



## **Exploring the Factors Ensuring Student Participation in English Classroom: An Action Research in Saudi Context**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Students' participation in English classroom at College of Science and Humanities, Sulail is being investigated in this study to see what internal and external factors influence their participation. Students' participation in English classroom is hindered and influenced by a variety of factors, including their fear of public speaking, familiarity with the topics covered, and instructor characteristics. For this reason, a quantitative design, based on a questionnaire is used in order to reach the aim. The sample of the study includes the English department students of different levels ranging from level 3 to 8. This research will delve even further into the hidden and implicit sources of participation in order to shed light on what might occur in the classroom as a whole, rather than just on particular behaviours, rather than just on specific behaviours.

**Keywords:** EFL classroom, Students' participation, Saudi Arab, Action research, public speaking

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the field of English as a foreign language (EFL), it is necessary to conduct an in-depth investigation of the factors that affect and contribute to the teaching strategies that are utilized in EFL classes. This is extremely important due to the fact that the underlying pedagogical components define the manner in which EFL classroom teaching practices are articulated and can have a considerable impact, either positively or negatively, on the execution of various EFL classroom teaching practices. Furthermore, the nature of EFL classroom teaching techniques is shaped by these fundamental pedagogical components. In addition, if practitioners notice and thoroughly assess these traits, they will have a much better understanding of EFL classroom teaching strategies and performance. In the end, this will result in an improvement in the way EFL education is conducted. It will be beneficial to examine each environment for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) separately in order to identify the actual factors that have contributed to the evolution of the teaching methods that are currently being used in EFL classrooms. This will allow for the identification of the actual factors that have contributed to the development of the teaching methods that are currently being used in EFL classrooms. This is due to the fact that every environment for teaching English as a foreign language possesses its own unique set of characteristics (Kumar et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2022).

Many educators believe that participating in class discussions and responding to inquiries from the teacher are indications that a student has learned. In fact, when they observe favorable connections between themselves and the children in the classroom, teachers get a sense of fulfillment. The teachers and the students engage in a wide array of behaviors and activities. This applies to both the teachers and the students. Participating in the activities that are created jointly by the teachers and the students in the class is one example of the kinds of interactions that can take place in a classroom setting (Yu et al., 2022; ). Additionally, as was already said, by using this activity, it gives pupils a method to demonstrate their participation in the classroom. By the time students complete a foreign language program, they should be able to prove their proficiency in the target language. This was accomplished thanks to studying a foreign language. The importance of communicating in the language being learnt is emphasized in the instructional classroom activities that employ the communicative approach (Littlewood, 1981; Paulmony, et al., 2022; Aslam, et al., 2022). Learners must have a motivation or desire to communicate in the language they are studying before they may become communicatively competent (the target language). Actually, a student's success in communicative language training frequently depends on how willing they are to join in conversation in the target language (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2016; Ajmal & Kumar, 2020;). The phrase carries more significance because it might be viewed as the ultimate goal of L2 training (Dornyei, 2008; Vinu, et al., 2022).

One of the countries that has emphasized the importance of English as a second language is Saudi Arabia, which wants its students to be able to interact and converse with people from all over the world. Despite increased

government funding for English teaching in Saudi Arabia, the country's rate of second-language learning continues to outperform all predictions (Akhter, 2020; Alqahtani, 2016; Younes & Albalawi, 2016). Despite the multiple benefits of communication, some students lack the motivation to engage in conversation with their classmates, both within and outside of the classroom. Some people might be surprised by this. As a result, many individuals who are learning a language encounter a significant barrier in the form of hesitation or reluctance to speak. According to Baran-Lucarz (2014): "speech is a vital part of [language learning] that is not only considered as a product of acquisition but also a precondition for it; therefore, it is crucial to discover and understand the reasons for some students' unwillingness to speak." (p.446) Similar to this, Hamouda (2012) observed that most second and foreign language learners, particularly in Asia, are cautious and timid when learning English in the classroom, and pupils do not interact, volunteer remarks, or ask questions. Asia is a region where this is extremely common. Asia is noted in particular for having a high prevalence of this condition. The likelihood of this happening is often much higher at educational institutions in Asia. (Abdelrady, et al., 2022) and Rabab'h's (2005) research lend more credence to this claim. Rabab'h contends that knowing how to converse successfully in the Arabic they are learning is one of the hardest hurdles for Arabic students to overcome. The work of Rabab'ah provides more support for this position (2005). Rabab'ah adds their support to this. Saudi students are frequently viewed as being unwilling to participate in class in Saudi Arabia since they rarely provide answers to teacher inquiries, rarely ask their own questions, and prefer to keep quiet for the majority of the allotted EFL class session (Aljumah, 2011; Alhmadi, 2014; Reza, 2015; Al-wossabi, 2016; Yunus, et al., 2022). The growth of language learners is severely hindered by this refusal to communicate. As a result, the goal of this article is to carry out research into the elements that contribute to Saudi Arabian students' reluctance to engage in discussions in English. To help educators and policymakers deal with this communication challenge, fascinating insights and practical suggestions are offered.

### 1.1 Research Problem

Maintaining positive interactions between teachers and students, particularly within the framework of instruction in a foreign language, is dependent on the active participation of students in conversational activities. Moreover, it is undeniable that learning English requires students to use and practice the language. For this reason, students should raise and answer questions, take part and join classroom discussion to improve their level in English proficiency, which guarantees an on-going teaching-learning process. Despite having studied English for a while, some students in the English department choose not to speak out or participate in class discussions for a variety of internal and external reasons. The causes of this are numerous.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

This study will research the factors that impact EFL students' participation in the English classroom in Saudi Arabia. These students are studying English as a foreign language. The College of Science and Humanities in Sulail, Saudi Arabia, commissioned this research with the intention of determining the factors that influence the degree to which students participate in English classes. It seeks to do both of these things as comprehensively as possible, illuminating some of the factors that may influence the style of classroom interaction used by students and understanding the concepts or motivations that underpin their engagement in the classroom. Both educators and legislators are given fascinating insights and doable suggestions on how to solve this communication problem.

