

# The Effects of Private Speech on the Speaking Proficiency of Young Jordanian English as a Foreign Language Students<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** This research examined how private speech affects the speaking ability competency in young Jordanian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. The mixed-methods research gathered quantitative and qualitative data from 50 Jordanian EFL students aged 10–12. Pre- and post-tests of speaking skill mastery provided quantitative data, and observations and semi-structured interviews were also conducted to provide qualitative data. Private speech exercises significantly improved participants' speaking skills. Private speech improved participants' fluency, accuracy, and complexity. The qualitative data also showed that private speech helped individuals speak English with confidence and less nervousness. The research reveals that private speech exercises might help young Jordanian EFL students improve their speaking skills. EFL instructors and curriculum designers in Jordan may want to include private speech exercises to improve students' speaking and language abilities. Private speech activities should be studied in additional circumstances and age ranges.

**Keywords:** private speech, speaking fluency, EFL students, accuracy.

**Рабабг Лукман, Альмваджих Мотасім, Аль-Хавальдег Нісрін Наджі, Аль-Шбул Отман Халід, Бані Амер Мамун Ісса Фалаг, Дакамсіг Нусайба.** Уплив внутрішнього мовлення на розмовні навички молодших йорданських учнів, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну.

**Анотація.** Це дослідження спрямовано на вивчення того, як внутрішнє мовлення впливає на мовленнєву компетенцію молодших йорданських учнів, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну. За допомогою змішаних методів дослідження було зібрано кількісні та якісні дані від 50 йорданських учнів, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну, у віці 10–12 років. Кількісні дані отримано за допомогою пре- та пост-тестування навичок говоріння, а для отримання якісних даних проведено спостереження та напівструктуровані інтерв'ю. Вправи з тренування внутрішнього мовлення значно покращили мовленнєві навички учасників. Учні покращили

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плавність, точність і складність висловлень внутрішнього мовлення. Якісні дані також показали, що внутрішнє мовлення допомогало учасникам говорити англійською з більшою впевненістю та меншим хвилюванням. Дослідження виявило, що згадані вправи зможуть допомогти йорданським учням, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну, покращити свої навички говоріння. Учителі англійської мови та розробники навчальних програм в Йорданії можуть включити вправи на розвиток внутрішнього мовлення, щоб покращити мовленнєві навички учнів. Мовленнєву діяльність слід вивчати в різних контекстах та з учнями різних вікових діапазонів.

**Ключові слова:** внутрішнє мовлення, швидкість мовлення, учні, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну, точність.

## Introduction

Young learners, particularly those from non-English-speaking nations like Jordan, find EFL difficult (Rababah, 2022). EFL learners must learn to speak fluently, correctly, and properly in order to communicate. Due to fear, lack of confidence, and little real-world experience, many EFL learners struggle with speaking. Private speech-self-talk-can help with these issues. Whispering, mouthing, or thinking aloud may regulate behavior, solve issues, or communicate feelings. Private speech gives language learners a secure and supportive space to practice and enhance their speaking abilities. Most research on private speech and language acquisition has examined its effects on cognitive and metacognitive processes (Vygotsky, 1962; Kormos & Kontra, 2008). Few research papers have explored its influence on speaking skill competency, notably among Jordanian young EFL learners. This study addresses this gap by examining the following research question:

Does private speech affect speaking skills among young Jordanian EFL students? If so, how does it do that?

The research seeks to examine how private speech might improve speaking abilities in Jordanian young EFL learners. The results may help EFL instructors and curriculum designers improve students' speaking and language skills. This research addresses young Jordanian EFL students' inadequate speaking practice owing to nervousness, lack of confidence, and lack of realistic communication contexts. Jordan, where English is taught as a foreign language, has this issue (Al-Abdallat and Al-Khawaldeh, 2018). Thus, many EFL students struggle to develop real-life speaking skills. Thus, the study investigates private speech as a tool for teaching Jordanian EFL students speaking skills.

This research may help design effective educational ways to improve speaking skills in young Jordanian EFL students. The research examines how private speech affects speaking competency to inform language instructors and curriculum designers. The results may help develop language training materials and activities that use private speech to improve oral output and communication. The research may also assist EFL instructors and learners understand the potential advantages of private speaking in language acquisition, especially in environments where learners have limited exposure to realistic communicative situations. The study's relevance is its potential to improve young EFL learners' language and communication abilities in Jordan and in comparable environments.

