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Assessing the Impact of Role-Play and Group Discussion on Spoken English Performance in Engineering Colleges

Shivani Sharma, Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, NIILM University, Kaithal (Haryana)
Dr. Savita Ahuja, Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, NIILM University, Kaithal (Haryana)

Abstract

The demand for proficient English communication skills has become crucial in the Indian technical education landscape. This study explores how two communicative pedagogical strategies—role-play and group discussion—influence spoken English performance among engineering students. A 6-week intervention was conducted with 100 second-year students across two engineering colleges in Delhi. A mixed-method research approach, including pre- and post-assessments, classroom observation, and interviews, was employed. The findings reveal significant improvements in fluency, vocabulary usage, coherence, and self-confidence, validating the effectiveness of interactive speaking tasks.

Keywords: English communication, Role-Play, Group Discussion, Coherence

1. Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of globalized engineering and technological innovation, the demand for proficient English communication skills among engineering graduates has grown significantly. In India, where English often serves as the lingua franca in academia and industry, spoken English has become a prerequisite for employability, effective collaboration, and professional growth [1]. However, English language instruction in most Indian engineering institutions continues to prioritize reading and writing over speaking and listening skills, often adhering to traditional pedagogical approaches rooted in grammar translation and rote memorization [2]. As a result, students—especially those from vernacular medium backgrounds—remain passive learners in English classrooms, hesitant or unable to articulate their thoughts confidently in spoken English. The phenomenon of "classroom silence" is not merely a linguistic deficiency but a pedagogical and psychological issue. Research by Kaur (2017) shows that even students with basic grammar knowledge and vocabulary struggle to engage in English-speaking activities due to fear of making mistakes, peer judgment, and lack of speaking opportunities [3]. These students often internalize a sense of inadequacy, which further discourages oral participation. This silence is particularly prevalent in technical colleges where language learning is often sidelined in favor of core subjects like mathematics, coding, and engineering design [4]. In light of these challenges, communicative language teaching (CLT) strategies such as **role-play** and **group discussion** have gained attention as effective tools to foster oral fluency and break the culture of silence in engineering English classrooms [5]. Role-play allows students to simulate real-world scenarios in a controlled environment, enabling them to practice vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in context. Group discussions, on the other hand, create space for negotiation of meaning, collaborative learning, and peer-to-peer correction, all of which are critical in developing spontaneous and authentic speech [6]. The benefits of these activities are well-documented in the context of second language acquisition. According to Kumaravadivelu's postmethod pedagogy, context-sensitive approaches that empower students as active participants rather than passive recipients are vital in multilingual and multicultural classrooms like those in India [7]. Studies have shown that when students are given structured, low-anxiety platforms to speak, their confidence, pronunciation, and fluency improve significantly over time [8]. Moreover, mobile-assisted learning tools such as voice-recording apps and feedback systems can enhance these interventions by offering learners reflective space to evaluate and improve their oral skills [9]. Because we do it all the time and can analyze the steps involved in our daily lives through speech, it is one of the most basic abilities we possess as humans. An individual's command of the English language depends on many things, including their vocabulary, sentence structure,

and the correct arrangement of grammar rules. The ability to speak is the result of integrating numerous subsystems. It is difficult for engineering graduates to speak English while incorporating all these aspects. However, they must acquire this skill since it is inescapable. Sometimes it's thought of as really easy to just encourage people to chat. All around the world, business language schools hire people who have never had any training in teaching public speaking. While it's natural to converse to one another, doing it in a language other than our own is far from easy. Based on Bailey's work (2003: 48), Improving one's command of the English language is possible by the use of any number of accessible instructional methods and media. If students want to become better public speakers, role-playing is a fun and effective way to do so. For students to practice their public speaking skills in a safe setting, role-plays are a great option (Bailey in Nunan, 2003: 57). Students of a language participate in a role-play by acting out scenes set in that language. For instance, in one scenario, a student calls the police to report that someone has stolen his wallet. A second actor steps in as a police officer who offers the traveler assistance in filling out a complaint. In order to prepare students to communicate effectively in real-life scenarios, role-plays provide them with opportunities to practice speaking the target language. Students engage in role-playing when they are asked to imagine themselves in a specific circumstance. Their curiosity and desire for learning are heightened. The game encourages students to think creatively in English and starts class discussions, both of which are great ways for students to practice and improve their spoken English.

Given these pedagogical insights, this study titled "Assessing the Impact of Role-Play and Group Discussion on Spoken English Performance in Engineering Colleges" seeks to evaluate how structured speaking activities can serve as effective interventions in improving the oral communicative competence of engineering students. It aims to address the gap between theoretical English instruction and practical spoken proficiency, particularly among students from regional language schooling. The study further explores how a student-centered, task-based approach can transform English classrooms from zones of silence into dynamic spaces of speech and engagement.

