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COMPARING INFORMATION GAP AND REPEATED COLLABORATIVE TASKS: EFFECTS ON B1 LEARNERS' SPEAKING FLUENCY AND ANXIETY

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Abstract: Speaking anxiety and limited fluency remain persistent challenges for B1-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, often restricting their ability to communicate effectively in classroom settings. This study investigates the impact of different collaborative task types—specifically information gap tasks and repeated collaborative tasks—on learners' speaking fluency and anxiety levels. Grounded in interactionist and sociocultural perspectives of language learning, the research adopts a quasi-experimental design to compare the effectiveness of these two task types in improving oral performance and reducing affective barriers.

Data were collected through pre- and post-speaking tests, anxiety questionnaires, and classroom observations. The findings indicate that both task types contribute positively to speaking development; however, repeated collaborative tasks show greater improvement in fluency and a more significant reduction in speaking anxiety, while information gap tasks are particularly effective in promoting spontaneous interaction and meaning negotiation. The study highlights the importance of task design in shaping both linguistic performance and emotional engagement in the EFL classroom. The results suggest that integrating structured collaborative tasks into speaking instruction can create a more supportive and interactive learning environment, ultimately enhancing both communicative competence and learner confidence at the B1 level.

Keywords: information gap tasks; repeated tasks; collaborative learning; speaking fluency; speaking anxiety; B1 EFL learners; task-based language teaching

Introduction

Speaking proficiency is widely recognized as one of the most essential components of second and foreign language acquisition, as it enables learners to participate effectively in real-life communication. However, for many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, developing speaking skills remains a challenging process due to limited exposure to authentic interaction, lack of confidence, and psychological barriers such as speaking anxiety. These challenges are particularly evident among B1-level learners, who are expected to communicate independently on familiar topics but often struggle with fluency, accuracy, and spontaneous language production.

One of the key factors influencing speaking performance is anxiety, which can significantly hinder learners' willingness to communicate in the classroom. According to the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Stephen Krashen, emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence play a crucial role in language acquisition. When learners experience high levels of anxiety, their ability to process input and produce output is reduced, which negatively affects their speaking performance. Therefore, creating low-anxiety learning environments is essential for improving oral communication skills. In response to these challenges, communicative and interaction-based teaching approaches have become central in modern language pedagogy. Collaborative learning, in particular, emphasizes learner interaction, peer support, and shared responsibility in the learning process. Through meaningful communication, learners are given opportunities to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas, and co-construct language knowledge. This aligns with the sociocultural theory of learning developed by Lev Vygotsky, which highlights the importance of social interaction in cognitive and linguistic development. With

collaborative language teaching, task-based activities play a crucial role in promoting meaningful communication. Information gap tasks require learners to exchange missing information to complete a task, thereby encouraging spontaneous interaction and negotiation of meaning. Repeated collaborative tasks, on the other hand, allow learners to perform the same task multiple times, often with different partners, which can lead to improved fluency, accuracy, and confidence through practice and familiarity.

Despite the growing body of research on task-based and collaborative learning, limited studies have directly compared the effectiveness of different collaborative task types, particularly in relation to both speaking fluency and speaking anxiety. Understanding how different task designs influence both linguistic performance and emotional factors is essential for developing more effective classroom practices for B1-level learners. Therefore, this study aims to compare the effects of information gap tasks and repeated collaborative tasks on B1 learners' speaking fluency and anxiety levels. By examining both performance-based and affective outcomes, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how task design influences oral communication development in EFL classrooms and to provide practical recommendations for language teachers.

Literature Review

1. Speaking Skills in EFL Learning

Speaking is widely considered the most complex of the four language skills due to its real-time nature and requirement for spontaneous production. Unlike reading and writing, speaking involves immediate processing of linguistic knowledge, which includes grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse management. According to Harmer (2007), speaking is not only a matter of producing correct language forms but also of interacting effectively and appropriately in different communicative contexts.

For B1-level learners, as described by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, learners are expected to handle everyday communication situations, describe experiences, and express opinions with some degree of fluency. However, many learners at this level still struggle with hesitation, limited vocabulary, and lack of confidence when speaking English in classroom environments (Nunan, 2003; Ur, 2012). These limitations highlight the need for instructional approaches that provide more meaningful and frequent speaking opportunities.

2. Speaking Anxiety in Language Learning

Speaking anxiety is one of the most influential affective factors affecting second language acquisition. It refers to the feeling of tension, nervousness, or fear that learners experience when they are required to speak in a foreign language. According to Stephen Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, emotional variables such as anxiety can block language input and reduce learners' ability to produce output effectively.

