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## Investigating Problems of Speaking Skill: A Case Study at Al-Baha University

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to explore the problems of speaking skill for students of preparatory year of Al-Baha University, Saudi Arabia. In order to answer the questions of the study, the researcher adopted the descriptive approach. The sample of the study consisted of (54) teachers of the university, most of them are MA and PhD holders. The questionnaire was prepared and refereed by specialized assistant professors then directed to teachers to answer (agree, strongly agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). The study indicated that there is a wide range of difficulties and problems facing those students. The demographics of the society around them is one of the most important obstacles. The gap between teaching speaking at secondary stage and university is one of the obstacles. Students of preparatory year are mostly shy while trying to speak. The study recommended reviewing the ways of assessing student's speaking skill taking into granted the tribal nature of the students. The administration of the university should draw explicit goals at the local level of the university to help students develop the skill. The role of teacher is increasing constantly under these circumstances to help his students improve the skill as one of the most significant skills of English although they come from different cultural backgrounds. The study recommended further research to study the role of society structure in developing speaking skill.

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### KEYWORDS

*speaking, Problems, demographics, obstacles, preparatory year*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The skill of speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended and evolving. It is a natural way to communicate. Without speaking, people must remain in most total isolated from any kind of society. For most people, the ability to speak a language is the same with knowing a language since the speech is the most basic means of human communication while (Cornbleet & Carter, 2002) defines that speaking is significant to an individual's living processes and experiences as are the ability of seeing and walking. (Woolf, 1980) states that speaking has a variety of meanings: they are such as :to tell, to say, to make known or as by speaking; to declare ;to announce; to proclaim; to celebrate; to use or be able to use (a given language ) in speaking; and to address.

EFL learners surely face serious problems or inevitable obstacles in speaking due to the fact that schools in the Arab countries, particularly, Saudi Arabia pay the greatest attention to English grammar, reading and vocabulary. Speaking skill is not important part of the syllabus design or curricula. In addition, it is not practiced in daily life though people there face real problems when dealing with doctors or nurses in hospitals or multinational companies in their own country. There is a lack in exposure to different kinds of speaking materials. Even college students majoring in English have no enough hours in regular training per week.

Speaking skill is not assessed well during the school year for secondary students which resulted in the low level for those students when joining university which in turn made the ministry of education decide to achieve what is known preparatory year in all universities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as remedial program. This remedial program is represented in implementation of a new curriculum from Cambridge Press called English Unlimited Special Edition, four levels (EUSE). This course has

been applied in the preparatory year for some years in most universities including Al-Baha University. Nevertheless, there has been a continuing a complaint among those who are interested in English language due to low the level of the students of preparatory year in Al-Baha University. This is reflected in their ability to speak in English.

Hence, the present study attempts to find out abroad point of view about understanding how preparatory year students of Al-Baha University in Saudi Arabia, Al-Baha city in context face such problems in speaking.

### **Statement of the problem**

The present study aims at the clarifying Problems of Speaking Skill for Preparatory year Students at Al-Baha University: Teachers' Views. The students of preparatory year have real problems with speaking in their real life situations. They have inadequate knowledge of grammar, listening, reading and writing, so when it comes to speaking skill, they encounter actual obstacles.

### **Objectives of the study**

The current study seeks to find out the kinds of speaking problems they faced in secondary stage and extended to university as well as the reasons for those problems. The study provides some suggestions for the teacher of foreign language to help his students overcome speaking problems. It also helps students solve the speaking problems and improve students' levels.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study concentrates to be a good background to whom it may concern at the university to prepare a clever student able to study scientific majors without obstacles. In most cases, the sub level in the scientific majors is due to the low level in English especially speaking. It can draw attention to construct a remedial program to treat the shortcomings of speech development. Syllabus designer can use this study to develop the English language courses currently taught.

### **Questions of the study**

- 1- What are the various problems that those students face when they practice speaking in and out classrooms?
- 2- How can the teacher help his students overcome speaking problems through English Unlimited Special Edition (EUSE)?
- 3- How far the structure of Saudi society is considered unbeatable obstacles when practicing speaking skill.
- 4-What are the gaps between teaching speaking in the preparatory year and Secondary school?

