



# مجلة بحوث

## جامعة حلب في المناطق المحررة

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## مجلة جامعة حلب في المناطق المحررة

مجلة علمية محكمة فصلية، تصدر باللغة العربية، تختص بنشر البحوث العلمية والدراسات الأكاديمية في مختلف التخصصات، تتوفر فيها شروط البحث العلمي في الإحاطة والاستقصاء ومنهج البحث العلمي وخطواته، وذلك على صعيدي العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية والعلوم الأساسية والتطبيقية.

### رؤية المجلة:

تتطلع المجلة إلى الريادة والتميز في نشر الأبحاث العلمية.

### رسالة المجلة:

الإسهام الفعّال في خدمة المجتمع من خلال نشر البحوث العلمية المحكمة وفق المعايير العلمية العالمية.

### أهداف المجلة:

- نشر العلم والمعرفة في مختلف التخصصات العلمية.
- توطيد الشراكات العلمية والفكرية بين جامعة حلب في المناطق المحررة ومؤسسات المجتمع المحلي والدولي.
- أن تكون المجلة مرجعاً علمياً للباحثين في مختلف العلوم.

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## معايير النشر في المجلة:

- ١- تنشر المجلة الأبحاث والدراسات الأكاديمية في مختلف التخصصات العلميّة باللغة العربية.
- ٢- تنشر المجلة البحوث التي تتوفر فيها الأصالة والابتكار، واتباع المنهجية السليمة، والتوثيق العلمي مع سلامة الفكر واللغة والأسلوب.
- ٣- تشترط المجلة أن يكون البحث أصيلاً وغير منشور أو مقدم لأي مجلة أخرى أو موقع آخر.
- ٤- يترجم عنوان البحث واسم الباحث والمشاركين أو المشرفين إن وجدوا إلى اللغتين التركية والإنكليزية.
- ٥- يرفق بالبحث ملخص عنه باللغات الثلاث العربية والإنكليزية والتركية على ألا يتجاوز ٢٠٠-٢٥٠ كلمة، وبخمس كلمات مفتاحية مترجمة.
- ٦- يلتزم الباحث بتوثيق المراجع والمصادر وفقاً لنظام جمعية علم النفس الأمريكية (APA7).
- ٧- يلتزم الباحث بألا يزيد البحث على ٢٠ صفحة.
- ٨- ترسل البحوث المقدمة لمحكمين متخصصين، ممن يشهد لهم بالنزاهة والكفاءة العلمية في تقييم الأبحاث، ويتم هذا بطريقة سرية، ويعرض البحث على محكم ثالث في حال رفضه أحد المحكمين.
- ٩- يلتزم الباحث بإجراء التعديلات المطلوبة خلال ١٥ يوماً.
- ١٠- يبلغ الباحث بقبول النشر أو الاعتذار عنه، ولا يعاد البحث إلى صاحبه إذا لم يقبل، ولا تقدم أسباب رفضه إلى الباحث.
- ١١- يحصل الباحث على وثيقة نشر تؤكد قبول بحثه للنشر بعد موافقة المحكمين عليه.
- ١٢- تعبّر الأبحاث المنشورة في المجلة عن آراء أصحابها، لا عن رأي المجلة، ولا تكون هيئة تحرير المجلة مسؤولة عنها.

## جدول المحتوى

- ٧.....العوائق القانونية لتطبيق مبدأ الاختصاص الجنائي العالمي  
أ. محمد النبهان أ.د. عبد القادر الشيخ
- ٣٩..... دور الحوكمة في السمعة التنظيمية للجامعات في الشمال السوري  
أ. أسامة الجمعة د. محمود عريض
- ٧٧..... أثر تخفيض الضرائب في جذب الاستثمار في مناطق الشمال السوري  
أ. محمد ناصر أ. د. عبد العزيز الدغيم د. ياسر الحسين
- دور الاستثمار في رأس المال البشري في التنمية الاجتماعية المستدامة (دراسة استطلاعية  
لآراء عينة من أعضاء الهيئة التدريسية في جامعات الشمال السوري) ..... ١١٧  
أ. عز الدين الجراد د. معروف الخلف د. محمد يعقوب
- دور التعزيز في زيادة التحصيل الدراسي لدى تلامذة الحلقة الأولى من التعليم الأساسي من  
وجهة نظر المعلمين في الشمال السوري ..... ١٥٥  
أ. يوسف أحمد حاجولة د. محمد الحمادي
- أثر استخدام المسجل في تعليم تلاوة القرآن الكريم في مقرر التربية الإسلامية ..... ١٨٩  
أ. محمد الطه العبد الله أ.د. عبد المهيم ديرشوي
- أخطاء الحذف في شكل الفعل في كتابات طلاب اللغة الإنكليزية السوريين ..... ٢٢٥  
أ. غياث الشيخ إبراهيم د. عبد الحميد معيكل
- العوامل المؤثرة في القلق المتعلق بالتحدث خلال المشاركة الصفية لدى طلاب اللغة  
الانكليزية في جامعة إدلب في شمال غرب سورية ..... ٢٥١  
أ. عبد القادر حمادي د. زكريا العبسي
- مدى التزام معلمي الحلقة الأولى من التعليم الأساسي بأخلاقيات مهنة التعليم من وجهة  
نظرهم ..... ٢٧٥  
أ. عبد الرحمن هلال د. سهام عبد العزيز
- الواقع النفسي في بناء رواية القوقعة لمصطفى خليفة ..... ٣٠٥  
أ. بلال محمود خليفة د. محمد رامز كورج
- النزعة الإنسانية في ديوان بدوي الجبل ..... ٣٢٥  
أ. أحمد محمد جعلوك د. محمد رامز كورج
- التنافس الديني عند أنس الدغيم ..... ٣٤٣  
أ. طلال المنلا د. محمد رامز كورج



العوامل المؤثرة في القلق المتعلق بالتحدث خلال المشاركة الصفية لدى طلاب اللغة  
الإنكليزية في جامعة إدلب في شمال غرب سورية

إعداد

أ. عبد القادر حمادي      د. زكريا العبسي

## ملخص البحث:

لطالما كان التحدث أمام الجمهور مصدر قلقٍ لكثيرٍ من الناس حتى في لغتهم الأم، ويعد التحدث أكثر المهارات إثارة للقلق، وذلك من بين المهارات اللغوية الأربع في تعلم لغة أجنبية، وهكذا، فإن الدراسة الحالية تجيب عن سؤالين: ما العوامل التي تحفز مشاركة الطلاب في التحدث خلال الحصة الدراسية؟ وما العوامل التي تعيق المشاركة في التحدث أثناء الحصص الدراسية؟

إضافةً إلى ذلك، فإن هذا البحث يستكشف ويصف العوامل التي تؤدي إلى حدوث القلق من التحدث في الحصص الدراسية لـ (٥٥) من الطلاب المتخصصين في اللغة الإنكليزية في جامعة إدلب في شمال غرب سورية.