The main goal of language teaching is to develop learners' communicative skills and encourage them to speak and express themselves. It is really important to find out the factors behind students' lack or low participation in English classes. This research study has threefold goals and objectives, which are as follows:

- To examine the most important factors influencing learners' English as foreign language (EFL) learning.
- To discover how teachers may motivate students to participate more in EFL classes.
- To assess best practises for dealing with the factors and ensuring participation.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The section comprises two parts: theoretical framework and previous literature. It undertakes a wide theoretical study and literature review to determine the many definitions of participation, the role of participation in foreign language learning, and key elements that influence students' participation in various countries, including Saudi Arabia.

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

#### Definition of participation

It would appear to be quite challenging to describe properly due to the numerous forms that participation could take. Fritschner (2000) indicates that teachers and students have diverse conceptions of what constitutes participation, despite the fact that its definitions in the literature are often associated with particular acts such as asking or replying to questions. Because it teaches students to be good listeners, thinkers, and reflectors, silence

in the classroom may be more successful than verbal involvement because teachers define participation as oral participation. Silence in the classroom may encourage students to be good listeners, thinkers, and reflectors (Jaworski & Sachdev, 1998). According to them, students use silence as a "facilitative device... to gain access, organise, and absorb new material" (p. 286), which means that even if they do not speak during class discussions, they still express their feelings about the goings-on by making physical gestures like shaking their heads and making eye contact (Li, et al., 2022; Khan, et al., 2020; Olsher, 2004).

Students, on the other hand, acquire the ability to explain their thoughts and make use of language when they take an active part in the dialogue that takes place in the classroom. Additionally, through asking questions, kids are able to increase the breadth of their grasp of the content that they are currently studying. According to the parameters of this study, participation is defined as "in-class student participation," which encompasses behaviors such as posing questions, putting up one's hand, offering comments, and taking part in activities involving groups (Bippus & Young 2000; Lee, 2005). Fassinger (1995) offers yet another definition, stating that it is "any comments or questions that students offered or raised in class" (p.27). Participation on the part of the students is one of the elements of a "ideal class discussion" according to Wade (1994), in which students are learning and listening to the thoughts and recommendations of others. According to Ghalley and Rai (2019), participation is also described as "paying attention, being on task, and responding to questions." Furthermore, they emphasize that "group participation involves discussion, asking questions, demonstrating respect, seeking assistance, and making efficient use of class time" (p.2). Participation in the classroom necessitates that students engage actively with one another and the teacher in order to show that they are learning and paying attention.

Fritschner (2000) shows that instructors and students have diverse conceptions of what it means to be involved in a class when defining participation. Students' perspectives indicate that a calm environment in the classroom may be more useful for students' ability to listen, ponder, and reflect than teachers' evaluations of students' oral engagement. [Citation needed] (Jaworski & Sachdev, 1998). Oral participation, as suggested by Liu (2005), has the potential to aid students in bridging the gap that exists between their desire and their ability to express themselves. According to him, one of the advantages of engaging in verbal activity is the opportunity to review and exercise the newly acquired vocabulary and grammatical structures learned in language training.

### **The Role of Participation in Foreign Language Learning**

Over many years, the role of participation has had an increasing interest in the foreign language learning context. A great number of researchers argue that participation is important and necessary for learning a foreign language. For instance, Abede and Deneke (2015) assert: "In the classroom, learners' participation is necessary for the progress of instruction. Students' participation is not confined only to physical presence, but it means their mental presence. In class, their interaction should take interest in the class work attentively and listen to the teacher and give a good response". (p. 75)

This shows that the quantity of utterances learners create closely correlates to the quality of their spoken language, and vice versa. Additionally, while they create works in the language they are learning, students can test their assumptions about the language they are studying. Students actively participate in "the negotiation of comprehensible input and the formulation of comprehensible output," which are crucial elements of language learning, when they respond to the questions and ideas raised by the teacher or by other students, ask questions, and offer feedback. They are, in other words, actively involved in "the negotiation of comprehensible input and the formulation of comprehensible output." (Abede and Deneke, 2015, p. 75). To put it another way, if students participate in the verbal exchange of ideas and the process of meaning-making, they will have a larger potential for language acquisition (as cited by Simanjalam, 2008). According to the findings of Liu's (2005) research, oral participation may assist students bridge the gap between what they want to say and their capacity to explain it. This can help students become more successful in their academic endeavors. According to him, when language learners engage in verbal conversation, they have the chance to absorb and put into practice the new vocabulary and structures that are introduced in language sessions. In a different study, Ghalley and Rai (2019) found that student participation has a lot of advantageous benefits. By demonstrating that they can create arguments, express ideas, and participate in conversations with their peers, Fritschner (2000), who thinks outside the box of education, concludes that students' engagement will help them advance not just in their education but also in their jobs (as cited by Ghalley & Rai, 2019). Additionally, it has been established that taking an active role in class has advantages for both students and teachers. Participation is a strategy that "actively involving students in the educational process" according to Cohen (1991), and that "improving our teaching and bringing life to the classroom" (p. 699).

