

Enhancing Confidence in Students' English Speaking Skills by the Use of Interactive Practices

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ABSTRACT

In a developing country like Pakistan, speaking English has emerged as the most popular tool for communication. Fluent speakers of English get good job opportunities as this is also the need of the hour. The English language has become an international language widely spoken all over the world. For the present study, the problem identified by the researchers was the low confidence level of students in spoken English. Therefore, the core purpose of the current endeavor was to enhance the confidence of students in speaking English by using interactive practices. The present study was conducted at one of the private sector universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The quasi-experiment and pre-and post-test research designs were used in the study. An intact group consisting of 40 students from the university was included in the study. Furthermore, these 40 students were divided into two groups, i.e., the experimental group and the control group. The traditional teaching method utilized in the English language lessons was replaced by innovative and interactive sessions for one semester for the experimental group. The null hypothesis developed was: there was no change in the confidence level of students in speaking English before and after the intervention. The data was statistically analyzed, and it was discovered that interactive activities can boost students' confidence and reduce anxiety while promoting an urge in them to speak up without hesitation. Thus, it is proposed that interactive activities be used in the English language classroom to boost students' speaking skills in English.

KEYWORDS

English Speaking, Pre & Post-test Research Design, Interactive Activities

JOURNAL INFO

HISTORY: Received: February 10, 2022

Accepted: March 18, 2022

Published: March 24, 2022

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, confidence is considered the key to success. Confident speakers get attention and have more chances of getting selected or promoted in jobs. However, it is generally noticed that numerous foreign language speakers have to deal with the issue of low confidence level as they find themselves incompetent while speaking fluently in a foreign language. Jamila (2014) has stated that speaking, which is a productive skill, is considered to be the most challenging one to teach, especially in a developing country like Pakistan, where English is our second language. Sometimes the foreign language learners seem to become anxious, and they appear to be quite perplexed in the classroom. In an academic scenario, students feel themselves inferior in fluency while speaking English as they are not native speakers of English. While fluency in spoken English is one of the major requirements of many institutes or companies for getting selected for admission or promotion in a job (Suleimenova, 2013).

In the same context, Burdelski & Howard (2020) also elaborated that language classrooms are dynamic spaces with a lot of diversity, and each student has to be addressed to make him confident, fluent, and competent in the use of language. Therefore, Schweitzer (2007) suggests the remedy for overcoming this anxiousness is to keep students more involved in oral assignments and tasks because the more engaged in the classroom, the more meaningful the learning will be. Some-Guiebre (2020) states that communicative competence in a language classroom is enhanced by increasing the interactions in the classroom among students and between students and the teacher. Therefore, it is always desirable to create an interactive classroom environment as this is the key to paving the way for long-lasting results in teaching and learning in a language classroom, through which teachers can be successful in focusing students' attention and learners can learn more in comparison to the traditional method. Owing to the interactive language learning activities, there are numerous activities that can be conducted in a classroom, such as creative drama, role-playing, problem-solving, and discussion groups. These activities help the learners share their emotions and thoughts, which will be shifted to the learning environment as it allows for active learning and teaching (Omar et al., 2020).

Kohnke (2021) states that encouragement by the teacher leads to more interaction, which further enhances confidence in communication. Smit et al. (2021) elaborate that if the teacher carefully observes the classroom dynamics, there can be improvements related to the overall confidence level of the class as the teacher can then identify the issues and work on them during his or her observations. Lochman (2002) explains that oral corrective feedback by the teacher is also crucial but needs

to be done carefully so as not to demotivate students when they speak. If teachers discourage and use harsh words in the classroom during students' presentations and group discussions, most of the shy and anxious students will avoid participating in public speaking activities in the classroom ultimately. Therefore, they prioritize written assignments, and even if they do not ask any questions or clear their queries from the teachers, because for this they have to speak but they have a fear of embarrassment. Battle & Deal (2021) suggest that students should be encouraged to share their experiences in the classroom, which will enhance their confidence eventually.

In view of Beasley (2021) sometimes in a few cultures, gender roles also dominate communication in the classroom. We can see that in our context as well, especially in underdeveloped areas, where males are often considered the spokesperson while resolving or discussing some important issues at home and women are not allowed to talk much. This also leads to less confident female students in the classroom. In our country, English is a compulsory subject till higher education, and there is a dire need for students to be able to speak this language proficiently and confidently.

