

**The role of Readers Theatre in Developing Speaking Skills and
Reducing Speaking Anxiety of EFL Secondary School Students
(An experimental study)**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of readers theater in developing speaking skills of EFL secondary school students and reducing their speaking anxiety. The sample of the study consisted of fifty-five first year secondary school at El- Lozy Secondary School for girls in Damietta Governorate. The two group quasi-experimental design, based on pre-post, non-equivalent control group design was used. The instruments of the study included a speaking skills test, a speaking skills rubric, and a speaking anxiety scale. The results of the study revealed that readers theater significantly developed overall speaking skills of EFL secondary school students and reduced their speaking anxiety. On the other hand, there were no statistically significant differences concerning speaking sub skills: content, accuracy, and pronunciation.

Keywords:

readers theater, speaking skills, speaking anxiety, EFL secondary school students.

1. Introduction

Speaking is a very demanding productive skill. It needs a lot of efforts to acquire especially in an EFL context. Both cognitive and affective factors can influence students' desire to master such skill. As for cognitive factors, speaking includes a variety of sub skills (Nunan, 2003). To develop these sub skills, students need a lot of practice and interaction using different motivating activities. On the other hand, affective factors such as anxiety, low self-esteem and apprehension are a major source of speaking difficulties.

Concerning anxiety, Al-Sibai (2005) and Cheng (2002) describe speaking as the most anxiety provoking skill compared to listening, reading and writing. In addition, Onwvegbuzie, Bailey and Daley (2000, p. 87) contend that second/foreign language anxiety is best described as a form of situation-specific anxiety. Kitiano (2001, pp. 552-557) categorizes the sources of such anxiety into six types: (1) personal and interpersonal anxieties (e.g., self-esteem, communication apprehension), (2) learners' beliefs about language learning, (3) instructor beliefs about language teaching, (4) instructor-learner interactions (e.g., teachers' harsh manner of correcting student's mistakes), (5) classroom procedures (e.g., speaking in front of peers), and (6) testing.

One of the strategies that can be used to develop different language skills is Readers Theater (RT). It can be structured to accommodate students' diverse skills and abilities while providing an authentic reason for repeatedly reading the same material (Tyler & Chard, 2000, p.169). According to Moran (2006, p. 319), RT is both text and performance based. That is the reason, as Moran indicates, why it can be

used to develop many language skills. The relationship between RT and language learning is explored in detail in many studies such as these of Hubbard (2009), Liu (2000), Millin and Rinehart (1999), and Rinehart (1999) but one particularly powerful connection is motivation which is an important factor for learning a foreign language.

Griffith and Rasinski (2004) point out that RT requires interpretation of text through the human voice. As a result, the drama involved in RT is communicated by the learners through phrasing, pausing and expressive reading of text. Similarly, McMaster (1998) indicates that drama has been shown to have a positive effect on personal attitudes associated with language growth such as self-confidence, self-concept, empathy, and cooperation. So, RT may help students master different language skills and also overcome different psychological barriers that may hinder the development of these skills.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Developing the speaking skills is a real challenge for many EFL students because they have very limited opportunities to use or even hear English outside the classroom. The level of secondary school students' speaking skills is weak. This is revealed by the results of previous studies (Ghonem, 2001; Nassef, 1999; Shehata, 2008) and the views of both EFL secondary school teachers and teaching practice supervisors in some schools in Damietta and Port Said Governorates. In addition, cognitive as well as affective factors can hinder students' desire to develop such demanding skill. Speaking anxiety is one of the affective factors that make even good students reluctant to speak in class as revealed in previous studies (Al-Sibai, 2005; Kassem, 2006; Li, 2010).

So, the problem of the study can be identified in the remarkable weakness of speaking skills in EFL of first year secondary school students and their high level of anxiety when they get involved in speaking tasks.

Hence, this study sought to find answers to the following main question:

What is the effectiveness of RT in developing the speaking skills of EFL secondary school students and reducing their speaking anxiety?

The following sub-questions were also answered:

- 1-What are the speaking skills necessary to EFL secondary school students?
- 2-What are the types of speaking anxiety of EFL secondary school students?
- 3-What are the components of the RT strategy proposed for developing EFL secondary school students' speaking skills and reducing their speaking anxiety?
- 4-How far is RT effective in developing the speaking skills of EFL secondary school students?
- 5-How far is RT effective in reducing the speaking anxiety of EFL secondary school students?

1.2. Hypotheses of the study

Based on reviewing literature and related studies, the following hypotheses were derived:

- 1- There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the speaking skills test in favour of the former.

- 2- There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the speaking skills test concerning speaking sub skills (content, accuracy, delivery, fluency, pronunciation, and body language) in favour of the former.
- 3- There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the speaking anxiety scale in favour of the former.
- 4- There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the speaking anxiety scale concerning speaking anxiety types (reluctance to speak, speaking insecurity, fear of evaluation, and low self confidence) in favour of the former.

1.3. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was twofold:

- 1- Investigating the effectiveness of RT in developing the speaking skills of EFL secondary school students in terms of content, fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, delivery, and body language.
- 2- Determining the effect of RT on reducing the speaking anxiety of EFL secondary school students in terms of four related types of anxiety low self confidence, fear of evaluation, reluctance to speak, and speaking insecurity.

1.4. Significance of the study

The significance of the study stems from the following considerations:

- 1- The speaking skills test and the speaking anxiety scale might be

beneficial to EFL researchers and curriculum designers.

- 2- The study might provide guidelines upon which further strategies may be used to develop speaking skills and reduce speaking anxiety.
- 3- EFL teachers might be able to use RT when they teach their future students different speaking skills and reduce their speaking anxiety.