In the light of these benefits, a wide range of studies have concluded the role of active participation in language learning. In this respect, the experience of Rocca (2010) is as follows: "As instructors, many of us have had the experience of teaching courses where students participate frequently, the classes flow well, and all involved feel like the course was a success. On the other hand, most of us have also had quite the opposite experience, where it is a regular struggle to get students to ask questions and participate in discussions". (p.185)

According to Rocca's decision based on this experience, students who participate actively in class discussions are more likely to receive higher grades than students who do not participate in such activities and are considered passive learners. Rocca's conclusion from this event is as follows. This conclusion is supported by the observation that students who participate actively in class discussions express a higher level of satisfaction and a greater proclivity to continue participating in class than students who are considered passive learners because they do not participate actively in such activities. Rocca comes to this conclusion after observing that students who actively participate in class conflicts tend to have higher grade point averages (Simanjalam, 2008). Later, the latter demonstrates that a student's low exam score and unfinished assignments are a critical indicator that there is a problem with the student's participation in class. This finding shows that engagement in class and academic achievement have a strong correlation.

## 2.2 Previous Researches

This section discusses the previous research on factors influencing students' participation. As stated previously, participation plays an integral role in learning and acquiring a foreign language. However, there are many factors that hinder students' participation which have been observed and studied by many teachers and researchers.

Smith (2000) supported a number of options, with the conversion of large classes into formal settings for small-group instruction being the most prominent. In this article, a number of instructors who successfully rearranged their huge classrooms to prioritize small group learning by implementing a number of tactics share their positive experiences. This page includes the experiences of these instructors. Carpenter (2006) discovered that students prefer any teaching strategy that involves active learning, such as conversation, over merely passively listening to a lecture. Carpenter's exploratory study was similar to Smith's (2000) in establishing the optimum teaching method for big class environments. This result was consistent with Smith's (2000) finding that the most effective teaching method for big class settings is active learning. Through the utilization of group activities, Zhang (2005) created an approach to action research that was simple and effective. As a result, the classroom now has a productive participatory culture. Each stage of the action study was carefully planned and carried out, introducing the activities to the students in a way that was both incremental and explicative.

Saudi English majors were requested to evaluate the WTC in English for a study by Alrajhi (2017). He employed a multifaceted approach to gather information from 100 third-year students. The students' level of communication skills and their level of eagerness to communicate were significantly and favorably correlated. According to the results of the survey, Saudi Arabian students majoring in English believe that their present level of English proficiency is enough for their needs. Five major factors have been identified as having an impact on the development of pupils' oral communication skills. Personal characteristics, educational concerns, curriculum-related features, social contact between students, and the amount of time spent talking are all examples of these factors.

Al-Qurashi (2018) conducted research on the factors that influence students' oral communication skills when they are enrolled in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. Thirty students and three staff members from City University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia contributed the information. The results show that internal impacts and external influences are the two main types of factors that affect people's willingness to communicate with others. Internal traits include things like motivation, linguistic skill, and psychological traits like confidence and shyness, according to the study's findings. Although the found external elements (such class size and duration) indirectly affect classroom management in some way, they are not directly related to it. These elements include the way that pupils are taught, the tools used in education, the topics that are relevant, the usage of the first language, and code-switching.

A study conducted by Ghalley and Rai (2019) among Bhutanese students titled "Factors Influencing Classroom Participation: A Case Study of Bhutanese Higher Secondary Students", in which they interviewed twenty students picked randomly to find that there are still many factors affecting their participation in English classrooms. This study reveals that there are five factors influencing students' participation in class. The first factor is the teacher. Teacher traits play an important role in impacting classroom participation. The following factor is friends. Students' support and motivation make their classmates feel more comfortable to participate freely in the classroom. Another factor that has widely been discussed in the literature is classroom size. In this study, eight out of ten students state that they feel nervous and reluctant to participate in large classroom size. Another factor is advanced class preparation. If the content being taught were familiar, students could participate extensively and feel more comfortable to express their opinions and thoughts. The last factor is language barriers. Poor or low level in English language make students anxious speaking in front of their teachers and peers.

Kalyar, Pathan, Channa, Lohar, and Khan (2019) conducted research to determine the level of participation shown by Pakistani elementary school pupils while they were taking English as a Second Language lessons. Sending a questionnaire with closed-ended questions to a total of 300 participants served as the primary technique of data collecting. McCroskey (1992) created this survey, which was sent out by mail. For a variety of

reasons, students use English in the classroom. Individual differences in students' communicative preparation can be ascribed to two distinct types of motivation: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Dittmann (2018) discovered a link between the lack of enthusiasm shown by EFL students and their unwillingness to engage in conversation in English. This was thought to be a key development. English language learners (ELL) complain that they don't have enough time to study for class, and in other situations, they hardly ever bring up concerns like how well they can tolerate linguistic and cultural ambiguity or how the classroom environment makes them feel anxious. Students studying English as a Second Language (ESL) frequently lament their lack of preparation time.

Basoz and Erten (2019) conducted a study to evaluate the opinions of Turkish EFL students regarding the elements that impact the amount of in-class English engagement they exhibit. The researchers asked the students to rate the factors from most important to least important. In this particular inquiry, a qualitative approach was taken to data collection. This study involved 32 undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students from Balikesir University in Turkey. These pupils were enrolled in a university English course. Through the utilization of the criteria sampling approach, participants were actively sought out and recruited to take part in the study. In order to get the necessary information, we conducted interviews of a semi-structured type. On the entire dataset, a qualitative analysis was carried out. According to the findings of the research, there was a correlation between a number of parameters and participation in the English classroom. These factors included the atmosphere of the classroom and the students, the strategies and materials used by the instructor, motivation, anxiety, self-perceived communication skill, and previous experience with communication.

