

Speak Up: Overcoming Anxiety and build Confidence Through Public Speaking Activities (a Middle School case study)

تكلم بثقة : التغلب على القلق وبناء الثقة بالنفس من خلال أنشطة الخطابة (دراسة حالة في مرحلة التعليم المتوسط)

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الملخص:

تُعَدّ الخطابة أمام الجمهور من أكثر المهارات تمكينًا للشباب، إذ تعزز التواصل والتعبير عن الذات والثقة بالنفس. غير أن تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الليبية لا يزال يتسم بالاعتماد على الطرق القائمة على القواعد، والتي تقدم دعمًا محدودًا للممارسة الشفهية المؤدية إلى خطابي صفيّ مُنظَّم. وتواجه الطالبات، على وجه الخصوص، تحديات اجتماعية وثقافية إضافية لإثبات أنفسهن أمام الجمهور، مما يرفع من مستوى القلق التواصل لديهن.

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى بحث أثر التدخل التدريسي في مستويات الثقة بالنفس، وقلق الخطابة، والقلق العام لدى طالبات المرحلة الإعدادية في ليبيا. تم تطبيق منهجية بحثية مزيجية (كمية ونوعية) على عينة مكونة من 60 طالبة قُسمن إلى مجموعتين: تجريبية وضابطة. خضعت المجموعة التجريبية لبرنامج تدخل استمر 8 أسابيع تضمن مهام تحدث متدرجة الصعوبة، بينما تلقت المجموعة الضابطة تعليمًا تقليديًا.

جُمِعت البيانات بواسطة استبانة قبلية وبعديّة (تتألف من 15 فقرة وفق مقياس ليكرت موزعة على أربعة مجالات) بالإضافة إلى خمسة أسئلة مفتوحة. ولتحليل البيانات، تم

استخدام اختبارات "ت" (t-tests) للعينات المترابطة والمستقلة، وتحليل التباين المصاحب (ANCOVA)، وحساب حجم الأثر، إلى جانب التحليل المحتوئي الموضوعي للإجابات النوعية.

أظهرت النتائج تحسناً جوهرياً لدى المجموعة التجريبية بين الاختبارين القبلي والبعدي؛ إذ ارتفعت مستويات الثقة بالنفس، وانخفض الخوف من الخطابة والقلق العام، كما ازداد وعي الطالبات بأن التحدث مهارة مكتسبة. وصوّرت المحاور النوعية تحولاً من الخوف والقلق إلى الثقة والنمو، وهو ما ارتبط بتشجيع الأقران والمعلمين. وتخلص الورقة البحثية إلى أن مهام التحدث يمكن استخدامها بفاعلية مع الطلاب الليبيين في مرحلة المبكرة ضمن سياق تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبية (EFL)، مع تقديم توصيات تربوية وسياداتية ذات صلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخطابة أمام الجمهور أو «الإلقاء». ، الثقة بالنفس، القلق التواصل، التعليم في ليبيا، المراهقات.

Speak Up: Overcoming Anxiety and build Confidence Through Public Speaking Activities (a Middle School case study)

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Abstract

Speaking in public is known to be one of the most powerful skills that young people can acquire, promoting communication as well as confidence and strength, but in Libyan schools, the teaching of English is still characterized by grammar-based methods that provide limited support for oral practice conducive to structured classroom discourse. Female students, for example, often confront added cultural and social challenges to assert themselves in public, which, in turn, increases their communication apprehension. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of government on the confidence, public speaking anxiety, and general anxiety levels of Libyan middle school girls. A mixed-methods study was implemented with 60 students in experimental and control groups. The experimental group received an 8-week intervention of incremental

difficulty speaking tasks, whereas the control group received traditional instruction. Data were collected by a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire (15 Likert items in four domains) and five open-ended questions. Paired and independent-samples t-tests, ANCOVA, effect size computations, and thematic content analysis of the qualitative responses were conducted. Results demonstrated substantial gains for the experimental group from pre to post-test: confidence increased; public speaking fear and general anxiety declined, as did student awareness that speaking is a learned activity. Qualitative themes depicted transformation from fear and anxiety to confidence and growth, and were associated with peer and teacher encouragement. The paper finally suggests that speaking tasks can be effectively used with young Libyan students in the EFL context, providing pedagogical and policy implications.

