

## **Difficulties of Learning English-Speaking Skill from Students' Viewpoint in Public Secondary Schools in Rural Damascus Governorate (Maadamyyat Alsham City)**

صعوبات تعلم مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنكليزية من وجهة نظر الطلاب في المدارس الثانوية العامة في محافظة ريف دمشق /مدينة معضمية الشام/

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### **Abstract**

The research aimed at investigating the difficulties of learning English-speaking skill from students' viewpoint in public secondary schools in Rural Damascus according to the variables of gender, academic specialization, and grade. The research sample included (282) male and female students in scientific and literary sections in both first and second secondary grades from the two secondary schools in Maadamyyat Alsham city. The method adopted in this research was the descriptive method. The instrument of the research was a questionnaire of (18) items distributed to (3) fields. It was applied to the participants of the research after being verified for its validity and reliability. Findings of the research showed the following:

- There were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the sample individuals in the questionnaire of difficulties in learning English-speaking skill from the viewpoint of public secondary school students in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyyat Alsham city) according to the variable of gender.
- There were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the sample individuals in the questionnaire of difficulties in learning English-speaking skill from the viewpoint of public secondary school students in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyyat Alsham city) according to the variable of academic specialization in favor of the scientific specialization students.
- There were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the sample individuals in the questionnaire of difficulties in learning English-speaking skill from the viewpoint of public secondary school students in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyyat Alsham city) according to the variable of grade.

**Key words:** Difficulties, English-Speaking Skill, Students, Public Secondary Schools

## **Introduction:**

English language is the world most important languages. This is due to the fact of its wide use around the world and for being the language of communication at the world level. Actually, everyone nowadays needs this language for studying, travelling, getting a job or corresponding with others. In other words, a language that is indispensable.

The importance of teaching the four skills of English language appears in all stages of education, among which the secondary stage. One important skill among these four skills is the speaking skill that is the medium of communication between the teacher and students and between the students themselves in the classroom. In fact, teaching the speaking skill for secondary stage students provides them with more exposure to English language and gives them the chance to use and practice English in academic settings.

Actually, the importance of the speaking skill in English language motivates EFL learners to focus on learning and mastering this skill, but unfortunately, the process is not that easy and simple. Sometimes, there are different difficulties or obstacles that make it not easy to learn this skill by EFL students of different academic levels.

## **Research problem**

Learning English-speaking skill by EFL learners is not all the time easygoing. Some difficulties may appear and complicate the process. Among the studies that addressed the difficulties of learning this skill is the study of Hanapi and Feri (2023) which indicated that students found it challenging to practice English conversation because they lacked confidence and courage and were afraid to make mistakes. In addition, they needed an intense environment and a suitable vocabulary. A second study was the study of Nani (2023) which came up with different challenges of teaching and learning English-speaking skill among secondary stage students such as linguistic difficulties, mother tongue use, inhibition, teachers' perceptions, and tacit beliefs. A third study was the study of Ali (2023) who found out that many factors prevent fluency among learners at university level, including how to use the language, fear of criticism, lack of practicing, and pronunciation of difficult words.

During discussion with some friends, who are teachers of English at some secondary schools in Rural Damascus, the researcher felt that learning English-speaking skill is not an easy issue for students at these schools and that they might face different difficulties.

Therefore, a pilot study was conducted for surveying the existence of these difficulties. The sample of the pilot study was other than the main sample of the research. It included (40) male and female students in the two secondary schools in Maadamyat Alsham city in Rural Damascus governorate.

Hence, and depending on what is mentioned above, the research problem can be stated in the following question:

**"What are the difficulties of learning English-speaking skill from students' viewpoint in public secondary schools in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyat Alsham city)?"**

## **Significance of the research:**

The significance of the research springs from the importance of English-speaking skill as the second skill among the four skills of English. However, learning this skill by first and second secondary grades students is not always easy. It is sometimes faced with certain difficulties or obstacles. Hence, the necessity appears to assure the importance of learning this skill by all

students, especially secondary stage students, and surpass the difficulties that hinder learning this skill correctly.

### **Aims of the research:**

The research aims at the following:

1. Pointing out difficulties of learning English-speaking skill among first and second secondary grades students in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyat Alsham city).
2. Providing suggestions that may contribute to facilitating these difficulties.

### **Questions of the research:**

The main question of the research is the following:

What is the level of difficulties in learning English-speaking skill from the perspective of students in public secondary schools in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyat Alsham city)?

Three main sub-questions are derived as follows:

1. Are there statistically significant differences in the scores of the research sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of gender?
2. Are there statistically significant differences in the scores of the research sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of academic specialization?
3. Are there statistically significant differences in the scores of the research sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of grade?