Ghannaj (2019) did a case study for the influencing factor in the Moroccan context. He identified that the reasons that lead to low participation in class. The first reason is the lack of linguistic items. Some students are not really linguistically well-equipped to hold a conversation and express themselves because, as he cited, have lost interest in. The second reason is teacher's use of elicitation and questioning. This means that the teacher's use of language may not be understandable by the students due to their lack of linguistic items. For this reason, Ghannaj suggests that teachers simplify their language as much as they can in addition to using body language to help convey the message clearly.

Holbah and Sharma (2021) studied what demotivates ESL students in the classroom. The qualitative study included semi-structured informal interviews and classroom observations from over 125 EFL students at Saudi Arabia's Jazan University. The study's results and recommendations are intended to inspire students, instructors, parents, and administrators to address demotivation problems in order to improve EFL instruction and give students the independence, enthusiasm, and confidence they need to flourish in the 21st century.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Population**

For this research, a total of 90 Saudi boy students from College of Science and Humanities at Sulail, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, KSA have participated in this study.

#### **3.2 Research instrument**

This study is based on a questionnaire that consists of three sections. The first section deals with the demographic information of the respondents such as age, level they belong to. In addition to two general questions to know how often they participate in English class, and whether or not they prefer having sessions in the morning and why. In the following section, they are asked to choose how often the internal factors stated hinder their participation. Moreover, the third section emphasizes whether they agree or disagree with some environmental factors that may affect their participation in English classes.

#### **3.3 Data collection**

The survey is developed in Google Forms and then sent out through the internet for the purpose of data collecting. Who else except some of the instructors offered to share it with their pupils besides those people?

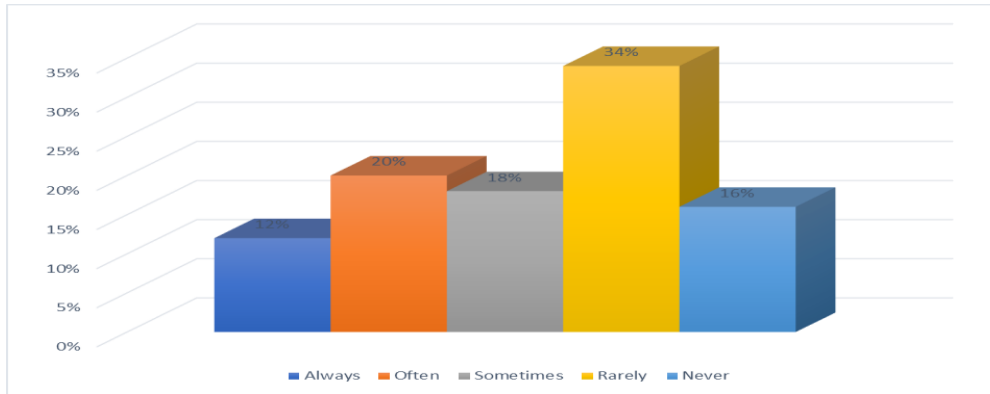
#### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Before classifying the data, the questionnaire is analysed in terms of students' choice in each section. Furthermore, Microsoft Office Excel 2007 is used to transform the findings of the data into graphs in order to be clear, readable, and to demonstrate the factors that hinder and affect students' participation in English classes.

### **4. RESULTS**

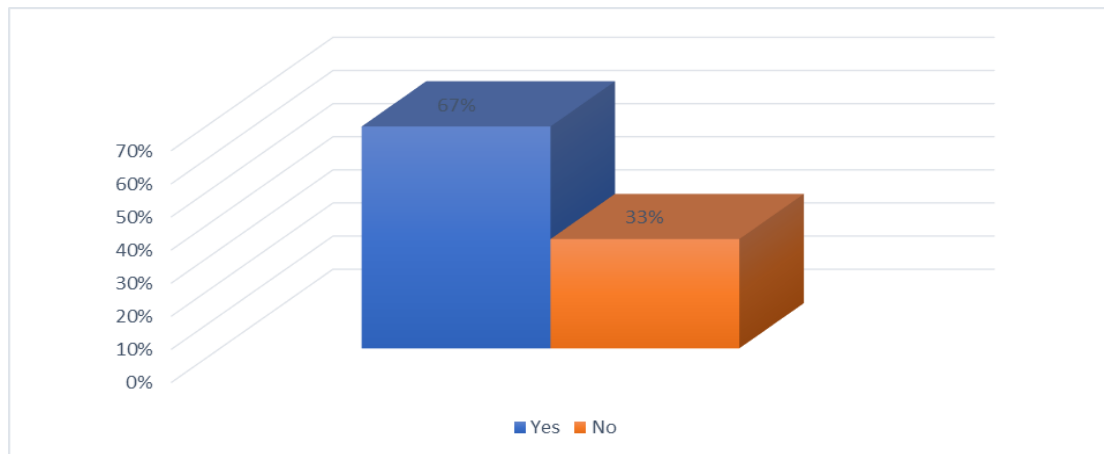
To explore the factors behind low participation in English classes, this section seeks to give a detailed analysis of the collected data and a discussion of the results. It also focuses on analysing the internal and environmental factors that hinder students' participation. In order to do so, Microsoft Office Excel is used to transform the data into clear and readable graphs.

The first category deals with the percentage of students' participation in the English classroom. It also shows the percentage of students who prefer participating in the morning sessions as well as it shows the reasons behind their choice.



