

## Investigating the Effect of Gender on 85 ESL DELL UOB Students' Self-Confidence When Speaking English

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How to cite:

AlSabbagh, Z.(2023). Investigating the Effect of Gender on 85 ESL DELL UOB Students' Self-Confidence When Speaking English. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies* 4(2).71-97.

<https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v4i2.316>

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:  
10/02/2023

Accepted:  
17/04/2023

### KEYWORDS

ESL, Gender,  
Oral  
Performance,  
Self-Confidence

### Abstract

*There are many psychological factors negatively affecting English language learners. This research aims to investigate the psychological factors, negatively affecting 85 ESL, UOB, DELL students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender, through conducting 2 classroom observations, administering a self-assessed questionnaire, & analyzing data using IBM SPSS. Moreover, the findings of the 2 classroom observations suggest that students lack self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates is negatively affected regardless of their classmates' gender, whereas, the questionnaire suggest that the students' self-confidence is negatively affected when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender which is principally due to psychological factors. Furthermore, the Bivariate Correlation test conducted via IBM SPSS indicateS that the relationship between the student's gender and their self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the same and/or opposite gender is negative.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. The English Language

The English Language has become an international language due to its extensive use in business, academic & daily communication. Therefore, globalization made it necessary for many if not all people to learn English to communicate with everyone from around the globe effectively. According to Mareta *et al.* (2017), people's realization of the importance of The English language due to globalization made acquiring and learning English as a second language (ESL), or a foreign language (EFL) a high priority [to them]. Mareta *et al.* (2017) further stressed that the most effective employment of the English language is, with no doubt, in oral (spoken) communication.

### 1.2. The English Language and Oral Performance

Speaking is the most used way to communicate one's ideas [to others]. It was defined by Tridinanti (2018) as an act that "Involves two or more people who make two-way communication" (p. 36). Speaking can involve more, but never less. If it was one person conversing with him/herself, it would be called talking instead. Moreover, Kayi (2006) defined speaking as: "To select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation, and subject matter" (p. 1). In this research, the researcher's definition of

“speaking” combines the abovementioned definitions. It will connote “An act of verbally talking involving two-way communication in which the speaker selects appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation, and subject matter.” Furthermore, the verbal act of speaking a language (its vocabulary) is not enough for a successful communication process. One has to be fluent in it.

### **1.3.English, Oral Performance, & Fluency**

Bailey & Nunan (2004) defines fluency as: “The capacity to speak fluidly, confidently, and at a rate consistent with the norms of the relevant native speech community” (p. 4). Moreover, according to Richards & Renandya (2002) achieving fluency in oral communication in ESL or FL is the learners’ main motivation to learn a language. However, that is not enough, as a language speaker can follow the definition of fluency put by Bailey & Nunan (2004), yet remain unable to communicate any meaningful verbal message that he/she intends to communicate, resulting in either a miscommunication, misinterpretation or no communication at all with the listener/s. This is because, in addition to Bailey & Nunan’s definition of fluency, a language speaker must also accurately pronounce the sounds in a language, and connote the appropriate meanings in their suitable context, using the right syntactic structure of a particular language to convey a message appropriately when speaking, all combined, for the verbal communication process to be successful.

Therefore, being fluent in a language demands both linguistic competence (i.e., knowledge of the language “syntax, morphology, phonology, semantics”), in addition to excellence in performance (i.e., how one verbally uses his/her linguistic knowledge of the language). Therefore, ESL or EFL learners must not only master the grammatical, syntactic, and semantic aspects of the language to become fluent in it but also have to be able to speak the language in an accurate, articulate, and confident manner. All this cannot be achieved if language learners lack self-confidence when speaking [a language]. And since oral linguistic skills determine one’s performance and thus show his/her fluency (i.e., the state of successfully speaking and learning or acquiring the language), one must perform well, especially since it is crucial for any language learner to confidently speak the language to successfully communicate his/her ideas, opinions, and feelings to the listener.

Nonetheless, despite the importance of speaking skills when it comes to learning a language, research has shown that both ESL and EFL learners find it challenging to speak a foreign language (Shein, 2019). Additionally, Hosni (2014) emphasized that no matter how much EFL learners know about English, they still face speaking difficulties. In line with that, Bailey & Savage (1994) stated that the ability to perform languages orally well in an SL or FL is considered one of the most demanding language skills. Even after years have passed, the researcher Bailey stressed, again, in one of his books “Practical English Language Teaching Speaking” that English speaking is indeed very demanding and is the most difficult skill to acquire, stating that: “Speaking English [or any other language] can be particularly difficult because, unlike reading or writing, speaking happens in “real-time” (Bailey & Nunan, 2004, p. 16).

### **1.4.Psychological Problems Negatively Affecting ESL Students’ Oral Performance**

Fitriani *et al.* (2015) define Psychology as “The science of the study of the thought processes and behavior of humans and other animals in their interaction with the environment (p. 6). Moreover, many psychological barriers stand in the face of ESL and/or EFL learners in

mastering English speaking which is seen in how ESL speakers' oral performance can be articulate when one is relaxed and confident due to a stable psychological and emotional state, and sound inarticulate and disturbing due to a lack of confidence which occurs due to many psychological factors. Furthermore, according to Xinghua (2007), psychological problems are problems that often interfere with one's emotional and physical health, his/her relationships, work productivity, and/or life adjustments such as nervousness, lack of self-confidence, and/or being afraid of speaking. These psychological problems are common among ESL or EFL learners and result in keeping their English-speaking skills weak, causing them to rarely and poorly perform orally, thus making it difficult for them to master English speaking.

Although the psychological and emotional problems negatively affecting ESL learners' self-confidence when speaking English might be hard to confirm, they however could be detected. Many scholars addressed these psychological and emotional factors such as Lawtie (2004) who stated that: "Speech difficulties can be negatively affected by a person's emotional state. Speech is often clearer when a person is feeling confident and relaxed, and this is one of the most important factors to consider when communicating with people who have speech difficulties" (Cited in Fitriani, 2015). Moreover, Fitriani *et al.* (2015) mentioned anxiety as one of the psychological factors that negatively affect language learners' speaking performance, whereas, Tridinanti (2018) mentioned both anxiety and hesitancy among the factors that have a negative effect on second language learners' self-confidence when speaking English. Another researcher, that being Shen (2019) adds to these factors by stating that "[for most of the EFL learners] Psychological problems [factors] (e.g., nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence was the primary reason for English speaking difficulties" (p. 88). In line with that, Arifin (2017) stated that "Students often faced similar [psychological] problems such as nervous [nervousness], [lack of] self-confidence, [lack of] self-esteem, which are common become speech anxiety that influences their [student & teachers] speaking performance in the classroom" (p. 31). Moreover, Arifin (2017) mentioned shyness, speaking slowly, refusing to speak up, difficulty talking, stammering, stuttering, blushing, shaking, sweating hands, and absence of good mannerisms (e.g., good eye contact or smiling) as psychological signs showing students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English. Arifin (2017) further stated that [the above-stated] "Psychological problems often influence the ability, willingness, and motivation of the students to achieve speaking competence" (p. 30). These psychological factors not only negatively affect ESL learners' oral performance by making them produce inarticulate speech, but could make them unmotivated to learn and speak the language, and as a result, lead them to avoid participating verbally in the classroom, or anywhere public for that matter. This was noted by Hosni (2014) who detected how many EFL learners had difficulty speaking English, due to psychological factors, which resulted in the learners' avoidance of speaking (and participation) in the classroom.

