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BRIDGING IN-CLASS AND OUT-OF-CLASS LEARNING THROUGH PODCAST-INTERTWINED COLLABORATIVE TASKS TO REDUCE EFL SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG HIGHER PROFICIENCY LEARNERS

Research Article

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Abstract

Although speaking anxiety among foreign language learners at lower levels of proficiency has been extensively studied, far too little attention has been paid to learners at more advanced levels like student teachers enrolled in English Language Teaching (ELT) programs. However, speaking in the target language is a complicated mental process influenced by several other factors than proficiency. The present study has aptly been undertaken due to considerable reticence on the part of student teachers in communicative activities. An action plan was initiated to identify the sources of student teachers' avoidance behaviors in oral production and address the concerns generated by these factors. An open-ended survey, journals, overall reflection papers and field notes were employed to gain insights as to the research process. Analysis of qualitative data revealed that student teachers were susceptible to experiencing anxiety in oral production due to personal and interpersonal issues, and they were positive in their perceptions of the planned intervention since it helped them build a sense of community in their classroom and enhance their self-esteem. These findings suggest several courses of action for language practitioners and teacher training institutions.

Keywords: speaking anxiety; higher proficiency learners; student teachers; collaborative learning; podcasts; out-of-class learning

1. Introduction

English has become a lingua franca of education, science, technology, commerce and business in the rapidly globalizing world. Hence, having citizens capable of communicating in English has been in the limelight of the educational policies of worldwide countries. Turkey desiring to take an active part in the international arena has not been an exempt from this trend, either. Accordingly, English has been given priority over other foreign languages like French, German and Arabic in the Turkish context since mid-1900s as a response to the increasing economic and military power of English-speaking countries (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998).

Yet, despite many initiatives to increase the quality and quantity of English learning experiences in educational settings, foreign language learners generally experience problems with oral communication in Turkey. Put differently, living in an expanding circle country where English has neither an official nor a co-official status (Kachru, 1992, Kırkgöz, 2009),

Turkish learners of English do not have opportunities to communicate in natural settings and their use of it is mostly limited to limited time in classrooms. This being the case, even learners with higher proficiency levels like students in ELT programs may go through negative experiences during communicative activities (Aydın, 2008; Tum & Kunt, 2013).

Several factors may interfere with learners' oral performance. Over the last four decades, there has been a burgeoning of research demonstrating the impact of affective factors on students' learning of foreign languages and anxiety has been particularly suggested as one of the most influential variables affecting learners' oral proficiency. According to Toth (2017), anxiety experienced by advanced learners is indeed not a matter of linguistic knowledge; but a psychological state of personal inadequacy resulting from "the disparity between the "true" self as known to the language learner and the more limited self as can be presented at any given moment in the foreign language" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

It is this experience of anxiety manifested by student teachers in an ELT program that has driven the current action research. In order to reduce the feelings of apprehension, uneasiness and tension arising during communicative tasks, the researchers initially aimed to find out the sources of anxiety experienced during oral communication. In alignment with this, the first research question was formulated as follows:

1. What are the major factors that provoke anxiety in second-year student teachers in oral communication?

Having identified the reasons which were mostly related to personal and interpersonal anxieties, the researchers designed and implemented an action plan drawing on the literature on collaborative learning, out-of-class learning and podcasting. To this end, the following research question was used to guide the second part of the study:

2. What are the perceptions of second-year student teachers in relation to the overall impact of podcast-intertwined collaborative tasks on reducing speaking anxiety?

It is hoped that this research can contribute to the calls made by several researchers (Marzec-Stawiarska, 2015; Toth, 2017; Tum & Kunt, 2013) for further research into anxiety at higher levels of proficiency and generate fresh insights into the extant literature since it provides one of the first investigations into the effect of blending in-class collaborative tasks with out-of-class collaborative tasks through podcasting to alleviate speaking anxiety at more advanced levels.

2. Theoretical Background

Interest in affective variables in ELT dates back to 1970s. With the advent of humanistic theories, scholars such as Asher (1977), Curran (1976), Gattegno (1972), Lozanov (1979), and Krashen and Terrell (1983) suggested that cognition alone cannot account for the complex process of second language acquisition (SLA) and affective factors also have a decisive impact on language learning. As a result, a number of methods such as Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Desuggestopedia, Total Physical Response, the Natural Approach and the methodology of Communicative Language Teaching emerged to set the value of affect as well as cognition in ELT.

