



Enhancing EFL speaking through scenario-based learning: Evidence from foundation students in Oman

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Submitted: 9 March 2026 Revised: 11 May 2026 Accepted: 24 May 2026 Published online: 27 September 2026

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of scenario-based learning (SBL) on improving the English-speaking proficiency of foundation students at Oman College of Health Sciences and to examine students' perceptions of using SBL in speaking classes. A quasi-experimental design was employed involving two intact foundation groups: an experimental group ($n = 20$) taught using SBL and a control group ($n = 20$) taught using conventional speaking instruction methods. The intervention lasted four weeks. Data were collected through a speaking pre-test and post-test, in addition to a perception questionnaire administered to the experimental group. Independent-samples and paired-samples *t*-tests were used to analyze the data. Independent-samples *t*-test results showed no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test, confirming group equivalence. However, post-test results revealed a statistically significant difference in speaking proficiency between the two groups in favor of the experimental group. Paired-samples *t*-test results further indicated a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's speaking performance from pre-test to post-test. The improvement was evident across linguistic accuracy, fluency, strategic communication skills, and psychological aspects such as confidence and willingness to speak. Questionnaire results indicated that over 70% of students reported positive perceptions toward SBL, particularly regarding engagement, motivation, collaboration, and real-life relevance. SBL appears effective for improving speaking proficiency among foundation students. As a learner-centred and context-based approach, SBL offers a sustainable pedagogical option for strengthening communicative competence and supporting more inclusive participation in speaking activities, provided that curricula and teacher development support its consistent implementation.

Keywords: Communicative competence; EFL speaking proficiency; Foundation students; Learner-centred pedagogy; Scenario-based learning

1. Introduction

English has widely been adopted as a global lingua franca, with approximately two billion people using it regularly for communication (Al-Eiadeh et al., 2016). In Oman, as in many Arab countries, English functions as the primary medium of instruction across universities and colleges, making communicative competence in the language a critical educational objective (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014).

Among the four macro skills of English, speaking is considered the most essential for real-world interaction and discourse (Zaremba, 2006). Despite mandatory foundation English programs and English-medium instruction across several majors, Omani students continue to struggle with oral communication competency (Al-Hadhrami & Amzat, 2012). This gap reflects a broader pedagogical challenge: conventional teacher-centered instruction typically offers limited opportunities for authentic language use.

Gulnaz et al. (2015) noted that teacher-centered classrooms tend to position students as passive recipients of information, limiting their active engagement. Sorin (2013) argued that traditional lecturing restricts the scope for transformative learning and advocated instead for situated approaches in which students learn in experience rather than merely from it. Situated Learning (SL) theory, which integrates authentic contexts and merges practical with abstract knowledge, has gained considerable traction as a framework that directly addresses these limitations (Brown et al., 1989; Sindelar & Brownell, 2001).

Within situated learning frameworks, SBL offers a practical mechanism for achieving authenticity in the language classroom. Errington (2008) defines SBL as any instructional approach that employs scenarios deliberately to produce desired learning outcomes. Research in Oman has indicated that students frequently receive insufficient speaking instruction in schools, with

grammar taught explicitly through Arabic while communicative skills remain underdeveloped (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). This reality underscores the urgency of exploring context-rich, learner-centered strategies such as SBL.

The present study therefore investigates the effectiveness of SBL in improving the speaking proficiency of foundation students at Oman College of Health Sciences, in comparison with conventional instructional methods. It also explores students' perceptions of SBL. Two research questions guide the study:

RQ 1) Are there any statistically significant differences in students' speaking skills between the experimental group taught through SBL and the control group taught through conventional methods?

