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Pyramid model of willingness to communicate versus communicative tasks: Can they reduce EFL learners' speaking barriers?

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Abstract

The present explanatory mixed methods study was designed to investigate the difference between the effects of using the pyramid model of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Communicative Tasks (CTs) on reducing Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' speaking barriers. The participants were 57 Iranian EFL learners selected based on convenience sampling from a language institute in Tehran. The Preliminary English Test (PET) results verified their homogeneity. To foster a stronger spirit of cooperation among the participants, they were placed in three different classes based on their tendencies; hence, the researchers could consider them as three groups: the Pyramid Model Group (PMG), the Communicative Tasks Group (CTsG), and the Conventional Approach Group (CAG) each including 19 participants. The PMG received instructions pertaining to the six levels of PM in willingness to communicate (WTC), while the CTsG received instructions based on information gap, reasoning gap, and opinion gap activities. The CAG relied on the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), which the institute regularly followed. Accordingly, the three groups went through pretesting, intervention, and post-testing. The participants completed a speaking barriers survey as pre- and post-tests. Then, ten participants from the three groups were randomly selected and interviewed about the impact of the methods they had experienced on their speaking barriers. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed the priority of the pyramid model of WTC over communicative tasks and conventional teaching in reducing learners' speaking barriers. The interview results also confirmed the quantitative findings indicating that anxiety, learners' low self-confidence, along with linguistic and instructional barriers could be reduced through being exposed to the pyramid model instructions. The results can be helpful for ELT professionals, EFL teachers and learners, and other stakeholders to hold more thriving L2 speaking classes.

Key Words: Communicative Tasks, Iranian EFL Learners, Pyramid Model of WTC, Speaking Barriers, Speaking Skill

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1. Introduction

Second language speaking, as the primary mode of communication, is essential, as it enables learners to interact with people in various settings and express their ideas and opinions. However, improving students' ability to communicate while fostering their growth as contributing members of the target language-learning community has always been challenging (Fisher et al., 2024; Koutska, 2024). Despite their high communication efforts, many students have voiced dissatisfaction with mastering the skill. Understanding the challenges faced by L2 learners has long been a focal topic of research and practice (Baker, 2015). Most of such challenges are rooted in speaking barriers individuals face when practicing L2 speaking (Alhmadi, 2014; Farokhi Pour et al., 2018; Ismiati, 2021; Wei & Zhang, 2013). Issues such as shyness and lack of self-confidence can prevent students from speaking in the classroom and impede the development of their skills (Rashtchi & Keyvanfar, 2002; Sadeghi & Maleki, 2015). Sawir (2005) categorized the challenges faced by Asian students in learning English into linguistic, instructional, and affective barriers, as well as a lack of support, all of which stem from psychological or social factors. Additionally, factors such as excessive dependence on teachers, a low level of autonomous learning practices, and language transfer issues may pose challenges for learners (Wei & Zhang, 2013).

Speaking barriers are situations or affective obstacles that impede effective communication and can obstruct or prevent students from communicating smoothly (Ismiati, 2021). Among speaking barriers, anxiety, low self-confidence, deficiency in L2 vocabulary knowledge, and minimized self-assertiveness have been highlighted (Hashemifardnia et al., 2021; Ismiati, 2021; Wei et al., 2013). In the same vein, it is argued that a lot of EFL learners demonstrate low speaking proficiency (Al-Tamimi, 2014; Ismiati, 2021; Sayed, 2015), are weak in producing connected speech (Karimpour & Chopoghlou, 2014), experience speaking anxiety (Farokhi Pour et al., 2018; Sadighi &Dastpak, 2017), and present their ideas unconfidently (Abedini & Chalak, 2017). Therefore, several factors influence EFL learners' ability to present their ideas, start effective communication, or act efficiently in classroom debates and discussions.

Iranian EFL learners often experience anxiety when speaking publicly in formal presentations or participating in group discussions (Abedini & Chalak, 2017;

Hashemifardnia et al., 2021). A lack of confidence in one's language skills and inadequate listening and speaking abilities are the basic causes of this reluctance to speak up and communicate effectively (Ayawan et al., 2022; Farokhi Pour et al., 2018).

Communicative tasks (Burns, 2019; Mirsane & Khabiri, 2016; Richards, 2006; Savignon, 2005) and the pyramid model of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Henry & MacIntyre, 2023; MacIntyre & Wang, 2021; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2021) are among the approaches that have been proposed as effective in teaching second language speaking. Instead of viewing WTC as a trait-like variable, the heuristic pyramid model of WTC expands its scope. WTC is viewed as a situational variable with both temporary and enduring factors due to its social effect (McIntyre et al., 1998). The willingness to engage in a conversation with a specific individual or individuals at a specific time while using a second language is thus described as "L2WTC" (McIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547).