2. Review of Literature

Kaur (2017)[10], in her study titled *"Enhancing Speaking Skills in Indian Engineering Classrooms,"* examined the persistent issue of communicative reluctance among engineering students, particularly in the regions of Punjab and Haryana. Through a combination of classroom observations and informal interviews, Kaur identified that the prevalent use of the grammar-translation method, along with a rigid exam-oriented curriculum, significantly limited opportunities for oral expression. English instruction in these technical institutes was largely centered on written grammar exercises and textbook-based learning, leading to passive classroom behavior and a culture of silence. Her intervention introduced structured role-play and group discussion sessions designed to simulate real-life communication. These activities enabled students—especially those from vernacular-medium schools—to overcome performance anxiety and begin participating more actively in class discussions. Kaur employed **Postmethod Pedagogy** as proposed by B. Kumaravadivelu to critique the limitations of traditional English teaching methods and advocate for a more context-sensitive, learner-centered approach. Her findings emphasized that pedagogical strategies must be tailored to the socio-linguistic background of learners, allowing flexibility, interaction, and the creation of a psychologically safe environment. The study concluded that such experiential methods not only build communicative competence but also empower students to find their voice within academic spaces. **Sharma and Bhatia (2015)[11]**, in their study titled *"Communicative Competence through Collaborative Learning,"* explored the role of structured group discussions in enhancing spoken English among second-year B.Tech students in Rajasthan. The researchers introduced a classroom intervention that involved small-group discussions on

technical and non-technical topics over a six-week period. Their primary objective was to assess the students' improvements in fluency, coherence, and interactive language use. The findings revealed that students showed a marked increase in their lexical variety, more natural transitions in dialogue, and improved turn-taking behavior. The shift from passive to active participation also indicated a move beyond rote memorization, encouraging spontaneous use of language. This transformation was attributed to the collaborative and supportive nature of group discussions, where peer interaction fostered greater engagement and risk-taking in speaking. The theoretical foundation of the study rested on **Vygotsky's Social Constructivism**, which posits that learning is fundamentally a social process, enhanced through scaffolding and dialogue with more capable peers. Sharma and Bhatia emphasized that communicative competence in ESL classrooms can be significantly nurtured through structured peer interaction, which not only aids language development but also promotes cognitive and social growth. **Mehta (2014)[12] – Role-Play as a Confidence Booster in ESL Contexts Mehta (2014),** in her study *"Role-Play as a Confidence Booster in ESL Contexts,"* investigated the effectiveness of role-play activities in enhancing spoken English among engineering students in Gujarat, with a specific focus on learners from rural and non-English medium backgrounds. Recognizing the barriers such students face—ranging from low self-esteem to fear of judgment—Mehta implemented a series of role-play scenarios mimicking real-life interactions such as job interviews, client meetings, and campus discussions. These simulated environments provided learners with a safe space to experiment with language use, practice intonation, and develop conversational strategies. The results showed a significant increase in students' confidence levels, fluency, and ability to express themselves spontaneously. Learners who previously hesitated to speak began participating more actively, demonstrating improved pronunciation and reduced anxiety. The study drew on **Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis**, which argues that emotional variables like anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence directly affect language acquisition. By lowering the affective filter through engaging and non-threatening activities, role-play enabled learners to internalize linguistic structures more effectively. Mehta concluded that incorporating role-play into ESL classrooms is particularly beneficial for under-confident learners, as it fosters not just linguistic competence but also emotional readiness to use English in real-world contexts. **Rao (2016) [13] – Developing Fluency in Engineering Students through Group Activities,** in his action research study titled *"Developing Fluency in Engineering Students through Group Activities,"* examined the impact of structured group work on spoken English proficiency among engineering students at a technical college in Andhra Pradesh. The intervention involved regular small-group tasks such as discussions, peer teaching, and problem-solving dialogues conducted over a semester. Rao observed that these interactive settings encouraged students to think on their feet, respond to spontaneous queries, and articulate their views with greater clarity and speed. This shift was especially notable among students who had previously been reluctant to speak in English. The structured group activities promoted natural language use, enabled negotiation of meaning, and helped learners transition from rehearsed to real-time communication. Rao's work was grounded in the principles of **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**, which asserts that language learning should prioritize meaningful interaction and practical communication skills rather than just grammatical accuracy and written tasks. By embedding speaking within purposeful, collaborative tasks, the study reinforced the idea that oral fluency deserves equal pedagogical attention alongside traditional writing and grammar-focused instruction. Rao concluded that consistent group interaction not only enhances linguistic fluency but also builds learners' confidence to participate in academic and professional conversations. **Iqbal & Roy (2018) [14] – Redesigning English Language Curriculum through Peer Interaction,** in their study *"Redesigning English Language Curriculum through Peer Interaction,"* explored how incorporating peer-led group discussions