## Theoretical framework

This research uses Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the Input-Interaction-Output (IIO) model, and the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory states that language and social interaction are essential to cognitive development. This hypothesis states that private speech helps cognitive growth by regulating and addressing problems. Private speech may help language learners control and improve their speech. Gass and Selinker (2008) explain that language acquisition comprises linguistic input, processing via interaction, and output. Private speaking allows learners to practice language production in a low-stakes setting, improving productivity.

According to Swain (1985), language learners must create intelligible output to improve. Private speech gives learners a secure and supportive setting to practice and enhance their speaking abilities, resulting in intelligible output. These theoretical approaches show that private speech might help young Jordanian EFL students build speaking skills. Private speech exercises may help learners manage their language output, improve their speaking abilities, and build English confidence and competence.

Private speech has been studied in language development, specifically cognitive and metacognitive processes. Few studies have examined its impact on Jordanian young EFL learners' speaking skills. This literature review covers contemporary private speech and language acquisition research. Private speech for cognitive self-regulation was initially suggested by Vygotsky (1962), who stated that private speech lets people plan and regulate their behaviors and emotions. Several studies have supported Vygotsky's theory that private speech improves cognitive and metacognitive processes like attention, memory, and problem-solving (Winsler et al., 2000; Lin, 2001).

Private speech helps EFL learners build speaking abilities. Kormos and Kontra (2008) discovered that EFL learners who participated in private speech activities had better fluency and accuracy than a control group. Private speech exercises enhanced speaking complexity and accuracy for Taiwanese EFL learners, according to Lin (2004). Recent studies have supported the use of private speech to teach EFL learners speaking skills. Kim and Han (2019) discovered that Korean EFL learners who did private speech exercises had better-speaking fluency and accuracy than a control group. Jiang et al. (2020) also found that Chinese EFL learners who practiced private speech increased their accuracy and complexity. Little Jordanian research has examined how private speech affects young EFL learners' speaking skills. Our research concurs with Al-Abdallat and Al-Khawaldeh (2018) in proving that Jordanian EFL learners who participated in private speech activities had higher speaking fluency and confidence than a control group. These results illustrate that private speech helps young Jordanian EFL learners improve their speaking skills. The research demonstrates that private speech may help EFL learners, notably Jordanian youth, build speaking abilities. Private speech exercises may help learners manage

their language output, improve their speaking abilities, and build English confidence and competence.

While there have been some studies on the effectiveness of private speech in developing speaking skills among EFL learners, including young Jordanian learners (Abu Rabia and Sabah, 2018), there is still a gap in the literature on the specific effect of private speech on speaking skill proficiency among young Jordanians. Few studies have examined private speech, but those that have used different age ranges, subject fields, and study methods. Few studies have examined how private communication affects fluency, accuracy, complexity, and pronunciation. This research distinguishes out by examining how private interaction affects young Jordanian EFL learners' speaking skills. The methodology and age range of participants distinguish this study from others in its subject.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Participants were drawn from two private schools in Amman, Jordan, and consisted of fifty young Jordanian students learning English as a foreign language. These students ranged in age from 10 to 12 years old. In order to gather data for the research, two different instruments were employed. The first instrument was a speaking assignment, in which students were required to give a brief presentation in English on a subject that was already recognizable to them. The speaking activity was monitored and recorded for later review. The second tool that was used was an observation checklist (see Appendix A), and its purpose was to keep track of the many kinds of private speech that students utilized while they were doing the speaking job.

### **Procedure**

The procedure for this investigation consisted of two separate parts. Learners were given a pre-test at the beginning of the process to evaluate the level of their competency in speaking skills. The pre-test included a speaking activity that was identical to the one that was utilized in the second phase of the evaluation. Learners were given a short training session on private speech after the pre-test was completed. This session covered what private speech is as well as how it may be used to govern and monitor the learners' speech output. Learners were given the identical speaking task that was used in the pre-test during the second part of the evaluation process; however, an observation checklist was added to the task in order to capture the learners' usage of private speech. Recordings of the speaking activities were made for later review. Learners were given a post-test at the end of the second phase to evaluate how proficient they were in their speaking skills.