The above discussed points are often neglected in our context, and students are not encouraged to talk more as a silent classroom environment is considered to be successful, which is doing well. On the other hand, a noisy class is considered a disaster. Under supervision, a language class can make a lot of noise while learning how to communicate successfully, like in group discussions where the noise production is unavoidable. However, teachers avoid providing a stimulating environment for the students in which they are provided opportunities to speak, and sometimes, even if teachers are willing to provide a stimulating environment, the students are reluctant to speak due to a lack of self-confidence. Teachers are also not trained in the spoken English language as they do not have knowledge about proper pronunciation and how to develop interactive activities. Therefore, students are also not given proper opportunities.

A low confidence level is generally noticed in learners of the English language when they talk in English. The grammar translation method, which is still popular in many institutes in Pakistan, has also been one of the reasons that students do not speak English with confidence, because this type of teaching methodology does not include any interaction among teachers and students. Students are passive learners and just do whatever they are told to. The interaction between teachers and students should be increased to overcome this issue. Jia (2013) stated that enhancing interaction makes the students feel confident and comfortable, making them talk without hesitation. However, if the instructor is well versed and trained in spoken English, the students will get a better chance of developing their confidence in speaking English. Wei & Zhou (2002) have also stated that some of the students are not confident enough in speaking English because they are not good at pronunciation, hence a well-trained teacher who has a good command of the English language pronunciation can resolve this issue.

The above-stated scenario presents a clear picture of students' anxiety in speaking English due to their lack of self-confidence. Although various research studies have been conducted worldwide regarding investigating the causes of poor self-confidence of students and even strategies have been explored by the researchers to minimize the reluctance of students to speak English. However, researchers of the present study have found a research gap as very few studies have been carried out to use interactive practices for enhancing the self-confidence of students towards fluent English speaking, especially with reference to Pakistan. The problem that the researchers recognized in their class was that most of the students were found to be inactive during the lessons, and mostly they were reluctant to speak. After investigating the issue informally, researchers realized that many students had issues with speaking English, which raised the need for blending interactive sessions along with regular teaching. Therefore, the current research study was carried out to find out whether interactive sessions like conducting small role plays, whole class and group discussions, informal interviews, pair sharing, and short presentations (which are not so commonly carried out in our language classrooms) can enhance the confidence level of students or not. The major aim of conducting this study was to enhance the confidence level of the students in spoken English, for which a null hypothesis was developed: There is no difference in the spoken English confidence of students before and after the intervention. The lack of confidence in students' spoken English at higher education levels was the problem observed. The problem of having a low confidence level in speaking a foreign language has been given much importance in the past few years because this is the major cause of hindrance to a student's progress. The present study is significant as it has provided a solution to overcome the issue of low confidence level in students through the use of interactive activities in the English language classroom. The study has been steered as an effort to investigate whether the interactive activities can help develop confidence in spoken English or not. The present research study has tried to resolve this issue of a low confidence level in students in higher education by teaching them with interactive activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety about speaking in a foreign language in a classroom has emerged as an influential determinant of affecting students' emotional well-being while shaking their self-confidence. An enhanced level of anxiety always becomes a hindrance in the development of students' confidence levels in learning a new language. Unconfident students need to be tackled with care so as not to lower their morale in learning a new language (Suleimenova, 2013).

Esmail et al. (2015) have pointed out that the medium of instruction in the majority of the educational institutes in Pakistan is English, and since English has been given the status of a compulsory subject, we cannot deny its importance.

Moreover, English language proficiency guarantees a good future, but unfortunately, in developing countries, there is a lack of trained instructors to develop the spoken English confidence level in students. The fact that around 40,000 native English language instructors were planned to be hired in Turkey to collaborate with non-native teachers to teach this language to students more effectively demonstrates the importance of the English language around the world (Coskun, 2013).

The review of literature provides many studies that are relevant to the present research. One of the studies was done at the Kazakhstan institute. The questionnaire used in this study was developed by Horwitz to analyse the causes of anxiety in students while conversing in English. This scale measures anxiety while talking in English by taking into account the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The results showed a low level of confidence in students while speaking English (Suleimenova, 2013).