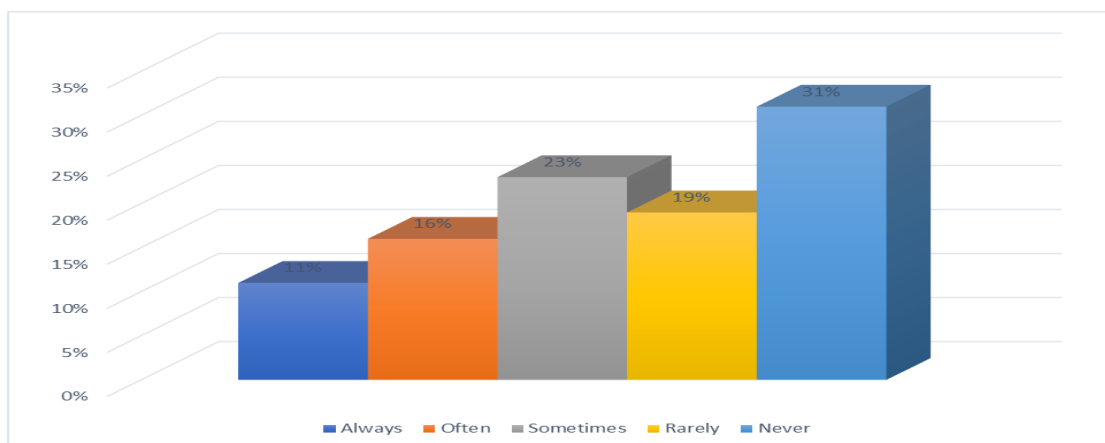
**Fig.1: The percentage of students' participation in the English classroom**

Figure 1 shows that only 12% of the participants always take part in English classes. 20% of them often participate while 18% sometimes do. On the contrary, the majority of the students or over a third (34%) state that they rarely join classroom discussion, and 16% never do.



**Fig.2: The percentage of students who prefer participating in the morning sessions**

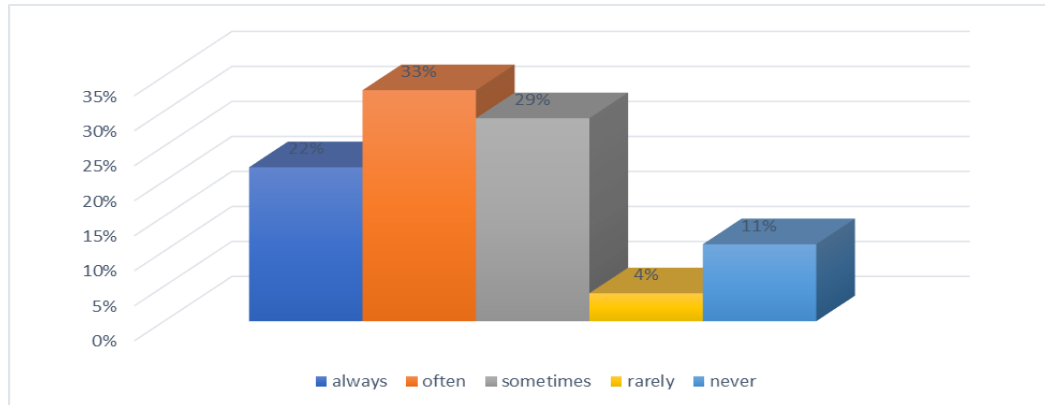
From the result above, it is clear that just over two thirds of the respondents (67%) prefer participating in the morning sessions because of two reasons. As figure 3 indicates, 62% of them state that they feel tired in the afternoon while 38% prefer participating in the morning because they feel fresh. However, a third of the respondents (33%) prefer the opposite.



**Fig.3: Students do not participate because they are not interested in the subject**

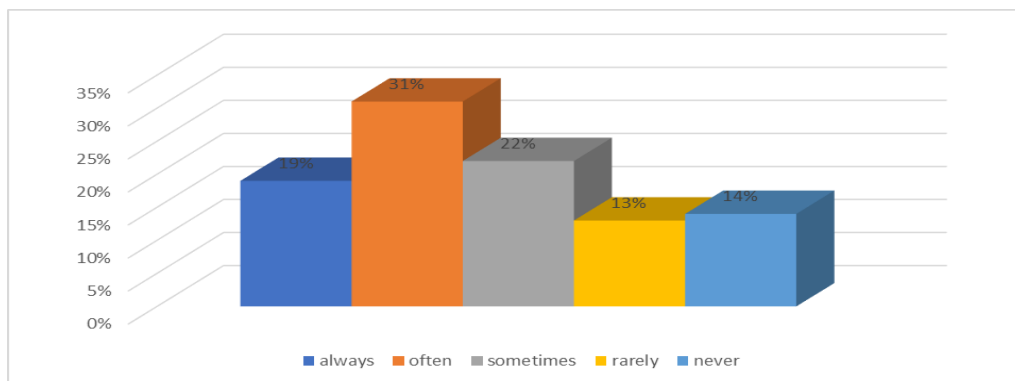
The results displayed in figure 4 admit that the minority of the participants (11%) do not participate in the English class because they are always not interested in the subject. 16% of them often do not take part in class for the same reason, and almost a quarter of the participants (23%) are sometimes not interested in learning

English. However, 19% of the respondents admit that they are not interested in the subject; whereas, the majority, about a third, (31%) prove that this factor does not affect them.



