

**Utilizing a Discussion Based
Programme to Develop AI-
Azhar Secondary Stage
Students' EFL Speaking Skills
and Motivation**



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EFL Teacher

المجلة العلمية المحكمة لدراسات وبحوث التربية النوعية

المجلد السادس - العدد الأول - مسلسل العدد (١١) - يناير ٢٠٢٠

رقم الإيداع بدار الكتب ٢٤٢٧٤ لسنة ٢٠١٦

ISSN-Print: 2356-8690 ISSN-Online: 2356-8690

موقع المجلة عبر بنك المعرفة المصري <https://jsezu.journals.ekb.eg>

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Introduction:

Language instruction includes four important skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are divided into aural (listening and speaking) and graphic (reading and writing). Listening and reading are receptive skills while speaking and writing are productive skills. Extensive exposure to receptive skills leads to the mastery of productive ones. These skills are interrelated and interchangeable. Language approaches are criticized for giving unbalanced concern on the four language skills. Some skills are emphasized while others are neglected. For example, the grammar translation method emphasises reading and writing skills and neglects oral skills. On the other hand, the direct and audiolingual approaches emphasise listening and speaking and neglect reading and writing.

Harmer (1995) states that it is too difficult to perform a skill without another as it is impossible to conduct a conversation, if you don't listen as well and people seldom write without reading. **So Byrne (1991)** argues that the four skills are interacted with each other. It is suggested that the four skills should be taught inclusively rather than separately. Speaking skills are the most important skills since reading and writing skills are in need for speaking. **Rivers (1968)** points out that when we read and write, we call upon what we know of the language orally.

As **Bygate (2001, p14)** states, speaking has occupied a peculiar position throughout the history of language teaching and has begun to emerge as a branch of teaching, learning and testing for nearly two decades. Bygate adds that there are three reasons for this. First, the traditional grammar translation methods still have a huge influence on language teaching. Second, tape-recording has been sufficiently cheap and practical to enable the widespread study of talk and use of tape recorders in classrooms only since the mid-1970s. Third, most language teaching approaches exploited oral communication as only part of their methodology and most of the focus in teaching oral skills was limited to pronunciation. Until recently, speaking has become a special area in language teaching.

Although speaking is an important skill, it is neglected in teaching English as a foreign language. **Al Harbi (2015)** notices that learners have low oral skills due to the absence of authentic language learning situations outside and inside classrooms. He states that there are two reasons that may affect speaking skills learning .Firstly, to practise oral skills in daily life and secondly the learner negativity towards English.

Marcelino (2005) mentions that most of EFL learners are passive during the speaking process. A lot of them are shy to use English in rules when they communicate and fail to acquire English because of the lack of motivation.

Ghanem (2001) administrates an oral communication test to secondary school students. The results showed a remarkable weakness of the oral language of the students. She concluded that students should be given a reason for speaking English not just to listen or memorize rules.

Shumin (1997) points out that although speaking skill is very important it is one of the most neglected skills in teaching English language. Speaking is especially difficult for foreign language learners because effective oral communication requires the ability to use the language properly in social interactions.

Zhang (2009) claims that speaking remains the most difficult skill to be mastered for the most of English learners and that they are still inefficient in communicating orally in English in his trail to show the reasons that cause speaking difficulties to EFL learners. The discomfort and the reluctance during the English speaking process are considered two of the biggest blocks for English foreign language learners as they fear to be negatively evaluated when they make mistakes, especially in front of their classmates (**Dil, 2009**).

Tam (1997) States that there are some factors related to speaking skills to be considered for effective English speaking performance. Pronunciation, vocabulary and collocations are singled out as important factors to be emphasized in building fluency for EFL speakers. Providing students with a variety of situations and frequent speaking tasks plays an important role in the improvement of speaking during the speaking process.

Nunan (1999) argues that there are some psychological factors that affect speaking fluency such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, the curriculum and environment. **Abdullah (2008)** views that there are several difficulties that face teachers as well as students in teaching and learning speaking in English language classrooms in Egypt .firstly, it is naturally difficult for students to speak in the foreign language they learn. Secondly, the teaching environment that students are involved in may prevent their speaking skills development. Thirdly, teachers use traditional methods of teaching English. Fourthly, students have passive attitudes towards English, particularly in Egypt. Fifthly, some psychological factors that may passively influence the student's performance in speaking.