Affective domain includes several elements ranging from emotional and motivational aspects of human behavior to personal characteristics (Imai, 2010). However, as stated by many in the field (e.g. Arnold & Brown 1999; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017; Oxford, 1999), anxiety is the most frequently experienced affective state influencing the process of language learning. Defined as "an unpleasant subjective experience of tension, apprehension or anticipation, imposed by the expectation of danger or distress or the need for

a special effort” (Kelly, Brown & Schaffer, 1970, p. 429), anxiety can play either a facilitative or a debilitating role in the learning process. Facilitating anxiety helps learners to be alert and more focused with respect to their learning processes; whereas, debilitating anxiety hinders learning and causes poor performance (Oxford, 1999). It is generally this harmful effect of anxiety that language learning has most often been associated with. As to its types, anxiety can be categorized as trait, state and situation-specific anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). While trait anxiety is defined as a predisposition to feel nervous in a variety of situations (Scovel, 1978), state anxiety refers to a sense of apprehension arising at a particular moment (Spielberger, 1983). Similar to trait anxiety, situation-specific anxiety is persistent but it is limited to specific situations like test-taking and classroom participation (Ellis, 1994).

Based on the works of Scovel (1978) and Gardner (1985) who posited that anxiety specific to the language acquisition context is different from a nervous personality and momentary experiences of feeling anxious, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) proposed the situation-specific construct of foreign language classroom anxiety. Referring to the debilitating effects of anxiety (e.g. apprehension, distress, lack of concentration, palpitations, avoidance behaviors) on foreign language learners, the authors define this phenomenon as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). Moreover, research (e.g. Cheng, Horwitz & Shallert, 1999; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Tsiplakides and Keramida, 2009; Young, 1991) indicates that although anxiety may show itself in all four language skills, it interferes most seriously with speaking skills given that during oral communication tasks, anxiety influences learners’ attention and as a result, inhibits comprehension and disrupts production (MacIntyre, 1999; Toth, 2006).

In order to reduce its negative impact on learners’ oral performance, several studies have been conducted to find out the sources of foreign language speaking anxiety. In her seminal article, Young (1991) states that related to the issues of self-esteem and competitiveness, personal and interpersonal anxieties come to the fore as the most frequently experienced affective states among foreign language learners. In line with this, Toth (2007) claims that low self-esteem along with competitiveness cause anxiety in learners and this results in low oral performance. Considering that success is contingent upon “what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom” (Stevick, 1980, p. 4), the nature of learning environment no doubt emerges as an important factor significantly affecting learners’ levels of anxiety.

According to Zhang (2010), “If the language class is meant to be a place where individuals can practice in communication in the foreign language, it is vital to establish a social and affective climate in which students are not restricted, aggressive, or feared” (p.82). In this respect, collaborative learning has long been considered beneficial to reduce personal and interpersonal anxieties in language classrooms. Brown (2004) states that collaboration in pursuit of common goals helps learners develop a community of learning and contributes to the establishment of an affective climate in language classrooms. Standing in stark contrast with competitive environments, collaborative classrooms encourage learners to act as a team and work together to accomplish a shared goal (Nunan, 1992). Therefore, Oxford (1997) suggests that since cooperation helps learners develop humane and altruistic relationships, anxiety interferes less and self-esteem gets enhanced.

Alongside with in-class collaborative activities, out-of-class learning opportunities should be utilized to deal with personal and interpersonal issues considering that out-of-class study can contribute to anxiety-free and self-directed learning experiences (Korucu-Kis, 2020).

Seen in another light, out-of-class study helps learners cross the boundaries of formal classrooms and offers a wide array of resources and options through which learners may overcome psychological and social barriers in more free, open and relaxing environments. Accordingly, Guth (2009) states that being a life-long process, second language acquisition does not end with formal education and it should be supported throughout life in out-of-class contexts as well. In a similar vein, Lai and Gu (2011) state that out-of-class study supplements in-class exposure and plays a complementary role for formal learning.

Providing learners with flexible, dynamic and social learning opportunities, technology is a promising venue where learners can continue practicing English outside of formal classrooms. According to Erben (2013), technology promotes motivation, supports learner-centered activities, offers authentic materials and decreases anxiety. Specifically, computer-mediated communication (CMC) often associated with features of participation, interaction, communication, and collaboration is suggested to help learners develop oral proficiency in tension-free learning environments (Arnold, 2007; Beauvois, 1998; Kartal & Balcikanli, 2018; Kern, 1995). Defined as communication that takes place between two or more people by means of computers (Herring, 1996), CMC takes its theoretical basis from several hypotheses in second language acquisition research (e.g. the input hypothesis, output hypothesis, interaction hypothesis). Offering learners unique opportunities to share their ideas, produce a large amount of output, work collaboratively and actively, focus on meaningful uses of language rather than language forms, alleviate anxiety and improve their linguistic performance (AbuSeileek & Qatawneh, 2013), CMC has proved to be an effective method in improving oral proficiency of learners in foreign language environments (Satar & Özdener, 2008).