This study employed the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) perspectives (Burgoon, 1976; McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McIntyre et al., 1998; McIntyre, 2020) as its theoretical framework. The pyramid model serves as a meeting point between learner psychology and second language learning. When the "deep, personal relevance of the topics under discussion" influences speakers' motivations and emotions, "WTC changes" (MacIntyre & Wang, 2021, p. 878). This indicates that, regardless of the task types and activities used in the L2 classroom, learners might not progress in their second language unless they are mentally and cognitively engaged with the discussion topics or learning outcomes (MacIntyre, 2020).

Moreover, research findings indicate that within the domains of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), CTs are effective in promoting the L2 speaking quality of ESL/EFL learners (Hasnain & Halder, 2021; Pakula, 2019; Purwati et al., 2023; Rashidova, 2023). The CTs employed in communicative language teaching can be used to help EFL learners improve their speaking skills. CTs encompass activities that promote and necessitate the use of spoken and unspoken language among learners, such as expressing oneself, repairing breakdowns in communication, learning about the target community's cultural aspects, and enhancing mutual understanding (Nunan, 2006). As the previous studies have not compared the effects of PM of WTC and CTs on EFL learners' speaking barriers (i.e.,

linguistic, psychological, and external factors), the present study attempted to fill this gap through a mixed methods study.

2. Review of the Related Literature

Emotions, as an inseparable component of WTC, play a significant role in the speaking performance of L2 learners. The negative correlation between WTC and anxiety (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2022) shows the role of emotions in learners' success in speaking. According to MacIntyre and Wang (2021), WTC evolves when the profoundly personal significance of the subjects being discussed impacts speakers' motives and emotions. Alhmadi (2014) showed that in addition to the poor teaching methods, the lack of sociocultural and socio-psychological factors in teaching speaking are barriers to L2 speaking development. Lodhi et al. (2019) also showed that female students presented superior speaking skills in private situations compared to male and female students speaking in public.

The pyramid model of WTC, as presented by McIntyre et al. (1998), is a re-conceptualized framework that views learning as a situational construct shaped by both transient and enduring variables. In this model, WTC in an ESL or EFL context is defined as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (p. 547). According to McIntyre et al. (1998), it offers a heuristic perspective on second language communication by integrating communicative, social psychological, and linguistic characteristics.

A socio-emotional educational interpretation of the pyramid model, suggested as a promising approach within the ELT field (MacIntyre & Wang, 2021), incorporates not only sociocultural considerations but also cognitive elements. This approach has been employed by researchers such as Kim (2014) and Piechurska-Kuciel (2021), who used the model to enhance EFL learners' L2 development within psychologically supportive and learner-centered programs.

Moreover, the pyramid model has been recognized for its significant influence on learners' L2 development across real-life, virtual, and multicultural learning contexts (Fernández-García & Fonseca-Mora, 2019; Kruk, 2022; Lee et al., 2022). Several studies

have also demonstrated the model's positive effects on increasing learners' grit, growth mindset, positive emotions, trust, and self-image, while simultaneously reducing anxiety and negative feelings (Lee & Liu, 2022; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2022).

In practice, the complex and dynamic nature of the pyramid model has been emphasized by MacIntyre and Wang (2021), who found that this dynamicity fosters a sense of achievement among learners in L2 classrooms. Furthermore, MacIntyre et al. (2022) highlighted that teachers' application of the pyramid model plays a vital role in reducing learners' stress, enhancing their coping mechanisms, and supporting overall well-being.

Additionally, the communicative strategies presented through CTs in training L2 speaking performance play a decisive role in enhancing learners' speaking performance. Shirazifard et al. (2022) found that task-based collaborative dialogues enhance EFL learners' speaking proficiency, as these tasks help learners communicate effectively with their peers. Emphasizing the role of emotions, MacIntyre et al. (2022) argued that teachers' hope is decisive in reducing their learners' stress, enhancing cooperation among learners, and increasing their well-being. Kruk (2022), who studied the dynamicity of WTC, L2 motivation, anxiety, and boredom among advanced EFL learners, found that positive factors such as the attractiveness of speaking topics, common interest discussions, and mutual understanding of ideas might promote WTC among learners.

However, negative factors such as unwillingness to speak, past negative experiences, and unpleasant interactions with other L2 users can hinder learners' success in developing L2 speaking skills. To address these challenges and promote more effective communication, EFL and ESL teachers are encouraged to employ various communicative tasks (CTs) —including opinion gap, information gap, and reasoning tasks— that actively engage learners in meaningful interaction (Rashidova et al., 2023). In the Iranian context, several studies have identified key barriers to speaking, such as language anxiety (Farokhipour et al., 2018; Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017), fear of negative evaluation from teachers and peers, low self-confidence, and an unsupportive classroom atmosphere (Abedini & Chalak, 2017). In addition, other research has highlighted the impact of linguistic and instructional barriers on speaking performance (Hashemifardnia et al., 2021; Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017). In the present study, the Speaking Barriers Survey

(Ismiati, 2021) was used to assess EFL learners' speaking challenges across two dimensions: psychological factors (e.g., lack of self-confidence, anxiety, and classroom effect) and performance condition factors (e.g., time pressure, classroom atmosphere, lack of practice, and instructional barriers).