From the previous studies, it can be concluded that there are three main factors for the inefficiency in speaking skills. Firstly, factors related to EFL teachers who usually use mother tongue and they do not have enough knowledge about speaking skills procedures and techniques. They also do not master speaking skills themselves. They usually use traditional methods in teaching which mainly concentrate on grammar and neglect the language four skills especially speaking skills . Second factors related EFL learners; they are embarrassed to share in any kind of discussion in English as they fear mistakes. They are only listeners within the teaching process. Third factors related to English curricula and exams as which do not have enough activities items to evaluate speaking skills

Speaking is a skill, like swimming, driving a car or playing a musical instrument. Thus, it incorporates two dimensions(1) knowledge, and (2) practise In traditional teaching methods, teachers focus on only linguistic knowledge e.g. knowledge of vocabulary and grammar rules while little or no attention is paid to practicing language skills. There is a great difference between knowledge and skills. **Bygate (1987)** showed that one fundamental difference is that both can be understood and memorized but only a skill can be imitated and practiced

Ali (2008) States that speaking is a productive skill which needs a lot of back-up factors like knowledge, confidence, self-esteem and enthusiasm. **Lazaraton (2001)** showed that spoken English is always accomplished by interaction with at least one other speaker. This means that a collection of demands are in a place at once: monitoring and

understanding the other speaker, thinking about one's own participation, producing its effect ,etc.

Thornbury & Slade (2005, p9) mentioned that speaking is a multi-sensory activity because it includes paralinguistic features such as eye-contact, facial expressions, body language tempo, pause, voice quality changes and pitch variation which affect conversational flow.

As a result for such complicated nature of speaking skill, developing it is a real challenge for many EFL teachers. Teachers in an EFL classroom confront certain difficulties in teaching spoken English. Some of them include how to deal effectively with oral practice that takes a considerable time and how to have learners concentrated on the various speaking tasks.

A pilot study was conducted in order to confirm the existence of the problem. A pilot speaking test was administered to a sample of 50 2nd year secondary school students. They were asked to answer some questions orally such as introducing themselves, giving their opinions about some topics, asking and answering some questions. They were asked to answer these questions individually, in pairs and in small groups. It was concluded that: the frequency of the students' responses to these skills were less than 50% and none of them could achieve the required mastery level (80%). Besides, some interviews were also administered to EFL teachers in some secondary schools. They confirmed that almost all the students lack the ability to talk and interact in English. This is supported by the results of interviews conducted with 3rd year secondary stage students who revealed their inability to engage in short dialogues or even produce meaningful utterances on their own to express ideas.

Students' attitude towards the learning process is also a factor that may cause less effective teaching. Motivation is one of the most important factors in a language learning. students with good attitude towards English are more likely to work hard and keep going when learning gets challenging. There are two kinds of motivation, firstly learning for a particular purpose, for example to get a job, get into university, traveletc. Secondly, learning English because you enjoy learning, having fun and making progress.

Alazhar students need to develop their speaking skills to correct the wrong image of Islam, renew the religious discourse ,face islamophobia phenomenon and portrait a clear real image for Islam principles .All these things will strongly motivate Alazhar students to develop their speaking skills. So,the researcher will select some mid understanding Islamic issues as sources for discussion. This will motivate students to participate in speaking process.

Hence, the researcher proposes a programme to enhance speaking skill for third year secondary stage. This programme is based on "open-discussion" among students. This programme is extra-curricular activities to develop speaking skills. These activities are designed mainly to provide a relaxed learning environment for teaching and learning speaking skills.

Discussion in general is considered as one of the best ways of presenting speech and it is an interesting form of oral practice in the classroom "*It can provide some of enjoyable and productive speaking in language classroom*" (Harmer, 1995, 46). Discussion in foreign language classrooms helps FL learners develop their communicative abilities as it gives them practice in expressing ideas orally in an organized manner and enables them to clarify or modify ideas, resolve differences and find alternative solutions. learners can bring their personal experiences of the outside world into the classroom. According to Thornburg (1998: P102) "*many teachers would agree that the best discussions in class are those that arise spontaneously either because of something personal that a learner reports or because a topic or a text in the course book riggers some debate*".