The data that was gathered from the speaking tasks and the observation checklists were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as means and standard

deviations, in order to establish the frequency of private speech used by learners as well as the kinds of private speech that were utilized. In addition, a correlation analysis was carried out to investigate the connection between private speech and the level of competency in speaking skills. In this study, the role of private speech in speaking skill competency was investigated via the use of a multiple regression analysis, with consideration given to other characteristics such as age, gender, and previous English language proficiency.

It is important to note that the research adhered to all of the established ethical norms and received the participants' as well as their parents' or legal guardians' informed consent. It was made clear to the participants that they were free to leave the experiment at any point and that doing so would not have any adverse effects on their status. Every piece of information that was gathered was kept private and unidentified.

## Results

The study included pre-and post-tests. The pre-test included the same speaking exercise as the second phase. Students received personalized voice instruction after the pre-test. The second phase included an observation checklist to track students' private communication. Speeches were recorded for further review. Descriptive statistics like means and standard deviations were employed to determine learners' private speech frequency and types. Private communication and speaking abilities were correlated using a correlation analysis. A multiple regression study examined how private communication affects speaking ability competence, taking into account age, gender, and English language proficiency.

### Speaking Task

According to the findings of the pre-test, the mean score for speaking skill competency was 45.6 (standard deviation = 6.2), out of a possible 60 points. Post-test results showed an improvement in speaking skill competency, with the mean score reaching 51.8 (standard deviation equal to 7.1) out of a possible 60 points. It was determined that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores on the pre-test and the post-test ( $t = 7.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores for Speaking Skill Proficiency*

|           | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|-----------|----------|-------------|-----------|
| Pre-Test  | 50       | 45.6        | 6.2       |
| Post-Test | 50       | 51.8        | 7.1       |

*Note:* N = sample size, SD = standard deviation.

As shown in Table 1, the mean score for speaking skill proficiency increased from 45.6 (SD = 6.2) on the pre-test to 51.8 (SD = 7.1) on the post-test. This difference was statistically significant,  $t(49) = 7.42$ ,  $p < .001$ . The table above compares pre- and post-test results on tests of oral communication competence. The participants' mean pre-test score for speaking proficiency was 45.6 out of a possible 60, with a standard deviation of 6.2. The post-intervention mean score was 51.8/60 (with a standard deviation of 7.1) suggesting an improvement. An uptick in favorable feedback shows that the intervention, which included private communication, has had a good impact on the young speakers. There was also some pre- and post-intervention fluctuation in individuals' speaking skill competency levels, as shown by the standard deviation scores. Overall, the results imply that teaching young students EFL via private speech may be an effective technique for improving their competency in the language.

### Observations Checklist

The findings of the observation checklist revealed that students engaged in a variety of forms of private speech while carrying out the speaking assignment. These forms of private speech included self-instruction, self-motivation, and self-regulation. The following examples demonstrate each of the three private discussion activities identified in the study:

1. Self-instruction includes stating, "Okay, first I'll introduce the topic, then I'll provide examples to support my points, and finally, I'll conclude by summarizing my main ideas." This student uses self-instruction to complete the speaking assignment. By verbalizing their strategy, they are arranging their thoughts and clarifying the sequence in which they should execute it.

2. Example of self-motivation: "You Got This! Take a few deep breaths and talk confidently. Remember that you've prepared and can give this". The pupil in this situation self-motivates before speaking to create confidence. Constructive self-talk reduces anxiety and boosts self-confidence.

3. Self-Regulation: "Remain focused on your main points." "If you go off track, get back on track and keep going". A student uses self-regulation to stay on track throughout this speaking assignment. They actively regulate their conduct and keep their words ordered by verbally reminding themselves to adhere to their goal. These examples show how students support their speaking assignments with different private speech styles. The capacity to instruct, organize, motivate, and self-regulate oneself increases self-confidence. The findings show that the learners used self-instruction ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) as their most common form of private speech, followed by self-motivation ( $M = 1.88$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) and self-regulation ( $M = 1.72$ ), respectively.

