

The Impact of Pedagogical Intervention in Developing the Speaking Proficiency of Engineering Students

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ABSTRACT

This article focusses on an experimental study conducted to improve the speaking proficiency of engineering students using the task-based approach. Engineering students are expected to possess adequate speaking proficiency for career growth prospects. The major impediment in job placement faced by students is their lack of proficiency in speaking. This article explores the pivotal role played by the English Language teacher in guiding students towards oral proficiency in English and enabling them to overcome constraints in speaking. The participants of the study are first-year civil engineering students comprising 38 participants in the experimental and control group respectively. The main tool used in this study is oral communicative tasks, which are administered to the experimental group. The results of the statistical analysis have revealed that there is a significant level of improvement in the oral proficiency of the experimental group.

Keywords: Oral communicative tasks, pedagogical intervention, speaking proficiency

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalisation, communication skills are a major pre-requisite for engineering students aspiring to succeed

in their profession. Engineering students are expected to be fluent speakers who are able to convey their thoughts clearly; this pertinent demand necessitates them to develop their speaking skills. An engineer needs oral proficiency in English to make presentations, conduct meetings, give instructions and participate in discussions in the workplace. Though engineering students have been learning English since primary school, many of them struggle to meet the industry requirements regarding

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oral proficiency in English. There is a gap between the corporate expectation and the educational outcome. More efforts are needed to improve the speaking proficiency of tertiary-level students. Clement and Murugavel (2015) have argued that, "Mere changes in the syllabus will not be able to bring in desired changes unless the English teachers are motivated to enhance their teaching methodologies to bridge the gap between the college and the workplace" (p. 123). This researcher is an English Language teacher in an engineering institution and has played a crucial role as pedagogical intervener in developing the speaking skills of learners using oral communicative tasks. The objective of presenting oral communicative tasks to students is to enable them to think and generate organised content. It is expected that this study will enhance the participants' speaking performance and improve their professional accomplishments in terms of academic excellence and career prospects.

Need for the Study

The engineering curriculum prescribes two courses in Technical English, Technical English I and Technical English II in the first and second semesters respectively. The objective of the two papers is to develop the students' basic communication skills in English, with reference to the development of speaking skills. The stated expected outcome is to enable the learners to speak clearly, confidently and comprehensibly and to communicate with others using appropriate communicative strategies. The

importance is given only to reading and writing activities, grammar and vocabulary exercises. The teachers are inclined towards preparing the students for their semester examination. Speaking activities are not included both in internal assessments as well as in the external exam. The above instances explicitly convey that there is no scope or provision for speaking tasks in the class environment.

This experimental study attempts to create a positive scenario for teachers to devote one third of their scheduled sessions to speaking activities, which will help students to hone their oral proficiency, thus enhancing their career prospects. The students' inadequacy in spoken English is due to various reasons such as their regional medium of schooling, coming from a rural background, inadequate practice in speaking, fear of making mistakes, discouragement by peers, lack of exposure to an English-speaking environment both in their academic institution and at home, constraints in curriculum and shortcomings in and assessment methodologies, among other reasons. However, it is imperative that students of engineering must develop adequate oral communicative skills to be employable and successful in their career. Reimer (2007) has stated that engineering students are required to acquire a range of skills, among which communication skills in English are a vital component for meeting academic and industry expectations. The lag in communication skills reflect adversely on the individual and the profession. This, in turn, affects recruitment and retention in

engineering studies. Oral communication and presentation skills are considered one of the best career enhancers and the single biggest factor in determining a student's career success or failure (Polack-Wahl 2000). The pedagogical intervention could be a possible solution to this major impediment faced by engineering students in the ESL context.

