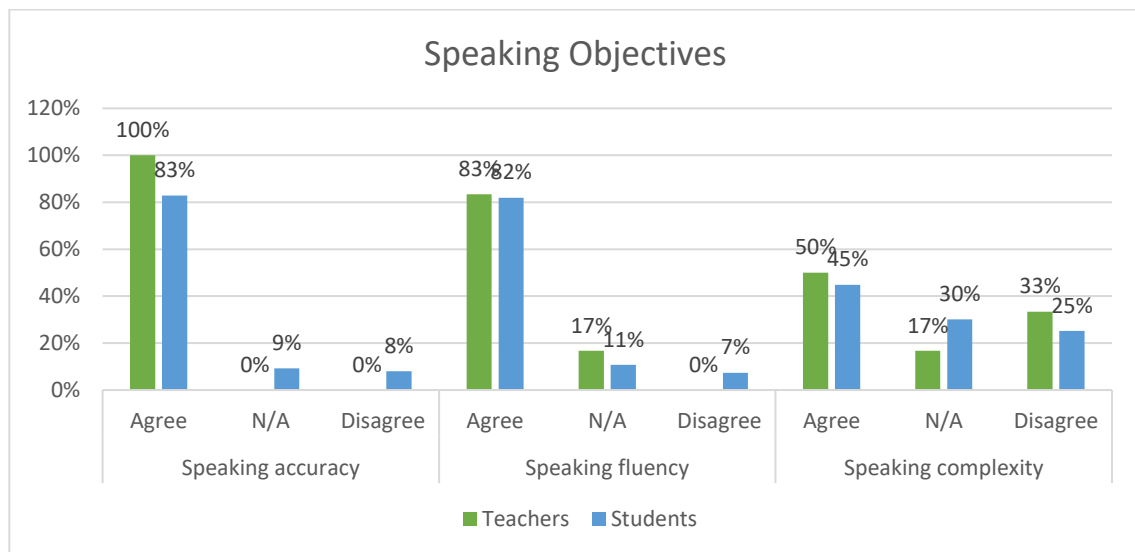
Figure 8: Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to Speaking activities' objectives

Teachers and students' questionnaires

All teachers stressed the importance of targeting speaking accuracy out of which 83% emphasized speaking fluency. Yet, only 50% of the teachers agreed on developing speaking complexity. These results are in line with students' answers where 83% of the

326 students found that speaking accuracy was targeted in their classroom, along with fluency (82% of 327 students). Only 45% of 326 stated that complexity was aimed in their classroom practice.

Classroom observations

Classroom observations indicated that accuracy was mainly targeted through speaking activities more than it was for fluency and complexity. Speaking time during Q&A targeted new introduced information while instant corrections of grammatical, lexical and phonological mistakes were made. Fluency was mainly targeted through oral presentations where students were given prompts to elaborate on previously prepared material without mentioning their mistakes at all.

Common points

Results from teachers and students' questionnaires revealed that both accuracy and fluency were targeted when practicing speaking skills with less focus on speaking complexity. Yet, classroom observations revealed that accuracy was mainly practiced in the classrooms while fluency was rarely considered and complexity was neglected.

4.1.5 Corrective feedback
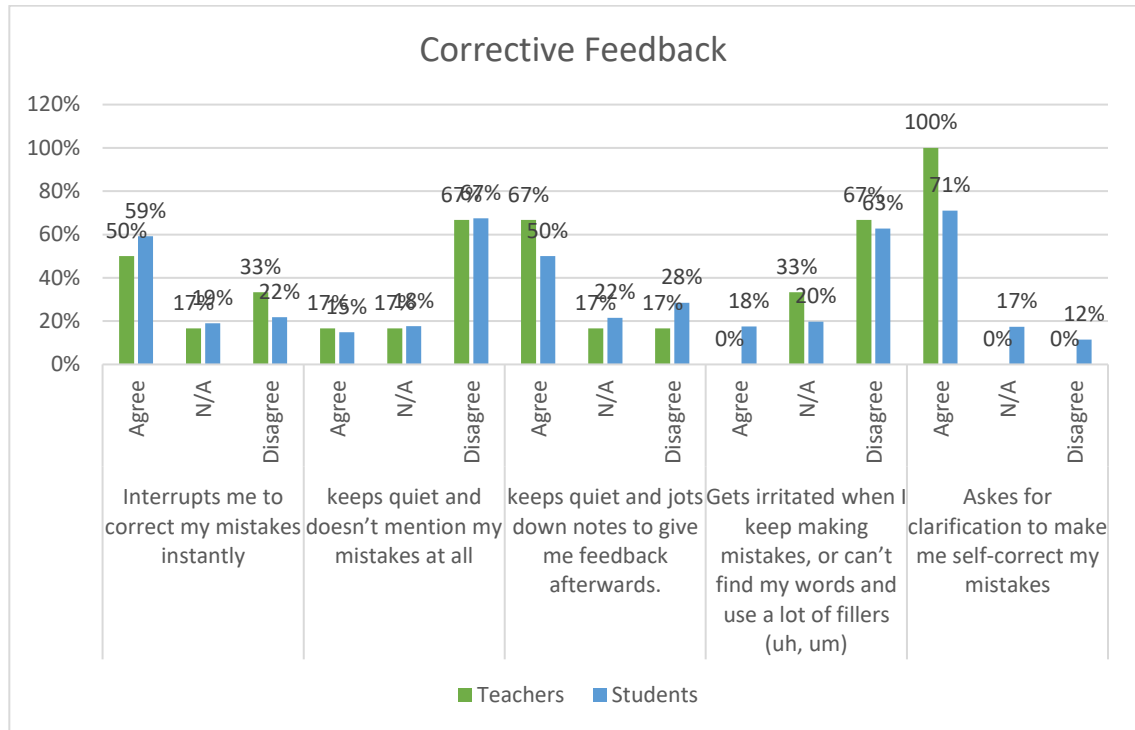
Figure 9: Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to corrective feedback

Teachers' questionnaires

Asking for clarification as a mean to make the students self-correct was approved by all the teachers while 67% of them keep quiet and do not mention the mistakes afterwards. Half of the teachers interrupt the students to correct them instantly and 17% of them never mention the mistakes. None of the teachers gets irritated when students can't find their words or hesitate.

