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## How to boost self-esteem of student teachers in speaking skills?

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### Abstract

The aim of this research study is to find out whether the causes of student teachers' speaking problems in English arise from low self-esteem. In the study, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was used as pre-post tests to measure the degree of self-esteem of the student teachers. The pre-test results indicated that most of the student teachers had low self-esteem. The participants were exposed to nine-week classroom treatment in order to increase their global and task self-esteem levels through classroom interaction activities. After the treatment process, RSES was readministered on the participants. Paired sampled t-test results indicated that the superiority of post-test results over the pre-test results with significant differences.

**Key words:** self-esteem, interaction, speaking skill, student teachers, communication

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## Introduction

Development in language learning largely depends on the capacity of a student in comprehension and production skills in the target language. In language teaching, the goal is to prepare students to be able to use the language for communication (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Snow, 2013; Gass & Selinker, 2008). Much effort, therefore, has been devoted to enhance students' language use abilities and communication skills. Communication is the interaction between the receiver and sender. In foreign language classrooms, interaction, for the most part, occurs between students and the teacher; thus, it is claimed that students who receive input and feedback through interaction and negotiation can produce comprehensible output (Garcia-Mayo & Lecumberri, 2003; Garcia-Mayo & Pica, 2000; Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, 2003).

The initial input source in the foreign language classroom is the teacher talk, the language typically used by teachers in the classroom which leads to input processing. Gass and Selinker (2008) make a distinction between two models of input processing: traditional instruction in foreign language learning and processing instruction in foreign language learning. Each model is displayed in Figure 1 and Figure 2:

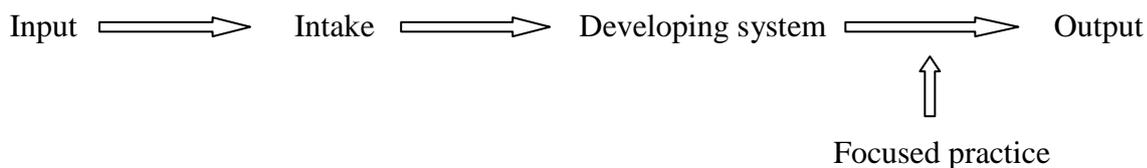


Figure 1

*Traditional instruction (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 373)*

In this traditional view, the initial input is converted into intake system, then to developing system through which interlanguage is developed. Subsequently, focused practice is provided and output is observed. In this type of instruction, the student practices the input as a form of output manipulation. The teacher's role is to offer students the required input comprising rules and phrases so that they can use them in communication with others. In the focused practice, the teacher provides them with the necessary expressions they need when they ask for clarification.

In the second model, an attempt is made to change the way the input is perceived and processed. In other words, after the input is provided, processing is implemented through the focused practice. In this model, language processing mechanisms are employed and the practice is focused. This refers to the ability of students to process the language in their minds by turning the input into intake coherently so that the information can be processed in the mind in order to develop the desired system.

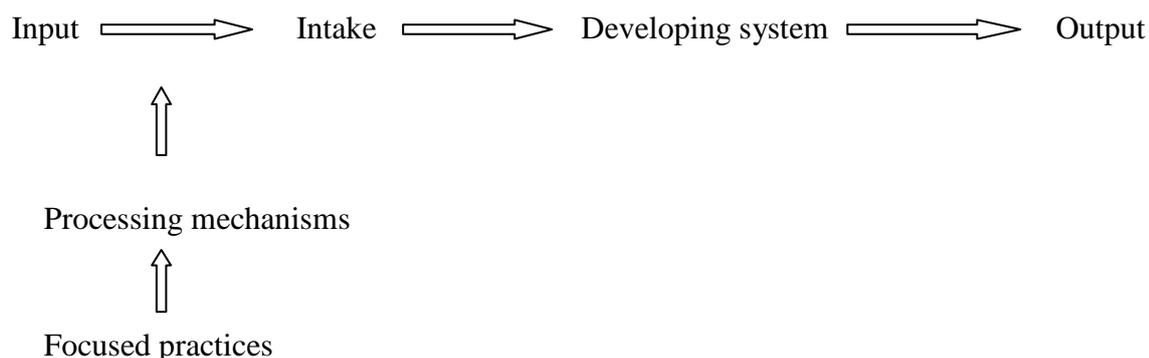


Figure 2

*Processing instruction (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 373)*

This second model can also be adapted to student-student interaction. Based on the stages of the model, it is possible to say that the interaction between students can be best processed through the focused practice after the input is provided. The focused practice stage can best be realized through interaction, particularly through conversational interaction.