Scope of the Study

On analysing the English proficiency status of engineering graduates, it was appalling to note that their lack of speaking skills had immensely affected their general employability. They had not been able to perform well in job interviews and therefore, had lost career opportunities. The third edition of the *National Employability Report* revealed that in 2014, only 18.33% of engineering graduates had been employable and only 18.09% had actually got a job. A *Times of India* article stated that 1.2 candidates were surveyed across the country, and 73.63% of the candidates were found to lack English speaking and comprehension skills ("Only 18% engineering grads", 2014). In *Business Standard*, a report by Aspiring Minds, a recruiting and HR training firm, stated that "43 percent of engineers cannot write correct English and lack accuracy in English grammar." It further reported that 25-35% of engineers were not good at spoken discourses in English, which include day-to-day conversations, official meetings and presentations. Seetha (2012) argued that, "The incorporation of communication

skills courses in English for engineers at the universities is becoming an essential element of continuous learning. Bringing real world practices into the engineering curriculum through English communication programmes will expose the engineering students to have a broader vision" (p. 5). Rani (2014) stated, "Proficiency in English is a prerequisite for a successful engineering career. And difficulty with the same is an important factor that impedes career prospects. The development of linguistic proficiency in the learner is needed for the spontaneous and appropriate use of language in different situations" (p. 425).

Clement and Murugavel (2015) conducted a survey on 400 engineering students and found that many third-year students were lacking in confidence to face the campus interview. They pointed out that teaching methodology needed to be interactive to improve the students' speaking ability. Nayak (2016) attested, "There is an urgent need to streamline the English language training in engineering colleges to enhance the employability of the students and make them industry ready" (p. 395). In addition, during the 82nd annual meeting of the Association of Indian Universities, the former President of India, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam asserted that only 25% of graduating students were employable and students were lacking in areas such as technical knowledge, English proficiency and critical thinking. These reports had led to the necessity in taking immediate measures to enhance students' speaking proficiency.

Theoretical Background

Zhou (1991) and Ellis (1993) have claimed that when the students are made to interact in the target language in class, their language proficiency seems to improve. Kurpa-Kwiatkowski (1998) has mentioned in her study that, "Interaction involves participation, personal engagement, and taking of initiative in some way, activities, that in turn, are hypothesized to trigger cognitive processes conducive to language learning" (p. 133). Since oral interaction is a noticeable behaviour, studies in the field of language learning have focussed on the significance of students' oral interaction. The more the interaction among the students as well as between the teacher and the students, the better the language learning achieved by the students. Teachers play a pertinent role in promoting interaction among the students and facilitating them to focus on the learning process. These studies have confirmed a positive relationship between language learning and the amount of time spent on oral interaction in the English classroom.

In Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), tasks play a significant role in achieving the desired outcome in the process of pedagogical intervention. Task-based language learning encourages learners to use language in the classroom interaction and help the teachers to use varied strategies to develop the speaking skills of the students. Norris (2009) has highlighted that TBLT integrates theoretical and empirical foundations for good pedagogy with a focus on tangible learning outcomes in the form

of 'tasks'. Cook (2008) has indicated that in TBLT, learning and teaching should be planned around a set of communicative tasks that are performed in the target language. Therefore, the task creates interaction in the language classroom. Additionally, communicative tasks can motivate learners and establish good relationships between the teacher and the students, as well as among the students, thereby encouraging a supportive environment for language learning. Littlewood (1992) has suggested that the classroom must be conducive to the learning environment pertaining to the needs of the learners. He has also emphasised that processes and products are important in engaging the learners in the classroom. Kumaravadevelu's (1993) description gives us the key idea for developing speaking skills through communicative tasks.

...a communicative classroom seeks to promote interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning. This means learners ought to be active, not just reactive in class. They should be encouraged to ask for information, seek clarification, express an opinion, agree and/or disagree with peers and teachers. More importantly, they should be guided to go beyond memorised patterns and monitored repetitions in order to participate in meaningful interaction.

