
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROJECT WORK IN REDUCING EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY IN PAKISTANI CONTEXT

Munawer Sultan

Assistant Professor,
Faculty of Social sciences & Humanities, Hamdard University Karachi,
Sindh, Pakistan.

Email: munawer.sultana@hamdard.edu.pk

Imran Ahmed

Assistant Professor,
Govt. Premier College, Sindh Education & Literacy Department,
Sindh, Pakistan.

Email: 4ahmedimran@gmail.com

Tahira Maqbool Masavi

Associate Professor,
Govt. Science College Karachi, Sindh Education & Literacy Department,
Sindh, Pakistan.

Email: ta14hr@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present study showcases the problems faced by EFL learners that affect their language learning ability and achievement. Social phobia breeds speaking anxiety that hinders learners' communicational skills preventing them from learning the targeted language at their best. This study explores the causes of anxiety in language classrooms while measuring the efficacy of project works as an alternative solution. This study was founded on two research questions aiming to find out the solution to the problem. At first, how does the speaking anxiety trigger? Secondly, can these students benefit from project work in the language classrooms as a remedy to the said problem? For this purpose, 160 first-year female students of a public college in Karachi, Pakistan, were taken as the sample and were divided into two groups experimental and control randomly. The instruments employed to collect the data were a questionnaire (FLCAS) and speaking skill tests. The collected data was analyzed quantitatively through SPSS. The experimental group was taught by using project works. The control group was also taught the same material by the same researcher simultaneously through traditional method. The study highlights various factors that cause speaking anxiety in EFL learners. Moreover, project work facilitated students to overcome speaking anxiety stimulating them to use targeted language in the

language classroom. The findings of the study disclosed that the experimental group exhibited improvements while participating in numerous speaking activities on various forums. Besides, discussing the usefulness of project work, this study sheds light on its consequences.

KEYWORDS

EFL Classroom, Speaking Anxiety, Project Work

INTRODUCTION

The students of English language face a number of difficulties that directly or indirectly effect their learning abilities and success. Among them the most common problems are the speaking anxiety. It effects negatively on the learner ability to learn the target language and retain in mind. The researchers also encounter this kind of problem. Hayati, & Kaniadewi, (2022); Endian, Daud, Sari & Dwitami, (2020). considered speaking anxiety a major hurdle in learning English Language for EFL learners. Speaking anxiety is so serious problem that prevents learner in acquiring and employing targeted language.

Speaking anxiety is considered a well- known psychosomatic process that can't be ignored and it should be eliminated. Actually speaking anxiety is the feeling of pressure, worry, apprehension, and fear connected with provocation of unconsciously nervous system. MacIntyre, & Gregersen, (2022) detected speaking anxiety as a form of situational anxiety. The researchers of speaking anxiety should be employed the process of anxiety in using the ESL/EFL environment. They The speaking anxiety is considered as the harmful feelings that created during the practice of foreign language learning.

The researcher intended through light on the factors that arose speaking anxiety, and incorporated PW in language classroom. The PW create language classrooms congenial for learners, and provide them opportunities in achieving their targets language learning. The basic purpose of utilization project work to eliminate speaking anxiety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past decade language learning researchers have discovered the relationship of speaking anxiety and the learning of second/ foreign language, in addition give the name of language learning anxiety. Some researcher stressed the negative relation between foreign language anxiety and language acquisition. while the other researcher indicated no relationship in these two variables. Experiential research showed that the worried learners were not interested in taking part in language classroom therefore showed low achievement in language learning. The motivated and less anxious

learners performed better as compared worried learners.

Arnold and Brown (1999:8) declared anxiety a disturbing feature that persistently hindered the acquiring process. Anxiety becomes a source of poor language acquisition. Both the teachers and students should have tried to elude language anxiety and specially speaking anxiety and considered it an extremely serious problem. Educationist and language teacher should discover the motivational methods and strategies eliminate anxiety from the language class room (Worde, R., 2003). Shi, & Zhang, (2023) recommended unease in speaking the targeted language effected motivation and enthusiasm that directly confines the use of foreign language.