In this research, the psychological factors that show ESL learners' stressfulness, anxiety, or lack of self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of their classmates were categorized into two main categories: verbal and non-verbal signs. Some of these signs/factors were adopted from previous researchers such as (Tridinanti, 2018; Arifin, 2017; Fitriani *et al.*, 2015; Hosni, 2014), whereas the rest were put together from what the researcher detected from the two conducted classroom observations. The signs are as follows:

***The verbal signs showing a lack of self-confidence are:***

- Stuttering
- Unfathomable utterances
- Using too many filler-words
- Shaking/Trembling of one's voice
- Stating one's desire to avoid speaking
- Speaking too fast or too slow "than usual"
- An extremely low or high "than usual" pitch of voice

***The non-verbal signs showing a lack of self-confidence are:***

- Blushing
- Sweating
- Avoiding eye-contact
- Avoid responding orally
- Shaking one's hands/fingers
- Squeezing one's hands/fingers
- Tapping with one's fingers/nails
- Tendency to cover one's mouth/face
- Moving/Playing with one's accessories
- Hiding/Covering one's shaking hands/fingers

The participants' self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of their classmates of the same and opposite gender will be assessed based on the above-mentioned verbal [output] and non-verbal signs. It is worth noting that, the terms "lack of self-confidence", "stressed", and "anxious" when speaking, are used interchangeably in this research.

### **1.5.ESL Student's Oral Performance & Self-Confidence**

According to Merriam-Webster (2020), self-confidence is defined as "Confidence in oneself and in one's powers and abilities. Moreover, according to Elliot (1998, p. 29), "Self-confidence relates to self-assuredness in one's judgment, ability, power, etc., something manifested excessively" (Cited from Tridinanti, 2018). Furthermore, whenever the term self-confidence is used in this research, it will primarily refer to the state of being confident while speaking, and its definition, which is set by the researcher will connote "One's certainty in one's abilities and capability reflected in one's performance to be clear, fathomable, and respectful".

Moreover, the speaker's confidence when speaking not only shows how linguistically capable (i.e., competent and fluent) the speaker is but also makes the listener more confident in the speaker and his/her words. Therefore, one can safely say that speaking confidently is a demanding skill that seems to be a stepping stone for many ESL or EFL students, where one of the principal problems ESL learners struggle with is poor speech which could be mainly due to psychological factors causing them to become stressed & anxious and thus, lack self-confidence (when speaking English publicly).

This research aims to fill a gap not filled, yet. This is because whenever researchers investigated the students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English, they considered many variables such as age, linguistic competence, and socioeconomic background, yet, it seems that, to my knowledge, not many researchers considered gender as one of the variables that might negatively affect ESL DELL UOB students' confidence when speaking English in the presence of their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender. In addition, the psychological

factors negatively affecting ESL DELL UOB students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of their classmates are not well researched.

For this, this study aims to investigate the following:

### **1.6. Research questions**

1. To what extent does gender affect ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates?
  - 1.1 To what extent is ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence affected when speaking English with classmates of the same gender?
  - 1.2 To what extent is ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence affected when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender?
  - 1.3 Do ESL DELL UOB female students feel more confident when speaking English with classmates of the same gender than when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender?
2. What are the verbal and non-verbal signs that ESL DELL UOB students show indicating their lack of self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender?
3. What are the most prominent psychological factors present among ESL DELL UOB students that negatively affect their self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender?
4. What are the most prominent factors negatively affecting ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender?

### **1.7. Hypotheses**

H1. ESL DELL UOB students feel more confident when speaking English with classmates of the same gender.

H2. ESL DELL UOB female students feel less confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender.

H3. The verbal signs showing ESL DELL UOB students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender will be more prominent than the verbal signs showing students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the same gender.

H4. Psychological factors will be the most prominent factors negatively affecting ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Previous research suggested that both psychological and linguistic difficulties negatively affect ESL or EFL students' self-confidence when speaking English publicly. To reach this research desired outcomes, only research investigating the psychological factors such as stress, anxiety & lack of self-confidence encountered by ESL/EFL students when speaking English will be further mentioned and discussed.

A thesis by Sari & Dewi (2021) investigated the correlation between students' self-confidence and speaking skills of twelfth-grade students of SMA N 2 Bukittinggi, enrolled in the academic



year of 2020/2021, consisting of 8 classes, and a random sample consisting of 28 students were chosen. The researchers conducted a personality test consisting of 25 questions, in addition to speaking tests. The correlation coefficient between self-confidence & speaking skills results was 0,286 showing a positive correlation between both variables. The researchers concluded that students with high self-confidence have high speaking skills, whereas students with low self-confidence have low speaking skills.

Another researcher, that being Tridinanti (2018) investigated whether or not there is a significant correlation between students' speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and speaking achievement, where data were collected by interviewing a sample of 5th-semester students. The results indicated that speaking anxiety had no significant correlation with students speaking achievements, it, however, showed a significant correlation between students' self-confidence and their speaking achievements (i.e., the higher the student's self-confidence, the higher their speech achievements). Such results stress the importance for EFL/ESL teachers, lecturers, professors, and instructors to cultivate students' self-confidence when speaking English by encouraging them to practice speaking English publicly (in the classroom, and when speaking with their classmates [outside and inside of the classroom]).

In line with Tridinanti (2018), Mareta *et al.* (2017) investigated the relationship between students' self-confidence and students speaking achievements and found that self-confidence was of high and great direct impact on students speaking, where the more confident the students are when speaking, the higher their speaking achievements. Moreover, the researchers noted that the psychological problems the students faced such as feeling shy and being afraid of making mistakes not only negatively affected their self-confidence when speaking English but also negatively affected their grades, stating that "There is a relationship between self-confidence and students speaking achievement" (p. 10), "The lower confidence of students, the lower students mark they got" (p. 9), and "The more confident the learners', the greater communicative competence they will achieve, and the better psychological adjustment and cross-cultural adaption they experience" (p. 10). Furthermore, the researchers stressed that despite the negative impact psychological factors such as fear and shyness have on students' speech, their motivation to learn and [verbally] use the English language persists, stating that students "Still have a huge willingness to use and improve their speaking ability in English" (p. 8).

Moreover, research by Fatmawati *et al.* (2020) investigated the factors affecting EFL learners' self-confidence when speaking English rather than its correlation with other variables. The researchers followed the qualitative method where interviews were conducted with what the researchers referred to as "4 nervous participants". It identified the core factors affecting EFL learners' self-confidence when speaking English and divided them into two categories: 1. Factors rising from students: e.g., lack of preparation, believing that the English language is difficult, & 2. Factors rising from teachers: e.g., the teacher's personality, the teacher's way of speaking in front of the class, and the teacher's providence of explanations that the students find difficult to comprehend. Yet, the number of participants in this research is relatively low, making generalizing the findings on the whole population or drawing any conclusions from it inadequate.

Nonetheless, another researcher that being Shen (2019) had a significant number of participants when investigating both the diverse factors causing difficulties in English Speaking to EFL learners, in addition to providing successful strategies to improve EFL learners' speaking performance. The research conducted a five-level Likert-scale questionnaire on a sample of 148 ESL Sophomore and junior English majors in Taiwan. In this research among the factors that affected EFL learners speaking English, psychological factors such as (e.g., “nervousness”, “fear of making mistakes”, and “lack of confidence”) appeared to be the principal factors in causing difficulty for EFL learners when speaking English, whereas the research results showed that 38.4% of the participants considered psychological factors as the primary barrier negatively affecting their English speaking.

In line with Shen (2019), a study conducted by Jabor *et al.* (2017) investigated the effect of self-confidence on English language learning, using a quantitative method: some statistical methods and a questionnaire answered by several 42 selected students (26 females, and 16 males), in the College of Arts, University of Kufa. It concluded that most students are self-confident when speaking English, especially males. Yet, a significant number of students face psychological problems (i.e., feel less confident, anxious, worried, and shy) when speaking English with their classmates and especially, their professors. It also noted that females showed a higher lack of confidence than males when speaking to their professors and classmates, where results showed that 50% of females and 38% of males feel scared when speaking English with their professors. Note that the percentage was higher in the case of females' lack of confidence not necessarily because they were less confident [i.e., more scared] than males but likely because the majority of participants were females (26 female participants) as compared to the number of male participants (16 male participants).