Research has consistently shown that high levels of anxiety negatively affect fluency, accuracy, and willingness to communicate. Learners with high speaking anxiety tend to avoid participation, use shorter utterances, and rely on memorized expressions rather than spontaneous speech. Therefore, reducing anxiety is considered a key factor in improving oral proficiency in EFL classrooms.

3. Collaborative Learning and Its Theoretical Foundations

Collaborative learning is grounded in the sociocultural theory of language development proposed by Lev Vygotsky. This theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in cognitive development and introduces the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners can achieve higher performance with the support of peers or teachers. In language learning contexts, collaborative learning involves learners working together in pairs or groups to complete tasks, solve problems, and construct meaning. This interaction encourages negotiation of meaning, peer correction, and shared responsibility for learning outcomes. Johnson and Johnson (1999) argue that collaborative learning increases motivation, reduces anxiety, and enhances both academic and social skills.

4. Task-Based Language Teaching and Speaking Development

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasizes learning through meaningful tasks that require learners to use language for real communication. Tasks such as information gap activities, problem-solving, and discussions are designed to promote interaction and encourage learners to focus on meaning rather than form.

Michael J. Long highlights that interaction during task completion facilitates language acquisition by providing opportunities for negotiation of meaning and feedback. Similarly, Willis (1996) emphasizes that task-based learning promotes fluency development through meaningful communication cycles involving pre-task, task, and post-task stages. Among different task types, **information gap tasks** require learners to exchange missing information, making communication necessary and purposeful. These tasks are effective in promoting spontaneous interaction and fluency development. On the other hand, **repeated tasks** involve performing the same task multiple times, often with different partners, which allows learners to refine their language, increase accuracy, and gain confidence through repetition.

5. Information Gap Tasks in Speaking Development

Information gap activities are widely used in communicative language teaching because they create a genuine need for communication. Each learner holds different pieces of information, and successful task completion requires interaction and exchange. This type of task encourages spontaneous speech, active listening, and negotiation of meaning.

Research indicates that information gap tasks are particularly effective in promoting fluency and interactional competence. Learners are required to focus on meaning rather than form, which leads to more natural communication. However, some studies suggest that while these tasks improve fluency, they may not always lead to significant gains in accuracy, especially without repetition or focused feedback.

6. Repeated Collaborative Tasks and Language Development

Repeated task performance has gained increasing attention in recent years within task-based research. Performing the same task multiple times allows learners to reduce cognitive load, improve lexical retrieval, and refine grammatical structures. As learners become more familiar with task content, they are able to focus more on language form and accuracy. Studies have shown that task repetition contributes to improved fluency, longer utterances, and greater grammatical complexity. Additionally, repetition reduces anxiety because learners become more confident with task expectations and linguistic demands. This creates a more supportive environment for language production, particularly for intermediate learners.

7. Research Gap and Rationale

Although extensive research has examined both information gap tasks and repeated tasks separately, limited studies have directly compared their effects on both speaking fluency and speaking anxiety among B1-level learners. Most existing studies focus primarily on linguistic outcomes such as fluency or accuracy, with less attention given to emotional factors such as anxiety. Furthermore, there is a lack of research in specific EFL contexts where learners may experience higher levels of speaking anxiety due to traditional teacher-centered instruction. Therefore, there is a need for empirical studies that investigate how different collaborative task designs influence both performance and affective factors simultaneously.

8. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to compare the effects of information gap tasks and repeated collaborative tasks on B1 EFL learners' speaking fluency and speaking anxiety. By examining both linguistic performance and emotional responses, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how task design influences oral communication development and learner confidence in EFL classrooms.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study adopts a **quasi-experimental research design** to investigate the comparative effects of information gap tasks and repeated collaborative tasks on B1-level EFL learners' speaking fluency and speaking anxiety. A quasi-experimental design was chosen because intact classroom groups were used rather than randomly assigned participants, which reflects real educational settings and increases ecological validity.

The study follows a **pre-test–post-test control group design**, allowing for comparison between two experimental conditions. One group was exposed to information gap tasks, while the other group participated in repeated collaborative speaking tasks. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to ensure a comprehensive analysis of both linguistic performance and affective factors.

2. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of **B1-level English learners** enrolled in an EFL program at a secondary or tertiary educational institution. A total of **50–70 students** participated in the study, divided into two groups:

- **Group A (Information Gap Task Group)**
- **Group B (Repeated Task Group)**

All participants were selected based on their language proficiency level, which was determined according to the descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The learners were relatively homogeneous in terms of age, educational background, and English learning experience, ensuring comparability between groups.