Given the importance of L2 speaking skills for EFL learners and the potential role of reducing speaking barriers in developing these skills, this study had two main objectives. First, it aimed to compare the effectiveness of the pyramid model of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and communicative tasks (CTs) in reducing speaking barriers among Iranian EFL learners. Second, using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study sought to explore EFL learners' perceptions of how the pyramid model of WTC and CTs influenced their speaking barriers. To achieve these objectives, the researchers formulated the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between the effects of the pyramid model of WTC and communicative tasks on reducing Iranian EFL learners' speaking barriers?

2. What are the students' attitudes toward the impacts of performing the pyramid model of WTC and communicative tasks on their speaking barriers?

3. Method

3.1. Design

The researchers employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, incorporating a quasi-experimental approach in the quantitative phase using a non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design. Following Field (2024), control was maintained to examine the effect of the study's independent variable—implemented in two modalities (the pyramid model of WTC versus communicative tasks)—on the dependent variable, which was EFL learners' speaking barriers. In the qualitative phase, consistent with Maxwell (2022), data were collected through interviews with 10 randomly selected EFL learners from all groups. Thus, the study integrated both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023).

3.2. Participants

In the quantitative phase of the study, using convenience sampling, 57 intermediate-level female EFL learners were selected from a pool of 70 students enrolled at a language institute in Tehran. These participants, aged between 18 and 25, were chosen based on their scores on the Preliminary English Test (PET), with only those falling within one standard deviation above and below the mean included to ensure homogeneity. The PET results confirmed that the participants were relatively uniform in language proficiency. They were then randomly assigned to three groups: the Pyramid Model Group (PMG), the Communicative Tasks Group (CTsG), and the Conventional Approach Group (CAG), with 19 participants in each.

In the qualitative phase, ten participants from both the experimental and control groups were randomly selected for interviews. These individuals had indicated their willingness to participate by checking the appropriate box during the posttest phase. The interviews aimed to explore their perspectives on the impact of the pyramid model of WTC and communicative tasks on their speaking barriers.

3.3. Instrumentation

The data were collected using a standard Preliminary English Test (PET), a speaking barriers questionnaire (Ismiati, 2021), and an interview scheme. The PET was used to ensure participants' homogeneity. In their study, Orozco and Shin (2019) used the Pearson correlation coefficient to examine the reliability of the PET's writing and speaking sections across raters. The writing section had an inter-rater reliability of $\alpha = 0.83$, while the speaking component had an inter-rater reliability of $\alpha = 0.80$ (p. 7). Additionally, they mentioned that confirmatory component analysis verified the test's construct validity.

The Speaking Barriers Survey (Ismiati, 2021) was administered before and after the intervention. The Likert scale survey comprised 15 items, measuring EFL learners' speaking barriers in terms of Psychological Factors (items 1-8, such as lack of self-confidence, anxiety, and classroom effect) and Performance Condition Factors (items 9-15, such as time pressure, lack of practice, and instructional barriers) as its two components. The estimated reliability of the survey, as measured by Cronbach's alpha,

was 0.89, and its construct validity has been verified through factor analysis (Ismiati, 2021, p. 38). The current researchers also estimated the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients in the pretest (α = .89) and the posttest (α = .724).

In line with Van Katwijk et al. (2022), the researchers employed a semi-structured interview to gather data on EFL learners' views regarding the impact of methods and techniques used in each of the three study groups on reducing their speaking barriers. Before the semi-structured interview, the researchers developed general questions based on a thorough literature review. Then, the interview questions were checked and piloted with 10 EFL learners. Moreover, in line with Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), the interview questions were reexamined by two TEFL PhD holders to ensure the appropriateness of content and language (credibility). As a result of some modifications, two items were removed, and an item was added, resulting in six prompts in the final version of the interview questions (see the Appendix). Following Dörnyei's (2007) framework, the researchers obtained the consent of the participants in advance while ensuring their anonymity. During the interviews, the interviewees' sense of autonomy was a priority.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure was categorized into three phases, as described below.

Phase One: Pretest

In the first phase of the pretest section, the participants of the study were selected. First, the standard version of PET was administered to the participants to homogenize them regarding their general English proficiency. Out of the 70 intermediate level female learners, 57 individuals whose scores fell within one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected as the main participants of the study. The selected participants were randomly assigned to three groups; two experimental groups and one control group. Then, the speaking scores of the participants in the PET were taken into consideration; the means of the learners’ scores were compared together to assure their homogeneity prior to the treatment. After that all the participants in the three groups received the speaking barriers survey (Ismiati, 2021) as the pretest in the study.

Phase Two: Intervention

The intervention took 16 sessions. The PMG received innovative instruction in the speaking skill, relying on the six layers of the pyramid model of WTC as proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998). Based on the heuristic pyramid model of WTC, EFL learners' willingness to communicate with others would be immediately affected by personal, psychological, and inter-personal factors. Moreover, situational notions, self-confidence, previous experiences, motivation, intergroup behavior, and cultural factors would affect learners' communication quality (MacIntyre &Wang, 2021).