Furthermore, research by Arifin (2017) not only investigated the psychological problems students face when speaking English in the classroom but the psychological factors teachers face when speaking English in the classroom as well. This was done through the use of the qualitative method by implementing library research based on personal observation of a speaking class, that being fourth-semester students of the English Department at State Islamic Institute Salatiga (Institute Agama Islam Negeri IAIN) in Indonesia. The researcher found that psychological problems (i.e., anxiety, low self-confidence, low self-esteem) were common problems present in students' performance. Surprisingly, even when students were given the material of their speech (including themes and time expected to perform) beforehand, they, still faced the above-mentioned psychological problems. The research concluded by recommending strategies and approaches for teachers to implement during their classes to minimize the psychological problems (i.e., lack of self-confidence, lack of self-esteem, shyness, fear) that arise among EFL students when speaking English in the classroom.

Although the psychological factors negatively affecting EFL students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates are well-researched, to my knowledge, the psychological factors negatively affecting ESL DELL UOB students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates are not well-researched. In addition to that, gender as a variable causing these psychological factors to increase or decrease was not considered in any of the above-mentioned research.

### **3. DATA COLLECTION METHODS & PROCEDURES**

#### **3.1. Methodologies**

The research method followed in this paper is the mixed-methods approach. The qualitative method will be used to provide [descriptive] information about conditions, situations, and events that occur in the present (Ross, 2005). The 2 classroom observations in addition to the self-assessed questionnaire results will be descriptively discussed. Moreover, the quantitative method will be used to [numerically] describe data “Obtained when the variable being studied is measured along a scale that indicates how much of the scale is being present” (Fraenkel *et al*, 2012, p. 188). The graphs presenting the self-assessed questionnaire’s findings in addition to the statistical data obtained via IBM SPSS (i.e., Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) will provide quantifiable data that will be presented and further discussed.

This research aims to (1) investigate to what extent gender affects ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates. And (2) investigate whether or not ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence is affected when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender. In addition to (3) Finding the verbal & non-verbal signs showing ESL DELL UOB students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates, and (4) Finding the most prominent factors negatively affecting ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of their classmates. For this, the procedures followed in this research will be as follows (the procedures are ordered from the ones conducted first to last):

### **3.2.Procedures**

#### **3.2.1. Classroom Observations & Note Taking**

First, the researcher will be the first to attend 2 randomly chosen English classes held in the DELL at UOB, and will covertly observe and take notes of how comfortably the students speak in English with each other's, especially in the absence and presence of peers of the opposite gender. The researcher will also look for verbal and non-verbal signs showing stressfulness, anxiety, and lack of self-confidence when the students speak English with their classmates -if there are any. If any difference was found in the students' self-confidence when speaking English in the presence or absence of their classmates of the opposite gender, it will be noted, stated, and further analyzed in this paper. The observed verbal and non-verbal signs showing the students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates [of the same and opposite gender] were beneficial when designing this research self-assessed questionnaire.

#### **3.2.2. A Self-Assessed Questionnaire Designed Using Google Form**

Second, an 8 questions questionnaire designed using Google Forms was created to investigate how ESL DELL UOB students feel about their self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of classmates of the same and opposite gender. The questionnaire included verbal and non-verbal signs that the researcher noticed during the 2 class observations. The questionnaire was self-assessed and answered by 85 anonymous ESL DELL (i.e., Department of English Language & Literature) UOB (i.e., the University of Bahrain) students. In the self-assessed questionnaire, the participants were asked the following (See Appendix 1 for the questions included in the questionnaire). The questionnaire was designed to meet Fowler's practical standards, namely: 1. Is this a question that can be asked exactly the way it is written? 2. Is this a question that will mean the same thing to everyone? 3. Is this a question that people can answer? 4. Is this a question that people will be willing to answer, given the data collection



procedure? The students' answers were submitted via Google Forms which were then analyzed. The analysis of the participants' answers provided descriptive and numerical data that were presented on graphs and tables, discussed, and further analyzed in the research findings & discussion section. Additionally, based on the self-assessed questionnaire's answers pedagogical recommendations to reduce students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender were provided (See 7 recommendations).

### 3.2.3. Statistical Analysis Using SPSS

Third, SPSS (i.e., Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used in analyzing the students' responses to 2 questions included in the administered self-assessed questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and Bivariate correlations were extracted, presented, and analyzed in the paper (see 4 findings & 5 discussion sections).

### 3.3.Sampling

The targeted population was all English as a Second Language (ESL) students in the Department of English Language & Literature (DELL) at the University of Bahrain (UOB). The accessible sample was 85 ESL students in the DELL at UOB. Out of these 85 students, 91.8% were females and 8.2% were males (see figure 1), making the sample stratified and representative as in the DELL at UOB, the majority of enrolled students are females with 78.3% and above. Moreover, of the 85 students aged 18 to 26 years old 82.4% were aged 18 to 20, 14.1% were aged 21 to 23, and 3.5% were aged 24 to 26 (see Figure 2).

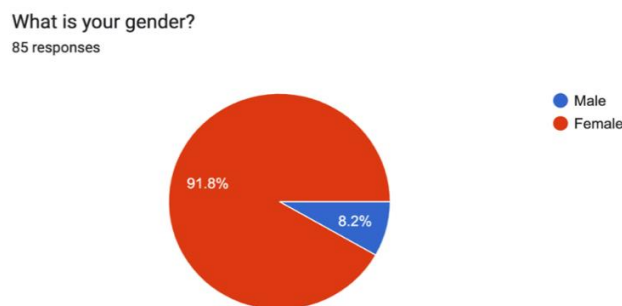


Figure 1. Percentages of participants' gender

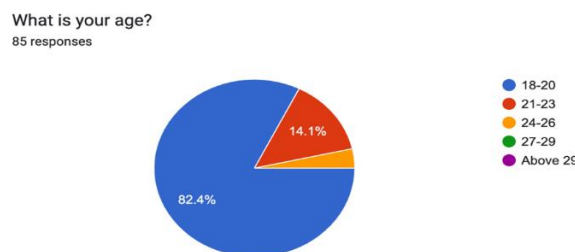


Figure 2. Percentages of participants' age groups

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1.Classroom Observations

#### 4.1.1. Classroom 1 Observation Notes:

In the first week of December 2022, the researcher chose a random English class held in the DELL at UOB. The researcher chose to attend that class because she noticed the presence of 3 male students only (they were early to attend the lecture) and their loud voices attracted her (the door was slightly open). The researcher stood outside and kept observing the male group from the door's glass window, and interestingly none of the male students paid attention to her as they were attuned to their conversation. Not only did the males look at and loudly speak with each other, extremely used body language to express their thoughts and words (e.g., a male student was acting as if he were eating a sandwich which then his facial expressions and hand gestures indicated that it was so delicious), but their words were clear and uttered without hesitation or stuttering. The entrance of another male who was not close with any of the males in the group (this is assumed as the new male comer did not greet and sat apart from them) did not result in any change in the males' language or pitch of voice as they kept talking with the same enthusiasm and were not shy from the other male colleague hearing them. Interestingly, when the female researcher decided to enter the classroom, all the males' lowered their voices. Over a period of 3-5 minutes, the classroom became filled with other females and the more females entered the classroom the lower the males' voices became. At a point in time, their voices became barely heard by the researcher who sat in one of the seats facing the males' seats which were on the last row.