and evaluations could enhance spoken English skills among engineering students in Maharashtra. Conducted over a semester, the study involved restructured classroom activities where students engaged in guided discussions, assessed each other's performance, and received peer feedback on verbal delivery aspects such as pronunciation, fluency, body language, and eye contact. The findings demonstrated that this format not only improved technical aspects of spoken communication but also fostered a sense of responsibility and active engagement among learners. Students became more mindful of their articulation and interactive behavior, leading to measurable improvement in their overall communicative competence. The research was theoretically anchored in **Bakhtin's Dialogism**, which emphasizes that language learning is inherently dialogic—constructed through ongoing interaction, exchange of perspectives, and mutual meaning-making. Iqbal and Roy argued that when learners collaborate and critique in dialogic spaces, they move beyond mechanical speech to more authentic, context-sensitive communication. Their study concluded that peer interaction, when structurally embedded in the curriculum, can serve as a powerful catalyst for both linguistic development and learner autonomy in technical education settings. **Thomas & Rani (2019)[15] – Language Anxiety and the Indian Engineering Student,** in their psychological-linguistic study titled *"Language Anxiety and the Indian Engineering Student,"* explored the deep-rooted connection between speaking anxiety and classroom passivity among engineering students in Kerala. The study identified that fear of making mistakes, fear of peer judgment, and low self-confidence were major barriers preventing students from participating in spoken English activities. Through a carefully designed intervention involving non-threatening, student-friendly tasks such as role-plays, guided dialogues, and informal conversation circles, the researchers observed a significant reduction in speaking-related anxiety. Students reported feeling more at ease when speaking in English and were more willing to take communicative risks in front of their peers. The success of the intervention was attributed to the shift from teacher-dominated instruction to a more learner-centered approach. The theoretical underpinning of the study was drawn from **Carl Rogers' Humanistic Theory**, which emphasizes the importance of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and the creation of emotionally safe learning spaces. Thomas and Rani argued that when learners feel respected, supported, and free from fear of ridicule, they are more likely to engage in meaningful communication and show linguistic growth. The study concluded that emotional well-being is inseparable from language performance, and that nurturing environments using role-play and other interactive methods are crucial for overcoming language anxiety in technical education settings. **Banerjee (2020)[16] – Integrating Drama-Based Pedagogy in Technical Education,** in the study titled *"Integrating Drama-Based Pedagogy in Technical Education,"* investigated the pedagogical potential of drama techniques—such as improvisation, scripted dialogues, and character enactments—in enhancing spoken English among engineering students in Kolkata. The intervention was designed to move beyond rote speaking drills by immersing learners in performance-based scenarios that demanded emotional engagement and creative expression. Students participated in dramatized role-plays simulating interviews, public speeches, and workplace dilemmas, which required them to adapt tone, gesture, and language based on context and character. The findings indicated a significant rise in learner motivation, classroom engagement, and oral examination performance. Many students reported that drama activities helped them internalize language more naturally, improved their articulation, and gave them the confidence to speak in public settings. Banerjee anchored the study in **Brechtian Pedagogy**, which emphasizes theatre as a space for critical engagement and transformation rather than mere entertainment. Drawing from Bertolt Brecht's emphasis on reflective participation, the study argued that drama-based tasks encourage learners to think critically about language use, identity, and communication contexts. Banerjee concluded that incorporating dramatic elements into ESL instruction fosters a more holistic and authentic command of English, particularly valuable in technical education