1.5. Limitations of the study

Since it was beyond the limits of a single study to consider a wide range of factors, this study was restricted to:

- 1- Selected speaking skills that are required for EFL secondary school students.
- 2- Specific types of speaking anxiety which are (reluctance to speak, speaking insecurity, fear of evaluation, and low self confidence).
- 3- A limited duration for implementing the program (three months).

1.6. Definition of terms

Readers Theatre (RT):

RT is "theatre of imagination because it requires the performers to orally interpret the story and the audience to imagine it (Dixon, 1993, p. 23).

RT is a "unique art form that combines oral interpretation and presentational theatre" (Tanner, 1993, p. 7).

According to Annarella (1999, p. 3) RT is "a student focused activity in which students use literature to develop a group enactment and interpretation as a way to focus on the meaning of literature."

Similarly, Millin and Rinehart (1999, p. 73) define RT as an instructional strategy that combines oral repeated reading with writing, performance, and creative skills.

In the present study, RT is defined as a repeated reading strategy that is based on transforming a text into a script involving many characters. The script is then performed for an audience (other teachers and students) through oral reading.

Speaking:

Chaney (1998, p.13) defines speaking as the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts.

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Flores, 1999, p. 4).

In the present study, speaking is defined as the ability to express one self in any situation appropriately using verbal and non verbal symbols to convey a specific meaning.

Speaking anxiety:

Speaking anxiety is defined as feeling nervous, worried or uneasy about speaking in public (University of Southern Mississippi, 2009).

According to Li (2010, p. 4), speaking anxiety means that learners feel anxious when speaking English. It contains three categories that are communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

In the present study, speaking anxiety is defined as a state of uneasiness related to speaking English in EFL classrooms at the secondary stage as a result of reluctance to speak, speaking insecurity, fear of evaluation and low self-confidence.

2. Review of literature and related studies

The following section sheds more light on the main variables of this study which are readers theatre (RT), speaking, and speaking anxiety:

2.1. Readers Theatre

Repeated oral reading takes many forms. One technique recommended by many experts in language learning is RT (Allington, 2001; Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn, 2001; Shaywitz, 2003). RT was initially developed after World War II from the speech and drama fields of oral interpretation and conventional theater (Adams, 2003). It is defined as an interpretive activity in which learners practice and then perform a written script (Rinehart, 1999). It includes reading aloud expressively by one or more persons, rather than acting or memorizing text (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

RT allows for repeated reading of meaningful texts. In RT, students rehearse and perform a short play or story in front of an audience, reading from the script the entire time. Because the students are reading with a purpose, to perform the play and convey its meaning to an audience, the exercise becomes meaningful (Lubbard, 2009, p.2). Avoiding boredom is not the only positive effect of RT. According to Hill (1990, p.13), in creating RT scripts, students increase their knowledge of language structure, language use and the metalinguistic awareness.

RT is different from conventional drama. According to Swanson (1995, p. 15), RT is the practice and dramatic reading presentation of play-like scripts in which no costumes, actions, or scenery are involved, and students do not have lines to memorize. Instead, as Swanson adds, expressive reading is emphasised in order to set the tone and to maintain

the audience's interest in the presentation. So, student develop accuracy, fluency, rhythm, and intonation as they familiarize themselves with the script.

On the other hand, Caudill-Hanse (2009, p.24) indicates that RT is an ideal strategy for applying a Vyotskian teaching approach; it requires that students interact with one another. He adds that through the process of preparing a RT performance, students constructively critique one another, the teacher provides the necessary support and modeling as well. In addition, Worthy and Prater (2002, p. 295) point out that the socially embedded nature of learning within RT is consistent with Vygotskian theory. These researchers contend that RT is an inherently meaningful purpose vehicle for repeated reading, effective performances are built upon positive social interactions based upon reading, in which modeling, instruction and feedback are natural components of rehearsals.

Furthermore, Rioux (2003) indicates that RT addresses several of Gardner's multiple intelligences. First, RT appeals to students with linguistic strengths because it uses reading and speaking. Second, it has a positive effect on interpersonal learners because it is a group effort. Third, kinesthetic learners will enjoy the physical aspect of RT. Fourth, it promotes interpersonal skills as performers develop a sense of their own affect. Fifth, RT enables spatial learners to envision the pictures that the story relates. This include students as performers and as members of the audience.

It is important to mention that RT offers the students the opportunity to practice repeated reading of text within the context of a group. The support of their peers is an essential component of RT,

which is consistent with Cole's (2002) emphasis on the importance of peer relationships in promoting students learning. RT promotes cooperative interaction with peers and makes the reading task appealing (Prescott, 2003). In addition, students can receive feedback from the teacher and their peers about omissions, substitutions, mispronunciations, or insertions (Fenty, 2007; Vadasy & Sanders, 2008).

Unlike traditional drama, which relies on set costumes and physical action on stage, the readers use reading rate, volume, expression and the language itself to communicate the meaning of a particular text (Hoyt, 1992, p.582). In addition, fiction and non fiction literature is suitable for RT. Young and Vardel (1993) suggest that biographies and other informational literature adapted as RT scripts enables students to become fluent readers while learning content area materials. In addition, Dixon (1993, p. 27) indicates that RT is a valuable technique for involving students with different types of literature while using creativity to perfect oral presentation skills.

Concerning the implementation of RT in classroom, Patrick (2008, pp. 1-2) outlines four basic steps for using RT:

- a) Readers first read the story , and then
- b) make selective and analytical choices in transforming the story into a script through social negotiation,
- c) formulate, practice and refine their interpretations, and
- d) finally perform for an audience , reading aloud from hand-held scripts.

RT has been found to be a high interest strategy that achieves many advantages. Lengeling (1995) notes that using RT is advantageous

because it incorporates four major language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. In addition, Hoyt (1992) indicates that RT helps students gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of literature when they are able to integrate reading and oral language with drama.

