



EXPLORING THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SELF-CONFIDENCE AND SPEAKING PRACTICES AMONG BACCALAUREATE STUDENTS IN MOROCCO: A CASE STUDY OF BENI MELLAL AND KASBA TADLA HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

The research paper aims to investigate the relationship between self-confidence and speaking skills among EFL learners. It seeks to examine the extent to which various emotional and psychological aspects contribute to improvements in baccalaureate students' oral performance. Employing a quantitative approach, the study depends on an e-questionnaire administered to forty-eight EFL students from different high schools and educational backgrounds. The participants, who vary in terms of gender, include students from high schools in Beni Mellal and Kasbah Tadla. The findings demonstrate that EFL students who experience fear when speaking in the classroom tend to suffer from lower levels of self-confidence. The latter springs from various affective factors that hinder students' oral proficiency and the learning process. The results also show that feelings of shyness and uneasiness stand as the main obstacles that disrupt the development of self-confidence in speaking activities. The study, besides, reveals that the fear of giving incorrect answers represents another major factor that discourages students from engaging in oral classroom interaction. Based on the findings, the paper suggests that enhancing learners' self-confidence fosters communicative competence in English language teaching.

Keywords: EFL learners, self-confidence, speaking skills, affective factors, English language learning

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1. Introduction

Language diversity within the Moroccan education system offers students valuable opportunities to learn different languages. However, this learning process might be hampered by several challenges. A number of learners experience significant difficulties in learning English, or more precisely, in improving their speaking skills. In some cases, students remain unable to produce simple and accurate sentences despite their prolonged exposure to English. This linguistic failure stems from various personal and affective factors, including shyness, introversion and lack of self-confidence. The latter, specifically, emerges as a crucial factor that shapes learners' personality, thus influencing their linguistic competencies. A high level of self-confidence enables students to manage and overcome the negative feelings that limit their oral participation. In this respect, the research paper investigates the relationship between self-confidence and speaking practices among EFL learners. It tries to determine the extent to which self-confidence affects students' oral performance and speaking abilities inside the classroom.

To explore the issue, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- 1) Self-confidence has a positive impact on the speaking performance of baccalaureate students, and
- 2) Poor pronunciation lowers baccalaureate students' self-confidence in oral participation.

The paper attempts to identify the different aspects of self-confidence that encourage EFL students to participate orally during speaking sessions. It also aims to examine the other factors that impede the performance of EFL learners in relation to their speaking capabilities.

To achieve the aforementioned objectives, the paper addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What is the profile of EFL students who engage in oral participation in the classroom?
- 2) Why do some students tend to speak more than others in EFL classrooms?
- 3) Do fluency and pronunciation impact EFL students' performance?
- 4) What factors contribute to students' low self-confidence in EFL classrooms?

The paper seeks to provide answers to these inquiries through the analysis and discussion of the findings.

2. Literature Review

Self-confidence underlies the dynamics of the learning atmosphere, standing as a fundamental element in effective teaching and learning. This educational effectiveness depends on learners' psychological aspects. Hence, the process of second language acquisition is supposed to take into account the "*emotional side of human behavior*", which represents the "*affective domain*" (Brown, 2000, p.139). Such an affective dimension

contains a range of internal determinants that shape the success of learning activities, factors that significantly contribute to students' linguistic development. Lawrence (2001) argues that *"sustained high self-esteem is dependent on internal factors such as feelings of confidence and personal integrity"* (p. 21). In other words, learners' affectivity, or rather their intrinsic personality, strongly influences the learning process. Therefore, several variables, including anxiety, attitudes and inhibition, support the need to consider *"the emotional side of human behavior in the second language learning process"* (Brown, 2000, p. 139).

Every single human being adopts a particular mode of thinking, a way of handling problems, and a strategy for dealing with fears and stress. Such cognitive and affective techniques help to alleviate the burden of difficult experiences by creating a symbolic relaxing space, or rather a comfort zone. The human mind feels at ease with familiar and repetitive experiences. This redundant consistency allows it to internalize activities and situations, changing them into ordinary routines. Such internalization advances consistency and steadiness, making habitual actions steady and familiar. This consistency places habitual performances within the dimensions of the comfort zone. The latter nurtures positive feelings and attitudes, promoting the development of self-confidence. As Burton & Platts (2017) stress, *"The sense of feeling confident inside comes with increased practice and familiarity with what you do"* (p. 11). Accordingly, familiarity and repeated practice establish the foundation for the emergence of self-confidence.

People often fear leaving their comfort zones, hesitating to cross the psychological boundaries that provide them with mental security. This reluctance to explore the unknown emanates from a lack of self-confidence. Said otherwise, fearful and anxious individuals, according to C. Kelley (2016), avoid stepping outside the limits of the comfort zone. Low levels of self-esteem and other negative feelings prevent them from overcoming the fear of change. However, Palmer & Cooper (2010) indicate that people could defy the negative perceptions they have about themselves by visualizing themselves in frightening situations. Hence, it is necessary to possess a certain degree of self-confidence in order to move beyond familiar boundaries. As C. Kelley (2016) believes, *"With genuine self-confidence, you can do anything; without it, you can do nothing but fall prey to your most desperate fears"* (p. 31).

