

TBLT EFFICACY IN REDUCING ENGLISH SPEAKING ANXIETY OF ESL UNDER GRADUATE ENGINEERING STUDENTS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

Mr. Solomon V Anbuchelvan, Research Scholar, Sri Vasavi College, Erode
Lt. Dr. N. Mythili, Assistant Professor of English, sSri Vasavi College, Erode

Abstract The aims of this study are to measure the level of English speaking anxiety among engineering students and to determine the effect of task-based language teaching approach in minimizing learners' English speaking anxiety. This empirical study was conducted on a total of 60 first year Engineering students, who were in the ages of between 18 and 20. These purposive samples were given Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire which was designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and the translated Tamil version of FLCAS by the researcher to study the first research question which tests the presence of English speaking anxiety. To investigate the second research question, 15 Information gap tasks and 15 Opinion gap tasks were prepared and administered for the Experimental group for a period of 4 months. To calculate the level of English speaking anxiety and the effectiveness of tasks in minimizing the speaking anxiety both Quantitative method and Qualitative method were used. IELTS public version rubrics were adapted in pre test and post test to quantify the data and semi structured interview, structured observation and journaling were adapted qualitatively. The findings revealed the presence of English speaking anxiety among the students moderately in terms of communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. The use of 30 tasks based on task based approach throughout the treatment has given positive effect on the score achieved in the post-test.

Keywords Task-based Approach, Speaking Anxiety, ESL Low Proficiency Learners

1. Background of the Study

Students of Engineering are preferably expected to be strong in subject knowledge and also to be fluent to expressing technical ideas to find solution or to direct someone to do something. According to Tartar (2005), the success of language learning is active participation in classroom activities. When a student hesitates, relucts or uses limited words in an interaction, it is the evidence of not learning well. (Hamouda, 2013). It is a common situation, which can be witnessed in any teaching and learning environment. This type of behavior was caused by many reasons. According to Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) and in fact in the most recent study by Amorim (2013), students' oral performance was affected by affective variables especially second language anxiety can be one of the most affective variables that filters them to perform.

2. Statement of Problem

Since the early 1980s, scholars have conducted extensive study in the subject of Second Language Acquisition to investigate educational approaches (SLA). Language anxiety has been documented in EFL and ESL learners by researchers such as Horwitz (1986), Worde (2003) Chan and Wu (2004), Liu (2007), Andrade and William (2009), Mamhot, Martin, and Masangnya et al. (2013) Indeed, Arnaiz's (2012) research found that lower-grade pupils had higher levels of anxiety, and lower-level students were more nervous. All of these studies were conducted to determine the presence of anxiety, the factors that lead to language anxiety, methods for reducing anxiety, and the consequences of anxiety on language learning. Despite the fact that many studies have been conducted on the subject of anxiety, Although many studies have been done on anxiety, a specialized educational strategy that helps ESL learners cope with anxiety has not received the same level of attention.

3. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the language anxiety and the major component of anxiety and to minimize the anxiety by using Task based approach.

4. Research Objectives

The aims of this study are:

To find the level of speaking anxiety among Engineering students

To study the effect of task-based approach in minimizing Engineering students' English speaking anxiety.

5. Research Questions

This research will be conducted in order to find answers for the following research questions:

What is the level of English speaking anxiety of first year engineering students?

Does task-based approach minimize engineering students' English speaking anxiety?

6. Review of Literature

Gardner & MacIntyre (1993) define language anxiety as an uncomfortable fear experienced by a learner when a situation needs the learner to utilize a second language in which they are not fully skilled. Anxiety is defined by Chan and Wu (2004) as a psychological concept, although Spielberger (1966) defines it as "subjective, consciously perceived feelings of apprehension and tension, accompanied by or connected with autonomic nervous system activity or arousal" (p.15). In other words, anxiety is an unpleasant feeling that overpowers a learner's excitement and leads to concerns about completing his or her goals. The feeling of terror arises within a learner when the emotion of worry becomes inappropriate for a given setting.

Language or Speaking Anxiety is caused by a variety of factors and causes.