### ***Conversational interaction and developing speaking skills***

In language learning process, students' attempts to interact with others may lead up to speaking skill development. Speaking skill in foreign language is a very difficult competence and performing in speaking takes a long time to develop (Luoma, 2004). Additionally, the ability of speaking in a language indicates that the learner knows that language due to the fact that speech is the crucial means of communication (Celce-Murcia, et al., 2013); the common question "Do you speak English or any other language?" is often asked to check whether a person knows a foreign language or not, because it is expected that speaking a foreign language means mastering in that language.

According to Bygate (2010) in the pedagogical field, two basic skills are pointed out: motor-perceptive skills and interaction skills. Motor-perceptive skills involve perceiving, recalling, and articulating the correct order sounds and structures of the language, whilst interaction skills involve making decisions about communication, such as what/how to say in accordance with one's intention while communicating with others (Bygate, 2010, pp. 5-6). The former one which is essential for initiating and carrying on the interaction is form-oriented skill; the latter one is meaning-oriented skill.

Long (1996), in his Interaction Hypothesis, claims that through interaction, internal capacities and selective attention of learners are shaped and enhanced between the input and output chain in a productive way. Thus, the chain is exposed to some modifications of forms through negotiation for meaning. Gass (1997) states the benefits of negotiation through processes of repetition, segmentation, and rewording. In those processes, students' attention may be drawn to form-meaning relationships; as a consequence, they can focus on encoding meaning while noticing the mismatches between the input and their output.

During interaction, the sender may also modify the input. Lynch (1996, p. 61) outlines some specific features of input modifications: ways of highlighting the topic, repetition, rate of speaking, syntactic simplification, and elaboration. Such modifications help listeners comprehend the input. Lynch (1996) also emphasizes that since the potential advantages of modifications are all short-term, language teachers have to take the longer-term view interests to create a direct link between comprehension and learning, and thus, schematizes the effects of interaction and modifications on learning:

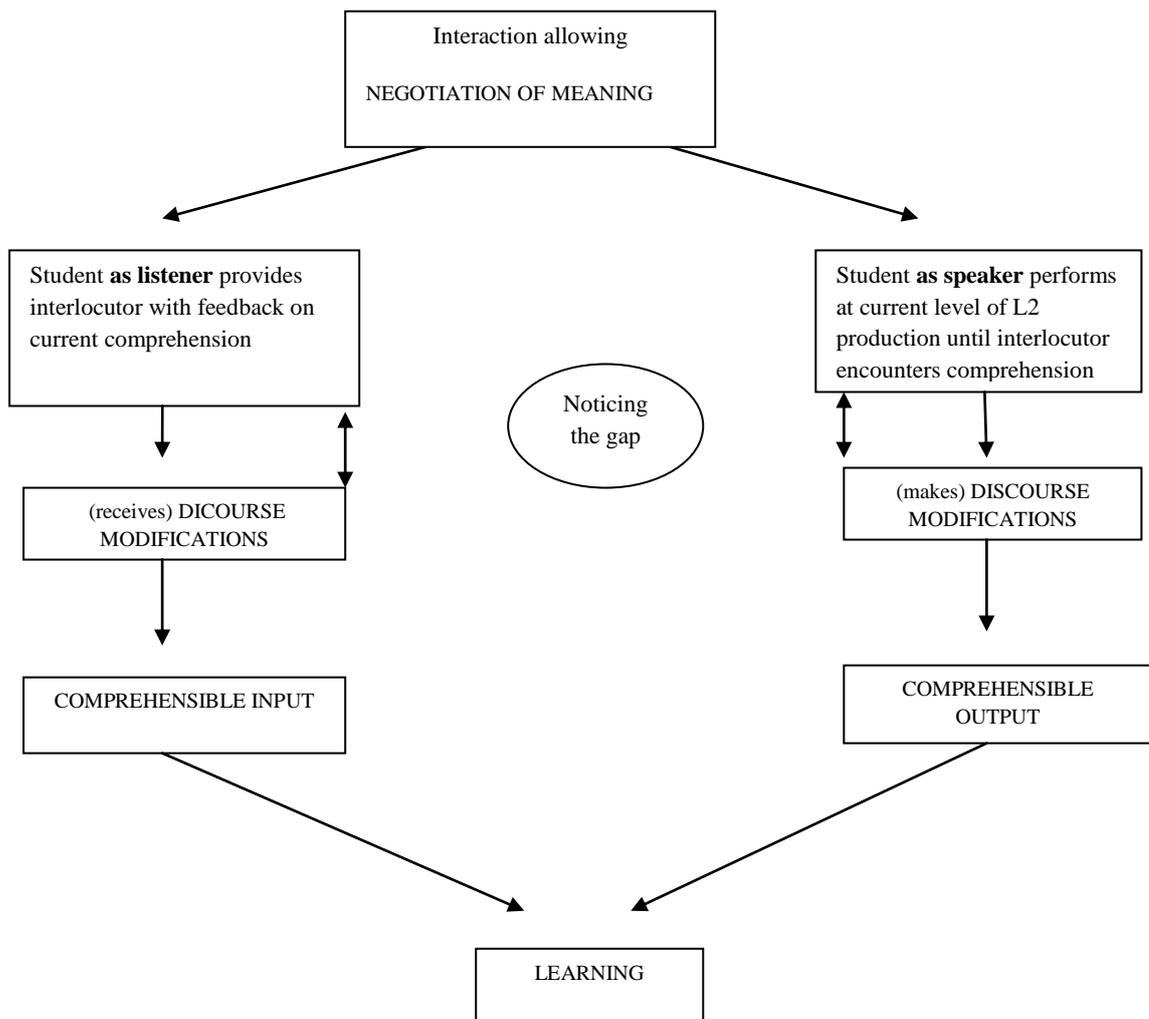


Figure 3

*From interaction to learning Lynch (1996, p. 61).*

As displayed in Figure 3, interaction is assumed to be fostering learning through input modifications by both the speaker and listener and makes both the input and output comprehensible. During negotiation for meaning, modifications are the corrective feedbacks which are important sources of interactional benefits. Feedback consists of implicit or explicit forms: clarification requests, confirmation checks, repetitions, and recasts occurring during

interaction may serve as forms of implicit feedback; corrections and metalinguistic explanations are explicit feedback types (Mackey, 2007).

Language classes in which students have opportunities to interact with each other may successfully facilitate students' knowledge construction by making them participate in collaborative and cooperative tasks and share experiences (Brown, 2007). If language classes are more student-centred settings, more opportunities can be offered for students to take active participation in learning process for developing better language skills. For the most part, while developing speaking skills, students may face some difficulties such as pronunciation problems, lacking vocabulary and grammar knowledge, poor fluency, inappropriate contextual comprehension. Therefore, provided feedback during and after the interaction process gives opportunities to students to revise and improve their performance (Ellis 2009; Mackey, 2007). Research on the impact of the feedback has focused on the quality of the information provided (Ellis, 2009). By the use of feedback, students get the chance of revising and improving their performance as well as comprehending the teacher's methodology and checking or judging their progress in a course (Meerah & Halim, 2011).

### ***Communication skills and self-esteem***

As abovementioned, the elements necessary for developing speaking skills are fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, contextual knowledge. In addition to such elements, students' ability to perform well in a foreign language is also interrelated with the psychology of students, particularly with the degree of self-esteem- that is the belief in one's own capabilities to successfully perform any activity (Horwitz, 2008). Brown (2007, p. 155) states three types self-esteem: global self-esteem -the general or prevailing assessment one makes of one's own worth over time and across a number of situations; situational or specific self-esteem -one's self-appraisals in particular life situations; and task self-esteem - one's self-evaluation of a particular task within a specific situation, for instance speaking, writing. All these three levels of self-esteem are correlated positively with the performance on the oral production measure and teachers can really have a positive and influential effect on both the linguistic performance and well-being of the student (Heyde, 1979, as cited in Brown, 2007). However, it is not clear whether high self-esteem causes to language success or language success causes to self esteem, though both seem cooperating factors (Brown, 2007). Therefore, self-esteem check is necessary for recognizing how students feel about themselves and language learning (Horwitz, 2008).

A number of studies have been carried out to check the relationship of self-esteem with academic performance (Canfield & Wellis, 1994; Choi, 2005; El-Anzi, 2005; Fook et al., 2011; Hayati & Ostadian, 2008; Niki Maleki & Mohammadi, 2009; Valentine, Dubois, & Cooper, 2004). Regarding the relationship of self-esteem and academic performance, the studies concluded that self-esteem has positive relationship with academic performance, but the results do not show any clear conclusion about whether self-esteem effects academic success or academic success leads to higher self-esteem. This may imply that both factors consist of forces fostering each other in the education process. Additionally, self-esteem may be one of the motivating factors for academic achievement. Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998, p. 257) claim that the highest human priority is the need for self-acceptance; therefore, when a

student is demotivated, s/he shows a lack of interest to the subject matter and hesitates to participate in classroom activities. A demotivated person is someone who was once motivated but has lost his or her commitment/interest for some reasons (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2012); thus, for motivating such individuals again, the potential reasons of demotivation need to be explored.