RQ 2) What are the perceptions of the experimental group students toward the use of SBL?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Situated Learning Theory

Situated Learning (SL) theory holds that genuine knowledge acquisition occurs within authentic, socially embedded contexts rather than through decontextualized instruction (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Brown et al. (1989) established that cognition is fundamentally situated, emphasizing the role of social interaction and community in meaningful learning. Within this framework, authentic instructional contexts provide opportunities for learners to integrate practical and conceptual knowledge through collaborative activity (Sindelar & Brownell, 2001). SBL operationalizes situated learning in the language classroom by providing realistic scenarios that require students to use language purposefully and interact meaningfully with peers.

2.2. Scenario-Based Learning: Definition and Features

SBL is broadly defined as any pedagogical method that employs scenarios purposefully to achieve intended learning outcomes (Errington, 2008). Burden and Byrd (2010) described SBL as a strategy in which mixed-ability students work in small collaborative teams on varied learning tasks. Errington (2010) emphasized that SBL promotes deep learning by engaging students in realistic critical incidents that require decision-making and reflective practice. In language classrooms, SBL situates learners in contexts where they assume roles, negotiate meaning, think critically, and communicate authentically (Akins & Crichton, 2003; Errington, 2010).

2.2.1. Elements and components of scenarios

Seren Smith et al. (2018) proposed five essential elements of effective scenarios: challenge, narrative, choice, roles, and authenticity. Challenge engages learners and clarifies objectives from the outset. Narrative introduces conflict and sustains interest while encouraging spontaneous reasoning. Choice fosters autonomy and critical thinking. Role assignment immerses learners in collaborative, professional-identity-building activities. Authenticity connects learning to real-world conditions, enhancing motivation and relevance (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Together, these elements create a comprehensive learning environment that supports deeper cognitive processing and communicative development.

2.2.2. The strategic interaction model

Among the most influential SBL models is Strategic Interaction, developed by Robert Di Pietro and grounded in Vygotskian principles of social learning (Carkin, 2009). This model employs authentic, conflict-based scenarios in which participants negotiate meaning without prior knowledge of each other's goals (El-Naggar et al., 2019). The model proceeds through three stages: Planning, in which the teacher assigns role-specific tasks to small groups; Performance, in which students sustain communication in the target language to resolve an embedded conflict; and Debriefing, in which the teacher facilitates reflective discussion of language use, cultural elements, and performance (AlShehri, 2018). This study's SBL intervention drew directly on this model.

2.2.3. Assessment in SBL

Assessment within SBL serves both formative and summative functions, providing immediate feedback to learners and teachers, supporting reflective practice, and utilizing diverse evaluative tools (Clark, 2009; Snoek, 2003). Errington (2010) identified usability, engagement, relevance, and learning outcome achievement as central evaluation criteria. Ferris and Tagg (1996) distinguished two primary evaluative mechanisms: feedback (teacher and student-generated) and debriefing, with the latter encompassing plenary, individual, team-based, and small-group formats. The present study employed both modes.

2.3. Teaching Speaking in EFL Contexts

Speaking is a complex, multidimensional skill requiring the simultaneous deployment of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency (Derakhshan et al., 2016). In EFL settings, authentic communicative practice is limited, making speaking instruction particularly demanding (Zuheer, 2008). Effective speaking instruction requires teachers to create varied interaction opportunities, establish supportive learning environments, and provide meaningful feedback (Harmer, 2012; Rivers, 1968). Sari (2008) noted that many EFL classrooms remain disproportionately focused on reading and writing, a pedagogical imbalance that learner-centered approaches such as SBL are well positioned to address.

2.4. Prior Research on SBL and Speaking

Empirical evidence increasingly supports SBL's effectiveness for EFL speaking development. Al-Attar (2019) found that SBL significantly improved speaking and higher-order thinking skills among EFL secondary learners. Abdel-Aleam (2023) demonstrated that SBL enhanced speaking skills and engagement among secondary stage students in Egypt. Abdullah (2018) reported positive outcomes from SBL in pre-service EFL teacher preparation. Mariappan (2023) found that SBL reduced learner passivity and promoted confidence. Sheridan and Kelly (2012) emphasized SBL's capacity to simulate professional communicative demands. Collectively, these studies support the pedagogical value of SBL, though evidence from Omani higher education foundation programs remains limited, a gap this study addresses.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental research design with a non-equivalent control group pre-test-post-test structure. This design is appropriate when random assignment to conditions is not feasible and allows for meaningful comparison between intact groups before and after an intervention (Creswell, 2014). The independent variable was the instructional strategy (SBL versus conventional instruction), and the dependent variable was students' speaking proficiency, assessed against IELTS band descriptor criteria encompassing fluency, coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation.