Keywords: public speaking, confidence, communication apprehension, Libyan education, female adolescents

1. Introduction

Public speaking is one of the most difficult yet necessary skills for young students to master in our global society. Being able to articulate a thought clearly and forcefully to an audience is not just a skill for school and work; it is also a skill of life and upward mobility. Nevertheless, a wide range of reports has indicated that public speaking anxiety is one of the more prevalent anxieties, especially among young people, and has considerable adverse effects on self-esteem, classroom participation, and learning achievement (Chen, 2024; Gallego et al., 2022; Reeves et al., 2021). For middle school students in a country where English is not the primary language, it presents a different set of challenges, including linguistic insecurity, few opportunities for honest communication, and cultural factors that hinder oral participation (Yahaya et al., 2021; Ying et al., 2021). Tackling these issues in the early years would become important to ensure that students have the confidence and tenacity to meet academic and social challenges.

The Libyan education system, as in many other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, is also known to focus on grammar-based teaching and rote learning in English language teaching (Boufarrag, 2021; Dow Sultan, 2024). Although this method allows for teaching structure, it does not always take advantage of chances to let students

practice speaking in a natural approach, rather than studying from books. Consequently, a lot of elementary-level students go on to secondary education with little oral proficiency and are often afraid of speaking English in public (Omar & Othman, 2025; Tawir & Bin Baharum, 2024). Not only does this lack of confidence in communication skills hinder educational achievement, but it also limits wider participation in cultural and civic life. It has been found in international studies that incorporating public speaking practice into a course (short speech, debate, role play, and peer presentation) reduced apprehension of communication, which led to an increase in confidence and more positive attitudes towards language learning (López & César, 2023; Mphahlele & Tandlich, 2025). Evidence is, however, limited regarding such interventions in the Libyan setting, especially among middle school and female students.

Although the significance of interaction in education is well known, hardly any studies have investigated the impact of public speaking on young Libyan learners. Most of the previous corpus-based research in the region has centered on language learning and grammar-driven teaching, while oral skills development, the building of confidence, and the psychological barriers influencing classroom participation have been somewhat overlooked. It is especially pronounced in adolescent girls, who may have fewer chances to hone oracy skills as social norms are continued to be shaped under patriarchal frameworks. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of structured public speaking experiences on Libyan female middle school students, with emphasis on three variables: confidence, fear of public speaking, and anxiety. The research aims to provide evidence about whether communicative tasks in the classroom can contribute to creating better learner attitudes and lowering affective filters that close doors.

The contribution of this study is to both the practice and the educational research fields. Functionally, it emphasizes basic, inexpensive strategies that can be incorporated by teachers in standard curricula to facilitate oral communication skills. Theoretically, it contributes to an understanding of communication apprehension and adolescent learning in a North African context and informs future cross-cultural research in comparable educational settings. Four research questions guide the study:

- How effective is public speaking in raising self-reported confidence among Libyan female middle school students?

- What is the impact of public speaking activities on public speaking anxiety compared to a control condition?
- How does participation in public speaking activities relate to students' general anxiety?
- How do individuals report their experiences of participating in debate?

By addressing these questions, the paper presents evidence on the ways in which straightforward but structured classroom-based activities may empower learners in resource-poor settings, but it also offers culturally specific contributions to the international literature on communication apprehension and language learning.

2. Literature Review

Public speaking is a complex phenomenon with a significant impact on students' personal development and academic success. This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to public speaking in education, communication anxiety, adolescent empowerment, and the Libyan educational system. It explores how participating in public speaking can improve the communication, self-esteem, leadership, and critical thinking skills of adolescents. Significant issues related to communication apprehension and communication anxiety, particularly in second language classrooms, and their interactions with student confidence. This chapter also looks at early adolescence as a stage of development, with identity issues, peer pressure, and gender dimensions, especially with regard to the challenges faced by female learners in public expression. The Libyan context is finally juxtaposed, and the existing English language teaching practices, social culture, and regional research deficit in the area of Structured public speaking interventions (SPSIs) are detailed. The following are the primary subheadings of the chapter: Educational significance of public speaking; Theories and effects of communication apprehension and anxiety; Adolescent development and building up confidence; The Libyan educational system and regional comparison; Summary of results and gaps in research.

2.1. Public Speaking and Its Educational Importance

There is a significant role for public speaking as it relates to education, both in a communication skills sense and as a developmental tool. In a

formal study setting, it is typically identified as the controlled practice of speaking to a group of listeners for the purpose of informing, persuading, or entertaining (Carnegie & Esenwein, 2017). It does not usually occur spontaneously, is prepared in advance, and forces students to order and adjust their thoughts to the audience. Activities within the classroom, like debates, presentations, or speeches, are considered structured opportunities that would help in developing these skills and practice them. Moreover, these days, Oral Presentations have been introduced in many curricula not only as exercises but also as exams, recognizing that through Public Speaking, communicative and cognitive skills are developed (Tridinanti, 2018). Thus, it can be claimed that public speaking is simultaneously a process of preparation and practice and also a performance of communicating with peers or a wider audience.

