

Research Article

THE EFFECT OF BUILDING CONFIDENCE ON IRANIAN INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNER'S SPEAKING ABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is a fundamental and yet demanding skill to be mastered by learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Compared to other language skills, speaking has been given less attention in second language acquisition, research, teaching, and assessment. The present study explored the effect of building confidence on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's speaking ability. In so doing, this study was carried on a 10 students. Students received treatment based on confidence building. Then statistical analysis of the results obtained from Paired-Samples T-Test provided some evidence in support of the positive effect of building confidence on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's speaking ability.

Key Words: *Confidence, Speaking Ability*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking in the foreign language has always been considered the most demanding skill to develop in the learners of the target language compared to such other skills as listening, reading, and writing. This is in part due to the fact that it involves more than simply knowing the linguistic components of the language. Of course, knowledge of the linguistic components such as vocabulary and grammatical structures seems essential but not sufficient. What makes Speaking distinct from the other skills is that the speaker needs to have a quick access to all the relevant knowledge required to produce the appropriate language in relatively short lags of time, whereas in other skills the learners normally have enough time to either match the input with the existing knowledge, e.g., in reading or writing or to search for the accurate forms to produce the language with no immediate recipient who might be waiting even some times impatiently to receive the language, e.g., in writing.

Chastain (1988) maintains that speaking a language involves more than simply knowing the linguistic components of the message, and developing language skills requires more than grammatical comprehension and vocabulary memorization. Teachers and students come to language classes with conscious or subconscious attitudes, expectations, interests, and needs. These are especially germane to establishing course objectives for speaking, which has tended to receive the greatest attention and emphasis in recent years and for which achievement has tended to be the most disappointing, perhaps because expectations have been elevated beyond realistic levels (p. 270).

Statement of the Problem

The teaching of speaking L2 is usually considered to be the most difficult part for English teachers. English teachers always find ways to help students master the speaking skills. Undeniably, assisting our next generation to speak English competently is an important task as we all know that it is very vital to maintain the international status of Iran in future.

Most of the students in Iran are found to be passive and unenthusiastic in English speaking. The students of our school have no exception. Due to the weak foundation of English Language, inadequate training in primary schools and personalities, they are shy and unwilling to speak English in class even though they are forced by teachers. It is very common to see that only few students are brave and competent to answer teacher's questions confidently. The attempt to create a negotiating and students-centered learning atmosphere in English by teachers is usually unsuccessful. The achievement of effective communicative teaching becomes a daily headache to all English teachers. Inevitably, the lack of student's participation

Research Article

leads to the teacher-centered learning in English lesson. The purpose of this research is to find ways to increase student's confidence in speaking English in class. It aims to help student develop interests in speaking English and motivate them to acquire better communication.

Research Question

In order to tackle the problem of the research in a much consolidated way, the following research question has been formulated as follows:

RQ: Does building confidence have any effect on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's speaking ability?

Research Hypothesis

In order to answer the research question, the following null hypothesis has been formulated:

H0: Building confidence does not have any effect on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's speaking ability.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Method

1.1. Introduction

This study investigated the effect of building confidence on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's speaking ability. So the methodology of the research is as follows: the design of the study, Participants, materials, procedures and statistical analysis.

1.2. Design of the Study

The design of the study was quasi-experimental design, which is a pre-post test design.

1.3. Participants

The subject of the study was 30 students from Iran language institute. Having being homogenized by a MELAB test, 10 students were selected. The subjects were participated for a pre test of speaking ability.

The purpose of such a test was to measure the learner's initial subject knowledge of speaking ability.

Then the subjects received treatment based on building confidence during 10 sessions and at the end the subjects attended for the post test of speaking ability.

1.4. Materials

The following materials were employed throughout the course of this study. A MELAB test was used for the purpose of homogenizing the proficiency of the learners. Another type of the test, which was used for the purpose of the study, was speaking test. This type of test was used as a pre-test to measure the learner's initial subject knowledge in two groups. And finally the same speaking test was used as a post-test based on which the efficacy of building confidence was determined.

1.5. Procedure

The procedure through which this study was conducted includes different stages of application, which embraced the selection of the subjects, instrument and materials. Basically three types of test were used in this study, one was MELAB test, which was used to make the subject homogeneous and the next one was pre-test of speaking ability, which was used to assess the initial subject knowledge of the participants under investigation and the last one was the post-test of speaking ability used to assess the subject's ability of the specific treatment program.