A few minutes later, a male instructor entered the classroom, and by his entrance, all students became quiet and listened attentively. The instructor did not notice the presence of a new face, that is the researcher as she was setting in the seats facing the back seats. The instructor greeted the students and then started explaining the lesson. When the instructor finished explaining the lesson and asked whether any of the students had any questions, all said no, yet when the instructor asked one of the male students who loudly said it was "All clear" to explain a basic grammatical rule, which the instructor took more than 30 minutes explaining, the student avoided speaking as he did not respond for a few seconds, which made the rest of the students turn around and stare at him. And when the instructor asked him to speak up, his face became red (i.e., blushed), started talking slower than usual, and repeatedly used filler words such as I mean, so, umm, and like, and suddenly and rapidly uttered 3 to 4 words that no one seemed to understand (it seemed that because the words were difficult to pronounce and the student feared mispronouncing them, therefore, he pronounced them rapidly so that no one could recognize if he mispronounced them), wiped his seemingly clean hands with his t-shirt (they were probably sweating) then hid them in his pocket, and was repeatedly shaking his legs when talking, all which he did none of when he was talking to his male friends on their own. The instructor asked another female student that quietly answered half of the question, as the class's time was up and attention was brought by one of the students who apologized while leaving the classroom saying that he had an exam to attend. The instructor said: "That's all for today" and that he "Will be asking [them] you about this next class". Interestingly, when almost most of the students left the classroom the male student whom the instructor asked to explain the grammatical rule was asked by a friend of his to explain it to him as he did not get it. Remarkably, the hesitant male explained the grammatical rule to his male friend in a clear voice without using any filler words, stuttering, blushing, or shaking any of his legs!

While the male student was explaining the grammatical rule to his friend almost all the females left the classroom and only 3 were in (they seemed to have to attend another class in the same

classroom). The female researcher approached the male student (the same male student that the instructor asked earlier to explain the grammatical rule) and asked him if he could explain the grammatical rule to her as well. The male student hesitantly agreed to explain it to her. When he was explaining the grammatical rule to the female researcher, he spoke slower than when he spoke with his male friend, and the hand in which he was carrying a pen was shaking. When he finished explaining, the researcher turned around and asked the other male students who were standing next to him whether all of them understood the grammatical rule or not, and all of the males answered without looking into her eyes and with a hesitant voice saying they did [understand it]. Then the researcher thanked them and headed out of the classroom.

After having finished observing the first classroom, the researcher started looking for another classroom to observe on the same day. Note that this time, the researcher was looking for a classroom occupied with females only to observe whether their natural language and behavior would change in case other females they are not close with or male students enter the classroom.

#### **4.1.2. Classroom 2 Observation Notes**

The researcher started looking for a classroom in the DELL at UOB that is only occupied with females, a thing which was easy to find since the majority (around 78.3% and above) of the students in the DELL are females. The female researcher noticed a group of females chatting in a classroom full of other female students. The researcher directly headed to that classroom and greeted them in a clear voice which almost all the females responded to in a clear voice as well. The researcher interrupted a group of females who were chatting (there was more than one) asking them how they performed in the mid-term. They happily, clearly, and comfortably talked about how easy the multiple-choice questions were. The researcher played along and when they were about to stop talking, she said “Don’t you think we needed more time to finish answering the test?” all the females agreed and said that the essay question did indeed need more time to complete, and one of the females who agreed said that she did not have enough time that the instructor who was observing them had to pull her test paper from her.

It was interesting that just like in the first observed classroom, none of the [female] students noticed that the researcher was a newbie. The females did not avoid eye contact with the female researcher, spoke frankly, and drew their shoulders toward the researcher when talking to her. The females’ sudden lowering of their voices made the researcher look for the reason why which she noticed was due to the entrance of a group of male students, as the females did not lower their voices when other female students were entering the classroom. When the researcher saw the instructor teaching the classroom she intended to observe, talking to students near a corner facing the classroom door, the researcher approached her and asked to talk to her privately, and when the students that were talking to the instructor entered the classroom, the researcher asked for the instructor’s permission to attend her class without giving the instructor any additional information, which the instructor agreed on.

Upon the researcher's and the instructor’s entrance to the class, the students' voices were barely heard. A few minutes after the instructor wrote a few sentences on the board, she started explaining the lesson. During the lesson, the researcher noticed two females slightly pushing

each other's shoulders. Then one of the females raised her hand and asked the instructor to repeat what she said. The instructor seemed not to have heard her and asked her to come again (i.e., repeat what she said). The female seemed not to understand the phrase and blushed as the instructor was looking at her while waiting for her to repeat what she said. It was only until the female's friend slightly hit her with her elbow telling her that the instructor is asking her to repeat what she said earlier. The female student seemed hesitant to repeat her question and was blushing as all her classmates were paying attention to her either by looking or listening to her. She then apologized in a trembling voice and in a more indirect way than the first time she asked the instructor whether she (i.e., the instructor) could repeat what she said earlier. The instructor said that there is no need to apologize and repeated what she discussed earlier after one of the students reminded her of what she was talking about.

By the time the instructor finished explaining the lesson, she wrote a question on the board and asked the students to discuss it in groups. The students formed a group with the students sitting next to them. The groups consisted of 5 to 6 students. The researcher noticed that the only 4 male students in the classroom formed a group on their own and intentionally excluded the female that was sitting next to them who was not included in any group. It was only when the researcher slightly waived to the female student and asked her to join her group that the female was included in the group. By that, all groups formed consisted of members of the same gender. After students finished discussing their answers and the time came for the student to present their answers, the researcher noticed many female students avoiding speaking and inviting other females to talk instead of them. As a result, only the confident (i.e., outspoken, initiative-takers) students in the groups stood up and discussed their answers, where only 8 out of 40 students spoke (7 of them were females and 1 was male), while the rest of the students kept quiet.

One of the students was reading her answer from a paper and repeatedly mispronounced a certain word, and every time she mispronounced it, she apologized saying: "I have foggy eyesight". One of the quiet male students disagreed with the female's response, which was obvious as his facial gestures showed his disagreement in addition to what he uttered in a low voice that only the males sitting in the back seats and a few females sitting near them could hear, which was: "I beg to differ". The female blushed and seemed bewildered as she seemed not to have understood the male's comment. However, the instructor heard what the male student said and asked him (i.e., the male student) "Why was that?" (i.e., why does he disagree with the female's answer), but the male student avoided looking at the instructor and even avoided responding. The instructor understood the male student's silence and respected his wish and carried the discussion without obligating the male student to respond.

Then, the instructor asked a few students to write their answers on the board, the students occupied as less physical space as they could and avoided even slightly looking and standing next to their classmates (of the same and opposite gender) whereas they waited for their classmates to write their answers, move away from the board and go back to their seats so that another student could get up and go to the board to write their answers, to avoid having any physical touch, which was evident in how careful they were in avoiding touching their classmates' shoulders. It was worth noting that when the instructor chose random students and asked them by name to say their answers out loud all the students gave brief answers and started speaking in a low voice pitch that is barely heard, used too many filler words such as umm, I mean, like and so, their voices and hands were shaking, and constantly played with their

accessorize where the students moved their rings back and forth or fixed their watches, and some started blushing. And one of the students kept tapping with the tips of her nails on her notebook cover the whole time she was answering and only stopped by the time she finished speaking.

Interestingly, by the end of the class, one of the males stood closely and spoke comfortably with one of his female classmates while looking her in the eyes. He was not blushing, his hands and legs were not shaking, and he did not stutter or use any filler words when communicating with her. Likewise, the female that he was talking to stood close by him, looked him in the eyes, was listening attentively, and responded correspondingly. When they finished talking and he left, the researcher wanted to know whether this comfort and confidence in the behavior and speech of both the male and the female was because they were cousins or because they were just close and familiar with each other. This made the researcher indirectly ask the female saying: “You look alike. Is he your cousin or something?”, which she laughed at and replied saying “No, no, no. He is not a cousin of mine. Both of us are registered in the same English courses and classes for this semester. And we probably look alike because we have similar personalities. Isn’t that what you mean?” The researcher said “Of course. What else would I mean? You clearly have a prettier face than his ;)” Both the researcher and the student laughed and got out of the classroom each heading in her way.