### **Hypotheses**

- 1- Students of preparatory year at Al-Baha University face some problems with speaking skill while studying English.
- 2-The teacher can help his students overcome speaking problems so far.
- 3- The demographics of Saudi society is considered unbeatable obstacle when they want to practice English speaking.
- 4- There are some gaps between teaching speaking at university and basic education stages.

### **Limitation of the study**

The study is limited to students of preparatory year who study English as a foreign language at Al-Baha University, Al-Baha city, Saudi Arabia. This school year was constructed mainly to prepare students linguistically for the following four years. In addition, it is a remedial programe with a content of a mount of communication skills to treat deficiencies in English.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose of conducting this study, the researcher adopts the descriptive method. The descriptive method is a questionnaire which is used for searching some problems under investigation, (Teachers' questionnaire 54 teachers). This questionnaire was set even to search for the importance of speaking skill and students' problems or difficulties with this skill. The teachers of preparatory year are expected to choose their responses from four choices; agree, strongly agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. (Likert Scale). The questionnaire will be analyzed statistically to seek information about speaking problems and the reasons behind them. The data collected will be analyzed statistically by the SPSS program

### **Validity**

The validity of these data and questions was reviewed by a number of referees who are considered experts in the field of teaching English. The language used and content validity of the questions were evaluated by research specialists to edit the mistakes. Thus, they reviewed it and made some comments that the researcher took them in his consideration before applying.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to (Ismail, 2017) "If children are exposed to the L2 in the same way as they are exposed to the L1, greater success will be achieved". There is no doubt that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is accelerating day by day in the field of education, but the level of achievement in learning English speaking skill is far below. According to (Alshumaimeri &

Almasri, 2012) “Teachers have pointed out that students leave the secondary stage without the ability to carry out a short conversation.” After learning English for so many years, the students have achieved little in terms of language proficiency. So, the important question is why there has been no improvement among the students regarding speaking skill. For what reason they still cannot construct a simple sentence while speaking.

### **What is speaking?**

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Florez, 1999) Speaking requires learners to not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary but also that they understand when, where, why and in what ways to produce language.

As (Elfadil, Abdul Gadir, & Ienas, 2018) states, many language teachers consider speaking as the most effective means of gaining a fluent reading knowledge and correct speech as the foundation for good writing. As (Nunan & Carter, 2001) states, speaking has occupied a peculiar position throughout the history of language teaching and has begun to emerge as a branch of teaching, learning and testing for only two decades. Bygate concludes that there are three reasons for this.

### **The significance of speaking skill**

Speaking is the communication tool to transform ideas (Conrad & Dunek, 2012) express feelings (Cefalu, 2004) explain about discoveries, research results and discussions and responding to others is a proficient in the four language skills. Such skillfulness provides the speaker .Mastering speaking skills makes the speaker a well-rounded communicator who with several distinct advantages which let them enjoy sharing idea with others and managing to understand and respect their own selves (McLean & Ransom, 2007) Speaking skills are important to achieve the career success.

### **Problems affecting teaching and learning speaking skill**

Globally, there is a debate that the majority of high school graduates cannot speak English language properly. Even the bright students who get high scores in written examinations are unable to express themselves orally in English language In Saudi Arabia, students lack communicative and linguistic competence and often code switch during conversation or in group discussions in class Many students in secondary schools are shy and preferred remaining quiet in class because they were unable to

express themselves properly in spoken English (Gudu, 2015)

### **Speaking Activities**

There are different possible approaches of teaching speaking: the genre-based approach which primarily relies on imitating models which is not necessarily the way in which people communicate in real life; the task-based approach that focuses more on the process of using language rather than on the language that learners actually produce, the comprehension-based approach relying on listening tasks (Sim & Pop, 2016).

### **Information Gap Activities**

In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that the other partner does not have and the partners will share the information. This kind of activity serves many purposes. Each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk.

### **Jigsaw Activities**

Each partner has one or a few pieces of the “puzzle”, and the partners must cooperate to fit all the pieces into a whole picture. No two partners hear or read exactly the same text or conversation.