This programme is mainly based on the linguistic theory which considers language as a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning: this view is called "functional view" which emphasizes the semantic and communicative dimension rather than merely the grammatical characteristic of the language. This programme is also based on Brain-Based learning theory as one of its principles sees that "Brain is sociable" because man gains most of his information through interaction with other people.

Johnson (2006) states that there is an accord among EFL scholars that using some activities which centre the learner such as group

discussion, speeches and debates can alleviate the problem of low oral skills.

This programme includes extra-curricular speaking activities presented weekly and students will discuss a certain topic that they have already selected with the help of their instructor. Students construct their own knowledge and become independent learners. They collect and discuss information themselves. A teacher is only an advisor, observer, a facilitator and consultant and also provides instant feedback for errors.

The researcher hopes that this programme will enhance speaking skills among 2nd year secondary stage students of Al-Azhar Institutes. There are some previous studies which proved that discussion has an impact on developing speaking skills. **Tharp and Gallimore (1988)** found that discussions are useful teaching techniques for developing speaking skill and modifying learner's roles. During discussion learners are always active participants rather than passive recipients of information. This study is also consistent with **Maley and Duff (2005)** who found that relaxation plays a significant role in developing learner's confidence in using the language and reducing tension to the minimum. The study also highlighted the importance of providing a native-like environment for enhancing speaking skills.

Speaking extracurricular activities are useful parts of education that provide positive gains for students. They are useful for developing learners' communicative oral abilities due to increased self-confidence and better time management. Similar findings were found in **Gerber (1996)** who concluded that students must be encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities like debate and group discussion to help assist in learning useful new skills such as time management, critical thinking ,teamwork and social skills. They added that exposing to such activities might help lessen the mental tension and stress of studying for short period of time. **Daif-Allah and Khan (2015)** proved that open discussion session can enhance oral communicative abilities for English language majors at Buraydah University.

Some of these studies dealt with discussion activities to develop speaking skills such as: **Thepsuriwong (2014)** who emphasizes the development of speaking skills by discussion activities representing in dramatic activities. **Kayum (2015)** found in his study that students were

more interested in joining discussion activities and they had fun in doing those activities. In lines with these results, **Safari and Koosha (2016)** found out those discussion sessions as a useful technique for developing speaking skills and modifying learners' roles.

Statement of the problem:

In the light of reviewing the previous discussion and the pilot study it can be stated that students are weak in English speaking skills and may lack of motivation. The researcher proposes a new way to overcome the difficulties. It is the Open Discussion Based programme that may develop speaking skills and motivation of Al Azhar secondary stage students.

Questions of the study:

- The study attempted to answer the following main question:
 - 1- What is the effect of an open-discussion based programme on enhancing third year AlAzhar secondary stage students' speaking skills and motivation?

This main question could be divided into the following sub-questions:

- 1) What are the speaking skills required for 2nd year secondary stage students at Al-Azhar Institutes?
- 2) What is the actual performance of 2nd year secondary stage students'?
- 3) What are the features of a proposed discussion based programme that may help develop such speaking skills?
- 4) What is the effect of the programme on secondary stage students' motivation?
- 5) What is the effect of the proposed programme on developing speaking skills of 2nd year secondary stage students

Hypotheses of the study:

- The quasi-experimental design was used to test the hypotheses of the study. The main hypotheses of the study which were verified in the recent study are:
 - 1- There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in the post speaking test results of EFL speaking skills in favour of experimental group.

- 2- There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre- post test results of the experimental group in favour of the post test results.
- 3- There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control group in the observation sheets results of EFL speaking skills in favour of experimental group.
- 4- There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of experimental group in the pre-post observation sheets results of EFL speaking skills in favour of the post results.
- 5- There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in post administration of motivation checklist in favour of the experimental group results.
- 6- There was a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of experimental group in the pre-post administration of motivation checklist in favour of the post results

The significance of the study:

- It is hoped that this study will help:

- 1- **Students** as it may
 - Improves their speaking skill.
 - Provides them an environment void of stress or anxiety.
 - Helps them speak fluently and accurately.
 - Involves students in discussion instead of being only receptors.
- Increase students' motivation to develop their English in general and speaking skills in particular
- 2- **Teachers** may use this programme to enhance students' speaking skills and motivation besides their own speaking skills.
- 3- **Supervisors** may use this programme to set training courses for teachers.
- 4- **Curriculum designers** can supply curriculum with activities and exercises based on this programme content.