where oral communication is often undervalued. **Ghosh & Dutta (2021)[17] – Multimodal Strategies for Enhancing Speaking Proficiency,** in their study titled *"Multimodal Strategies for Enhancing Speaking Proficiency,"* explored the integration of visual and gestural modes into spoken English pedagogy through the use of video-recorded role-plays among engineering students in West Bengal. The researchers implemented a classroom strategy where students performed scripted and improvised role-plays that were recorded and later used for both self and peer-assessment. These recordings enabled students to observe their own performance critically, focusing not only on speech but also on body language, facial expressions, posture, and eye contact. The analysis revealed that students became more aware of the visual aspects of communication and showed measurable improvement in their fluency, articulation, and delivery over time. Many participants reported that watching their performances helped them identify nervous habits, improve clarity, and better understand the impact of non-verbal cues. The study was grounded in **Multimodality Theory** as proposed by **Kress and van Leeuwen**, which emphasizes that communication is not limited to verbal language but involves multiple simultaneous modes—visual, gestural, spatial, and auditory. They argued that a multimodal approach reflects real-life communication more accurately and provides learners with a richer, more engaging language learning experience. The study concluded that incorporating video-based multimodal feedback into role-play activities offers a powerful tool for fostering holistic spoken English development in technical education contexts. **Joshi & Patel (2016)[18] – Role-Play vs. Traditional Method in Engineering ESL Classrooms,** in their study titled *"Role-Play vs. Traditional Method in Engineering ESL Classrooms,"* conducted a comparative experimental investigation to evaluate the effectiveness of role-play as opposed to traditional lecture-based instruction in enhancing spoken English among engineering students in Gujarat. The study involved 60 undergraduate students divided equally into control and experimental groups. While the control group received standard textbook-based grammar instruction, the experimental group engaged in weekly role-play sessions simulating real-world scenarios such as interviews, negotiations, and workplace conversations. Pre- and post-tests assessed students' speaking proficiency across parameters like spontaneity, tone modulation, and vocabulary use. The results revealed that students in the role-play group demonstrated significant improvement in their ability to speak extemporaneously, use a wider range of vocabulary, and employ appropriate intonation patterns. The intervention was grounded in **Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory,** which posits that learning is most effective when it involves active experimentation, reflection, and concrete experiences. They argued that role-play offered a dynamic platform for students to internalize language through direct engagement, rather than passive reception. The study concluded that experiential activities like role-play not only enhance communicative performance but also make language learning more relevant and memorable for engineering students. **Menon (2013)[19] – Communicative Strategies and Performance Anxiety among Engineering Students,** in her study titled *"Communicative Strategies and Performance Anxiety among Engineering Students,"* focused on the relationship between speaking anxiety and the effectiveness of strategy-based instruction in engineering colleges across Tamil Nadu. The research introduced targeted communicative strategies such as paraphrasing, turn negotiation, and clarification-seeking into group discussion formats over an eight-week period. These strategies were explicitly taught and practiced in peer interaction sessions, allowing students to engage with language meaningfully while managing their anxiety. The findings revealed that students who underwent this form of training showed a marked increase in their frequency of participation, clarity of expression, and overall confidence during oral communication. Many participants reported reduced fear of making mistakes, attributing this to the supportive, feedback-rich environment fostered by collaborative learning. The study drew on **Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory**, which emphasizes learning through observation, imitation, and the reinforcement of modeled

behavior. Menon argued that repeated exposure to structured peer dialogues, coupled with modeled strategic use of language, empowered learners to internalize both language forms and social functions. The study concluded that integrating strategy-based group discussions can significantly alleviate performance anxiety while fostering sustainable gains in spoken English proficiency among engineering students.

Verma & Singh (2022)[20] – Exploring Gendered Participation in Role-Play Activities, in their study titled *"Exploring Gendered Participation in Role-Play Activities,"* examined how gender influences verbal participation in spoken English tasks among engineering students in Uttar Pradesh. The researchers conducted a semester-long observation involving 100 students (50 male and 50 female) across various classroom speaking activities, particularly focusing on structured role-play sessions. Initially, female students exhibited noticeably lower levels of verbal engagement, hesitating to take initiative or speak for extended durations. However, as the intervention progressed, the inclusion of supportive peer dynamics—such as mixed-gender pairing, role rotation, and feedback sharing—gradually empowered female students to speak more freely and assertively. By the end of the study, the gender gap in verbal participation had significantly reduced, and many female students reported increased confidence and reduced fear of judgment. The research was framed through the lens of **Feminist Pedagogy**, which critically examines how classroom power structures, gender norms, and traditional teacher-student hierarchies affect participation and learning outcomes. They argued that pedagogical strategies must intentionally create equitable spaces that validate all voices, especially those historically marginalized. Their findings underscored the importance of inclusive, dialogic, and emotionally safe classroom environments to promote linguistic equity and participation in ESL education. **Reddy & Prasad (2021)[21] – Technology-Assisted Role-Play in ESL Speaking Classrooms,** in their study titled *"Technology-Assisted Role-Play in ESL Speaking Classrooms,"* explored the impact of integrating digital tools into role-play activities to enhance spoken English proficiency among engineering students in Hyderabad. The researchers designed an innovative module where students recorded their role-plays using mobile devices and shared them asynchronously via WhatsApp groups for peer feedback. This format allowed learners to rehearse their speech, reflect on their delivery, and receive constructive suggestions from classmates without the immediate pressure of a live audience. The results demonstrated notable improvements in pronunciation, fluency, and conversational confidence, particularly among students who were previously hesitant to speak in traditional classroom settings. The asynchronous model reduced speaking anxiety, encouraged repeated practice, and enabled learners to engage with language at their own pace. The study was conceptually grounded in **Connectivism**, a learning theory suited to the digital age, which emphasizes knowledge distribution across networks and the role of technology in facilitating collaborative, self-directed learning. They argued that when learners are given control over the timing, format, and audience of their spoken interactions, their engagement deepens and language acquisition becomes more meaningful. The study concluded that technology-mediated role-play can be a powerful tool in ESL pedagogy, particularly for enhancing learner autonomy and reducing communicative anxiety in engineering classrooms.