Researcher has categorized language learning anxiety as facilitating anxiety that motivated and facilitate learner to participate in learning a language on the other hand the debilitating anxiety or a negative force that creates hurdles' and obstacles in learning the language and keeps the learner away from the language activities in the classroom (Motoda,2005). Chahrazad, & Kamel, (2022) declared verbal communication in the targeted language becomes very difficult activity that creates frustration in learners. Therefore, speaking anxiety is as the one of the source of anxiety. Moreover, Rasool, Qian, & Aslam, (2023) said that EFL/ESL learners encountered language anxiety without any discrimination of their standard of performance. The language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, are the basic need of EFL/ESL. Out of these language skill speaking is the most important and difficult one. It is the major source of anxiety in language classroom.

Anxiety Generating Factors

Alrabai (2014), pointed out the main source of anxiety is the fear of communication in the targeted language. Oteir and Al-otaibi (2019), foreign language learning anxiety directly affect the abilities of the learner to learn and understand the new language Word, (2003), reported a variety of anxiety-inducing activities, including speaking and listening exercises, difficulty understanding, unpleasant or gloomy circumstances, fear of failing or receiving a low grade, academic practice, and the teachers themselves. The major anxiety provoking sources are listening and speaking practices, dread of speaking in front of the teacher and fellow students, interacting with others in the classroom, taking part in group discussions (Worde, 2003). According to Ly (2024), language learners have fulfilled a dual role by acquiring new language and presenting it with confidence and fluency. According to his findings, language learners find enormous significance in the process of peer and teacher evaluation. This is because they are highly sensitive to the opinions of their peers and teachers regarding their speaking. The inability to understand the instructions and the dread of calling on someone unexpectedly in class are two other factors that cause anxiety. Anxiety associated with learning a foreign language must be brought to the attention of

educators and students.

Anxiety Reducing Factors

A sense of belonging and community, a friendly classroom atmosphere, the importance of the teacher's position, and the proactive involvement of the student are some of the elements that reduce anxiety. In order to reduce anxiety, a teacher's role is more significant than a specific teaching style because teachers might cause worry in their students at times. Speaking anxiety can be eliminated by participating in group activities including role-playing, games, and skits (Said & Omar, 2022).

Method of Reduction Anxiety and Enhancement in Motivation

Integration of PW in the language classroom help in reducing foreign language learning anxiety in general and speaking anxiety in particular. PW alleviates speaking anxiety by creating friendly and supportive environment and advance harmonization and association among the group members. In project work students perform meaningful activities which diminish language learning anxiety and enhance friendly environment and motivation. In group activities, the role of the learner is proactive and supported by the group work. The role of teacher is crucial in creating friendly and learning environment by choosing authentic related and thought-provoking content to discuss. The teacher plays a crucial role and gives importance to the view point of the students provide valuable forthcoming to them in a politely and gently style during the correction of learners projects. Worde, (2003) stressed to admire the learners' artifacts and timely feed. In project work learners are not overloaded by the new material in one class sitting so it is easy for them to accumulate and utilized the new material.

Speaking nervousness must be eradicated from language classrooms since it has a variety of negative effects on language learning activities. Anxiety reduction leads to improved motivation, improved language acquisition, and improved knowledge retention. Suparlan, (2021) found that anxiousness of the learners also impacts their capabilities to adopt novel targeted language and harm the process of learning. He also found a relationship among speaking anxiety, tough actions and ability of students that produces hurdles in acquiring focus language, in improving and replicating it. Anxiety also has an impact on the usefulness of cognition. It impairs cognitive function. Anxious learners find it difficult to communicate or demonstrate what they have learned, and their learning process slows down (Ghanmi, Babaci, & Boubekeur, 2020).

According to Amorati, & Hajek, (2021). creativity encourages learners to perform better and it can be enhanced by some common classroom activities. Said, & Omar, (2022) indicated that the anxiety level of EFL learner increase when they are asked to speak in the target language.