The objectives of the study:

The current study assumed that speaking skills can be developed through communication among students which is represented in a program based on discussion. It also presumed that the best way to

improve speaking skills is to be involved in the process itself that means learning by doing.

- This study also aims at:

- 1- Specifying the speaking skills and sub skills of 2nd year secondary stage students.
- 2- Presenting a proposed programme to develop speaking skills for secondary stage students.
- 3- Confirming the new educational trend "learner centered approach".
- 4- Asserting learning by doing or the principle "practice makes perfect".
- 5- Increasing students' motivation to develop their speaking skill and language learning in general.

Instruments of the study:

Some instruments were developed and used to investigate the problem are:

- A checklist as a pre-requisite.
- A test as a real instrument.
- A rubric as a post requisitic.
- A checklist as a scale to measure motivation.

Delimitations of the study:

- The current study was limited to the following:
 - 1- Al Azhar second year secondary stage students at Awlad Zaid religious institute in Sharkia governorate.
 - 2- Certain speaking skills that should be developed within the programme. These skills are listed as follows:
 - Pronunciation
 - Fluency
 - Accuracy
 - Language functions
 - 3- The study was limited to measure the effect of the proposed programe on speaking skills and motivation.
 - 4- The instructional time devoted to the programme lasted for ten hours in 10 weeks.

Procedures of the study:

To answer the research questions, the following procedures were conducted:

- 1-Reviewing relevant literature and previous studies related to:
 - a- The independent variable. Discussion based programme to frame the study experiment.
 - b- The dependent variable: Speaking to crystallize the target speaking skills.
 - c- Another dependent variable: Motivation
- 2-Designing a speaking checklist of the main and sub speaking skills, judging it by TEFL jury members and modifying it according to their opinions.
- 3-Translating the approved speaking skills into a pre/post test and an observation sheet.
- 4-Choosing the study participants from AlAzhar institutes and dividing them into experimental and control groups.
- 5-Designing the proposed programme in the light of its aims, activities, methods, procedures and learner's and teacher's role.
- 6-Pre-administrating the study instruments to both groups.
- 7- Teaching the experimental group by the proposed programme while the control group was taught by regular methods.
- 8-Post -administrating the study instruments to both groups.
- 9-Comparing the pre to the post results statistically of both groups.
- 10-Concluding, suggesting for further studies.

Definition of terms:

- 1- Speaking skills:
 - **Radwan (1999: p9)** defined speaking as *"the oral productive mastery of second language in different context as one component of the oral communication skills"*.
 - **Finocchiaro (2000)** defined speaking as *"The ability to use pronunciation, stress,intonation,grammatical structure,vocabulary and communication"*.
 - **Sayed (2005 p17)** defined speaking as *"an interactive process, two persons or more are involved in a real life situation they exchange talk"*

or use the language so as to fulfill a certain communicative purpose or accomplish a certain social function".

-Speaking is operationally defined as:

"A reactive process that involves certain skills such as pronunciation, accuracy, fluency and language functions that promote or enhance oral fluency for 2nd year secondary stage students through using a discussion Based-programme.

2-Motivation:

Motive: a factor or circumstance that drives a person to act in a particular way. (Oxford dictionary-2000).

Jenkins & Demaray (2015) defined motivation as "It is the force which provides the impetus for human behavior, causing individuals to initiate and sustain goal-directed actions".

3- Discussion

- "Oxford living dictionary" defines discussion as "the action or progress of talking about something in order to reach a decision or exchange ideas".

- The operational definition:

"It is a programme in which students discussed a topic they have previously selected with the help of their teacher. They were divided into four groups and each group contains five students. This discussion lasts for 50 minutes as students exchange ideas and opinions about the topic in English to enhance EFL speaking skills through practicing it."