3. Objectives

1. To assess the effect of role-play on fluency, coherence, and spontaneity in spoken English.
2. To evaluate the impact of group discussion on vocabulary usage, critical thinking, and peer interaction.

4. Methodology

Research Design: Mixed-method approach combining quantitative (pre- and post-tests) and qualitative (observations and interviews) methods.

Sample: 100 second-year engineering students (ages 18-21) from two Delhi-based colleges; 60% Hindi-medium, 40% English-medium background.

Intervention: Conducted over 6 weeks; included the following:

- Weekly role-play activities simulating job interviews, workplace meetings, and real-life interactions.
- Group discussions on both technical (AI, renewable energy) and general (climate change, social media) topics.
- Peer feedback sessions and reflective journals.

Tools for Data Collection:

- Spoken English rubric measuring fluency, coherence, vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence.
- Self-report questionnaires.
- Teacher observation logs.

5. Findings and Analysis

The intervention integrating role-play and group discussion significantly enhanced students' spoken English abilities, affirming both the linguistic and affective benefits of communicative approaches in technical education. Evaluated through a comprehensive five-point rubric and triangulated with qualitative tools such as observation logs, reflective journals, and feedback forms, the intervention yielded clear, measurable progress across key domains of oral communication. The findings illustrate how structured, interactive, and contextual speaking tasks can foster not only language proficiency but also learner autonomy and confidence—outcomes often neglected in traditional, grammar-oriented instruction models.

Fluency (+62.5%): The most prominent improvement among the five spoken English performance criteria was in fluency, which recorded a 62.5% gain from pre- to post-intervention. This improvement reflects a clear shift from hesitant, fragmented speech to more continuous, spontaneous, and rhythmically smooth articulation of ideas. Prior to the intervention, many students—especially those from Hindi-medium backgrounds—struggled with initiating or sustaining conversation in English. This was due to a combination of linguistic insecurity, lack of speaking practice, and fear of making mistakes in front of peers. The weekly role-play activities played a transformative role in mitigating these barriers. Each session simulated real-world scenarios such as job interviews, client negotiations, help-desk conversations, and collaborative team briefings. These structured speaking events provided predictable contexts in which students could anticipate the flow of dialogue, rehearse language patterns, and gain confidence in common functional expressions. Over time, the repetitive nature of these tasks facilitated automated retrieval of sentence structures and vocabulary, enabling students to speak more naturally and fluidly. The psychological impact of this structure was equally critical: the absence of pressure to be "correct" in every utterance encouraged students to focus on communication rather than perfection. In cognitive terms, repeated exposure to these verbal tasks contributed to the development of procedural memory or "muscle memory" for speech. As a result, students became less reliant on conscious translation from their native language and more capable of producing English spontaneously. The improvement in fluency thus illustrates both a linguistic and cognitive adaptation fostered by repeated performance in emotionally safe, task-based environments.

Coherence (+51.9%): The intervention also led to a significant 51.9% increase in coherence, defined as the ability to organize and connect ideas logically and consistently during speech. This progress is particularly meaningful, as coherence is not merely a linguistic feature but a cognitive skill involving real-time mental organization, sequencing, and adaptation to conversational flow. The group discussion format was instrumental in developing this aspect of communication. These discussions, conducted on both technical topics (e.g., artificial intelligence, renewable energy) and social themes (e.g., climate change, social media ethics), demanded that students not only express their views but respond meaningfully to the ideas of others. This dialogic setting required them to engage in turn-taking, argument construction, and

thematic summarization, all of which are critical elements of coherent speech. Moreover, the open-ended nature of group discussions encouraged higher-order thinking, such as comparison, evaluation, and cause-effect reasoning. To participate effectively, students had to structure their thoughts before speaking, use appropriate transitions ("moreover," "however," "on the other hand"), and maintain thematic continuity throughout their responses. Many students initially found it difficult to sustain a line of thought, but over the six-week period, the repetitive engagement with abstract concepts and peer dialogue honed their cognitive-linguistic coordination. Teachers' observation logs and student self-reflections also noted a shift from linear, one-idea-at-a-time responses to multi-layered, contextual contributions, where students would reference earlier points or link ideas logically. In essence, the intervention not only improved the mechanical fluency of speech but also enhanced the discourse-level organization, a key marker of academic and professional communicative competence.