One of the most significant advantages of public speaking in education is that it gives way to good communication skills (Bylkova et al., 2021; Jean-Pierre et al., 2023). Pupils who regularly participate in guided speaking activities hone their power of expression, speaking clearly and persuasively in a structured way (Jean-Pierre et al., 2023). Public speaking also involves the adaptation of language, tone, and physicality to the situation, thereby developing linguistic flexibility. In these ways, repeated practice develops fluency, lexical depth, and overall oral proficiency in ways that can be carried over to larger academic and social contexts (Tridinanti, 2018). In this respect, the practice of preparing and delivering oral communication is reflective of the architecture of good writing, offering students repeated practice for organizing thoughts, anticipating particular questions, and directly responding in time.

Also, the practice of public speaking can enable self-confidence, a well-known phenomenon. Now, talking in front of a group of peers can be daunting, especially for young people; however, successful speaking opportunities also have a significant impact on a student's feeling of accomplishment and value (Ebrahimi et al., 2019; Ferreira Marinho et al., 2017). Studies examining youth mentoring and debate programs have evidenced that formalized opportunities for public speaking are positively related to self-confidence and self-perceptions (Marshall-Wheeler et al., 2022; Worker et al., 2023). This confidence does not just stay in communication, but spills over into other areas of life, as Shy students, or students who felt unable to "find their voice," typically exhibit changing

attitudes about their readiness to engage further within class or even outside of it, once they have an opportunity for continuous practice with positive reinforcement (Worker et al., 2023). This, in turn, fosters growth in self-efficacy; the sense of being capable of completion, especially important during adolescence (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Public speaking is also a warm-up to leadership and civic engagement (Waisanen, 2020). Expressing views clearly and articulately is frequently cited as an essential leadership characteristic. The literature on leadership development contains indications of the importance of being able to speak with confidence, a vital attribute of those who have to take responsibility, since this is the way that leaders earn respect, motivate teams, and effectively deal with challenges (Españo, 2025). Students who excel in public speaking are more apt to take on student council roles, captain teams, or lead group projects at school, and such experiences develop persuasive and motivational skills, which are crucial for such activities and future careers. The literature, therefore, also locates public speaking, not merely within the academy, but as training for involved citizenship (Españo, 2025).

Related to these results is the development of critical thinking. For a student to prepare a speech, the student must research, analyze, and present information in a way that makes sense (Ramos, 2020; Taman et al., 2024). The speakers are required to be able to anticipate arguments against their position, calibrate the knowledge (and ignorance) of the audience, and argue effectively. These are higher-level cognitive functions that require synthesis, evaluation, and structured thought (Ramos, 2020). Accordingly, speech writing and performance provide a unique opportunity to develop students' skills of thinking and problem-solving. Researchers argue that these skills, cultivated in oral performance, transfer to academic writing and reading and to decision-making in various disciplinary contexts and topics (Worker et al., 2023). In addition to these skill-building benefits, however, public speaking serves as a special outlet for adolescent development. Early adolescence (11–14 years) is marked by rapid changes in self-concept, greater social awareness, and heightened susceptibility to peer evaluation, and providing formal opportunities for speaking during this period enables young people to come to grips with difficulties in a more nurturing setting (Kahlon et al., 2019; Musto, 2019). The experience of being able

to present a class presentation or a debate promotes the sense of achievement and contributes to the reinforcement of self-efficacy and even of resilience (Musto, 2019). In addition, public speaking represents a mode of making meaning about identity for adolescents to express opinions, values, and personal stories to their audience of peers. Concurrently, in talking in front of their classmates, the social validation (e.g., clapping, congratulatory comments, even just a quiet acknowledgement) satisfies the teenager's growing requirement for peer endorsement, which helps solidify feelings of inclusion in the peer group (Musto, 2019). These developmental advantages explain the suitability of speaking tasks for secondary education.