Students' questionnaires

Seventy-one percent (71% of 321) students approve that their teachers ask them for clarification, while 59% of 321 students confirm that they get interrupted to be corrected. Half of 316 students receive corrections after they have finished their message,

while 15% of 316 state that their teachers never mention their mistakes. Yet, 18% of 319 report that their teachers get irritated when they make mistakes.

Classroom observations

Classroom observations showed that lexical errors were corrected instantly by four teachers out of six by providing an explicit correction. In addition to the explicit correction, teachers provided an explanation or stated few examples or synonyms of the lexical errors afterwards. Grammatical errors were being corrected either explicitly or by providing metalinguistic corrections (i.e. Teachers remind the student of the grammatical rule briefly) to make the students self-correct. Phonological errors were sometimes corrected by the teacher through recasts but they were always corrected by peers explicitly. Only one teacher was getting irritated when students were not fluent while speaking or reading by reading or speaking on their behalves.

When students' speech was unclear and incomprehensible, all the teachers asked the students to clarify their message by asking them questions to make them elaborate and express themselves. Even though prompts were given, three teachers out of six did not give students enough time to elaborate their thoughts. Teachers were satisfied with few uttered words that fit the answer of the questions. They interrupt the student and call on another one to hear another answer.

Common points

The results from the three instruments converged for all the statements regarding teachers' corrective feedback. Almost half of the teachers provided instant corrections for lexical and grammatical errors. These corrections were followed by more explanations

after students finish their speech. In addition, all teachers asked the students to clarify their message when it was incomprehensible and they rarely got irritated by students' mistakes.

4.1.6 Learner-centered classrooms
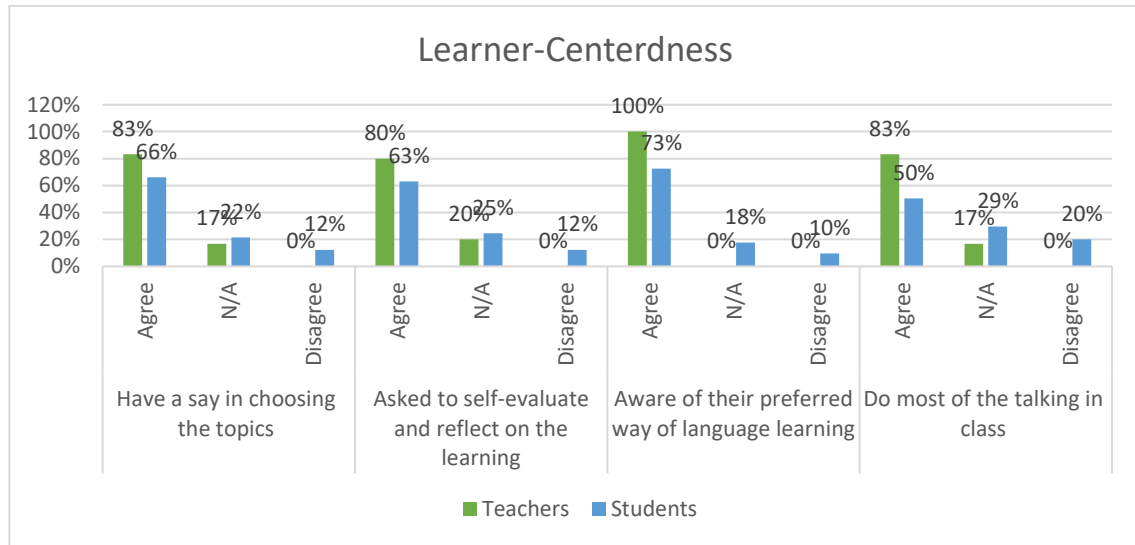
Figure 10: Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to learner-centered classrooms.

Teachers and students' questionnaires

Eighty-three percent (83%) of the teachers admitted that their students have a say in choosing the topics they work on in class, which was approved by 66% of 325 students. Even though 80% of the teachers confirm that their students are asked to self-evaluate and reflect on their learning, only 63% of 324 students confirmed it. Along with the teachers' full approval regarding their students' awareness of their own learning styles and strategies, 73% of 320 students agreed. 83% of the teachers acknowledge that their students do most of the talking in the classroom. Yet, only 50% of 319 students agreed.

Classroom observations

While observing the classroom instruction, it was clear that five teachers out of six abided by the topics defined in the textbook. Only one teacher did not rely on textbooks and implemented audio-visual material discussing trendy topics. Therefore, students didn't have a say in choosing the topics they were being discussed in class nor the choice of the activities. Perhaps the students misunderstood since they have a say in peer discussions that occurred based on the theme and topic specified in the textbook. Four teachers out of six were doing most of talk in the classroom, and only one teacher only was acting as a facilitator during students' discussions and debates. None of the observed session included a self-evaluation and a reflection of the learning process.

Common points

Results from the questionnaires showed that teachers agree that their classroom is learner-centered. They confirmed that students have a say in the classroom, do most of the talking in the classroom and they are asked to self-evaluate. More than a half of the students agreed with these statements as well. Yet, classroom observations showed that students don't have a say in the choice of topic and activities and they were not asked to self-evaluate on their learning in any observed session. In addition, teachers did most of the talking in class.