لقد تم استخدام ثلاث أدوات في الدراسة: استبانة ومقابلات شبه منظمة ومقابلات منظمة، وأظهرت النتائج أن ٨١٪ من الطلاب يشعرون بالقلق عندما يضطرون للتحدث أمام زملائهم في الفصل خاصة إذا كان الموضوع صعباً أو إذا اضطروا للتحدث لفترة طويلة، وعندما يكون للمدرسين دور سلبي في مخاطبة الطلاب تقع الأخطاء والتثبيط عندهم. وقد وافق ٧١٪ من الطلاب على أن الثقة بالنفس تلعب دوراً حيوياً في التحدث عن القلق، وكلما كانت أعلى، قل قلق الطلاب والعكس صحيح. ومن ناحية أخرى، للتغلب على القلق، أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب بحاجة إلى ممارسة التحدث كلما سنحت لهم الفرصة أو تخصيص وقت يومي لممارسة التحدث، ودعم المعلمين وتشجيعهم باستخدام عبارات المدح ومناقشة موضوعات شائقة وسهلة يمكن أن تساعد الطلاب في التقليل من قلقهم.

وعلاوة على ذلك، فإن الأنشطة الزوجية/ الجماعية مقارنة بأنشطة التحدث الفردي تساعد الطلاب على الشعور بمزيد من الراحة، كما أنها تحثهم على المشاركة أكثر في الحصص الدراسية الأمر الذي سيقبل لديهم من القلق المتعلق بالتحدث.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** قلق التحدث، الثقة بالنفس، دور المعلم، التحفيز، أنشطة المحادثة، الحصة الدراسية، المشاركة في التحدث.



## Factors Affecting Classroom Speaking Participation Anxiety among English Majors at Idlib University in Northwest Syria

prepared by:

Mr. Abdul Qader Hammadi Dr. Zakaria Al-Absi

### Abstract:

Public speaking has always been a concern for many people even in their native language. Also, among the four language skills in learning a foreign language, speaking is the most anxiety provoking skill. Thus, the present study answers two questions; What are the factors that motivate students' speaking participation in the classroom? What are the factors that deter classroom speaking participation? In addition, it explores and describes the factors that lead to speaking anxiety in the classroom for 55 English majors at Idlib University in northwest Syria. Three tools have been used throughout the study: a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews. The results revealed that 81% of students get anxious when they have to speak in front of their classmates especially if the topic is hard, or if they have to speak for a long time, and when the teachers have a negative role in addressing students' mistakes and discouraging them. Also, 71% of students agreed that self-confidence plays a vital role in speaking anxiety. The higher it is, the less anxious the students are and vice versa. On the other hand, to overcome anxiety, the results showed that students need to practice speaking whenever they have the chance or dedicate daily time to practice speaking. They also benefit from teachers' support and encouragement through praising statements and discussing interesting and easy topics that could help students lessen their anxiety. Furthermore, pair/group activities, in comparison with speaking alone, would help students feel more comfortable and encourage them to participate more in the classroom which in turn will reduce their speaking anxiety.

**Keywords:** Speaking anxiety, Self-confidence, Teacher's Role, Motivation, Speaking Activities, Classroom, Speaking Participation.

## Kuzeybatı Suriye'deki İdlib Üniversitesi'ndeki İngilizce Öğrencilerinde Derse Katılım Sırasında Konuşma Kaygısını Etkileyen Faktörler

Hazırlayanlar:

Mr. Abdul Qader Hammadi Dr. Zakaria Al-Absi

### Özet:

Topluluk önünde konuşmak birçok insan için anadillerinde bile her zaman endişe kaynağı olmuştur. Yabancı dil öğrenirken dört dil becerisinden en endişe verici olanı konuşmadır. Dolayısıyla bu çalışma iki soruyu yanıtlamaktadır: Öğrencilerin ders sırasında konuşmaya katılımını motive eden faktörler nelerdir? Derslerde konuşmaya katılımı engelleyen faktörler nelerdir? Ayrıca bu çalışma, Kuzeybatı Suriye'deki İdlib Üniversitesi'nde İngilizce eğitimi alan 55 öğrencinin derslerinde konuşma kaygısının oluşmasına yol açan faktörleri araştırıyor ve açıklıyor. Çalışmada üç araç kullanılmıştır: anket, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve yapılandırılmış görüşmeler. Sonuçlar, öğrencilerin %81'inin sınıf arkadaşlarının önünde konuşmak zorunda kaldıklarında, özellikle konu zorsa veya uzun süre konuşmaları gerekiyorsa ve öğretmenlerin öğrencilere hitap etmede olumsuz bir role sahip olduğunda kaygılı hissettiklerini gösterdi. Öğrencilerin %71'i kaygı hakkında konuşurken özgüvenin önemli bir rol oynadığını kabul etti, ne kadar yüksek olursa, öğrencilerin kaygısı o kadar az olur ve bunun tersi de geçerlidir. Öte yandan, kaygının üstesinden gelebilmek için öğrencilerin fırsat buldukça konuşma pratiği yapmaları veya konuşma pratiğine her gün zaman ayırmaları gerektiği de sonuçlarda ortaya çıkmıştır. Öğrencilerin kaygılarını azaltmalarına yardımcı olabilecek iltifatlar kullanarak ve kolay, ilgi çekici konuları tartışarak öğretmenlerin desteğine ve teşvikine de ihtiyaçları vardır. Ayrıca ikili ve grup etkinlikleri, öğrencilerin bireysel konuşma etkinliklerine göre kendilerini daha rahat hissetmelerine yardımcı olurken, derslere daha fazla katılmalarını teşvik ederek konuşma kaygılarını azaltacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Konuşma Kaygısı, Özgüven, Öğretmenin Rolü, Motivasyon, Konuşma Etkinlikleri, Ders, Konuşmaya Katılım.



