



## EXPLORING EFL TEACHERS' TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING ORAL SKILLS IN AN EFL CONTEXT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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### Abstract:

Instead of following grand theories and methods prescribed during pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, experienced teachers follow their own theories of practice. However, due to the dominance of hypothetico-deductive mode of inquiry in language teaching, theories of practice have rarely been explored. To uncover personal theories implicit in teachers' practice and how these theories are realized in down-to-earth techniques, this data-driven study aims at exploring fifteen experienced teachers' techniques of teaching oral skills in junior high schools of Shahrood, a major city in Semnan province. To this end, language teachers' perspectives were qualitatively explored and analysed through the principles and procedures of grounded theory. Final analysis revealed that the participants used "Learners' Mother Tongue", "Warm-up", "Role-play", "Summarizing", "Storytelling", "Describing Pictures" and "Practicing Linguistic Patterns" to teach oral skills. The findings have clear implications for curriculum developers and pre-service language teacher educators.

**Keywords:** teachers' perspectives, theoretical sampling, teaching techniques

### 1. Introduction

Teacher education programs expose teachers to the findings of the theory-driven studies and make them cognizant with alternative methods and alternatives to methods hoping that graduates will apply them in practice after they enter the profession. What

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is missing in these programs, however, is a body of knowledge that raises teacher learners' awareness of contextual constraints.

Language teachers don't simply teach; rather they teach a specific group of learners in a given context. And it is an awareness of the contextual constraints and the stake-holders' preferences and priorities that shape teachers' practice rather than their familiarity with theories, methods and principles of language teaching learned during pre-service programs.

Observing language teachers' practice and exploring and analysing their perspectives through data-driven mode of research yield theories of practice which complement the findings of theory-driven studies. These personal theories and the techniques implicit in teachers' practice account for the situated knowledge of language teaching; hence, the field of English language teacher education is in urgent need of theories of practice that complement the findings of theory-driven studies.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Teaching Conversation**

In second language acquisition (SLA), researchers agree that input is crucial for successful second or foreign language (FL) acquisition to occur, that is, learners should be exposed to the target language (TL) as much as possible in order to develop their language skills. It seems that simulating an L2 environment is being universally considered a prerequisite of successful language learning and effective language teaching (Asher, 1993; Chaudron, 1988; Ellis, 1984; Halliwell & Jones, 1991). Turnbull (2001) also believes that it is important for teachers to use as much L2 as possible in a situation where the students spend only a short period of time in the class on daily basis. In a multilingual class, it is no good using any particular L1. However, Philipson (1992) and Aurbach (1993) have challenged these assumptions. They think that these are impractical in global contexts and lack in pedagogical evidence. They have also highlighted the fact that monolingual principles are rooted in a particular ideological perspective, which serves to reinforce injustices in the boarder society.

The use of L1 is a natural process in learning a second language (Stern, 1992). For the past fifteen years, monolingual orthodoxy has lost much of its appeal. It has been argued that it is degrading to exclude L1 and it has harmful psychological effects on the learners (Nation, 2003). The monolingual approach claims that native speakers are the ideal teachers. However, the phrase 'native speaker' is problematic. It is because there are many versions of English and it is a matter of debate what makes an authentic native English speaker (Philipson, 1992).

Atkinson (1987) has identified three reasons why a limited amount of L1 should have allowed in the class in EFL context: it is a learner-preferred strategy, a humanistic approach and an efficient time saver. Harmer (2001) has found out five similar reasons: a) L1 is required by the activity at hand; b) it is entirely natural to translate from and into L2; c) Learners like using L1; d) Teachers use learners' L1 because they like it; and e) The amount of L1 use depends on the learner's styles and abilities. Cianflone (2009) also believes that using L1 is a learner-preferred strategy and teachers subscribe to the judicious use of L1. Whereas, Cole (1998) thinks that L1 can be used at lower levels in a monolingual context to show the differences between L1 and L2 and to teach tenses. Cianflone (2009) states that at the tertiary level, where language proficiency is higher, using L1 can be an important device in language learning as it can save time and increase learners' motivation.