As the first three layers consisted of communication behavior, behavior integration, and situated attendance, it was assumed that these layers would emphasize situational learning and "depict situational influence on WTC" (Waluyo, 2021) and in turn would affect EFL learners' speaking ability and minimize their speaking barriers. One session was dedicated to describe the pyramid model of WTC and its layers. The following three sessions were dedicated to activities such as describing desires, talking about daily issues and asking students give presentations about their lives and feelings. Moreover, to teach the other three layers which dealt with motivational properties, affective-cognitive context, and social-individual context, three sessions were dedicated. These layers were assumed to leave enduring effect on L2 communication processes. So, learners performed the activities which integrated their motivation, problem solving, and establishing network with other students. The other nine sessions of the treatment process were dedicated to practicing, reviewing the materials, and giving feedback to the learners.

The CTsG enjoyed practicing speaking through CTs in line with the principles of TBLT. The researchers used the method and tasks laid out by Prabhu (1987), Ellis (2009), and Nunan (2006). In the present study, the researcher relied on task-supported language teaching which represented a weak version of CLT that usually uses tasks to make language teaching more communicative (Ellis et al., 2019). The first three sessions were dedicated to teach information gap, reasoning gap, opinion gap tasks. The other 13 sessions were dedicated to practicing, reviewing and giving feedback to the learners. One of the researchers, who was also the classroom teacher in this experimental group, checked the learners' spoken performances to provide more clarity and assist them with

improving their second language speaking abilities. In order to help students see their own shortcomings and areas for improvement, the instructor employed oral corrective feedback (OCF). Also, pedagogical tasks were used in this experimental group as they were more controlled than the real-life tasks and were used more effectively in the classroom with regard to the current status of the participants' knowledge of L2 speaking.

The CAG was exposed to the institute's conventional method, which relied on speaking and listening, similar to what is usually emphasized in the Audio-Lingual notions, through the course book was the Touchstone Series (McCarthy et al., 2019), book 2, units 1 to 4. Therefore, learners in this group received instructions, practices, exercises, feedback, and assignments on promoting their listening and speaking abilities (Burns & Richards, 2009). The procedure was as follows: (1) the language instructor provided a concise overview of the dialogue's content, (2) the language learners listened attentively as the instructor read or recited the dialogue at a normal pace multiple times, and (3) language learners recited the dialogue either line by line or collectively, depending on its length. The teacher corrected any errors and instructed the learner to repeat the statement (s), and 4) repetition proceeded with progressively smaller groups in the class. Then, the leaners were encouraged to practice speaking in small groups and later talk about their own personal experiences.

Phase Three: Posttest and Interviews

After the intervention, the participants took the speaking barrier survey as the posttest. The next step was collecting the students' opinions on the teaching approach used in each class. The interviews were recorded on a Digital Voice Recorder (DVR), transcribed, translated into English, categorized, and then analyzed. Each interview lasted 10 to 15 minutes, while the interviewees received a copy of the questions in advance. The qualitative data obtained from the learners' interviews were analyzed using a content analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

4. Results

As it was noted earlier, 57 intermediate EFL learners whose scores fell within one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected based on non-random

convenience sampling technique based on their performance on PET pre-test. Table 1 reveals the descriptive statistics of the three groups.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics; PET Test by Groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pyramid model	19	32.11	9.921	2.276	27.32	36.89
Communicative task	19	32.74	9.344	2.144	28.23	37.24
Control	19	31.42	9.996	2.293	26.60	36.24
Total	57	32.09	9.598	1.271	29.54	34.63

Table 2 displays the main results of the one-way ANOVA. Based on these results ($F(2, 54) = .086$, $P = .917$, $\omega^2 = .033$, representing a weak effect size) it was concluded that there were not any significant differences between the means of the three groups on the PET test. Thus, it was claimed that they were homogenous in terms of their general language proficiency prior to the study treatment.

Table 2.

One-Way ANOVA; PET Test by Groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16.456	2	8.228	.086	.917
Within Groups	5142.105	54	95.224		
Total	5158.561	56			

4.1. Research Question One

The first research question aimed to find whether there was any significant difference between the effects of the pyramid model of WTC and communicative tasks on reducing Iranian EFL learners' speaking barriers. Prior to the treatment, the three groups were homogenized with respect to the preset of speaking barriers. Hence, a one-way analysis of variances (one-way ANOVA) was run to compare the pyramid model, communicative task and control groups' means on the pretest of speaking barriers.

Before discussing the results, it should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was retained on the pretest. Table 3 displays the results of the Levene's test. The non-significant results of the test (Levene's F (2, 54) = 2.44, P = .97) indicated that there were not any significant differences between the three groups' variances.

Table 3.