CMC has two main modalities namely, synchronous and asynchronous. Abrams (2008) states that while synchronous CMC (SCMC) refers to real-time interaction, asynchronous CMC (ACMC) includes delayed interactions. In SCMC environments like chat rooms and audio/video conferencing, the immediacy of individuals and responses matters and this situation restricts the use of outside resources. Yet, unlike face to face communication, this mode provides learners with more time to process the input. On the other hand, learners are not confined by the limits of time and space in ACMC. They have extended time for processing input, planning, producing output and accessing outside resources. According to Chen (2015), so far, text-based ACMC (e.g. wikis, blogs, emails) has been used in a large bulk of research to improve learners' productive skills and the potential of voice-based ACMC like podcasts is yet to be explored in oral communication classes.

The term 'podcast' was derived from the combination of the words of iPod and broadcast and it refers to audio files that can be automatically downloaded to digital devices for later listening (O'Bannon, Lubke, Beard & Britt, 2011). Although audio programs are already available on the web, what differentiates podcasts from other programs is its use of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed. Through the use of RSS, users get alerts once new content is uploaded and the latest episodes are downloaded automatically (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). Thorne and Payne (2005) suggest that podcasts display promising features for foreign language classrooms since they offer diverse authentic materials for aural comprehension and various possibilities for oral speech through dramatic performances, talk show formats, interviews or monologues. In a similar vein, Sze (2006) states that there are two main types of podcasts, namely radio and independent podcasts. In the independent podcasting, learners can either use podcasts created by others or produce their own podcasts. According to Dudeney and Hockly (2007), although the latter is "more demanding, but ultimately perhaps more rewarding" (p.99). In alignment with this, Sze (2006) points out that since creating podcasts allows learners to rehearse the content for several times, work collaboratively,

practice the language behind the scenes, and have product and a real audience at the end, they offer huge benefits for language learners to overcome their oral communication anxiety.

To put it in a nutshell, several studies showed that in-class collaborative activities (e.g. Brown, 2004; Oxford, 1997; Nunan, 1993), out-of-class learning (e.g. Guth, 2009; Lai & Gui, 2011) and CMC (e.g. Abrams, 2003; Arnold, 2007; Satar & Özdener, 2008; Sze, 2006) emerge as promising methods to address problems related to oral performance. Hence, drawing on these approaches, an action plan has been developed in an attempt to alleviate personal and interpersonal anxieties experienced by higher proficiency learners during communicative activities. What follows now is an account of the design and implementation process of the study.

3. Research Design

Richards (2003) states that action research “represents a move from descriptive/interpretive stance to an interventionist position, where a key aim is to understand better some aspect of professional practice as a means of bringing about improvement” (p. 24). Accordingly, this study has adopted an action research approach to identify and address a classroom issue that the researchers were concerned about and wanted to improve by implementing practical interventions. As suggested by Burns (2010), the first author acted as a practitioner-researcher who explored her own teaching context and engaged in the stages of plan, act, observe and reflect to resolve the question at issue.

3.1. Setting and Participants

This study was carried out in an ELT program of a state university in the spring term of the 2018-2019 academic year. In order to get a place at an ELT program in Turkey, senior year high school students majoring in English take two examinations, namely Basic Proficiency Test (TYT) and Foreign Language Examination (YDS). While in the former, learners are tested on such areas as the Turkish language and mathematics; in the latter, their knowledge about the English language and reading comprehension skills are measured through different kinds of questions about knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, translation and reading comprehension. The skills of listening, speaking and writing are neglected in this proficiency examination. The first year of ELT programs mainly focuses on the development of language skills and areas. As a result, undergraduates take courses like the structure of English language, reading, oral communication, writing, and listening and pronunciation. From the second year on, they start taking more pedagogically-oriented classes including but not limited to approaches, methods and techniques, second language acquisition, ELT methodology, teaching English to young learners, classroom management, and testing and evaluation. Participants of this study were second-year student teachers. They were comprised of 21 females and 7 males and ranged in age from 19 to 23 with the exception of two students who were 31 and 41 years of age.