## Introduction

Why do some students participate in speaking in the classroom while others do not? Learning English requires 4 skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. It is quite obvious that speaking skill is the most difficult one because almost all students complain about learning it, and it is commonly known that students' extreme challenge in learning English language is speaking anxiety. If anyone asks them about their performance in learning English, they immediately say that they are good at all language skills except for speaking. They find difficulty in developing speaking because when they have to speak, they have the fear of making mistakes, lack speaking practice, and poor use of suitable words and sentence structures (Woodrow, 2006). Speaking participation in the classroom has been a research topic for decades due to its importance in the learning process. Teachers believe that the more participation, the more active and interactive the class will be. In fact, "teachers feel happy when they observe positive student-teacher interaction in the classroom." (Al-Ghafri, 2018, p. 12). In addition, speaking participation is seen as an indicator of students' engagement and understanding of the class material. Also, it is a solid ground for students to express their thoughts as well as commenting on and getting involved in the classroom activities, and it is hard to maintain students' focus and attention when all they hear is the teacher talking. It helps to hear another voice as well as an answer or another point of view (Walsh and Rísquez, 2020). However, there are possibly other factors that could influence speaking anxiety during participation either positively or negatively. Because speaking participation in the classroom is of high importance for learners, aspects influencing speaking participation should be investigated thoroughly. Mainly, this research will focus on factors influencing the speaking participation anxiety of English literature students in the classroom at Idleb University in Syria.

## Literature review

Anxiety has been considered a research topic for many scholars who did research in this regard and defined anxiety in an academic way so that we can have a general overview about anxiety nature. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (cited in Tasee, 2009, p. 33) define foreign language anxiety

as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process”. So, this definition sheds light on how students feel and behave when they participate in classroom activities because the teacher might get to know their beliefs and perception once they speak. Also, Sdorow (1998, p. 485) stated that, “anxiety is a feeling of apprehension accompanied by sympathetic nervous system arousal, which produces increases in sweating, heart rate, and breathing rate”. This one relates to the physiological state of the learner, for example, if a student is anxious, he/she will be sweating or having fast heartbeats. And Fogiel (1980, p. 522) defined anxiety as “a crucial concept in the study of abnormal psychology because it is considered to be both a symptom and a cause of varying neurotic disorders”. Moreover, anxiety of learning a second language was defined as follows:

Language anxiety is the unease feeling, nervousness or a kind of fear due to individual’s perception in learning or using a second language. It is an expression of fear, a feeling of disturbance, an emotional conflict during specific language performing situation. (Rajitha and Alamelu (2020, p. 1054)

Thus, Rajitha and Alamelu link the language anxiety to the psychological side of the learners where they express fear and disturbance while participating.

However, interesting research highlighted the role of the teacher in enhancing speaking participation in the classroom; “teacher should be approachable, nice and frank in the classroom to provoke classroom participation or should be able to draw curiosity among students so that students will participate in classroom by asking more questions” Ghalley and Rai (2019, p. 9). Another study highlighted the role of teacher in enhancing speaking and participation was conducted by Matsuda and Gobel (2004) where students expressed the importance of the teacher’s role stating that “The teacher was very relaxed, so we too were able to relax and study” (p. 32). So, this implies that the teacher’s personality and mode can have a great impact on the classroom atmosphere. Also, the classroom atmosphere must be regularly evaluated and improved whenever possible. One





possibility is to videotape and critically analyze their own instruction to observe what is going on in the classroom from a respondent's point of view. Attending workshops, observing other teachers teaching, doing role play and facilitating group work can make a good classroom atmosphere where students are more involved and encouraged.

Riasati (2012), in his research on factors influencing willingness to speak, highlighted many factors like the task type, which is whether to speak individually, in pairs, or groups. Also, he figured out that most of the students prefer to speak either in pairs or in groups because that would make it less stressful, and they feel more comfortable than speaking individually as this one causes them to feel more anxious. Additionally, in Egyptian colleges, teaching English is still following the traditional way because many lecturers employ a teacher-centered methodology. The teacher carries out everything inside the classroom, and he does not give the students the chance to participate, and the students are just listeners. This makes the teaching process only theoretical while it should be both theoretical and practical and this, of course, hinders the students' ability to improve their English learning skills particularly their speaking as well as increases anxiety. Also, apprehension and anxiety negatively affect their ability to learn the target language and impair their performance. Since each learner has his/her own identity, the expression or severity of foreign language anxiety's symptoms may vary. Others merely want a slight suggestion, a little assistance, or a little encouragement to be able to execute with less effort and barely perceptible worry, and to be able to work more easily and without showing any symptoms of anxiousness.

Students themselves have a role in increasing or decreasing their anxiety of speaking participation. Riasati, in his study, reported that the sex of the interlocutor is a factor influencing speaking; three out of seven respondents expressed their willingness to speak with a person of their sex, two preferred to speak with the opposite sex, and one individual stated that it does not matter for him. In another study by Zeng (2010) about Chinese students' willingness to communicate in English in Canada, it was found that the Chinese students still depend on the traditional methods of EFL which in comparison with the new methods in Canadian classrooms negatively affected their willingness to speak. In addition, there are language barriers that represent challenges for students when it comes to speaking participation in the classrooms such as less exposure to the

English language, just like the case here in northwest Syria where students have very low exposure to English language, pronunciation, and lack of vocabularies, interlocutors' language deficiency. Gianna, who is a respondent in Sun's 2008 study, expressed her concern about speaking by saying; "The only thing I am not working is, past tense and future. I tend to...I tend to...mix tenses. Like present with past, past with future. I'm mostly thinking "OMG did I say the verb with -ed or OMG" (p 21).