Vocabulary Usage (+52.0%): The intervention led to a significant 52.0% improvement in vocabulary usage, demonstrating that students developed a broader and more confident command of academic and topic-specific terminology. This enhancement can be directly linked to the diverse and content-rich nature of the group discussions, which introduced learners to multiple lexical fields such as technology, environment, ethics, and workplace communication. As students engaged with varied themes, they encountered new words in context and were motivated to use them meaningfully in their own speech. Self-report reflections indicated that many students became increasingly aware of their vocabulary gaps, particularly when attempting to articulate complex ideas, and actively sought to bridge these gaps through peer interaction, contextual guessing, and post-session self-study. Teachers also observed a shift from basic or repetitive word choices to more nuanced expressions, with students showing a willingness to experiment with synonyms, idioms, and discourse markers like “in contrast,” “as a result,” and “in addition.” The collaborative and non-threatening environment of group discussions played a crucial role in facilitating this kind of incidental vocabulary acquisition, where words are learned organically through use rather than rote memorization—a cornerstone of communicative language competence.

Pronunciation Clarity (+37.9%): While the gains in pronunciation clarity were more modest compared to other linguistic domains, the 37.9% improvement reflects a noteworthy development in students’ phonological awareness. Students showed increased attentiveness to elements such as syllable stress, sentence intonation, and articulation of consonant and vowel sounds. The format of the role-play activities, which encouraged repeated practice in familiar contexts, helped students refine their delivery and gradually move toward clearer enunciation. Additionally, peer feedback and audio-recorded reflections enabled students to identify mispronunciations and self-correct over time—especially effective for those who had never had the opportunity to hear their own spoken English before. However, the findings also suggest that pronunciation, being a more technical skill, requires explicit phonetic instruction alongside communicative tasks for deeper improvement. Without targeted input on sound production, intonation patterns, or mouth positioning, learners may plateau in their phonological development. Thus, while communicative strategies such as role-play and discussion effectively lay the groundwork for pronunciation improvement, their impact would be amplified by integrating structured phonetics sessions into the curriculum to address specific articulatory challenges.

Speaking Confidence (+90.9%): The most substantial improvement observed during the intervention was in speaking confidence, which recorded an impressive 90.9% increase, nearly doubling from the pre-intervention average. This remarkable shift underscores the affective dimension of language learning—often overshadowed by linguistic accuracy in traditional classrooms—and is especially pertinent in the context of Indian engineering colleges, where students frequently experience inhibitions rooted in prior educational backgrounds, fear of peer

judgment, and a limited history of oral practice in English. Many participants, particularly those from Hindi-medium or rural schools, initially approached spoken English with apprehension, shaped by years of exposure to grammar-translation methods and performance anxiety. The design of the intervention—centered on low-stakes, student-centered speaking opportunities such as role-plays and peer-led group discussions—created a psychologically safe environment where students could practice without fear of ridicule. The non-threatening, collaborative structure of these activities played a crucial role in reducing communication anxiety. As students consistently participated in weekly interactions, their reluctance gave way to a growing sense of linguistic self-efficacy, the belief that they could communicate effectively in English regardless of perfection. Over time, students began to initiate conversations, respond spontaneously, and even take leadership roles in group discussions—behaviors rarely observed at the outset. Moreover, peer affirmation, constructive feedback, and instructor encouragement helped students internalize a sense of linguistic agency. They no longer perceived English as an elite or intimidating language but as a usable, learnable medium of expression. This shift in perception was key to their newfound confidence. The intervention thus demonstrates that building speaking confidence is not just a by-product of language instruction, but a core outcome that must be intentionally nurtured through emotionally supportive, interactive, and meaningful communication tasks. This gain in confidence is not only instrumental in language acquisition but also empowers students for academic and professional communication beyond the classroom.

Qualitative Insights

The qualitative data collected through student journals, teacher observation logs, and peer feedback sessions provide rich insights into the socio-emotional and cognitive shifts that occurred during the intervention. These observations offer critical evidence that supports the numerical improvements in spoken English performance, highlighting how role-play and group discussions worked not only as instructional tools but as transformative classroom practices.