Research provides a strong basis for the relationship between oral communication ability and academic performance (Cavanagh et al., 2019; Demir, 2017). Massive studies on extracurricular debate and public speaking programs demonstrate significant correlations to improved grades and college readiness. For instance, one study of high school debaters reported that participants in competitive high school debate had higher grades and were more college-ready than comparable peers who did not participate in high school debate (Marshall-Wheeler et al., 2022). Its adherents argue that speaking practice underpins a number of academic skills, including critical thinking, and that repeated practice is required to develop them. Other research has demonstrated that students who had taken courses in public speaking wrote better than students who had not, and thus it may be that the requirements of organization in speech production benefit our writing skills as well (Worker et al., 2023). Last, mentor programs, including speaking engagements, showed evidence of beneficial effects on youths' self-esteem and confidence, and youth participants consistently included positive perceptions of personal development among their reported benefits of speaking before others (Worker et al., 2023). Taken together, these results show that public speaking directly and indirectly promotes academic growth.

However, public speaking is challenging, especially for young students and students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Speaking in front of others causes severe anxiety in many students, and according to one report, public speaking is one of the greatest fears that many people have, even ranking higher than the fear of death (Miklosikova et al., 2019; Raja, 2017). Glossophobia, or speech anxiety,

which occurs most frequently during adolescence, when a fear of peer judgment is heightened, is the most commonly spoken of speech impediment among children, and shy children might find being required to speak in front of the class even more awkward (Dellah et al., 2020; Oloba et al., 2025). Besides fear of communicating, low-level proficiency causes problems for EFL learners. Some students who are good at grammar exercises find it hard to remember words or cannot talk easily off the cuff. On the individual level, Indonesian EFL learners consistently forget words or mispronounce them as they actually did not practice using English on a frequent basis (Indrayadi et al., 2021; Tambunsaribu & Simatupang, 2021). This lack of practice not only hampers fluency but also contributes to hesitation and anxiety when faced with formal speaking tasks.

To sum up, speaking in public in the educational sense is not only a performance skill, as it fosters communication and confidence, leadership, and critical thinking. It could be considered a developmental tool for young people in the midst of adolescence. Despite obstacles ranging from fear, incompetence, and cultural inhibition, evidence supports that for shepherding them through, the value of debate experiences to students in school and beyond outweighs the challenges. In doing so, educators set learners up for success academically and as confident citizens who engage with society.

2.2. Communication Apprehension and Anxiety in Learning

Communication apprehension (CA) has long been known to be a key dimension in how students learn and is defined as a general fear of communication that includes oral communication in person, group discussions, and public speaking (Malik et al., 2021; Sawyer, 2018). High CA individuals frequently describe somatic symptoms (e.g., racing of the heart, shaking, dry mouth) in conjunction with a strong inclination to avoid communicative scenarios (Malik et al., 2021). About 15–20% of people can be considered to be highly communication apprehensive, and in schools, this means not speaking up, avoiding presentations, or checking out in cooperative learning (McCroskey et al., 2014). This withdrawal prohibits involvement, and it can influence academic decisions and career paths. Although CA is sometimes viewed as a relatively stable characteristic, McCroskey insisted that situational support and focused interventions can mitigate the impact of CA, which

he identified as an issue of preeminence for educators (McCroskey et al., 2014).

There are trait anxiety and state anxiety, and a distinction exists between the two that needs to be understood. Traits CA is a Persistent general tendency of an individual not to communicate; state anxiety is applicable to specific situations, for example, tests or presentations (Croucher et al., 2024). McCroskey invented instruments like the PRCA-24 to quantify these dispositions and demonstrated with them how powerfully they can guide behavior in the classroom. High CA is correlated with low levels of social integration and achievement, but the research shows that this can be managed and reduced with appropriate interventions (McCroskey et al., 2014).

In second language acquisition, CA intersects with Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), which is a unique package of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors (consciously or unconsciously adopted) that each individual has about his/her own language learning process (Botes et al., 2020; Zheng & Cheng, 2018). Although it has an overlap with test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, it is not completely explained by those factors. Learners with low overall CA might have relatively high FLCA because of the difficulty in communicating and expressing themselves in a newly acquired language (Zheng & Cheng, 2018). Symptoms associated include nervous physical reactions, avoidance, and withdrawal from classroom interaction (Botes et al., 2020; Zheng & Cheng, 2018). High FLCA is associated with reduced attendance and academic underperformance in studies, and a self-reinforcing cycle is established, where anxious individuals do not speak, lose out on opportunities to practice, and perform poorly, which serves to escalate their anxiety. Critically, FLCA is frequently skill-specific, with speaking referred to as the most anxiety-causing activity because errors are both public and instantaneous (Botes et al., 2020; Zheng & Cheng, 2018).