3.2. Participants

The study was conducted during the third trimester of the 2023–2024 academic year at Oman College of Health Sciences, North Batinah Branch. The accessible population comprised all Level 3 foundation students at the institution. Using convenience sampling, two intact speaking classes were selected, yielding a total of 40 participants: 20 in the experimental group and 20 in the control group. The sample was predominantly female, reflecting the enrollment patterns of the institution. Both groups were taught by the researcher, thereby controlling for teacher variability, and both studied the same speaking topics from the Foundation IELTS Masterclass textbook. Ethical approval was obtained from the institution's ethics committee, and written informed consent was collected from all participants prior to data collection.

3.3. Intervention

The experimental group underwent a structured, four-week SBL intervention totaling 16 instructional hours, grounded in Di Pietro's Strategic Interaction model (AlShehri, 2018; El-Naggar et al., 2019). The control group received conventional instruction through question-and-answer exchanges and teacher-directed presentations. The SBL intervention comprised five scenarios: one introductory model scenario demonstrated by the researcher over two to three lessons to familiarize students with SBL procedures, and four practical scenarios linked to textbook Units 1, 2, 5, and 7.

Each practical scenario followed three structured stages. In the Planning stage, the researcher divided students into small groups, distributed role-specific scenario cards, and allowed students time to prepare their roles, organize key vocabulary, and script their arguments collaboratively. In the Performance stage, groups enacted the scenario before the class, requiring sustained communication in English to negotiate positions and resolve the scenario's embedded conflict. In the Debriefing stage, the researcher facilitated a whole-class reflective discussion addressing language errors, communicative strategies, pronunciation, and areas for improvement, with peer feedback incorporated systematically throughout.

3.4. Data Collection

3.4.1. Speaking test

A researcher-designed speaking test modeled on IELTS Speaking Parts 1 and 2 served as both pre-test and post-test. Students introduced themselves and then prepared and delivered a two- to three-minute talk on a randomly selected topic card. Scoring was based on official IELTS speaking band descriptors, adapted and approved by the college's Exam Committee. Both the researcher and a colleague administered the tests, and scoring was conducted independently to ensure inter-rater reliability. Face and content validity were established through expert review by an Associate Professor from Sultan Qaboos University's Curriculum and Instruction Department and senior English teachers with extensive EFL experience.

3.4.2. Perception questionnaire

A 23-item Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to the experimental group at the conclusion of the intervention. The instrument examined students' attitudes toward SBL across three dimensions: (1) linguistic skills, (2) strategic competencies and communication skills, and (3) psychological aspects and interpersonal skills, with an additional overall perception section. The questionnaire was validated by the same expert panel. Reliability for both instruments was confirmed through pilot testing with students not involved in the main study; Cronbach's alpha coefficients returned acceptable internal consistency values for both instruments.

3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the speaking tests were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Prior to conducting inferential analyses, the assumption of normality was examined for both groups' pre-test and post-test scores using Skewness and Kurtosis values. Following George and Mallery (2010), Skewness values within ± 1.96 and Kurtosis values within ± 3.0 were considered acceptable indicators of approximate normality, justifying the use of parametric tests. An independent samples *t*-test was used to compare pre-test scores between groups and to compare post-test scores between groups, while a paired samples *t*-test examined within-group improvement for the experimental group. Perception questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, with means interpreted according to a five-point equivalence scale (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Equivalents for Mean Score Interpretation