Project work

The project work is a new, modern and communicative approach of teaching a language. It enhances communicative competence of the EFL/ESL learner and provides opportunities in using tagged language in daily conversation among the group members, in completing their project (McCarthy,2010). PW provides congenial and supportive learning environments to the language learners. The motivational force for the researcher to investigate the sources of speaking anxiety learners encounter during language classroom, and to find out the effect of using project work in reducing/minimizing ESL/EFL learners' speaking anxiety (Li Ke, 2010). Project work focuses on all of the students' activities. The teacher purposefully included entertaining and engaging exercises in the classroom. Consequently, it fosters a welcoming, cordial, and encouraging learning atmosphere. An engaging and friendly environment is very important in lowering anxiety levels. Anxiety and motivation are typically inversely correlated.

In PW motivation is vital either intrinsic or extrinsic and an effective factor that influence learning foreign language. In a classroom, students' active engagement in activities, group lunches, watching films and television shows in the target language, study groups, and language clubs can all help reduce anxiety. Calm classroom settings help students feel more confident, which reduces anxiety. Fragoulis (2009), pointed out that language learning anxiety did not effect by the pedagogy of the teacher, but it directly effects by the attitude and style of the teacher. Sometimes the teacher herself becomes the sources of language anxiety.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the impact Project work on learns speaking skills and language learning anxiety
2. To present a practical model for enhancing speaking skills
3. To change traditional classroom from being teacher centered to student centered

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does the speaking anxiety Triger?
2. Can the incorporation of project work in language classroom as a remedy to the said problem?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out by using Quasi-experimental research design and pre-test/post-test control and Experimental strategy was employed to conduct the current study. For this purpose, two groups, control and treatment were formed. 160 students were selected and divided randomly into two groups. The researcher taught both the

groups for twelve weeks. To control the validity and reliability of the research, the research was involved from the first to last steps of the project. Experimental group was exposed PW, while control group was taught by employing TM (traditional method). The sample standardization was recognized by collecting the demographic data. The researcher found that many of these students were being passive learners having English acquisition level below average, unable to understand content terminology and academic discourse with almost no performance. Even they were so incompetent that could not understand the guidelines after the repetition frequently. Most of the learners usually waver, in communication and written expression and were unable reply the questions.

The instruments used to collect the data were (FLCAS) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale introduced by Horwitz et al, (1986) and used in several researches, and the speaking skill tests developed by the researcher according to the standard. (FLCAS) comprised on four related components, (a) test anxiety (b) fear of communication (c) fear of negative evaluation (d) and fear of English classes. The questionnaire consisted on 33 statement, and was assessed on five- point Likert scale with values 1-5. The measurements indicated the level of language anxiety. Higher scores showed the high level of anxiety among the learners. On the other hand, some items such as the items 2, 5, 8,11,14,18, 22, 28, 32, were scored negatively were calculated inversely. Data was gather twice during the experiment firstly at the beginning and at the completion of experiment to investigate the association between language learning anxiety and the speaking skills. The researcher employed the instruments reliably to measure the level of language learning anxiety of the language learners' and the impact of PW in learning a language. The intention of the researcher was also in measuring the amount and type of anxiety exhibited by the learners in a language classroom.

Speaking skills of EFL learners was evaluated by employed two tests, public speaking and group discussion. The tests were developed, piloted and administered by the researcher. Baker & Westrup, (2006), oral performance; informing and interacting involved authentic situation. The evaluation criteria were also developed to evaluate students and given to the participant prior to the testing. The aim of these kind of strategies was to assess learners speaking skills in public as well as in group, before and after the employment of project work (PW). The learners' speaking performance was assessed on Likert five-point scale. Likert assessment scale entailed a number of posse descriptor that are beneficial in capturing several characteristics of learners' communication performance.

The chief concern of the investigator for administrating the post-tests at the end of the completion of project work was to check the change in the students' speaking skills

and the level of speaking anxiety. Two subject experts were engaged to check the content validity and reliability of the tests. The investigator adopted quantitative methodology to analysis all the significant perceptions, of reliability, validity and statistical analysis.

Projects' Planning and implementation

For the study, the investigator adopted project framework introduced by Beckett and Slater's (2005). Project framework was the most effective at advancing concurrently language acquisition, subject knowledge, and abilities. The experiment group's work was focused on prose, poetry, and drama—all subjects covered in the required English curriculum. Table 1 describes the PW teaching given to the experimental group, including the weekly schedule, curriculum elements, language skills addressed, and project kinds. Every project was meticulously prepared, taking into account the deadline, language proficiency, content knowledge input, and ultimate product. Throughout the project, students interacted with the teacher, other students, and the curriculum. They also used resources at various points throughout the project.