Among the most prevalent types of CA is Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA). Though many students are able to interact effectively and with ease in informal situations, the prospect of delivering a speech or presentation is enough to strike fear into the hearts of the boldest of them (Kelsen, 2019; Takac et al., 2019). PSA can be described as a type of social anxiety, which is most likely triggered by specific situations;

however, some information regarding this phenomenon is limited (Kelsen, 2019; Takac et al., 2019). In a Sudanese sample, 45% of subjects reported moderate PSA, and 11.5% reported high PSA despite being high in self-efficacy overall (Ahmed et al., 2025). These findings demonstrate that PSA also influences self-confident pupils. Its implications are far-reaching: students can avoid communication-rich courses, perform weakly in assessments, and restrict their futures in work that demands presentations.

These concerns coincide with the adolescent phase, a stage in life that is marked by increased self-consciousness and sensitivity to peers. Early adolescents are prone to imaginary audience ideation, which is the belief that the eyes of others are constantly on them, heightening the dread of humiliation (Paul et al., 2015). Hormonal and cognitive differences ramp up stress responses, making presentations especially difficult (Herting et al., 2021; van den Bos et al., 2017). Anxiety at this age is associated with poorer attention, less active involvement at school, and behavior problems (van den Bos et al., 2017). In language learning situations, their unwillingness to take the risk of volunteering answers, make eye contact, or be physically present enough to actually practice, and the occasional lost attempt further serve to make anxiety a cumulative phenomenon (van den Bos et al., 2017).

The interplay between the two factors of anxiety and confidence is critical. When anxiety is high, participants are suppressed, but as confidence grows, anxiety is reduced — a feedback loop that can go either way (McNatt, 2019; Nadiah et al., 2019). For example, speaking anxiety alone did not strongly correlate with performance in the speaking score, and self-confident EFL students have significant achievement in the speaking test, as cited in Tridinanti (2018). This could imply that facilitating the build-up of confidence might be even more influential than removing anxious feelings. Qualitative data suggests that concern of being negatively evaluated is one prevalent theme, with many students falling into the trap of thinking that “everyone is scrutinizing every mistake,” which leads to low self-confidence (McNatt, 2019). However, over time, positive speaking experiences whittle down fear and build self-efficacy, proving that confidence can make a difference when it comes to participating.

Studies emphasize strategies for coping with communication fear, and here, supportive teaching is key as they not only normalize anxiety but also encourage effort and provide a respectful environment, which reduces anxiety (Atifnigar, 2024; Ginsburg et al., 2022). Step-by-step exposure to speaking tasks, beginning with small-group discussions and building up to larger presentations, helps to reduce fear through desensitization (Ginsburg et al., 2022). Explicit instruction in speaking skills, such as argument structures and body language, promotes a sense of control, which, in turn, decreases nervousness. Video self-modeling, which involves watching videos of themselves demonstrating successful behaviors, has also shown success in increasing confidence (El-Sayed Mohamed, 2020; Zhang et al., 2025). Other effective techniques include mentoring and one-on-one coaching, which can provide personalized guidance, and cognitive behavioral methods such as reframing negative thoughts and practicing relaxation to manage the body's response to stress (Aqeel & Chung, 2024; Montero & Alvarado, 2019). Outside of the classroom, extracurricular activities like debate clubs or Toastmasters provide repeated low-stakes practice, which has the potential to be correlated with gains in confidence and performance.

2.3. Educational Context of Libya and the Wider Region

A number of changes have been implemented in the Libyan educational policy for the last thirty years, but English language teaching still faces many challenges even today (Abushafa, 2014; Najeeb, 2013). English is taught in late Primary or early Secondary, but teaching has been based traditionally on the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), with its overemphasis on grammar, reading, and very little attention given to speaking. In the late 1990s, the Ministry of Education implemented a communicative language course supported by Garnet Publishing to be consistent with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) ethos (Owen et al., 2019; Talag, 2023). The reform showed a reduction of the emphasis placed on written accuracy in oral communication, which reflected the international teaching practices.

Yet, these intentions are not realized as much as was desired in the Libyan context. Research indicates that there is a continued dispute over the gap between the curriculum aims and the national examination system, which is still too much in favor of grammar and writing (Owen et

al., 2019). In turn, teachers who were on the receiving end of “teach to the test” reverted to focusing on test content as opposed to communicative activities. Moreover, there was a sudden imposition of the curriculum without proper preparation and support, such that many of the teachers trained in traditional ways were unprepared for interactive speaking activities (Owen et al., 2019; Talag, 2023). Enrolment, inadequate infrastructure, and teachers’ resistance were other factors that limited uptake (Owen & Razali, 2018). The consequence is that a lot of classes remain teacher-fronted and exam-focused, while ‘oral’ communication skills are relegated. Studies in the field have emphasized that the successful implementation would require trained teachers, motivated learners, and smaller classes, which are all conditions that are lacking severely in most of the public school system in the country (Altaieb, 2013; Owen & Razali, 2018).