In the foreign language learning process, students can easily be demotivated, particularly in developing speaking skills. Speaking in the target language may also involve taking risks in some situations. There are various risk factors in speaking classes. When students cannot express themselves fluently or accurately, they may be discouraged to speak in the target language. Another risk factor is classmates or the teacher. If they are not supportive enough, the student may not take risk to attempt to speak, and oral communication can be anxiety provoking (Rubio, 2007). Such behaviors may demotivate language students and decrease the level of their self-esteem.

Additionally, the value of tasks can be demotivating when students do not develop intrinsic motivation due to negative expectations about the task value (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). For that reason, tasks need to be designed regarding students' capability to implement the assigned tasks. Otherwise, they may lose interest and decrease the degree of self-esteem. In this sense, the self-esteem concept also links with the planned behavior which allows people to see and link well to intervention strategies, such as enactive mastery and verbal persuasion in a supportive environment by getting verbal encouragement from peers or teachers (Ajzen, 1991). The intervention, thus, may lead to autonomous learning, self-directed learning, high self-efficacy, collaborative learning, and high level of global, task, and situational self-esteem.

### **The current study**

As aforementioned, the difficulties confronted with speaking skills for language students may be various. Knowing about a language is different from using it; students often find it difficult to practice speaking in the target language, even though they know about the system of that language (Ur, 2000). The common expressions language students mostly use when they are forced to talk on a given topic is "I have no idea about this topic"; "I don't know how to explain"; "the topic is not interesting for me"; or "I don't have enough words to explain my ideas"; or "no comment". Instead of talking, they keep silent during the course time. Therefore, in this research study, low self-esteem, one of the factors creating difficulties for students, was focused on and it was aimed to explore whether the causes of speaking problems stem from low esteem. If so, some possible ways of increasing low self-esteem were investigated through the classroom intervention. The precise question of this research study is "Are language students able to develop higher self-esteem through interaction for better achievement in speaking skill?"

### ***Participants***

The participants of the study who were 32 (25 females-7 males) second year language students attending English Language Teaching (ELT) department at a Turkish University were the prospective teachers of English. Horwitz (1996) states that when advanced language

students become language teachers, low self-esteem can limit the experiences they offer to their students. In this respect, increasing student teachers' self-esteem needs to be one of the main goals in teacher education process. The participants were nearly at the same age level (between 19 and 21); therefore, the variable 'age differences' was not evaluated in the study. In addition, since most of the participants were female, gender differences of the participants were not focused on as a separate variable. They were recruited from one class of the ELT department and taught by the researcher in the Speaking course.

### ***Methodology***

This case study involves a mixed methods design that combines both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis procedures. Using mixed methods research design improves the validity of research, increases the strengths while eliminating weaknesses of research, and leads to better understanding of a complex phenomenon through multi-level analysis (Dörnyei, 2007). To collect the qualitative data, introspective procedures such as semi-structured interviews and observation reports were used to scrutinize the quantitative data collected through elicitation procedures.

### ***Instruments***

In the study, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation reports were utilized to measure the degree of self-esteem of the student teachers and the difficulties they had while speaking English. RSES which is Likert type scale comprises 10 items designed to measure individuals' global self-esteem. The scale explicitly refers to personal evaluation that assesses a general sense of self-esteem. The scale is available at:

<http://www.wwnorton.com/college/psych/psychsci/media/rosenberg.htm>

The reason for selecting this instrument for the present study was that RSES is the most popular and most frequently used in the research. Prior to data collection, to test the reliability of the instrument a pilot study was conducted and Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of the scale was found out to be as .87. The item scores of the scale are calculated as: for items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7: strongly agree = 3, agree = 2, disagree = 1, strongly disagree = 0; for items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 which are reversed in valence: strongly agree = 0, agree = 1, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 3. The scale ranges from 0-30. Scores between 15 and 25 are within normal range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. The analysis of the data was implemented through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 17.0.

Semi-structured interviews were used to evaluate task self-esteem levels of the students -one's self-evaluation of a particular task within a specific situation. The interview sessions were implemented after the students carried out the assigned tasks. For the interview data, no statistical analysis was used; instead, the statements were evaluated and interpreted through the content analysis.

To test the effectiveness of the treatment, the participants were also exposed to oral tests at the beginning and end of the treatment process to examine whether the treatment had any influence on their achievement levels. The oral tests were scored by two raters; then for the reliability of the scores, the discrepancies were discussed and reevaluated. The scores of

the two raters were measured through Cohen's Kappa, and inter-rater agreement ( $K = .96$ ) was achieved. The difference between the scores of the pre/post oral tests was calculated through the paired sampled t-test.