#### 4.1.3. Classrooms Observations Findings

The two classroom observations suggest that the observed ESL DELL UOB students are indeed more confident when speaking English with 1. classmates of the same gender or 2. classmates they’re familiar/close with (regardless of gender). This is supporting evidence for H1. ESL DELL UOB students feel more confident when speaking English with their classmates of the same gender. However, the students frequently showed several verbal & non-verbal signs showing stressfulness, nervousness, and lack of confidence when speaking English in the classroom, which answered this research Q2. What are the verbal and non-verbal signs that ESL DELL UOB students show which indicate their lack of self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender? These signs were constantly apologizing when making grammatical mistakes, avoiding speaking, being hesitant when [unexpectedly] asked to say or repeat something, using too many filler words, uttering unclear words, and speaking faster or slower “than usual” (which was in line with one of the factors Fatmawati *et al.* (2020) found to negatively affect EFL learners’ speech), lowering their voices, their voices shaking/trembling, avoiding eye contact, playing with their accessories, blushing, shaking their legs and tapping with their fingers/nails when speaking in the presence of their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender, as many of these signs were not present when the students were only in the presence of classmates of the same gender. The fact that many of these verbal & non-verbal signs were only present in the 85 ESL DELL UOB students in the presence of classmates of the opposite gender suggests that indeed the 85 ESL DELL UOB observed students’ self-confidence when speaking English is negatively affected. Yet, it was noticed that it was affected due to 4 main reasons, namely: 1. Element of surprise; being suddenly asked to talk/respond/repeat what they said/say something, (which was in line with Fatmawati *et al.* (2020) who found that EFL students’ lack of preparation negatively affected their confidence when speaking English), 2. The speaker’s usage of words that the audience does not know their meaning, 3. The presence of their classmates (regardless of gender) they are not close/familiar with, and 4. The presence of



classmates of the opposite gender. To confirm whether or not the assumption that the gender of classmates present in the classroom negatively affects ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English is true, two statements (Q.3 & Q.4) were included in the self-assessed questionnaire and discussed in the discussion section (See discussion 8.1).

**4.2. The Self-Assessed Questionnaire's Findings**

(See Appendix 1 for the questions included in the questionnaire)

The designed questionnaire was shared and answered on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of December, 2022, and was taken by 85 ESL DELL UOB students at the University of Bahrain. The link was sent via Airdrop to one of the students who then forward it to their classmates via their WhatsApp group. The students were asked to click on the link, and the researcher went through each question with the students to explain and illustrate the verbal and non-verbal signs mentioned in the questionnaire. The students had all the time (within 48h) they needed to answer the questionnaire as they were told that they could submit their answers anytime throughout the day. The participants were told from the start that participating in the questionnaire is optional and anyone not wishing to take it can do as they wish.

Attached below are the findings of the questionnaire (graphs & their analysis):

***The 2 statements regarding how confident the 85 ESL DELL UOB students feel when speaking English with classmates of the same & opposite gender (see figures 3 & 4):***

I feel confident when speaking English with my classmates OF THE SAME GENDER.  
85 responses

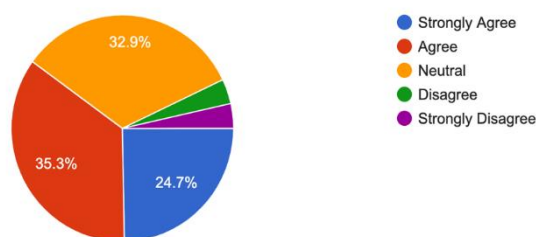


Figure 3. The 1<sup>st</sup> statement, “I feel confident speaking English with classmates of the same gender”. It illustrates that the majority of students (35.3%) Agree with the statement “I feel confident speaking English with classmates of the same gender”, whereas (32.9%) are Neutral (see Figure 3).

Table 1. Figure 3 responses

Sentiment Level	Numerical Value	Responses	Total
Strongly Disagree	1	3	3
Disagree	2	3	6
Neutral	3	28	84
Agree	4	30	120
Strongly Agree	5	21	105

The average score for this statement’s responses is 3.74 (Agree)

I feel confident when speaking English with my classmates OF THE OPPOSITE GENDER.

85 responses

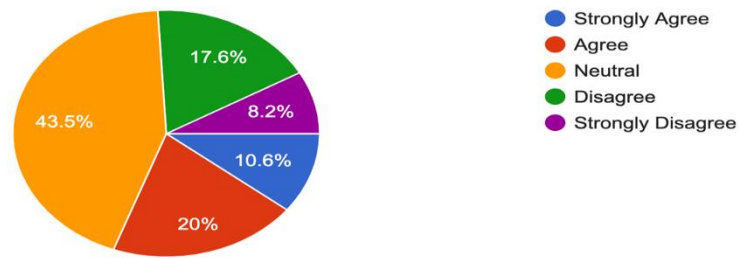


Figure 4. The 2<sup>nd</sup> statement “I feel confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender”

Contrary to the 1<sup>st</sup> statement, when presenting the students with the statement “I feel confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender”, the majority of students (43.5%) are Neutral, whereas (20%) Agree with it (see Figure 4).

Table 2. Figure 4 responses

Sentiment Level	Numerical Value	Responses	Total
Strongly Disagree	1	7	7
Disagree	2	15	30
Neutral	3	37	111
Agree	4	17	68
Strongly Agree	5	9	45

The average score for this statement’s responses is 3.07 (Neutral)

Analyzing the above-attached tables (see Tables 1, & 2) including the scores of the 2 statements included in the self-assessed questionnaire (see Figures 3 & 4) which are based on a 5-point Likert scale, the average sentiment score [for both statements] is 3.4 (i.e., Neutral)

***The 17 verbal & non-verbal signs 85 ESL DELL UOB students showed when speaking English with classmates of the same and opposite gender (see Figures 5 & 6):***

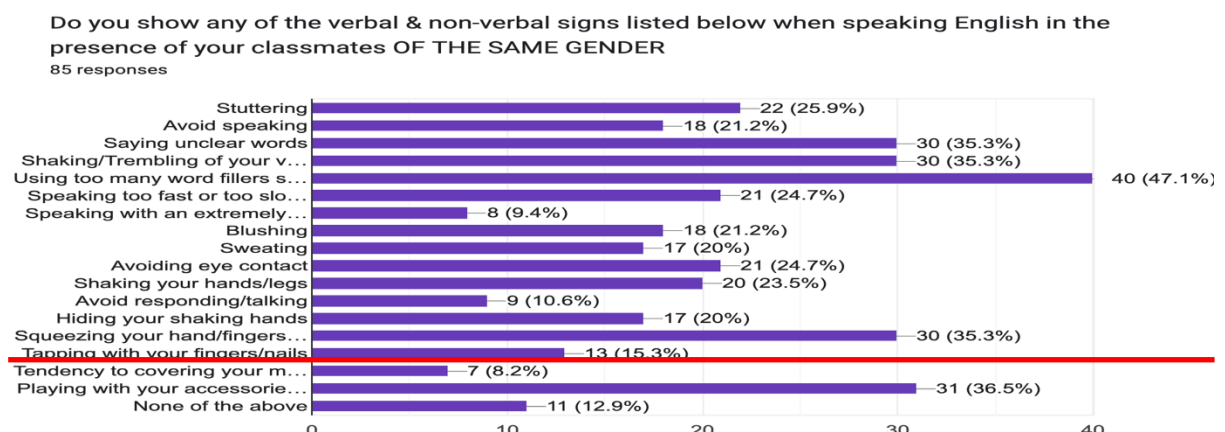


Figure 5. The verbal & non-verbal signs negatively affecting ESL DELL students’ self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of classmates of the same gender

The crucial findings illustrated in Figure 5 are as follows (Note: the red line separates the verbal signs from the non-verbal signs):

In the case of verbal signs, the most frequent sign is using too many filler words, which 40 of the students (47.1%) have. In second place comes the two verbal signs; 1. Saying unclear words and 2. Shaking/Trembling of one's voice which 30 students (35.3%) have [for each sign]. However, speaking with an extremely low or extremely high voice pitch "than usual" is the least prominent verbal sign, as only 8 of the students (9.4%) have it.

In the case of non-verbal signs, the most frequent sign is playing with one's accessories which 31 of the students (36.5%) have. The second most frequent non-verbal sign is squeezing one's hands/fingers which 30 of the students (35.3%) have. However, the tendency to cover one's mouth/face is the least prominent non-verbal sign, as only 7 of the students (8.2%) have it.