The pioneer who investigated the evolution of foreign language anxiety in the classroom by developing and administering the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) was Horwitz et al. (1986). Later, Young (1990) evolved a questionnaire to study in detail the causes of second language anxiety during speaking activity in the classroom.

Mak (2011) studied nervousness of 313 Chinese ESL first year university students in Hong Kong. The research stated that five elements that cause the fear are speaking in front of the class, speaking in front of the class without preparation, being corrected while speaking and not being prevented to use the first language in a second language class. Besides, learners developed the anxiety when they search for the correct form of the language. (Abdullah & Rahman, 2010). Variables like sex and culture also induces language anxiety in certain places. (Cheng, 2012).

Anxiety's Consequences

Since the 1970s (Scovel, 1978), studied the effects of anxiety its presence impacts learners' involvement in the classroom on foreign language learning Mamhot et al. (2013) language anxiety of ESL and EFL learners were studied and found that the output is the most affected language process for both EFL and ESL learners.

Actually, During output stage, anxiety really made the learner difficult to speak in the second language by McIntyre & Gardner (2000 in Tanveer, 2007, p.23), Negative attitudes, according to Mak (2011), might influence oral performance and grades while completing mandatory requirements to talk and contribute to group projects.

Anxiety from biological Perspective - language and the brain

The right hemisphere of the brain is involved with emotions. The left side of the brain is in charge of language processing. "Broca's area" and "Wernicke's area" are two significant left hemisphere areas associated with language learning. The Broca's area of the brain is involved in speech production, whereas the Wernicke's area is in charge of language comprehension and sound image storage. It converts thoughts into words. When a person begins to speak, the stored information is transmitted to Broca's area via the "arcuate fasciculus," or fibre routes. These sound pictures are processed in Broca's area and sent to the motor area for speech creation (Harley, 2013). The amygdala, an almond-shaped structure in the medial temporal lobe, processes the sensation of anxiety. In a scenario or threat, it evaluates the emotions received through the senses and gives signals to the body to "fight or flight." Fear or anxiety is activated when the amygdala is stimulated, and this activation of fear prepares the body to be protected from harm. The limbic system of the brain sends an alarm to the body to act by creating electrochemical signals after the fear was signaled. The hypothalamus is involved. It transmits a signal to the autonomic nervous system, which induces the release of adrenaline and serves as a source of energy for the body. The obvious indications of anxiety are an accelerated heartbeat, gasp, parched throat, and sweat. While fear and anxiety are often confused, there are some distinctions between the two. Fear is a major feeling that comes on quickly and lasts only a few seconds. The body's response might be used to assess or express it. Fear dissipates once the threat has been gone. Anxiety, on the other hand, is a type of fear that is more of a state than a reaction. The anxious mind manifests itself in the form of dread symptoms or fear associations. As a result, once anxiety is triggered, the entire body's focus will be on preparing the body to deal with the threat. Above all, the brain prioritizes emotional processes over cognitive functions (Wolfe, 2001).

Anxiety from psychological Perspective

Anxiety is defined by psychologists as a nonspecific fear that is connected with or without an object (Scovel, 1978). Worry, apprehension, fear, and tension are all aspects of this emotional state. Anxiety is defined as a "subjective experience of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry coupled with an activation of the autonomic nervous system," according to Spielberger (1983, cited in Horwitz et al, p. 1). All modern understandings of the mind and its activities may be traced back to Sigmund Freud. Fear and anxiety are distinct but intertwined, according to him. Fear is a conscious experience that is constantly associated with objects. Anxiety, on the other hand, is linked to an 'unconscious repressed concept' that originates during the course of a dread occurrence that is expected to occur. Anxiety, he says, is an "unconscious state of fear." The existence of an item is what distinguishes fear from anxiety. Fear is the emotion that arises when there is an object to point out. If not, that unconscious feeling is worry, which is related to terror. The mind creates the emotion anxiety in order to activate defence systems in order to deal with the threat that the individual is facing. In stressful situations, the mind will either boost problem-solving methods to react or apply defence mechanisms. As a result, everyone feels less anxious when confronted with difficult situations. Because conscious fear is usually linked to a physical visible object, Freud refers to anxiety as an unconscious fear. Anxiety is a response to risk. When "the ego is too severely strained," anxiety gets activated. (Schultz and Schultz, 2009, p. 59). Anxiety can be a personality trait or a result of a specific scenario.