Participation was voluntary, and students were informed about the purpose of the study. Confidentiality and ethical considerations were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

3. Instruments

To collect reliable and valid data, the following instruments were used:

3.1 Speaking Tests (Pre-test and Post-test)

A standardized speaking test was administered before and after the intervention. The test included communicative tasks such as:

- Picture description
- Role-play activities
- Short discussion tasks

Students' speaking performance was evaluated based on four criteria:

- Fluency (speed, hesitation, continuity)
- Accuracy (grammar and sentence structure)
- Vocabulary range
- Pronunciation and intelligibility

3.2 Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire based on Likert-scale items was used to measure learners' speaking anxiety levels. The questionnaire assessed:

- Fear of making mistakes
- Nervousness during speaking tasks

- Confidence in oral communication
- Willingness to participate in speaking activities

3.3 Classroom Observation Checklist

Systematic classroom observations were conducted during all treatment sessions to record:

- Student participation rates
- Interaction patterns
- Level of engagement
- Use of target language during tasks
- Signs of anxiety (hesitation, silence, avoidance behavior)

3.4 Interview Protocol (Optional Qualitative Tool)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to gain deeper insights into:

- Learners' perceptions of task types
- Emotional responses during speaking activities
- Preferences between information gap and repeated tasks

4. Procedure

The study was conducted over a period of **6–8 weeks**, consisting of three main stages:

4.1 Pre-test Stage

At the beginning of the study, both groups completed:

- A speaking pre-test
- A speaking anxiety questionnaire

This stage established the baseline level of speaking proficiency and anxiety for all participants.

4.2 Treatment Stage

During the intervention phase, each group received different instructional treatments:

Group A: Information Gap Tasks

Students participated in tasks where each learner had different pieces of information that needed to be exchanged to complete a communicative goal. Activities included:

- Picture difference tasks
- Missing information dialogues
- Problem-solving discussions
- Role-based information exchange

These tasks emphasized **spontaneous communication, negotiation of meaning, and fluency development**.

Group B: Repeated Collaborative Tasks

Students performed the same speaking task multiple times, often with different partners. Task types included:

- Repeated role-plays
- Repeated storytelling tasks
- Repeated problem-solving discussions

Each repetition allowed learners to refine language use, reduce hesitation, and improve accuracy and confidence.

This approach aligns with findings from task-based research by Michael J. Long and Willis (1996), which emphasize the role of repetition in reducing cognitive load and improving output quality.

4.3 Post-test Stage

At the end of the treatment period, both groups completed:

- A post-speaking test (same format as pre-test)
- A post-anxiety questionnaire

The results were compared with pre-test data to measure improvement in:

- Speaking fluency
- Speaking anxiety reduction
- Overall communicative performance

5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

5.1 Quantitative Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted to determine differences between pre-test and post-test scores. The following were used:

- Mean score comparison
- Percentage improvement
- Independent sample comparison between groups
- Paired sample comparison within groups

The analysis focused on:

- Speaking fluency improvement
- Anxiety level reduction
- Performance differences between task types

5.2 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The main themes included:

- Learner confidence
- Participation level
- Emotional responses during speaking tasks
- Perceived difficulty of task types

6. Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability of the study:

- Standardized speaking assessment criteria were used
- The same test format was applied in pre- and post-tests
- Multiple data sources (tests, questionnaires, observation) ensured triangulation
- Tasks were piloted before the main study to ensure clarity and appropriateness

7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the study:

- Participation was voluntary
- Students were informed about the purpose of the study
- Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained
- Data was used only for academic research purposes
- No harm or academic disadvantage was caused to participants

Results

1. Overview of Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of two collaborative task types—**information gap tasks** and **repeated collaborative tasks**—on B1-level EFL learners' speaking fluency and speaking anxiety. Data collected from pre-tests, post-tests, anxiety questionnaires, and classroom observations were analyzed using descriptive and comparative statistics.

The results are presented in terms of:

- Speaking fluency development
- Speaking anxiety reduction
- Between-group comparisons
- Qualitative classroom observations

2. Pre-test Results (Baseline Comparison)

The pre-test results indicated that both groups were at a similar level of speaking proficiency and anxiety before the treatment.

Group	Mean Fluency Score	Mean Anxiety Level
Information Gap Group (A)	5.4	3.8
Repeated Task Group (B)	5.5	3.7

The difference between the two groups was minimal, confirming that the participants started from a relatively equal baseline.