### **Communicative Output Activities**

These activities allow students to practice using all of the language they know in situation that likens actual settings. Students must work together to develop a plan, solve a problem, or complete a task. The most common kinds of communicative output activity are *role plays*, *discussion*, completing a task, surveys, solving problems and debates.

### **Games**

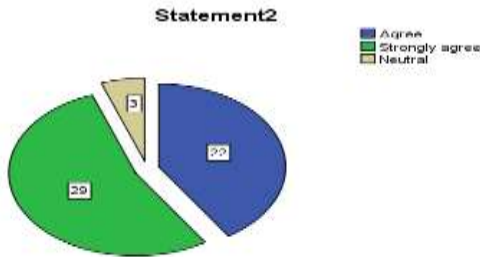
Games are often useful to liven up a lesson. A typical example of speaking practice game is which is called: “I spy”. This game consists of the teacher chooses something from the classroom, for example, the blackboard and says to the learners: “I spy with my little eye something beginning with “b”, giving them only the first letter. The learners have to guess what it is.

### **Teaching speaking using short Movie**

Teachers needs some preparations to bring short movie as media, such as the movie that will be played, power point, laptop, speaker, and projector. As short movie does not take long time, therefore is considered effective to be used.

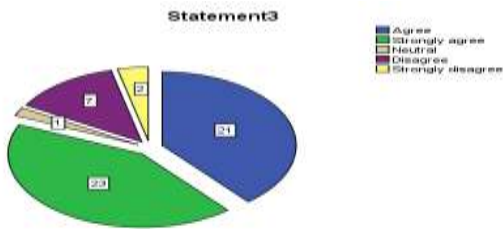
**4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

**Statement (1): Speaking skill enhances student's understanding of English.**



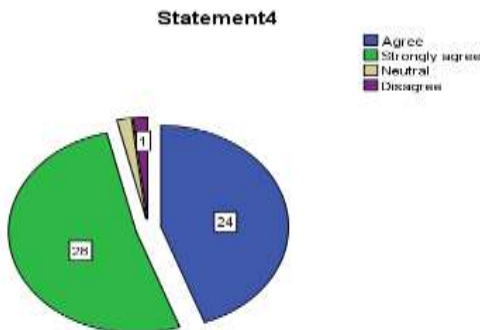
The diagram shows that, speaking skill enhances student's understanding of English. (94.4%) of the sample agree that, speaking skill enhances student's understanding of English.

**Statement (2): Your students face some problems while practicing speaking**



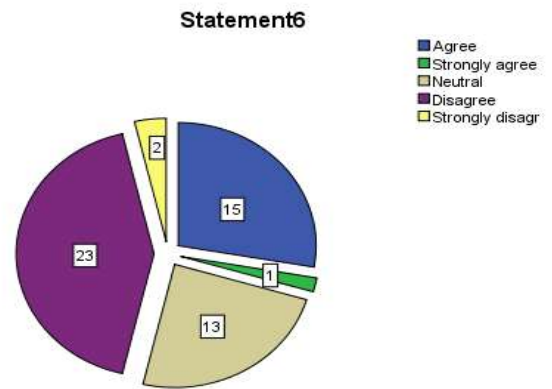
The above diagram shows that, (81.4%) of the respondents agree that your students face some problems while practicing speaking.

**Statement (3): Teachers can help students overcome speaking problems.**



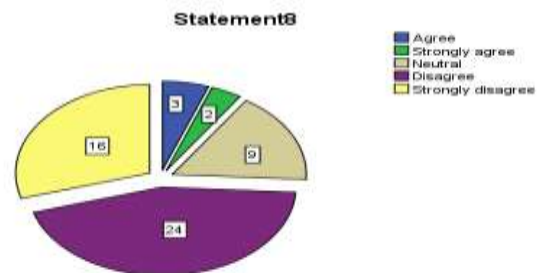
The diagram shows that, you as a teacher help your students overcome speaking problems. According to the statistical analysis of statement, most respondents (96.3%) agree that, you as a teacher help your students overcome speaking problems.