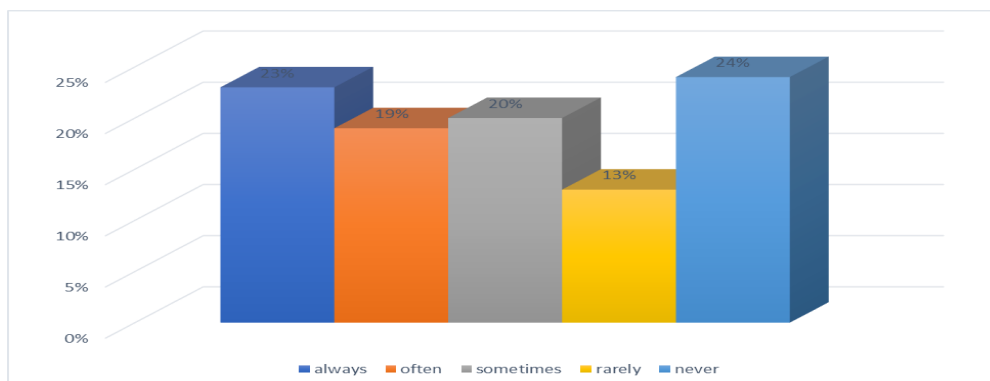
**Fig.4: Students do not participate because they fear speaking without prior preparation**

The results above demonstrate that 22% of the respondents do not participate because they always fear speaking without prior preparation, and a third (33%) of them often suffer from this problem. Moreover, 29% state that they sometimes fear taking part in the session when they are not prepared. Yet, the minority (4%) of the students rarely do, while the remaining 11% declare that this factor does not affect them even if they are not prepared.



**Fig.5: Students do not participate because they are worried to be negatively judged by their teachers for making mistakes**

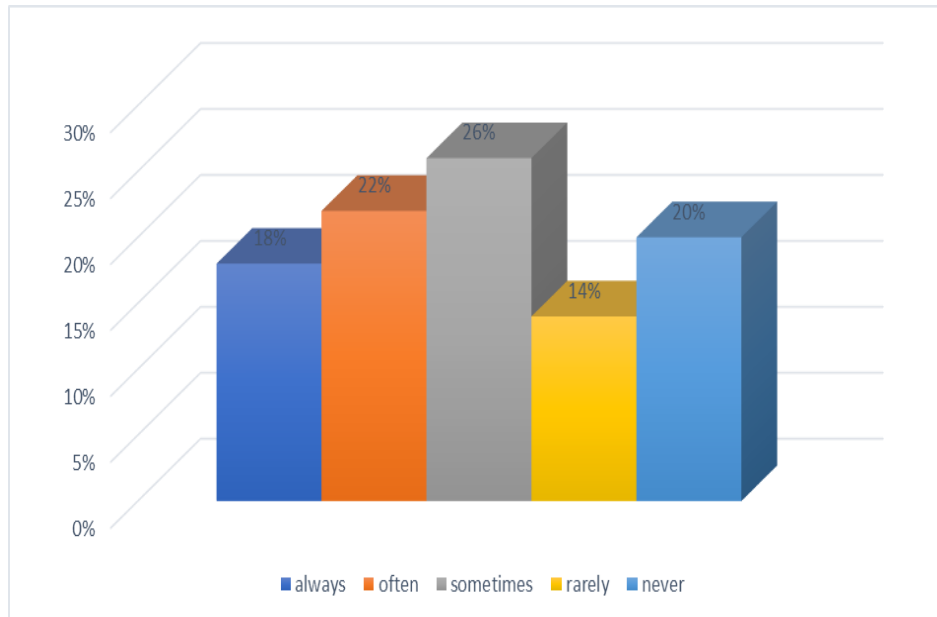
From the result above, it is clear that 19% of the participants do not take part in class discussion because they are always worried to be negatively judged by their teachers for making mistakes. In addition to this, about a third of the respondents (31%) often suffer from this problem, and 22% sometimes do. A minority of the participants (13%) rarely worry about getting negative judgement by their teachers; whereas, 14% of them assert that this factor never affects them.



**Fig.6: Students do not participate because they are worried to be mocked at by their classmates for poor pronunciation or wrong answers**