### **Hypotheses of the research**

1. There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the research sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of gender.
2. There are no statistically significant differences between the average scores of the research sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of academic specialization.
3. There are no statistically significant differences between the average scores of the sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of grade.

### **Methodology of the research:**

The method adopted in this research was the descriptive method in order to observe the difficulties of learning English-speaking skill among first and second secondary grades students, as the objective of this method is to observe a phenomenon as it is existed in reality. It is "the approach that studies variables as they exist in their natural settings to determine the relationships that can occur between them" (Wiersma, 2004, 15).

### **Definition of terminologies:**

- Difficulties:

According to Hosni (2014 cited in Jannah and Niati, 2022) difficulties are some characteristics that can make learning speaking difficult. These are linguistics difficulties, mother tongue use, and inhibition (p. 122).

According to Ellis (1985 cited in Sari, 2017) they are factors that influence learning English-speaking skill. These are age, aptitude and intelligence, cognitive skills, personality, and motivation (p. 25).

The researcher defines difficulties in this research as the problems or obstacles that make it difficult for first and second secondary grades students to learn English-speaking skill as a foreign language, where these problems or obstacles are related to either the course book, the teacher, or the students themselves.

- English-speaking skill:

The researcher defines English-speaking skill as the second skill in English as a foreign language that is taught to first and second secondary grades students along the series of pre-university public education starting from the first grade and ending with the secondary third grade. It is taught in addition to the other three skills of English language; namely listening, reading, and writing.

- Students: Male and female first and second secondary grades students in the two secondary schools in Maadamyat Alsham city in Rural Damascus governorate.

- Public secondary schools:

In the present research, they are public schools for secondary stage students in Rural Damascus governorate in the city of Maadamyat Alsham.

**Limitations of the research:**

- Human limitations:

The human limitations of the research consisted of a sample which amounted to (282) students of first and second secondary grades students in the two secondary schools in Maadamyat Alsham city in Rural Damascus governorate.

- Time limitations:

The instrument of the research was implemented in the first term of the academic year 2024-2025.

- Place limitations:

The instrument of the research (questionnaire) was implemented in the two secondary schools in Maadamyat Alsham city in Rural Damascus governorate.

**Previous Studies:**

The study of Rahayu (2015), Indonesia, entitled with "An analysis of students' problems in speaking English daily language program at Husnul Khotima Islamic Boarding School". The study aimed at studying the problems that students face in speaking English daily language program at Husnul Khotima Islamic Boarding School. The sample consisted of (19) students in the afore-mentioned school. The descriptive method was used. The instruments used by the researcher were interview and observation. The results showed that students of the sample had many problems in speaking English such as lack of understanding the grammatical patterns, incorrect pronunciation, mother tongue use, and seldom practice.

The study of Al-Nakhalah (2016), Palestine, entitled with “Problems and Difficulties of Speaking That Encounter English Language Students at Al Quds Open University”. The study aimed at exploring the speaking difficulties that are faced by English language students at Al-Quds Open University. It also aimed at exploring the causes of such difficulties. The study sample consisted of students in the above-mentioned university. The researcher used the experimental method. The instrument was an interview designed by the researcher. Results showed that there were some difficulties in the speaking of the students due to some reasons such as fear of mistake, shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence.

The study of Suliman (2020), UAE, entitled with “Investigating English Speaking Difficulties that Encounter ESL Learners”. The study aimed at investigating English-speaking difficulties encountered by high school students in some private schools in Abu Dhabi. It also aimed at founding out the factors that negatively affect students’ English-speaking performance. The method used was the descriptive method. Concerning instruments of the study, they were classroom observation and interviews. Results of the study indicated that students face several difficulties when speaking English such as linguistic problems, using the mother tongue, and oral communication apprehension.

The study of Normawati et al (2023), Indonesia, entitled with “EFL Learners’ Difficulties in Speaking English”. The study aimed to investigate the difficulties faced by EFL learners in speaking English. The sample of the study involved first-semester non-English Department students of Tidar university who studied English as a General Course Class. The method applied was the descriptive method as data were collected from the students’ spoken production and responses to the questionnaire. The results of the study show that there are three major difficulties identified from the students’ responses. They are grammar (48%), pronunciation (27%), vocabulary (15%), and other aspects less than 10%.

#### Comment on the previous studies:

In general, there is accordance or similarity between the present study and the above-mentioned previous studies in that both of them aimed at studying the difficulties of learning English-speaking skill. Therefore, the present study is largely similar in its aim to the study of each of Rahayu (2015), Al-Nakhala (2016), Suliman (2020), and Normawati et al (2023).