3.2. Procedure

This study emerged from the first author’s concerns over encountering reticence, avoidance behaviors, and forgetful moments with second-year student teachers in classroom discussions. Although students were provided with course materials beforehand and told that the courses would be mostly run based on discussions and applications, prolonged silence and students’ general tendency to give short answers to the questions posed urged the practitioner-researcher to seek out the reasons for this problem. With this aim, students were first provided with an open-ended survey inquiring into the sources of their’ unwillingness to speak in classes. Having identified that the students were experiencing anxiety during oral performances primarily because of self-efficacy and peer pressure issues (see section 4 for

more details), the researchers decided to develop an action plan to address this problem. The results were subsequently shared with students and it was announced that a two-hour speaking practice session would be held each week from the following week on and the participation would be on a voluntary basis.

The study consisted of two cycles. The first cycle lasted for three weeks. It was based on in-class collaborative activities designed around fun and meant to break the ice between learners and establish interpersonal relationships. Based on learners' oral feedback and the practitioner-researchers' observation notes, the second cycle was built upon the idea of intertwining in-class activities with out-of-class learning experiences to increase interaction and communication opportunities in English and continue to promote self-efficacy and altruistic relationships through podcasts. To these ends, (a) groups were assigned randomly, (b) each group member had a responsibility while carrying out tasks and producing podcasts, (c) interesting, creative and entertaining topics were selected (e.g. surviving on a desert island, solving a mysterious crime, if you had a superpower, surviving a nuclear war... etc.), (d) various types of group works were implemented (i.e. games, simulation, role-plays, interviews, opinion exchange, brainstorming, drama, problem solving and decision making) and podcasts were shared on an educational platform called Edmodo and listened, commented upon and liked by class members. To illustrate, the topic of surviving a nuclear war required the use of simulation techniques. In the classroom, learners in groups of ten worked through the imaginary situation of surviving a nuclear war. There were eight people at the airport but only six of them would be able to go to an uninhabited island that was not influenced by radiation. Based on the occupations each student was assigned, the group had to discuss who would get on the plane and live, and who would die ("Idea for an EFL Conversation Class," 2010). This activity continued outside the classroom through the creation of podcasts about starting a new civilization with the survivors. The podcasts were shared on Edmodo and further interaction was ensured via students' likes and comments. The practitioner-researcher acted as a participant-observer throughout the whole process. This role enabled her to keep an account of what was taking place for research purposes. During and after each class, she jotted down some notes about activities, events, learners' actions, emotional ups and downs, and behaviors toward each other. In parallel, participants were asked to keep weekly journals and reflect on that day's learning experiences. The second cycle lasted for seven weeks and the process was finalized with learners' overall reflections about the whole process.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative methods were used both for data collection and analysis. An open-ended survey, reflection journals, overall reflection papers and participant-observation notes were the tools used for collecting data since these methods lend themselves better to find out participants' perceptions and obtain rich data of their actions in situ (Creswell, 2012). The open-ended survey was administered before the stage of 'act' and inquired into how students felt during oral performances and what made them feel so. Observations involved the teacher-researcher's field notes written down either in situ or immediately after sessions with respect to events, activities, time and students' behaviors and reactions during individual and collaborative oral performances. To identify what improvements to do in the next cycle and have a deeper understanding of learners' perceptions, participants were asked to keep weekly journals and reflect on their learning experiences through such questions like "How did you feel in the class?, Have you ever felt anxious at any time in class today?, Did you find the tasks enjoyable or boring?" etc. At the end of the second cycle, they were also required to write a detailed reflection paper summarizing the whole process they underwent answering some guiding questions related to (a) their satisfaction level with the use of collaborative

activities and podcasts, (b) thoughts about the effect of these tools on their oral communication anxiety and (c) intentions to disseminate the results of this implementation with their peers and their future students and colleagues.

The questions utilized throughout the intervention process were prepared by the researchers in line with research purposes and pilot tested with some non-participant students to ensure the clarity and conciseness. While journals and practitioner researcher's fieldnotes were used to triangulate the data via constant comparison method, overall reflection papers provided the final data for analysis. Content analysis was used to search for patterns, interpret the data obtained and draw conclusions. Both of the researchers independently read through the open-ended surveys and reflection papers several times to discern key ideas, coded them, brought related codes together, put them into categories and developed themes. In order to ensure the reliability of encoded data, minor discrepancies between the researchers' codings were resolved through negotiated agreement and feedback of an outside researcher.

4. Findings and Discussion

1. What are the major factors that provoke anxiety in second-year student teachers in oral communication?

Results indicate that second-year EFL student teachers experience anxiety during oral activities and they attribute it to interpersonal (86%) and personal (68%) issues resulting primarily from peer pressure and low self-esteem. It should be noted that within the context of this study, while interpersonal factors involve issues related to others, personal factors are variables concerned with the individual itself and as the results imply there is not a clear-cut distinction between these two primary sources of anxiety since one may lead to another. Table 1 shows the themes and percentages of participants from the total sample.