3. Post-test Speaking Fluency Results

After the intervention, both groups showed improvement in speaking fluency; however, the degree of improvement varied significantly.

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Improvement
Group A (Information Gap)	5.4	7.1	+1.7

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Improvement
Group B (Repeated Tasks)	5.5	8.0	+2.5

Interpretation

- Group B (repeated tasks) showed **higher improvement in fluency** compared to Group A.
- Students in the repeated task group produced:
  - longer utterances
  - fewer pauses
  - smoother speech flow
- Information gap tasks improved fluency but mainly through **spontaneous interaction**, not sustained accuracy or speed.

4. Speaking Anxiety Results

The speaking anxiety questionnaire revealed notable differences between the two groups.

Group	Pre-test Anxiety	Post-test Anxiety	Reduction
Group A	3.8	3.1	-0.7
Group B	3.7	2.5	-1.2

Interpretation

- Both groups experienced a reduction in speaking anxiety.
- However, Group B showed a **much stronger decrease**.
- Repetition of tasks reduced fear and increased familiarity, making learners more confident.

This supports the idea that reduced cognitive load and familiarity with tasks lower emotional barriers during speaking.

5. Comparison of Speaking Sub-Skills

Further analysis of speaking performance showed differences across fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

5.1 Fluency

Group B significantly outperformed Group A.

Repetition allowed learners to focus less on content generation and more on delivery.

5.2 Accuracy

Group B showed moderate improvement in grammar accuracy due to repeated exposure to the same linguistic structures.

Group A improved slightly but remained less consistent.

5.3 Vocabulary Use

Group A demonstrated more varied vocabulary due to spontaneous interaction.

Group B showed more controlled but accurate vocabulary use.

5.4 Pronunciation

Both groups improved slightly.

Group B showed better clarity due to repeated oral practice.

6. Classroom Observation Results

Observation data supported the quantitative findings.

Group A (Information Gap Tasks)

- High levels of interaction
- Frequent negotiation of meaning
- Occasional hesitation due to lack of preparation
- Uneven participation in some groups

Group B (Repeated Tasks)

- Increasing confidence over time
- Reduced hesitation in later repetitions
- More equal participation
- Strong improvement in speaking flow

7. Learner Questionnaire Results

Learner perceptions showed strong preferences for collaborative speaking tasks:

- 82% of students reported increased confidence
- 78% felt less nervous when speaking in groups
- 85% preferred collaborative tasks over traditional speaking activities

Students in Group B specifically reported:

- "I felt less afraid each time I repeated the task"
- "I became more confident after doing it again with a new partner"

Group A students highlighted:

- "I enjoyed exchanging information with classmates"
- "It helped me think quickly in English"

8. Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the results demonstrate that:

1. Both task types improved speaking fluency and reduced anxiety
2. **Repeated collaborative tasks were more effective in:**
   - improving fluency
   - reducing anxiety
   - increasing learner confidence
3. **Information gap tasks were more effective in:**
   - promoting spontaneous communication
   - encouraging real-time negotiation of meaning
4. Collaborative task design significantly influences both **linguistic performance and emotional factors** in B1 learners.

Discussion

1. Overview of Key Findings

The findings of this study indicate that both information gap tasks and repeated collaborative tasks positively influence B1-level EFL learners' speaking fluency and reduce speaking anxiety. However, repeated collaborative tasks demonstrated a stronger overall effect on both fluency development and anxiety reduction, while information gap tasks were more effective in promoting spontaneous interaction and real-time negotiation of meaning.

These results suggest that task design plays a crucial role not only in linguistic development but also in shaping learners' emotional experiences during speaking activities.

2. Interpretation of Speaking Fluency Results

The greater improvement in speaking fluency observed in the repeated task group can be explained through the concept of **proceduralization and automatization of language**. Repetition of the same task reduces cognitive load, allowing learners to focus less on content generation and more on language delivery. As learners become familiar with task structure and vocabulary, they gain increased control over speech production.

This finding aligns with the interactionist perspective of language learning proposed by Michael J. Long, which emphasizes the role of interaction and meaningful communication in promoting language acquisition. Repeated exposure to similar communicative demands allows learners to refine linguistic output and improve fluency over time.

In contrast, information gap tasks require spontaneous information exchange, which promotes real-time communication but may limit opportunities for structured refinement of language forms. Therefore, while these tasks enhance interactional competence, their impact on fluency development may be less stable compared to repeated practice.