The sample of the present study was composed of (282) first and second secondary grade students (males and females). Thus, it is similar to the study of Suliman (2020), but differs from the studies of Rahayu (2015), Al-Nakhalah (2016), and Normawati et al (2023).

Concerning the method used in the present study, it was the descriptive method. Therefore, in this regard the present study is similar to the studies of Normawati et al (2023), Rahayu (2015), and Suliman (2020), but is different from the study of Al-Nakalah (20216).

As for the instrument, a questionnaire was applied on the individuals of the sample to achieve the objectives of the present study. Hence, this study is in accordance with the study of Normawati et al (2023), but different from the studies of Rahayu (2015), Al-Nakhalah (2016), and Suliman (2020).

In relation to findings, it can be said that the findings of the present study were similar to the findings of all the previous studies mentioned above in that students face difficulties in learning English-speaking skill, but differs from all of them in the domains or fields of difficulties. In the present study, students faced difficulties in learning English-speaking skill in the fields of English course book, the teacher of English, and the students themselves. In

addition, what distinguishes this study from the previous studies is that according to the variable of academic specialization, the differences were in favor of scientific specialization students. Also, it aimed at highlighting the difficulties to learning English-speaking skill in an important educational stage, which is the secondary stage as this stage is considered as a preparatory stage for the next most important stage, which is the university.

### **1- Speaking skill:**

#### **1) Definition:**

According to Saiful (2022 cited in Khaerunnisa, 2022), speaking is one form of activity in conveying and getting information that is done orally. In speaking or communicating, people have to think about what will be said, with whom they are speaking, and focus on fluency and accuracy is the main thing to improve their English speaking skills. Speaking is an ability that everyone should have. Speaking is a tool used to communicate or interact. Speaking English is not an easy thing because speaking English is a direct thing to do (p. 10).

#### **2) The importance of speaking skill:**

For many people, the ability to speak in English language is so important. It has been viewed as the most demanding of other four skills. For that, we frequently ask the question “Do you speak English?” to foreign language learners rather than asking them “Do you write in English?” The question shows the importance of speaking as skill because mastering this skill means mastering other skills. Ur (1996 cited in Ibrahim, 2017) states “of all four skills, speaking seems constitutively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as “speakers of the language, as if speaking included all other kind of knowing” (p. 164).

#### **3) Principles of speaking skill:**

This is the important key for students to speak English. They can express their ideas freely. In this way, the students will not feel bored, but rather they will be interested in class. Bailey (2005 cited in Sari, 2017) explained five principles for teaching speaking skill as follows (p. 17-18):

- A. Recognizing the difference between learning a second language and language learning of the international context.
- B. Focusing on both fluency and accuracy.
- C. Support students to have opportunity of using group work or pair work.
- D. Task speaking planning by negotiation for meaning.
- E. Guidance and practice have designed to classroom activities that involved in both transactional and interaction are speaking.

#### **4) Features of speaking skill:**

According to Brown (2001 cited in Ali, 2023), there are four suggested speaking skills as follows (p. 29-30):

- 1- Accuracy: It means the ability to produce correct sentences using correct grammar and vocabulary.
- 2- Fluency: It means to continue speaking correctly without any interruption by thinking which next word should be.
- 3- Pronunciation: It is the way in which words or letters are said correctly in spoken English.
- 4- Vocabulary: Vocabulary is a group of words which act as the most basic building blocks and understanding of sentences.

## **2- Difficulties of English-speaking skill:**

Thornbury (2005 cited in Rezeki & Dalimunte, 2024) states that basically, learner-speakers face two main areas of difficulty, namely knowledge factors and skill factors that influence other factors such as lack of self-confidence or self-awareness (p. 37).

According to Siregar (2021), many factors cause difficulty in speaking. They are (p. 12-13):

- A. Inhibition: students are worried to commit a mistake, fearful of criticism or simply shy.
- B. Nothing to say: students have no motivation to express themselves.
- C. Low or uneven participation: only one participant can talk at time because of large classes and tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not all.
- D. Mother tongue use: students who share the same mother tongue tend to use it because it is easier and students feel less exposed when they speak their mother tongue.

Ork et al (2024) mentioned a number of factors that are challenging students in speaking English. The first factor is fear of mistakes as students' hesitation to speak in English inside class is often attributed to fear of making a mistake. A second factor is shyness because many students experience shyness on an emotional level when they are asked to speak in English in class. Another challenge that learners face in speaking the English language is mother tongue interference. The fourth factor is anxiety, which is a state of tension, apprehension, and nervousness related to the condition of learning a foreign language. Another cause is the lack of confidence when speaking English, which is the main difficulty for the learners in speaking English. Moreover, the factor of the lack of motivation that is an important factor in determining how ready students are for communication. In addition, the linguistic factor is a main cause of low English-speaking performance. One last factor is the lack of practice that hinders students from speaking English confidently (p. 4-7).