This pedagogic lag has immediate consequences for public speaking. In average Libyan classrooms, students are used to doing mere translation, so are grammar drills and short dialogues, but not speaking in a structured way or having debates (Owen & Razali, 2018). Private schools or classes taught by younger-generation international teachers may have communicative activities in such classes. In reality, though, most students still get little practice speaking and, consequently, they end up unable to hold a conversation, lacking both the fluency and confidence to communicate comfortably (Owen & Razali, 2018). However, the longevity of grammar-based approaches illustrates a number of shortcomings. Norms that prioritize correctness before fluency mean that students fear error and choose not to talk (Cumbicos & Chicaiza, 2024; Hunter, 2012). No oral tests in national exams act as a deterrent to both teachers and students from speaking. The lack of oral assessment in high-stakes exams also reduces the priority of learning the language and discourages both teachers and students from speaking. Insecure EFL teachers who are unsure of their speaking ability tend to steer clear of class work that requires speaking, and the textbook is grammar-centered and contains few communicative activities (Owen & Razali, 2018). Students prone to passive learning will argue against group work or presentations, viewing them as distractions from real study, and all these contribute to keeping speaking in the background.

In addition, it is also the norms of the culture that shape public speaking in Libyan schools (Belshek, 2010; Grada, 2014). Disrespect of the teachers and obedience to authority contribute to high levels of inhibition in using language spontaneously. Modesty ascribed to girls by society would heighten silence, too, particularly in a mixed group (Alkour & Mohd Hussain, 2024; Spadaro & Yeaw, 2020). Girls have vast opportunities for access to schooling, but some communities do not consider a girl's assertive speech fitting. Saving face and not putting oneself up to public embarrassment are also matters of concern that render public speaking a high-stakes activity, especially during adolescence (Rahman et al., 2024). These factors can silence students, girls especially, unless schools and teachers intentionally make an effort to create supportive environments. Arab culture also prizes poetry and rhetoric for eloquence; maybe re-casting public speaking as something of a heritage issue could help boost engagement. The rising awareness with regard to English as a means for global mobility also offers a practical reason for students and families to invest in communicative ability (Gewider, 2012; Gherwash, 2024).

The struggles faced by Libya are not unique to it but reflect wider patterns in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Elsewhere, countries like Tunisia, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia grapple with moving away from rote and replicative learning toward a communicative model of teaching (Haddad, 2025; R'boul, 2025). Progress has been limited by large class sizes, exam pressure, and cultural conservatism. Studies such as those conducted in Saudi Arabia have shown high levels of speaking anxiety among female learners, which is influenced by societal norms (Abdel-Khalek & Alansari, 2004). Experiences at a regional level highlight a number of key lessons, such as changes will not be sustainable without training and ongoing professional growth of teachers; oral assessment should be included in examinations to encourage classroom practice; and cultural adaptation of communicative activities enhances acceptance (Owen & Razali, 2018). Programs in Egypt and Morocco that introduced debate clubs, model United Nations, or gender-sensitive adaptations have found that students can thrive when they are given structured opportunities to speak (El-Kogali & Krafft, 2019; Mostafa, 2023).

However, there are also significant research gaps that still exist, as most studies on Libyan EFL education talk about curriculum change, teacher practice, or general language learning issues, and few on oral communication (Elabbar, 2011; Hussein, 2018). Very little research has been conducted on the use of public speaking structured activities in Libyan secondary classrooms, and there is almost none on their effect on Libyan teenage students' confidence and speaking anxiety. This lack of knowledge is especially strong for female students, whose communication anxiety and empowerment through public speaking have received limited research attention. Global research indicates that speaking more than once will reduce nervousness and increase self-confidence, and there is no available localized evidence on the Libyan classes (Aldarasi, 2020; Tawir & Baharum, 2024).

To sum up, the Libyan EFL setting is marked by persistent conflict between the traditional, grammar-based approach and the orientation of communicative teaching. For cultural, systemic, and logistical reasons, public speaking has never developed as a fundamental element of classroom practice, so it is disproportionately underdeveloped in the next generation of communicators. Regional comparisons show that the country shares common problems and promising approaches, yet there is a dearth of evidence in Libya to inform such interventions. To fill this gap with research focusing on a structured public speaking activity with adolescent girls, makes both scholarly and practical contributions—scholarly in terms of what we can learn about providing culturally responsive strategies that enhance self-efficacy, diminish self-doubt and allay performance anxiety and practical in assisting educators to craft pedagogical practices that support young learners in speaking with confidence.