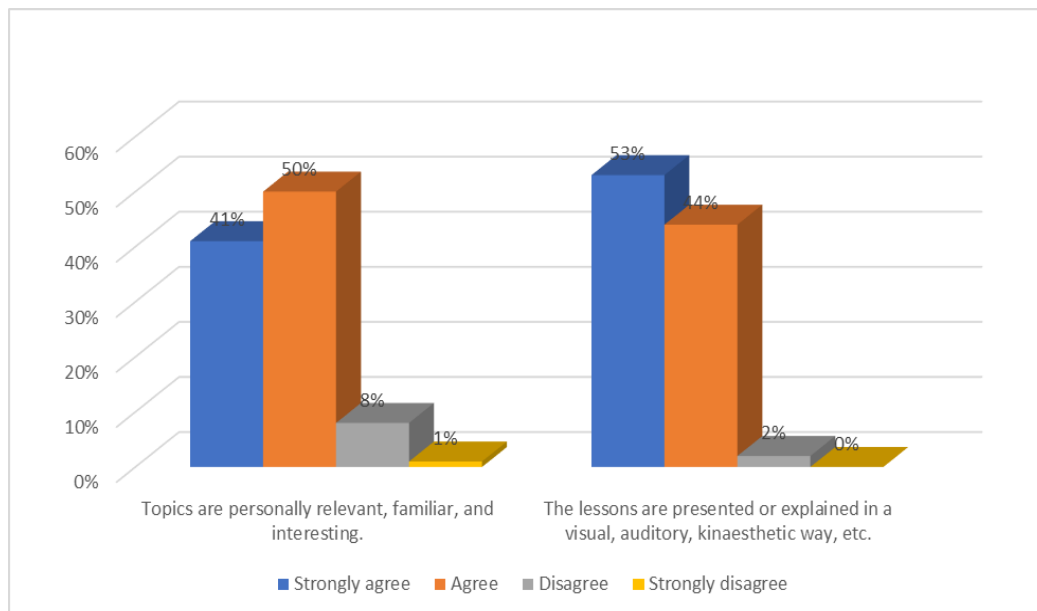


The results in figure 6 show that 23% of the respondents do not participate in English classes because they are worried to be mocked at by their classmates for poor pronunciation or wrong answers. 19% of them state that this factor often hinder their participation and a fifth (20%) assert that it sometimes does. However, 13% of the participants rarely worry about being mocked by their peers, while about a quarter of the participants i.e. majority (24%) never get affected by this factor.



**Fig.7: Students do not participate because they feel nervous speaking in public**

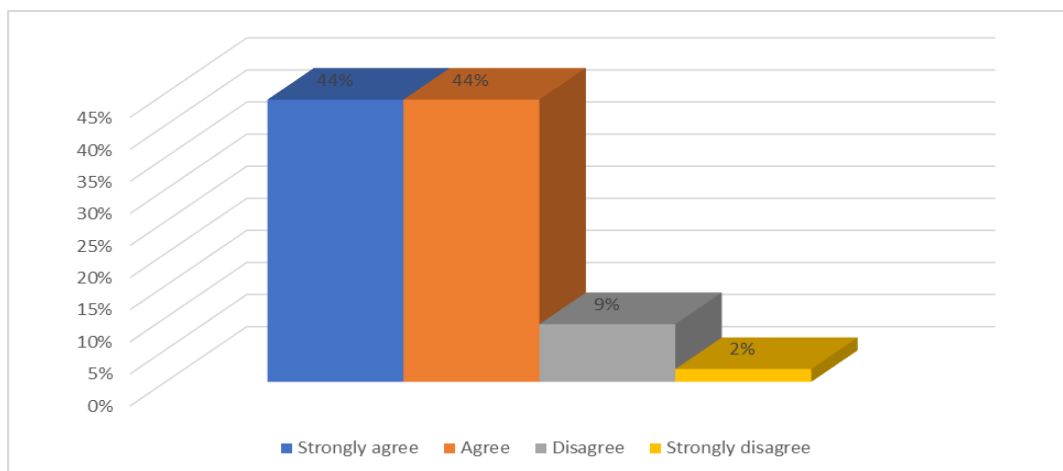
This results show that 18% of the respondents always feel nervous speaking in public and 22% of them often do. In addition to this, over a quarter of the students (26%) admit that they sometimes do not participate in English classes because of this factor, and a tiny minority of 14% rarely feel nervous speaking, while a fifth (20%) never get affected by this factor.



**Fig.8: Factors related to the topics taught and ways of presenting the lessons in English classes**

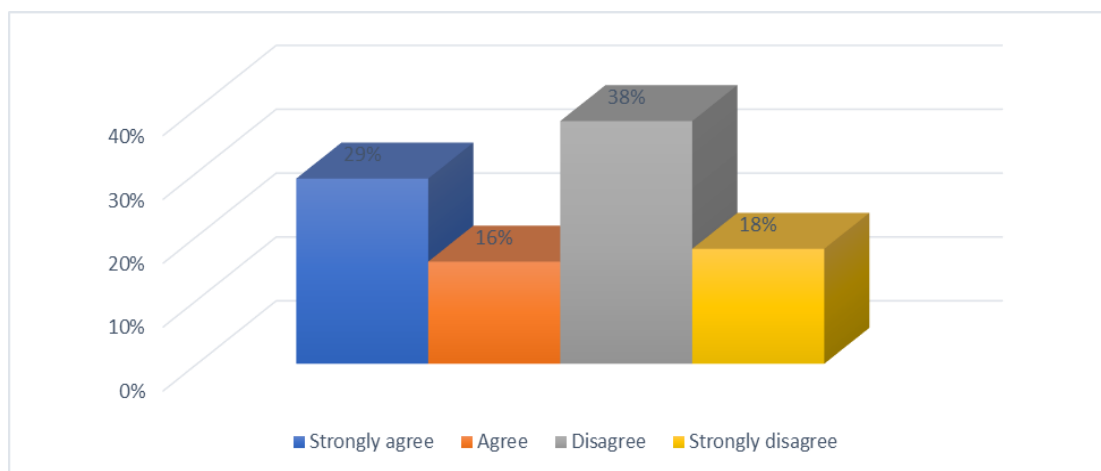
As indicated in figure 8, 41% of the participants strongly agree that they tend to participate when topics are personally relevant, familiar, and interesting while the majority of the participants (50%) agree with that. However, a small fraction (8%) do not participate even if the topics taught are interesting and personally relevant, which is the case with the 1% of the participants who strongly disagree with this.

The results in the same figure also show that the majority of the participants (53%) strongly agree that they tend to participate when the lessons are presented in a visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic way. 44% of them agree with this statement; whereas, a small minority (2%) are not willing to take part in class discussion even if lessons are presented in different ways.



**Fig.9: Students tend to participate when the teacher uses words and vocabulary that students are familiar with**

The figure above demonstrates that the same percentage of the students (44%) agree and strongly agree that teachers' use of language with which they are familiar encourages them to take part in class discussion. A small proportion of (9%) do not tend to participate along with a tiny minority of 2% who strongly disagree even if teachers use simple language.