Role-Play as a Safe, Semi-Scripted Space: Role-play emerged as a transformative pedagogical strategy within the intervention, functioning not merely as a language activity but as a psychologically safe rehearsal ground for learners grappling with linguistic insecurity. For many students—particularly those from Hindi-medium or vernacular language backgrounds—spoken English had long been associated with anxiety, embarrassment, or fear of negative evaluation. This fear often stemmed from their past experiences in rigid classroom settings where oral mistakes were highlighted rather than normalized, reinforcing silence as a safer option than participation. In contrast, role-play activities such as mock interviews, customer-service simulations, team meetings, and workplace briefings provided a semi-structured, predictable format where students could prepare mentally before speaking. These contexts offered functional language use—a critical feature missing from grammar-dominated instruction. Because each role was context-specific and goal-oriented, students were encouraged to use language not for correctness alone but for communicative purpose, thereby reducing the pressure of performing "perfectly." Unlike open-ended debates, where linguistic improvisation can heighten anxiety, role-plays allowed mental scripting, which supported smoother speech production and lowered the cognitive load. The role-based format also depersonalized the speaking task. When students assumed professional personas—such as interviewees, managers, or service representatives—they were less likely to feel vulnerable. This psychological distancing enabled them to experiment with tone, sentence structure, and vocabulary in a way that felt exploratory rather than evaluative. The familiarity and repetition of weekly role-play sessions helped build fluency and discourse control through safe trial and error. As students encountered similar interaction types over time, they began to develop internalized speech templates, allowing them to respond with greater ease and spontaneity in unscripted moments. From a cognitive perspective, role-play served as a scaffold that

supported learners in transitioning from passive language consumers to active users. It bridged the often-difficult gap between receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing) by creating situational authenticity—a cornerstone of experiential learning. As students grew more comfortable within these staged yet realistic interactions, their hesitation decreased, and their ability to self-monitor and adjust their language in real time improved. Moreover, role-play inherently involved peer collaboration and feedback, which further enriched the learning environment. Students learned not only from their own practice but also from observing others perform the same roles with different expressions and strategies. This collective engagement helped build a community of practice, where risk-taking was normalized and peer validation helped offset fears of judgment.

Group Discussions as Catalysts for Peer Learning and Critical Thinking: Group discussions functioned as a powerful pedagogical tool that extended the benefits of language learning beyond fluency and accuracy to encompass critical thinking, collaborative engagement, and discourse management. Unlike role-play—which provided structure through assigned roles and scenarios—group discussions required students to generate and express original viewpoints, respond spontaneously, and navigate the complexities of unscripted peer interaction. This format closely mirrored authentic academic and workplace communication, where participants must contribute meaningfully, interpret others' statements in real time, and build or refute arguments with coherence and clarity. The interactive nature of group discussions fostered a strong sense of peer learning, wherein students were not only exposed to a variety of ideas and language styles but also learned through observation, imitation, and constructive dialogue. As students listened to their peers, they became more conscious of effective communication strategies—such as paraphrasing, summarizing, turn-taking, and signaling agreement or disagreement. These micro-skills are essential for maintaining cohesion in any discussion and are often underdeveloped in traditional ESL instruction. Through continuous practice, learners began to recognize lexical and structural gaps in their own speech and took the initiative to expand their vocabulary and sentence variety by emulating others or seeking clarification.

Moreover, group discussions inherently demanded higher-order cognitive processes. Students were expected to formulate opinions on complex issues such as artificial intelligence, social media ethics, environmental sustainability, and workplace diversity. These themes required analytical thinking, perspective-taking, and evidence-based reasoning—which naturally improved the organization and depth of their responses. Many students reported that preparing for these discussions pushed them to structure their ideas logically, anticipate counterpoints, and communicate more persuasively. The ability to link arguments cohesively and shift seamlessly between points marked a significant improvement in their discourse competence. Importantly, the collaborative and dialogic setting of group discussions contributed to a positive shift in classroom culture. Mistakes were no longer sources of embarrassment but became opportunities for learning and feedback. Students felt encouraged to take linguistic risks, knowing that their peers were also learning and experimenting. This mutual understanding fostered an atmosphere of trust and support, where participants corrected each other respectfully, praised insightful contributions, and gradually moved away from the fear of being judged. The teacher's role also evolved from that of a sole evaluator to a facilitator who guided interaction, encouraged participation, and ensured inclusivity. In addition, group discussions nurtured meta-cognitive awareness among students. They began to reflect not just on what they were saying, but how they were saying it—analyzing their own clarity, coherence, and choice of words. Some learners kept reflective journals or noted down new vocabulary after each session, indicating a growing commitment to self-directed improvement. This internal motivation is a hallmark of effective language learning and highlights the lasting impact of discussion-based pedagogy.