Pair and group activities provide learners with more time to speak the target language than the teacher-fronted activities. In

addition, learners may feel less anxious and more confident when interacting with peers during pair or small-group activities (Mc Donough, 2004, p. 210). The most challenging task for any English teacher is facilitating students to speak English in class. This results from learners' lack of exposure to authentic English language environments that allow them to use English for communication and expression. Nunan (1999) and Thornby (2005) argue that psychological factors such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation and fear of making mistakes hinder students from speaking. In addition, Shanmugasundaram (2012) in his research has broadly categorised the factors that affect students when performing speaking tasks as psychological, sociological, linguistic and pedagogical. He has substantiated the factors affecting speaking proficiency prevalent among students of government and private Arts and Science colleges. The resistance to English has not been so pronounced in the engineering setup as it has been in the Arts colleges; still, their lack of speaking skills is undeniable. This study has examined the avenues for improving the speaking proficiency of engineering students and has attempted to exhibit a model for the teaching community of higher institutes of engineering and technology in the ESL context. This study has reinforced the significance of oral communicative tasks and has provided language educators with teaching tools and techniques through both quantitative and qualitative inquiry.

Research Questions

The following research questions are addressed in this paper.

1. How do the oral communicative tasks improve the speaking ability of the experimental group?
2. What are the learners' constraints in performing the oral communicative tasks?
3. What is the role of pedagogical intervention in improving the speaking proficiency of the students?

INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS

Participants

The participants of the study are first-year Bachelor of Engineering (BE) students of Civil Engineering at the M.A.M College of Engineering and Technology, Tiruchirapalli. The participants (N=76) are selected based on simple random sampling, in which the samples have been assigned to the control and experimental groups using lottery method (Kothari, 2004). The control and experimental groups consist of 38 students respectively. Their ages range between 17 and 19 years. The participants comprise 22 females and 54 males. Most of them are from the same background pertaining to their first language, previous educational experience and learning context.

Oral Communicative Tasks (OCT)

Ellis (2003) has stated that tasks are tools for providing opportunities for learners to use the target language. Oral communicative

tasks enable the students to think and generate sentences on their own. Tasks are assigned in a graded structure from simple to complex and this sequencing of tasks encourages the students to volunteer in the OCT. The use of icebreakers at the initial stage of the OCT is to prepare the learners and elicit their interest in the OCT. Self-introduction is used as a pre-test to assess and mark the entry level of the control and the experimental group. The OCT is categorised as initial tasks, core tasks and supporting tasks. In this study, nine tasks have been planned for the experimental group. The initial tasks are: Listing 10 activities of the given professional; Listing five to-do's; Mentioning associated ideas on a topic; and Situation-based responses. The core tasks are: Long-answer interview; Comparing task; Story completion; Roleplay; and Group discussion. Tasks such as Roleplay and Situation-based responses resemble real life situations; hence; they help students by presenting them with situations with which they are likely to be familiar. Tasks such as Story completion and Roleplay are creative and students are expected to use their imagination and creativity. The rest of the tasks are informative and the students have to think on the content they should generate before presenting it. These tasks can be categorised as individual, pair and group work. The supporting task, 'Short-answer sessions', has been used to prepare the students to respond comprehensibly in English. An Impromptu speech, "The best gift I have ever received" has been given as the post-test to validate the exit level of the experimental group.

Questionnaire

A pre-study questionnaire has been administered to elicit details regarding the participants' profile. In addition, a post-study questionnaire has been administered to collect feedback on the implementation of the oral communicative tasks from the participants.

Observation Sheet

An observation sheet has been used to note down the students' performance of the oral communicative tasks i.e. ability to perform the task, diction, sentence construction, coherence and correct pronunciation of words. At the end of each task, the data from the observation sheet has been transferred to the scoring sheet comprising the assessing parameters as specified in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

Scoring Rubric

Task performances of the students have been evaluated using analytic scoring proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF 2001). It includes assessing parameters such as range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence. The assessment criteria and weightage of marks are tabulated.

Table 1
CEFR speaking assessment criteria

Components Tested	Weightage of Marks
Fluency and coherence	4 marks
Grammatical acceptability	2 marks
Ability to expand the idea	1 mark
Volume	2 marks
Pronunciation	1 mark
Maximum score	10 marks

Implementation

In this quasi-experimental study, a schedule of 24 classes of 50-minute duration spread over a period of 12 weeks was conducted to develop the speaking proficiency of the experimental group. The icebreaker session comprised the following two activities: Point out the imaginative uses of A) shoe lace, B) ruler, C) newspaper, D) pencil; and Make as many words as possible from the phrase 'Solving problems'. The students participated actively and expressed their ideas willingly in the two tasks. Two teams came with 18 different uses of newspapers for the first task. A team came forward with 40 words for the second task as this task made them think and reason out the possibilities. This was effective as the students participated voluntarily.