4.1.7 Homework
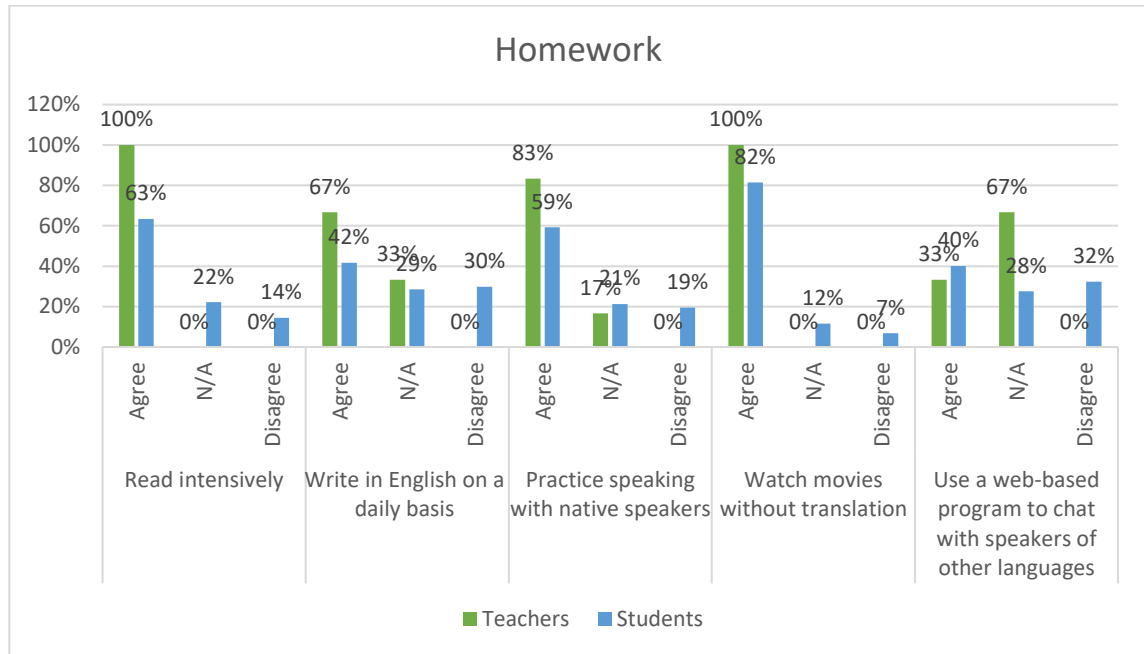
Figure 11: Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to homework

Teachers' questionnaires

All teachers asked their students to watch movies without translation and to read intensively at home improve their English proficiency. 83% of the teachers encouraged students to practice speaking with native speakers, 67% to write in English daily, while only 33% asked the students to use web-based program to chat with native speakers.

Students' questionnaires

Eighty-two percent (82% of 319) students approved that their teachers asked them to watch movies without translation, read intensively (63% of 320 students) and practice speaking with native speakers (59% of 319 students). Forty-two percent (42%) of 319 students agreed that teachers asked them to write daily in English while 40% stated that

their teachers encouraged them to use a web-based program to chat with English native speakers.

None of the observed sessions included assigning a task for the following session.

4.1.8 Speaking assessment
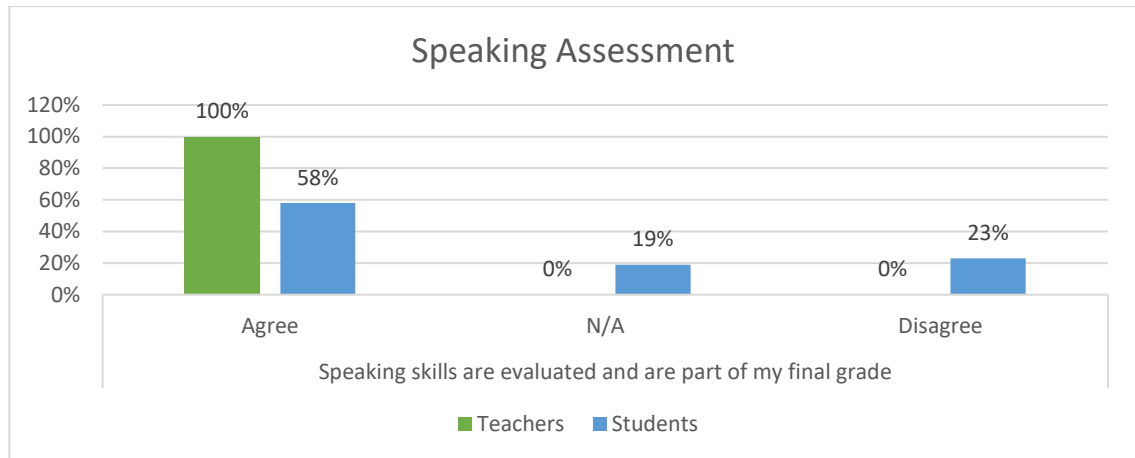
Figure 12: Comparison of students and teachers' answers related to speaking assessment

Teachers and students' questionnaires

All teachers confirmed that speaking assessment was part of the final grade, which was only approved by 58% of 312 students.

Classroom observations

One session out of eleven included speaking assessments. French Baccalaureate students picked a topic randomly, and prepared for ten minutes before speaking. They presented their speech individually, followed by Q&A for five minutes.

To sum up, the common classroom practices of the English language focus on practicing reading, writing and learning vocabulary and grammar. Even though it was declared that an explicit practice of speaking and listening skills was performed in both students and teachers' questionnaires, it was not frequently observed in classrooms. When it came to the practice of speaking skills, the most common activity was answering comprehension questions related to a written text, a visual or to audio-visual materials. Equally, discussions among peers occurred with little focus on oral presentations and debates. These speaking activities targeted accuracy in general, despite the fact that fluency was also mentioned as a main learning objective in both students and teachers' questionnaires. The material that was implemented was far from being relevant to students' culture. Some of the texts and audio-visual materials provided authentic input while others were designed for learning purposes. These two aspects that are related to the relevance and authenticity of the material were neglected by both teachers and students in the questionnaires.

Overall, students didn't have a say in choosing the activities in the classroom and none of them were asked to self-evaluate. Teachers preferred one teaching style over many others during the sessions and did most of the talking in the class, similar to what have been reported in the literature (Bahous, Bacha & Nabhani, 2011a). This makes English language classes teacher-centered in French-medium schools. Both students and teachers confirmed that students were advised to watch English movies without translation, read intensively, write daily and practice speaking with native speakers. Yet, none of the observed sessions included assigning homework. After all, speaking skills

were not part of the final grade of the English language in Lebanese Baccalaureate programs as opposed to those enrolled in French Baccalaureate program.

Interestingly, the main challenges encountered by French-educated students are their preference to code-switch to Arabic and French and finding themselves unused to express themselves in general. Teachers' prompts were either to encourage students to translate the missing words into another language or to find the synonyms and describe the word using the English language. When the message was incomprehensible, all teachers asked their students for clarification. Surprisingly, questionnaires and classroom observations reveled that almost half of the teachers interrupted their students instantly during their speech, while few others corrected their errors afterwards.