Such affective aspects as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety are meant to establish a comfortable framework in which the teaching-learning process takes place effectively. Learners who are highly motivated make more effort to learn the target language, compared to the less motivated learners who struggle to engage in the learning process. Self-motivated learning relies on motivation and confidence as substantial and critical factors in school life. Motivated learners tend to discover new sets and systems of communication easily as they possess a strong passion for learning; said otherwise, *"with proper motivation, the learner may become an active investigator of the nature of the language to be learned"* (Rubin, 1975, p. 43). Nurturing motivation and interest in the EFL context require a *"vivid conception"* of the target language (Jespersen, 2007, p. 8). Nevertheless,

maintaining such positive feelings and attitudes seems to be a challenging task because learning a second language is a *“lifelong process”* (G. Donald & E. Kneale, 2001, p. 1).

Anxiety and confidence emerge as intersected and intertwined concepts. Low self-confidence increases the level of anxiety; the latter, on the other hand, decreases the feeling of confidence and thus prevents learners from demonstrating their abilities. D. Brown (2000) claims that *“no successful cognitive or affective activity can be carried out without some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of yourself, and belief in your own capabilities for that activity”* (p. 143). High self-confidence allows students to build a positive perception of themselves. Said otherwise, valorizing one’s values and qualities underpins self-esteem. M. Schab (2013) suggests, *“When you have a strong sense of self-worth, you understand and accept your weaknesses, and you appreciate and celebrate your strengths”* (p. 3). Self-esteem, however, starts to decrease as soon as people decide to compare themselves with others.

Self-confidence is not considered an innate or inborn quality possessed by particular human beings. It is, rather, a learned quality that learners can develop when they are motivated to achieve a certain educational objective. It is a major factor that allows people to demonstrate their hidden talents and capabilities. In this respect, Carnegie (1956) explains, *“Anyone can develop his latent capacity if he has sufficient desire to do so”* (p. 4). Self-confidence facilitates the process of learning a foreign language and helps learners enhance their speaking skills. This oral proficiency depends on the act of speaking itself, or rather on building self-confidence through active oral participation. Carnegie (1956) further clarifies, *“The first way, the last way, the never-failing way to develop self-confidence in speaking is-to speak. Really, the whole matter finally simmers down to but one essential: practice, practice, practice”* (p. 12). Continuous speaking practice, in brief, establishes the groundwork for stronger communicative competence and higher levels of confidence.

Speaking is the act of producing oral words and verbal sentences. This uttering process manifests as a key element in language learning since it is necessary for EFL learners to speak and participate as much as they can in EFL classrooms. Learners are required to engage in oral participation due to the lack of opportunities to practice their English outside the classroom. Oral practice enables students to develop their speaking skills and demonstrate an adequate level of language mastery. This active oral engagement allows them to experience and nurture the feeling of confidence, unlike learners who hesitate to speak in the classroom and choose to remain orally inactive.

Willis (2008) postulates:

“Many students build their listening vocabulary before they are ready to speak [...] As students begin to respond with one-word answers and receive approval and encouragement, they will become more confident about expanding their answers into complete sentences.”
(Willis, 2008, p. 89)

Learners' self-confidence is reinforced by the positive feedback of the teacher. The latter contributes to the augmentation of self-confidence by providing encouraging reactions. Pronunciation also affects the degree of learners' self-confidence. Szyszka (2017) mentions that *"while proper L2 pronunciation may make a learner more confident, less perfect articulation may lead to a lack of confidence and fear of negative evaluation linked to anxiety"* (p. 2). Accordingly, poor pronunciation seems to significantly influence the cognitive and personal development of EFL learners. It not only impedes the development of self-confidence but also increases the feeling of anxiety and thus disrupts the learning process.

3. Materials and Methods

The paper explores the significance of such affective factors as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence in the EFL context. These cognitive and emotional elements promote not only learners' linguistic skills but also their overall academic performance. The section highlights the research hypotheses, variables, and questions that are meant to narrow the field of research and identify its limitations. It also uncovers the sample population, the research approach and the instrument that were used in the data collection. The paper, as mentioned before, aims to enquire into the dynamics of the relationship between self-confidence and speaking skills. Such a relation revolves around the following hypotheses: Self-confidence has a positive impact on the speaking performance of baccalaureate students, and poor pronunciation lowers baccalaureate students' self-confidence in oral participation. The paper, in this regard, tries to provide answers to these questions:

- 1) What is the profile of EFL students who orally participate in the classroom?
- 2) Why do some students speak more often than others in the EFL classrooms?
- 3) Do fluency and pronunciation impact EFL students' performance?
- 4) What are the reasons behind students' low self-confidence in the EFL classroom?