Pedagogical Implication: Task-based Instruction (TBI)

Primarily, language learning tasks not only aims language forms but also focuses on verbal interactions with other learners. Tasks acts as catalyst to consciously focusing on language forms and enables the learner to learn while interacting. Indeed, a task-based approach gives realistic and meaningful content, real-world interactive tasks, and motivating feedback to learners (Hadi, 2013).

According to Ellis (2003), the same task can produce different activities when performed by different learners, and it can also produce different activities when performed by the same learners at different times. This is due to the fact that when people perform a task, they 'build' it in terms of their own unique goals and objectives.

A task, according to Ellis (2003), is a tool that directs learners to engage in specific sorts of information-processing processes that are seen to be necessary for effective language usage and/or language acquisition from some theoretical viewpoints. Ellis (2003) also offers the following composite definition:

"A task is a work-plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed."

Nunan (2006), on the other hand, described a task as a piece of classroom work that requires learners to understand, direct, produce, or communicate in the target language while their attention is focused on using their grammatical knowledge to express content rather than manipulating form.

It is the manner individuals carry out the activity, not the work itself, that creates the context for learning, according to Socio Cultural Theory (SCT). As such, the task is merely a tool that participants can use to help the teacher identify areas where assistance can be beneficially supplied, allowing appropriate Zone of Proximal Development (ZPDs) to be established.

TBLT is one of the language learning methodologies that facilitates 'learning while doing' (Moore, 2018). TBLT mainly concentrates on student centric approach, meaning of communication and alters the context of classroom.

Researchers such as Estaire and Zanon (1994), Lee (2000), Prabhu (1987), Skehan (1996), and Willis (1996) have developed several task-based lesson designs which have three stages, pre-task, during the task, and post-task. The pre-task is planned to facilitate in creating a positive learning environment free of tension and worry. 'During the task,' whereas, empowers the learners to use the target language to complete the task. The post-task, which emphasizes target language, is the final stage.

In summary, language anxiety is reduced by improving the speaking skills first through interaction and participation. Next reduces the speaking anxiety. (Vizayaletchumi, 2012).

Research Design and Methodology

This research was conducted using a quasi-experimental empirical study. Throughout the treatment, just one group was used (Brown and Rodgers, 2002). To find the presence of English speaking anxiety and its major component a quantitative method was employed to analyze the data. Next, to find the impact of a task-based approach in minimizing speaking anxiety a qualitative method like structured observation, semi Structured interview and journaling were adapted.

Population

The Samples were chosen from Erode Sengunthar Engineering College, Erode District, Tamil Nadu, India. 60, First year Engineering students who were registered for Electronics and Communication Engineering were chosen as research samples

Participants

The investigation was done on only one group of first year Electronics and Communication Engineering students who were in the age range of 18 to 20. A total of 60 students participated in this study. The sampling was made based on research scholar's own class. The students were separated into control group and experimental group.

Research Tools

Questionnaire

The presence of speaking anxiety was tested in these purposive samples using a questionnaire to support the first study question. Horwitz et al. established the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was used to create this questionnaire (1986). 'English language,' 'English language class,' and 'English language teacher' were replaced for 'foreign language,' 'language class,' and 'language instructor,' respectively. All the questions were translated in Tamil Language for better facilitation and to get the exact reflections from the students.

Information gap and Opinion gap Tasks

The Intensive English Programme based on Information Tasks and opinion Tasks was conducted for 4 months. It was handled by the researcher for 4 hours from Monday to Friday. The participants spent a total of 60 hours to complete the programme. They were asked to use English throughout the programme. 15 Information gap Tasks and 15 opinion gap tasks were prepared meticulously based on daily routines, day today activities, events and processes by the researcher to conduct this research.