Mean Range	Descriptive Equivalent
1.00 – 1.80	Strongly Disagree
1.81 – 2.60	Disagree
2.61 – 3.40	Neutral
3.41 – 4.20	Agree
4.21 – 5.00	Strongly Agree

4. Findings

4.1. Research Question 1: Effects of SBL on Speaking Proficiency

Before conducting inferential analyses, normality was assessed through Skewness and Kurtosis values for all pre-test and post-test score distributions. All values fell within the accepted parametric ranges (Skewness ± 1.96 ; Kurtosis ± 3.0), confirming approximate normality and supporting the appropriateness of *t*-test analyses.

Table 2 presents the independent samples *t*-test results comparing pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups.

Table 2

Independent Samples t-Test: Pre-Test Scores for Experimental and Control Groups

Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Experimental	20	5.14	0.765	0.652	38	.522
Control	20	4.97	0.860			

As shown in Table 2, no statistically significant difference was found between the experimental and control groups on pre-test speaking scores ($t(38) = 0.652$, $p = .522$), confirming the initial equivalence of the two groups. This finding established a sound basis for attributing subsequent performance differences to the instructional intervention.

Table 3 displays the paired samples *t*-test results for the experimental group, comparing pre-test and post-test speaking scores.

Table 3

Paired Samples t-Test: Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores for the Experimental Group

Test	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Pre-test	20	5.14	0.765	–3.499	19	.002
Post-test	20	5.87	0.868			

The experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in speaking proficiency following the SBL intervention ($t(19) = -3.499$, $p = .002$), with the mean score increasing from 5.14 ($SD = 0.765$) at pre-test to 5.87 ($SD = 0.868$) at post-test. This within-group gain indicates that the SBL intervention produced meaningful and measurable improvements in oral communication performance.

Table 4 presents the independent samples *t*-test comparing post-test scores between the experimental and control groups.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-Test: Post-Test Scores for Experimental and Control Groups

Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Experimental	20	5.87	0.868	3.662	38	.002
Control	20	4.85	0.905			

A statistically significant between-group difference was observed on post-test speaking scores ($t(38) = 3.662$, $p = .002$), with the experimental group ($M = 5.87$, $SD = 0.868$) significantly outperforming the control group ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 0.905$). These results collectively provide strong evidence that the SBL intervention produced superior speaking proficiency outcomes compared to

conventional instruction.

4.2. Research Question 2: Students' Perceptions of SBL

4.2.1. Linguistic skills

Table 5 presents students' perceptions of SBL's impact on their linguistic skills.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics: Students' Perceptions of SBL's Impact on Linguistic Skills

Statement	M	SD
I can ask grammatically correct questions in scenarios.	4.15	0.875
I can correctly summarize others' ideas in scenarios.	3.75	0.966
I learnt to present my ideas in a coherent way in scenarios.	4.20	0.695
I can use different types of sentences and vocabulary in scenarios.	4.15	1.039

Mean scores for the linguistic skills dimension ranged from 3.75 to 4.20, all within the "Agree" range. The highest-rated item was "I learnt to present my ideas in a coherent way in scenarios" ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.695$), while "I can correctly summarize others' ideas in scenarios" received the lowest rating in this dimension ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.966$). These results indicate that students perceived SBL as particularly effective in developing coherence and grammatical production.

4.2.2. Strategic competencies and communication skills

Table 6 presents students' perceptions of SBL's impact on their strategic and communicative abilities.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics: Students' Perceptions of SBL's Impact on Strategic Competencies and Communication Skills

Statement	M	SD
I learnt to find other ways to communicate when lacking words.	4.10	0.640
I learnt to ask questions for clarification in scenarios.	4.00	0.973
I knew how to redirect discussion toward a new topic from scenarios.	3.80	1.056
I can produce more effective oral communication in English than before.	3.90	1.020
I learnt to show verbal negotiation skills.	4.20	1.056
I learnt to resolve a conflict or disagreement through speaking.	3.80	0.951
I contribute effectively to discussing important topics in scenarios.	4.05	0.686
I can express new ideas logically and clearly in scenarios.	4.45	0.604