Another research conducted on law students in the Multan district of Pakistan revealed through quantitative findings that students have a low confidence level while they speak in a foreign language (Ahmad, 2011). According to Ahmad (2011) English is the language of law studies in Pakistan; therefore, the medium of instruction is also English in law institutes. This study also provided an insight into the problems faced by the students, and the researcher devised a course outline by taking into consideration the issues revealed in order to create confident speakers of English.

One more research study conducted in Faisalabad district revealed almost the same findings as the aforementioned research study. This research also focused on finding the causes of low confidence levels in students. The research was conducted on 110 female students at two educational institutes. The data was collected through a closed-end questionnaire. The results showed that students lacked the proper usage of tenses and hesitated in speaking English with confidence. The researcher suggested that teaching English through the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) should be discontinued and students should be taught by advanced teaching methods that focus on developing communication skills in English (Esmail et al., 2015). A similar study on postgraduate students at the University of Baluchistan found similar results as students were not very confident in the language class, and fear of making mistakes prevented them from speaking English (Ahmad, 2017).

Review of literature has shown some findings from other countries as well, which are relatable to the Pakistani context also. In one of the studies done in Sudan, it was found that lack of trained teachers, low economic conditions, and inappropriate teaching materials were some of the factors that affected the students' ability to talk with confidence (Abdalla et al., 2015). Meylina (2017) elaborated on another important factor: teaching English becomes more challenging when the instructors have to deal with students who have different dialects and accents, which makes it difficult for the instructor to sometimes understand without asking them to repeat.

According to Haidara (2016) human psychology influences English speaking ability; therefore, instructors must be well trained in this area as well. Seidlhofer (1996) stated that in Austria, research showed that many teachers were of the view that teaching English was challenging because they were not native English speakers. This shows that English language teacher training is one of the most important factors to keep in mind if we want to produce confident English language speakers. A study in Hong Kong also showed that due to a lack of confidence, students tend to play passive roles in the English language classroom, which hinders their progress (Littlewood, 1996). Chang (2008) has further linked the low confidence in spoken English to the inability of the students to listen to English being spoken to them and comprehend it due to their limited exposure to listening English. Therefore, a lot of factors contribute towards the low confidence of English language speakers, as explained by the review of literature. In short, a review of the literature shows that various studies have found low confidence levels in students when they have to speak English.

RESEARCH PARADIGM

Mertens (2019) states that the selection of a suitable research paradigm is crucial for conducting research as it is the foundation of any research study. Guba & Lincoln (1994) further elaborated that understanding various research paradigms is the first important step towards developing and conducting a successful research. Moreover, Martens (2019) explains that the two basic paradigms are the positivism and constructivism. Contrary to it other researchers have classified the paradigms in various ways, like Creswell (2009) who has presented the four paradigms, Post positivism, Constructivism, Participatory and Pragmatism while on the other hand Fraenkel and Walled (2012) have classified the paradigms into three main categories positivism, postmodernism and, pragmatism.

The present research study has adopted a positivist paradigm because of the nature of the research. It was a quasi-experiment pre-test post-test study which yielded results quantitatively to present a clear picture of the difference in students' confidence while speaking English as measured with and without the interactive sessions, i.e., before and after the changed teaching methodology or intervention.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It was a quantitative study that included a quasi-experiment (pre-test and post-test design) conducted on two groups of students. Quasi experiment designs are popular in educational research because they help the educationists validate their findings and sometimes act as stepping stones to establish certain beliefs (Thompson & Panacek, 2006). Quasi experiments are usually conducted when there are certain ethical barriers to conducting randomized controlled experiments. These experiment

types are very useful for researchers to test their hypotheses and to plan their next steps accordingly (Grimshaw et al., 2000; White & Sabarwal, 2014).

The study was conducted on the first semester undergraduate students of a private sector university in Lahore. The intact group of forty students was taken and divided into two groups i.e. control and experimental group each having 20 students. The groups were homogenous because they were formed according to the scores on the pre-test. The groups were formed with the same number of high achievers, average performers, and low achievers. There was no change in the teaching methodology of the control group students while the experimental group was taught with the utilization of interactive activities. There were two sessions of one hour per week which were based on utilizing interactive activities. The activities included simulations, word chain activities, role plays, mock interviews, and so on. In place of reading and writing, the students had to listen, speak, and discuss, which made them quite excited as well.