**Statement (4): Students of preparatory year understand native speaker' mostly.**



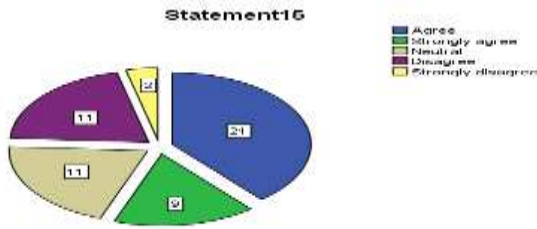
From above diagram it is shown that (46.3%) disagree with the statement. Therefore the statement is accepted.

**Statement (5): Students of preparatory year practice continuous speaking skill outside classroom like hospitals or other institutions.**



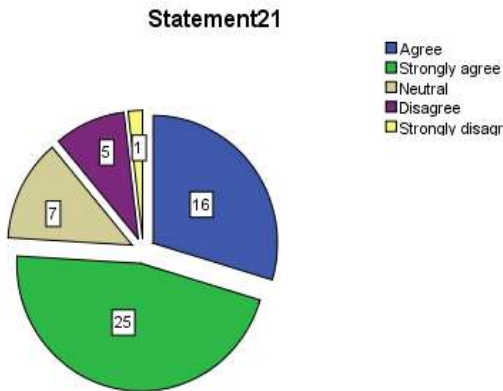
From above diagram we can conclude that, (74%) disagree with the statement.

**Statement (6): Your students have problems with American- British accent while speaking.**



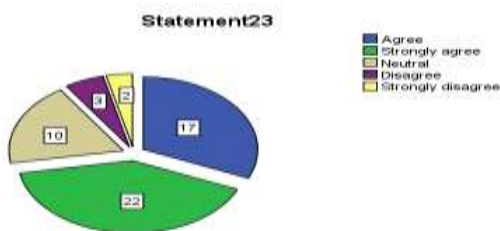
The statistical analyses of statement (8) in the diagram shows that (55.6%) of the respondents agree. that your students have problems with American- British accent.

**Statement (7): There is a gap between teaching speaking in the preparatory year and secondary school.**



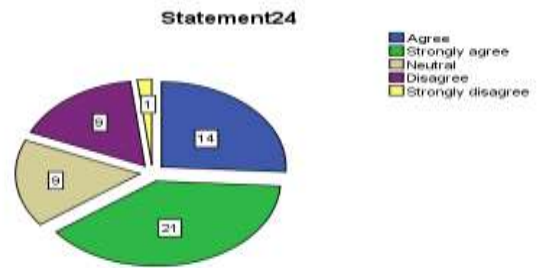
(75.8%) of respondents agree that gap between teaching speaking in the preparatory year and secondary school.

**Statement (8): Teaching methods applied in secondary schools resulted in the low level in English speaking skill for students of preparatory year.**



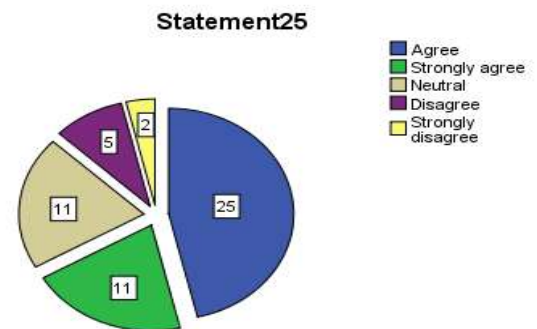
(72.2%) of the respondents agree that teaching methods applied in secondary schools resulted in the low level in English speaking skill for students of preparatory year.

**Statement (9): Most of the students of preparatory year are shy while practicing speaking skill in front of their colleagues.**



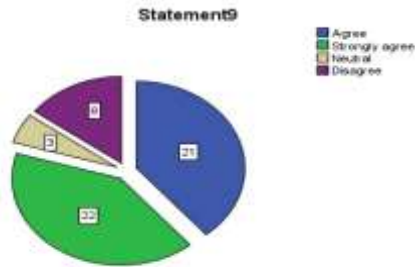
(64.7%) of the respondents assure the statement so it is accepted.