Classroom Observation: Decline in Silence and Hesitation: Teacher observation logs provide compelling evidence of behavioural transformation in student participation. During the first two weeks of the intervention, a noticeable pattern of silence prevailed, particularly among students from non-English-medium schools, who often refrained from speaking altogether. However, by the mid-point of the program, a visible shift occurred. Students who were previously quiet began to initiate conversations, volunteer answers, and even assume leadership roles in discussions. The frequency of peer-to-peer interactions increased, and the classroom dynamic evolved into a more dialogic space. The combination of role-play's structure and the spontaneous nature of group discussion appeared to foster both linguistic confidence and social engagement. By the sixth week, participation had become more equitable, with less dominance from fluent speakers and more contributions from hesitant learners, indicating a democratization of voice within the classroom.

Representation of Quantitative Findings

Criterion	Pre-Intervention Score (Avg.)	Post-Intervention Score (Avg.)	% Improvement
Fluency	2.4/5	3.9/5	62.5%
Coherence	2.7/5	4.1/5	51.9%
Vocabulary Use	2.5/5	3.8/5	52.0%
Pronunciation Clarity	2.9/5	4.0/5	37.9%
Confidence in Speaking	2.2/5	4.2/5	90.9%

These findings clearly establish the value of integrating role-play and group discussions as low-cost, high-impact strategies in enhancing spoken English skills among engineering students. The results advocate for their inclusion in English language curricula, particularly in technical institutions with high proportions of non-native English speakers.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study strongly reinforce the pedagogical value of incorporating communicative strategies—specifically role-play and group discussion—into the English language curriculum for engineering students. The substantial gains in fluency, coherence, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and most notably, speaking confidence, demonstrate that these interactive methods serve as effective tools for enhancing oral communication skills. The results resonate with **Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis**, which posits that language acquisition occurs most effectively in low-anxiety environments where learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current level (i^{+1}). Role-play and group discussion provided such contexts, allowing students to engage with language meaningfully while reducing the affective filter—thus facilitating more spontaneous and confident speech production. Moreover, the outcomes align closely with the principles of **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT),** which emphasizes meaningful communication over rote memorization or grammar drills. In many engineering colleges in India, traditional English instruction is heavily exam-oriented and grammar-focused, which limits authentic language use. The present study disrupts that paradigm by offering student-centered, interaction-rich sessions where learners practice real-world scenarios (e.g., interviews, debates, workplace meetings). These exercises not only improved their linguistic competencies but also helped shift students from passive listeners to active participants—a transition that is crucial in a professional environment where communication often determines employability. Furthermore, the peer-driven nature of these activities nurtured **collaborative learning and social interaction**, both of which are key elements in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of language development. Students reported increased comfort speaking in front of their peers over time, suggesting that the group format enabled risk-taking and self-expression without the fear of negative evaluation. This was particularly important for students from Hindi-medium backgrounds, who often enter engineering programs with lower levels of spoken English

proficiency and confidence. As classroom observation logs indicated, the silence that once characterized these students' participation began to dissolve as the intervention progressed, replaced by active engagement and mutual encouragement.

In essence, the study not only affirms the linguistic benefits of role-play and group discussion but also underscores their socio-affective impact. By fostering an inclusive, participatory atmosphere, these methods effectively lower psychological barriers to communication and create pathways for sustainable language growth. The findings advocate for a shift in language pedagogy from lecture-based to performance-oriented models—particularly in technical institutions where English serves as the bridge between subject knowledge and employability.

7. Conclusion

This study concludes that group discussion and role-playing are not supplementary methods but rather crucial, game-changing resources for improving engineering students' oral English proficiency. Their strength is in the engaging, anxiety-free setting they create, which is ideal for improving pronunciation, coherence, vocabulary, and, most importantly, self-assurance when speaking. A change that is particularly important in technical education, where communication skills are frequently underemphasized while being critical for employment, is the dynamic and learner-driven classroom atmosphere, which the interventions effectively replaced with a more passive and teacher-centric model. Both Vygotsky's Social Development Theory and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis highlight the importance of social connection and emotional safety as drivers of language learning, which is in line with the educational impact of these tactics. The study's consistent finding of a considerable decrease in student involvement and an increase in class participation highlights the socio-affective advantages of communicative methods to language teaching. So, with the help of training and evaluation frameworks for faculty, engineering institutions should make group discussion and role-playing essential parts of their English language courses. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for future studies to investigate if similar approaches can be easily applied to different fields of study and to different types of students, such as those in rural areas, those pursuing graduate degrees, and first-generation learners. To better equip students for academic and real-world communication issues, this method can help lead language education toward a more inclusive, participative, and competency-based paradigm. It can also contribute to a larger reform in Indian higher education.

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