The pre and post-test were based on a simple informal interview technique which involved asking students to introduce themselves and then talk about any one of the provided topics, i.e., "my most valuable belonging" or "a moment I cannot forget". After this, an extended discussion took place based on the topics on which the students had already spoken. The pre-test and the post-test were kept the same.

The pre-test and the post-test were assessed utilizing the Spoken English assessment scale developed by the researcher which was adapted from the scale originally devised by Spitzberg (2007) under the title Conversational Skills Rating Scale (CSRS). The CSRS can be responded to by self, the student can rate himself, can be rated by conversational partners, and by third-parties (e.g., the instructor or other observers) not directly involved in the interaction(s). The CSRS may be used to refer to past conversations in particular or in general. Its most typical application is an instructor rating students interacting in a get-acquainted conversation (or other stimulus conversation). For present work, researchers did not take into account the other sections of the scale rather focusing on only rating of student by the instructor. The scale items were modified according to the requirements of the present study. The internal reliability of the scale (coefficient alpha) has consistently been above .85, and is often above .90.

The CSRS consists of 25 items (e.g., speaking rate, articulation, posture, questions, inappropriate interactant-appropriate) and divided into four skill clusters: attentiveness (attention to, interest in, and concern for conversational partner), composure (confidence, assertiveness, and relaxation), expressiveness (animation and variation in verbal and nonverbal forms of expression), and coordination (non-disruptive negotiation of speaking turns, conversational initiation, and conversational closings).

The normality test was applied to the data collected from the pre and post-test. The test showed that the data did not seem to be distributed normally, hence the non-parametric alternatives to the parametric tests were utilized, i.e., the Independent Samples Mann Whitney U Test and Related Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test were applied to the data for the analysis.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The normality test, showed that the P value was less than 0.05 which indicated that the data was skewed. The non-parametric tests were applied on the data.

Table 1 *Test of Normality (Spoken English Test)*

Items	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistics	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
1	.276	143	0.00	.875	143	0.00
2	.215	143	0.00	.891	143	0.00
3	.244	143	0.00	.872	143	0.00
4	.219	143	0.00	.883	143	0.00
5	.184	143	0.00	.876	143	0.00
6	.207	143	0.00	.902	143	0.00
7	.226	143	0.00	.891	143	0.00
8	.198	143	0.00	.902	143	0.00
9	.226	143	0.00	.897	143	0.00
10	.252	143	0.00	.887	143	0.00
11	.207	143	0.00	.868	143	0.00
12	.216	143	0.00	.900	143	0.00
13	.173	143	0.00	.840	143	0.00

NON PARAMETRIC TESTS

Frost (2015) has stated that non-parametric tests are utilised when we have a small sample, the data is skewed, or when we have ordinal data. Some researchers even state that non-parametric tests are more reliable than parametric tests in

such conditions as stated by Frost. Therefore, non-parametric tests are preferred in all practical situations because of their high efficiency for small sample sizes where the distribution of data is not normal.

INDEPENDENT SAMPLES MANN WHITNEY U-TEST

Frost (2015) states that the Mann Whitney test is suitable for the Likert type scale data and is not less powerful than the para-metric tests as usually believed.

Table 2 shows the results of the Mann-Whitney test. The result does not show much improvement in the confidence level of the students in the comparison of the pre-test scores of both groups. The post-test scores (Table 3), on the other hand, showed a much greater difference between both groups. Hence, the null hypothesis is retained in the pre-test while it is rejected in the post-test.

Table 2. Pre-test Scores Comparison

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of all the items from 1 to 13 is the same across the categories of type of the evaluation checklist.	Independent Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.523	Retain the null hypothesis
2	-	-	.423	-
3	-	-	.544	-
4	-	-	.092	-
5	-	-	.425	-
6	-	-	.353	-
7	-	-	.763	-
8	-	-	.708	-
9	-	-	.643	-
10	-	-	.671	-
11	-	-	.654	-
12	-	-	.636	-
13	-	-	.503	-

Table 3. Post-test Scores Comparison

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of all the items from 1 to 13 is the same across the categories of type of the evaluation checklist.	Independent Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis
2	-	-	.015	-
3	-	-	.034	-
4	-	-	.014	-
5	-	-	.000	-
6	-	-	.000	-
7	-	-	.000	-
8	-	-	.000	-
9	-	-	.001	-
10	-	-	.006	-
11	-	-	.000	-
12	-	-	.000	-
13	-	-	.000	-

RELATED SAMPLES WILCOXON SIGNED RANK TEST

Wilcoxon's Rank test was utilized for the data analysis as well. According to Whitley and Ball (2002) this test is considered to be the simplest of all the nonparametric methods. This test is used to compare a single sample with a hypothesized value. The Sign test is utilized in those situations in which a paired t-test could traditionally be applied.