Hosni (2014 cited in Jannah & Niati, 2022), argues that three difficulties are encountered by learners when speaking English. They are as follows (p. 122):

1. Linguistic difficulty: It was found that students struggle to find the appropriate vocabulary item when trying to speak in English, which reflects their insufficient vocabulary repertoire.
2. Mother tongue use: It was noticed that students tend to speak in Arabic when they discuss the rubrics of different tasks.
3. Inhibition: It was observed that students' fear of making mistakes in front of their classmates was the reason for not speaking English in the class.

The above-mentioned points in the literature review are useful for building the instrument of the research and the interpretation of the results. Despite the fact that they are very brief, they are very necessary to highlight the importance of the English speaking skill and focus mainly on the difficulties that are faced when learning this skill.

## **Research population and Sample:**

The original research society consisted of all students in the first and second secondary grades in public secondary schools affiliated with Maadamyyat Alsham city in Rural Damascus Governorate, whose number, according to the statistical lists of the Planning and Statistics

Directorate in Rural Damascus Education Directorate during the academic year /2023-2024/, amounted to (941) male and female students.

Table (1) shows the distribution of the number of individuals of the original society of students according to the variables of gender, academic specialization and grade.

**Table (1) Number of individuals of the original population and their distribution according to the variables of gender, academic specialization and grade**

Grade	Specialization	Male	Female	Total
<b>First secondary</b>	<b>Scientific</b>	147	363	510
	<b>literary</b>	0	40	40
<b>Second secondary</b>	<b>Scientific</b>	100	252	352
	<b>literary</b>	0	39	39
<b>Total</b>		247	694	941

To achieve the research objectives and answer its questions, the researcher drew a purposed sample of (282) students from the original students' society, representing approximately (30%) of the original students' community. The researcher drew the sample of the research using this method because he lives in Maadamyat Alsham city and so it will be more flexible for him to apply the research instrument as he is nearer to the schools. In addition, all the female first and second literary students were included in the sample as there are no male students in the literary section in both first and second grades. Table (2) shows the distribution of the number of the research sample individuals according to the variables of gender, specialization, and grade.

**Table (2) Distribution of students in the research sample according to the variables of gender, academic specialization, and grade**

Grade	Specialization	Male	Female	Total
<b>First secondary</b>	<b>Scientific</b>	38	87	125
	<b>literary</b>	0	40	40
<b>Second secondary</b>	<b>Scientific</b>	30	48	78
	<b>literary</b>	0	39	39
<b>Total</b>		68	214	282

The number of individuals in the research sample drawn after applying the questionnaire and collecting the applied questionnaires decreased to (271) due to excluding incomplete questionnaires and those with the same pattern in answering all the statements.

### **Research instruments and their psychometric characteristics:**

In order to achieve the objectives of the research and answer its hypotheses, the researcher prepared a questionnaire to measure the difficulties of learning the English speaking skill from the point of view of students in public secondary schools.



**Objective of the questionnaire:** Evaluating the degree of difficulties in learning the English speaking skill from the point of view of students in public secondary schools in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyyat Alsham city).

**Preparation of the questionnaire:** The questionnaire was prepared after reviewing the theoretical literature and previous studies related to the subject, and reviewing some measurement tools for measuring and studying the difficulties of learning the English speaking skill from the point of view of students in public secondary schools. In light of this, the questionnaire was prepared in its initial form and consisted of (18) phrases distributed to three fields. The first field: difficulties related to the English language course book, the second field: difficulties related to the teacher of English, and the third field: difficulties related to the students. Each of the three fields included (6) items, so the total number of the items included in the questionnaire was (18). The answer alternatives were determined using the three-point Likert scale: (agree, neutral, disagree).

