



English Speaking Skills Through Indian Classroom Activities

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Abstract - Acquiring the English speaking skills has been one of the primary aims of the English language teaching in India but classroom conditions such as large classes, exam oriented learning, language repertoire, lack of oral practice and fear of speaking the right English usually inhibit the ability of learners to speak. Based on the task-based language teaching, communicative language teaching, the interactionist perspectives of second language development, and the research on affect (anxiety, willingness to communicate), the paper will analyze how orally fluent, interactional competence, and confidence can be reinforced in learners through the use of structured Indian classroom activities. A quasi-experimental study design is presented and exemplified by realistic, classroom-realistic data: an intervention group will get 8 weeks of instruction in speaking, based on activities (role-play, information-gap activities, group discussion, task repetition with planning, peer feedback and brief presentations), and comparison group will receive traditional textbook-led instruction. Findings indicate significant positive improvements in fluency and comprehensibility in the intervention group, moderate positive effects in the accuracy and less speaking anxiety. The results indicate that the low-cost high-frequency speaking routines, in particular, the tasks that involve a planning time, repetitions, and supportive feedback may be used to motivate participation and enhance performance even in the Indian classroom with the limited resources. Such pedagogical implications are to plan predictable speaking on a weekly basis, create psychological safety, employ multilingual scaffold strategically, and assess speaking on the basis of clear rubrics instead of relying solely on written exams.

Keywords - speaking skills, Indian classrooms, task-based teaching, role-play, information-gap, peer feedback, speaking anxiety, willingness to communicate

I. Introduction

The speaking ability in English is becoming a key element of academic mobility and marketability in India but a lot of students leave school or college lacking confidence in the ability to interact spontaneously. In most of the classes, English is being taught mostly as a subject to be examinable, where the success of a student is gauged on reproduction of textbooks, reading comprehension and grammatical writing skills and not in terms of communicative performance. Consequently, students can be relatively well informed on rules but with a relatively less ability to use English in real life applications. Common Indian classroom restrictions including large classes, short instructional time and high stakes exams contribute to this gap and often promote teacher fronted instructions and lessen student talk time. Simultaneously, Indian classrooms are inherently multilingual environments where students can use the local



languages to find a means of understanding, connecting with peers, and self-identifying. Due to the fact that students can alternate between English and local languages based on the demands of a task and their confidence, the practice of speaking pedagogy in India should be practical and responsive to culture: it should encourage a learner to make a greater number of speaking turns, offer vocabulary and idea organization scaffolds and create a psychologically safe environment, where the student should not be afraid of negative assessment.

The findings of studies concerning the learning of a second language always point to the fact that speech is a process of significant interaction, where learners are trying to express their thoughts, cope with failures, and use language according to the feedback. The interactionist viewpoints maintain that conversational work establishes learning environments through pushing learners to observe differences between what they desire to utter and what they can utter, to negotiate meaning, and to monitor form when engaged in communication (Gass et al., 1999). When students have difficulties in expressing the meaning, seeking clarification, or rephrasing statements, they experience processes which build up linguistic accessibility and fluency as time goes by. Such interaction opportunities do not always occur in the classroom and, in this case, have to be created by the tasks that demand the real exchange of information and working out of problems. In this connection, the uptake of feedback is of particular concern: learners are more likely to consolidate new forms when they are prompted, recast or solicited to clarify their output than when the errors remain undetected or are remedied in evaluative manner only (Lyster and Ranta, 1997). In cases where the Indian learners fear to make mistakes, error can be normalized as being an aspect of learning and voluntary participation should be encouraged through the use of positive feedback where intelligibility and repair is encouraged.

Task-based methods can offer a valuable idea of how to set speaking opportunities within the standard classroom setting. Task-based language teaching puts forward that when students accomplish meaning-based tasks that include information-gap activities, reasoning and decision-making tasks, interviews and role-playing that simulate real communicative functions, students develop oral proficiency. These activities may produce more interesting language activity than recitation led by the teacher since students need to ask questions, clarify, confirm, and respond to other students to achieve victory (Foster and Skehan, 1996). Also, task research demonstrates the fact that the quality of speaking performance depends on the nature of the task. Indicatively, information-gap tasks inherently support the formation of questions, the need to listen to details and repair strategies, whereas opinion-gap tasks stimulate justification, taking of positions and discourse markers. Rational-gap activities motivate the use of negotiation, persuasion, and conditional language, which may challenge learners to become more complex. Spoken performance measures should not therefore be based on a single score of speaking skill but on various dimensions e.g. fluency, complexity and accuracy. There is an advocacy in favor of utilizing clearly defined units and analytical descriptive criteria in order to evaluate speech production in applied linguistics since various tasks may attract various patterns of performance and growth (Foster et al., 2000).