There are various ways of teaching new L2 words, but L1 translation is the most effective. The use of L1 can also be a very useful tool of teaching grammatical structures. Finally, Nation states that using L1 in English language class is showing respect to the learners' mother tongue. While arguing for L1 use in the class, most researchers have cautioned against its overuse because it can create an over dependency on L1 and can over simplify the differences between L1 and L2. It can encourage laziness among learners and minimize the use of L2 (Atkinson, 1987).

Sze (1996) believes that all of one's conversational competence in the mother tongue is not transmissible to a second language. It is because of cultural differences that transfer of all features of first language conversational competence into English are impossible. According to Richards, (1990) the direct approach remembers the traditional methods of teaching grammar, whereby new linguistic information is passed on and practiced explicitly. Language classes following this approach adapt various features of direct grammar instruction to the teaching of conversational skills; that is, they try to provide focused instruction on the main rules of conversational or discourse-level grammar (e.g., pragmatic regularities and politeness strategies, communication strategies, and various elements of conversational structure such as closings, openings, and the turn-taking system).

Dornyei and Thurrell, (1994) say that some of second language learners of English who have a good knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary fail in their conversations because they have not acquired the appropriate rules or strategies involved in 'conversational competence'. Dornyei and Thurrell (1994) argue that the indirect approach to teaching conversation accepted by most textbooks that have style of communicative is less effective than a direct approach which provides explicit language strategies. The direct approach involves designing a conversation program,

which will give the learner the specific skills and strategies required for fluent conversation.

If a language course were focused on audio/video material with the textbook taking on a dependent role, our tendency with using the medium of print to teach spoken communication might begin to decrease. One of the main defects of the audio-lingual method was that the spoken drills were generally based on decontextualized written language forms, rather than on natural spoken conversation. Video and audio material used during the conversation class should not be used to teach grammar points or listening comprehension. Instead, the program would have to be specifically oriented towards productive speaking skills (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1994). In today's audio visually driven world, audiovisual devices such as satellite and conventional televisions can suggest easy access to authentic programs which are considered to be a rich source of language input for SLA. The urgency of current affairs programs ensures that learners' exposure to the language is up-to-date and embedded in the real world of native speakers. Indeed, by recognizing the limitations in the environment in EFL and some ESL contexts to provide language input in a social situation, various audiovisual technologies can be entered as sources of authentic language input (Bahrani & Tam, 2012). According to Chapple and Curtis (2000), films have many cross-cultural values, provide excellent basis for the development of critical thinking skill, provide a rich source of content for language learners, and suggest linguistic diversities. These features of films along with the motivating feature simplify language learners' oral communication (Chapple & Curtis, 2000).

## **2.2. Teaching Speaking**

As Harmer (2001) says in this activity, two speakers have different parts of information making up a whole; therefore, there is a "gap" between them. An information gap activity is called "Describe and Draw". A student has a picture, which he or she must not show his or her partner. The partner has to draw the picture without looking at the original, student will give instructions and descriptions and painter will ask questions. In Talking Drawings, students are asked to create mental pictures of topics they will be studying. Deriving meaning from the texts depends on making visual images in the mind in the process of interacting with the text (Reutzel, 2003). Another information gap activity is called "find the differences". It is popular in puzzle books and newspaper entertainment sections all over the world. Students divide to groups double, each look at a picture, which is very similar to the one their partner has. They should find ten differences between their pictures without showing their pictures to each other. They should ask a lot of questions and answers to find the differences (Harmer, 2001).