Listing the factors that affect students' speaking performance, one has to highlight several elements. For example, students lacked appropriate vocabulary of the topic being discussed, not to mention lacking knowledge about the topic itself. In addition, teachers gave students little time to prepare before speaking, pressuring them to speak quickly to allow the participation of more students in a large class. The constant participation of dominant speakers added to the factors that negatively affected the practice of speaking skills.

Equally important, external factors added to students' speaking challenges. To illustrate, the foreign context "Lebanon" where English is being taught, the limited hours assigned to learn the English language at schools, placing more stress on scientific subjects and the absence of assessment of the English language are the main factors that are adding to the situation.

Chapter five

Discussion

Investigating the challenges that affect students' speaking fluency of the English language when taught as a third language and the potential factors linked to classroom practices are the main purpose of this study. As an attempt to answer this research question, questionnaires sent to teachers and students along with classroom observations were conducted and collected for Grade 12 in five French- system schools in Lebanon, just few months before students join universities.

It was apparent that many Lebanese French-educated students showed poor fluency while speaking the English language, as identified by the subjective perception of the listener during classroom observations, also known as perceived fluency (Macalister, 2014). Students failed to find English words while speaking, which made them code-switch frequently. They hesitated and used many fillers and unfilled pauses that affected the flow of the speech tremendously. It seems that code-switching is a common phenomenon in multilingual contexts where some languages occupy dominant statuses compared to others (Olshtain & Nissim-Amitai, 2004). Along the same line, teachers of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia acknowledge that their students cannot carry out a short discussion after the secondary level (Alshumaimeri, 2003). In addition, students were using direct translations from Arabic or French to construct their sentences in English. Code-switching was also reported by Esseili (2014) and Bahous et al, (2011b) when they investigated teachers' work conditions and their perceptions regarding students' English proficiency in both public and private schools respectively.

The findings of this study reveal that the major challenge encountered by Lebanese French-educated students is their preference of expressing themselves in another language, either French or Arabic. The great majority of students code-mixed using colloquial Arabic since it is their mother tongue, spoken by 75% of the participants at home. Other students preferred French since it is their first language of instruction and it is used by 15% of the participants as the main language of communication at home.

By translating unknown words or sentence structures into another language, 62% of the participants proved that they found an effective way to cope with their lack of vocabulary or structures, a speaking challenge that was confirmed by 83% of the teachers and 47% of the students. This speaking strategy is complex and it is usually employed by advanced students (Lopez, 2011), showing that they have gained confidence while speaking and they wish to transmit their message without interrupting the flow of the conversation. In agreement with this analysis, 65% of the students and 50% of the teachers have reported that they do not lack confidence while speaking. Even though it is argued that making use of certain types of strategies is defined by students' level of proficiency (Lopez, 2011; Griffiths, 2003), teachers' prompts, encouragements, and instructions seem to have a deeper impact on the students' use of speaking strategies. In the Lebanese foreign context, four out of six teachers urged their students to speak in English when they could not find their words. Teachers encouraged them to find the word's synonyms or describe what they want to say in English by giving them prompts. By doing so, speech fluency was significantly affected since students focused their attention on describing one word that could have been replaced quickly by another word from another language.

Therefore, Lebanese students cannot be described as competent speakers (Hedge, 2000) since they are restricted to the use of one or two speaking strategies.

Code-switching as the major students' speaking challenge is related to three main factors. The first factor is linked to students' lack of motivation to learn a third language, as observed in many classrooms. Some students were seen sleeping, having small talks or even studying for another subject during the English session. This lack of motivation can be partly blamed on the choice of topics discussed in class. These topics are predefined in textbooks that are imported from the U.S. or the U.K. that are not representatives of Lebanese students' lives and culture. Esseili (2014) pointed out that inadequate textbooks and materials are the major challenges that add to public and private teachers' work conditions. The themes and texts are not designed to consider Lebanese learners' needs, background nor the Arab culture in any way. Moreover, their educational objectives are developed to serve American assessments and not Lebanese official exams.

This lack of awareness of the irrelevance of the topics to the Lebanese culture was inferred from both students and teachers' answers to the survey questions (100% of the teachers and 74% of the students viewed that the material was relevant to students' culture and lives). No matter how hard teachers tried to connect students' lives to the U.S. culture that is portrayed in the textbooks, students could not make connections between the text and their personal experiences. Shaaban (2013) emphasized the importance of working with relevant topics where students can relate to their immediate environment. They must intrigue and provoke students' interests and fit their intellectual and developmental growth. He also warned that implementing books that are meant to address a different culture is a violation of the Lebanese curriculum's principles and guidelines.

The lack of authenticity in the material published in some of the imported textbooks presents another challenge, since some of the chosen material, especially audio passages, were constructed specifically for educational purposes. The lack of authentic input can affect students' perception of fluency aspects related to the speech rate, the natural use of pauses and fillers (Yang, 2014), reduced speech (Lazarton 2001), intonation, rhythm, pronunciation (Goodwin, 2001) and contextualized language (Macaro, 2003).

The situation is aggravated as the teachers blindly abide by the textbooks' topics, materials and activities as observed in classrooms. Only one teacher out of six did not rely on any textbook and chose topics such as technology, education and the current political systems. It was clearly observed that these topics motivated the students to participate in class discussions and debates since it fits their needs, interests and preferences.

Another aspect that affect students' motivation to participate is the minimal reliance on additional resources and technological tools. Even though the five observed private schools were equipped with LCD projectors and connected to the internet, one teacher out of six implemented additional resources to their practice. At one school, a smart board was used to display the textbook's exercises. For instance, after listening to an audio passage, grammatical and vocabulary activities written in the textbook were displayed on the smart board. Students were called on, by turn, to answer the activities on the board. They were not allowed to comment on each others' answers until the answers get verified by the technological tool. Then, they were asked to recopy correct answers on their textbook. Therefore, the excessive reliance or the misuse of technological features can impede classroom interactions, which normally promote speaking skills.