Table 1. *Second-year student teachers' reported sources of speaking anxiety*

Categories	%	Themes	%
Fear of negative evaluation	82	Interpersonal factors	86
Competitiveness	21		
Sense of inhibition	61	Personal factors	86
Low self-esteem	46		

Fear of negative evaluation is defined as concern over others' evaluation, avoiding from evaluative situations, and apprehension about being negatively evaluated by others (Horwitz et al, 1986). According to Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009), learners who experience fear of negative evaluation regard making mistakes as a threat to their self-image and they are most often withdrawn and do not take part in language activities. Within the context of this study, fear of negative evaluation was the most frequent theme expressed by the majority of the student teachers (82%). The participants stated that making mistakes and the concomitant possibility of being derided made them feel anxious and caused them to display avoidance behaviors in participating oral activities as can be seen in one of the student teachers' comments:

I don't know why but whenever I want to speak in English, I am afraid of making mistakes. Yes, I know every person can make mistakes and it is normal, but this feeling impedes me...I feel like everyone is listening to me carefully and searching for my mistakes. Of course they do not do it, but I feel like that.

Furthermore, regarding making mistakes as a blow to his ego that can make him seem foolish in his peers' eyes, another student teacher stated:

The two most important reasons that cause anxiety in me are making silly mistakes and having failure during my speech. These thoughts cause me to think that I am going to make a mistake and others will make fun of me. Moreover, I will lose face if I make a mistake. I know such kind of thoughts should be overcome otherwise they will create a big obstacle for me to speak fluently and my eagerness to perform speaking in English.

In her study carried out with pre-service EFL teachers, Tum (2015) also obtained similar results. She stated that making mistakes and being ridiculed were major concerns for her students and those participants subsequently limited themselves from interacting with others in the target language. This sense of fragility can verily be explained by the concept of *language ego* which posits that adults with their native language-based egos feel defenseless when they have any difficulty in the target language and this may cause defensiveness in them against the situations requiring interaction (Brown, 2001).

Competitiveness was another recurring concept mentioned by some of the participants (21%) with respect to the interpersonal factors. According to Bailey (1983), competitive thoughts lead to negative comparisons with others, cause low self-concept and consequently induce communication apprehension. Likewise, participants of this study reported that when they compared themselves to their peers, they felt less proficient and fluent in speaking. They further stated that this situation made them anxious and decreased their willingness to communicate in English as exemplified in the following comments:

Another reason that makes me feel stressed is that some of my friends are more knowledgeable than me. Seeing them getting in conversation more easily than me makes me feel anxious about where I am. I begin to question my level of proficiency.

I feel stressed while I am speaking in English... There are a few people I refrain from in the class. They are good at speaking. They can answer questions without any anxiety... After speaking, I realize my errors and I do not want to speak again.

These results also reflect those of Bekleyen (2004). In her study conducted in an ELT program in Turkey, she found out that due to a competitive atmosphere in their classrooms, some of the participants tended to avoid from participating in oral activities since they thought that they couldn't perform as well as their peers.

As to factors related to personal issues, most of the student teachers (61%) indicated that they were suffering from feeling inhibited during oral activities. They noted that not remembering the words they intend to convey their messages with, forgetting what to say, and overthinking about grammar and pronunciation slow them down and inhibit their oral proficiency and fluency. The following comments depict these feelings:

Another reason that makes me feel stressed or anxious is to forget what I intend to say... Actually, I can put words together in my mind to make sentences but I can't transfer them to other people... Unfortunately, it interrupts my speech.

Other reason that makes me feel stressed is fear of forgetting what to say. This reason is probably my biggest fear... I am suffering from that a lot in daily life. What if I forget what to say, what am I going to do? I am trying to overcome that but I don't know how to do.

This result was also reported by Marzec-Stawiarska (2015) in her study conducted with 54 MA students specializing in EFL teaching. The researcher stated that more than half of the participants exhibited emotional reactions like lack of concentration, difficulty in retrieval, forgetting and the mind going blank during communicative activities. This state could be attributed to the fact that anxiety can be both an effect and a cause and there is a recursive

relationship between anxiety and achievement (Toth, 2007). In the same way, this theme suggests that as learners get anxious, their oral production is hindered and as they feel inhibited, their anxiety level increases.