Test of Homogeneity of Variances; Pretest of Speaking Barriers by Groups

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Pretest	Based on Mean	2.441	2	54	.097
	Based on Median	2.413	2	54	.099
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.413	2	41.271	.102
	Based on trimmed mean	2.471	2	54	.094

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics for the three groups on the pretest of speaking barriers. The results indicated that the pyramid model (M = 48.68, SD = 13.20), communicative task (M = 49.79, SD = 7.01) and control (M = 45.42, SD = 8.09) groups had almost the same means on the pretest of speaking barriers.

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics; Pretest of Speaking Barriers by Groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pyramid model	19	48.68	13.208	3.030	42.32	55.05
Communicative task	19	49.79	7.013	1.609	46.41	53.17
Control	19	45.42	8.092	1.856	41.52	49.32
Total	57	47.96	9.820	1.301	45.36	50.57

Table 5 displays the main results of the one-way ANOVA. Based on these results (F (2, 54) = 1.01, P = .368, ω2 = .001 representing a weak effect size) it was concluded that there were not any significant differences between the means of the three groups on the pretest of speaking barriers. Thus, it was claimed that they were homogenous in terms of their speaking barriers prior to the main study.

Table 5.

One-Way ANOVA; Pretest of Speaking by Groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	196.035	2	98.018	1.017	.368
Within Groups	5203.895	54	96.368		
Total	5399.930	56			

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was run to compare the means of the PMG, CTssG, and CAG on the posttest of speaking barriers. Initially, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was ensured. The outcomes of Levene's test presented in Table 6 (Levene's F (2, 54) = 2.51, p =.091) suggested no statistically significant difference between the variances of the three groups.

Table 6

Test of Homogeneity of Variances; Posttest of Speaking Barriers by Groups

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Posttest Speaking Barriers	Based on Mean	2.511	2	54	.091
	Based on Man	2.358	2	54	.104
	Based on Mean and with adjusted df	2.358	2	49.499	.105
	Based on trimmed mean	2.591	2	54	.084

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics for the three groups on the posttest of speaking barriers. The results indicated that the PMG (M = 31.37, SD = 5.15) had the lowest mean on the posttest of speaking barriers, followed by the CTsG (M = 38.47, SD = 8.74) and the CAG (M = 44.84, SD=7.08).

Table 7.

Descriptive Statistics; Posttest of Speaking Barriers by Groups

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
PMG	19	31.37	5.155	1.183	28.88	33.85
CTsG	19	38.47	8.746	2.006	34.26	42.69
CAG	19	44.84	7.089	1.626	41.43	48.26
Total	57	38.23	8.950	1.185	35.85	40.60

Table 8 displays the results of the one-way ANOVA (F (2, 54) = 16.89, p <.001, ω2=.358 representing a weak effect size), indicating significant differences between the means of the groups on the posttest of speaking barriers.

Table 8

One-Way ANOVA; Posttest of Speaking Barriers by Groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1726.351	2	863.175	16.890	.000
Within Groups	2759.684	54	51.105		
Total	4486.035	56			

Table 9 displays the results of the post-hoc Scheffe's tests run to compare the groups two by two. The results show a statistically significant difference between the PMG and the CAG (p<.001). A statistically significant difference exists between the CTsG and the CAG (p=.029). Additionally, a significant difference is observed between the PMG and CTsG (p = .013), suggesting that the pyramid model of WTC implemented in the current study could reduce participants' speaking barriers. Employing tasks for improving the learners' speaking was also more effective than typical practices derived from the conventional method used in the control group.

Table 9

Multiple Comparisons; Posttest of Speaking Barriers by Groups

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CAG	PMG	13.474*	2.319	.000	7.64	19.31
	CTsG	6.368*	2.319	.029	.53	12.21
CTsG	PMG	7.105*	2.319	.013	1.27	12.94

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Research Question Two

The second research question aimed at finding the students' attitudes toward the impacts of performing the pyramid model of WTC and communicative tasks on their speaking barriers. The interviews helped the researchers to collect qualitative data to answer this question. Ten learners from the three groups were interviewed after the intervention. Out of the six questions in the interview, three of them covered topics related to reducing speaking barriers. Hence, answers given to items 1 (asking learners to provide their assessment of the instructional approach employed by their instructor in the classroom), 4 (asking learners to talk about whether they can employ classroom learning in the outside world), and 6 (requesting learners to put anything else they would like to add about their classroom experiences), were taken into account to be reported in this paper.

Table 10 categorizes the ideas of ten EFL learners from each group regarding their classroom practices. As the table indicates, 90% of the interviewees in PM group reported experiencing a pleasant atmosphere in the class. In comparison, 80% of the CTs group shared the same sentiment, while just 60% of the CAG did so. Regarding motivation, all participants (100%) in the PM group had a high level of motivation in the classroom. In contrast, the CTs group had a lower level of motivation (70%), and the CAG had the lowest level of motivation (50%). Item 3 elicited from the interviews show that all the PMG learners (100%) took priority over the other two groups (i.e., CTsG= 70%; CAG= 40%) emphasizing students' engagement in discussions regarding their personal life experiences. The same is with items 5 and 7 as the Table shows. However, with respect to actively participating in classroom discussions which required learners to engage in

extensive reading beyond the classroom, 100% of both PMG and CTsG learners had this idea, while only 60% of the learners in the CAG had said so. It is worth noting that 70% of the CAG members found the class boring, while only 40% of the participants in the CTsG had this idea and none of the students in the PMG presented this notion.