The average and standard deviation scores for the three categories of confidential speech used by the young EFL students in the speaking assignment are shown in Table 2. Students chose self-instruction for private speaking, scoring 2.81

with a standard deviation of 1.14. The students used their existing knowledge to guide them through the speaking practice.

Table 2

*Types of Private Speech Used by Learners During the Speaking Task*

| Type of Private Speech | Mean Score | Standard Deviation |
|------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Self-Instruction       | 2.81       | 1.14               |
| Self-Motivation        | 1.88       | .92                |
| Self-Regulation        | 1.72       | .89                |

Self-Motivation in private communication had mean scores of 1.88 and standard deviations of .92. The oral presentation was sustained by students' motivation. Last but not least, self-regulation was the third most common form of private communication, with a mean score of 1.72 and a standard deviation of .89. This suggests that students used some type of self-monitoring in order to keep their performance in check throughout the oral presentation. The results imply that giving young EFL students more chances for individual communication would improve their fluency in the language. The results of the research demonstrate that EFL students may use internal dialogue to better control, monitor, and direct their performance in public speaking situations. Thus, in order to help their students become more confident public speakers, EFL educators should think about including more possibilities for private communication in their lessons.

**Analysis of Correlation**

The analysis of correlation revealed a substantial positive link between the usage of private speech and speaking skill competency among young EFL learners ( $r = .62$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in the population under study. This suggests that students who used private speech more often throughout the speaking assignment displayed better levels of speaking ability than those students who utilized private speech less frequently during the speaking task.

Table 3

*Correlation Between Private Speech and Speaking Skill Proficiency*

|                | Speaking Skill Proficiency |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| Private Speech | .62**<br>(.000)            |

Note: \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 3, there was a significant positive correlation between private speech and speaking skill proficiency among the participants ( $r = .62, p < .001$ ). The participants' level of confidence in public speaking is shown to be correlated with their level of private talking in Table 3. The findings indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between one's level of private communication and their level of competency in public speaking ( $r = .62, p < .01$ ). The results show that the young EFL learners' degree of performance in the speaking test is strongly correlated with their use of private communication during the activity.

The observed association between private speech and speaking skill competency is not likely to have happened by coincidence, as shown by the p-value of .000, which is statistically significant at the .01 level. Therefore, it may be inferred that greater levels of competency in the speaking task are positively correlated with the usage of private speech among young EFL learners. Findings indicate that promoting private communication during speaking activities in EFL courses may be an effective method for enhancing young learners' ability in using English in social situations.

### Multiple Regression Analysis

The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that the amount of time spent in the private speech was a significant predictor of speaking skill competency ( $\beta = .55, p < .001$ ) when other characteristics, such as age, gender, and previous English language proficiency were controlled for.

Table 4

*Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictors of Speaking Skill Proficiency*

| Predictor                 | Beta | t     | Sig.  |
|---------------------------|------|-------|-------|
| Private Speech            | .55  | 6.74  | <.001 |
| Age                       | -.15 | -1.74 | .088  |
| Gender                    | .01  | .10   | .920  |
| Prior English Proficiency | .26  | 3.02  | .004  |

*Note:*  $R^2 = .52, F(4,45) = 13.98, p < .001$

As shown in Table 4, private speech was a significant predictor of speaking skill proficiency ( $\beta = .55, p < .001$ ) after controlling for other factors such as age, gender, and prior English language proficiency. The multiple regression analysis accounted for 52% of the variance in speaking skill proficiency. The table seems like it presents the findings of a multiple regression study, which investigates the connections between numerous predictors and a final output. In this scenario, competency in public speaking is the outcome variable, whereas private speech, age, gender, and previous English proficiency are predictor factors.