### **Procedure**

The research procedure in this study was implemented in six stages. First of all, the global level of self-esteem of the participants was examined through RSES. The first stage self-esteem scale was handed to examine the initial state of self-esteem of the participants. It was assumed and observed that since the participants' self-esteem degree would be low, they hesitated to speak in English in the courses. Then, the participants were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. Moreover, before the treatment, a pre-test was administered on the participants to check their achievement levels in speaking skills. In the next stage, the participants were exposed to treatment process for nine weeks. After nine-week process, the self-esteem scale was administered on the participants once again to check whether they developed high self-esteem or not in the course of the treatment. And as a post check, the participants were tested in an oral exam to examine the efficiency of the treatment on their academic achievement levels in speaking.

## **Results**

### **Initial state of self-esteem**

The first step in the data analysis displayed that the participants had low level degree of self-esteem. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Self-esteem scores before the treatment*

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	-	3	3	26
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	-	1	11	20
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	4	17	8	3
I am able to do things as well as most other people	1	3	18	10
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	4	4	18	6
I take a positive attitude toward myself	7	14	6	5
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	-	3	12	17
I wish I could have more respect for myself	9	11	7	5
I certainly feel useless at times	7	10	12	3
At times I think I am no good at all	3	7	21	1

As abovementioned, the scale ranges from 0-30: scores between 15 and 25 are within normal range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. According to the frequency results of the pre-treatment self-esteem scale (RSES), 26 participants got below 15 points and were assigned with low esteem. Of those participants, 6 had scores between 15 and 25. This means that nearly 83% of the participants had low self-esteem. In order to increase the degree of self-esteem of the participants, they were all exposed to treatment process in the speaking classes.

To design treatment activities in the speaking classes regarding the needs and expectations of the participants, the researcher designed semi-structured interviews and collected verbal data.

### ***The interview reports***

The next step in data collection was to investigate the participants' task self-esteem status through their self-evaluation of speaking tasks within a specific situation. The participants mostly declared similar problems in their evaluations. Their problems were categorized through the content analysis and presented below with some sample statements of the participants:

The main problem was that they hesitated to use their own stored knowledge in English while speaking for the fear that they could make errors and their classmates would laugh at them. This problem was categorized as "fear of making errors in front of the audience". The statements below were uttered nearly by all participants in similar ways:

*"I am often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom..."*

*"I am worried about making mistakes..."*

*"I am afraid of being criticized by my teachers and classmates...so speaking in English is difficult for me..."*

*"I want to keep silent and show no interest all along the course...English is easy but speaking in English is difficult...particularly in front of my classmates..."*

Another problem was that they first thought the statement in Turkish, and then they tried to translate the same sentence into English. The category of this problem is "translation from L1 into L2".

*"I forget the words and I think the statements in Turkish...then I try to translate..."*

*"I try to use Turkish linguistic rules to construct my sentences in English..."*

They declared that they did not think of using an alternative word or clause when they did not remember the corresponding ones for what they thought in Turkish. The category of this problem is "inability in using compensatory strategies".

*"I forget the words when I speak in the classroom...I cannot find the suitable words...I stop...I cannot speak..."*

*"If I prepare PPT, I believe I will be more successful in speaking English...if I have problems with the words I can approach the slides..."*

The other problem they declared about the topics and tasks: the problem was categorized as "low task self-esteem".

*"I don't know how to express my ideas about a topic..."*

*"...speaking around a topic and organizing the ideas in front of the audience are hard and daunting task for me..."*

*"Sometimes the topics are not interesting...I don't know what to speak..."*

The common point declared by nearly all participants was that they hesitated to utter the words of which pronunciation was challenging or difficult for them. Actually they tried to use avoidance strategy but were not able to use alternative words; this point was categorized as “ability in using avoidance strategies” which is preferred in language learning process.

*“I mostly utter the words of which pronunciation is easy for me...”*

*I do not want to use the words which I cannot pronounce...I want to find alternative words for the words which are hard for me to pronounce...”*

Most of them proclaimed they had shaking hands, heartbeat, and trembling voice while speaking, so they were not aware of what they were saying. And few of them declared they were never enthusiastic or ready to speak among their classmates or other people for the fear that they would never complete their speech. Those declarations were categorized as “the state of embarrassment and anxiety”.