In response to the aforementioned questions, the research employs a quantitative approach that measures the data numerically. This method facilitates the process of conducting an objective analysis of the sample under study. It adopts an online questionnaire that includes thirteen multiple-choice questions, in addition to one open question that encourages the respondents to express their thoughts and opinions freely. In totality, the questionnaire contains fourteen questions that target the subject of inquiry. Besides, the study has two variables. The independent variable is the degree of self-confidence that tremendously differs from one EFL student to another. On the other hand, the dependent variable is the actual oral performance of EFL learners inside the classroom.

Forty-eight baccalaureate students answered the questionnaire. Thirty-two respondents were female, whereas the remaining eighteen participants were male. Regarding age, the majority of the EFL students were seventeen years old. Besides, the participants belonged to three different high schools: Mohamed V High School and Ibn Sina High School in Beni Mellal, as well as Molay Rachid High School in Kasbah Tadla.

The research paper opts for both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The former manifests itself in the unrestricted inclusion of age and gender. The latter is used to determine students' proficiency levels and to guide the selection of high schools. This intentional choice springs from several considerations. First, both Ibn Sina High School and Moulay Rachid High School provide literary and scientific stream programs; the difference between the two high schools lies in their geographical location. However, Mohamed V High School offers technical stream subjects associated with information technology.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Background of Participants