Table 10.

Participants' Viewpoints about the Interventions Received

No.	Viewpoint	Frequency			Percentage		
		PMG	CTsG	CAG	PMG	CTsG	CAG
1	The class had a convivial ambiance.	9	7	4	90%	70%	40%
2	The level of motivation in the classroom was substantial.	9	8	6	90%	80%	60%
3	Students engaged in discussions regarding their personal life experiences.	10	7	4	100%	70%	40%
4	The vast majority of learners participated in the classroom activities.	9	8	6	90%	80%	60%
5	To actively participate in classroom discussions, students were required to engage in extensive reading beyond the classroom.	10	10	6	100%	100%	60%
6	In the lesson, the think-aloud protocols and brainstorming approaches were employed.	10	4	2	100%	40%	20%
7	Students have the potential to enhance both their English language skills and their comprehension of the world.	10	7	3	100%	70%	30%
8	The class was tedious.	0	4	7	0.00%	40%	70%

Table 11 summarizes the ideas presented by learners about how they could employ classroom learning in the outside world. Nearly all interviewees shared similar views regarding utilizing classroom instruction for academic goals, reading literary works, viewing films, listening to music, traveling abroad for business or pleasure, and communicating. Besides, a few students suggested applying what they learned in class to email and online activities. Table 11 summarizes the opinions of the ten students chosen randomly from each group.

Table 11.

Student Views about Using Classroom Learning in the Outside World

No.	Views	Frequency (f)			Percentage		
		PMG	CTsG	CAG	PMG	CTsG	CAG
1.	Utilizing classroom instruction for academic goals	9	8	9	90%	80%	90%

2. Reading literary works	8	8	8	80%	80%	80%
3. Viewing films and listening to music	9	8	9	90%	80%	90%
4. Traveling abroad for business or pleasure	8	9	9	80%	90%	90%

Table 12 presents the learners' overall experiences with the method they were exposed to in each of the three groups taking part in the experiment. In this study, students from all three groups gave thoughtful accounts of the benefits they had received from prior use of specific educational approaches and strategies.

Table 12.

Positive and Negative Experiences of the Learners in the Groups

No. Attitudes	Frequency (*f*)			Percentage		
	PMG	CTsG	CAG	PMG	CTsG	CAG
Exhibiting a high degree of friendliness	70	80	60	70%	80%	60%
Creating a motivating atmosphere for learners to continue	80	70	60	80%	70%	60%
Utilizing films, video snippets, and instructional materials	80	70	50	80%	70%	50%
Prioritizing second language speaking	80	70	60	80%	70%	60%
Imposing rigorous workload on pupils	10	20	60	10%	20%	60%

When asked about their impressions, students in the PMG overwhelmingly expressed that the classes were friendlier and more enjoyable than their prior experiences. They also emphasized the potential for gaining more information and knowledge during the semester compared to prior semesters. In addition, they were highly motivated to study in class and made explicit links between class and outside activities. It is worth mentioning that weak students in the three groups reported feeling exhausted from completing the assignments.

A remarkable aspect of the negotiated syllabus emphasized in the pyramid model is the inclusion of shared decision-making. This approach encourages all students to actively participate and contribute to the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the perspectives of the most outspoken individuals appear to be acknowledged, rather than those who remain silent and refrain from expressing their viewpoints. Regrettably, the individuals who were less engaged in learning in the current study were part of the second group.

5. Discussion

The results showed notable disparities in the means of the posttest scores for speaking barriers among the CTsG, PMG, and CAG, indicating that the PMG exhibited the lowest average score on the posttest measuring speaking barriers. The qualitative results were consistent with the quantitative results, providing further evidence that using the pyramid model may be more effective than the communicative tasks and the ALM.

The success of the pyramid model of WTC in minimizing EFL learners' speaking barriers could be due to personal, social, and interpersonal factors of the model, which can pave the ground for less anxiety and more willingness to communicate. In line with MacIntyre and Wang (2021), the current researchers argue that cultivating mutual communication through the model could facilitate improving the speaking ability of EFL learners by reducing the speaking barriers such as anxiety and demotivation, while enhancing their motivation to speak and WTC.

Moreover, the present study findings imply that pyramid model phases can minimize L2 speaking barriers such as deficiency in autonomous ability, constructing discourse, negative transfer of mother tongue, developing thought patterns, and choosing proper words and expressions, which greatly hinder EFL learners' oral English learning. These findings highlight what Wei and Zhang (2013), in their study of oral communication barriers of Chinese students, have found, though they did not focus on the pyramid model.