*“Speaking in English, discussing my ideas with my friends... all are not easy for me...”*

*“I try to imitate the expressions my teacher and friends use...but I forget how to manage my ideas when I speak...my hands are shaking...I don't know how to speak...”*

*“I think my teachers and friends know better than me...I don't want to have speaking responsibilities...”*

As seen in the statements, most of the participants were not satisfied with their own capabilities and had low self-confidence in front of other people. They were not enthusiastic to take speaking tasks and implement those tasks. Their low degree of global self-esteem was thought to be also influential on their task self-esteem; thus, they developed inhibition in speaking tasks.

### ***Treatment process***

To defeat such problems and to increase the participants' global and task self-esteem levels, they were exposed to some speaking tasks in the speaking classes. Beforehand, they were assured that while implementing the tasks, accuracy and fluency would not be sought to test their speaking skills. Then, their needs and expectations for the speaking tasks were detected. Depending on the needs analysis, it was concluded that they mostly wanted to participate in presentation tasks through slide shows on the topics in which they were interested. While preparing and presenting the speech in the classroom, they were encouraged to feel themselves free to make errors while presenting the topic. Moreover, the teacher's talk would be reduced; instead, the participants were encouraged to talk more in the classroom. All participants took place in the presentation tasks between 10 and 20 minutes for three weeks. After the presentations via PowerPoint slides, they were encouraged to prepare speeches without slides.

The next three weeks, they were assigned to give impromptu speeches on any topic which they would choose among the ones prepared by the researcher. During the following weeks, less hesitant behaviors were observed in the classroom for the reason that they were encouraged to ask questions each other after or during the presentations or impromptu speeches all through the treatment process.

While interacting with each other, the participants took notes about the mismatches of the speaker and the classmates. They were also directed to make self-corrections and peer-corrections or group corrections. During those practices, it was observed that they recognized their own and others' failures; thus, they felt themselves as identical to the others and developed relaxed and volunteer behaviors. During the presentation sessions, they tended to use mother tongue when necessary through code-switching strategy. Code-switching made them feel more comfortable, and gradually they ignored using this strategy.

Progressively, they came at a stage where they could speak English despite the common errors and mistakes. Subsequently, the participants were provided with the opportunities of having ample practices in the classroom to express their ideas in the situations where they could use spontaneous language. Such classroom tasks were also observed to be fostering their confidence to achieve communication beyond that of practicing the language itself. Through the classroom interaction they were able to implement information gap activities which are more authentic; such activities offer opportunities for practicing real life conversations through which learners experience how to use repetitions, interruptions, recitations, and facial expressions (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996).

Additionally, in the treatment process, the most favored activities were the discussion activities which served as the source of spontaneous interaction. During the discussion activities, the participants were more capable of giving their opinions and receiving the others' by reporting something personal. The participants were also instructed on how to use speaking strategies appropriately. When they failed to use strategies efficiently, they were supported by the lecturer and peer feedback. Among the activities, it was assumed that the most effective tool was speaking strategies instruction.

### ***Observation reports***

During the speech presentations, the researcher kept observation records to evaluate each individual's speaking development. It was observed that after a few presentations, the participants were better in their language use as well as body language use. Additionally, they developed some communication strategies consciously to defeat the problems they faced. They began to accomplish the speaking skill in English more appropriately and confidently. In the prepared speech presentations, they mostly used paraphrasing strategies and reduction strategies through which the participants reduced their communicative objectives by giving up the topic or abandoning a specific message. In the impromptu speeches, they mostly used avoidance strategies, compensation strategies, and socio-affective strategies through which they tried to overcome the difficulties when necessary. The other noteworthy development to mention here was that they tried to take the other classmates as models and encouraged themselves. They took risks and did not hesitate to say when they did not know how to say. In other words, they struggled with the difficulties such as correct word order, appropriate vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar rules, linking words, and discourse markers. Thus, they perceived that the best way to overcome the problems of communication was using communicative strategies. As Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) stress communicative strategies are speakers-oriented; that is, they are used by students to compensate for the scarcity of L2 knowledge or their inability to access to the L2 knowledge they have. In this study, through

negotiations, the students in the interactive situations retained more L2 words. In the classroom, they tried to modify the incorrect or problematic language items through negotiation. While assisting each other, they tried to perform better in speaking skill.

### ***Post-treatment evaluation***

After nine-week treatment, RSES which had been administered on the participants at the beginning was handed to the participants over again to check whether they could develop high self-esteem.