Structured Observation

Observation as a research method has to be objective, intentional, planned, purposeful and systematic to gain accurate and reliable data (Gavora, 1998 and 2001). Observational data are less predictable and offer a fresh outlook on the subjects of research

Gavora (1998) distinguishes between two observational methodologies. Unstructured observation (a style of field notes in which chronological and detailed notes of the lessons are written down) is on one end, while structured observation (a technique of field notes in which chronological and detailed notes of the lessons are written down) is on the other (a rubric for observation is prepared with exact categories, the researcher has an agenda of issues in systematic order).

Semi structured Interview

The semi-structured interview guide provides a clear set of instructions for interviewers and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data.

Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation, informal and unstructured interviewing in order to allow the researchers to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions.

Journaling

In academics, journaling is used to aid reflection, increase students' understanding, and stimulate critical thinking. As a result, a variety of journaling-based teaching methodologies have arisen in the literature. One of the strategies that encouraged as a way to encourage reflective learning is reflective journal writing.

Reflective journaling has the advantage of highlighting students' opinions and perceptions about course material. It is a heuristic teaching technique that encourages students to build critical thinking abilities and reflective behaviours. This arouses the students' attention and drives them to investigate further. Reflective journaling is more than just a recollection of the day's happenings; it's a learning activity in which students express their comprehension of, reflections on, responses to, or analyses of an event, experience, or topic in writing. This type of writing captures all of the students' ideas and feelings on certain areas of their classroom experiences while also improving their attention and concentration.

In addition, reflective writing is an important part of the transformative learning process. Transformative learning is deliberate learning done by the student under the direction of the teacher. It enables students to shift their orientation by critically thinking on their views and consciously developing and implementing plans that strengthen their ability to re-define their beliefs. Reflective journaling is an effective method for encouraging critical reflection, which is at the heart of transformative learning.

Reflective journaling assists students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of course content by providing a channel of inner communication that connects beliefs, feelings, and behaviours. This results in effective learning environments and self-discovery. A reflective notebook, also known as a learning journal, is a continuously developing document that the learner keeps to track their development. Learners keep a learning notebook for whatever course they take, as well as for everyday tasks.

Reflection In-Action during the activity like experiencing, thinking from one's feet, what to do next and Reflection On –Action after the activity like recall, interpret and learn are the two types of reflection by Schön (1983)

Journaling is a habit of keeping a notebook that aids you in achieving your objectives or improving your quality of life. This can take many forms for different people, and the results can vary greatly, but they are virtually always positive.

Journaling can be beneficial for a variety of reasons and can assist you in achieving a variety of objectives. It can aid in the clearing of your mind, the formation of vital connections between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

According to psychologist Barbara Markway, "There's simply no better way to learn about your thought processes than to write them down."

She points out that in order to fix our harmful thought patterns, we must first understand them! Journaling is helpful in identifying our negative automatic self-talk and identifying the source of our uneasiness.

Rubrics for assessing speaking based on IELTS Public Version

The rubric for assessment is developed from the public version of IELTS examination speaking skills rubrics. Students' speaking skills are assessed before and after the intervention classes. Four sub skills of speaking skill namely fluency, accuracy, coherence and pronunciation are assessed.

Data Collection Procedure

A pre-test was required of the samples, as well as 30 tasks during 3 months 4 hours in a week. The samples were given questionnaires to ascertain whether or not they felt anxious. The 4 months program was run using a task-based approach. Participants were given a variety of tasks to encourage them to utilize target language in the classroom. Task performances of students were observed structurally, feedback was received by structured interview and self awareness on self learning was facilitated for by journaling. Participants were obliged to take a post-test at the conclusion of the program.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed quantitatively. The statistical results for the three primary components of anxiety: communication apprehension, negative evaluation and test anxiety were generated by using SPSS. The mean and standard deviations of language anxiety experienced by ESL Engineering students in speaking English were determined using a paired T-test.