Motivation is also another key factor that could affect speaking anxiety. In a study carried out on Chinese students by Wang (2022), the results showed that foreign language anxiety is affected by motivation like when students are motivated, they perform better than being demotivated. For example, the study on EFL students in Saudi Arabia by Ashraf (2019) who revealed that 94.73% of students stated that overcrowded classes demotivate students and prevent them from receiving enough instruction from teachers. Furthermore, 76.31% of the students wished for well-equipped classrooms and trained EFL teachers to simulate real-life situations while learning. Also, thirty-one students 81.57% stated that they were unable to grasp the teacher's instruction the thing that made them feel tensed. Moreover, twenty-eight students 73.68% stated that they struggled of lacking vocabularies while doing some tasks, and 65.78% of the students expected the lecturer to allow them to select the theme for their work on their own because they thought their assigned topic was challenging in comparison to others. In addition, 81.57% said that the members of the group should be selected by the teacher while 84.21% of the students stated that some members of their groups were reluctant to do their assigned tasks. Finally, thirty-five respondents 92.10% cited technical issues as one of the causes and key impediments to completing their duties.

Self-confidence has various roles in our life as Kanza (cited in Christie and Listyani, 2018, p. 143) reported that "Generally, self-confidence is someone's feeling of trusting and believing in his/her abilities to do things in successful way". Self-confidence has a major role in the field of learning a foreign language. Students require self-confidence as an emotional component in order to engage and take chances without fear. Additionally, it is regarded as a crucial trait that students of foreign languages should have. Students that are confident in themselves have clear objectives that they are working toward without worrying about the results. Thus, in order to inspire



pupils, teachers must always look for new and innovative approaches. Additionally, teachers must emphasize the value of confidence in pupils and support them in developing a good self-image (Hikmatullayevich, 2022).

In an interesting study carried out on English Arabic-speaking students in Saudi Arabia by Turjoman (2016) to indicate the differences among public and private schools regarding willingness to communicate, it was revealed that shyness represents 51 per cent of their unwillingness to communicate in addition to lack of language proficiency, anxiety, and lack of confidence. On the other hand, students in the private schools revealed that lack of confidence is the main factor of unwillingness to communicate at 18 per cent and shyness at 12 per cent which is lower than 51 per cent of the public-school students. In their study, Kansil, Tuna and Liando (2022), reported that the final result of their conducted research suggests that the elements that can affect the students' speaking ability, including the motivation to speak, were acknowledged by all of the respondents. The factor that affects students' self-confidence receives a high percentage of agreement from the respondents, such as students' concern about making mistakes was accepted by 90% of the respondents. Furthermore, the student's opinion concluded that student speaking skills are promoted by the way of self-confidence. From the final result of the studies conducted, it is found that the students' self-confidence has an impact on the students' speaking ability. Therefore, the researchers suggest that teachers should pay more attention to students' self-confidence in learning methods, especially their speaking potential, because students' self-confidence influences students' speaking ability. Students need to increase their self-confidence in the learning process, especially their confidence in speaking ability, because if students have excellent self-confidence, students' speaking ability can be highly increased.

Also, Japanese students in Williams and Andrade's study (2008) reported that when performing duties that required public speaking, nervousness was experienced while having to stand in front of a class and read or recite a prepared speech. In particular, the need to make a face-to-face presentation in front of the class in a small group was often cited as a source of great anxiety. The pupils in this instance felt particularly stressed because of the silent periods that happened as they struggled to come up with something to say. However, if students have to speak in small groups or pairs with

students they know well, then there is no problem at all in this case. Other prominent sources of stress were difficulty in putting one's thoughts into words, needing to use broken or plain English, committing grammatical errors, and worrying over pronunciation. Even if the teacher's question's content was comprehended, the inability to answer it was a cause of concern.

## Methodology

Several methods currently exist for the measurement of speaking anxiety like the questionnaires, interviews, observations, semi-structured interviews, and foreign language classroom anxiety scale. Among these instruments, questionnaires, structured and semi-structured interviews took place in this research.

The first tool was the questionnaire. The first section contains a short introduction and demographic information and codes distributed to respondents in order to keep confidentiality. The second section is concerned with students' opinion about statements while the last section consists of multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire was administered with English majoring students and contained simple and easy-to-understand questions so that the respondents did not find difficulty or ambiguity answering them and did not take long time as well to finish this tool. Also, it was translated into Arabic, reviewed, and edited by the researcher's supervisor to avoid confusing questions and in order not to mislead the respondents as Krosnick stated that "the more effort the respondent devotes to thinking about the questions, the more mislead or confused it appears that he or she will be" (2018, p.442).

The second tool was the structured interview, which was conducted with four teachers. Since teachers who have a good amount of information, ideas, insights about the topic under research, and long experience communicating with students, they can provide in-depth information through this tool. The researcher met a group of teachers who have several years of teaching experience among the four years of English department at Idlib university and two of them teach the speaking subject. The researcher has one-on-one meetings with them to ask questions about the topic under research using the structured interviews in informal settings to enhance the interviewer to generate information as much as possible. The research asked the teachers to select the appropriate places for them, so the interviews took



place in teachers' office and teaching hall. The tool was designed to focus on qualitative data (Kumar, 1989). Also, the researcher recorded the interviews after getting the teachers' consent so that the researcher does not miss any

information while transcribing the data.

The third tool was a semi-structured interview that was carried out with some of the students who administered the questionnaire in order to get more detailed information from them. This tool consisted of framework questions of the area of investigation and then other questions arose as the answers flew. McIntosh and Morse (2015, p. 1) stated that "The semi-structured interview (SSI) is designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced. Respondents are free to respond to these open-ended questions as they wish, and the researcher may probe these responses."

The purpose of the present research is to investigate the factors influencing speaking anxiety among English majors in Northwest Syria because English language is considered a foreign language here in this region. Thus, students possibly suffer of speaking anxiety due to their limited exposure to the English language. Based on the research purposes outlined above, the present research could therefore be classified as descriptive in nature. Meaning that, this study describes the phenomenon of speaking anxiety as well as the factors causing this anxiety. Furthermore, this descriptive study explores the situations in which students' speaking anxiety is increased or decreased.