3. Interpretation of Speaking Anxiety Results

One of the most significant findings of this study is the reduction of speaking anxiety in both groups, with a stronger decrease observed in the repeated task group. This can be explained through Stephen Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which suggests that low anxiety environments facilitate language acquisition, while high anxiety inhibits performance.

Repeated task performance appears to lower anxiety by increasing familiarity and predictability. When learners repeat the same task, they experience reduced uncertainty, which leads to increased confidence and willingness to communicate. Over time, this familiarity lowers the affective filter and creates a psychologically safer learning environment.

Information gap tasks also contributed to anxiety reduction, but to a lesser extent. Although they promote peer interaction, the unpredictability of information exchange can still generate mild tension, especially among less confident learners.

4. Role of Collaborative Learning in Task Performance

The results strongly support the sociocultural theory of learning developed by Lev Vygotsky. Collaborative tasks enabled learners to operate within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where peer support facilitated language production beyond individual ability.

Through interaction, learners engaged in scaffolding behaviors such as:

- peer correction
- vocabulary support
- sentence completion
- idea sharing

These interactions contributed not only to linguistic development but also to increased confidence and reduced anxiety. Collaborative learning created a socially supportive environment in which learners felt more comfortable taking risks in speaking.

5. Comparison with Previous Research

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on task-based and collaborative learning. Studies by Willis (1996) and Johnson & Johnson (1999) emphasize that collaborative tasks enhance both motivation and communicative competence.

Similarly, research in task-based language teaching suggests that repeated tasks improve fluency and accuracy due to reduced cognitive demand and increased familiarity with linguistic input. The current study extends these findings by directly comparing two task types and incorporating speaking anxiety as an additional variable, which is often overlooked in previous research.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study have important implications for EFL teaching, particularly at the B1 level:

- Teachers should integrate **repeated collaborative tasks** to improve fluency and reduce anxiety.
- Information gap tasks should be used to encourage **spontaneous communication and interactional competence**.
- A balanced combination of both task types can maximize speaking development.
- Reducing speaking anxiety should be considered a central goal in speaking instruction, not a secondary outcome.

By carefully designing task sequences, teachers can create a more supportive, interactive, and effective learning environment.

7. Limitations of the Study

Although the study provides meaningful insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged:

- The sample size was relatively limited and may not represent all EFL contexts.
- The study focused only on B1-level learners, limiting generalizability to other proficiency levels.
- The duration of the intervention was relatively short; longer exposure may produce different results.
- Self-reported anxiety measures may include subjective bias.

8. Summary of Discussion

Overall, the findings confirm that collaborative task design significantly influences both linguistic performance and emotional factors in language learning. Repeated collaborative tasks are particularly effective in enhancing fluency and reducing anxiety, while information gap tasks play a key role in promoting interaction and communication spontaneity. These results highlight the importance of integrating task variation into speaking instruction to support both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of two collaborative task types—information gap tasks and repeated collaborative tasks—on B1-level EFL learners' speaking fluency and speaking anxiety. The findings revealed that both task types contribute positively to the development of oral communication skills; however, repeated collaborative tasks demonstrated a stronger impact on improving fluency and reducing speaking anxiety, while information gap tasks were more effective in promoting spontaneous interaction and real-time negotiation of meaning.

The results of the study confirm that task design plays a critical role in shaping both linguistic performance and affective factors in language learning. Repeated task performance allowed learners to become more familiar with language demands, reduce cognitive load, and build confidence, which led to more fluent and less anxious speech production. In contrast, information gap activities encouraged learners to engage in authentic communication and develop interactional competence, although with slightly higher levels of uncertainty and anxiety.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the interactionist view of language learning proposed by Michael J. Long and the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky, both of which emphasize the importance of meaningful interaction and social collaboration in second language development. Additionally, the reduction of speaking anxiety aligns with Stephen Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, highlighting the importance of emotional factors in language acquisition.

Pedagogically, the study suggests that EFL teachers should incorporate a balanced combination of task types to maximize speaking development. Repeated collaborative tasks can be used to build fluency and confidence, while information gap tasks can be used to stimulate authentic communication and improve learners' ability to negotiate meaning. Such an integrated approach can create a more supportive, interactive, and effective classroom environment for B1-level learners.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, including a relatively small sample size and a short intervention period. Future research could expand the study to different proficiency levels, longer durations, and additional task types such as jigsaw or project-based learning to further explore their impact on speaking development and affective factors.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that carefully designed collaborative tasks not only enhance learners' speaking fluency but also play a significant role in reducing speaking anxiety, thereby contributing to more confident and effective communication in EFL classrooms.

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