Schneider and Jackson (2000, p. 40) maintain that drama is a powerful tool for instruction and learning because it supports literacy while encouraging students' imaginations. It further enhances students' experiences with literary elements such as theme, plot, conflict, characterizations and tone (Smith & Herring, 1998).

Similarly, Tierney and Raence (2000, p.23) suggest that RT is appropriate for students of all ages and abilities. They add that RT is a student-centered activity that is adaptable to any classroom situation. Rasinski (2003, p. 294) adds that RT provides an authentic reason for students to engage in repeated reading. It is a powerful way to read and communicate meaning. Thanner (1993) elaborates on the benefits of RT by discussing five values which are dramatic quality, appreciation of literature, personal development, cooperation, and pleasure. Using literature requires students to read and reread to fully understand the piece. This promotes fluency and comprehension (Harp & Brewer, 2005)

Fluency gains is strongly associated with RT participation (Millin & Rinehart, 1999). One explanation for these improvements is that RT demands practice and practice requires repeated readings. Rereading increases rate, accuracy and comprehension and RT motivates even struggling and reluctant readers to reread texts (Larkin, 2001; McMaster, 1998; Rinehart, 1999; Tyler & Chard, 2000; Vthman, 2002; Worthy & Prater, 2002). Students know that they will be performing RT and the

desire to put on a great performance is more motivating than simply requiring that a story be reread a prescribed number of times.

Most importantly, research indicates that these increases in rate, accuracy, and comprehension do not end with texts that have been practiced but carry over to new and unpracticed texts (Tyler & Chard, 2000, p. 165). Students who have participated in RT may be more likely to associate practice with good reading and be motivated to practice consistently (Millin & Rinehart, 1999, p.84)

RT performances model the prosody and expressiveness of fluent reading. An additional benefit of RT is that the same text can be used with diverse skill levels. Consequently emergent, struggling and more advanced readers can participate in the same performance with equal opportunities for success (Larkin, 2001, p. 478). So it is the audience, rather than the text, that is the greatest motivator. Moreover, the shared meaning making between readers and audience is why many researchers like Moran (2006) and Patrick (2008) do not use an apostrophe in the term readers theater because the entire process is a jointly interpretive act for both readers and audience.

As for affective advantages, Worthy and Prater (2002) explain that because there is no memorization involved in RT, students can concentrate on oral reading. Through performance, as they add, students will experience success, thus increasing their self-esteem. Dixon (1993) points out that RT is a simple, effective, and risk-free way to get children reading. Similarly, Latrobe (1996, p. 52) indicates that RT engages students in reading and writing and brings about cognitive and affective benefits.

According to the Readers Theatre Institute (2004), the major advantage of using RT is related to students' affective domains as RT motivates students engage in cooperative learning and can be successful regardless of ability. This success helps to improve students' self image. In RT classroom, trust, focus, a sense of cooperation and teamwork, imagination, problem solving, and opportunities for guided and independent practice are promoted (Campbell & Parr, 2004).

A growing body of research is recognizing the positive impact of RT on students' attitudes and language learning. Reading research of Carrick (2000), Corcoran and Davis (2005), Griffith and Rasinski (2004), Rinehart (1999), and Worthy and Prater (2002) revealed increases in reading motivation for students who had participated in RT.

Concerning reading skills, Martinez, Roser and Strecker (1999) integrated 30 minutes of RT instruction into their literacy instruction each day. After 10 weeks, they reported pre-post gains in reading comprehension, oral reading fluidity, phrasing and expression. In addition, Rasinski's study (2000) revealed that students made significant gains in reading rate and overall reading achievement as measured by an informal reading inventory. Ree (2005) also showed that RT had a positive impact on ninth grade students' overall literacy development, including metacognition, confidence in oral reading, collaboration and writing. Similarly, Millin and Rinehart (1999) and Wolf (1998) proved that RT supported the development of oral reading ability.

Moreover, fluency research of Hiebert (2005), Keehn (2003) and O'conner et al. (2002), Pressley, Gaskins and Flingeret (2006) found that RT is especially effective with at risk students. Ward (2009) showed that

RT is an effective method to improve fourth grade students' reading comprehension, prosody and confidence in their abilities. These findings are in concurrence with the results of Hubbard's study (2009). Hubbard concluded that the reading fluency rates of second and third grade elementary school students with learning disabilities improved using repeated reading of RT over the course of seven weeks.

On the other hand, Tagger (2008) showed that there were no significant differences between students who used RT and students in the control group concerning reading accuracy and comprehension but rate gains were significant. Similarly, Caudill– Hansen (2009) indicated that RT was effective in developing students' reading fluency. However, the difference on reading comprehension scores was not statistically significant.

As for writing, Stewart (1997) used writing of RT scripts as a way to study the author's craft in a piece of literature. The results proved that RT was effective in developing different writing skills. Similarly, Liu's study (2000) revealed that using RT activities with 14 ESL students in an intermediate L2 writing class was effective in developing their writing skills. Oral communication skills were also investigated. A qualitative study by Patrick (2008) showed that a class of 28 EFL engineering students had positive experiences using RT in the learning of oral communications skills. RT helped them to communicate their ideas in a group setting when discussing the script.

It is clear that most of the studies focused on the effect of RT on developing different reading skills. But it is known that there is a strong relationship between reading and speaking. Florez (1999, p. 13) indicates

that the integration of speaking and reading skills in particular results in great language development. In addition, Hilferty (2000, p. 3) examined the research literature on the relationship between the development of reading and speaking skills especially with adult English for speaking of other language (ESOL) learners. He indicated that much recent research reveals the influence of reading on speaking. There also seems to be reciprocity between them. So, oral reading can be used to teach speaking and vice versa.