The information gathered during the pre- and post-test was extremely useful in determining the link between anxiety and speaking abilities. The determined correlation coefficient revealed whether the two variables have a positive association or vice versa, as well as the level of significance. Furthermore, the effects of a task-based approach on reducing anxiety among first year Engineering learners were discovered by examining the statistical difference between the means of "without" and "with TBA" at a significant level of 1%.

Pre Test

Table 1. The level of English speaking anxiety among undergraduate Engineering students

S.No.	Total FLCAS	Anxiety level	No. of Learners	Percentage
1.	98 -140	High	23	38.33%
2.	70 - 97	Moderate	32	53.33%
3.	28-69	Low	5	8.33%

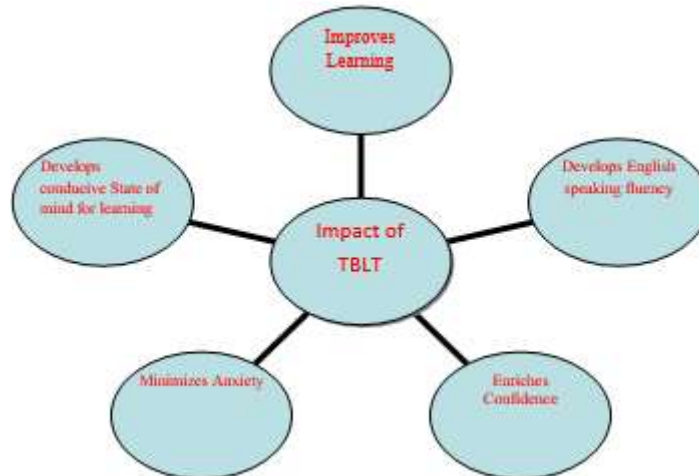
Table 2. Major Component of English speaking anxiety among undergraduate Engineering students

S.No.	Component of Speaking Anxiety	Question Numbers	Pre Test Mean
1.	Apprehension in communication	1,4,9,14,15,18,24,27,29,30,32	2.62
2.	Fear of negative assessment	2,7,13,19,23,31,33	2.82
3.	Exam anxiety	3,5,6,8,10,11,12,16,17,20,21,22,25,26,28	2.85

Post Test

S.No.	Total FLCAS	Anxiety level	No. of Learners	Pre Test Percentage	Post Test Percentage
1.	98 -140	High	18	38.33%	30.00%
2.	70 - 97	Moderate	35	53.33%	58.33%
3.	28-69	Low	7	8.33%	11.66%

S.No.	Component of Speaking Anxiety	Question Numbers	Pre Test Mean	Post Test Mean
1.	Apprehension in communication	1,4,9,14,15,18,24,27,29,30,32	2.62	2.59
2.	Fear of negative assessment	2,7,13,19,23,31,33	2.82	2.77
3.	Exam anxiety	3,5,6,8,10,11,12,16,17,20,21,22,25,26,28	2.85	2.81

Impact of TBLT**Themes from Semi Structured Interview and Journaling**

Theme	Impact	Codes
Learning Level of English	Improves Learning	I can speak more confidently and clearly.
		My speaking also increased. As we had many opportunities to speak. My level has very much increased.

		But now I can speak English very well
		I am confident to speak English in front of others
		I can answer in English.
Level of English speaking Performance	Develops English speaking fluency	We exchange information and Express share in English right now. Due to these activities other students get inspired and start to speak English.
		But now I communicate and share the information in English.
		We exchange our opinions. share our thoughts in English right now.
		Because of this activity classes. Everybody started speaking English. we were so happy and confident right now in communicating English
		We exchange our opinions. Share our thoughts in English right now.
		We are very fluent right now. We share our opinions and thoughts in English right now.
		We are all talking in English sharing our knowledge and sharing our thoughts in English
		In my classroom I can share my thoughts and opinions with my friends without any fear
		I can share my thoughts to my friends in English, after attending the activity class
Level of Confidence	Enriches Confidence	It makes me confident.
		my confidence level was increased.
		I am confident to speak English in front of others
		improved my confidence level
		I can realize that my confidence level is higher than initial stage
		my confidence level increased
Level of Anxiety	Minimizes Anxiety	This class will help to reduce my fear and hesitation
		help to reduce my fear and hesitation
		after classroom activities my anxiety and fear were reduced
Emotional Level while learning	Develops conducive State of mind for learning	We are really very happy right now.
		I am really very happy now.
		I participated in many seminars in English without fear.
		we will share our opinions in a friendly manner
		we were so happy and confident right now in communicating English
		if you learn swimming you have to jump in the water. the same way you have to learn English and speak in English.
		we will never get bored
		This activity improved me.
		So I am very happy now.
		I'm very confident to speak in English
		It is highly energetic, so I recommend this method to my