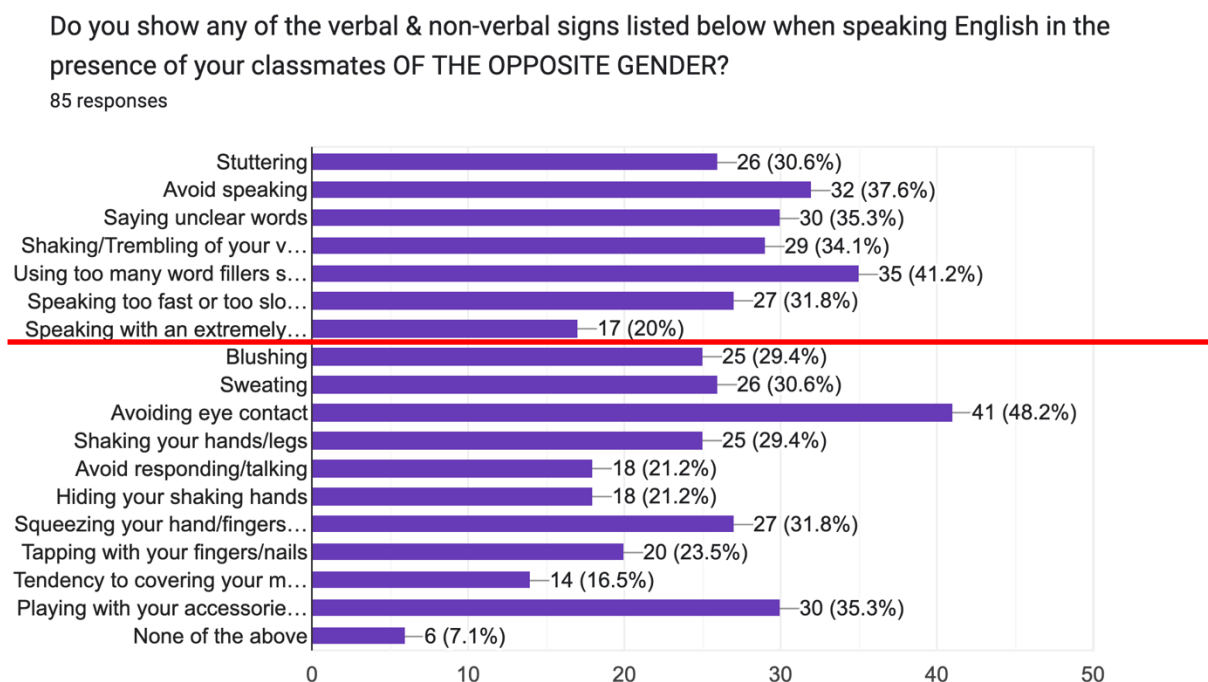


Figure 6. The verbal & non-verbal signs negatively affecting ESL DELL students' self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of classmates of the opposite gender

The crucial findings illustrated in Figure 6 are as follows (Note: the red line separates the verbal signs from the non-verbal signs):

In the case of verbal signs, the most frequent verbal sign is using too many filler words, which 35 of the students (41.2%) have. The second most frequent verbal sign is avoiding speaking which 32 of the students (37.6%) have. With a nearly similar frequency, saying unclear words which 30 of the students (35.3%) have, is the third most frequent verbal sign. The fourth most frequent verbal sign is shaking/trembling of one's voice which 29 of the students (34.1%) have. The fifth most frequent verbal sign is speaking too fast or slow "than usual" which 27 of the students (31.8%) have. And the sixth most frequent verbal sign is stuttering which 26 of the

students (30.6%) have. However, speaking with an extremely low or extremely high voice pitch “than usual” is the least frequent verbal sign, as only 17 of the students (20%) have it.

It is worth noting that not only speaking with an extremely low or extremely high voice pitch “than usual” is the least prominent verbal sign in both cases of speaking English with classmates of the same and opposite gender but also increased by 10.6% in the case of the latter (see Figure 5 & 6).

In the case of non-verbal signs, the most frequent non-verbal sign is avoiding eye contact which 41 out of 85 of the students (48.2%) have. The second most frequent non-verbal sign is playing with one’s accessories which 30 of the students (35.3%) have. The third most frequent non-verbal sign is squeezing one’s hands/fingers, which 27 of the students (31.8%) have. The fourth most frequent non-verbal sign is sweating which 26 of the students (30.6%) have. However, the tendency to cover one’s mouth/face is the least prominent non-verbal sign, as only 14 of the students (16.5%) have it.

It is also worth noting that not only the tendency to cover one’s mouth/face is the least frequent non-verbal sign in both cases of speaking English with classmates of the same and opposite gender but also increased by 8.3% in the case of the latter (see Figure 5 & 6).

Note that 6 out of 7 verbal signs showing students’ lack of self-confidence, each received 30.6% and above when students are speaking English in the presence of classmates of the opposite gender (see figure 6) which was more significant than the number of verbal signs showing students’ lack of self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of classmates of the same gender (see Figure 5) which only 3 verbal signs out of 7 received 35.3% and above.

It is also worth noting that when looking at the verbal and non-verbal signs that students have when speaking English with classmates of the same and opposite gender, 14 out of the 17 (verbal and non-verbal) signs received a higher percentage when students are speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender (see Figure 6), than when speaking English with classmates of the same gender (see figure 5).

***The responses to the 7<sup>th</sup> question in the self-assessed questionnaire, which was directed at the students who become less confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender, asking them: What do you think is the reason that causes you to become less confident [when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender]?***

The responses were subcategorized into 4 main categories (i.e., psychological, cultural, linguistic, and religious factors), and each main category/factor was assigned a point by the researcher for every time it was mentioned to see the most frequent factor. It is worth mentioning that because many students mentioned more than 1 sub-factor this resulted in the total number of points accumulated by the main factors being more than the total number of

participants. The total number of points received is the number mentioned beside each main factor's heading. And below each sub-factor, a few of the participants' responses were mentioned within parentheses. The factors were listed from the most frequent to the least frequent, and were subcategorized as follows:

***Psychological factors: 41 Points***

1. Fear 4
2. Stress 2
3. Shyness 5
4. Eye gaze 3

(If their stare is sharp/When all eyes are on me/Many eyes on (looking at) us).

5. Unfamiliarity 5

(Not being close/Hate speaking with people I'm not used to/If we're not friends).

6. Nervousness 2
7. Self-consciousness 1
8. Lack of confidence 6
9. Anxiety/Social Anxiety 5
10. Feeling uncomfortable 1
11. Feel/Fear of being judged 2
12. Number of people (speaking) 1
13. Not liking speaking/talking to people 3
14. Lack of energy at the time (of speaking) 1

The psychological factors receiving the highest number of points (41 points), by that being the most frequent factors negatively affecting ESL DELL students' when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender proved H4. Psychological factors will be the prominent factors negatively affecting students' self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender.

***Cultural factors: 36 Points***

1. Culture/society 9
2. Enrolling/Bing in segregated/Public schools 5
3. Infrequently communicating with members of the opposite gender 22

(Not used to speaking/Not interacting with the opposite gender as it is not known is my/our/one's culture/Spending much/more time with members of the same gender/Rarely around boys/girls).

***Linguistic factors: 21 Points***

1. Fluency 9

(Avoid speaking due to inability to speak fluently/Not professional in speaking English/My English is poor/Not fluent enough/Fear of saying the wrong vocabulary/The possibility of making mistakes/grammatical mistakes).

2. The speaker's speedy speech 2

(The speaker talking fast/The speaker talking faster than me).



3. The complexity of the speaker's jargon 4

(If he/they (the speaker/s) use/s complex words/Speaks better than me).

4. Infrequently practicing English speaking 6

(Do not Usually speak English/Not being used to speaking English/Need more speaking practice).

**Religious factors: 7 Points**

1. Avoiding eye contact because of Religion 1

(Lowering my gaze (when talking with the other gender) because of religion).