**Statement (10): Most of the teachers at secondary schools do not teach the English curriculum in complete which has a great impact on all English skills speaking specially.**



The above diagram show that, (66.6%) of the respondents agree that most of the teachers at secondary schools do not teach the English curriculum in complete.

**Statement (11): The number of students in a class influence practice of English speaking and other English skills.**



It is shown that, (79.6%) of the respondents agree that the number of students in a class influence practice of English speaking and other English skills as well.

**Statement (12): The structure of Saudi society hinders practicing English speaking.**



From above table and diagram, it is clear that (51.9%) of the respondents agree the structure of Saudi society hinders practicing speaking.

**Findings**

1- Students of preparatory year at Al-Baha University confront real obstacles when they practice English as a language particularly speaking skill. Those problems are represented in the language laboratories and modern appliances. Also, the number of students in a class influences practicing speaking skill badly and negatively.

2-The structure of Saudi society especially Al-Baha region can hinder practicing Speaking English to an extent. It is a tribal area. The majority of its population appreciates learning English but when it comes to

reality the matter is different. The students put in their minds a long time ago that English is a subject which cannot be studied and this confirmed by the lack of the academic interest in schools and families in the region. This public opinion resulted in the deterioration in the level of the language affected by the atmosphere around them. How can a student do his best while those who are around him, indoors and outdoors, are frustrating? From the point of view of the researcher it is one of the most influential factors. That problem assured by different observations and interviews conducted by the researcher many years.

3-Here comes the role of the corner stone of any educational process to support his students overcome any educational difficulties. Teachers can double their effort and replace the old teaching methods with new ones that help develop students' speaking skills. The teacher's role is a participant, feedback provider, and facilitator.

4-One of the main problems facing those students is the difficulty in understanding native speakers which is caused by the lack of teaching authentic materials.

5-Students of preparatory year have other aids at their homes to help them improve speaking. Since we live the age of technology, it became easy to log so many websites to train speaking skill individually like italki and Lingoda.

6-The American accent and British accent can cause a kind of embarrassment when starting to speak. This is mainly due to the fact that the students were learning English using the American curriculum in the stages of basic education to secondary school and then switched to the British curriculum at the university. Even the researcher taught different curricula in different regions in Saudi Arabia. This trend creates a kind of lack of focus and duplication when assessing students.

7-Speaking skill is not assessed enough throughout the school year of the preparatory year. This draws attention to the need for more methods of assessing students' speaking skills, not to do so in a traditional way.

8-The gap between teaching speaking at secondary schools and at the university is unbridgeable gap represented in curriculum, teachers, methods, time of classes and assessment. Students of Al-Baha take weekly quizzes to assess their performance and progress.

9-There is a great deal of agreement among teachers of preparatory year that teaching methods applied to secondary students resulted in the sub level of the same students when moving to university.

10-One of the fundamental reasons of the low levels of speaking skill among those students is that most of them are afraid or shy when they practice speaking due to the neglect of the skill, they found essential when they moved to university.

11-Teachers of secondary schools did not use to complete teaching the English language courses. This led to a sharp decline in the level of students, especially in speaking.

12- Native teachers from relevant jobs (teaching jobs and certificates) in their countries contribute greatly to improve the speaking skill for students of preparatory students. While those native teachers from irrelevant jobs (craftsmen) in their countries do not contribute greatly to improve speaking skill for students of preparatory students and this what is known linguistically as interactive theory. That is why some universities conditioned that the native teachers should have CELTA certificate or MA in applied linguistics even though the results were not great compared to nonnative teachers who established the programmes of teaching English in Saudi Arabia to the extent we can classify it as white washing.

13-Arab teachers contribute greatly to improve the speaking skill for students of preparatory students. They are bilingual teachers from the same cultural background of the sample of the study and can easily communicate with them which help remove all obstacles.

### **Recommendations**

1-Students of preparatory year cannot rely on native speakers to acquire and practice speaking skill. Otherwise what does it mean for some universities to reduce depending on them to teach students English especially Al-Baha University.

2-The teacher is always recommended to help his students overcome their speaking problems.