The session continued and the students were prompted to answer the questions asked in the activity. The students were expected to list the activities of the given professions in words and phrases in the initial task. The next task, 'List five to-do's to save money, to look beautiful, etc.' was done as a group task. In the third task, 'Mention five associated ideas with Facebook, Dream, etc.', the learners seemed to be more confident and did not consider the evaluation of friends negative. They corrected their mistakes based on the teacher's feedback. In the Situation-Based Responses, most of the students used general terms such as 'sorry', 'congrats' and 'excuse me' etc. Only a few responded appropriately. The core task, Long-Answer Interview, induced

interest in the learners, and they participated enthusiastically, despite their speaking constraints. It was generally observed that their anxiety level was reduced. Peer pressure and teacher's motivation influenced the slow learners to interact in the class. In the next task, Discuss similarities and differences, the students made a sincere attempt, and many of them showed steady improvement in delivering coherent content. The duration of interaction also duly increased over a period of time. This task turned out to be interactive and the students voluntarily contributed their ideas as in the case of the previous task. The seventh task, Story Completion, elicited instantaneous interaction and girls interacted well. In the subsequent task, Roleplay, although the students made a few grammatical errors, they were able to enact their roles skilfully. Pauses and fillers had reduced considerably. There was maximum participation in the following task, Group Discussion (GD). The initiators of GD had an influence on the reluctant performers. The Impromptu Speech, was administered as the post-test to both the control and experimental groups to examine the difference in attainment of speaking proficiency, and there was a substantial improvement in the experimental group. The control group were reluctant to perform the post-test. They were not able to perform the task, as they were not exposed to the nuances of content generation and the delivery mechanism of speaking skills and the strategic implication of oral communicative tasks.

Table 2
Participation percentage of students in the tasks

S. No	Name of the Activity	No. of Participants	% of Participation
1.	Pre-task: Self-Introduction	35/38	92%
2.	Icebreakers	35/38	92%
3.	Initial task: 10 activities of given professions	16/38	42%
4.	Initial task: Five to-do lists	28/38	74%
5.	Initial task: Five associated ideas on a topic	29/38	76%
6.	Initial task:-Situation-based response	32/38	84%
7.	Core task: Long-Answer interview	33/38	87%
8.	Core task: Discuss the similarities and differences	33/38	87%
9.	Core task: Story completion	13/38	34%
10.	Core task: Role play	24/38	64%
11.	Core task: Group discussion	34/38	89%
12.	Post-task: Impromptu speech	33/38	87%

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 17. The focus of the study was to examine whether the OCT approach had a positive effect on first-year civil engineering

students, with respect to their spoken proficiency. The independent sample t-test was computed to compare the mean scores of each component in the pre- and post-test scores of the control and the experimental groups. The mean and standard deviation of the scores of 76 participants are tabulated in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3
Independent sample T-Test for spoken components in Pre-Task

Test Components	Group	N	Mean	SD	T Value	Level of Significance
Fluency and Coherence	Experiment	38	1.3816	0.53819	0.480	NS
	Control	38	1.3158	0.65162		
Grammar	Experiment	38	0.5921	0.19643	3.561	0.01
	Control	38	0.4474	0.15551		
Idea/Content	Experiment	38	0.5395	0.24333	1.209	NS
	Control	38	0.4737	0.23096		
Volume	Experiment	38	0.7632	0.25300	4.825	0.01
	Control	38	0.4868	0.24624		
Pronunciation	Experiment	38	0.6053	0.20658	3.764	0.01
	Control	38	0.4474	0.15551		
Total	Experiment	38	3.9079	1.01246	2.813	0.01
	Control	38	3.1579	1.29503		

Table 3 reveals that there was no significant difference between the control and experimental groups in terms of fluency and coherence and Idea/Content in the pre-test score. They were not able to generate ideas in the initial stage as they were lacking in content. There was a significant difference between the groups in terms of grammatical ability, volume, pronunciation and the

total score at the 0.01 level. The reason for this difference might be the reluctance of the control group to perform the pre-test. Moreover, volume, pronunciation and grammar were considered subsidiary parameters compared with the main scoring parameters such as fluency and content generation.