Table 2

#### *Self-esteem scores after the treatment*

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	3	11	9	9
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	7	12	11	2
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	-	8	18	6
I am able to do things as well as most other people	7	21	4	-
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	-	5	27	-
I take a positive attitude toward myself	8	19	4	1
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	8	16	7	1
I wish I could have more respect for myself	3	4	24	3
I certainly feel useless at times	1	4	10	17
At times I think I am no good at all	5	7	20	-

When compared the results of the scales before and after the treatment, a significant difference between the participants' beginning and end-course self-esteem levels was noticed. 23 participants got scores between 15 and 25; however, 9 participants still got scores below 15. In other words, the low self-esteem degree of nearly 72% participants increased after the treatment. In the study, to investigate the difference between pre-test and post-test about self-esteem, a t-test was performed and the results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

#### *Paired sampled t test results for pre and post tests*

Statements	Pre-treatment self-esteem		Post-treatment self-esteem	
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	32	3.07	32	3.37
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	32	3.27	32	3.62
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	32	3.39	32	3.14
I am able to do things as well as most other people	32	3.16	32	3.41
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	32	3.15	32	3.43
I take a positive attitude toward myself	32	2.96	32	3.04
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	32	2.83	32	3.27
I wish I could have more respect for myself	32	2.87	32	3.17
I certainly feel useless at times	32	2.89	32	3.14
At times I think I am no good at all	32	2.85	32	3.19

Mean was based on a 1-4 scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree.

Mean comparison of total self-esteem scores is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Paired sampled t test results of pre and post self-esteem tests*

Scale	Test	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Self-esteem	Pre	32	3.04	.45	31	-4.31	.001
	Post	32	3.28	.42			

As the total self-esteem mean comparison indicates, the mean rated from post-test ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ) was higher than the mean rated from pre-test ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ). A statistically significant difference [ $t(31) = 4.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ] was found out between the pre and post tests. The results confirmed that the treatment program in speaking classes yielded positive results; and it was assumed that the treatment increased self-esteem levels of the participants.

In order to evaluate whether the increase in the participants' self-esteem level had any influence on their achievement level in speaking skill, the scores of the pre and post oral exams were also calculated through the t-test and the results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Pre-test and post-test oral exam scores*

Group	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Pre-test	32	39.32	12.07	31	-25.62	.001
Post-test	32	84.70	22.78			

As displayed in Table 5, a significant difference was found out between the pre and post oral exam scores of the participants,  $t_{(32)} = -25.62$ ,  $p < .01$ . The post-test scores mean ( $M_{post-test} = 84.70$ ,  $SD = 22.78$ ) was significantly higher than the pre-test scores mean ( $M_{pre-test} = 39.32$ ,  $SD = 12.07$ ).

## Discussion

Knowing about a foreign language or language rules does not always mean having good command of using that language orally (Celce-Murcia et al., 2013). Students of a foreign language often find it difficult while practicing the speaking skill due to various reasons, even though they may be competent enough about the system of the language. Of the possible reasons, low self-esteem degrees of students mostly create difficulties for them while communicating with others (Dörnyei, 2005). Such low esteem problems were also diagnosed for the participants of the present study. To defeat their low self-esteem problems, the treatment process was initiated and feedback was provided in a friendly atmosphere. They were given ample opportunities to interact with each other in the classroom.

The research results indicated that the participants' low esteem level got increased and they displayed more volunteer attitudes for interaction. Such increase in the rate is thought to be strongly related with the classroom activities and the tasks designed primarily on base of

the participants' needs and expectations. The significant difference between the oral test scores administered before and after the treatment also indicated the effectiveness of the treatment on the participants' academic achievement and development in speaking skill. As noted, higher level of self-esteem also leads to academic achievement.

The main cause of low self-esteem was the inhibition of the participants of this study. They initially seemed fearful with trembling voice. To get rid of such obstacles, they were provided with the opportunities in which they could practice interaction with the classmates. As Scriver (2005) points out the aim of communicative activity in class is to get students to use the language they are learning to interact in realistic and meaningful ways, usually involving exchanges of information or opinion.

In line with Long's (1996) opinions, in the present study, interaction shaped the input, internal student capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways. Thus, the chain between input and output was modified when necessary through the negotiation. During the treatment process, the students' attention was drawn to form-meaning relationships by encoding meaning while noticing the mismatches between the input and their output. As they raised awareness about how to deal with speaking problems and issues, it was presumed that their self-esteem levels increased. For that reason, as Horwitz (2008) declared self-esteem check is necessary for recognizing how students feel about themselves and language learning.