2.2. Speaking skills

It is quite clear that the main goal of speaking is communication. Chen (2009, pp. 4-5) views speaking in the larger context of communication with the focus on the speakers' ability to take in messages, negotiate meaning and produce comprehensible output. This comprehensible output, as Chen indicates, requires the learners to negotiate meaning and formulate and test hypotheses about the structures and functions of the language they produce. In addition, Burnkart (1998, p. 6) indicates that the goal of teaching speaking skills is to communicate efficiently. She adds that learners should try to avoid confusion in the message due to faulty pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary and to observe the social and cultural rules that apply in each communication situation.

Moreover, Carter and McCarthy (1995) and Cohen (1996) agree that speaking requires that learners not only knew how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary (linguistic competence), but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language (sociolinguistic competence). Springer

and Collins (2008, p. 40) point out that more exposure and practice of the language has an important impact on developing fluency and oral competence.

Speaking involves a combination of skills that may have no correlation with each other. Nunan (2003, p. 42) specifies many speaking skills as the following:

- Producing the English speech sounds and sound patterns.
- Using word and sentence stress, intonation pattern and the rhythm.
- Selecting appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject.
- Organizing thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence.
- Using language as a means of expressing values and judgments.
- Using language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses, which is called fluency.

According to Brown and Nation (1997, p.12), in speaking classes, students must be exposed to three key items: (a) form focused instructions, that is attention to details of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and so forth; (b) meaning focused instruction, that is opportunities to produce meaningful messages with real communicative purposes; and (c) opportunities to improve fluency. Florez (199, p. 11) adds that teachers can help learners improve their speaking abilities by considering what good speakers do, what speaking tasks can be used in class, and what specific needs learners report.

Regarding the speaking environment, Grognet (1997, p. 23) points out that students' speaking skills develop best in dynamic interactive

learning environment, where enough time is provided for them to share and listen to a variety of ideas. A safe, comfortable, and relaxed atmosphere, as Grognet adds, is critical for the development of productive talk in the classroom for all students.

As for the stages of speaking, Florez (1999, p. 9) divides them into three main stages: pre-speaking, speaking and post speaking. Before speaking, the speaker should determine the actual content of the message, how it should be presented and what kind of audience will be hearing the message. While speaking, the speaker must attend to such things as presenting a clear message, tone of voice, suitable vocabulary, possible responses, the environment, and non verbal gestures. Following speaking, the speaker might accept comments, answer questions, explain concepts not understood, and assess the process.

Effective speaking activities should have specific criteria. According to Hedge (2000, p. 183) and Thornbury (2005, p.25), speaking activities should be characterized by participation, productivity, purposefulness, interactivity, collaboration, socialization, challenge, motivation, safety, authenticity and maximizing practice time. In addition, teachers should adopt different activities to arouse students' motivation to speak the target language and help them more easily to acquire this skill (Davis, 1999).

Concerning speaking tasks, Brown (1994, p. 18) points out that although dialogues and conversations are the most obvious and the most often used speaking activities in language classrooms, a teacher can select activities from a variety of tasks. Brown lists six possible task categories: imitative, intensive, responsive, transactional, interpersonal,

and extensive. In addition, Burns and Joyce (1997, p. 7) indicate that when presenting tasks, teachers should tell learners about the language function to be produced in the task and the real context in which it usually occurs. They should also provide opportunities for interactive practice and build upon previous instruction as necessary.

Speaking is one of the most difficult skills to evaluate. According to Pennington (1999, p. 40) the difficulty of assessing speaking skills is due to the difficult matching of the testing goals and appropriate instruments and tasks for assessment. O'Malley and Pierce (1996, p. 25) point out that speaking assessment can take many forms, from oral sections of standardized tests to authentic assessment such as progress checklists, analysis of taped speech samples, or anecdotal records of speech in classroom interaction.

Taylor and Falvey (2007, p. 81) illustrate that there are two main methods of assessing the learner's speaking ability: holistic scoring (giving a single score on the basis of an overall impression); and analytic scoring (giving a separate score for different aspects of the task). Fulcher (2003, p. 4) also suggests using both progress tests to evaluate learners' progress in the development of speaking skills during the course and on achievement test to assess overall spoken language proficiency at the end of the course .

As for tasks involved in speaking tests, Kitao and Kitao (1996, p. 31) advocate the use of pictures, diagrams, and maps to test speaking skills. Nakamura and Valens (2001, p. 43) also suggest three different types of speaking tests: monologue speaking test which is called presentation, dialogue speaking test which is also known as the interview, and multilogue speaking test that is called discussion and debating.

As a result of the variety of speaking skills and assessment tools, many problems related to students' poor performance in speaking emerged. Ur (1997, p. 121) points out problems that may prevent students from developing their speaking skills. These problems include inhibition, lack of ideas, low participation and students' preference to use their mother language. Richard (2002, p. 15) also mentions reasons for poor speaking skills as:

- lack of curriculum emphasis on speaking skills,
- teachers' limited English proficiency,
- class conditions do not favour oral activities,
- limited opportunities outside the class to practice , and
- examination system that does not emphasis oral skills.

Evidence from empirical research on developing speaking skills revealed the effectiveness of a variety of activities, strategies, and programs in developing these skills for different EFL learners. This is shown in a group of field studies. Among these studies is a study conducted by Nassef (1999) to investigate the effect of using interactive activities to develop speaking skills of secondary school students. The program was effective in developing speaking skills but failed to solve some pronunciation problems. To solve the previously mentioned problems and develop different speaking skills, researchers used a variety of strategies. Farahat' s study (1997) revealed that the audiolingual approach was more effective than the communicative approach in developing fourth graders' speaking skills.

Concerning dramatization, Ghanem (2001) showed that creative dramatic strategy was effective in developing secondary school students'

communication. El-Naggar (2003) also revealed that dramatizing the content of novels was effective in developing first year prep school students' speaking skills. Similarly, Zayed's study (2003) indicated that dramatic activities were effective in developing oral performance skills of prep stage students.