2. Unfamiliarity with members of the opposite gender because of religion 6

(Not being used to speaking/Not used to interacting with the opposite gender because of religious reasons).

***The responses to the 8<sup>th</sup> question in the self-assessed questionnaire, which was directed at the students who become less confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender, asking them: What do you think can be done to make you more confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender?***

The solutions provided by the students were listed under the previously mentioned 4 main factors/categories. The factors were listed from factors receiving the most suggested solutions to factors receiving the least suggested solutions [that can help students become more confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender]. It is worth mentioning that because many students mentioned more than 1 solution this resulted in the total number of points accumulated by the main factors being more than the total number of participants. The total number of points received is the number mentioned beside each main factor's heading. And below certain solutions, several participants' responses were mentioned within parentheses. They are as follows:

***To deal with linguistic Factors: 39 Solutions***

1. Speaking English more frequently 35

(More conversations/More speaking assignments/Talking about different things/Speaking more with them/Using English more frequently/Practicing speaking in front of a group of people/Practicing/Speak often with the opposite gender/Talk frequently/Talk more to each other in classes/Frequent talk/Speak more often/Make group works/More conversations/learn to speak English more/More courses in speaking English/More speaking practice/More speaking sessions).

2. Using the Arabic Language 1

3. Work on one's self (one's proficiency and fluency) 1

4. Adjusting one's tone of voice to be at the same level as the speaker 1

5. Using English dialects in most conversations and avoiding speaking to speak in Arabic 1

***To deal with cultural factors: 21 Solutions***

1. Be in a mixed [educational] environment 14

(Having a friendly environment/Socializing with them/Enrolling in more activities that require communication between students/More interaction with the opposite gender in the university).

2. Have frequent engagement with members of the opposite gender 7

(Speak often with members of the opposite gender/Speaking with my/your dad/brother can make me/you more comfortable with them/Start a conversation with them/Talk more with the opposite gender/Getting to know them more/Speak with them more often/ (members of the opposite gender)/Talk more frequently in English together).

***To deal with psychological factors: 16 Solutions***

1. Therapy 1
2. Breaking the Fear 2
3. Retaining eye contact 1
4. Working on one's self (behavior) 1
5. Using Methods to calm one's Self 1
6. Avoid looking at the speaker's face 1
7. Working on one's confidence (Being more confident) 3
8. Familiarize yourself with members of the opposite gender 6

(Get familiar with the person/Knowing the person/Feel stress-free interacting with the opposite gender/Become friends)

***To deal with religious factors: 0 Solutions***

No solutions were provided by the students on how to deal with religious factors negatively affecting their self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender.

**4.3. Self-Assessed Questionnaire Findings**

5. Table 3. Descriptive Statistics: (i.e., Mean & Standard Deviation) of the 2 questions presented in Figures 3 & 4

**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	85	1	2	1.92	.277
"I feel confident speaking English with my classmates of the same gender"	85	1.00	5.00	2.2588	.98986
"I feel confident when speaking English with my classmates of the opposite gender"	85	1.00	5.00	2.9294	1.06668
Valid N (listwise)	85				

From the above-attached descriptive statistics table, it can be seen that out of the 85 students answering the self-assessed questionnaire, the minimum of self-confidence is 1, whereas the maximum is 5 (see Table 3). And while the mean in Q1 (see Figure 3) was 2.2588, the mean in Q2 (see Figure 4) was 2.9294, and the Standard Deviation was 0.98986 in Q1 (see Figure 3), and 1.06668 in Q2 (see Figure 4).

Tables 4, 5, & 6. Descriptive Statistics: (i.e., Frequencies, Valid & Cumulative Percentage) of the 2 questions presented in Figures 3 & 4)

Tables 4

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Male	7	8.2	8.2	8.2
	Female	78	91.8	91.8	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Tables 5

“I feel confident speaking English with my classmates of the same gender”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Strongly Agree	21	24.7	24.7	24.7
	Agree	30	35.3	35.3	60.0
	Neutral	28	32.9	32.9	92.9
	Disagree	3	3.5	3.5	96.5
	Strongly Disagree	3	3.5	3.5	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 6

“I feel confident when speaking English with my classmates of the opposite gender”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Strongly Agree	9	10.6	10.6	10.6
	Agree	17	20.0	20.0	30.6
	Neutral	37	43.5	43.5	74.1
	Disagree	15	17.6	17.6	91.8
	Strongly Disagree	7	8.2	8.2	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 7. Bivariate Correlations (of the 2 questions represented in Figures 3 & 4)

**Correlations**

Gender	“I feel confident speaking English with my classmates of the same gender”	“I feel confident when speaking English with my classmates of the opposite gender”

Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	-.182	-.060
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.095	.584
	N	85	85	85
“I feel confident speaking English with my classmates of the same gender”	Pearson Correlation	-.182	1	-.377**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.095		<.001
	N	85	85	85
“I feel confident when speaking English with my classmates of the opposite gender”	Pearson Correlation	-.060	-.377**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.584	<.001	
	N	85	85	85

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the above-attached Bivariate Correlations table, it can be seen that the relationship between students' gender and their self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the same and opposite gender is negative (see Table 7).

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The two classroom observations proved that the observed 85 ESL DELL UOB students are more confident when speaking English with classmates of the same gender compared to when speaking English with/in the presence of classmates of the opposite gender, providing supporting evidence for this research H1. ESL DELL UOB students feel more confident when speaking English with classmates of the same gender & H2. ESL DELL UOB female students feel less confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender. This is mainly because the observed 85 ESL DELL UOB students frequently showed several verbal and non-verbal signs showing a lack of self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of classmates of the opposite gender which they did not show when they were speaking English in the presence of classmates of the same gender only. Moreover, the researcher's two class observation [stated] notes answered this research Q.2 (What are the verbal and non-verbal signs that ESL DELL UOB students show indicating their lack of self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender?). These were constantly apologizing, when making grammatical mistakes, avoiding speaking, being hesitant when asked to say or repeat something, using too many filler words, uttering unclear words, speaking faster or slower “than usual”, lowering their voices, their voices shaking/trembling, avoiding eye contact, playing with their accessories, blushing, shaking their legs and tapping with their fingers/nails when speaking in the presence of their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender, as many of these signs were less frequent and some were not present when the students were only in the presence of classmates of the same gender.

In addition, the above-mentioned verbal and non-verbal signs that the researcher noticed on the observed 85 ESL DELL UOB students indicating their lack of self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of their classmates were in line with the findings of the 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> questions (see Figures 5 & 6) that were included in the self-assessed questionnaire, indicating that regardless of gender, the most prominent verbal sign showing ESL DELL UOB students' lack of self-confidence is using too many filler words such as ummm, like, really, ahaa, and I

mean which 40 of the students (47.1%) have when speaking English with classmates of the same gender, and 41 of the students (48.2%) have when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender. The likelihood of this verbal sign increased [though not significantly] by 1.1% in the case of the presence of classmates of the opposite gender. The verbal sign of saying unclear words comes in second place receiving the same percentage in both cases [with classmates of the same and opposite gender] as 30 students (35.3%) have when they are speaking English with their classmates. Moreover, regardless of gender, the most prominent non-verbal sign showing ESL DELL UOB students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates is playing with one's accessories (i.e., watch, ring, bracelet, necklace) which 31 of the students (36.5%) have when speaking English which classmates of the same gender, whereas, 30 of the students (35.3%) have when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> statement "I feel confident when speaking English with classmates of the same gender" & 4<sup>th</sup> statement "I feel confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender" (see Figures 3 & 4) were included in the self-assessed questionnaire either to confirm or refute the observations' findings. The two above-mentioned statements' findings were as follows: the majority of students (35.3%) [3.74] agree with the former statement whereas only (20%) agree with the latter (15.3% less). Moreover, (32.9%) [3.07] are neutral to the former statement, whereas the majority of students (43.5%) are neutral with the latter (10.6% more). The fact that there is a 17.6% increase in students feeling less confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender (see Figures 3 & 4) and a 15.3% increase in students feeling more confident speaking English with classmates of the same gender (see Figures 3 & 4) not only support the researcher's class observations findings but also proves this research H1. ESL DELL UOB students feel more confident when speaking English with classmates of the same gender, and in proves H2. ESL DELL UOB female students feel less confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender. In addition, a 15.3% increase in students feeling more confident speaking English with classmates of the same gender, answers this research Q1.1 (To what extent is ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence affected when speaking English with classmates of the same gender?). And the fact that a is a 17.6% increase in students feeling less confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender, in addition to the fact 14 out of the 17 verbal and non-verbal signs received a higher percentage when students are speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender (see Figure 6) than when speaking English with classmates of the same gender (see Figure 5) provides strong evidence to and answer this research Q1.2 (To what extent is ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence affected when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender?)