### **Validity of the questionnaire:**

1. **Content validity:** The questionnaire was presented to four expert and specialized referees in English language teaching methods, and measurement and evaluation, to verify the suitability of the questionnaire items for the purpose for which they were developed, the suitability of the questionnaire items for the sample individuals, the clarity of the questionnaire, and the soundness of the linguistic formulation of its items. Later on, and in light of the opinions of the referees, some phrases were modified, and some others were rephrased. The questionnaire was applied in its final form to a sample of (40) students from students of the first and second secondary grades in public secondary schools in Maadamyyat Alsham city other than the basic research sample, with the aim of knowing the suitability and clarity of the questionnaire items for the research sample individuals, as well as to verify the psychometric properties of the questionnaire. In light of the results of the survey sample, some phrases that were not clear to the students were modified.
2. **Structural validity:** The structural validity of the questionnaire items was verified by calculating Pearson's correlation coefficients between the score of each phrase in each field with the total score of the field to which the phrases belong. The results of this are shown in Table (3):

**Table (3) Pearson correlation coefficients between the score of each item in each field and the total score of the field to which the items belong**

Field of difficulties related to English coursebook		Field of difficulties related to the teacher		Field of difficulties related to students	
Item no.	Pearson Correlation	Item no.	Pearson Correlation	Item no.	Pearson Correlation
1	0.759**	1	0.457**	1	0.661**
2	0.761**	2	0.636**	2	0.611**
3	0.668**	3	0.762**	3	0.686**
4	0.597**	4	0.665**	4	0.678**
5	0.746**	5	0.565**	5	0.725**
6	0.459**	6	0.641**	6	0.571**

(\*\*) Significant at 0.01 significance level

It is clear from Table (3) that all correlation coefficients are statistically significant at the significance level (0.01). The correlation coefficients between the items of the first domain

related to studying difficulties related to the English language coursebook and the total score of this domain ranged between (0.459-0.761), and the correlation coefficients between the items of the second domain of the questionnaire related to studying difficulties related to the teacher and the total score of this domain ranged between (0.457-0.762), while the correlation coefficients between the items of the third field of the questionnaire related to studying difficulties related to the student and the total score of this field ranged between (0.571-0.725), which indicates the existence of internal consistency between the items of the questionnaire and that they measure what they were designed to measure, and confirmed the structural validity of the research questionnaire.

### Reliability of the questionnaire:

In order to verify the reliability of the questionnaire, two methods were used:

1. Internal consistency reliability using Alpha Cronbach's equation: The internal consistency coefficient of the psychometric study sample was calculated using the Alpha Cronbach's equation, and the results are shown in Table (4).
2. Reliability using the split-half method: The researcher studied the reliability of the research questionnaire using the split-half method, by dividing the items of each field into two parts, the first part included the odd items and the second part included the even ones, then the Spearman-Brown equation was applied for calculating reliability. Table (4) shows the reliability coefficients using the Alpha Cronbach's equation and the split-half method.

**Table (4) Results of verifying the reliability of the questionnaire using the Alpha Cronbach's equation and split-half methods**

Fields of the questionnaire	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Spearman-Brown Coefficient
First domain	6	0.737	0.743
Second domain	6	0.744	0.816
Third domain	6	0.759	0.747
Total score of the questionnaire items	18	0.882	0.871

Table (4) shows that the reliability coefficients using the Alpha Cronbach's equation for the questionnaire and its fields ranged between (0.737-0.882), which are good and acceptable reliability coefficients for the purposes of the current research. As for the reliability coefficients using the split-half method, they ranged between (0.743-0.871), which are also acceptable reliability coefficients for the purposes of the current research.

It is clear from the above-mentioned results that the research questionnaire has good validity and reliability coefficients. Therefore, it is suitable for use as a tool in the current research.

### Questionnaire correction:

The questionnaire consists of (18) items, distributed over three fields, each consisting of (6) statements, and the alternatives to answer the questionnaire statements are three-point using the three-point Likert scale: (agree, neutral, disagree). The individual responding to the questionnaire statements is given three degrees if his answer to the statement is (agree), two degrees if his answer to the statement is (neutral), and one degree if his answer to the statement is (disagree). Thus, the highest score that a student can get when answering all the

questionnaire statements is ( $18 \times 3 = 54$ ) points, and the lowest score that a student can get when answering all the questionnaire statements is ( $18 \times 1 = 18$ ) points. Thus, the scores on the research questionnaire range between (18-54) points.

### Statistical treatments used:

The statistical package program (SPSS version 24) was used to analyze the data using the computer, and the Pearson correlation coefficient, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the Spearman-Brown equation were used to verify the psychometric properties of the research tool. The arithmetic means, standard deviations, percentages, and the Student's t-test for independent samples were calculated to answer the research questions and hypotheses.

### Findings: Presentation, analysis, and discussion:

The main research question: What is the level of difficulties in learning English-speaking skill from the perspective of students in public secondary schools in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyat Alsham city)?

In order to answer the main research question, the researcher extracted the arithmetic means, standard deviations and percentages of the scores of the sample students on the research questionnaire related to studying the difficulties of learning the English speaking skill from the point of view of students in public secondary schools in Rural Damascus governorate. Table (5) shows the level of difficulties of learning the English speaking skill from the point of view of students in public secondary schools.