In addition, Shehata (2008) used debates to develop speaking skills of secondary school students. She indicated that it had positive effects on motivation, interaction and speaking skills. As for pre service teachers, Abdel Hack's study (2002) revealed that peer tutoring was effective in developing the speaking skills among prospective teachers of English. Darwish (2005) also indicated that using culture oriented activities was effective in improving motivation and speaking skills among third year basic education English majors. All the previously mentioned studies stress the importance of interaction and providing interesting activities that motivate students to participate in speaking tasks.

2.3. Speaking Anxiety

One of the main factors that plays a significant role in learning a foreign language is the affective factor. The affective filter hypothesis, illustrated by Krashen (1985, p. 65), shows that acquisition of a language becomes easier if learners have more self-confidence, high motivation and low anxiety. He adds that there are three types of affective factors influencing the acquisition of second/ foreign language: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. As a result, if a learner keeps a high motivation, high self-confidence and low anxiety, it is easier for him/her to master a foreign language. Moreover, high anxiety could impede people to acquire, retain, and produce the new language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

The role of anxiety and its potentially damaging effect on learning a second/foreign language have concerned educationalists for years. Language anxiety is defined as feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, insecurity, or apprehension and is intricately intertwined with self-esteem issues and natural ego-preserving fears (Sellers, 2000, p. 514). Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986, p. 127) give a more precise definition of second/foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." . On the other hand, Gardner and MacIntyre (1993, p. 5) define the anxiety that many learners experience in the process of learning a second/foreign language as "the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient."

Concerning the kinds of anxieties related to second / foreign language learning , Horwitz , Horwitz and Cope (1986) hypothesise that anxiety specific to second/foreign language learning corresponds to three related performance anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. According to Casado and Dershiwsky (2001), communication apprehension refers to nervousness related to communication with people. Students report that they are afraid to speak in the foreign language, and show feelings of nervousness, confusion and even panic. In addition, test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety resulting from fear of failure. The third performance anxiety stems from fear of negative evaluation. They add that since foreign/second language students are uncertain of themselves and what they are saying, they may

feel that they are incapable of making the proper social impression.

Previous research revealed a negative relationship between anxiety and language achievement (Aida, 1994; Ganschaw & Sparks, 1996; Saito & Samimy, 1996) and a negative relationship between anxiety and second language proficiency (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997). The reasons why students suffered from anxiety were low self-confidence, fear of failure, flawed performance or negative evaluation. The relation between anxiety and those elements become a vicious circle (Cheng, Horwitz & Shallert, 1999). Similarly, Kitiano (2001) highlighted some factors influencing language anxiety which were fear of negative evaluation and low perception of one's ability.

In a field study, Casado and Dereshiwsky (2004) compared their American and Spanish students. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was used. The researchers found that their American university students displayed high levels of anxiety in 13 out of 33 questions on FLCAS and that the Spanish students showed even higher levels of anxiety since 20 out of 33 questions reflected this phenomenon.

Various aspects of foreign/second language learning seem to provoke anxiety in students, but speaking courses appear to produce greater anxiety than other skill courses (El Khafaifi, 2005). Sato (2003) outlines some basic reasons behind speaking anxiety in China. The first reason lies in the dominance of the traditional teaching method which focuses on grammatical accuracy in the written form of the language. The second is large class sizes, which tends to limit students' speaking and promotes teacher-centered environment. Another reason is the feeling

of insecurity. Students' answers might be wrong. So it is better, from their perspective, to remain silent. These reasons seem to apply to the Egyptian context as well.

In addition, Ganschow and Sparks (1996, p. 201) describe the sources of speaking anxiety of foreign language learners as fear of losing face, insecurity, and lack of confidence which all hinder success in foreign language learning, preventing students from fully participating in oral communication activities in classrooms. Speaking anxiety also reveal itself through psycholinguistic factors such as distortion of sounds, inability to produce the proper intonation, failing to remember words or phrases just learned or simply refusing to speak (Haskin, Smith & Racine, 2003).

As for speaking anxiety research, Cheng, Horwitz and Shallert (1999) revealed that speaking in a foreign language is cited by students as their most "anxiety-producing" aspect of language learning. In addition, Woodrow (2006) pointed out that there was a negative relationship between anxiety and oral performance. On the other hand, Huang (2005) found that achievement and motivation could be seen as prediction of English oral anxiety.

Moreover, Al-Sibai's study (2005) revealed that Saudi female university students' level of anxiety was high in 19 of the 33 questions of the FLCAS with respect to communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Her students also agreed that oral activities are the most anxiety producing aspect of learning a foreign language.

Regarding experimental studies, Kassem (2006) indicated that training secondary school students in naturalistic practice of English and

compensation strategies enhanced their speaking skill and reduced speaking anxiety. Badr's study (2008) also revealed that using blended communicative output activities supported with utilizing anxiety management techniques was effective in reducing levels of language anxiety and improving oral communication skills of EFL pre service teachers in Taibah University. On the other hand, Li (2010) investigated the relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking strategies among university students in Taiwan. It was found that the higher English proficiency students have, the more speaking strategies they tend to utilize. In addition, test anxiety had the highest positive correlation with speaking anxiety.

To sum up, the combination of text, interpretation, and performance makes RT a valuable tool for language development. It is an enjoyable activity to students that motivates them to use the language without fear or anxiety. The oral repetition of meaningful texts involved in RT can help students master different skills especially in an EFL context. So, it is a highly motivating strategy that can be applied in different ways to develop various language skills.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the study

The researcher used the two group quasi-experimental design, based on pre-post, non-equivalent control group design. Before the treatment, the answers of the students on speaking skills test and speaking anxiety scale were collected, analyzed, and scored. Then the treatment was carried out. The duration of the instruction was 12 weeks, two sessions per week. At the end of the instruction, the same instruments were

applied to determine the effectiveness of RT in developing the speaking skills and reducing the speaking anxiety of EFL first year secondary school students. The treatment was applied in the second term of the school year 2009–2010.