The null hypothesis is accepted in all the items. (Table 3) as far as the control group is concerned, when the pre and post-test scores were compared. While it is rejected in all the items for the experimental group (Table 4), it shows improvement in the confidence level of the students while talking in English.

Table 4. Control Group Comparison

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The median of differences between each question in the control group equals 0.	Related Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank test	0.30	Retain the null hypothesis
2	-	-	0.30	-
3	-	-	0.30	-
4	-	-	0.20	-
5	-	-	0.30	-
6	-	-	0.40	-
7	-	-	0.30	-
8	-	-	0.40	-
9	-	-	0.20	-
10	-	-	0.40	-
11	-	-	0.30	-
12	-	-	0.30	-
13	-	-	0.30	-

Table 5. Experimental Group Comparison

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The median of differences between each question in the experimental group equals 0.	Related Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis
2	-	-	.000	-
3	-	-	.000	-
4	-	-	.000	-
5	-	-	.000	-
6	-	-	.000	-
7	-	-	.000	-
8	-	-	.000	-
9	-	-	.000	-
10	-	-	.000	-
11	-	-	.000	-
12	-	-	.000	-
13	-	-	.001	-

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although the results showed an increase in the confidence level of students, the study also pointed out many reforms which need to be done for confident speakers of English. The results of the study are promising as well because they show an increase in the confidence level within a short span therefore, if the span is longer and there are follow up, the students can gain confidence and become more comfortable in learning English language.

An interactive classroom environment in which various forms of interactive practices are executed is supportive of providing autonomy to the students because they have freedom to speak in an environment in which no one will point out their mistakes. Interactive language activities assist the learners to improve their proficiency. Learners rarely share their opinions and thoughts during the speaking activities in traditional classroom activities. Eventually, the learners can improve their

speaking skills once the interactive speaking strategy is implemented, as they find it interesting and encouraging (Omar et al., 2020).

As shown by the data analysis, the interactive activities proved to be effective in increasing the confidence of students in spoken English, while the routine methodologies failed to provide the desired outcomes. The comparisons of both groups showed that the students in the experimental group became confident speakers, while the students in the control group were still at a lower confidence level. These results indicate a dire need for traditional teaching methodologies to be replaced by innovative teaching methods. The researcher also made some observations during the course of the research. The students in the beginning were hesitant and their faces were tense while talking in English, but with the passage of time, as their interaction with each other grew, they became quite relaxed. In the beginning, there were a few volunteers who would participate, but slowly everyone started to take part in the activities. In spite of mere reading and writing, the students had to indulge themselves in listening, speaking, and discussion, which filled them with zeal and enthusiasm as well.

As the results of the study have shown that interaction holds a special place in an English language classroom, it can be concluded that interaction is the core of any class, but especially in an English language class where the students are either learning a foreign language or a second language. This result is more relevant to developing countries as they face the same issues as Pakistan, i.e., less facilitated classrooms, non-availability of audio-visual resources, less trained teachers, etc. The tools utilized for this study can be used by language teachers, preferably those who are teaching in developing countries, to assess their students' performance and also their own teaching practices. Moreover, the results can also make the teachers identify the shortcomings of their lesson plans and make the overall curriculum revisions to incorporate interactive sessions into the curriculum or syllabus for use in the language classroom.

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE STUDY

- As the present study was delimited to only one university, in future more universities with larger sample can be included for broader generalization of the results.
- Future researchers can conduct experiments on students in schools as well, because English is a compulsory subject in schools and students feel the same anxiety as students in higher education. So, to enhance their confidence and to minimize their reluctance to speak, such an intervention based on interactive sessions can be arranged for them also.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Dr.Afsheen Salahuddin: Visualization, Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation, **Dr.Farah Deeba:**, Data curation, Writing- Reviewing and Editing **Amna Saleem:** Conceptualization, Methodology

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS:

It is declare that all authors don't have any conflict of interest. It is also declare that this article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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