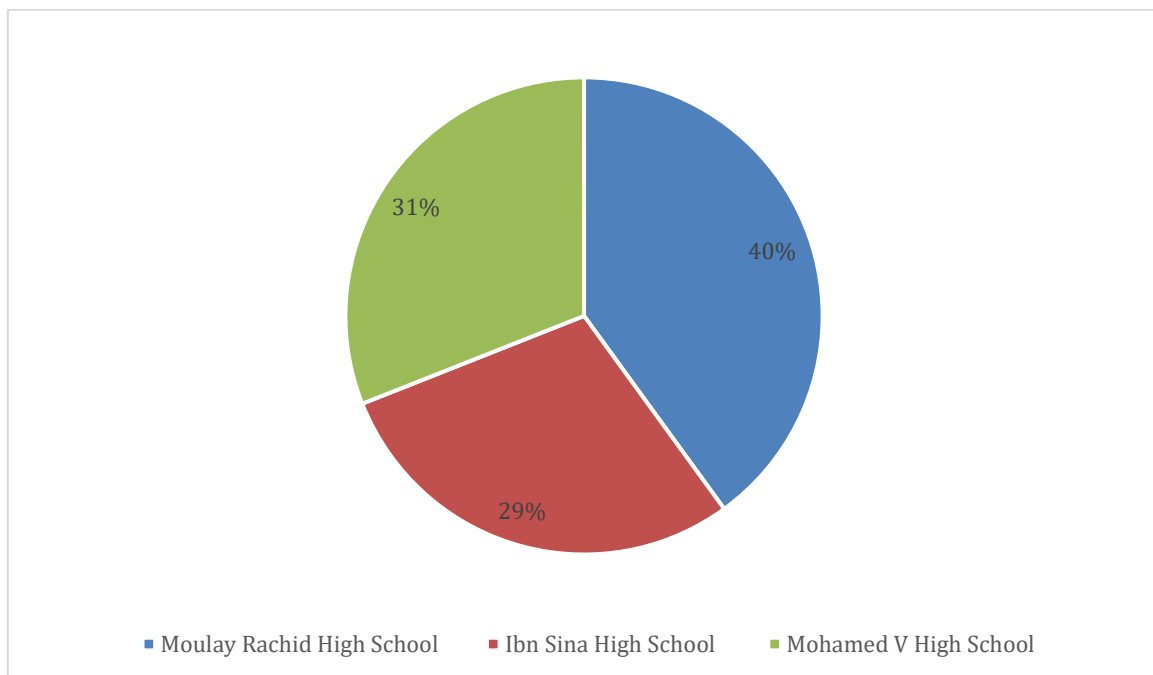


Chart 1: Percentage Distribution of Participating High Schools

4.1.1 Gender

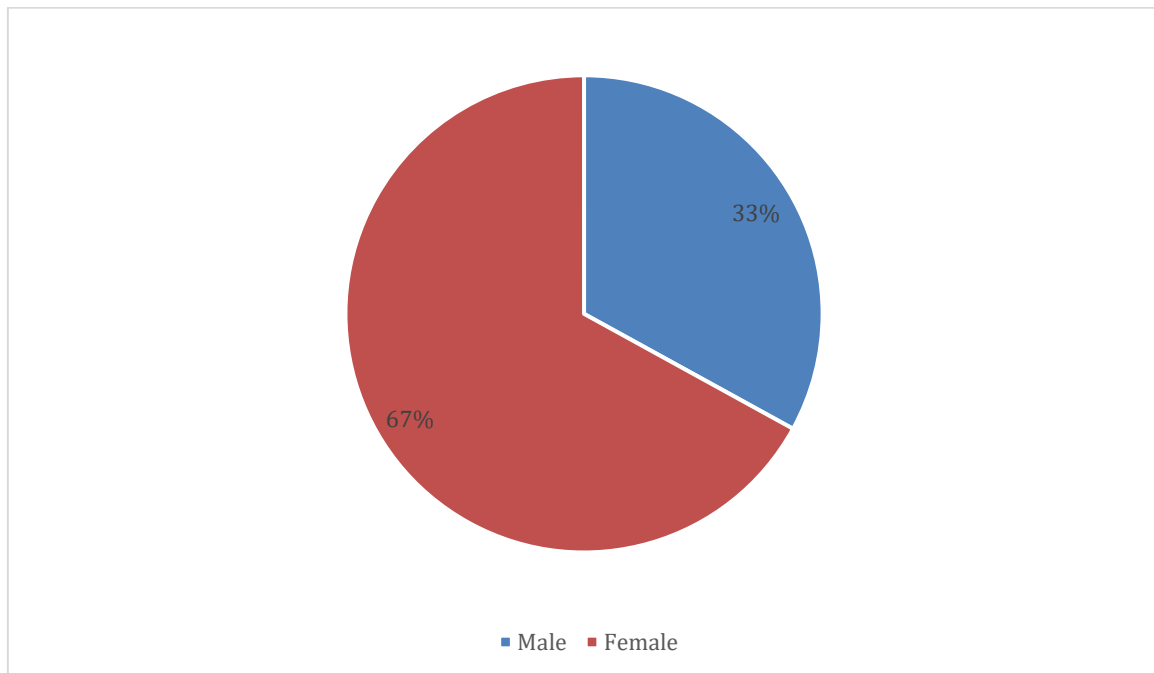


Chart 2: Gender Distribution of Participants

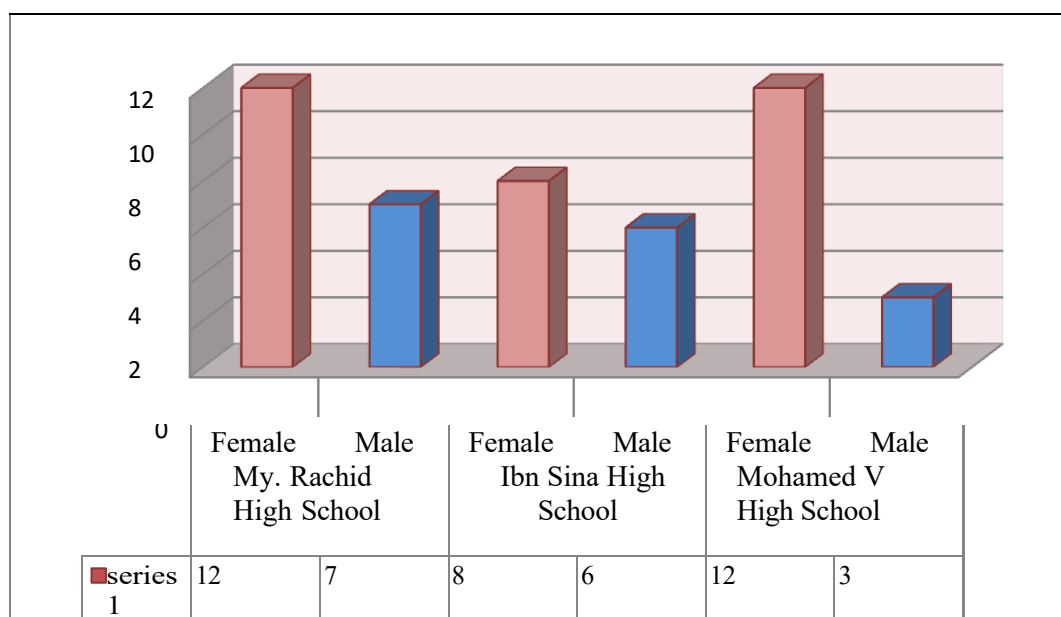


Chart 3: Distribution of Participants across High Schools

4.1.2 Age

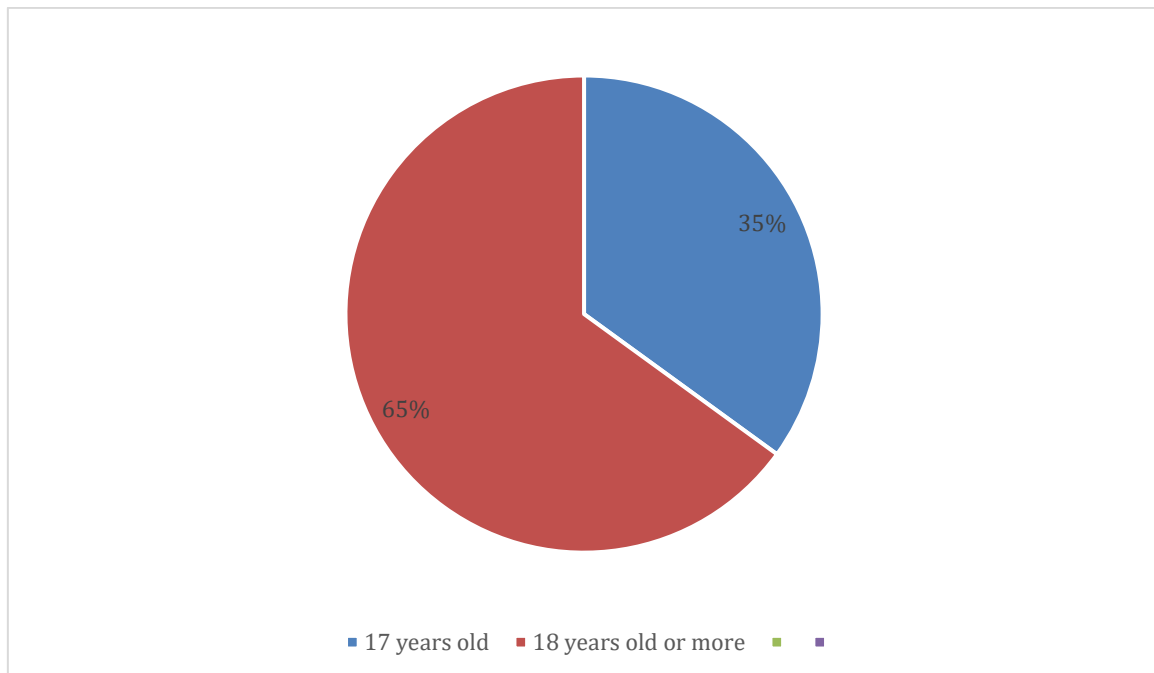


Chart 4: Participants' Age Distribution

4.1.3 Years of Studying English

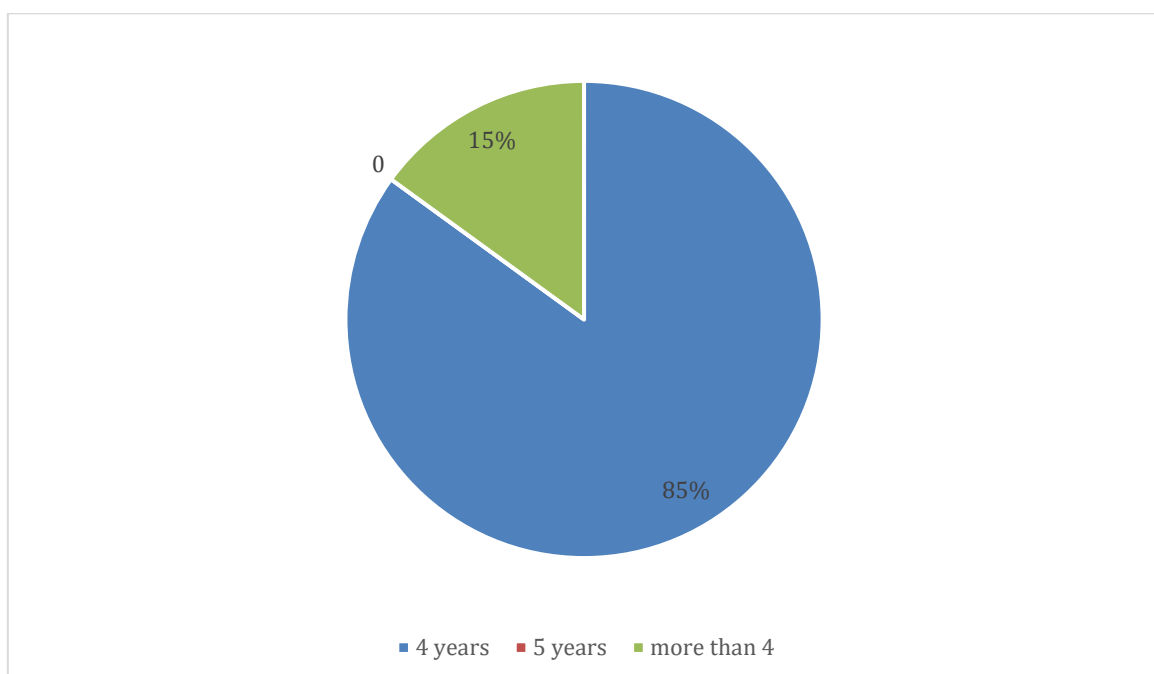


Chart 5: Duration of English Language Study

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Results of the e-Questionnaire

5.1.1 Result 1: Students' Responses on Oral Participation

Table 1: Results of the First Category of Questions

	Yes	Sometimes	No
I feel comfortable participating orally.	23	16	9
I can replace words or expressions if I am stuck.	20	10	18
I am bullied because of an incorrect answer.	14	18	16
I can do what my classmates can do in the classroom.	14	9	25