Table 1: Designated syllabus of 1st year English Text Books for Projects.

No	Curriculum Content	Projects	Duration / Time	Language Aims
1- Verses	Character of a Happy life Lines from The Deserted Village Sonnet Composed Upon the Westminster Bridge Lines from the Lay of the last Minstrel	Recitation of the Poem Role Play	4-weeks	Speaking
2- Prose	My Bank Account The Wolves of Cernogratz Science and society Science	Story completion Simulation	4 weeks	Speaking
3-Play	The Count's Revenge	Group discussion presentation & Drama performance	4 weeks	Speaking

Additionally, project evaluation sheets were created to track the final results, such as dram performances, simulations, and poetry recitations. Speaking abilities, topic understanding, and presenting abilities/display were the domains that were assessed. The researcher and other faculty members observed the students' efforts during the final project exhibition and certificate presentation. The two English language

specialists graded the completed work.

The researcher has developed the project keeping in mind the model of Anderson, 2002, by using communicative approach. The above mention unit were selected for developing speaking project. Project were introduced at the commencement of the research. Both the groups were taught 45 minutes in a day and three times in a week. This process was continued for three months (12 weeks). The dropout rate of this study was insignificant, only six subjects, out of 160 participants left over the study during this long research at different stages that is common feature of investigational research and the ratio of participants 96.25%, out of these, 51.3 %participants n=79 were in treatment group; on the other hand, control group was involve 48.7 % n= 75. The dropout ratio of control group was higher as compared treatment group, that was the proved that project work motivates learners to learn foreign language.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

To investigate the effect of PW in reducing FL learners speaking anxiety, a questionnaire administered to the participants drawn from two different groups (experimental and control groups) adopted from Young’s (1990). To order to answer the research questions, the collected data was scrutinized and equated through SPSS, version 22.

Table 2: Evaluation scores of languages learning anxiety and speaking skills between the two groups

Independent sample t- test - Scores of pre-test							
Variable	1=experimen	N	Mean	SD	SD	T	P
s	tal				Erro	Value	Val
	2=control				r		ue
					Mean		two
							-
							tail
							ed
Anxiety	1	79	109.04	15.364	2.332	1.938	.054
	2	75	104.27	13.447			
					2.324		
Speaking	1	79	45.33	12.249	1.873	-.038	.970
	2	75	45.40	10.917	1.686		
Posttest Scores of post-test							
Anxiety	1	79	60.19	17.21	2.837	-9.769	.000
	2	75	87.91	2.875	.616		
Speaking	1	79	121.99	9.201	1.216	53.54	.000
skills						7	

2 75 49.10 8.034 1.470

Table 2 indicates that the level of anxiety in pretest of treatment group is 109.03, while in control group it is 104.51. it means both the groups were equal in their level of anxiety at the beginning of study. Independent t-test displays the value of $p = .054$, it shows insignificant difference between the two groups control and treatment group in pretest

The results indicated that both the groups were equal in their level of language learning anxiety at the start of study. In posttest the value of mean score of anxiety in treatment group = 60.19 and in control group is= 87.91. It indicates that both the groups are unequal and have a difference. (-26.72). The comparison of post-test shows a difference of (- 26.72), and indicates that the level of language learning anxiety in control group was greater in comparison with treatment group Table 2 shows, p value is $.000 < .05$, This infers that control and treatment group have major variance in language learning anxiety at the end of Experiment.

The result designated that the learners of control group were more apprehension as in comparison to the treatment group. This proved that project work decreases the language learning anxiety. The results of speaking skills test show mean scores of pretest of treatment group (45.33) and the mean scores of pretest of control group (45.40). it indicates the equality of scores . Independent t-test displays $p = .970 > .05$. This also suggests both the groups are similar in ability of speaking skills. At the begging of experiment. The results indicated the treatment and control groups were equal in performance of speaking ability at the begging of the experiment.