According to Celce-Murcia (2001), discussions are the most commonly used activity in the oral skills class. The students are introduced to a topic by a reading, a listening passage, or a videotape and then are divided into pairs or groups to discuss a related topic to give a solution, a response. According to (Nunan, 2003) simulations are more accurate than role-plays. They provide more realistic environment for language practice. It is suitable for practicing the sociocultural activities such as complimenting, complaining, and so on. As far students' level, role-plays can be performed from prepared scripts (Cele-Murcia, 2001). According to (Harmer, 2001) most teachers ask students to participate in simulations and role-plays. In simulation, students act as if they were in a real-life situation. Role-plays resemble the real world in the same kind of way, but the students are given specific roles- they are told who they are and often what they think about a certain subject. Students have to speak from their new character's standpoint.

Another information gap activity is storytelling; the teacher divides the class in four groups. To each group he gives a picture, they have to remember everything they can about the pictures. The teacher collects them and asks them to change their groups. Now they should explain one by one to their classmate in-group everything about picture that they had. Story telling fosters creative thinking. It also helps students express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have (Kayi, 2006). As Cele-Murcia (2001) says, children usually enjoy hearing the same story several times. The teacher can easily change the presentation.

Kayi (2006) in her article, *teaching speaking: activities to promote speaking in a second language*, infers that there are thirteen activities to promote speaking. They include: Discussion, Role play, Simulations, Information gap, Brain storming, Storytelling, Interviews, Story completion, Reporting, Playing cards, Picture narrating, Find the differences and Picture describing. She says for example in role play students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles and in brain storming on a given topic, students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and students generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristic of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to sharing new ideas. According to (Nunan, 2003) teachers can also use contact assignment in their teaching. Teachers can send students out of the classroom with a stated purpose to talk to people in the target language.

To motivate students in EFL contexts, teachers should include many activities and strategies that attract students' attention and make them interested in the lesson. As

Celce-Murcia (2001) states, "*Activities need to be child centered and communication should be authentic*". As Gronna, Serna, Kennedy, and Prater (1999) say, teaching functions can be facilitated through the use of puppets. Using puppets in the classroom is one of the methods to encourage students to learn English. Ozdeniz (2000, P. 9) states that "*Puppets can encourage your students to experiment more with the language and "have a go" when they may have otherwise remained silent.*" In EFL classrooms, students are not comfortable and feel hesitant to speak English because they are not sure of the words. So as Ozdeniz (2000, P. 9) says, "*when a child speaks through the puppet, it is not the child who is perceived as making errors but the puppet, and children find this liberating.*"

### **3. Purpose of the Study**

This study aims at conceptualizing experienced language teachers teaching English to 7<sup>th</sup> graders in junior high schools of Shahrood. To elicit theoretically relevant data, we asked the participants the grand tour question, "What techniques do you usually use in teaching oral skills to 7<sup>th</sup> graders?" Initial data collection and analysis aimed at developing more focused questions. These refined questions were then used to theoretically sample perspectives which contributed to the saturation of the emerged concepts and categories.

### **4. Research Method**

#### **4.1. Research Context**

The majority of students study English in public high schools although some of these students enrol in private language institutes. Public high school students study English one ninety-minute period a week while those who go to private language institutes study English four and half an hour a week. In public high schools, on the one hand, English language students are divided into two groups including those who go and those who do not go to English classes. As a result, some students well understand the new conversational method and the others find it difficult to understand what is going on when English sentences are produced. On the other hand, teachers are divided into two groups as well. Some of them well understand the method and know how to use it because they are simultaneously using it in other situations such as private institutes. However, other teachers do not know about the method and try to teach textbooks as they taught previous textbooks, using grammar-translation method or audio-lingual method. Due to this fact, this research has been conducted in public high schools to discover techniques applied by experienced teachers in CLT.

## 4.2. Participants and Sampling

To collect the required data, fifteen experienced language teachers from different public high schools in Shahrood, a city in Semnan province, participated in this study. The study started with open-ended interviews with participants who were willing to share their views and experience with the researcher. These fifteen participants were both male and female with at least five years of teaching experience and were selected based on a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Four males and eleven females participated in this study. Thirteen of the participants had earned their Bachelors' degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL); two had received their associate degrees in TEFL. Of course, the number of interviewees was not pre-determined; the researcher stopped sampling new participants when theoretical saturation happened.