Table 4
Independent sample T-Test for spoken components in Post-Task

Test Components	Group	N	Mean	SD	T Value	Level of Significance
Fluency and Coherence	Experiment	38	2.2763	0.60065	7.451	0.01
	Control	38	1.1316	0.73231		
Grammar	Experiment	38	0.9605	0.21377	10.173	0.01
	Control	38	0.4211	0.24372		
Idea/Content	Experiment	38	0.7237	0.2519	5.155	0.01
	Control	38	0.4079	0.28129		
Volume	Experiment	38	0.8947	0.23704	6.00	0.01
	Control	38	0.5000	0.32880		
Pronunciation	Experiment	38	0.7368	0.25300	6.083	0.01
	Control	38	0.3947	0.23704		
Total	Experiment	38	5.6316	1.1251	8.463	0.01
	Control	38	2.8553	1.68020		

The above table reveals that there has been a substantial difference between the control and experimental groups in the post-test score in terms of fluency and coherence, grammatical ability, idea/content, volume, pronunciation and the total score is at the 0.01 level. It is obvious that the experimental group had shown considerable improvement compared with

the control group. Willis (1996) has stated that “tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome” (p. 23). The table explicitly indicates that pedagogical intervention using oral communicative tasks has enhanced the spoken performance of the experimental group effectively.

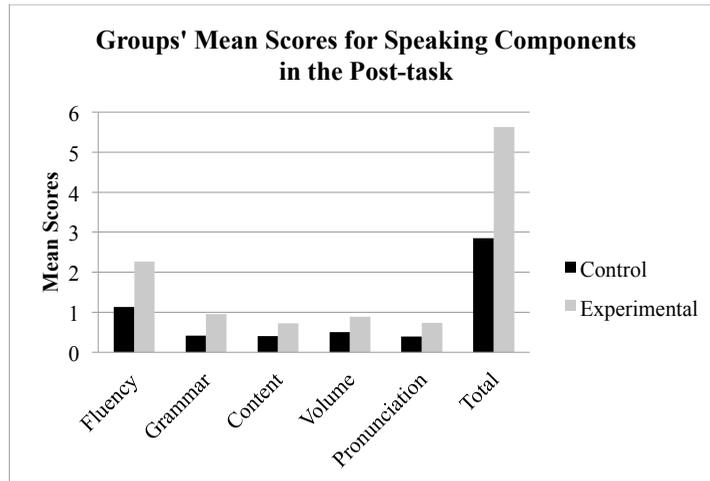


Figure 1. Results of comparison of speaking components in the post-test

Figure 1 also indicates that the experimental group has performed better than the control group in the post-test based on the analytic parameters of the Common European Framework of Reference. So it can be concluded that the experimental group has outperformed the control group in their speaking proficiency.

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: Execution of OCT

The Oral Communicative Task (OCT) was administrated in a regular classroom environment by observing and recording students' progress, interacting and reflecting on various aspects of the tasks and students' outcomes. The demonstrative sessions at the beginning of every task enhanced the understanding of tasks by the learners and subdued their fears and inhibitions. In the self-introduction task a few felt interested in presenting themselves confidently in English

and a few replicated others' performances. Some relied on the teacher's assistance in organising their thoughts in framing sentences. Most of the students perceived this activity to be a new experience for them. For the first task on 10 activities of the given professions, the students searched for words and got struck mid way. The teacher and peers prompted words so as to enable them to continue with the task. Subsequently, for the next task on listing five to-do's, the students prepared the answer by discussing it with peers and seeking the help of the teacher. While a student presented the answer, the others tried to contribute their ideas. This kind of interaction was encouraged and appreciated by the teacher. Their confidence level improved considerably in performing the subsequent tasks, Situation-Based Responses, Long-Answer interview and the rest. In the final task, Impromptu Speech, many tried to outperform their peers by effortlessly participating in