Mean scores ranged from 3.80 to 4.45. The item "I can express new ideas logically and clearly in scenarios" was rated highest ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.604$), falling within the "Strongly Agree" range. Verbal negotiation skills ($M = 4.20$) and finding alternative communicative strategies ($M = 4.10$) also received strong ratings, while redirecting discussion and resolving conflict received comparatively lower means (both $M = 3.80$), remaining within the "Agree" range.

4.2.3. Psychological aspects and interpersonal skills

Table 7 presents students' perceptions related to psychological confidence and interpersonal development.

Mean scores across this dimension ranged from 3.95 to 4.40, all within the "Agree" range. The highest-rated item was "I can engage in everyday communication" ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.680$), while confidence- and ease-related items received comparatively lower but consistently positive ratings ($M = 3.95$). Students also reported notable gains in teamwork and respect for peers' viewpoints.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics: Students' Perceptions of SBL's Impact on Psychological Aspects and Interpersonal Skills

<i>Statement</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I can introduce myself and others in scenarios.	4.35	1.039
I can engage in everyday communication.	4.40	0.680
I can communicate collaboratively in a team in scenarios.	4.20	0.695
I can participate appropriately in group conversations.	3.95	0.686
I respect other people's opinions even if different from my own.	4.10	1.020
I feel completely at ease when engaging in communication with others.	3.95	1.145
I feel confident in my ability to communicate with others.	3.95	0.998

4.2.4. Overall Perceptions

Table 8 presents students' overall perceptions of the SBL experience.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics: Students' Overall Perceptions of SBL

<i>Statement</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I like the Scenario-Based Learning (SBL) method.	3.60	0.994
I can speak better without any hesitation.	4.00	0.917
I engaged better in the classroom through SBL.	4.05	0.759
I benefited a lot in terms of speaking through the use of SBL.	3.80	1.005

Overall perception means ranged from 3.60 to 4.05. The highest-rated overall item was "I engaged better in the classroom through SBL" ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.759$), while "I like the SBL method" received the lowest overall rating ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.994$), suggesting that while students recognized SBL's benefits, some experienced reservations related to its preparation demands. Nonetheless, overall perceptions were positive, with students agreeing that SBL helped reduce hesitation in speaking ($M = 4.00$) and produced notable speaking benefits ($M = 3.80$).

Table 9 presents the aggregated group means for each questionnaire dimension.

Table 9

Aggregated Group Means by Questionnaire Dimension

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Group M</i>	<i>Group SD</i>
Linguistic Skills	4.06	0.701
Strategic Competencies and Communication Skills	4.03	0.478
Psychological Aspects and Interpersonal Skills	4.12	0.488
Overall Perception towards SBL	3.86	0.479

Group means across all dimensions fell within the "Agree" range, with the psychological and interpersonal skills dimension recording the highest aggregate mean ($M = 4.12$), followed by linguistic skills ($M = 4.06$), strategic competencies ($M = 4.03$), and overall perception ($M = 3.86$).

5. Discussion

The findings of the present study offer substantive insights into the pedagogical value of SBL for EFL speaking instruction in Omani higher education. The two research questions are discussed in turn, with connections drawn to the broader theoretical and empirical literature.

5.1. Effects of SBL on Speaking Proficiency

Pre-test equivalence between groups confirmed that observed post-intervention differences could reasonably be attributed to the SBL treatment rather than pre-existing ability differences. The experimental group's statistically significant within-group improvement, combined with a significantly higher post-test mean than the control group, provides robust evidence that SBL produced meaningful gains in speaking performance across IELTS-aligned rubric criteria.