**Fig.10: Students tend to participate when classroom size is too small**

The results shown in the last figure assert that 29% of the respondents participate when the students' number in the classroom is too small, and 16% of them also agree with this statement. However, a majority of 38% do not tend to participate even if classroom size is too small, and 18% of them also strongly disagree with the statement above.

## 5. DISCUSSION

From figure 1, it seems clear that the majority of the students (34%) rarely participate and 16% of them never do, which confirms that there are factors behind students' low participation in English classes. This section also seeks to demonstrate the effect of time in which students have classes on their willingness to speak and participate. Expectedly, (figure 2) results assert that the majority of the students prefer participating in the morning rather than afternoon sessions. Their choice is justified by two reasons. The first reason is tiredness; just over two thirds of the students (67%) admit that they do not participate in the afternoon because they feel tired. A possible explanation can be that when students are so tired, they cannot follow the teacher's explanation or instructions. Thus, they cannot actively engage in the learning process. In addition to this, the respondents'

report a high willingness to participate in the morning sessions because they feel fresh and enthusiastic enough to join classroom discussion.

The next figures reveal some internal factors that hinder students' participation in English classes. The first factor it deals with is lack of interest in learning English. For example, when students are interested in this subject, they seek teachers' and friends' help by asking questions to clarify their ideas and joining oral activities to strengthen their speaking skills. On the contrary, a student who is no longer interested in English, he or she will not be intrinsically motivated to learn it. In this respect, results show that most of the participants (23%) sometimes do not participate because they are not interested in this subject (figure 3).

One of the examined factors that make students afraid and worried speaking in the classroom is lack of prior preparation. According to the findings on page 15 (figure 4), a third of the participants (33%) admit that they often fear speaking in class without prior preparation. A possible explanation for this might be that when students have already prepared their lessons or exercises, they find it easy to give their opinions, answer questions and express their ideas. According to the results of this study (figure 5), almost a third of the students (31%) confirm that they fear being judged negatively by their teachers for making mistakes. Moreover, the fact that they fear being seen as stupid or incompetent if they make mistakes, students prefer remaining silent so that they can avoid their teachers' criticism and any embarrassment in front of their classmates. In this respect, fear of being laughed at by their peers is another factor influencing EFL learners. For instance, when students are asked to answer a question or read a text, they get worried about their pronunciation, thinking that their poor pronunciation will cause embarrassment and negative criticism by their classmates. Also, when students laughed at their peers, the latter lose face in front of their teachers. In addition to the internal factors, environmental factors also seem to influence students' participation. However, the findings reveal that the presence of these factors will enhance students' willingness to participate in English classes. Lack of interest in the topics taught seems to have a great impact on students' willingness to participate. It is clear that when students find topics interesting and relate to their background, they will grab their attention and push them to know more by asking questions. In this respect, the results in this action research show that 50% of the participants agree that they tend to participate when topics taught are interesting, familiar, and personally relevant (figure 6). Moreover, results in the same figure show that students would like to learn through different modes such as auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic modes. For this reason, using educational music or video in the classroom will definitely improve students' participation in English classes.

Another factor that has been mentioned in the second section is teacher traits. As results demonstrated previously (fig 7), a good percentage of the students find that fear of negative teacher's traits when making mistakes make them reluctant to speak in class. In this respect, it is clear that a friendly teacher who does not mind when students make mistakes and corrects them gently encourages participation more than a harsh and strict teacher. For example, when a teacher is friendly, students will feel comfortable asking and giving questions because they already know his or her good traits. However, if teacher is strict and harsh and does not tolerate mistakes, students prefer keeping silent to getting negative criticism that will embarrass them in front of their fellows.

Teachers' choice of words and vocabulary used to explain the lessons also influences students' participation as reflected in figure 9. A possible explanation can be that the fact that if the vocabulary used is familiar to students, they can understand what the teacher is saying. Thus, they can easily engage in the learning process. Moreover, this point has been stated by Ghannaj (2019) who finds it necessary for teachers to motivate students' speaking by simplifying their language as well as using body language to help convey the message.

Think-time, that is defined by Melder (2011) as the period of silence following an oral question, is another factor behind students' low participation in English classes. For example, when teachers ask students to answer a question, they must allow some time for them to understand it and organize their ideas before giving the response, especially if students do not have the vocabulary needed to answer the question. For this reason, almost half of the participants (49%) admit that they tend to participate when they are given think-time.

The last factor examined in this educational action research is classroom size. This factor, however, does not affect students' participation much. In respect to the results (figure 10), only 29% of the students admit that they feel comfortable to participate when the students' number in the classroom is small. This can be explained by the fact that students feel nervous speaking in public.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Since the primary goal of language teaching is to encourage students to communicate and express themselves, there has been a crucial need to examine the factors that hinder their oral participation in the EFL classes. In this respect, findings of the present study have demonstrated that students' oral participation is affected by a range of internal factors such as fear of making mistakes, fear of teachers' traits, poor pronunciation, and lack of vocabulary knowledge, etc. Moreover, the study's quantitative data confirm that there are a number of environmental factors that should be taken into consideration by English teachers, due to the positive impact they have on students' willingness to participate, with regards to topics familiarity, task type, think-time, etc.

For this reason, teachers should not attribute students' reticence to one single factor such as students' lack of interest in learning English or their lack of preparation and practice.

Although this action research has succeeded to reveal the common factors that 2<sup>nd</sup> year baccalaureate students' suffer from, low oral participation in English classes cannot be explained only through this sample of participants. For this reason, future researchers should investigate other possible factors behind this problem by using more instruments, which will help them develop more strategies and approaches to engage EFL students in the learning process.

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