The English literature students and instructors were the respondents in the study. There are 7 English literature instructors; all of them hold master's degrees except for only one of them who has philosophy of doctorate degree (PhD). As the number of students is high to be included in the study, the researcher took a random sample that represents all of them. The sample was chosen by going to each classroom and briefing the students about the research and the questionnaire. Thus, the researcher asked the students; who would like to take part in the questionnaire? Many of them raised their hands, but the researcher selected only the needed number of them in a random way. The total number of all respondents was 59; 27 male students, 28 female students and 4 instructors. The English department in Idlib University contains about 1150 English literature majoring students. They

must pass about 54 subjects among the four years of study in order to get their graduation certificate. The researcher sought consent from all parties; the university presidency, the dean of the faculty, the teachers, and from the students participated in the study and explained to them the objectives of the study as well as highlighted the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents that every respondent would be given a code without mentioning any name next to their answers and responses. The data was collected through questionnaire which was designed on Kobo application and the researcher took the respondents' WhatsApp numbers and sent the link of the questionnaire individually to every respondent, so they just need to click on the link and the questionnaire will open with detailed information on how to complete it. Once the respondents click on the link, they see introduction in both languages Arabic and English in addition to full explanation on how to complete each section of the questionnaire. Also, the semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted, so the researcher had 8 recorded semi-structured interviews with four male students and four female students, and each respondent was given a code so that the researcher could keep confidentiality by writing codes instead of their names while taking the notes of their recorded answers. In addition, structured interviews were implemented with 4 teachers to get data from different resources. The process of collecting the data took about one and a half months approximately. The recorded answers were analyzed by transcribing and coding them that each idea, which is relevant to the objectives of the study, was stressed. The study design is descriptive in nature. According to (Parab and Bhalerao, 2010, p.128), the descriptive study "describes the frequency, natural history and determinants of a factor/disease. It is a study to identify patterns or trends in a situation."

## Results

The results indicate that there are many factors that motivate students' speaking participation in the classroom. For example, engaging in pair/group work activities is useful because in this case the students would feel more comfortable speaking to their classmates and committing mistakes. However, speaking to the teacher would make them focus more on every single word they speak. Furthermore, they would hesitate especially if the speaking task were hard because they need to take time while speaking to think more about the correct structures and words used.



Also, speaking to people of the same gender was another factor that encourages students to speak in English Mustapha et al (2010) as they feel more comfortable than speaking to the opposite gender. In addition, when the teacher is approachable, that would motivate students as well to participate more in the classroom because they will not be afraid of criticism when they make mistakes or stutter while speaking. Furthermore, self-confidence can affect speaking participation because those who have high self-confidence can communicate more effectively and convey the ideas in a clear way as stated by one of the first-year students (LSM909):

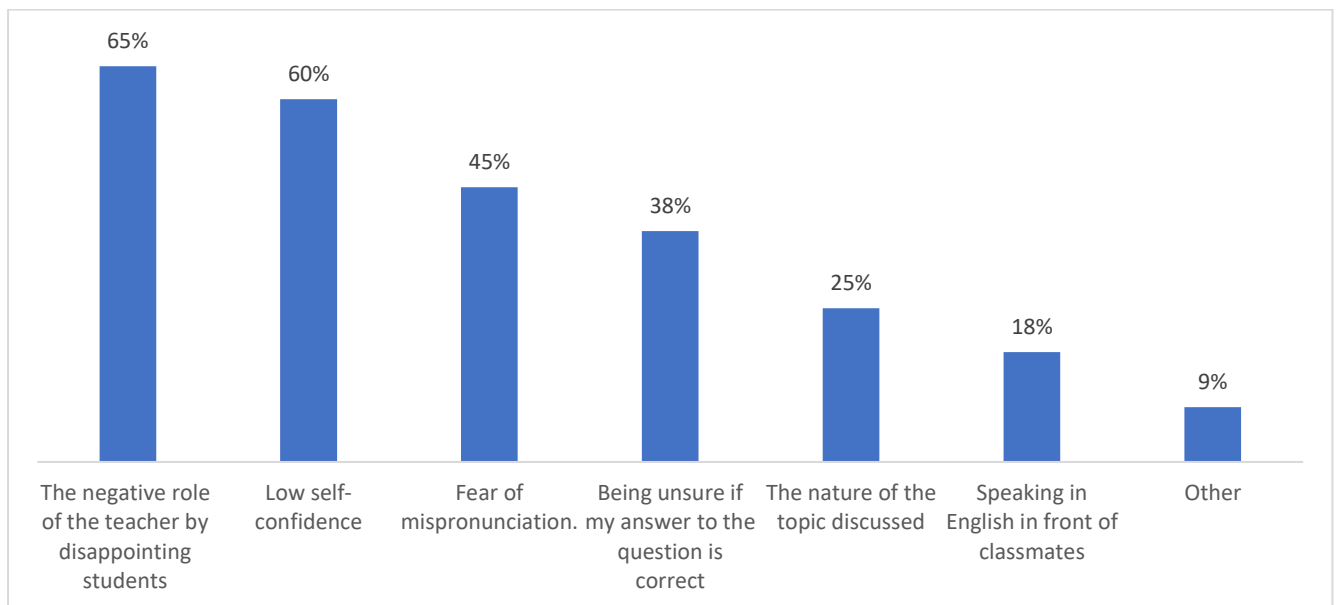
“If someone has low self-confidence, then he/she will hesitate to speak in front of others because they might tell themselves look, he/she is committing a lot of mistakes. While if someone has very good self-confidence, then he/she will throw people’s opinions behind his/her back and move forward without becoming anxious when making mistakes.”

Also, self-confidence plays an important role in motivating students and encouraging them to express and share their thoughts freely without being afraid of negative comments when they make mistakes while speaking in English. For example, of the students (LSM870) who participated in the semi-structured interviews referred to the role of self-confidence saying that:

“Of course, if you have self-confidence, you will speak and you do not care whatever once they ask you for any task to do, you are brave enough to go for it.”