the task. Meticulous preparation using dictionaries exemplified their involvement in the task. It was evident that negative factors like shyness, embarrassment and apprehensiveness minimised in due course. These tasks brought real-life situations into the classroom, and students were provided with opportunities to express their ideas and share their opinions. The students volunteered to participate in the tasks. They could express their ideas freely because they performed the activities in pairs and groups with their peer group and the classroom naturally evolved into a learner-centred environment.

In the class of 38 students, a substantial number of 23 students showed improvement in their speaking proficiency after attempting the oral communicative tasks. According to the data in the Table 4, it was evident that the implementation of oral communicative tasks had helped to develop the spoken performance of the experimental group, and the experimental group scored better than the control group in the post-task components. The majority of the students aspired for more OCT sessions, exhibiting their interest in the interactive learning environment. It is also important to highlight that some students were highly motivated in performing the tasks, since they perceived the significance of developing speaking skills in English and they realised it was a pertinent pre-requisite for their career prospects. Consequently, they actively took part in all the oral communicative tasks. The result of such active participation in the tasks increased their language proficiency in the due course. So it was confirmed that

the implementation of oral communicative tasks and pedagogical intervention enabled the experimental group to outperform the control group in their speaking proficiency.

Research Question 2: Learners'

Constraints

The experimental group faced many constraints while performing the Oral Communicative Task (OCT). Majority of the participants were first-time speakers and were affected by their fear of failure. Stage fear prevented them from speaking and comprehending the prompting cues. The students could not practise and prepare for the tasks in the home environment due to their inability to generate sentences in English on their own. The students who had had Tamil-medium schooling believed that they could not learn to speak in English and speaking in English was possible only for English-medium students. Another issue was the discouragement by peers. As Jianing (2007) indicated in her work "To protect themselves from being laughed at, the students are reluctant to speak English... the less they speak, the less they improve their speaking skills, and the more they are afraid of speaking" (p. 1), the students had fear of being insulted or teased if they tried to hold a conversation in English with friends. Liu and Jackson (2008) claimed in their study that lack of vocabulary was regarded as a predominant impediment for spoken communication by Chinese English learners. In this study too, the participants considered their inadequacy in vocabulary as a prevalent obstacle in

their task performance. Many found it difficult to convey a message or an idea. They seemed to be lacking in the discourse ability of organising a thought. This was found to be a major impediment in their oral proficiency. They either produced half sentences in their speech or had false starts. They were unable to speak clearly and their voice level dropped during their speech due to their shyness, inhibition and lack of confidence. Some of them mumbled and made unnecessary and unnatural pauses in their speech as they searched for the right word. Some used fillers like “aaah,” “uumm,” “and”, “I” and etc. Some students avoided eye contact with the audience during their performance.

Research Question 3: Pedagogical Intervention

A teacher can be instrumental in training students to attain oral proficiency in English. The English teacher can take up many roles, as Littlewood (1981) conceptualised, pointing out that the teacher can be a facilitator of learning, who plays sub-roles as classroom manager, consultant, adviser and co-communicator with the students. The teacher can subdue students' psychological barriers by providing motivation, encouragement and a conducive classroom environment. The teacher can overcome the linguistic constraints of the students by providing interactive classes and feedback sessions. The teacher must assure that all the students are given equal opportunity. The researcher-cum-facilitator in this study encouraged the students and motivated them

to participate in the tasks. The students were made to interact with peers to overcome their constraints in speaking. Their participation increased their confidence level in making an oral presentation. Yet some of the slow learners felt inhibited to participate in the class interaction and the facilitator paired them with enthusiastic high-performance learners and shared the challenging tasks. The slow learners started to acquire the nuances of delivering content with logical progression of ideas. The facilitator enabled them to select the right word, structure a sentence, suggest an alternative word, and correct an ill-constructed sentence or their mispronunciation. The facilitator also helped the students to think in English. The students were made to read aloud to overcome their pronunciation problems. During the oral communicative tasks (OCT), the comments and feedback provided by both their peers and the facilitator helped the students to perform better in the subsequent oral tasks. The facilitator motivated the learners by making them work in pairs and groups and acted as the audience. The majority of the students asked for more OCT sessions, exhibiting their interest in this interactive learning environment.