Methodology:

The current study adopted the quasi-experimental design to investigate utilizing a discussion based programme to develop Al-Azhar Secondary Stage students' speaking skills and motivation. This design was a major source for data collection in which participants were divided into two groups (control and experimental). The experimental group was taught through the discussion-based programme while the control group was taught through regular instruction. The study instruments were designed to study the participants before and after the implementing of the experiment. The experiment was initiated in the 1st term of the academic year 2019/2020. Both speaking skills pre-post were

administrated by the researcher to both groups before and after the experiment.

The Study Participants:

The participants of the current study included (40) 2nd year of secondary students at Awlad Zaid religious institute in Al-Ibrahimia administration Sharkia governorate. They were randomly assigned in two groups, experimental (20) students and control (20) students. It was assumed that the participants formed a homogenous group as they were randomly chosen.

Results of the study:

- 1- There was a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group students in the post-test of overall speaking skill and its sub-skills favoring the experimental group.
- 2- There was a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-post test of overall speaking test and its sub skills in favour of the post-test.
- 3- The discussion based program is effective in developing overall speaking skill and its sub- skills.
- 4- The discussion based program had a great effect on the participants' motivation in the Experimental group.

Results of the pre-post speaking test exposed the significant effect of the discussion based programme on developing learners speaking skills and motivation a long with improving their self-confidence to use the language. In line with this finding, **Safari and Koosha (2016)**, **Alyan (2013)**, **Gan (2012)** found discussion sessions as useful teaching techniques for developing the speaking skill and modifying learners' roles. During discussions, learners were active participants rather than passive recipients of information. This study is also consistent with **Jaiharn (2013)** and **CheeKeong et al., (2014)** who found out that relaxation plays a significant role on developing learners' confidence in using the language and reducing tension to the minimum. The study also highlighted the importance of providing a native-like environment for enhancing speaking abilities as stressed by **Bakar et al., (2013)** and

Kayum (2015). In addition, this study found that students were more interested in joining discussions activities and they had fun in doing those activities. This result was supported by **Mennaai (2013)**, **Prisana & Kerdpol (2015)**, **Thepsuriwong (2014)** who emphasized the development of the speaking skill by discussion activities.

Discussion of Results:

The results of the experimental and control groups on the EFL speaking skills pre-test indicated that the students of the two groups were almost homogeneous as there were no significant differences of the two groups in the pretest before administering the experimental treatment of the study. In addition, it was obvious that the levels of the two groups in the speaking skills pre-test were low. This result could be attributed to the following reasons:

- 1- The traditional methods followed in teaching English.
- 2- Students couldn't have enough time in speaking.
- 3- Students couldn't participate at any discussions or debate in classroom.
- 4- There are not attractive activities to motivate students practise speaking in classroom.
- 5- There are not attractive topics to help students participate in class room discussion.

After experimentation, results revealed that the level of the experimental group taught using the discussion based program was higher than that of the control group who received the traditional methods of teaching.

This result indicated that the program used in the present study had a positive effect on the speaking skills of 2nd year secondary school students in the experimental group. The performance of those students in the post test was better than that of the control group student.

There some reasons behind the improvement of experimental group results:

- 1) Improving students' ability to communicate with people in real life (not only in or out of class).
- 2) Developing students' confidence in different communicative contexts.

- 3) Enabling students to express their opinions and ideas in correct English.
- 4) Enhancing the students' ability to pronounce words appropriately.
- 5) Enabling students to organize their ideas coherently and speak fluently about a specific issue.
- 6) Enabling students to be better listeners.
- 7) Promoting self-learning and co-operative learning.
- 8) Sketching feasible topics in their daily learners' using English.

Conclusion:

Improving learners' speaking skills nowadays is not an easy job for teachers. The limitations of time and the obligation to finish certain materials really inhibit teachers' creativities. One effective way to resolve this problem is by providing speaking extracurricular activities. Speaking is one of the central elements of communication that needs special attention and instruction. The collected results show that identification of learners' needs that involves both student and instructors informants should be in the heart of educationists' attention when planning English language speaking courses to obtain a balanced view. The discussion based programme was viewed as an effective method to develop students' speaking skill and motivation since it provided a relaxed learning environment void of fear or worry about making mistakes. This learning environment encouraged students' participation, promoted self-confidence, prepared students for real-life communication and gave them opportunity to practice the speaking skill. Finally, the study opens up the opportunity for other researchers to explore the possible impact of the discussion based programme on a national scale, incorporating videos and other interactive components, allowing for diverse gender and broader geographic populations.