On the other hand, there are many factors that deter speaking participation, as revealed by the results. For example, speaking in front of everyone demotivates students and deters them from participation in the speaking activities. Also, if the speaking task is hard then students may withdraw from participation as this will expose them to making mistakes and stammering while speaking and embarrassing themselves in front of their classmates. Another deterring factor is fear of mispronouncing words, so students expressed their points of view about their reluctance to speak because they might not pronounce some words correctly while speaking. Also, lacking grammar accuracy was another factor that deterred students

from participation in speaking activities because students feel confused, for example, when and how to use the appropriate tense during speaking. In addition, if the teacher is strict, the students would prefer not to participate in speaking because they fear being criticized or mocked or humiliated. Furthermore, teachers need to pay attention to this point which some might perceive as fostering student commitment, yes it could be so, but care should be given not to escalate it negatively. Thus, teachers need to balance strictness and flexibility. Finally, when the teachers keep correcting the students while speaking, the students become more hesitant to participate because they feel confused and embarrassed in front of their classmates, so the teachers here play a negative role and as a result, students may be less willing to participate.



**Figure 1 what factors do you think could contribute to the student's anxiety during speaking in English in the classroom?**

Figure 1 reveals that the two most prominent factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety are the negative role of the teacher in disappointing students when they give wrong answers at a percentage of 65%, and the second one is low self-confidence at 60% while the other factors declined gradually to 18% for speaking in English in front of classmates. Nevertheless, there are still other factors that the respondents

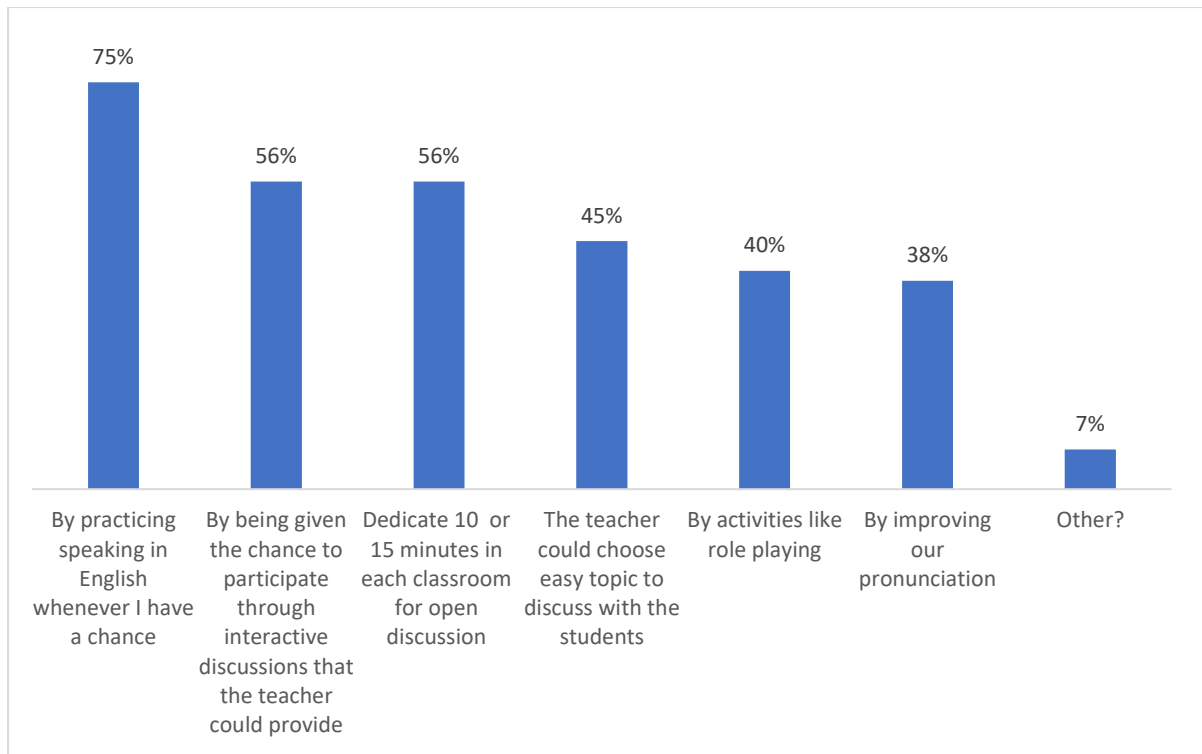




provided such as: previous weakness, discrimination by the teacher, being bullied by a classmate, forgetting some words related to the discussion, no encouragement, and having few vocabularies and idioms. Furthermore, data from structured interviews with teachers revealed additional factors, such as lack of confidence, fear of failure, social cultural differences, gender, and peer pressure among learners could lead to anxiety. There was an interesting point about teacher's understanding to students' situation by one of the teachers who took part in the interviews (5MPI2):

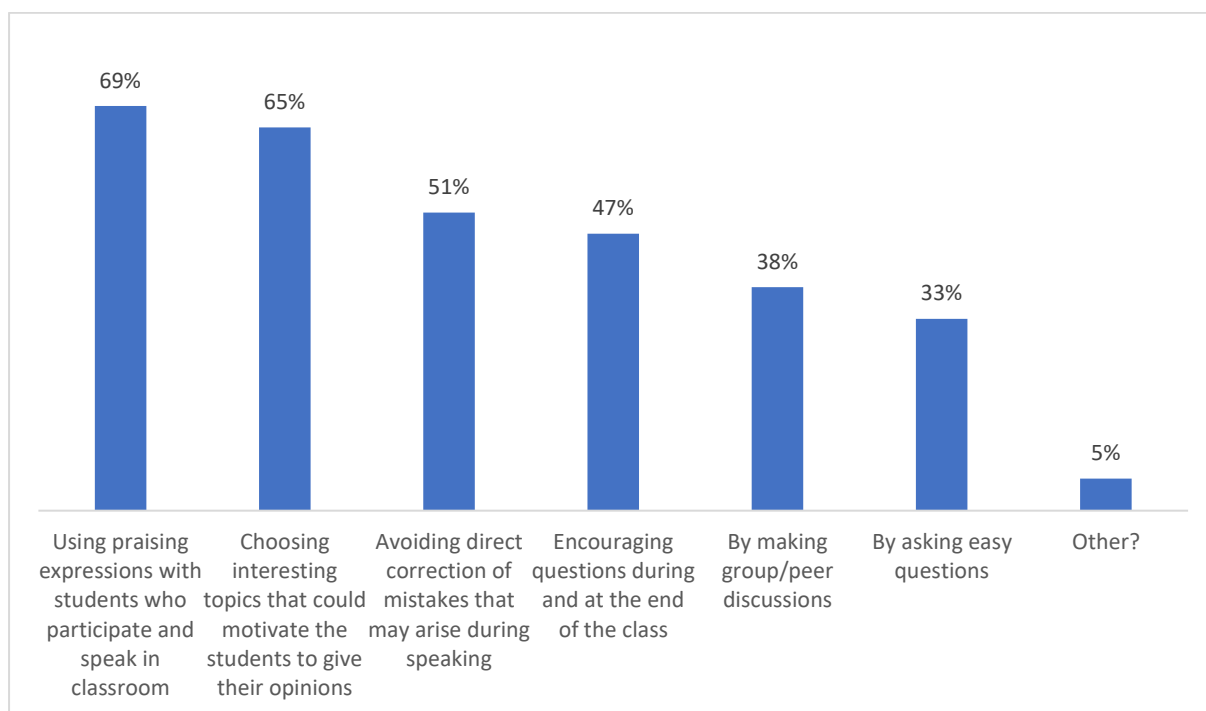
“Perhaps the students could be facing some problems at home, so good teacher tries to understand students' difficulties, perhaps they have financial problems or other problems may be emotional or social ones, so the teachers should take into consideration such type of problems and support their students in any possible way.”