While the mean scores of post-test of Experimental Group of speaking skills (122.37) and mean scores of posttest of Control Group (48.69) are unequal with maximum difference (-73.68), and indicates that the scores of experimental group were higher as compared to control group in speaking skills. Table 2 also shows; p value is $.000 < .05$, This implies that there is significant difference in speaking skills between post-test of Experimental and Control Group.

The conclusion shows that the performance of treatment group is higher in speaking skill in comparison of control group in the posttest, so, it is concluding that project work is a better methodology to develop the learners speaking performance.

Table 3: Evaluation of scores of control and treatment groups with paired sample t-test in pre& posttests

Paired Samples test - Pair Differences						
Mean	Std	Std. Error	T	df	Sig (2 tailed)	

		Mean					
Anxiety	pretest	16.600	22.352	2.581	6.432	74	.000
control group							
Anxiety	posttest						
control group							
Anxiety	pretest	48.835	29.175	2.268	21.536	78	.000
experimental group							
Anxiety	posttest						
experimental group							

Table 3 demonstrates the value of $p = .000 < .05$, it means there is significant difference in pre & posttest in level of anxiety of control Group. The H_0 is rejected. A paired samples t- test exposes significant difference of anxiety between the mean scores of pre & posttest of control group. The level of anxiety in pretest is + (104.51) while the mean scores of post-test = (87.91) of control group.

Table 3. also shows that $p.000 < .05$, of speaking skills in paired sample t-test is less than alpha, data provide sufficient evidence that there is a major alteration in the level of anxiety in pre & posttest of treatment group. The paired sample test exposes a significant difference in the mean scores of pre & posttest of Treatment group of level of anxiety. In pretest the level of anxiety was (109.03) and mean score of post-test of experimental group (60.19), therefore H_0 is rejected and determine that a significant difference is observed in level of anxiety in pre & posttest of treatment group. The level of anxiety It is also concluded that reduction in the level of anxiety in experiment group is due to the project work. Project work is better pedagogy in reducing the language learning anxiety.

Table 4: Comparison of pre and post-tests scores of Control and Experimental groups with paired sample t-test

		Paired Samples test					
		Pair Differences		Std.Error Mean	t	df	Sig (2 tailed)
		Mean	Std				
Speaking	skills	-3.293	13.209	1.525	-2.159	74	.034
pretest control group							
Speaking	skills						
posttest control group							
Speaking	skills	-77.038	15.018	1.690	-45.593	78	.000
pretest experimental group							

Speaking skills
posttest experimental
group

Table 4. shows $p = .035 < .05$, a noteworthy alteration in speaking Performance pre & posttest of Control Group. A paired samples test discloses unswerving change between the mean scores of pre-test of control group of speaking performance (45.40, and mean scores of posttest of control group (48.69).

Table 4. also indicates $p = .000 < .05$, This suggests a significant difference in speaking performance of experimental group pre and post-test. A t- test discloses a major change in mean scores of pretest of speaking performance(45.33) of treatment group, while the mean scores of posttest of treatment group (122.37). Therefore, H_0 is rejected and it is determined a major change in pre & posttest of experimental group in the performance of speaking skills. The enhancement in speaking proficiency is due to the project work. It is concluded PW is effective in eliminating speaking anxiety of the students.

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the factors that caused FL learners' speaking anxiety, and introduce a new and modern method of teaching Pw to reduce the learners' feelings of anxiety in speaking the targeted language. In the context of speaking, foreign language speaking anxiety is claimed to intervene in the communication process and make it an unpleasant experience for students. Thus, this study tried to find out the sources of FL speaking anxiety that led learners feel frustrated and anxious while they are speaking in the target language. To achieve this task, N=160 participants were selected and randomly divided into two groups, control and experimental groups. To collect the data pre and posttests of anxiety and speaking skills were administered. The collected data was analyzed quantitatively by employed SPSS.