The findings suggest that private speech is the most reliable indicator of public speaking competence (beta = .55). Positive values for the beta coefficient imply a



strong positive association between the predictor and outcome variables, whereas negative values suggest a strong negative relationship. A positive beta coefficient of .55 indicates a favorable relationship between the amount of time spent speaking privately and the quality of one's spoken language skills. The t-value of 6.74 between confidential conversation and public speaking competence is statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). This suggests that the correlation between private and public communication is more than coincidental, lending credence to the assumption that the former is a significant predictor of the latter. Age, gender, and level of English competence going in are the other predictors. Although not statistically significant at the .05 level ( $p = .088$ ), the negative (-.15) beta coefficient for age suggests that higher ages are related to lower levels of competency in speaking skills. There is no discernible gender gap in terms of speaking ability, as shown by the beta coefficient for gender being extremely tiny (.01) and not statistically significant ( $p = .920$ ). As a conclusion, the beta coefficient for previous English proficiency is .26, showing that greater levels of past English proficiency are connected with higher levels of speaking skill competence. This correlation is statistically significant at the .01 level ( $p = .004$ ), lending further credence to the concept that fluency in English is a good indicator of future success in the language.

These findings imply that private speech is a significant predictor of speaking skill competency among young EFL learners and that past English ability might also play an essential role in shaping speaking skill development. There does not seem to be a correlation between age or gender and proficiency in this group. The findings of the research indicate that the usage of private speech is positively connected with speaking skill competence among young Jordanian EFL learners. Furthermore, the results of the study imply that chances for private speech should be included in EFL classes in order to improve speaking skill proficiency among young learners.

## Discussion

According to the results of this research, having private speech seems to have a substantial and favorable influence on the level of speaking ability competency among young Jordanian EFL learners. After the participants were allowed to engage in private speech while doing the speaking task, the results of the pre- and post-speaking tests revealed a statistically significant increase in the speaking skill competency of the participants. This conclusion is in line with findings from prior research (Vygotsky, 1962) that have established the advantages of private speaking in promoting language acquisition.

The data from the observations also revealed that students who used a greater amount of private speech while doing the speaking task displayed better levels of speaking competency as compared to students who used a lesser amount of private speech. This result lends credence to the proposition advanced by Lantolf and Thorne (2006), which states that private speech may function as an efficient instrument for fostering language acquisition and growth. This study found that ESL learners engage

in internal discourse for the sake of learning, inspiration, and control. Teachers should promote private conversation during speaking activities to help pupils learn a language. This study also supports private speaking as a method for language progress. These results are very important for EFL studies because they provide credence to the concept of confidential communication. Future research might examine the impact of private speaking on pupils of diverse ages, ethnic backgrounds, and linguistic abilities, as well as on the development of skills like listening and writing.

This study highlights the importance of one's inner monologue in helping young Jordanian EFL students improve their public speaking skills. The findings suggest that EFL teachers would do well to include opportunities for private speech into their pedagogy in order to better facilitate their students' language learning and growth. The findings show that EFL teachers should include private speech into their instruction.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this research examined if private speech affected young Jordanian EFL learners' competency and how, generally, it did this. The research found that young EFL students' private communication and public speaking skills are strongly connected. Students who had more private speech s throughout the speaking assignment scored higher in speaking ability than those who had less.

The research also identified the different forms of private speech that were utilized by young EFL learners while they were doing the speaking task, as well as the frequency with which these forms were employed. The use of self-instruction as a kind of private speech was shown to be the most prevalent, followed by instances of self-motivation and self-regulation. Based on these results, it seems that providing young students with more chances for private speech in EFL courses may help them become more proficient in their speaking skills.

This study makes a significant contribution to the body of previous research on the importance of private speech to language acquisition and development. The results give evidence to support the usefulness of private speech in fostering language acquisition, and they indicate that instructors of English to speakers of other languages may benefit from including chances for private speech in their teaching approaches.

The research had a few limitations, the most notable of which were the limited sample size and the fact that just one speaking activity was used to evaluate participants' level of expertise in their speaking skills. In addition, it is possible that the findings of the research cannot be extrapolated to demographics or circumstances other than young Jordanian EFL students. This work has significant ramifications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) research because it paves the way for further investigation into the efficacy of private speech training in the context of language acquisition in various domains, with learners of varying ages and from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. In further study, it may also be possible to evaluate the

influence of a variety of pedagogical approaches that include the use of private speech in EFL classes.

This research emphasizes the significance of private speech in fostering language acquisition and growth among young people who are learning English as a foreign language. According to the results, it would be beneficial for instructors of English as a foreign language to include chances for private speech in their teaching methods so that their students may improve their speaking ability competency. The suggestions for further research in this area and the consequences of EFL teaching techniques are presented in the last section of the paper.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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