In this qualitative study, theoretical sampling helped us in focused coding to find relevant data to fill the gaps in the data, refine categories, and saturate categories. The demographic features of the participants, such as their teaching experience, age, gender, and university degree are presented in the following table.

**Table 3.1:** Demographic features of the participants

Participants	Teaching experience	Age	Gender	University degree	Level
TP1	20 years	40	Female	TEFL	B.A
TP2	18 years	38	Female	TEFL	M.A
TP3	24 years	40	Female	TEFL	B.A
TP4	25 years	47	Male	TEFL	B.A
TP5	25 years	48	Female	TEFL	M.A
TP6	19 years	37	Male	TEFL	B.A
TP7	5 years	30	Female	TEFL	B.A
TP8	20 years	42	Female	TEFL	B.A
TP9	25 years	47	Female	TEFL	B.A
TP10	20 years	41	Female	TEFL	B.A
TP11	25 years	46	Female	TEFL	B.A
TP12	18 years	39	Male	TEFL	B.A
TP13	15 years	30	Female	TEFL	B.A
TP14	25 years	39	Female	TEFL	B.A
TP15	18 years	35	Male	TEFL	B.A

## 4.3. Data Collection

Intensive or open-ended interviews were conducted in order to explore EFL teachers' techniques in teaching and as well their experiences and views towards CLT. Before starting the interview, the researcher asked the participants for the permission to record

their voice. To collect the intended and required data, the research question, which was a general and an open-ended question was asked in their mother tongue, Persian. Since the first question was general and related to participants own experience, it motivated participants to deeply explain their ideas and it as well helped the researcher to gather plenty of data. As the principles of intensive interviewing require, we just asked the general questions and when the interviewees were expressing ideas, we carefully listened, wrote field notes, and asked more detailed questions if necessary.

The first question asked participants to explain the techniques they personally use in teaching English to 7th grade students. Afterwards, when we interviewed three participants analyzed the collected data and labelled some techniques and ideas in teaching seventh grade students. Consequently, we followed other participants' ideas on these techniques in the following interviews. When the first round of data was collected and analyzed, the researchers transcribed and analyzed the data. To develop the categories, we went to the participants or new participants to sample theoretically-relevant data for developing and refining categories. The next rounds of data collection required more narrowed and structured interviews by asking questions that were more specific. Rather than being new questions, these subsequent questions were interpretative in nature.

#### **4.4. Data Analysis**

As mentioned in data collection part, open-ended interviews give a mass of data that researchers cannot go through and use them to make theories. Thus, researchers should use coding procedures to reduce an extensive amount of collected data to transfer them into meaningful concepts. However, before analyzing the data, we needed the written form of the data to be more comfortable on data; as a result, we transcribed all audio files.

To code the data, we broke the data into discrete parts and read it different times carefully. Then, we started coding the data by initial coding. In this stage, we coded large pieces of data into concepts and determined some frequent categories in the data. In the next steps, after collecting the second round of the data, we analyzed the data again and determined some subcategories for categories by axial coding. In this stage, she followed sampling data to find the answer of questions such as what, how, why, where, when, and who. Finally, after filling the gaps and refining categories we went through focused coding to determine the central category and put other categories around it. Finally, we constructed the theory based on collected and analyzed data.



## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Techniques of Oral Skills

Previously, high school language education aimed at developing EFL learners' written skills, with a focus on reading, vocabulary and grammar. Recently, however the high school curriculum has shifted away from written skills towards oral skills. Although being informed by the knowledge-based developed through pre-service teacher education programs, teachers' action is mainly shaped by their awareness of contextual constraints. Analysis of teachers' perspectives yielded some down-to-earth techniques for teaching conversational skills. What follows aims at presenting these techniques and grounding them in teachers' perspectives.