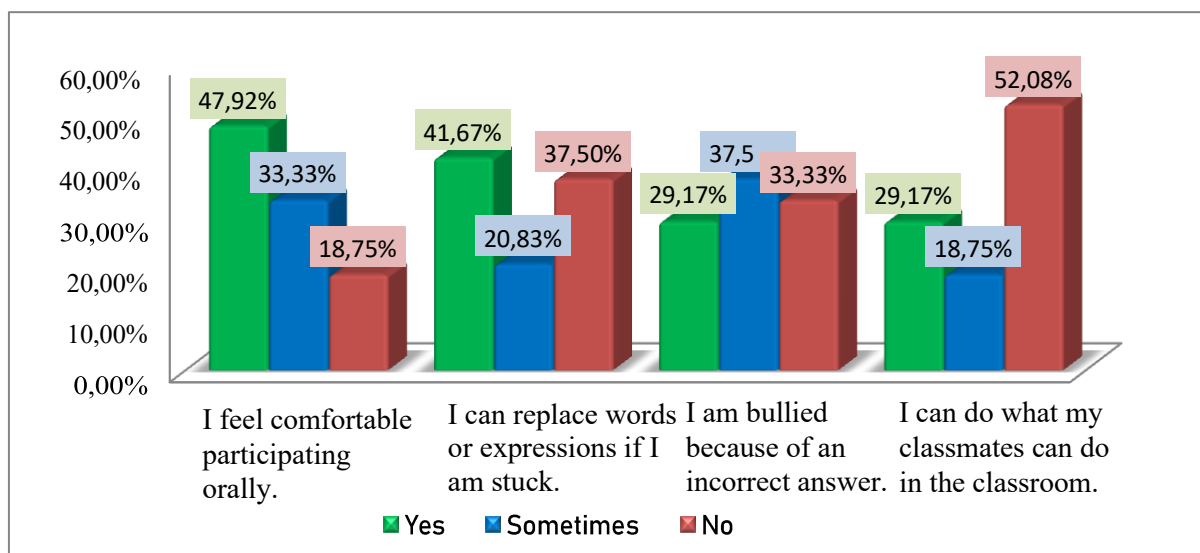


Chart 6: Percentage of Students' Participation in EFL Classrooms

5.1.2 Result 2: Variables Affecting Students' Speaking Performance

Table 2: Results of the Second Category of Questions

	Yes	Sometimes	No
Whenever I know the answer of a question, I participate.	29	11	8
I ask questions if I do not understand a part / some parts of the lesson.	14	9	25
As a student, I underestimate myself.	17	8	23
I have got more good qualities than bad ones.	7	17	24
I feel that I do not belong in my classroom.	24	11	13
I avoid participation so as not to be bullied.	17	12	19

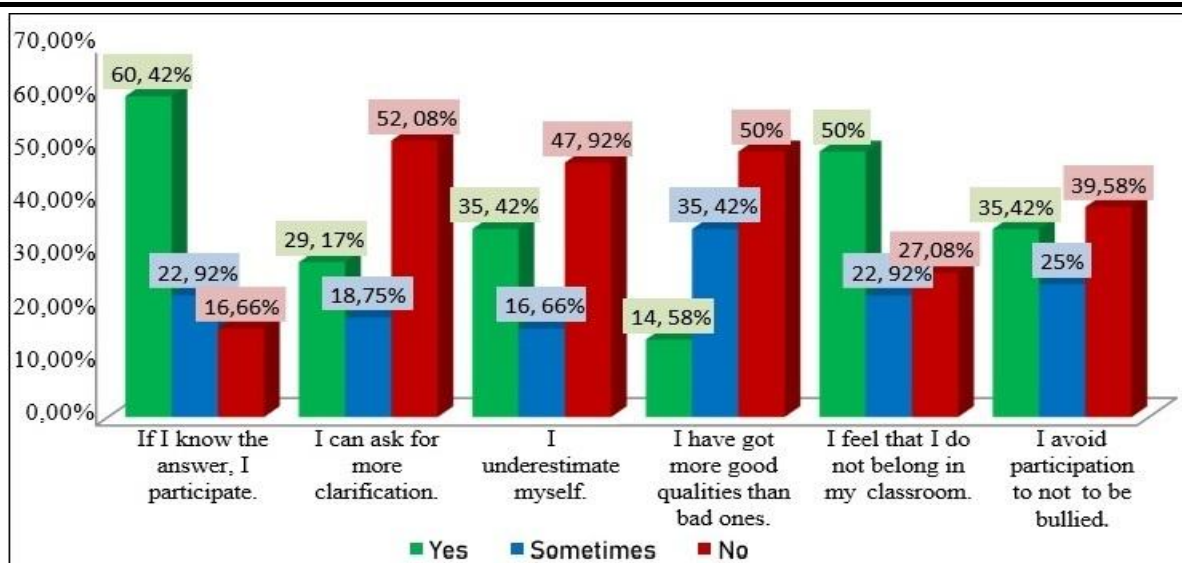


Chart 7: Elements Affecting Students' Speaking Performance in Percentage

5.1.3 Result 3: Impact of Fluency and Pronunciation on Students' Performance

Table 3: Results of the Third Category of Questions

	Yes	Sometimes	No
I speak in the classroom because I feel that my pronunciation is good.	20	8	20
I express my ideas freely in front of my classmates in / outside the classroom.	19	9	20
I feel afraid of making mistakes when I speak in the classroom.	24	18	6