Level of Improvement

The level of improvement of the students was analysed from pre-test to post-test and four groups were categorised according to their improvement percentage from High level of improvement to Above Average, Average and Low level of improvement.

Table 5
Improvement level of students in four categories

Category	Level of Category	Percentage of Improvement	No. of Students
Category 1	High level of improvement	100%-83%	4
Category 2	Above average	71%-55%	7
Category 3	Average	50%-37.5%	12
Category 4	Low level of improvement	33%-18%	15

In Category 1, the motivation level of the students was high and they participated in all the activities. They gradually progressed in their oral performance. Although they found it difficult to perform the tasks, they tried hard with the help of the teacher and also sought the help of their peers. Participant 23 in the beginning could not speak clearly due to lack of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, but her motivation level was high and she worked hard. She never hesitated to seek the teacher's help in performing the activities. In Category 2, students like Participant 2, Participant 9, Participant 15 and Participant 16 performed well in the later activities. They looked forward to the oral communicative task (OCT) sessions and they felt the need to improve their language proficiency. They really worked to make progress and approached the teacher and friends with interest for help. They sincerely approached the teacher to select a right word, or structure a sentence or correct grammar. In Category 3, the participants were highly inhibited and shy. Even those who were proficient enough to speak English were hesitant to take part in the classroom activities.

Some of them were bold enough to take part in the oral communicative tasks, but they were inadequate in vocabulary and grammar acquisition. Despite the teacher's support, they made slow progress. They could not show steady improvement, as they had some difficulty in constructing sentences and expressing their thoughts in speech. Category 4 had two different levels of students. The first were the better performers who did better in the pre-task and felt that the first task of listing down activities of given professionals was boring, and so, they were not patient to listen to their peers' performance. The second were reticent learners who did not get involved in the activities due to their lack of proficiency. The proficient participants were well ahead of the others in performing the tasks and moreover, they took part in all the tasks. The reticent students were reluctant and disinclined to participate in the oral communicative tasks. When they were compelled to perform activities, they were resistant and undemonstrative. They seemed to be uncomfortable throughout the session and absented themselves deliberately from some sessions.

CONCLUSION

This study is an attempt to improve ESL learners' speaking skills through oral communicative tasks (OCT). The findings of this study supports the recommendation that oral communicative task-based learning is essential in the engineering curriculum, as this would promote situation-based activities that provide opportunities for the learners to speak English and prepare themselves for similar kinds of exposure in their future career. The OCT is an effective approach that can be implemented to improve speaking ability. The facilitator has played a pivotal role in devising the task for learners, preparing them for execution of the tasks and motivating them to accomplish the task successfully. The results have indicated that task-based language teaching enables students to improve their speaking ability. The transformation in the teacher's role from authoritarian to facilitator, counsellor, organiser and adviser has enabled the students to get involved in the speaking tasks, to express themselves freely and to assume more responsibility for their own learning. The students have progressed in their speaking performance and the teacher assisted the students in assessing their peers. The individual feedback of the facilitator has motivated the students to perform better. Self-assessment and peer evaluation have enabled the students to be conscious of their learning process and to get motivated to self-correct and improve their language proficiency. In the class of 38 students, 23 members have participated in the oral tasks with involvement. The results have clearly

indicated that the students can be made aware of their constraints and improve their speaking skills by involving them in the oral communicative tasks. This study has addressed one of the major impediments faced by engineering students in approaching the spoken component in the curriculum. This experimental study has explicitly indicated that the speaking proficiency of the students can be improved using OCT, and it also draws English teachers' attention to their vital role in improving their students' language proficiency.

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