In addition, Ayawan et al. (2022) argued that speaking techniques relying on actions taken to solve problems through developing a friendly network, exchanging information, and constructing discourse can reduce speaking barriers such as anxiety and low motivation to communicate. Developing positive emotions in the L2 classroom can boost learners' communication skills and encourage them to share information, thoughts, and feelings through verbal and non-verbal exchange. The Pyramid Model improves learners' communication skills and, as proposed by MacIntyre et al. (2022), might improve learners' self-esteem, motivation, and self-expression. Moreover, as psychological factors such as L2 learners' lack of confidence and motivation have been found as significant barriers to speaking for EFL learners (Purwati et al., 2023), paying attention to "Affective-Cognitive Context" in the pyramid model is likely to be a solution to the problem. By

practicing language functions and speech acts, learners are motivated to speak more enthusiastically. As MacIntyre and Wang (2021) argued, minimizing the affective-cognitive barriers would facilitate communication.

Some studies have shown that among the linguistic barriers to L2 speaking promotion, the lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, and negative feedback from learners' peers play significant roles (Abrar et al., 2018; Ayawan et al., 2022; Purwati et al., 2023). A lack of vocabulary repertoire could make people feel less comfortable when they speak (Chou, 2018), which can be one of the reasons why some learners avoid using the English language in the L2 classroom (Salam et al., 2021). Teaching communication skills relying on the Pyramid Model can help EFL learners know their own and others' emotions and evaluate them carefully to get more social and emotional support from their environment. Besides, learners with low academic adjustment cannot consider others' perspectives. Such people often lack the necessary communication skills in society. Through enchaining social interaction, interpersonal relations, motivation, integrated behavior, and affective-cognitive notions, which are embedded in the pyramid model of WTC, teachers can compensate for the learners' weak function by enhancing their instrumental motivation to succeed.

In line with Alhmadi (2014) and Ismiati (2021), not being able to connect one's classroom learning to one's personal life has been mentioned by the interviewees as another speaking barrier. As the participants mentioned, "situated attendance" can open the door to personalized classroom learning. Thus, the model can encourage L2 learners to share their thoughts and feelings about current events, their lives, and the social environment in which they occurred. The dynamic intervention of teachers and peers can help learners overcome their learning anxiety (Farokhi Pour et al., 2018; Ismiati, 2021).

Another source of barrier impeding L2 learners' oral communication is anxiety (Akbari, 2015; Farokhi Pour et al., 2018), which can cause problems in learning and studying foreign languages (Al-Hakim & Syam, 2019). Anxiety scatters and confuses thoughts, disrupts the coherence of the mind, slows down the learning process, and produces academic stagnation. As an extensive and pervasive characteristic that accompanies a person from the first days of childhood to old age, anxiety can impede

learners' performance in EFL classes (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020). However, WTC levels manifested in the pyramid model facilitate positive relationships with others, foster a sincere and reassuring atmosphere, and prevent the emergence of uncompromising behaviors. For example, teaching adaptability, which reflects a person's constructive interaction with others, especially friends and peers, helps students understand and accept many psychological characteristics of themselves and others.

Communicative Tasks (CTs), similar to the tasks supported by the pyramid model of WTC, encompass different activities that promote and necessitate a learner to engage in speaking and listening with other learners, as well as with individuals in the educational program and community. Communicative tasks serve practical objectives such as gathering information, overcoming obstacles, discussing personal experiences, and acquiring cultural knowledge (Nunan, 2006). By incorporating communicative tasks into their teaching, teachers can help EFL learners reflect on their language use and overcome speaking obstacles they encounter daily (Ayawan et al., 2022).

The present study findings, however, might lead to a misunderstanding about the role of communicative tasks in the L2 classroom. Compared with the pyramid model, communicative task training was less attractive for EFL learners; however, a distinct line separating these two techniques cannot be drawn. The major departure seems to lie in the broad scope the pyramid model gives to the linguistic, communicative, and social-psychological characteristics in L2 communication. McIntyre et al. (1988), proposing their heuristic model, argued that "Situational influences" and "enduring influences" can be considered as two distinct ways in which each of the pyramid model's variables is supposed to affect WTC. This view provides the pyramid model with the capacity to encompass any task that serves communication. Based on the results displayed in the Table 9, the PMG outperformed the other two groups (i.e., CTsG and CAG) in reducing speaking barriers. In fact, the mean difference between the PMG and CAG (13.474) and between the PMG and CTsG (7.105) shows that the pyramid model group could significantly minimize the factors such as anxiety and low confidence which could bring about speaking barriers.

The students should be put at the center of the teaching process while teaching

L2 speaking to overcome the speaking hurdles. Teachers should assist students in developing their ability to think in English, boost their enthusiasm, overcome issues their mother tongue causes, speak English flexibly depending on the occasion, make appropriate use of the environment and instructional tools, and actively follow directions. Additionally, students should avoid adopting a passive attitude and show compassion when studying spoken English; thus, professors should inspire students appropriately and get them interested in the materials taught while ignoring their concerns. To address the phonological and cognitive issues, teachers should give sufficient materials for learners to emulate in spoken English lessons.