**Table (5) Arithmetic means, standard deviations and percentages of the scores of the research sample members on the questionnaire**

Fields of the questionnaire	No. of items	No. of individuals	Mean*	Std. Deviation	Percentages	Importance degree
First field	6	271	12.25	3.025	%68.1	Moderate
Second field	6	271	11.86	3.199	%65.9	Moderate
Third field	6	271	13.01	2.985	%72.3	High
Total score of the questionnaire items	18	271	37.12	6.981	%68.7	Moderate
*The highest degree for each item is (3)						

The results in table (5) show that the arithmetic mean of the students' scores in the sample in the total score of the questionnaire on the difficulties of learning the English speaking skill from the point of view of students in public secondary schools in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyat Alsham city) reached (37.12) with a percentage of (68.7%), which is an average percentage. This indicates that there is an average level of difficulties in learning the English speaking skill in public secondary schools in Maadamyat Alsham city from the point of view of the research sample students.

Referring to the three fields of the questionnaire: It is clear that the average of the students' scores in the first field of the questionnaire related to the study: /Difficulties related to the English language curriculum book/ reached (12.25) with a percentage of (68.1%), which is an average percentage indicating that there is an average level of difficulties related to the English language curriculum book from the point of view of the research sample students.

It is clear that the mean scores of the sample individuals in the second field of the questionnaire related to the study: /difficulties related to the teacher/ reached (11.86) with a percentage of (65.9%), which is an average percentage indicating the existence of an average level of difficulties related to English language teachers from the point of view of the research sample students.

In contrast, it is clear that the average scores of the students in the third field of the questionnaire related to the study: /difficulties related to the students/ reached (13.01) with a percentage of (72.3%), which is a high percentage and indicates the existence of a high level of difficulties related to the students from the point of view of the research sample students.

From these results, it can be said that the level of difficulties in learning the skill of speaking the English language from the point of view of the research sample individuals from public secondary schools in Rural Damascus Governorate (Maadamyyat Alsham city) was average.

The researcher explains the existence of an average level of difficulties in learning the English-speaking skill among the individuals of the research sample by saying that this is due to the fact that the individuals of the research sample from the first and second secondary grade students encounter multiple difficulties while trying to learn the English language and the speaking skill in particular. These difficulties may be related to the coursebook of the English subject itself, to the teacher of English, or to the students themselves, as they were not established well in English when they were younger. They realize the importance of learning speaking skill at this stage of their learning and try to make efforts to master this skill, which led them to a state that they suffer from an average degree of difficulties in learning English-speaking skill.

**The first hypothesis:** There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the research sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of gender.

In order to verify the validity of this hypothesis, the researcher used the Student's t-test for independent samples to verify the significance of the differences between the average scores of male and female students in the research sample on the research questionnaire related to studying the difficulties of learning English speaking skill from the point of view of public secondary school students in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyyat Alsham city). Results are shown in Table (6).

**Table (6) Significance of differences between the mean scores of the research sample individuals in the questionnaire according to the variable of gender**

Fields of the questionnaire	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig	Decision
First field	Male	65	12.65	3.069	1.209	269	0.228	Differences are not significant
	Female	206	12.13	3.008				

Fields of the questionnaire	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig	Decision
Second field	Male	65	11.89	3.187	0.104	269	0.917	Differences are not significant
	Female	206	11.84	3.211				
Third field	Male	65	13.40	2.833	1.194	269	0.233	Differences are not significant
	Female	206	12.89	3.028				
Total score of the questionnaire items	Male	65	37.94	7.443	1.082	269	0.280	Differences are not significant
	Female	206	36.86	6.827				

It is clear from Table (6) that the values of the Student t-test for independent samples to study the differences between the arithmetic means of the scores of male and female students in the research questionnaire and its fields ranged between (0.104-1.209) and the probability values associated with them ranged between (0.917-0.228) and they are all greater than the significance level (0.05). Therefore, the differences are not statistically significant; meaning that there are no statistically significant differences between the average scores of the sample individuals on the questionnaire of difficulties in learning the skill of speaking English language from the point of view of secondary school students in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyat Alsham city) according to the gender of each of them.

Therefore, we accept the proposed null hypothesis that states: “There are no statistically significant differences between the average scores of the research sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of gender”.