3.2. Participants

This study was administered in El- Lozy Secondary School for girls. Two intact classes from the first year students were chosen and assigned at random as an experimental group (N. 27) and a control group (N. 28). Both classes had the same English language teacher. The mean age of the subjects was (15.08) years.

3.3. Instruments of the study:

Three instruments were used in this study: (available with the researcher upon request)

- A- The speaking skills test.
- B- The speaking skills rubric.
- C- The speaking anxiety scale.

A- The speaking skills test

The speaking skills test was constructed in the form of direct controlled tape- recorded interviews which were developed and administered by the researcher. The speaking skills test (Appendix: A) was prepared by the researcher to assess speaking skills of EFL first year secondary school students before and after using RT concerning the following six sub skills: content, fluency, delivery, accuracy, pronunciation, and body language. It was submitted to a jury of four specialists in TEFL to specify the suitability of each task to EFL first year

secondary school students. The final version of the test, modified according to the feedback from the four jury members, consists of four major tasks which are job interview, complaint, picture description, and picture-cued story telling. Each task was scored out of (24). So, the speaking skills test was scored out of (96).

Validity of the speaking skills test

Before using the test, it was presented to four EFL jury members to evaluate the test in terms of accuracy, arrangement and number of questions, difficulty of the tasks and the suitability of the test for the EFL first year secondary school students' proficiency level. One of the main modifications was changing the third task in the test from "describing your room to your friend" to "picture description" as it is more challenging to students. The other opinions were also taken into consideration when preparing the final version.

Reliability of the speaking skills test

The test was administered to 30 EFL first year secondary school students in El- Lozy Secondary School for girls (not included in the main treatment of the study). Cronback's Alpha (Marascuilo, 1971; Payne, 1997) was used to calculate the reliability coefficient of the test. The calculated reliability coefficient was 0.96. Thus, the speaking skills test is reliable to be used in assessing EFL first year secondary school students' speaking skills.

B- The speaking skills rubric

A five level rubric (Appendix: B) was developed by the researcher after reviewing literature and related studies to grade the subjects' responses to the tasks in the speaking skills test before and after the treatment.

Each level in the rubric was given an estimated value. The first level (no response) was assigned (0). The second level (apprentice) was assigned (1). The third level (basic) was assigned (2). The fourth level (learned) was assigned (3). The fifth level (exemplary) was assigned (4). Using the rubric enabled the researcher to get detailed profiles of the subjects' responses to tasks in the test.

Validity and reliability

Before using the rubric, it was presented to a panel of jury of specialists in faculties of education (N. 4). Their opinions concerning categories and domains of analysis were taken into consideration. Based on their suggestions, the "language" sub skill was divided into "accuracy" and "pronunciation". These opinions were taken into consideration when preparing the final version of the rubric.

Reliability of the rubric was estimated by calculating the correlation coefficient between two raters' scoring of the speaking skills test of 27 EFL first year secondary school students in El- Lozy Secondary School for girls (not included in the main treatment). The correlation coefficient between the raters' scores is 0.97. The rubric was then used to grade the subjects' responses in the pre and post speaking skills test.

C- The speaking anxiety scale

The speaking anxiety scale was devised for assessing the effect of RT on reducing speaking anxiety of EFL first year secondary school students. This scale is a 28 item, self reported measure, scored on a 5 point basis (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree). The scale is written in Arabic. It focuses on four types of speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms. These sources are fear of

evaluation, reluctance to speak, speaking insecurity, and low self-confidence. First, fear of evaluation means that students are afraid of making mistakes so the teacher or other students may laugh at them. Second, reluctance to speak is related to feeling anxious before speaking tasks and trying not to participate in them. Third, speaking insecurity refers to feeling uncomfortable during speaking and forgetting what they had prepared in advance. Fourth, low self-confidence is due to the limited practice of speaking inside the classroom which leads to having no confidence in their ability to express their ideas in English orally. The statements for each component are as the following: reluctance to speak (8, 10, 13, 14, 20, 25, 27), speaking insecurity (2, 3, 7, 9, 16, 18, 22), fear of evaluation (1, 6, 11, 15, 19, 24, 28), and low self-confidence (4, 5, 12, 17, 21, 23, 26). For more details about the scale, see Appendix (C).

Validity and reliability

Before using the scale, it was presented to a panel of jury of specialists in educational psychology and TEFL (N. 5). Their opinions concerning categories and domains of analysis were taken into consideration. Based on their suggestions, all the statements in the scale were positive ones since it is easier for both the researcher to score the statements and the students to express their opinions. These opinions were taken into consideration when preparing the final version of the rubric.

The scale was administered to 27 EFL first year secondary school students in El- Lozy Secondary School for girls (not included in the main treatment). Cronback's Alpha (Marascuilo, 1971; Payne, 1997) was used to calculate the reliability coefficient of the scale. The calculated reliability coefficient was 0.81. Thus, the speaking anxiety scale is reliable to be used in assessing EFL first year secondary school students' speaking anxiety.

3.4. Treatment of the study

In the present study the subjects were involved in speaking about reading passages in Hello for secondary schools, year one. These passages were summaries of famous literary works: Dickens's Oliver Twist, Hemingway's The Old Man and The Sea, Shakespeare's King Lear, Defoe's Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Verne's Around the World in Eighty Days, and Conan Doyle's The Hound of the Baskervilles. Each summary includes three or four paragraphs. RT was used to change these six summaries into scripts to be performed by students in front of their colleagues and teachers. Each summary was presented in three sessions as the following:

The first session

- T. discussed the title and the pictures with the students.
- T. read the summary with the students and asked them to guess the meaning of difficult vocabulary items.
- T. discussed with students how to turn the first paragraph into a dialogue that included different characters.
- Students participated in suggesting different questions and answers.
- The other paragraphs were written as a dialogue like the first one.
- After turning the summary into a four scene script, T. made copies for students.