#### 5.1.1. The Use of Mother Tongue in Teaching Conversation

For decades, there has been a heated debate among scholars about using interlingual or crosslingual methods in teaching a foreign language. A revival of interest in using mother tongue in English classrooms is stipulated by the necessity to improve language accuracy, fluency, and clarity. However, the idea of abandoning the native tongue is too stressful for many language learners who need a sense of security in the experience of learning a foreign language. It is believed that all learners need the support of mother tongue in different situations of English classes, but the required amount of it depends on students' proficiency in English. In this line of thought, one of the participants mentions:

*"If I am about to introduce a new lesson, I initiate the topic in Persian and I smoothly change the flow of the class into English. For example, I state the Persian question " به چه غذایی علاقه دارید؟" and then with the help of students, I express its English equivalent. Afterwards, students repeat the English sentence and after that they express their own ideas about the question". (TP1)*

Although some teachers believe in the use of L1 in EFL classes, some teachers question its usage and advocate the monolingual approach; in other words, they suggest that the target language should be the only medium of communication, believing that the prohibition of the native language would maximize the effectiveness of learning the target language. However, judicious use of L1 can be efficient and beneficial sometimes; for example, managing and disciplining of the class is sometimes hard to be done in the target language, and emerging a serious problem in the class, a

teacher may not be able to cope with the problem if s/he insists on the English-only policy. Supporting this idea, one of the participants explains:

*In order to avoid any reliance on students' mother tongue in the class, some teachers prohibit the use of L1. According to these teachers, students' mother tongue should be used judiciously in the class. So if needed, I will write some hints or points in Persian on the board, and students are not supposed to orally read them. (TP6)*

### **5.1.2. Warm - up**

It can be said that a warming-up activity is a motivating starting point that will lead students to become conscious to work efficiently in language classes. For this purpose, teachers should use activities that encourage students' involvement and permeate. A fun warm-up, on the other hand, raises energy levels. Fun activities also make students more relaxed and less shy. With the right warm-up, a teacher can create a positive atmosphere to practice and experiment with the language. In this vein, one of the participants believes:

*"A brief explanation about the context of conversations prepares students to follow the dialogue. The subject of the conversation can be explained using pictures, objects, or even paintings or drawings. Sometimes, it might be necessary to give a brief explanation about the content of the conversation. Pre-teaching the key vocabularies of the conversation may also facilitate learning. Then, I explain the topic of each conversation. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that in CLT it is better to involve students in the process of teaching and learning questions through or telling stories. As well, we should move from known materials to unknown ones." (TP7)*

Sometimes providing a real-life context facilitates the process of teaching conversation. Some teachers believe that their teachers can use whatever they can see around them in their teaching to create authentic language use. In this regard, one of participant states:

*"Teachers should teach each conversation in the situations similar to real-life situations; for example, one of the lessons in the seventh grade is related to the appearance of persons and I ask students about their teachers in other courses and then I pretend that I do not know them. Then, they describe each of them until I know the teacher whom they are describing." (TP10)*

If students cooperate with the teacher in the teaching process, it will be much more effective and efficient; in other words, learners should be involved in the process of teaching to facilitate learning. Advocating this idea, one of the participants explains:

*"Involving students in the learning-teaching process is not a formidable task. We can easily involve them by relating topics to them and asking them questions; for example, in teaching the conversations related to age I ask students' birthdays in advance and if somebody's birthday coincides with the one presented in the lesson, we celebrate her birthday with a cake and afterwards we start the lesson."* (TP11)

### **5.1.3. Role-Play**

Role-play is a task-based technique in which students are presented with a real or artificial environment and they are exposed to some situations in which different people play different roles and each student should exhibit the his/her determined role. Role-play is an efficient technique for shy learners since it helps them providing a mask, where learners with difficulty in conversation are liberated. Furthermore, it is fun and most learners will agree that enjoyment leads to better learning. Regarding this idea, one of the participants explains:

*"Role-play is auspicious if real object are used in the task. Role-play should be started with sharper students who are more confident and then those weak and shy students should be encouraged to do the role-play. If they are not able to do the task, they should not be blamed."* (TP2)

Role-play should dramatize a real situation; in this case, it will be more attractive and motivating for students. Regarding this idea, one of the participants explains:

*"Using real objects such as tickets, newspaper, bags are effective in role-plays because students can touch it and it will be more authentic. The role of teacher is being as a facilitator. Students may need new language to be 'fed' in by the teacher. If rehearsal time is appropriate the feeding in of new language should take place at this stage. As students practice the role-play they might find out that, they are stuck for words and phrases; in such a situation, their teacher can support them by his/her knowledge. In the practice stage the teacher has a chance to 'feed-in' the appropriate language. This may need the teacher to act as a sort of 'walking dictionary' who monitors the class and assists when it is necessary."* (TP7)

Students can be asked to prepare more exercises or homework for the next sessions. In line with this idea, one of the participants explains:

*“I ask students to bring their family pictures and introduce each member of the family in the class and say some information or their biography to other students. For example, they should say when each member’s date of birth is. Then, they should be able to make a conversation with their friends about their family member” (TP12)*

#### **5.1.4. Summarizing and Storytelling**

Basic communication skills are at the core of every language-learning course. It is crucial that teachers help students to build these vital skills. Everything depends on teacher's creativity and the use appropriate teaching methods. Storytelling is a perfect method to develop second language learners' oral language skills in language classes. Regarding storytelling, one of the participants explains:

*“Since students are emotionally involved in the process of storytelling, they will truly enjoy this technique and it certainly creates a positive attitude toward the learning process. I frequently use this technique in my classes. For instance, I call one of the students to tell a short riddle or a joke at the beginning of the session (of course, they should be prepared beforehand). Sometimes I also give them a small dialogue and have them summarize it and then talk about it in the class.” (TP6)*

Storytelling is a useful technique in improving students' proficiency level in terms of speaking, reading, and listening skills. It is taken for granted that short stories motivate students and defiantly increase their class participation. Without any doubt, suitable texts and stories have significant effect on students' speaking ability. In this line of thought, one of the participants mentions:

*“Children need to be given the opportunity to speak English as soon as possible and as much as possible so they feel they are making progress. When acquiring a second language motivation is crucial. To this end, I introduce some simplified short stories in the class and divide the class into groups of four or five. Having read the stories, they summarize it in a few lines and explain it to their classmates.” (TP15)*

#### **5.1.5. Describing Pictures**

One of the sub-skills of speaking is describing. To develop this ability, English language teachers can use pictures. To this end, students are presented with some pictures and

they do their best to describe them. Picture-describing technique enhances their basic skills in future description of facts and phenomena. In support of using pictures, one of the participants says:

*“Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students pictures and having them describes what is observable in the picture. To do this activity, students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture in their groups, and then of them describe the picture to the whole class. This activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners. As well, their public speaking skills will be improved by the use of picture-describing technique. (TP3)*

Applying picture in teaching and learning process absolutely enables students to understand the lesson better. Indeed, since pictures are concrete they are advantageous to teach the meaning of words or to stimulate the student' participation especially in conversation classes. The concrete nature of pictures has a good starting point for students in practicing the language. In this point of view, one of the participants explains:

*“Based on the topic of the conversation, some related pictures will be shown to students. For example, in one of the units named “my appearance” I present some pictures associated to a person’s appearance. Then, I want them to take a pair and describe the picture together or I draw a girl/boy on the board and I want each student to come up with a description.” (TP7)*

Since active learning is an essential element in language learning, we, as teachers, should have many sources that can stimulate students' learning. Pictures are one of the assisting resources in stimulating students' interest and motivation. Since pictures make strong appeal to everyone, using them is considered as an efficient tool in teaching. Along the same line of thought, one of the participants says:

*“One technique that I frequently use in my classes is using pictures in various ways. For example, regarding the topic of the newly taught lesson, I will start drawing some pictures on the board and students should guess what I am drawing. Besides, there is another pair work which students seem to enjoy it very much; to do this pair work, each pair is given a picture, and one of them should describe the picture while the other one draws. When it is completed, then the roles can be reversed. (TP4)*

### 5.1.6. Practicing Linguistic Patterns

A substitution drill is a classroom technique used to practice new language. In this kind of activity, firstly the teacher models a sentence and the learners repeat it. Afterwards, the teacher substitute's one or more key words, or changes the prompt, and learners reconstruct the old pattern and produce a new sentence with the new word or phrase. Regarding the how of administering substitution drills, one of the participants explains:

*“One of the useful techniques in promoting students speaking ability is substitution drills. I read a sentence and after students repeated it different times, I call out some words that students must fit into the sentence. Substitution drill can also become a kind of game for students. To this end, I read a sentence and then some words to be substituted. Students should do the drill as fast as possible. (TP3)*

Substitution drills are slightly more interactive than repetition drills because they usually give students practice in changing a word or structure in response to a prompt or cue from the teacher or another student. In this line of thought, one of the participants explains:

*“Substitution drills work better for beginner students. They enable students to focus on structure while learning related vocabulary. Each session, after teaching the conversation or teaching a sentence structure, I start practicing different linguistic patterns, then students are allowed to substitute various content word. For instance I will say the sentence of “It’s hot today”, then students should substitute the word “hot” with “rainy, cold, snowy.” (TP13)*

## 6. Discussion and Implications

This study aimed at uncovering techniques of teaching oral skills from the perspectives of teachers teaching English to 7<sup>th</sup> graders in junior high schools of Shahrood. Analysis revealed that teachers use “Learners’ Mother Tongue”, “Warm-up”, “Role-play”, “Summarizing”, “Storytelling”, “Describing Pictures” and “Practicing Linguistic Patterns” to teach oral skills. Some of these techniques are in line with the previous theoretical perspectives and empirical findings. Just as the participants reiterated, the use of mother tongue has also been supported by other researchers (e.g., Atkinson, 1987; Cole, 1998; Harmer, 2001; Nation, 2003; Stern, 1992; Sze, 1996). However, other researchers criticized the use of L1 and considered as much as the use of L2 (Asher, 1993; Chaudron, 1988; Ellis, 1984; Halliwell & Jones, 1991; Turnbull, 2001). The importance of

role-play was also supported in the literature review (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1994; Richards, 1990). However, warm up, as an effective technique uncovered from the perspective of the participants has no precedent in previous studies. Moreover, there were some techniques in the literature not found in this study; these techniques are using videos and audios as natural inputs (Bahrani & Tam, 2012; Chapple & Curtis, 2000; Dornyei & Thurrell, 1994).

This study discovered the importance of summarizing and storytelling, picture describing, and practicing linguistic patterns as effective techniques in teaching oral skills. The usefulness of picture describing (Harmer, 2001; Reutzell, 2003) and storytelling (Cele-Murcia, 2001; Kayi, 2006) in teaching speaking is as well supported in the literature review. However, strategies such as summarizing and practicing linguistic patterns were not previously discovered in the literature. Vice versa, using puppets (Gronna, Serna, Kennedy, & Prater, 1999; Ozdeniz, 2000) and discussions (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Kayi, 2006) were not discovered in this study.

To conclude, the techniques uncovered in this study are descriptive in nature and should not be taken as a recipe for practice. Nonetheless, since they reflect the situated knowledge of language teaching, they have clear implications for language teacher education curriculum development. That is, instead of exclusively focusing on alternative methods, alternative to methods and top-down principles which are wrongly supposed to be universally applicable across a myriad of contexts, teacher educators should also expose teacher learners to the findings of data-driven studies such as the current study to make teachers cognizant with the contextual constraints and the situated knowledge of language teaching.

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