Moreover, the findings show that student teachers' low self-esteem increases speaking apprehension and results in taking on passive roles in oral activities. Brown (2007) states that self-esteem refers to an individual's belief in his/her abilities to successfully undertake an activity and involves a process of self-evaluation through which the individual judges his/her worthiness. According to Kitano (2001), due to their negative perceptions about themselves, learners tend to perform poorly and have significantly higher anxiety levels. Similarly, almost half of the student teachers (46%) in the present study stated disbelief in their capabilities to communicate successfully in English. They further indicated that feelings of low self-esteem cause tension and disable them to engage in oral production actively as can be seen in the following excerpts:

Maybe, it is because of my thoughts about myself... Actually, I am my biggest judge. Every night I question myself about what I did during that day whether or not I fulfilled my expectations about me, lastly what and how I talked with others. There are some good things about this habit of mine. However, I sometimes can't help but to overthink. Overthinking generally results in finding faults in every behaviour of mine which triggers my anxiety about my speaking and I start to feel ashamed of myself and my inadequate skills. I do not want to think like that and feel humiliated instead I want to be more confident when it comes to speaking.

I feel very uncomfortable while speaking in English. Because, I don't speak with fluency, so I feel like I cannot speak when teacher calls upon my name. Moreover, my lack of confidence has an impact on this issue. If I believed in myself I wouldn't hesitate as much as now.

Admittedly, there is a close link between an individual's language anxiety and degree of self-esteem as aptly stated by Krashen (as cited in Young, 1991, p.427) "... the more I think about self-esteem, the more impressed I am with its impact. This is what causes anxiety in a lot of people."

Taken together, although it is a common expectation that as proficiency increases, foreign language anxiety declines (see Liu, 2006), the findings obtained from the student teachers' responses broadly support the work of other studies indicating that learners with higher proficiency levels also experience speaking apprehension in the target language mostly because of personal and interpersonal factors (e.g. Abrar, Failasofah, Fajaryani & Masbirorotni, 2016; Bekleyen, 2004; Kitano, 2001; Marzec-Stawiarska, 2015; Toth, 2015; Tum, 2015). According to Toth (2007), that advanced learners' detection of their mistakes easily induce feelings of embarrassment and anger in them is one of the possible explanations for higher levels of anxiety among competent users of foreign language. What is more, the results denote that personal and interpersonal variables are interactional factors influencing one another. It is therefore suggested that along with academic achievement, educational institutions should take emotional and social well-being of learners into account by employing classroom techniques that can help learners fulfill their true potential.

2. What are the perceptions of second-year student teachers in relation to the overall impact of podcast-intertwined collaborative tasks on reducing speaking anxiety?

In order to help the participants reduce their speaking anxiety stemming primarily from fear of negative evaluation, competitive thoughts, feelings of inhibition and low self-esteem, an approach based on the integration of collaborative in- and out-of-class study has been adopted to create a positive classroom atmosphere and to allow learners to experience group membership and a sense of accomplishment as a means to bolster self-esteem in them. Table 2 presents a lucid summary of the student teachers' perceptions about how podcast-

intertwined collaborative tasks allowed them to alleviate the tension they go through during oral performances.

Table 2. *Second-year student teachers' perceptions of podcast-intertwined collaborative tasks on reducing speaking anxiety*

Categories	%	Themes	%
Enhancing social interaction	89	Building a sense of community	100
Establishing an affective climate	64		
Fostering meaningful learning	29		
Improving communication skills	75	Promoting sense of self-efficacy	89
Increasing self-confidence	43		

Student teachers reported that the entertaining nature and rich variety of topics and activities created a warm and fuzzy environment, increased interdependence between class members, fostered supportive relationships and consequently helped them feel like they were members of a community and the most important thing was to successfully accomplish the tasks rather than worrying over making mistakes.

Enhanced social interaction was one of the most pervasive themes that emerged from the data. It is encouraging to compare this finding with that suggested by Oxford (1997) who noted in her preliminary article that working cooperatively improves poor relations among classmates, enhances tolerance, eliminates prejudice and increases intercultural understanding. In the same way, the majority of the participants (89%) stated that both in- and out-of-class collaborative tasks increased the interaction and communication among class members and decreased the apprehension they experienced during oral production as exemplified in the following quotes:

When I heard that we would use podcasts in our classes, I remembered that I felt excited. I believe that we did a lot of good podcasts during this term... Each time I had listened to podcasts, I was proud of all of us. We developed better relationships with our classmates. I started to talk to my classmates whom I had never talked during the whole two years, and I regret not talking to them before. One of the reasons of our speaking anxiety was the fact that we refrained from each other. We were afraid of being humiliated. With podcasts, we started to talk our different classmates in every week since our groups had changed every week. So, we learnt about each other and we began to feel more comfortable. Thanks to this, I started feel more relaxed when I spoke in English with my friends.

Second, there is this group work reality. When you do something with your group members, that task is getting easier and easier for you. In group works, there are other people to help you and cooperate with you to achieve the task. And you are not alone with them. This feeling, not to be alone, is so good and assuring. I think that being a group is one of the most relaxing factors for reducing speaking anxiety.