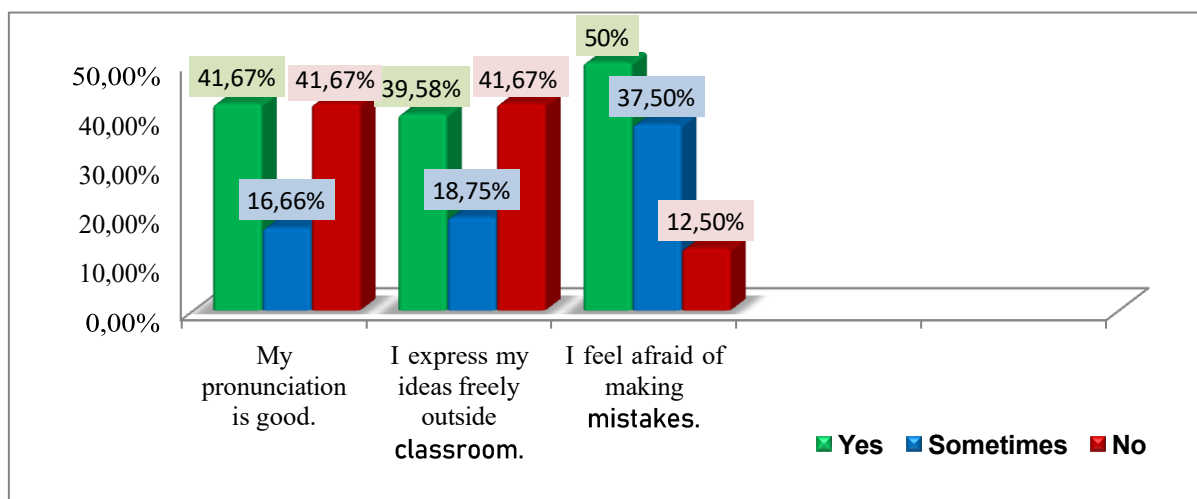


Chart 8: Students' Answers on Fluency and Pronunciation in Percentage

5.1.4 Result 4: Causes of Poor Speaking Performance

Table 6: Factors behind Students' Non-Participation

Causes of Poor Speaking Performance	Respondents' Number
Shy / Not comfortable	16
Fear of failure / Wrong answer	8
Pronunciation	4
Bullying	2