The second session

- T. modeled the reading for students focusing on expression, voice, pronunciation, and body language.
- T. divided the class into four group. Each group performed a specific scene.

- T. assigned parts in each group according to students' level and desire.
- T. asked students to rehearse either in groups or individually and at home.
- T. provided support to students where necessary.
- Students performed parts of the script.
- T. gave general comments about the performance. Common errors were discussed.

The third session

- Students performed the script for other students and teachers.
- Students presented their opinions about the main characters whether they liked them or not and the ending of the story.

As a result, the treatment consisted of 18 sessions, 3 sessions for each literary work. Students had 2 sessions per week and the treatment lasted 9 weeks. During the treatment, students were encouraged to participate in a safe environment. The teacher did not focus on individual errors that might make students feel bad about themselves, rather her main concern was to make all students participate and enjoy performing the scripts and later on she discussed the main errors. The teacher used to say positive comments to her students in order not to be anxious and have self confidence about their ability to speak in English. She explained to students that their fear of making mistakes while speaking in English, is irrational since making mistakes is a natural part of learning. For more details about the treatment, see Appendix (D).

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

Firstly, to control variables prior to implementing the treatment, the results of the pre- speaking skills test and speaking anxiety scale were

subjected to statistical analysis to find whether there were statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups in terms of speaking skills and speaking anxiety. Therefore, z test was used to compare the two groups.

Table (1)
"z" value of the pre speaking skills
test comparing the control and experimental groups

Speaking skills	Groups	Mean \pm SD	N	Z-test	Sig.
Content	Control	11.25 \pm 1.71	28	0.190	Not significant
	Experimental	11.33 \pm 1.82	27		
Accuracy	Control	10.82 \pm 1.70	28	0.026	Not significant
	Experimental	10.81 \pm 1.73	27		
Delivery	Control	4.50 \pm 0.69	28	0.146	Not significant
	Experimental	4.48 \pm 0.70	27		
Fluency	Control	7.50 \pm 1.99	28	0.077	Not significant
	Experimental	7.52 \pm 2.03	27		
Pronunciation	Control	8.04 \pm 1.75	28	0.188	Not significant
	Experimental	7.96 \pm 1.76	27		
Body language	Control	4.36 \pm 0.49	28	0.101	Not significant
	Experimental	4.37 \pm 0.49	27		
Overall	Control	46.46 \pm 7.02	28	0.068	Not significant
	Experimental	46.48 \pm 7.16	27		

Table (2)

"z" value of the pre- speaking anxiety
scale comparing the control and experimental groups

Types of anxiety	Groups	Mean \pm SD	N	Z- test	Sig.
Reluctance to speak	Control	21.46 \pm 2.85	28	0.316	Not significant
	Experimental	21.41 \pm 2.91	27		
Speaking insecurity	Control	19.96 \pm 2.53	28	0.258	Not significant
	Experimental	19.81 \pm 2.51	27		
Fear of evaluation	Control	23.79 \pm 3.89	28	0.221	Not significant
	Experimental	23.89 \pm 3.90	27		
Low self confidence	Control	25.46 \pm 4.00	28	0.280	Not significant
	Experimental	25.48 \pm 3.92	27		
Overall	Control	90.68 \pm 12.14	28	0.279	Not significant
	Experimental	90.59 \pm 12.30	27		

The previous two tables (1) and (2) show that there were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on overall speaking skills and speaking anxiety. Therefore, any variance between the two groups that may occur after implementing the treatment ought to be attributed to it.

Secondly, the results of the study will be presented in terms of the study hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis one: There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the speaking test in favour of the former.

The "z" test was used to find out the extent to which subjects' speaking

skills have developed throughout the treatment. Development of the subjects speaking skills was determined in terms of content, fluency, delivery, accuracy, pronunciation, and body language. The results of the "z" test proved to be statistically consistent with the above stated hypothesis as shown in table (3).

Table (3)

"z" value of the post speaking skills

test comparing the control and experimental groups

Speaking skills	Groups	Mean \pm SD	N	Z-test	Sig.
Content	Control	11.36 \pm 1.83	28	1.729	Not significant
	Experimental	12.22 \pm 2.08	27		
Accuracy	Control	10.71 \pm 1.68	28	1.673	Not significant
	Experimental	11.52 \pm 1.83	27		
Delivery	Control	4.46 \pm 0.69	28	6.384	0.001
	Experimental	8.04 \pm 1.37	27		
Fluency	Control	7.68 \pm 2.06	28	2.246	0.05
	Experimental	9.04 \pm 1.97	27		
Pronunciation	Control	8.14 \pm 1.90	28	1.249	Not significant
	Experimental	8.81 \pm 1.30	27		
Body language	Control	4.36 \pm 0.49	28	6.306	0.001
	Experimental	6.52 \pm 0.89	27		
Overall	Control	46.71 \pm 7.48	28	3.784	0.001
	Experimental	56.15 \pm 7.65	27		

Table (3) shows that there were statistically significant differences at 0.001 level in the mean scores of students in overall speaking skills in

the control and experimental group in favour of the latter. Therefore, there is enough evidence to support hypothesis one.

Hypothesis two: There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the speaking skills test concerning speaking sub skills (content, accuracy, delivery, fluency, pronunciation, and body language) in favour of the former.