These findings were in line with those of İbrahim et al. (2015) who pointed out that learners do not feel isolated from the rest of the class, depend on each other in their search of knowledge, support one another while carrying out tasks and feel like a part of community in collaborative classrooms. It is also suggested that learners do not feel anxious during interactive tasks, since collaborative activities provide learners with opportunities to negotiate and share their ideas freely (Tinzmann, 1990).

Closely related to the category of enhanced social interaction, the concept of having an affective classroom environment was another merit of collaboration in reducing anxiety that

most of the participants (64%) mentioned. According to Zhang (2010), since communication lies at the very heart of language classrooms, establishing a learning environment where learners do feel relaxed is vital and collaborative learning can help practitioners to create such a social and affective climate. In a similar vein, explaining how the collaborative atmosphere in the classroom made her feel relaxed and encouraged her to participate in oral activities, one of the student teachers stated:

So far, I have studied in traditional classes. In those classes, as we all know well, we were always taking notes and memorizing things. Our teachers were telling us what to do and we were doing all of them. So it was not effective teaching... When I came to university, I began to speak in English but I realized that I have speaking anxiety. However, with this lesson, everything began to change. It took time but it was totally worth it. Interactive tasks that we used in class provided us with funny, motivating and enjoyable class time. I remembered that in some classes I laughed out loud. So I felt relaxed most of the class times. When I felt relaxed and thanks to fun activities, I wanted to talk more and more.

Similarly, another student teacher noted:

We prepared a chicken recipe, we tried to stay alive on a deserted island, we talked about our regrets just like we were in group therapy, we became an investigator who tried to solve a crime, etc. During all of these, I enjoyed and tried to complete the task while having fun with the whole class. When you are feeling fine and entertained, you don't feel anxious or stressed. The topics were also the ones that we are highly interested in which made the tasks easier to complete and which made us speak more fluently.

These findings also go in line with those of Effiong (2015) who suggest that language classrooms should be considered as a social venue by learners to experience less anxiety while speaking in English. What's more, Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) suggest that creating a cooperative, friendly and comfortable learning environment helps learners relax through enjoyable activities and enable them to cope more effectively with language anxiety.

One of the strategies Alrabai (2014) proffered to induce positive changes in learners' foreign language anxiety is to promote collaborative learning in which learners get engaged in learning tasks. Given meaning is primary and language is a means to an end (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) it is suggested that collaborative activities enable learners to concentrate on fulfilling tasks rather than experiencing fear of being negatively evaluated by others. Likewise, some of the participants (29%) in the study referred to the importance of meaningful learning experiences in which their focus was on accomplishing the goals of the lesson rather than the bits and pieces of the target language as the comments below fully illustrate:

When we did an interactive task for the first time I didn't even realize what we were doing. I and my group friends only focused on the task, I didn't notice the grammar mistakes or any kind of syntactic error or I can say that I didn't care whether there was a mistake or not... Because I knew that we were not judging each other during activities and there is also no peer evaluation, I didn't get anxious while speaking. Even if I felt stressed, I knew that no one is thinking about grammatical forms of my speech and this thought made me feel relaxed a lot.

Throughout this term, we focused on lots of different topics. We solved a crime, we fell on a desert island, etc. and there was only one aim in our mind: finding an appropriate solution... Our focus was generally on the topic that needs to be solved. So, in some cases, I was even not aware of my speaking English very effectively... Later, through practicing in all those tasks, I recognized that I don't feel stressed or anxious anymore and the peers around me weren't focusing on how I was speaking, but trying to understand what I was saying. It was my biggest fear. I was always thinking like 'What if I say or pronounce something ridiculous and they laugh? ... Tasks in this

class were designed to promote communication as well as awareness of the target language by keeping you unconsciously busy with it.

Lastly, promoting self-efficacy was another salient theme that pervaded the majority of student teachers' oral communication experiences through collaborative tasks. As a result of engaging in a variety of activities, working in a supportive learning environment, practicing through podcasts repeatedly, interacting with different class members, focusing on functions rather than forms and experiencing a sense of accomplishment at the end of collaborative activities, 75% of the participants reported that their communication skills were positively influenced and 43% of them stated that their self-esteem increased. The following excerpts depict this theme:

Thanks to interactive tasks, we learned to listen to each other and respond to each other immediately. Before these activities, I used to focus on answering without listening to people, but now, I realize that first I listen and then answer.