The second factor is due to assigning few hours for teaching English for French-educated students in private schools in Grade 12. Two hours per week are the norm (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999), despite the fact that the majority of the schools are trying to add additional English hours due to the importance of the language locally and internationally (Bahous et al, 2011b). It should be noted that the third language is excluded from Lebanese official exit exams, added to the absence of internal assessment for speaking skills in some schools as mentioned by 58% of the students and supported by the literature (Esseili, 2014). These findings do not apply to Grade 12 students enrolled in French Baccalaureate since an individual assessment of speaking skills is added to the final grade of the English language. In addition, a higher-grade allocation is placed for scientific subjects compared to languages, which drives school policies to reduce the number of hours devoted to teach the third language. As a result, this neglect of the importance of languages and literature, in general, led to the closure of the "humanities" section in four schools out of five, not to mention the minimal number of students in the remaining class.

The third factor is related to the foreign context "Lebanon" in which English is being taught as a third language. Students get very few opportunities to practice the language outside the classroom, since colloquial Arabic is used for daily communication (Jamali et al, 2005). This factor adds an additional challenge to speakers of another language in a foreign context, similar to many findings in the literature (Afshar & Asakereh, 2016; Alharbi, 2015; Tuan & Mai, 2015; Shah, Hussan & Nassef, 2013).

The second major challenge Lebanese students face is the fact that they are unaccustomed to express themselves, which is approved by 83% of the teachers and 41%

of the students. This challenge is directly linked to the Lebanese curriculum that is content-based and thematic. More specifically, the Lebanese English language curriculum requires developing skills such as critical thinking, cultural awareness and study skills in addition to the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997). It also has defined the themes for all the levels, and they were numerous for intermediate and secondary levels, such as set 19 themes for Grade 10 (Shaaban, 2013).

Therefore, teachers felt they were pressured to finish the curriculum requirements, perceived as an obligation, which led to reduced opportunities of communication and interaction in class (Bahous et al., 2011b). Later on, skeptical' criticism was justified by Shaaban (2013) that the variety of themes was meant to offer as many options as possible for students to choose from, while teachers can concentrate on some themes without working them all. After all, the Lebanese curriculum requires clarification, evaluation and revision after 20 years of its inauguration. That's a natural process that applies for every educational curriculum to evaluate whether its implementation in schools have met the predefined approaches, methodologies and educational objectives (Al-Jardani, 2012).

For the few opportunities in which speaking skills were practiced inside the classroom, speaking activities mainly focused on Q&A related to written texts for most of the time, visuals, and less frequently to audio-visual materials. Discussions between peers along with oral presentations and debates are among the most applicable speaking activities in French-medium schools as reported by students and teachers. These types of activities are advised to be practiced by academic ESL students so they can benefit from

an extensive authentic practice inside the classroom (Lazarton, 2001). Yet, speaking skills' objectives and guidelines described in the Lebanese curriculum are somehow being ignored in classrooms' practices. These objectives and their corresponding activities comprise developing transactional routines that include interviews, and telephones conversations, information routines such as telling stories and giving instructions in addition to the use of formulaic expressions and information gap activities (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997).

Interestingly, the practice of the common speaking activities is questioned in French-medium schools. For Q&A that is the most practiced speaking activity in all schools, most of the teachers wait for the students to freely answer the questions. Others call upon students by abiding by a list of students' names. In the first case, it seems that dominant speakers always take turns, which does not leave room for other students to express themselves, as approved by 83% of the teachers. They replied to almost all the teacher's questions while other students were visibly disengaged. The second strategy enables the participation of the students in one task or another in the classroom, even though it seemed rigid and provoked peers' criticism when students did not have an answer for the question, which affect positive classroom environment.

Furthermore, discussions occurred with random pairing or grouping by asking those who are sitting next to each other to discuss a thread, without taking into consideration any factor such as such as gender, talkativeness, proficiency level and background (Lazaton, 2001). Even though teachers' instructions were clear and students knew what is expected from them, none of the students was assigned any specific task during the discussion that was given little time, such as 2 to 4 minutes. Usually, each

member of the group is assigned a specific role such as taking notes, reporting responses or keeping the time to ensure a successful oral outcome (Lazarton, 2001). Moreover, some teachers did not require reporting the findings of the discussion, an activity that will not be taken seriously by the students. Besides, most students used colloquial Arabic to communicate during the discussions even though teachers asked them to speak in English. As a result, discussion, which is an activity that fosters cooperative learning, the chosen framework for interaction in foreign language classrooms in the Lebanese curriculum (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997), proves that it does not promote English speaking skills. This is because Lebanese students are homogeneous EFL learners, sharing the same native language, Arabic, that is going to be used to negotiate between peers, similar to what has been criticized in the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies (2002).

Even though oral presentations or speeches are mentioned as one of the most common classroom activities from both the students and the teachers' perspectives, they do not occur as frequently as it seems. Out of 11 observed sessions, only one session included oral presentations that was all about impromptu speeches. Students were given one minute or two to prepare what they were going to say before they presented their speech to their classmates. Similarly, debates occurred in one session out of 11 and dominant speakers were mainly the students who were participating.

As opposed to the French Baccalaureate, prepared speech was rarely introduced in Lebanese Baccalaureate English classes. On one hand, this can be due to the large number of students in some classes, sometimes as much as 30 students; even though such activities can be well organized since the time of delivering prepared speech must be limited (Lazarton, 2001). On another hand, too many skills are required to be taught in

one English session to comply with the Lebanese curriculum's requirements (Bahous et al, 2011b).

Whether familiar and motivating topics are being discussed or not, an aspect that has been previously discussed in this paper, speaking in English mainly occurs in French-medium classes to brainstorm ideas, to answer questions but rarely to convey arguments or new ideas through oral presentations or debates. Therefore, speaking involved understanding, analyzing and evaluating new information related to the material at hand. This aspect does not serve speaking fluency which requires practicing previously-known material (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 1988). In addition, students lack appropriate vocabulary, as reported by 83% of the teachers and 47% of the students. Classroom observations have shown that students are being introduced to new vocabulary in three situations, all in context as supported by the Lebanese curriculum (Bacha, Ghosn & Mcbeath, 2008). The first situation happens when students either code-switch or describe the word in English, which makes teachers or peers provide the new word. The second situation takes place during class activities, mainly when reading passages that include new words and phrasal verbs. The third occurs when teachers use new words while speaking in class which makes students ask about their meaning. Regardless of being passive in vocabulary learning, students are rarely made aware of the importance of formulaic expressions, idioms and collocations. Promoting the use of the latter expressions in texts and speech have improved the perceived fluency since students begin to implement them in their speech (Wood, 2009; Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers & Demechelee, 2006) and avoid bookish speaking (Lazarton, 2001).