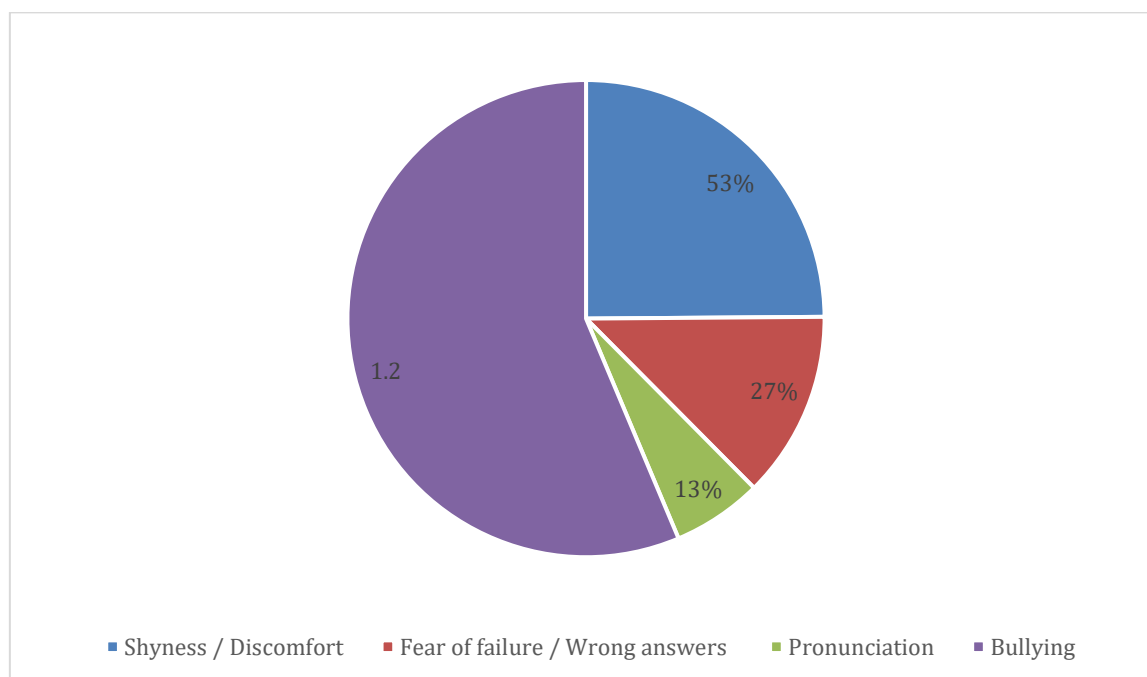


Chart 9: Percentage Distribution of Reasons for Students' Non-Participation

6. Discussion of the Questionnaire's Findings

6.1 Discussion of the First Category of Questions' Results

The questions explore the profile of students who participate orally in EFL classrooms. The findings demonstrate that the majority of learners who speak English fluently have prior knowledge of the language and a considerable vocabulary repertoire. These elements allow them to improve their oral performance. Willis (2008) believes that vocabulary development lies at the core of speaking practices. Additionally, the results reveal the extent to which competition and comparison inside the classroom affect EFL students' self-confidence and thus their speaking practices. Learners who do not seem to be as competent and active as their classmates hesitate to participate and speak less in the classroom. In this regard, Schab (2013) stresses the role of comparison in generating low self-esteem among students.

6.2 Discussion of the Variables Affecting Students' Speaking Performance

The questions in the second category determine the affective side that influences the speaking practices of EFL learners. The results indicate that both students who remain silent even if they know the correct answer and those who do not ask for more clarification when the lesson is unclear are less motivated to engage in the learning process. Donald & Kneale (2001) identify self-motivation as a key factor in language learning. The results also demonstrate that EFL learners who lack motivation constantly underestimate themselves. They perceive themselves as low-achievers. This lack of self-confidence prevents them from actively participating in different speaking activities. In brief, a high degree of self-confidence and motivation leads to a successful learning process and an efficient speaking practice, as Krashen (1982) suggests.

6.3 Discussion of the Impact of Fluency and Pronunciation on Students' Performance

The present discussion explores the impact of fluency and pronunciation on EFL students' performance. The results, on the one hand, show that good pronunciation helps EFL learners to express themselves confidently and speak English fluently. On the other hand, the results demonstrate that bad pronunciation significantly decreases learners' self-confidence and speaking performance. Half of the participants express a certain lack of confidence about their pronunciation and fluency. This internal doubt prevents them from engaging in various speaking activities. The results also reveal that a large number of EFL learners avoid speaking and participating in the classroom as they fear making oral mistakes. Therefore, pronunciation strongly affects the speaking practices within the EFL classroom. It either contributes to the development of EFL students' profile or lowers their self-confidence and thus their speaking skills, as Szyszka (2017) argues.

6.4 Discussion of the Fourth Category of Questions' Results

The result of this section reveals that the majority of students who do not participate in the speaking sessions experience shyness-related discomfort. This timidity triggers uneasiness in the learning context as it discourages learners from engaging in the speaking activities. Furthermore, many learners are unable to express themselves in the classroom because they worry about committing mistakes. These concerns and anxieties that characterize students' personalities spring from the fear of exploring the unknown and the unfamiliar. Learners hesitate to take part in speaking tasks because they feel insecure about stepping outside their comfort zone. Their low level of self-confidence prevents them from moving beyond the boundaries of their psychological safety area, as C. Kelley states (2016).

7. Recommendations

The paper proposes several recommendations about the importance of self-confidence in EFL contexts. It calls for the creation of a supportive and safe environment that reduces

learners' shyness and anxiety. It invites teachers to encourage their students to engage in oral participation through varying learning tasks. It also urges them to adopt interactive teaching strategies, including group discussion and role-plays, to increase students' speaking opportunities. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need to offer positive feedback to students to decrease their fear and hesitation. Teachers are required to consider learners' affective, emotional and psychological needs while promoting collaborative learning. They should arrange extracurricular activities that enable students to practice English in an anxiety-free setting. Finally, the paper highlights the necessity of more research on the correlation between psychological factors and language learning in different educational contexts.

8. Conclusion

The research paper investigates the complex relationship between speaking practices and self-confidence in the EFL context. It seeks to assess the extent to which self-confidence improves or hinders the oral performance of baccalaureate students in the classroom. The findings reveal that such affective factors as shyness, anxiety, demotivation and lack of confidence negatively influence learners' oral performance and communicative competence. Accordingly, improving speaking proficiency and encouraging active engagement in ELT classrooms require enhancing students' self-confidence which emerges as a crucial element in the educational context. The first section of the paper, the literature review, offers a concise overview of the theoretical accounts that examine the role of affective factors in the teaching-learning process. The second section outlines the methodology of the research paper, presenting the sample population, research approach, research instruments, data collection procedures, research variables, research hypotheses and research questions. The third section presents and discusses the findings of the study, revealing the various responses of EFL students and their distinct attitudes towards speaking practices within the classroom. It further interprets the results in the light of relevant theories, aiming to test the proposed research hypotheses. This verification process results in confirming the validity of the first hypothesis, which states that self-confidence has a positive impact on the speaking performance of baccalaureate students. It, conversely, leads to the rejection of the second hypothesis, which suggests that poor pronunciation reduces baccalaureate students' self-confidence in oral participation.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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