2.4. Summary

The literature presented in the review supports the argument that public speaking is an effective educational tool among adolescents. They develop communication and critical thinking skills and can, with experience, lower communication apprehension in students. Participation in debates/presentations/speeches is positively associated with increased self-confidence, self-esteem, and academic achievement. However, the theories of communication apprehension reveal that many students, especially in the context of foreign language classes, suffer severe fear

when speaking, which hinders their activities and class performance. The dynamic between confidence and anxiety is critical: supportive environments, incremental exposure, and explicit speaking instruction can help flip the script from avoidance to growth.

Adolescence is described as a significant phase. While it can be a time of increased self-doubt and anxiety, it is also a time when interventions can provide long-term benefits in confidence. This is particularly true for girls in traditional environments, where cultural norms may place added barriers to public representation. However, the number of studies concerning extempore public speaking is limited in Libyan schools. Students continue to experience little oral speaking practice with instruction mostly provided in a grammar-based manner. Accordingly, this research addresses an important gap about whether such a pedagogical strategy of structured public speaking can keep the effects of enhancing confidence, relieving the anxiety of Libyan adolescents, and have an empowering effect, academically.

3. Research Methodology

This study used a quasi-experimental mixed methods design with a pretest-posttest design (Åkerblad et al., 2021). The design selected enables us to capture the quantitative impact of students practicing structured public speaking activities on their confidence and anxiety, as well as the qualitative insights that describe what worked and what did not in their own lives.

There were several reasons to justify using a quasi-experimental approach. First, the classroom context precluded the random assignment of students; students already belonged to existing classes, which led to using the intact groups. Keeping the school's setup system and dividing participants into experimental (n=30) and control (n=30) groups enabled comparability. Second, the pre-test/post-test approach enabled the measurement of changes over time in persons and between groups, and the strengthening of causal inferences. Third, because the experience of confidence and anxiety is multifaceted, quantitative methods were found to be inadequate. The inclusion of qualitative items enabled the study to record complex emotional and psychological shifts not represented by scales.

This design reflects existing prior work in second-language pedagogy, where mixed methods capture performance as well as learner

perceptions. It also corresponds to the explorative case study nature of the study in that it aims to provide a theoretically underpinned, contextually based understanding of what is happening at Libyan institutions.

3.1. Participants

The sample of this study was 60 pupils aged 12-14 years attending a public middle school in Tripoli. Female students were chosen to overcome the gender related problem of speaking out publicly, especially in the Libyan culture. Adolescence is also the age when confidence and the ability to communicate can be influenced to a large degree. Two intact classes participated, with one constituting the experimental group (public speaking intervention) and the other acting as the control (traditional curriculum). Homogeneity was obtained by choosing classes of the same grade level, thus reducing discrepancies in past experience with English or the academic level of the participants. The demographic variables were age, years of learning English in school, and self-reported grade averages. This context information enabled the interpretation of the findings and taking the context effects into account.

3.2. Instruments

A mixed-methods survey including both quantitative and qualitative data was used in the study. The quantitative survey consisted of 15 Likert-type items contributing to 3 areas: speaking self-confidence, public-speaking anxiety, and general anxiety. Example items were the following: “Speaking in front of my classmates makes me feel confident”; “When presenting, I feel nervous and uncomfortable”; “I often feel worried about school, even when prepared.” Ratings were provided on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), to score the domains overall and to compare pre- and post-intervention responses. The survey was derived from reliable instruments for communication apprehension and anxiety to ensure conceptual validity. Furthermore, the survey also contained open-ended questions used to invite students’ opinions and reflections related to their experiences of public speaking. Sample prompts were:

- “Before speaking in front of the class, how do you feel and how do you act?”
- “What makes you feel more confident?” and
- “What is difficult for you when you have to speak in English?”