Moreover, during speaking activities, especially Q&A, students were not given enough time to think before speaking, knowing that too much skills are expected to be practiced in one session (Bahous et al, 2011a). Teachers asked the question and expected the answers right then, which again, fosters the participation of dominant speakers. Moreover, many teachers interrupted students' speech in different occasions. Some of them picked one or two words that best fit the answer of the question, others corrected grammatical and lexical errors instantly by providing explicit corrections and few recasts. In addition, pronunciation errors were easily criticized by classmates. All these practices contradict the development of speaking fluency, even though 83% of both students and teachers approve it is targeted when speaking skills are being practiced. Besides, students need to know the time limit for their speech if fluency were to be the goal. Speaking for a shorter time will urge students to speed up their articulation and to minimize filled and unfilled pauses (Macalister, 2014; Nation, 1997). This is in line with the findings reported in the literature where practicing speaking fluency seems to be neglected at schools, whereas the main focus is shifted to teaching reading and writing skills (Rasinki & Young, 2009; Rasinki et al, 2005).

Even though all teachers and 73% of the students confirm that students have a say in choosing the topics of the discussion, five out of six teachers were abiding by the topics defined in the textbooks. Lebanese students did not get the chance to make decisions about the topic that is going to be discussed in the classroom, nor the choice of the activity that can best fit their ways of learning or their preferred ways of assessment (Nunan, 2015). Teachers controlled the sequence of the activities in the language session, promoted one teaching style over many others and they did most of the talk in the classroom by asking

questions and reformulating ideas. The involvement of two of the teachers even got to the extent of summarizing the content of the session and dictating it to the students instead of asking them to reflect on their own learning. All these aspects demonstrate that foreign language classes in French-medium schools are still teacher-centered, where teachers transmit the knowledge instead of involving students in their own learning.

Chapter six
Conclusion

Becoming fluent speakers does not happen overnight and students cannot become effective communicators without practicing speaking even though they have good knowledge of the language. Neglecting the importance of practicing speaking skills in general and fluency in particular, students find themselves unable to express themselves in English as a third language without code-switching into Arabic and/or French. In addition to several external factors, such as the foreign context, the few hours to learn the language at schools while placing emphasis on scientific subjects, the practice of speaking skills in French-medium schools still does not meet expectations. The reasons underpinning this challenge move in a vicious circle. Teachers blame the Lebanese curriculum for the many restrictions and their work conditions (Esseili, 2014; Bahous et al, 2011b). School stakeholders and principals find that teachers lack professional training (Esseili, 2014; Orr, 2011; Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999). Students blame the teachers for traditional methods and demotivating topics (Bahous et al, 2011a) while parents place all the responsibility of teaching a language on the school (Bahous et al, 2011b).

Even though educational practices are mostly to be blamed, French-educated students learn English from the environment outside the classroom. Lebanese Grade 12 students are digitally literate, having access to the internet, smart phones and social media. That means they are exposed to authentic language input through English songs, movies and TV series, knowing that most of the movies shown in Lebanon are American, as reported in Shaaban & Ghaith's article (2002), which discussed the vitalities of the three

languages in Lebanon. It is also argued that a greater exposure to audio-visual mass media as a source of authentic language input improves speaking fluency in EFL context more than the social interaction in ESL context (Bahrani, 2011). The support from peers in an ESL social interaction, (and not form teachers) aims at making the language easier, which may not contribute to language development particularly speaking fluency.

While students have easy access to authentic input, they still need to practice speaking to improve their fluency. To improve students' motivation, teachers can skip topics that are not related to the Lebanese culture if comparing the two cultures cannot be attained (Shaaban, 2013) especially that the language is better acquired when the expression of feelings and opinions is involved (Macaro, 2003). Teachers can also implement real-life tasks where many language skills can be integrated instead of working with each skill separately, especially that the language is better acquired in context (Macaro, 2003). Many speaking activities can be implemented to target speaking skills such as role play, drama, debates (Lazarton, 2001) and speaking fluency such as pair taping (see Schneider, 1993) or 4/3/2 technique (see Macalister, 2014; Maurice, 1983). Another activity that engages both accuracy and fluency is "Audiotaped oral journal" where a recorded conversation occurs between the student and the teacher (Lazarton, 2001). English Only zone (EOZ) or English Only time (EOT) can be created during recess time to practice the language. Homework can include simple tasks involving watching English movies, listening to songs (Lazarton, 2001) or simply being exposed to many web-based programs, where one can chat and practice speaking with native speakers (Nunan, 2015). Many simple accommodations can be instilled in classrooms and in recess

time that can leave a major impact on students' learning experience of the English language.

After all, education policies promoted by the Lebanese curriculum is giving the English language a dominant status in the Lebanese foreign context. The English language is taught as medium of instruction in English medium schools and it is taught as a foreign language, given an equal importance to Arabic, the official Lebanese language (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997). French-medium schools are introducing the English language at lower elementary level rather than Grade seven as stated in the Lebanese curriculum (Bahous et al, 2011b). In addition, University students seem to be more motivated to learn English more than French (Diab, 2006), acknowledging its importance for higher education, business and technology. Therefore, Lebanese students should not pay any price for the natural context of multilingualism within which they are growing. They should be provided with plenty of opportunities to equally develop their oral and written language proficiencies, which paves the way for them to social and economic mobility, locally and internally.

6.1 Limitations of the study and further research

Although the findings of this study further my understanding of the challenges French-educated students encounter when carrying out short conversations in English, I do acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, schools' principals were scheduling the time for classroom observations. They preferred that the observations occur in each section of Grade 12 instead of observing all the assigned sessions in one section only. Even though this fact enabled me to have a deeper look at challenges facing students from

all sections, it didn't give me the chance to observe the progression of one complete lesson plan assigned for any section of Grade 12.

Second, classroom observations occurred at the third trimester of the school year in Lebanon, just few weeks before students leave school to get prepared for official exams in three schools out of five. During this time, teachers of other subjects were pressured to finish the requirements of the Lebanese official exit exams. Consequently, students' attention and dedication were more directed to other subjects, knowing that the English language is not included in the exam. This might have affected students' motivation to engage in the classroom and in learning the language in general.