The self-assessed questionnaire's 5<sup>th</sup> question investigating ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the same gender also provided additional supporting evidence to one of the research questions, that being Q1.1 (To what extent is ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence affected when speaking English with classmates of the same gender?). The answer is: to the extent that 3 out of 7 of the verbal signs and 2 out of 10 non-verbal signs showing a lack of self-confidence when ESL DELL UOB students are speaking English with classmates of the same gender received 30% and above (see Figure 3). While the frequency of the non-verbal signs was insignificant, the frequency of the verbal signs was significant, showing that the 85 ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking



English is not only negatively affected by the gender of classmates present, but is also negatively affected by the presence of their classmates [regardless of gender] as well.

Therefore, it is safe to state that the 2 classroom observations and the self-assessed questionnaire show that indeed, the level of the students' self-confidence when speaking English is negatively affected by the existence of classmates of the opposite gender as the verbal and non-verbal signs showing a lack of self-confidence increased rather than decrease with the mere presence of classmates of the opposite gender. This is not only what the researcher's 2 classroom observation notes and findings suggest, but what the self-assessed questionnaire's responses, especially the 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> questions (the two questions including verbal & non-verbal signs) (see Figures 5 & 6) show as 6 out of 7 verbal signs showing students' lack of self-confidence, each received 30.6% and above when students are speaking English with/in the presence of classmates of the opposite gender which was more significant than that of the verbal signs showing students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with/in the presence of classmates of the same gender which was 35.3% and above in only 3 verbal signs out of 7 (see Figures 5 & 6). And this proves this research H3. The verbal signs showing ESL DELL students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender will be more prominent than the verbal signs showing students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of classmates of the same gender.

The findings of the 7<sup>th</sup> question which was directed to students who become less confident when speaking English in the presence of classmates of the opposite gender, asking them: What do they think is the reason that causes you to become less confident [when speaking English with students of the opposite gender]? The responses were categorized into 4 main categories (i.e., psychological, cultural, linguistic, and religious factors) that negatively affected ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English in the presence of classmates of the opposite gender. Each factor was assigned a point by the researcher for every time it was mentioned to see the most prominent factor. The findings of this question showed that in the first place, psychological factors such as fear, stress, anxiety, shyness, nervousness, and lack of self-confidence were the most mentioned factors receiving 41 points. In the second place are cultural factors such as the infrequency of communicating with members of the opposite gender, rarely being around members of the opposite gender, and being enrolled in segregated schools receiving 36 points. In the third place are linguistic factors such as not being fluent in English, the speaker's speed of speech, the complexity of the speaker's jargon, and not practicing speaking English frequently receiving 21 points. And in fourth and last place are religious factors such as avoiding eye contact, lowering one's gaze, and having no familiarity with members of the opposite gender due to religion receiving 7 points. The above-mentioned 4 factors negatively affecting ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender answered this research Q.4 (What are the most prominent factors negatively affecting ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender?). Moreover, lack of self-confidence (mentioned 6 times) was the most prominent psychological factor, followed by unfamiliarity [with members of the opposite gender], shyness, and anxiety/social anxiety (each mentioned 5 times, followed by fear (mentioned 4 times) answers this research Q3. (What are the most prominent psychological factors present among ESL DELL UOB students negatively affecting their self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates of the opposite gender?). Furthermore, the fact

that psychological factors are the most prominent factors negatively affecting ESL DELL UOB students when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender proves this research H4. Psychological factors will be the most prominent factors negatively affecting ESL DELL students' self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender. This was in line with (Shen, 2019; Arifin, 2017; Mareta *et al.*, 2017; Jabor *et al.*, 2017) who found that psychological problems, henceforth called psychological factors to be common problems present in and negatively affecting EFL students' self-confidence when speaking English in class and thus negatively affecting their oral performance.

Despite all, Bivariate Correlations test results detected a negative relationship between the 85 ESL UOB DELL students' gender and their self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the same and opposite gender.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The psychological factors negatively affecting students' self-confidence when speaking English were investigated by various researchers (Shen, 2019; Jabor *et al.*, 2017; Mareta *et al.*, 2017; Airfin, 2017). However, to my knowledge, gender as a factor negatively affecting ESL DELL UOB students' oral performance in English was not well investigated. The findings of the researcher's observations of 2 classrooms looking at 85 ESL DELL UOB students' verbal and non-verbal language when communicating in the presence of classmates of the same gender, and how it was negatively affected and changed by the presence of classmates of the opposite gender confirmed the assumption that ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English is negatively affected by the presence of classmates, especially classmates of the opposite gender. In addition, the findings of the self-assessed questionnaire taken by 85 ESL DELL UOB students were in line with the findings of the 2 classroom observations as the students confirmed that indeed, they are more confident speaking English with classmates of the same gender, and less confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender.

This is as 1. 3.74 agree with the statement "I feel confident speaking English with classmates of the same gender", whereas, 3.07 are neutral to the statement "I feel confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender". In addition to that 2. 14 out of the 17 verbal and non-verbal signs showing ESL DELL UOB students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates received a higher percentage when students are speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender, than when speaking English with classmates of the same gender. Add to that that 3. The verbal signs showing students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates of the opposite gender were more frequent (6 out of 7 received 30% and above) than the verbal signs showing students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with their classmates of the same gender (3 out of 7 received 30% and above), and by that proving that the verbal signs showing ESL DELL UOB students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender are more than the verbal signs showing ESL DELL UOB students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the same gender. Not to forget 4. The self-assessed questionnaire also proved that the principal and most prominent factor negatively affecting the 85 ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender were psychological factors (received 41 points), followed by cultural factors

(received 36 points), then linguistic factors (received 21 points). Most importantly, the Bivariate Correlations test performed using IBM SPSS detected a negative relationship between the gender of the 85 ESL UOB DELL students' and their feeling of confidence when speaking English with classmates of the same and opposite gender.

IBM SPSS analysis supported and confirmed this paper's hypothesis. The findings were as follows: for the descriptive data, the mean in Q1 was 2.2588 (see Figure 3), and the mean in Q2 was 2.9294 (see Figure 4), whereas the Standard Deviation was 0.98986 in Q1 and 1.06668 in Q2. As for the Bivariate Correlations, a negative relationship between students' gender and their self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the same and opposite gender was detected (see Table 7).

All in all, the findings of this research methodology provided evidence supporting and proving all of this research's 4 hypotheses to be true, as H1. ESL DELL UOB students feel more confident when speaking English with classmates of the same gender, H2. ESL DELL UOB female students feel less confident when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender, H3. The verbal signs showing ESL DELL UOB students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender are more prominent than the verbal signs showing students' lack of self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the same gender, and H4. Psychological factors are the most prominent factors negatively affecting ESL DELL UOB students' self-confidence when speaking English with classmates of the opposite gender. It is worth mentioning that the findings proving this research H4 are in line with the findings of Shen (2019), as the researcher found psychological factors to be the most prominent factors causing speech difficulties for EFL learners.

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#### **Appendix:**

1. The self-assessed questionnaire consisted of 8 questions. The questionnaire's link is (<https://forms.gle/vUi6uErVDXuLWNCD8>).

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