The researcher explains the lack of statistically significant differences between male and female first and second secondary grades students regarding the difficulties of learning English speaking skill as students in the first and second secondary grades, regardless of their gender, see moderate levels of difficulty in learning English speaking skill in their schools, curricula, and teachers. All students in the present research sample study in a similar and close school environment, and go through the same educational and age stage, which may have led to the convergence of their views on the difficulties of learning the English speaking skill.

**The second hypothesis:** There are no statistically significant differences between the average scores of the research sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of academic specialization.

In order to verify the validity of this hypothesis, the researcher used the t-test Student's for independent samples to verify the significance of differences between the average scores of scientific specialization students and the average scores of literary specialization students on the research questionnaire. Results are shown in Table (7).

**Table (7) Significance of differences between the mean scores of the research sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of academic specialization**

Fields of the questionnaire	Specialization	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig	Decision
First field	Scientific	198	12.59	2.992	3.095	269	0.002	<u>Differences are significant</u>
	literary	73	11.33	2.939				
Second field	Scientific	198	12.21	3.268	3.019	269	0.003	<u>Differences are significant</u>
	literary	73	10.90	2.810				
Third field	Scientific	198	13.30	2.895	2.600	269	0.010	<u>Differences are significant</u>
	literary	73	12.25	3.108				
Total score of the questionnaire items	Scientific	198	38.10	6.795	3.881	269	0.000	<u>Differences are significant</u>
	literary	73	34.48	6.836				

It is clear from Table (7) that the values of the t-test Student for independent samples to study the differences between the arithmetic means of the scores of the students of the scientific and literary specializations on the research questionnaire and its fields ranged between (2.600-3.881) and the probability values related to it ranged between (0.010-0.000) and they are all smaller than the significance level (0.05). Therefore, the differences are statistically significant.

These significant differences are in favor of the students of the scientific specialization because their average scores in the total score of the questionnaire of difficulties in learning the skill of speaking the English language and the scores of its three sub-domains were greater than the average scores of the students of the literary specialization on the questionnaire and its three fields.

Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis proposed and accept its alternative hypothesis, which states: "There are statistically significant differences between the average scores of the individuals of the research sample on the questionnaire according to the variable of academic specialization".

The researcher explains the emergence of statistically significant differences in the level of difficulties in learning English speaking skill among public secondary school students between students of scientific and literary specializations in favor of scientific specialization students, as scientific specialization students are more inclined to develop their knowledge of learning the English language and its skills, especially the speaking skill, as they know that learning this skill will benefit them in their upcoming years of study at the university due to the scientific specializations that focus greatly on the speaking skill as one of the English language skills, and on English language in general. In other words, the scientific specialization students may well recognize that whatever branch of university study they will choose require a good, and may be an advanced level, of English. Therefore, they seek early in their secondary stage to improve their level in English in general and speaking in special.

**The third hypothesis:** There are no statistically significant differences between the average scores of the sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of grade.

In order to verify the validity of this hypothesis, the researcher used the Student's t-test for independent samples to verify the significance of the differences between the average scores of first-year secondary school students and second-year secondary school students on the research questionnaire and its fields related to studying the difficulties in learning the English speaking skill from the point of view of public secondary school students in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyat Alsham). Results are shown in Table (8).

**Table (8) Significance of differences between the mean scores of the research sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of grade**

Fields of the questionnaire	Grade	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig	Decision
First field	First	162	12.37	2.870	0.792	269	0.429	<u>Differences are significant</u>
	Second	109	12.07	3.248				
Second field	First	162	11.87	3.204	0.089	269	0.929	<u>Differences are significant</u>
	Second	109	11.83	3.207				
Third field	First	162	13.20	2.887	1.272	269	0.205	<u>Differences are significant</u>
	Second	109	12.73	3.117				
Total score of the questionnaire items	First	162	37.44	6.895	0.927	269	0.355	<u>Differences are significant</u>
	Second	109	36.64	7.111				

It is clear from table (8) that the values of the t-test Student's for independent samples to study the differences between the arithmetic means of the scores of the first and second secondary grade students on the research questionnaire and its fields ranged between (0.089-1.272), and the probability values associated with them ranged between (0.929-0.205), and they are all greater than the significance level (0.05). Therefore, the differences are not statistically significant, meaning that there are no statistically significant differences between the averages of the students' scores in the questionnaire of difficulties in learning the skill of speaking the English language from the point of view of the students of public secondary schools in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyat Alsham city) according to their academic grades.

Therefore, we accept the proposed null hypothesis, which states: "There are no statistically significant differences between the average scores of the sample individuals on the questionnaire according to the variable of grade".