Table (3) shows that:

- There were statistically significant differences at 0.001 level in the mean scores of students in both "delivery" and "body language" in the control and experimental group in favour of the latter.
- There were statistically significant differences at 0.05 level in the mean scores of students in "fluency" and in the control and experimental group in favour of the latter.
- There were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of students concerning "content", "accuracy", and "pronunciation" in the control and experimental groups.

To sum up, there were statistically significant differences at 0.001 level between the mean scores of the subjects in the speaking skills test for three speaking sub skills: delivery, body language and fluency but there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups concerning content, accuracy, and pronunciation. As a result, hypothesis two was partially verified.

Hypothesis three: There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the speaking anxiety scale in favour of the former.

In order to test the previous hypothesis, the researcher used "z" test. The results proved that there were statistically significant difference between the mean score of the subjects in overall speaking anxiety as well as the four types. These results were statistically consistent with the above stated hypothesis as shown in the following table.

Table (4)
"z" value of the post speaking anxiety
scale comparing the control and experimental groups

Types of anxiety	Groups	Mean \pm SD	N	Z-test	Sig.
Reluctance to speak	Control	21.54 \pm 2.90	28	2.920	0.01
	Experimental	19.37 \pm 2.83	27		
Speaking insecurity	Control	20.21 \pm 2.81	28	2.578	0.01
	Experimental	18.52 \pm 2.65	27		
Fear of evaluation	Control	23.86 \pm 3.89	28	2.545	0.05
	Experimental	21.33 \pm 3.80	27		
Low self confidence	Control	25.25 \pm 4.03	28	2.843	0.01
	Experimental	21.89 \pm 3.76	27		
Overall	Control	90.86 \pm 12.46	28	2.978	0.01
	Experimental	81.11 \pm 12.06	27		

Close inspection of data presented in table (4) reveals that there were statistically significant differences at 0.01 level in the mean scores of students in speaking anxiety in the control and experimental group in favour of the latter. Therefore, this provides enough evidence to support hypothesis three.

Hypothesis four: There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the speaking anxiety scale concerning speaking anxiety types (reluctance to speak, speaking insecurity, fear of evaluation, and low self confidence) in favour of the former.

Table (4) shows that:

- There were statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of students concerning "reluctance to speak", "speaking insecurity", and "low self confidence" in the control and experimental groups in favour of the latter.**
- There were statistically significant differences at 0.05 level between the mean scores of students concerning "fear of evaluation" in the control and experimental groups in favour of the latter.**

So, the fourth hypothesis of the study was supported as the experimental group outperformed the control group in the four types of speaking anxiety.

4.2. Discussion

Concerning the speaking skills, the positive results of this study that revealed that RT was effective in developing overall speaking skills of EFL secondary school students, support the findings of other studies like Caudill– Hansen (2009), Ree (2005) and Patrick (2008). In addition, students' progress might be due to the following factors:

- Students' speaking skills develop best in an interactive environment.**
- Assigning roles according to students' desire increased their motivation and involvement.**
- The intensive practice of different speaking skills during reading aloud**

of RT scripts encouraged students to exert a lot of efforts to perfect their roles.

– Modeling and feedback are natural components of RT rehearsals.

Yet, the results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between mean scores of students concerning "content", "accuracy", and "pronunciation" in the control and experimental groups. These results might be due to the fact that these sub skills can not be developed through practice only. As for "accuracy" and "pronunciation", improving them needs direct instruction, knowledge and the usage of a variety of rules and not only practice through RT. Moreover, developing "content" requires specific instructions in generating ideas which was not provided in RT since it focused on changing summaries of literary works into scripts collaboratively with the help of the teacher.

As for speaking anxiety, results revealed that there were statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of students in the control and experimental group in favour of the latter. This result is in agreement with the results of other studies like Corcoran and Davis (2005), and Griffith and Rasinski (2004). Students' improvement might be due to the following factors:

- The non threatening environment that motivated students to participate in RT without fear of evaluation.
- The sense of humor that prevailed during acting which helped students feel secure and increased their self confidence during RT rehearsals and performances.
- The change in the teacher's role from an assessor of students' speaking skills to facilitator, organizer, motivator, demonstrator, and an audience.

5. Conclusions, Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Studies

5.1. Conclusions

It is important to mention that the results of the study are limited by the sample size, the characteristics of the subjects, the length of the study and the selected speaking skills and types of speaking anxiety used in the study. Within these limitations, it can be concluded that RT is effective in developing the speaking skills of EFL secondary school students and reducing their speaking anxiety. These results support the indicators of success the RT studies showed in other contexts related to language skills (Liu, 2000; Patrick, 2008; Roser & Strecker, 1999; Rasinski, 2000; Ree, 2005; Millin & Riehart; 1999) and psychological factors (Carrick, 2000; Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Worthy & Prater, 2002). To sum up, the results of the study can provide the basis for many other programs based on RT to develop different skills in different language learning contexts.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the results of this study and the above mentioned conclusions, the following recommendations seem pertinent:

1-EFL teachers should be encouraged and trained to use RT to teach speaking skills and reduce speaking anxiety for the following reasons:

- RT depends on using scripts that offer psychological security to students as well as a rich source of comprehensible language that is natural and spoken.
- Drama involved in RT is a source of fun for students that encourages them to collaborate with each other to present a good performance.
- Using rehearsals in RT increases students self confidence and

makes them eager to participate in this enjoyable interactive activity.

- The desire to put on a great performance is very motivating for students.

2- RT teams should be established in different secondary schools.

3- RT should be included in students' books at the secondary stage.

5.3. Suggestions for further studies

1- Conducting studies to use RT with EFL learners at various educational levels and in different language learning contexts.

2- More research is needed to examine the effectiveness of RT in developing different language skills like listening, reading and writing.

3- More research is needed to examine different strategies that can help EFL first year secondary school students reduce their speaking anxiety.

4- Conducting studies to investigate the effect of different types of speaking anxiety on EFL students' oral performance.

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