...the more I practice something the better I become. I practiced a lot through podcasts... Listening to my voice, my tone showed my mistakes, and I tried to not to do these mistakes again...it helped me reduce my anxiety and improve my pronunciation. So, I think I began to feel more relaxed when I speak compared to the beginning of the term...

... when I listened to our podcasts, I saw that I can speak fluently and correctly. But, to do this I needed practice. For creating podcast I did practice and I improved myself ... Then I understood that the more practice the more fluency. When I speak fluently I feel myself good and this reduces my anxiety.

These findings evidently match those observed in earlier studies. For instance, Achmad and Yusuf (2014) highlight that taking part in collaborative activities help learners develop social skills like turn taking, politeness and respect in communicative activities. In a similar sense, Ur (1996) states that learners develop their oral fluency through group works thanks to increasing talk-time. Zhang (2010) epitomizes this theme noting that collaborative learning empowers learners with discourse control, provide them with more practicing opportunities through which they can promote their accuracy and fluency, makes them feel more competent at conversational skills and as a result, reduces anxiety. Focusing particularly on the significance of podcasts in developing oral fluency, Sze (2006) states that since creating podcasts allows learners to rehearse the content for several times, work collaboratively, practice the language behind the scenes, and have product and a real audience at the end, they offer huge benefits for language learners to overcome their oral communication anxiety.

Overall; student teachers' reflections indicated that intertwining in- and out-of-class learning through collaborative activities was highly effective in helping them alleviate their speaking anxiety resulting from fear of negative evaluation, competitive thoughts, sense of inhibition and low self-esteem given that this intervention offered a relaxing learning climate, fostered humane and caring relations, increased engagement on task, promoted proficiency through constant practicing and enhanced self-esteem through task achievement.

Based on the insights gained from these findings, there are a number of implications that can be drawn for language practitioners. Trainers of advanced learners of English need to be aware that higher proficiency does not imply anxiety-free oral communication since foreign language anxiety is a situation-specific phenomenon. They should not simply consider their anxious learners' low performance in oral activities as lacking proficiency, motivation or positive attitudes. To the contrary, practitioners should assume the role of researchers and understand the reasons underlying their learners' feelings of anxiety. Since awareness is the first step to solve any problem, it is thus essential for practitioners to help higher proficiency

learners suffering from communication apprehension realize the factors that heighten their tension in oral production. This should be accompanied by a carefully-designed action plan to respond to learners' needs appropriately. Because anxiety results primarily from the dynamic interplay between personal and interpersonal factors (Young, 1991), engaging learners in meaningful activities in supportive learning environments where they can work cooperatively, develop humane relations and discover their own capabilities is of considerable importance to help them overcome their anxiety. Language practitioners should also intertwine in-class learning with out-of-class facilities, make their learners aware of the availability of various instructional technologies (Korucu-Kis & Ozmen, 2019a, 2019b) and encourage them to utilize these resources outside the classroom to use the target language with their peers within less limited time conditions (Korucu-Kis, 2020). In summary, these findings suggest that language practitioners can have a profound influence on reducing learners' speaking anxiety by improving both the academic achievement and the emotional well-being of learners through in- and out-of-class collaborative activities seasoned with CMC tools like podcasts.

5. Conclusions

This article reported on an action research designed to identify the sources of EFL student teachers' speaking anxiety and address the concerns generated by these factors. The results revealed that the majority of student teachers were experiencing anxiety in oral production primarily due to fear of negative evaluation, competitiveness, feelings of inhibition and lack of self-esteem. As has been suggested, these findings lent support to the adoption of a sociocultural perspective and a collaborative learning approach was implemented both inside the classroom and with the help of podcasts outside the classroom. Participants' retrospective reflections indicated that the intervention was helpful in alleviating their speaking anxiety since it provided them with an innovative learning experience whereby they were working cooperatively in a positive learning environment to achieve learning goals, focusing on the meaning rather than language forms, having frequent opportunities to develop their communication skills and sensing self-efficacy over the accomplishment of tasks.

Although the present study was designed to address to the speaking anxiety of learners with higher proficiency levels in a Turkish setting, its implications go beyond this particular context. Teachers of lower proficiency levels or language practitioners in different settings may utilize from the procedures followed to add variety into their classrooms and help their learners ease the tension they feel in communicative activities. Nevertheless, despite the robust findings of the study, with a small sample size (N=28) and the uniqueness of each context, caution must also be applied as the findings might not be generalizable. Moreover, since foreign language anxiety of student teachers is an under-investigated area, further research is needed to develop alternative anxiety-coping strategies and implement these in teacher education programs to help student teachers overcome their anxiety since it may be likely that these anxious would-be teachers will be affected by the negative influence of anxiety in their on-the-job performance.

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