Recommendation:

Suggestions focused on providing a training sessions to students on how to engage in fruitful discussions and work as a member of a large group or a sub-group in discussion session; establishing a time when students may not speak a second time until everyone else has spoken; setting up sub-groups in light of students' speaking abilities so that high

contributors work together and low contributors work together; reducing class size so that individual voices can be heard; using Open Discussion Sessions in conjunction with other methods to maximize its usefulness; and incorporating visual cues like videos to enhance students' interactivity and participation.

Suggestions also emphasized the need to extend the Open Discussion Sessions outside the classrooms through using Social Network Sites such as Skype. These sites could, to a great extent, solve the problem of time constraints and assist the low proficiency or shy learners to build their confidence in using the target language orally and improve their speaking ability as well as discussion skills.

Abstract:

The current study was conducted to develop the EFL speaking skills and motivation for Al-Azhar secondary stage students through adopting a discussion based programme. Accomplishing this purpose, the present study used the pre-post, experimental-control group design. The two groups' pre-posttest design was adopted. Conducting the current treatment, forty EFL 2nd year secondary stage students from Awlad Zaid Institute, El-Ibrahimia department, Sharkia Governorate, Egypt, were randomly allocated in two groups, (twenty students for quasi-experimental group) and twenty for control group, the researcher designed EFL speaking test to measure EFL speaking skills before and after the treatment, a three-point likert type scale was designed for measuring the effect of the program on the students' motivation before and after the treatment. The current study was conducted over a period of ten weeks, along ten sessions, throughout the first term of the academic year 2019-2020. The results of the study indicated that the discussion based program was effective in developing the EFL speaking skills and motivation of Al-Azhar secondary stage students.

Key words: Speaking skills, Motivation, Discussion Strategy, Egypt

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استخدام برنامج قائم على المناقشة في تنمية مهارات التحدث باللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية

ثانية والدافعية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية الازهرية

الملخص :

تمثل الدراسة الحالية محاولة لتنمية مهارات تحدث باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لطلاب المرحلة الثانوية خلال برنامج قائم علي المناقشة واثره علي دافعية الطلاب، ولتحقيق هذا الغرض إستخدم الباحث نظام المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة، حيث إختار الباحث عشوائياً ٤٠ طالبا من طلاب الصف الثاني الثانوي العام بمعهد اولاد زايد، إدارة الابراهيمية

التعليمية، محافظة الشرقية، حيث إشمتمت المجموعة التجريبية على ٢٠ طالبا والتي درست باستخدام برنامج قائم علي المناقشة و ٢٠ طالبا للمجموعة الضابطة و التي درست بالطريقة التقليدية، وقد قام الباحث بإعداد كلا من أ) إحتبار شفهي لقياس مهارات تحدث اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، ب) مقياس لتحديد أثر البرنامج على الدافعية لدي طلاب الصف الثاني الثانوي وتطبيق كليهما قبليا وبعديا، هذا و قد استغرقت الدراسة الحالية عشرة جلسات خلال عشرة اسابيع من الفصل الدراسي الأول للعام الدراسي ٢٠١٩ - ٢٠٢٠، وبعد إجراء التحليل الإحصائي توصلت الدراسة إلى النتائج الآتية أ) وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسطى درجات طلاب عينة الدراسة فى إختبار تحدث اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية قبليا و بعديا لصالح التطبيق البعدي، ب) وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسطى درجات طلاب عينة الدراسة فى مقياس الدافعية قبليا و بعديا لصالح التطبيق البعدي، ج) البرنامج القائم علي المناقشة له تأثيرا إجابيا فى تنمية مهارات تحدث اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لطلاب المرحلة الثانوية، د) البرنامج القائم علي المناقشة له تأثيرا ملحوظا على الدافعية للطلاب المرحلة الثانوية.