6. Conclusion

This study initially showed that the pyramid model significantly reduced speaking barriers among Iranian EFL students compared to the CTs and conventional methods. Thus, the PMG exposed to the innovative syllabus outperformed the other two groups. The pyramid model of WTC considers six levels of communication behavior: behavior integration, situated attendance, motivational properties, affective-cognitive context, and social-individual context. The purpose of this article was twofold: To provide a theoretical foundation for classroom implementations of teaching foreign language speaking to remove the barriers and, secondly, to identify lines of inquiry for further study into the teaching and learning of speaking in foreign language classrooms. The current study suggests that the pyramid model highlights the "social-individual context" in which the interpersonal and intrapersonal notions take significance. Accordingly, to reduce the learners' speaking barriers, such as fear of the peers' judgments, ridicule, and low self-confidence, which are labeled psychological barriers.

The next factor emphasized in the pyramid model is affective-cognitive context. Social networks have expanded based on trust, and by relying on affective-cognitive information, knowledge can be transferred to an individual by making it more manageable. The data analysis from different studies also indicates significant correlations between the affective-cognitive, metacognitive, and second-language-speaking domains (Abrar et al., 2018; Aubrey et al., 2022; Rost, 2014). Also, a positive

and significant correlation exists between language ability and the use of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Besides, the correlation between reflective style and metacognitive, social, and emotional strategies is positive and significant (Karaoglan-Yilmaz et al., 2023). Hence, the attention paid to the affective-cognitive context in the pyramid model is justified and stressed.

The third element focused on in the pyramid model of WTC is motivational properties. The barriers to second language speaking would be minimized by enhancing motivation. Moreover, the dynamicity of perceived WTC affects the enhancement of motivation and reduces boredom and anxiety in the L2 speaking classroom practices.

The fourth component of the pyramid model, known as situated attendance, involves requesting students to do oral presentations in the classroom regarding current events, their own experiences, and their emotions related to recent occurrences within their immediate social environment, among other topics (Saleem et al., 2021). Such activities are expected to increase the sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies of the learner (Swain, 2000).

The fifth factor emphasized in the pyramid model of WTC" (MacIntyre & Wang, 2021), behavior integration, was practiced by asking students to talk about their desires. For example, they were asked to talk about what impedes them from negotiating with others and why they like or do not like to talk to them. Such questions were posed to make students think about their behavior integrations. Although spoken language is considered an independent language based on the pyramid model, cognitive support for learning L2 speaking and minimizing speaking barriers are bound to the integration of behavior among group members. It is likely that through cooperation and collaboration-oriented activities, learners get integrated in their problem-solving abilities, discussing language concepts and increasing their level of expertise in language use.

The sixth factor developed by MacIntyre and Wang (2021), which falls at the top of the pyramid, is labeled as communication behavior. It manifested in employing the classroom outcomes in their speaking practices and discussing different topics while trying to convey what they have in mind as clearly as possible. In this way, students are able to give presentations on a variety of subjects, debate and discuss topics in English,

and, ideally, use what they have learned in social media to make friends from all over the world, watch movies, solve everyday problems, and generally have fun in the English-speaking world. Accordingly, within the domain of the pyramid model of WTC, learners' anxiety and fear, as the psychological barriers impeding L2 speaking performance, will be minimized.

This study implies that EFL learners' exposure to various techniques and strategies derived from the pyramid model can help them experience less anxiety while enhancing their motivation to engage in speaking, thus minimizing their speaking barriers for better L2 performance. Various strategies from the pyramid model, as outlined in the six steps of this paradigm, could be used by second language teachers to raise their students' awareness of the issues they are facing. The underlying premise is that students learn more effectively when they are actively involved in a project-based learning environment, where they are required to focus on the characteristics of the input they receive and identify any discrepancies between their existing linguistic knowledge and the target-like forms presented. Cognitive comparison, long seen as an essential step in learning a new language, might be the key to accomplishing this. Likewise, EFL learners would notice the gaps and become aware of a mismatch between the input they receive and their current learning, which will help them gain more awareness of what they are supposed to do, reduce their anxiety and boredom, and enhance their strengths. Moreover, in this approach, the interactions within the classroom might be enhanced, which would aid the learners' future second language growth.

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Appendix

Interview Prompts

1. Please provide your assessment of the instructional approach employed by your instructor in the classroom this term.
2. How well have you learned to improve your speaking from the feedback provided by the teacher?
3. Did you (as students) and your teacher negotiate decisions on assignments and activities? How do you feel about that?
4. Can you employ your classroom learning in your daily life?
5. Can you assess your own speaking in terms of grammatical resources, lexical resources, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication?
6. Is there anything you would like to say about the method your teacher used in the classroom in the semester just finished?