Third, students' speaking skills cannot be merely the result of classroom instruction, especially at the secondary level. As already stated, Lebanon is a trilingual environment and private schools' students are skillful in using computers, smart tablets and phones. Therefore, the disparate exposure to the English language outside the classroom can lead to a heterogenous development of students' speaking skills.

Given the importance of the increased exposure to the target language in foreign contexts, and knowing that few changes can occur instantly in a classroom setting due to teachers' training and schools' policies; further research will examine the effect of different types of homework on students' speaking skills in Lebanon.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Students' Questionnaire

Purpose of the questionnaire

My name is Leila Dagher. I am a graduate student in Education at the Lebanese American University. I designed this questionnaire as part of my thesis in order to investigate the practice and the challenges students face when learning the spoken aspect of English when it is taught as a third language.

I would like you to take 7 to 10 minutes to complete this questionnaire to the best of your knowledge. Twelve questions are asked about the practice of speaking skills in the classroom, in addition to the difficulties students encounter while speaking English as a third language. Your answers will be kept confidential during and after the study.

Please circle the option that best describes your answer

Gender	Male	Female	
Nationality	Lebanese	Other, please specify _____	
Mother's nationality	Lebanese	Other, please specify _____	
Father's nationality	Lebanese	Other, please specify _____	
Age	17 years	18 years 19 years	20 years
Grade 12 section	General sciences Economics	Life sciences	Humanities
Main Language spoken at home	Arabic	French	English
Have you changed schools in the last grades?	Yes	No	
Have you been always enrolled in French medium schools?	Yes No If no, please specify the name of the school _____ From Grade _____ to Grade _____		

Please circle the number that best describes your answer.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not applicable	Disagree	Strongly
1. In the classroom, I :					
Have a say in choosing the topics we discuss in class	1	2	3	4	5
Am asked to self-evaluate and reflect on my learning	1	2	3	4	5
Am aware of my preferred way of language learning (e.g. write words down, memorizing, practice speaking with others)	1	2	3	4	5
Do most of the talking in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
2. To improve my English-speaking skills, I prefer to:					
Learn vocabulary (words and idioms) and grammatical rules	1	2	3	4	5
Practice speaking and listening skills explicitly	1	2	3	4	5
Repeat and memorize to practice spoken English	1	2	3	4	5
Be assigned real-life tasks and situations to learn the language	1	2	3	4	5
Focus on reading and writing skills	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					
3. These speaking activities are part of the classroom instruction:					
Debates and discussions	1	2	3	4	5
Oral presentations	1	2	3	4	5
Imitation exercises	1	2	3	4	5
Drama scenes, role play and simulations	1	2	3	4	5
Listening to audio-visual material	1	2	3	4	5
Answering questions related to a written text	1	2	3	4	5
Songs, poems and rhymes	1	2	3	4	5
Interviews	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					
4. I think speaking skills' objectives target:					
Speaking accuracy (speaking correctly with few mistakes)	1	2	3	4	5

Speaking fluency (speaking smoothly with few pauses)	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking complexity (using complex sentences in one's speech)	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

5. The material used to practice speaking skills is					
Relevant to my life and my culture	1	2	3	4	5
Authentic material showing real-life conversations between people	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

6. The external factors that affect my speaking performance are:					
The large number of students in class	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of motivation to learn the English language since it is not part of the official exams.	1	2	3	4	5
Few hours are devoted to teach English	1	2	3	4	5
Emphasis on scientific subjects rather than languages	1	2	3	4	5
No context to practice the English language outside the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

7. The factors that affect my speaking performance in class are:					
Lack of knowledge of the topic at hand	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of appropriate vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
My listening abilities are not well developed	1	2	3	4	5
Dominant speakers always take turns	1	2	3	4	5
I am not given enough time to prepare before speaking	1	2	3	4	5
I am worried about the teacher's feedback	1	2	3	4	5
I am pressured to speak in a limited time	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

8. When speaking, I face many challenges such as:					
Being shy because I am not used to express myself	1	2	3	4	5
Lacking confidence. I fear making mistakes and being criticized by my peers	1	2	3	4	5
Preferring to use French or Arabic while speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Not being able to think of anything to say	1	2	3	4	5

Others, please specify:					

9. When I find myself unable to transmit my oral message, my teacher encourages me to:

Translate an unknown/forgotten word into another language	1	2	3	4	5
Find a synonym or describe an unknown/forgotten word using the English language	1	2	3	4	5
Use fillers (uh, um, well) and maintenance cues (okay, alright, I mean) to gain time to think before producing my message	1	2	3	4	5
Use gestures and facial expressions	1	2	3	4	5
Complete my message by giving me prompts	1	2	3	4	5
Ask for clarification when I don't understand the other's message	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

10. When I make mistakes while speaking, my teacher:

Interrupts me to correct my mistakes instantly	1	2	3	4	5
keeps quiet and doesn't mention my mistakes at all	1	2	3	4	5
keeps quiet and jots down notes to give me feedback afterwards.	1	2	3	4	5
Gets irritated when I keep making mistakes, or can't find my words and use a lot of fillers (uh, um)	1	2	3	4	5
Askes for clarification to make me self-correct my mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

11. To improve my speaking performance outside the classroom, I am asked to:

Read intensively	1	2	3	4	5
Write in English on a daily basis	1	2	3	4	5
Practice speaking with native speakers	1	2	3	4	5
Watch movies without translation	1	2	3	4	5
Use a web-based program to chat with speakers of other languages	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

12. Speaking skills are evaluated and are part of the final grade.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your valuable time in completing this questionnaire. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Appendix B: Teachers' Questionnaire

Purpose of the questionnaire

My name is Leila Dagher. I am a graduate student in Education at the Lebanese American University. I designed this questionnaire as part of my thesis in order to investigate the practice and the challenges students face when learning the spoken aspect of English when it is taught as a third language.

I would like you to take 7 to 10 minutes to complete this questionnaire to the best of your knowledge. Twelve questions are asked about the practice of speaking skills in the classroom, in addition to the difficulties students encounter while speaking English as a third language. Your answers will be kept confidential during and after the study.

Please circle the option that best describes your answer.