The researcher attributes the lack of statistically significant differences between first and second secondary grades students with regard to difficulties of learning English speaking skill to the fact that first and second secondary grades students are going through the same educational stage. Therefore, they have similar tendencies towards learning the speaking skill, and academic requirements with regard to learning English speaking skills, and because they learn in similar schools and in the same educational environment, they are exposed to almost the same difficulties that face them in learning the speaking skill, which led to making them suffer from a similar level of difficulties in learning the English-speaking skill.

**Suggestions:** In light of the results of the present study, the researcher suggests:

1. Focusing more on the importance of teaching English-speaking skill in the secondary stage in general.
2. Putting the teaching of this important skill into practice starting from early grades.
3. Working to overcome the difficulties that students face when learning this skill.

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Dear student,



The following questionnaire is the instrument of a study on “**Difficulties of learning English-speaking skill from students’ viewpoint in public secondary schools in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyat Alsham City)**”.

Kindly read the items of this questionnaire carefully and answer each item by checking (✓) in the proper column. Your answers are going to be used only for purposes of this study. The key answers are three (agree- neutral- disagree).

*Thank you for reading and answering carefully.*

**The researcher**

### **Variables of the study:**

Please check ( ✓ ) in the box which is relevant to you:

Gender		Grade		Specialization	
Male	Female	First secondary	Second secondary	Scientific	literary

Annex (1) the questionnaire of Difficulties of learning English-speaking skill from students’ viewpoint in public secondary schools in Rural Damascus governorate (Maadamyat Alsham City)

	Items	Key Answers		
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
	<b>Difficulties Related to Course book of English:</b>			
1	There is no audio tapes or CDs attached to the book.			
2	There is no audio tapes or CDs players in the school.			
3	The course book lacks speaking skill exercises.			
4	Most of the exercises focus on the skills of writing, reading, and teaching grammar.			
5	The content of the course book is very large which make it minor to focus on speaking skill.			
6	The course book does not give priority to teaching speaking skill as the skill of communication in English.			
	<b>Difficulties Related to the teacher:</b>			
1	The teacher rarely speaks English in the classroom.			
2	The teacher often uses his mother tongue (Arabic) to teach English in the class.			
3	The teacher's poor speaking skill due to different reasons.			
4	The teacher’s main concern is to teach grammar rules and reading.			
5	The poor pronunciation of the teacher when speaking English inside the classroom.			
6	The teacher is not prepared well in the speaking skill.			
	<b>Difficulties Related to Students:</b>			

1	Students focus on learning grammar rules in the first place.			
2	Students speak using their mother tongue (Arabic) inside the class.			
3	Students are not interested in speaking skill, as they consider it not important for the exam.			
4	Students are not well established in speaking skill at their early grades of learning English.			
5	Students are not able to talk about themselves in English.			
6	Students are more interested in their academic achievement in English than their linguistic growth.			

## صعوبات تعلم مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنكليزية من وجهة نظر الطلاب في المدارس الثانوية العامة في محافظة ريف دمشق /مدينة معضمية الشام/

د. عبد الغني محمد كلاوي

### الملخص

هدف البحث إلى التعرف إلى صعوبات تعلم مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنكليزية من وجهة نظر الطلاب في المدارس الثانوية العامة في ريف دمشق وفقاً لمتغيرات الجنس والتخصص الدراسي والصف الدراسي. وقد شملت عينة البحث (282) طالباً وطالبة في الفرعين العلمي والأدبي في الصفين الأول والثاني الثانوي من المدرستين الثانويتين في مدينة معضمية الشام. وقد اعتمد البحث على المنهج الوصفي، أما أداة البحث فكانت استبانة مكونة من (18) فقرة موزعة على (3) مجالات، وقد تم تطبيقها على عينة البحث بعد التأكد من صدقها وثباتها. وقد أظهرت نتائج البحث ما يلي:

-لا توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط درجات أفراد العينة في استبانة صعوبات تعلم مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنكليزية من وجهة نظر طلبة المرحلة الثانوية في محافظة ريف دمشق (مدينة معضمية الشام) وفقاً لمتغير الجنس.

-توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط درجات أفراد العينة في استبانة صعوبات تعلم مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنكليزية من وجهة نظر طلبة المرحلة الثانوية في محافظة ريف دمشق (مدينة معضمية الشام) وفقاً لمتغير التخصص الأكاديمي لصالح طلبة التخصص العلمي.

-لا توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط درجات أفراد العينة في استبانة صعوبات تعلم مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنكليزية من وجهة نظر طلبة المرحلة الثانوية في محافظة ريف دمشق (مدينة معضمية الشام) وفقاً لمتغير الصف الدراسي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الصعوبات، مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنكليزية، الطلاب، المدارس الثانوية العامة.