3-The lack of language laboratories can be replaced by applying modern technology. Students can take some audio assignment to make analysis or summary to express their language understanding by speaking freely and directly. They prepare that in advance.

4-Students need to practice English continually in different places like hospitals and companies which

full of foreign or native speakers to train his English naturally. In large companies like Aramco in Saudi Arabia many Saudi people can speak English better than they write it because they live and speak with native speakers all the time. Students need something like this to refine their language and encourage them to make dialogues and conversations just like recreational trips which may be used to overcome the language obstacles and enrich their speaking as well as encourage them to write down the skills learned.

5-It is nonsense to teach in a class of forty or fifty students which prevents absolutely giving all students the opportunity to develop the skill of speaking as well as the pre-set time. The number of students in classes has been proved to be negative impact on education atmosphere in general. This point should be taken into granted.

6-Teachers of English should keep in mind the structure of Saudi Society especially the southern area should be taken into consideration. It is one of the most influential problems which prevent students from speaking freely. Ministry of education, schools, university should cooperate to eliminate this obstacle.

7- The English curriculum must be in the American or British accent so as not to put students in embarrassment or duplication when learning English.

8- Methods of assessing students' speaking skills should be reviewed.

9-The gap between teaching English at secondary schools and university (methods of teaching and curriculum completion) should be treated at the levels of authorities not the teachers at university.

10-The problem of students being shy when speaking ought to be removed by more exercises and involvement for students to participate confidentially and bravely and this is the role of the teacher.

11-Speaking skill should have explicit goals at the national level including preparing students to take the IELTS and TOEFL international tests which qualify students for postgraduate studies and study abroad.

This paper presented a summary of the difficulties of speaking skill facing the students of the preparatory year at the University of Baha, such as social difficulties and exposure to different dialects during learning. The information has been collected through questionnaires submitted to the teachers of the stage. The paper has reached new information that should be under consideration by those it may concern.

### **Recommendation for further research**

1-The role of teaching listening to enhance speaking skill for students of preparatory students at Al-Baha University.

2- How to develop the skill of speaking skill in relation to the demographics of the area of Al-Baha University.

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**APPENDIX**

**University of Sudan for Sciences and Technology**

**College of graduate studies**

**English Language department**

Dear colleague,

This questionnaire is prepared to seek the problems of speaking skill for students of preparatory year of Al-Baha University in the city of Al-Baha. This study is conducted as a scientific paper for publishing in the fulfillment of PhD degree in applied linguistics at University of Sudan for Sciences and Technology. You are kindly requested to complete it with reference to your great knowledge and teaching experience in that field. Bear in mind that your responses to the questionnaire will be kept confidential, and used only in this study for scientific purposes. Your contributions are highly appreciated.

Thank you very much in advance

**The title of the study**

Problems of Speaking Skill for Preparatory year Students at Al-Baha University: Teachers' View A case Study at Al-Baha University

Section 1: please complete the following information:

Name:.....  
.....

Scientific degree:.....

Gender: M ( ) F ( )

Section 2: Please tick the appropriate opinion from (Agree, Strongly agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly disagree)

Teacher's Questionnaire

	<i>Teacher's Question s</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>neutral</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
1	Speaking skill enhances student's understanding of English.					
2	Your students face some problems while practicing speaking.					
3	You as a teacher help your students overcome speaking problems.					
4	Students of preparatory year understand native speakers' mostly.					
5	Students of preparatory year practice continuous speaking skill outside classroom like hospitals or other institutions.					
6	The number of students in a class influence practice of English speaking and other English skills as well.					
7	Listening classes should be increased to give more chances for students to improve speaking skills.					
8	Students are motivated to improve and develop their speaking skill.					
9	The structure of Saudi society hinders practicing English speaking.					
10	Your students have problems with American- British accent while speaking					
11	There is a gap between teaching speaking in the preparatory year and secondary school.					
12	Teaching methods applied in secondary schools resulted in the low level in English speaking skill for students of preparatory year.					
13	Most of the students of preparatory year are shy while practicing speaking skill in front of their colleagues.					
14	Most of the teachers at secondary schools do not teach the English curriculum in complete which has a great impact on all English skills specially speaking.					