Gender	Male Female
Age	20-25 years 26-30 years 31-35 years 36- 40 years 41-45 years 46-50 years 51-55 years 56-60 years 60-64 years 65+
Educational level	Bachelor's degree Master's degree Teaching Diploma Other, please specify _____
Years of experience teaching the English language	First year 1-5 years 6-10 years 11- 15 years More than 16 years
Employment status	Full time Part time

Please circle the number that best describes your answer.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not applicable	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. In my classroom, my students:					
Have a say in choosing the topics they discuss in class	1	2	3	4	5
Are asked to self-evaluate and reflect on their learning	1	2	3	4	5
Are aware of their preferred way of language learning (e.g. write words down, memorizing, practice speaking with others)	1	2	3	4	5
Do most of the talking in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
2. To improve my students' English proficiency, I prefer to:					
Teach vocabulary (words and idioms) and grammatical rules to improve spoken English	1	2	3	4	5
Practice speaking and listening skills explicitly, while grammatical rules and patterns are deduced by the students	1	2	3	4	5
Use repetition and memorization to practice spoken English	1	2	3	4	5
Assign real-life tasks and situations to teach the language	1	2	3	4	5
Focus on reading and writing skills during my teaching	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					
3. These speaking activities are part of my classroom instruction:					
Debates and discussions	1	2	3	4	5
Oral presentations	1	2	3	4	5
Imitation exercises	1	2	3	4	5
Drama scenes, role play and simulations	1	2	3	4	5
Listening to audio-visual material	1	2	3	4	5
Answering questions related to a written text	1	2	3	4	5
Songs, poems and rhymes	1	2	3	4	5
Interviews	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

4. **Speaking skills' objectives target:**					
Speaking accuracy (speaking correctly with few mistakes)	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking fluency (speaking smoothly with few pauses)	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking complexity (using complex sentences in one's speech)	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

5. **The material used to practice speaking skills is:**					
Relevant to students' lives and diverse cultures	1	2	3	4	5
Authentic material showing real-life conversations between people	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

6. **The external factors that affect my students' speaking performance are:**					
The large number of students in class	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of motivation to learn the English language since it is not part of the official exams.	1	2	3	4	5
Few hours are devoted to teach English	1	2	3	4	5
Emphasis on scientific subjects rather than languages	1	2	3	4	5
No context to practice the English language outside the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

7. **The factors that affect my students' speaking performance in class are:**					
Lack of knowledge of the topic at hand	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of appropriate vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
Students' listening abilities are not well developed	1	2	3	4	5
Dominant speakers always take turns	1	2	3	4	5
Students are not given enough time to prepare before speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Students are worried about the teacher's feedback	1	2	3	4	5
Students are pressured to speak in a limited time	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

8. When speaking, students face many challenges such as:					
Being shy because they are not used to express themselves	1	2	3	4	5
Lacking confidence. They fear making mistakes and being criticized by their peers	1	2	3	4	5
Preferring to use French or Arabic while speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Not being able to think of anything to say	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

9. When my students find themselves unable to transmit their oral message, I encourage them to:					
Translate an unknown/forgotten word into another language	1	2	3	4	5
Find a synonym or describe an unknown/forgotten word using the English language	1	2	3	4	5
Use fillers (uh, um, well) and maintenance cues (okay, alright, I mean) to gain time to think before producing their message	1	2	3	4	5
Use gestures and facial expressions	1	2	3	4	5
Elaborate by giving them prompts to complete their message	1	2	3	4	5
Ask for clarification when they don't understand the other's message	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

10. When my students make mistakes while speaking,					
I interrupt them to correct their mistakes instantly	1	2	3	4	5
I keep quiet and I don't mention their mistakes at all	1	2	3	4	5
I keep quiet and jot down notes to give feedback afterwards.	1	2	3	4	5
I get irritated when students keep making mistakes, or can't find their words and use a lot of fillers (uh, um)	1	2	3	4	5
I ask for clarification to make my students self-correct their mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					

11. To improve their speaking performance outside the classroom, I ask my students to:					
Read intensively	1	2	3	4	5
Write in English on a daily basis	1	2	3	4	5
Practice speaking with native speakers	1	2	3	4	5
Watch movies without translation	1	2	3	4	5

Use a web-based program to chat with speakers of other languages	1	2	3	4	5
Others, please specify:					
12. Speaking skills are evaluated and are part of the final grade.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your valuable time in completing this questionnaire. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Appendix C: Checklist for classroom observation

Name of the school: _____

Number of students in class: _____

		Session 1
Emphasis on skills	Much emphasis is placed on teaching : Grammar - Writing- Reading - Speaking Listening - Pronunciation Real life tasks	
activities	Activities targeting speaking skills are: (Debates, discussions, oral presentations, imitation, role play, answering questions, Songs)	
Objectives	Speaking activities target: Accuracy, fluency or complexity	
Material	Material is relevant to students' lives and culture	
	Authentic material is implemented	
Learner-centeredness	Choice of topic is defined by the students	
	In general, students do most of the talking in class	
	Learning tasks suits different learning styles	
	Students are asked to self-evaluate	
Pre-speaking activities	Vocabulary, idioms and collocations are introduced.	
	Students are familiar with the topic at hand	
	Students show good listening abilities	

Corrective feedback	Teacher interrupts the students to correct mistakes instantly	
	Mistakes are not mentioned at all	
	Mistakes are corrected afterwards	
	Teacher gets irritated	
	Teacher makes the students correct their mistakes	
Communication breakdown	Translate an unknown/forgotten word into another language	
	Find a synonym or describe an unknown/forgotten word using the English language	
	Use fillers (uh, um, well) and maintenance cues (okay, alright, I mean) to gain time to think before producing their message	
	Use gestures and facial expressions	
	Elaborate by prompts given by the teacher to complete the message	
	Ask for clarification when students don't understand others' message	
Task	The tasks required are:	
Ass	Speaking skills are assessed?	
While speaking	Students have time to prepare what to say	
	Students are pressured to speak in a limited time	
	Students are worried about the teacher's feedback	
Speaking challenges	Students are shy because they are not used to express themselves	
	Students lack confidence. They fear making mistakes and being criticized by their peers	
	Students prefer to use French or Arabic while speaking	
	Students are not being able to think of anything to say	