These findings align with a substantial body of prior research. Abdel-Aleam (2023) reported

comparable improvements in speaking skills and engagement among Egyptian secondary students following SBL, while Al-Attar (2019) documented significant gains in both speaking and higher-order thinking skills in a Gaza EFL context. The present results also resonate with Clark (2009) and Burden and Byrd (2010), who argued that SBL's collaborative, role-based structure creates authentic communication spaces in which learners rehearse and refine language through purposeful interaction rather than passive reception. Errington (2010) similarly emphasized that scenario engagement fosters deep learning by requiring students to decide, negotiate, and reflect – processes that were systematically embedded in the three-stage intervention design employed here.

The gains in fluency and coherence are particularly noteworthy given the historically documented challenges of Omani EFL learners with spontaneous oral communication (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Al-Saadi et al., 2013). The SBL intervention addressed this deficit directly by providing repeated, structured opportunities for sustained speaking in authentic communicative scenarios. The debriefing stage likely played a pivotal role: Rivers (1968) and Harmer (2012) have consistently emphasized that meaningful feedback and rehearsal cycles are central to speaking development, and the systematic incorporation of peer and teacher feedback after each performance created precisely this reflective loop. By contrast, the control group's lower post-test performance reflects the limitations of conventional question-and-answer and presentation-based approaches in generating the kind of contextualized, negotiated interaction that characterizes authentic communication.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings corroborate Situated Learning theory (Brown et al., 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991) by demonstrating that embedding language learning within authentic, socially interactive scenarios promotes deeper and more transferable language acquisition than decontextualized instruction. The Strategic Interaction model's three-stage structure appears to have been particularly effective: the planning stage scaffolded vocabulary and role preparation; the performance stage demanded spontaneous communicative risk-taking; and the debriefing stage consolidated learning through structured reflection (AlShehri, 2018; El-Naggar et al., 2019).

5.2. Students' Perceptions of SBL

Perceptions across all four questionnaire dimensions were uniformly positive, with group means ranging from 3.86 to 4.12. This suggests that students not only improved their speaking performance but also experienced SBL as a meaningful and beneficial learning approach, lending further ecological validity to the quantitative findings.

The comparatively lower rating for "I like the SBL method" is worth considering. This result likely reflects the demands that SBL places on learners in terms of collaborative preparation, script development, and sustained performance before peers – challenges acknowledged by Sorin (2013) and Clark (2009) as inherent to scenario-based pedagogy. Nevertheless, students' consistent agreement that SBL reduced hesitation in speaking and improved classroom engagement indicates that affective reservations did not outweigh perceived communicative benefits.

The highest aggregate mean was recorded for the psychological and interpersonal skills dimension, particularly for items related to everyday communication and self-introduction. This finding is significant in the Omani EFL context, where students frequently report psychological barriers to spontaneous speaking, including fear of error and reluctance to communicate in front of peers (Al Hosni, 2014; Al-Saadi et al., 2013). Mariappan (2023) similarly found that SBL reduced learner passivity and promoted confidence, and Sorin (2013) attributed such gains to the supportive collaborative structure of scenario activities, which normalize communicative risk-taking and reduce evaluative anxiety. The present findings support this interpretation.

Students' strong endorsement of the item "I can express new ideas logically and clearly in scenarios" is particularly relevant to the goals of English for Academic and Professional Purposes (EAPP), which are central to foundation programs in health sciences education in Oman. This finding suggests that SBL may be especially well-suited for students who require professional oral communication competencies alongside general language proficiency – a point emphasized by

Errington (2011) and Abdullah (2018) in vocational and teacher education contexts. Verbal negotiation and strategic communication items further support Sheridan and Kelly's (2012) contention that SBL effectively replicates the communicative demands of professional interaction.

Taken together, the quantitative and perceptual findings reinforce the pedagogical case for integrating SBL into EFL foundation programs. The convergence of statistically significant test score improvements with broadly positive student perceptions suggests that SBL is not only effective in measurable terms but is also experienced by learners as engaging, purposeful, and relevant to their communicative development. These outcomes resonate with broader research on active learning, learner autonomy, and communicative language teaching (Nunan, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Seker, 2016).

6. Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of SBL in enhancing the speaking proficiency of foundation-level EFL students at Oman College of Health Sciences during the 2023–2024 academic year, alongside students' perceptions of the strategy. The experimental group, which underwent a four-week SBL intervention grounded in the Strategic Interaction model, demonstrated statistically significant improvements in speaking proficiency compared to both their own pre-intervention baseline and to the control group taught through conventional methods. Perceptual data further confirmed that students experienced SBL as a meaningful, engaging, and confidence-building instructional approach, particularly in the domains of interpersonal communication, logical expression, and verbal negotiation.

These findings contribute empirical evidence to the growing literature on SBL in EFL contexts and extend this evidence base to the specific setting of Omani higher education foundation programs, where speaking development has historically been identified as a critical gap. By demonstrating that a relatively brief but carefully structured SBL intervention can produce measurable speaking gains and foster positive learner attitudes, the study provides both theoretical and practical support for the integration of scenario-based pedagogy in foundation English education.

The present study sits squarely within the scope of Sustainable Education and Digital Transformation. SBL represents a sustainable pedagogical approach precisely because it develops transferable, real-world communicative competencies through experiential, collaborative, and reflective learning processes that are not bound to any single instructional context. Its adaptability to digital platforms—including virtual scenario delivery, online debriefing, and digitally-mediated peer collaboration—underscores SBL's alignment with the digital transformation of higher education delivery. In the rapidly evolving educational landscape of Oman and the broader Gulf region, where institutions are actively seeking sustainable, technology-ready pedagogies that prepare graduates for professional communication demands, SBL offers a particularly timely and relevant model.

7. Implications

The study's findings carry meaningful implications across curriculum development, teacher education, and educational policy. Curriculum designers in General Foundation Programs and higher education institutions are encouraged to systematically embed scenario-based activities into both in-house and imported instructional materials, positioning SBL as a structured, recurring component of speaking curricula rather than a supplementary option. Given SBL's demonstrated impact on fluency, coherence, and interpersonal communication, its integration should be deliberate and scaffolded, particularly in programs preparing students for professional communication in health and academic contexts.

Teacher training programs, English language supervisors, and in-service professional development workshops should prioritize equipping educators with both the theoretical foundations and the practical competencies required for effective scenario design, facilitation, and debriefing. Al-Attar (2019) identified insufficient teacher preparation as a primary barrier to

effective SBL implementation; addressing this gap is therefore a prerequisite for successful institutional adoption. Policymakers at institutional and national levels should recognize SBL not merely as a classroom technique but as a framework aligned with Oman's Vision 2040 workforce development objectives, which emphasize graduates' communicative competence, critical thinking, and professional readiness.

Future research should extend the duration of SBL interventions to allow for more sustained practice and richer feedback cycles, and should broaden the scope to include participants from multiple branches and institutional contexts to enhance generalizability. Comparative studies across educational levels and mixed-methods designs incorporating classroom observation and longitudinal follow-up assessments would further enrich the evidence base. Exploring the integration of SBL with digital tools, such as AI-assisted scenario generation, virtual role-play platforms, and asynchronous online debriefing, represents a particularly promising avenue in the context of digital education transformation. Such research would directly contribute to the mission of Sustainable Education and Digital Transformation by generating knowledge on how innovative, technology-enhanced pedagogies can support sustainable improvements in learner communicative competency across diverse educational settings in the Gulf region and beyond.

Data availability: Upon reasonable request, the corresponding author will provide the datasets created and/or analysed during the current work.

Declaration of interest: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research.

Ethical declaration: Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research and Ethical Review & Approval Committee of Oman College of Health Sciences (Approval No: OCHS/REC/PROPSAL-APPROVED/18/2024; Date: 22 September 2024). All procedures were conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards.

Funding: No external funding was received for this study.

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