So, this is in line with the psychological effect that was mentioned by Burns and Joyce (1997). This is particularly true for the students in Northwest Syria because they have experienced significant challenges due to the ongoing war that started in 2011. Moreover, the recent earthquake has further exacerbated their psychological suffering.



**Figure 2 How can you improve speaking participation in the classroom discussions?**

Figure 2 indicates that students can improve speaking participation in the classroom by following the activities shown in the chart. The highest percentage of 75% by practicing speaking in English whenever the students have the chance. The next two same percentage at 56% which was by giving the students a chance to participate and dedicate time for open discussion in the classroom. However, five students out of eight who participated in the semi-structured interviews stressed the importance of practicing English whenever they have the chance whether in classroom or outside it. Finally, the percentage gradually decreased for the other options, such as choosing easy topics, role playing and improving pronunciation. The respondents indicated the lowest percentage 7% for other activities that could motivate students include watching films and programs in English, listening to foreign songs, or reading novels and books. Furthermore, watching educational channels, preparing something before the lecture that is related to the subject, choosing a specific topic and talking about it individually with an audio recording and then listening to the audio again, so all of these can motivate students.



**Figure 3 How can the teacher contribute to encouraging speaking in the classroom?**

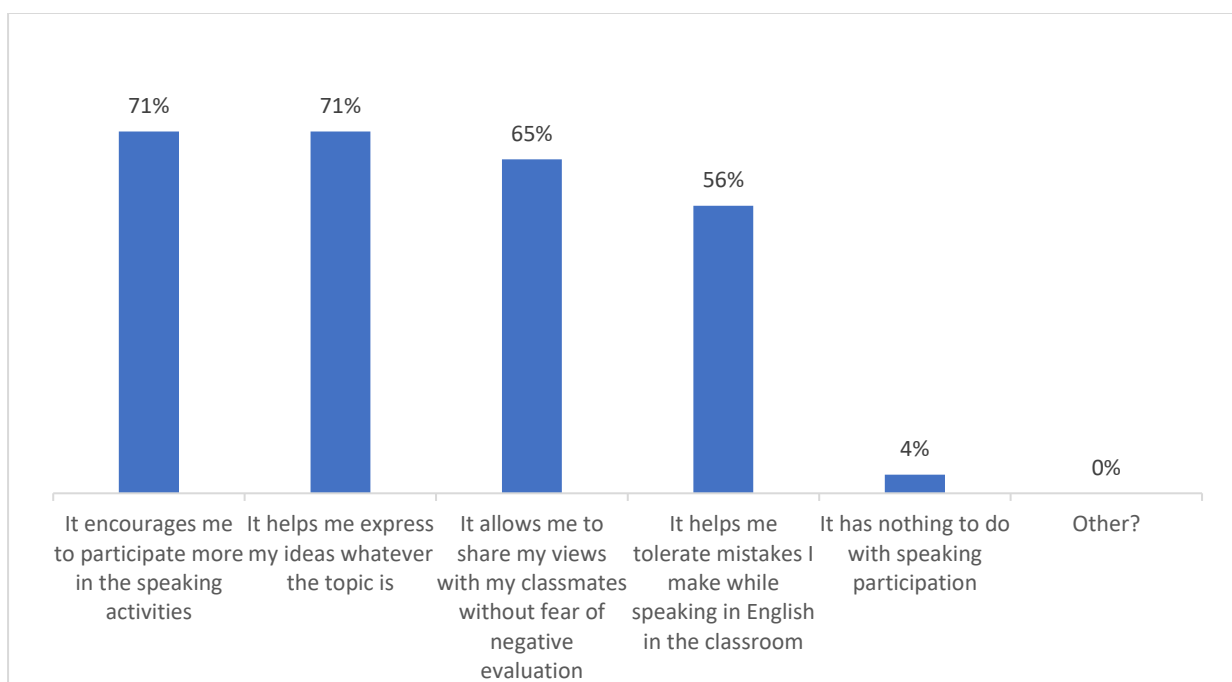
Figure 3 shows that the majority of the respondents chose the use of praising expressions 69% and the selection of interesting topic 65% by the teacher in order to encourage speaking participation in the classroom which seems to be very important for this process, and 51% chose to avoid correction while speaking, while others opted for encouraging questions during the class, making group/peer discussion and asking easy questions. Additionally, 5% of respondents suggested other options such as encouraging weak students to speak during lessons, taking into account any student's answer as providing something useful, encouraging students to challenge themselves by allowing one or two students each lecture to assume the role of the teacher and explain some ideas to their classmates. Moreover, the teachers who participated in the structured interviews shared several other points, such as role-plays, listening exercises and group discussion as stated by one teacher (5TYU2):

“Interaction through pair and group work is the keynote to steer learners’ motivation”.

Another teacher (5ARC2) stressed the importance of shadowing technique saying that:

“I usually use the shadowing technique that the student listens to the recording and say what he is listening to simultaneously, so this will increase speaking skill”.