These qualitative items also provided narrative evidence to augment the statistical results, providing further understanding into students' experiences of growth, challenge, and coping strategies during the intervention.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

This research was developed in accordance with a pre-defined three-step process. At baseline, the two comparison groups individually received the mixed-methods instrument, assessing for demographic information, initial levels of confidence, public speaking anxiety, and general anxiety. The intervention period then proceeded over eight weeks for the experimental group with tasks growing in difficulty: self-introduction and dialogue (Weeks 1–2), group presentation (Weeks 3–4), storytelling and role play (Weeks 5–6), and formal speech and debate (Weeks 7–8). These activities were progressively scaffolded to modestly build confidence, with a degree of teacher coaching, feedback, and peer support, whereas control students proceeded with work on grammar rules presented in a dialogic form, mainly void of oral production. After the intervention, the two groups completed the questionnaire again to determine the changes. Descriptive statistics, paired t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, and effect size were applied to the quantitative results to ensure the statistical and practical differences were included. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative responses; inductive coding identified emergent themes including fear of evaluation, teachers' support, and confidence development.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

The research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for minors. Consent was obtained from parents, assent from students, and participation was not mandatory, while anonymity was assured. Faculty made sure that public speaking exercises were safe and non-threatening, and the participants were also told that their academic marks would not be affected by their results.

4. Results

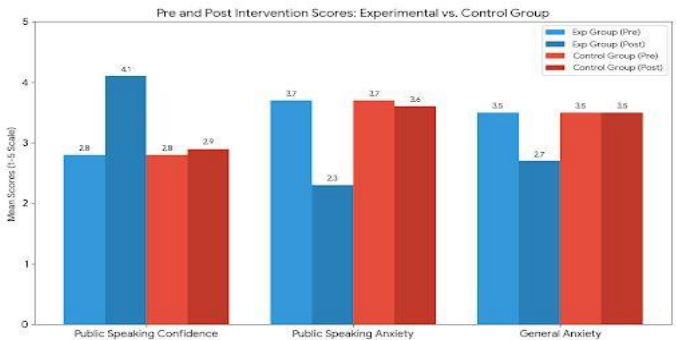
These results focused on the effect of structured public speaking activities on confidence, public speaking anxiety, and general anxiety for female Libyan middle school students are discussed in this chapter. Results are presented in two steps, with the quantitative findings being reported in terms of both pre- and post-questionnaire scores, followed by

the qualitative feedback from the open-ended questions. These results are combined to illustrate the effects that public speaking experiences had on participants, compared to those in a control group that was taught in a traditional manner.

4.1. Quantitative Findings

The internal reliability of the instruments was initially assessed for the four domains: confidence of speaking, public speaking anxiety, general anxiety, and perceived speaking benefits using Cronbach’s alpha. Alpha values, across both pre- and post-tests, consistently fell within acceptable parameters ($\alpha = 0.72\text{--}0.88$), indicating that the items in each construct measured the same attribute consistently. The stability of these values over time and groups further supports confidence in the robustness of the quantitative indicators and corroborates the application of the scales to identify the impact of the intervention.

Baseline comparisons demonstrated that the control and experimental conditions both started at the same point, which was evidence that the process of random assignment was successful in establishing comparability between conditions prior to the intervention. On a five-point scale, mean scores of confidence (PSC) did not exceed the value of 2.9 within each group. In comparison, speech anxiety was relatively high at baseline ($M \approx 3.7$); that is, on average, most participants expressed significant discomfort around having to talk in front of their peers. Furthermore, general anxiety scores were high ($M \approx 3.5$), indicating a more general tendency to



Based on the results provided, the chart above shows a comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores for both the experimental and control group across the three primary metrics: public speaking

confidence (PSC), Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) and General Anxiety (GA)

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of structured public speaking activities on the confidence and anxiety levels of middle school students in Libya. The findings indicate a statistically significant divergence between the experimental group, which participated in the structured intervention, and the controlled group. Which continued with traditional instruction.

Baseline data showed that both groups initially possessed low level of confidence, with mean scores failing to exceed 2.9 on a five-point scale. This suggests that without targeted intervention, students generally perceive themselves as lacking the necessary skill od efficacy to perform publicly. Following the intervention, the experimental group demonstrated marked increase in confidence. This improvement can be attributed to the structured nature of the activities, which likely provided a safe environment for iterative practice, scaffolding and constructive peer feedback-elements often missing in traditional Libyan education settings.

One of the most striking findings was the high level of the baseline public speaking anxiety ($M=3.7$). this high level of apprehension is common in adolescent population but may be intensifies by cultural expectation regarding female public performance, the post- intervention results showed a significant decrease I Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) for the experimental group. By normalizing the act of speaking through regular exposure, the structured activities likely functioned as a form of desensitization helping students manage physiological stress responses when standing before their peers

The consistency of the Cronbach's alpha values ($\alpha= 0.720.88$) ensures that these shifts are robust and reliable. The fact that control group showed negligible change confirms that time or traditional schooling alone is insufficient to address these psychological barriers. Instead targeted , structured intervention is essential to foster confidence and mitigate the debilitating effects of anxiety in this demographic.

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