		friends
		we don't feel shy
		I am very happy with this method.

Discussion

The findings revealed that Undergraduate engineering college students felt speaking anxiety in the classroom. Among the three components, students had more anxiety on communication apprehension. A majority of students when they were asked speak in English inside the classroom without preparation developed nervousness and felt weak. Speaking with classmates or being in an environment with people speak in English often creates uncomfortable situations to the students. This is due to the less exposure towards the usage of English language in the classroom or outside of the classroom.

Task based language teaching approach was adopted by the researcher to use meaningful real-world tasks which focus on the outcome (Skehan, 1996). Such tasks require learners to process language pragmatically to achieve an outcome (Ellis, 2003). In addition, according to Nunan (2005) pedagogical tasks involve language use for interaction which is different from grammatical exercises. Based on these references, the researcher designed information gap tasks and opinion gap tasks to enable the learners to use the target language to complete the given tasks.

In particular, the tasks were carried out in three phases: pre-task, task cycle and post-task (Willis, 1996). During pre-task, topics were introduced to create participants' interest by activating topic related words, phrases and sentences. During pre-task, researcher divided the class into groups. During task cycle students worked in groups to achieve the goal of the task. During post-task, researcher allowed the students to discuss all information towards the task. This provided an opportunity for them to analyse some of the specific features of the language which occurred naturally during the task (Willis, 1996).

All real-life activity created a fun learning environment which enabled learners to move around freely without anxiety. The more they were engaged in such activities, the less anxious they felt and consequently the outcome of every lesson was achieved. Subsequently, it created a safe and friendly environment which reduced speaking anxiety. In fact, Worde (2003) suggested that, teachers should create a relaxed atmosphere for starters and incorporate topics which interest the students. During these four months of intervention rules were integrated in task-based activities.

The learners felt less pressure when they make positive statements, work in pairs or groups, complete tasks related to real-life context and equal treatment given to all of them. In fact, they were less anxious after knowing that the other learners were also at the same proficiency level.

This exposure had given positive impact on the students' results. Students who initially had lengthy pauses before most words improved their fluency by maintaining their flow of speech to keep going. Those who had insufficient vocabulary and uttered isolated words or memorised utterances in the pre-test, managed to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics with a wide range of vocabulary in the post-test. This shows that the exposure towards the target language through various types of meaningful real-life interactive tasks enriched their lexical resource. The integration of grammatical components with the tasks, has given an opportunity for participants to apply them in appropriate circumstances.

Themes were identified based on the semi structured interview and journaling. The researcher identified the codes and developed the themes under five categories. They are Learning Level of English, Level of English speaking Performance, Level of Confidence, Level of Anxiety and Emotional Level while learning. Themes convey that TBLT helps in improving speaking in English, gaining confidence, enriching the emotional state of students thereby it minimizes the anxiety of speaking in English.

Conclusion

Educators and teachers believe that anxiety has an undeniable impact on learners' speaking skills. This has been proven through the findings of this study which revealed that anxiety exist among the learners in terms of communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. As a consequence, anxiety has become a hindrance to the development of speaking competency of many learners. The more anxious the learners became, the lower the grades were achieved. This was proven when the finding of the analysis showed that, there is a strong negative relationship between language anxiety and speaking skills among ESL engineering college students.

In addition, this research indeed identified the effects of task-based approach on learners' speaking anxiety. The use of task-based approach throughout the intervention has given positive effect on the scores achieved in the post-test and the themes emerged out of semi structured interview and journaling.

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