Also, exposure to the English language, considering the limited exposure to the language in the Syrian context. In addition to, providing students with different channels that have videos or series to allow them to listen and watch the language from native speakers and implementing the communicative approach, which enhances language acquisition, as well as using small rewards like candies.



**Figure 4 What role do you think self-confidence could have in speaking participation in the classroom?**

Figure 4 shows two interesting and similar percentages at 71% for those who consider self-confidence as an encouraging factor to participate more in the speaking activities as well as helping factor to express ideas regardless of the topic. Also, there are two other percentages at 65% and 56% indicated that self-confidence allowed students to share views with their classmates and helped them tolerate mistakes while speaking. On the other hand, only 4% of respondents revealed that self-confidence is not related to speaking participation. Additionally, the students participated in the semi-structured interviews shared many other points regarding self-



confidence, such as the important role of teachers in motivating students by helping and encouraging them to speak, even if they make mistakes. However, the teachers also have a great role in demotivating the students while speaking, for example, they rebuke students when making mistakes, and they do not praise or pay them compliments when speaking correctly. Also, practicing English everywhere like at home or in the university or with friends could help boost self-confidence.

## Discussion

Many factors deterring participation in English speaking activities have been

presented in the previous sections. One possible reason for these factors could be related to previous teaching methods in primary and high school where the concentration is only on the classical grammar translation method, which focuses only on teaching grammar and vocabularies as they are the main aspects in final grade of examination as well as extensive use of Arabic language instead of English, so they neglect speaking and listening. Also, English university instructors possibly follow the grammar and translation method and the classes are almost teacher-oriented, but also they use English as a means of communication and instruction following the communicative approach, but students would prefer to use both English and Arabic languages in communication and instruction especially first-year students because it was the way they used to be taught when they were at primary and high school as one of the first-year students (LSM906) who participated in semi-structured interviews stated that:

“I feel comfortable participating in English speaking task when the teacher is friendly and talk to us using Arabic and English”.

Thus, the results indicate that students come to university to be shocked of the amount of using only English in communication and instruction during classes, and they are expected to achieve assignments, do tasks, participate in classes, and take exams in English only, so this is consistent with what has been found in a previous study by Tien (2018).

The teacher's role in enhancing speaking participation and decreasing anxiety is of high importance as the results revealed. The teacher is the leader in the classroom and students' speaking participation is highly

dependent on the teacher's methods and ways of dealing with the students whether they are encouraging or discouraging ones. So, the positive role of the teacher was highlighted in many aspects; for example, students felt comfortable in participation when the teacher was kind, nice and approachable. Also, when the teacher avoids blaming students for making mistakes, but rather encourages them to make mistakes because he/she knows that students learn from mistakes. In addition, the use of praising expressions by teachers was a great factor that encouraged students to participate in English speaking activities without feeling anxious because we as human being like to be praised and this affects our psychological side positively which in turn reflects on our speaking participation and of course on all other sides of our character. Also, the ideas shared by teachers who participated in the structured interviews (also, see figure 3) indicated that teachers like to see students participating in speaking activities and we cannot just simply place all the blame on the teachers because they, possibly most of them, do their best to provide the most effective teaching methods and information delivery to the students and they feel proud of their students when they achieve good progress in the learning process.

On the other hand, as the results suggested that students did not like to participate in speaking when the teacher was strict because, for example, when the teacher interrupts students to correct them while speaking, they feel anxious and forget the ideas they were discussing, or teachers sometimes need students to answer in a short time without giving them enough time to think, however, time is not always flexible to give in every class because teachers have limited teaching hours and they have to finish their dedicated subjects. Furthermore, some teachers tend to disappoint students by telling them that they have low level of English skills, and their English is poor and they will never achieve any progress. As a result, students hesitate to ask or participate in the classroom, and this is in line with previous studies by Matsuda and Gobel (2004).

Self-confidence represented another dominant factor that affects students' speaking anxiety in the classroom as the results demonstrated. It affects the anxiety of speaking participation positively and negatively. First, it can affect in a positive way when students have high self-confidence. Once they have such a trait, they will possibly deliver the message in a professional way and communicate comfortably. Also, they will not feel anxious in



speaking participation even if they know that they would make mistakes in grammar or pronunciation and the teacher might correct or rebuke them. Second, having low self-confidence implies that anxiety would be high when participating in speaking because students at that point tend to withdraw and not participate as they fear making mistakes whether in any part of speaking like pronunciation, vocabulary, or sentence structure. So, self-confidence affects the way students participate in speaking activities.

As the results showed, teachers play an important role in increasing or decreasing students' self-confidence while speaking, for instance, when the teachers praise and encourage students to keep going on even when the students make mistakes then this will of course increase their self-confidence, but when teachers disappoint and negatively comment on students' performance, this will decrease students' self-confidence. Moreover, students themselves play a major role in enhancing their self-confidence by practicing speaking as much as they can and whenever they have a chance because this skill cannot be developed without more practice.

## Conclusion

The main goal of this research was to describe and determine the factors influencing anxiety in speaking participation for students majoring in English at Idlib university in Northwest Syria. The study investigated three sub-objectives; the first one was about factors that encourage or discourage speaking participation in the classroom, and the second one was about the role of the teacher in enhancing speaking participation in the classroom while the last one was about how to increase students' self-confidence in order to enhance their speaking participation in the classroom. Also, this study aimed to answer the following two questions:

- What are the factors that motivate students' speaking participation in the classroom?
- What are the factors that deter classroom speaking participation?

## Recommendation

Although the current study investigated many factors influencing classroom speaking anxiety among English majors in northwest Syria, there are still many other interesting factors that can be further researched. First, further research could be on choosing the sample at specific year of study instead

of choosing it among the four years as was done in this study, or even the sample can be chosen only from advanced students or beginners' level, so that results can be varied and more specific. Second, this study can be applied to primary schools to further investigate the roots of the problem about anxiety in speaking participation, especially students here in northwest Syria do not acquire English as a foreign language but rather learn it through schools and universities' curriculum. Moreover, students in primary schools might experience more anxiety in speaking participation since their level in English is similar or lower to that of university students. Third, the teaching system is an interesting factor that can be further researched to see how it can affect the way students participate in speaking activities in different stages whether in schools or universities by investigating and exploring the teaching methods as well as the curriculum.

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