Since the participants expressed their panic about not being able to express themselves fluently and accurately, it was supposed that such panic might arise from low self-esteem and discourage them to participate in speaking activities affectively. During the interviews, they were guided and encouraged for the classroom tasks and activities freely. For the duration of the classroom activities, they were exposed to supportive feedback by the teacher and classmates. Thus, they became more motivated. Instead of worrying about the possible mistakes and errors they would make, they tried to do their best and did not stop themselves from speaking confidentially in front of the class. Therefore, such treatment process in this study was assumed to be encouraging for increasing the low esteem level of the participants. In the previous studies by Canfield and Wellis (1994), Valentine et al. (2004), El-Anzi (2005), Choi (2005), Hayati and Ostadian (2008), Naderi et al. (2009), Niki Maleki and Mohammadi (2009), Fook et al. (2011), it was concluded that the degree of self-esteem and academic performance had positive relationship. The results of the present study are in line with the results of those previous studies. However, as noted by Brown (2007) it is not very clear whether high self-esteem caused to success in speaking skills or speaking skill development caused to increased self esteem; both appear to have worked together. In other words, the results imply that both self-esteem and academic achievement foster each other in education process.

In this study, a large part of the problem identified was not simply the psychological and personality factors related to the students, but also the intentions, methods, and strategies used by teachers to foster self-directed learning and the categories of self-esteem. The intervention in this study was successful because optimal attention was given to both the

participants' linguistic goals and personhood. Such conclusion of the study may contribute novel perspectives to language teaching applications.

As regards the research results of this study, some suggestions can be provided for further studies and classroom practices for developing speaking skills of foreign language students. First of all, students' problems need to be diagnosed and treatment should be designed regarding the needs and expectations of the students. The main goal of the course needs to be determined for typical communication purposes not just for accuracy or fluency. Necessary feedback either implicitly or explicitly should be provided for clarification. Teachers should not deal with oral production capacities of students all the time; instead, they should make decisions when and how to react to the students' errors so that the interactive activity will not break down each time. Errors should be welcomed during speaking performances.

The activities and topics should be designed with the collaboration of students. Particularly, interaction activities in the classroom may provide a space for students to share their own experiences with the others. Thus, they can recognize each other's speaking ability without hesitation for making mistakes or errors, since the feeling of shyness and fear of making mistakes and errors cause to poor communicative skill development. Such personality factors can affect class participation in speaking classes and make students keep silent without showing any interest in course activities while strong participators performing speaking activities. To take the attention of weak participators to the course and to increase their self-esteem level, initially, they should be assigned with presenting a prepared talk on a given topic choice in front of their classmates; then, they may present informal, spontaneous conversations through interaction. Additionally, opportunities should be offered for students to work in pairs and small groups for contributing to each other through comprehensive discussions; in-depth conversations among students should be encouraged; cooperative classroom activities should be designed; open-ended questions with more than one right answer should be prepared for making judgments in-class debates; students should be encouraged to prepare poster presentations for reflecting their ideas. While making students actively participate in all those activities, students should feel themselves free for making mistakes and errors. Later such mismatches can be reported and corrected either by students or by the teacher through negotiations. Additionally, how to use proper speaking strategies should be taught to students.

In the language classroom, the process of negotiation and interaction should be identified with the process of language learning. In this sense, interaction, which triggers the student's interest and potential to communicate with others, may facilitate not only language development but also increase students' self-esteem. If the interaction is promoted by teacher initiated questions, students may be more motivated and encouraged to reflect their own ideas. As a result, the entire classroom interaction implemented in a creative and friendly atmosphere may increase the students' interest towards the course, their self-esteem level, and eager attitudes for participating in speaking tasks.

## Limitations of the study

The study in its present form comprises some limitations. Since the intervention was carried out in speaking classes, the class size was deliberately designed in small size to get the opportunity to intervene each individual. In further studies, the sample size can be increased. Another limitation is that the study did not contain a true control group, and thus, a future study could further validate the results by conducting a study that uses control group. Additionally, instead of mere global self-esteem check, other interrelated factors such as self-efficacy, self-confidence, anxiety, etc. could be evaluated regarding the relationship of those affective domains with language learning.

## Conclusion

Language teaching approaches and methods are dominated by various purposes such as structural, functional, or interactive. A system of structurally related elements to code meaning is the core of structural purpose; the language as a system to accomplish a certain function is the domain of functional purpose, and the language as a vehicle for the construction and maintenance of social relations through interaction and negotiation is the central part of the interactive theory. For speaking skills development, interactive purposes come to the fore. Depending on the results of the present study, it can be concluded that adult students' speaking skills can be boosted through interactive activities, and thus their self-esteem levels can be increased. Under the interactive circumstances, the value systems of choice, freedom and equality can be experienced. Additionally, as a productive skill, speaking in foreign language can encourage students to develop language proficiency.

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