The analysis of the data revealed that Pw not only enhance speaking skills of the students, but also reduces foreign language learning anxiety. The results show positive perception of the students about the PW and strategies, used in speaking class. The study concludes that PW is an effective Method in eliminating speaking anxiety and can also be used with students who are familiar with the traditional method only. The topic of strengthening the speaking abilities is very significant since the capacity to communicate in English plays a vital role in every field of life. The findings of the study's suggest that using PW in English classes may be an additional strategy for improving students' language proficiency and subject-matter expertise. To lessen speaking anxiety, PW offers a stress-free learning atmosphere in the classroom. Learner anxiety is decreased in a friendly environment where students cooperate with one another as a result of group projects. It is intended that

this study will help guide future investigations to develop effective methods for teaching and learning English, not just in Pakistan but all throughout the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides two important pedagogical implementations. First, it would be reasonable to include some content based and interdisciplinary based project in an English class in the context of EFL that provides a number of opportunities to the learners in using the targeted language practically. This is an exploratory investigation about the enhancement of learners' speaking skills by utilizing project work. Generalizability of the study is thus limited. Future studies may focus on using a variety of project based activities in the English classroom and using other measure to examine speaking skills performance.

REFERENCES

- Amorati, R., & Hajek, J. (2021). Fostering motivation and creativity through self-publishing as project-based learning in the Italian L2 classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, 54(4), 1003-1026.
- Beckett, G. H. & Slater, T., (2005). *The Project Framework*; A tool for language content and skill integration, *ELT Journal*, 59/2, 108-116, Oxford University Press.
<http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract>
- Chahrazad, M. M., & Kamel, K. (2022). Dealing with foreign language speaking anxiety: What every language teacher should know. *Training, language and culture*, 6(1), 20-32. December 29, 2007, from <http://www.bie.org/pbl/pblhandbook/contents.php>
- Erdiana, N., Daud, B., Sari, D. F., & Dwitami, S. K. (2020). A study of anxiety experienced by EFL students in speaking performance. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 7(2), 334-346.
- Fragoulis, L. (2009). Project Based Learning in teaching of English as A Foreign Language in Greek Primary School: From Theory to Practice. *English Language Teaching*, Vol.2. No 3. Pp. 113-119.
- GHANMI, K., BABACI, M., & BOUBEKEUR, L. (2020). *The Impact of Anxiety on Students Classroom Oral Participation* (Doctoral dissertation, University Ahmed Draya-Adrar).
- Hayati, S. N., & Kaniadewi, N. (2022). Analyzing types and levels of students' English Speaking anxiety. *ELLTER-J*, 3(1), 25-35.
- Li Ke, (2010). Project-based College English: An Approach to Teaching Non –English Majors. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistic* (Bimonthly). Vol.33 (4) pp. 99-109.
- Ly, C. K. (2024). Teachers' Roles on English Language Teaching for Promoting Learner-Centered Language Learning: A Theoretical Review. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, 4(2), 78-98.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gregersen, T. (2022). The idiodynamic method: Willingness to communicate and anxiety processes interacting in real time. *International Review of*

-
- Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 60(1), 67-84.
- McCarthy, T. (2010). Integrating Project-based Learning into a traditional skill-based curriculum to foster learner autonomy: An action research. *The Journal of Kanda University of International studies* Vol.22. pp. 221-244.
- Motoda, S. (2005). Theory and realities of L2 learners' anxiety. Keisui Inc. (in Japanese)
- Occhipinti, A. (2009). Foreign Language Anxiety in in-Class Speaking Activities. Unpublished thesis. University of Oslo.
- Rasool, U., Qian, J., & Aslam, M. Z. (2023). An investigation of foreign language writing anxiety and its reasons among pre-service EFL teachers in Pakistan. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 947867.
- Said, H. M., & Omar, A. S. (2022). Language anxiety towards English among ESL students: The case of first year students at Mindanao state university. *The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education*, 12(3), 178.
- Shi, Z., & Zhang, R. (2023). Investigating Chinese University-Level L2 Learners' Foreign Language Anxiety in Online English Classes. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 13(1), 1-15.
- Suparlan, S. (2021). Factors contributing students' speaking anxiety. *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 9(2), 160-169.
- Worde, V. R., (2003). Students Perspective on Foreign Language Anxiety. From Inquiry. Vol. 8, No.1 Retrieved on 1st Aug, 2002 from <http://onlinelibrary.com>