A MELAB test was administered to the participants. The test covered the areas of reading, grammar, and vocabulary proficiency. This test was divided into 3 parts, cloze test, structure, and reading. Part one begins with questions 1 to 30, Part two from questions 31 to 60, and part three from questions 61 to 80 is a reading part. For questions, 1 to 30 students are supposed to mark one letter A, B or C on their answer sheet, which best completes each sentence. From questions, 31 to 60 students must choose the word or phrase that means the same as the underlined word or phrase. From questions 61 to 80 students should read the passages, and then answer the questions following them according to the information given in the passage. Then those participants above and below the mean were selected for the study. Then the subjects were participated for a pre test of speaking test. This test was used to show participant's current level of knowledge of speaking ability. Then the treatment program for the subjects under investigation was initiated.

Research Article

So participants received treatment based on building confidence. Before starting the treatment researcher asked students which subjects they would like the most or which subjects they are strongly interested in. So each session the teacher attended to the class with a checklist and asked the students their favorite subjects. In fact by negotiating with learner's interest, the researcher gave opportunities for students to speak English. By letting students choose their own topic of interest, the researcher promotes learner's participation to speak English. The researcher divided students into two groups in order to arouse student's confidence and encourage them to speak. The researcher conducted marks and gifts for those students who actively participated to speak English.

The participants attended the treatment program two sessions a week, the whole project took for 10 sessions, and each session took 60 minutes. After 10 sessions, participants sat for the post-test, which was the same speaking test, this test aimed at exploring the significant effect of specific treatment program, if there is any.

1.6. Statistical Analysis

The date of the study was computed based on computer assisted program (SPSS) software. Paired-Samples T-Test was used to present the analysis and result of the study based on the hypothesis of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to find out whether the treatment has been influential and beneficial in improving the subject's speaking ability; two kinds of statistical analyses were employed. First, the raw scores obtained in the pre-test and post-test exams were analyzed descriptively, and then inferential statistics were employed to find out whether differences, if any, were statistically significant. Descriptive statistics for the application of the results of the pretests and posttests are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the results of pretests and posttests

	Pretests	Posttests
N Valid	11	11
Missing	0	0
Mean	6.09	10.06
Std. Deviation	2.30	1.30
Range	6.5	4.25
Skewness	1.04	1.13

As is shown in Table 1, the mean score of the pretests is 6.09, while that of the post-tests is 10.06. This shows that the mean score of the posttests is higher than that of the pretests. It can be concluded that this increase in the amount of the student's performance may highly be attributed to the effect of the treatment. To continue, the standard deviation of the pretests is 2.30, and that of the posttests is 1.30. The range of pretests and posttests are 6.5 and 4.25, respectively. Thus, both the range and the standard deviation indicate that there is much more variation among the subject's performance scores in the pretests compared with that of the posttests. Furthermore, the distribution of the scores of the pretests and posttests is positively skewed, meaning that most of the scores are low, while a few scores are very high and that those high scores positively skew the distribution curve, even though the latter is more positively skewed (1.04 and 1.13, respectively).

Research Article

In order to decide whether the difference among subject's means of the pre- and post-tests is statistically significant, a Paired (Matched) samples *t* test was employed. Table 2 below represents the paired samples *t* test and the difference between the means of the pretests and posttests.

Table 2: Paired samples *t* test for pretests and posttests

df	Mean difference	t	Sig. (two-tailed)
10	3.97	-7.72	.000

$p < 0.05$, *t*-critical 2.228

As is shown in Table 2, the *t* observed (-7.72) is much greater than the *t*-critical (2.228) with the degree of freedom (df) 10. This indicates that the difference between the means of the subjects in pretests and posttests is statistically significant. That is, the subjects performed better in posttests than pretests and this better performance in their speaking production seems to be, to a great deal, the result of the treatment given.

So the study findings reject the null hypothesis of the research study, i.e. building confidence does not have any effect on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's speaking ability, but on contrary support that confidence of the subjects has a positive effect on their speaking ability: the more they have confidence, the more their speaking ability improves.

However, the results of this study may suffer from some defects and shortcomings. In the first resort, the research is conducted on a very small sample, which is not a representative of all Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, generalizing the outcomes of this study research on similar situations should be done cautiously. Secondly, it seems that more research is required to clarify the effect of building confidence on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's speaking ability.

Conclusion

The achievement of effective communicative learning needs efforts of teachers and students. Teachers are the facilitators to help students to learn effectively while student's participation is also necessary and it is the responsibility for teachers to arouse their interests.

The game was very encouraging as a lot of students were involved in the task. I will try different ways to diversify my teaching strategies, aiming at creating an interesting and active environment for students to learn English. In fact, various kinds of oral activities can be carried out in class, such as story -telling, reading poem aloud, and singing songs. I think they are all welcomed by students. In the coming days, I will continue to enhance my teaching skills, improving myself in order to make students to achieve the best.

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Research Article

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