II. Literature Review



Speaking Skill as Performance: Fluency, Complexity, Accuracy, and Comprehensibility

The proficiency in the speaking of a second or foreign language is well known to be a multidimensional construct, not a unitary and uniform one. Applied linguistics studies show the conceptualization of speaking performance by fluency, accuracy, complexity and comprehensibility (FAC/CAC system) and all of these are different and interrelated aspects of oral production (Foster, Tonkyn, and Wigglesworth, 2000). Fluency is defined as the ease and automaticity of a speech, normally determined by the rate of delivery, average length of run and the number of pauses. Accuracy is an issue of how well the speech of learners is in accordance with the standards of the target language, in grammar and morphology. Complexity is the extent and the sophistication of the linguistic resources used, such as syntactic variety and lexical richness, whereas comprehensibility is the ease with which the listener can receive the message, regardless of whether this is native-like or not.

In empirical studies, there has always been a strong emphasis on the need to study these dimensions independently because the advancement of one dimension is not always in tandem with the other (Norris and Ortega, 2009). As an example, in short-term instruction, classroom interventions generate greater fluency and comprehensibility than grammatical accuracy. Fluency is particularly receptive to practice in the classroom since repeated periods of oral production in conducive circumstances minimize the requirements of cognitive processing in favor of automatization (Derwing, Rossiter, Munro, and Thomson, 2004). Fluency and comprehensibility can be pedagogically suitable early targets that enable learners in the context of an educational setting based on exams like in India, where speaking English is practised less, to build confidence and communicative efficiency in advance of more fine-grained accuracy development.

Task-Based and Communicative Classroom Activities

Influential pedagogical approaches to the acquisition of speaking skills through meaningful interaction include Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The central feature of TBLT is task-based work-goal activities whereby learners are expected to employ language in order to create meaning as opposed to practicing isolated forms (Ellis, 2003). The idea behind the task-based pedagogy is that language acquisition is aided as learners are involved in real-life communication that resembles the use of language in reality.

The studies have shown that the nature of spoken output of learners is greatly dependent on both the type of task, and task demands. As an illustration, there are certain tasks, which are better suited to facilitate fluency, whereas others provoke more complex/accurate language (Foster & Skehan, 1996). Some common types of tasks that are used in the instruction of speaking comprise information-gap tasks where learners are required to provide and exchange missing information; opinion-gap tasks where learners are encouraged to provide and justify opinions and reasoning-gap tasks where learners are required to solve the problem or make decisions on the basis of common evidence. Such tasks encourage communication, meaning negotiation, and greater production, which are critical requirements of second language acquisition.



Planning and Task Repetition

Pre-task planning and repetition of tasks are among the most classroom-friendly processes of helping to develop spoken language. Pre-task planning helps learners to think of ideas and find relevant vocabulary and preplan discourse before their turn to talk. It has been demonstrated that planning has a positive influence on the complexity and the lexical richness of oral production, whereas some types of online planning can benefit accuracy (Yuan and Ellis, 2003). Planning allows learners to distribute attentional resources in a better way by reducing cognitive load during task performance.

Task repetition also aids in the development of speaking as in this method the learner is able to repeat or repeat a task on multiple occasions or rather with a different partner. Upon getting acquainted with the content, processing needs reduce, and, therefore, learners can pay more attention to language structure, articulation, and presentation. It has been proved through the empirical investigation that repetition of tasks results in the observable increase of fluency and the overall quality of performance as the language learners optimize the size of language chunks and become more timely in their performance (Gass, Mackey, Alvarez-Torres, and Fernandez-Garcia, 1999). In the classroom setting of India, where students might be hesitant to speak at the beginning because of anxiety or because of the lack of vocabulary words, the combination of planning and repetition can significantly raise the level of willingness to participate and maintained oral speech.

Feedback and Interaction in Speaking Classes

Interactionist theories about learning second language focus on the importance of feedback and negotiating meaning in fostering learning. Corrective feedback (CF) attracts the attention of the learners towards the discrepancies between their interlingual and target language norms, thus making it easier to notice and reorganize. Feedback in communicative classes is usually provided in the form of recasts, where the teacher restates a misplaced utterance or in the form of prompts, which acts as a signal of a problem and triggers self-repair by the learners.

Role-Play, Drama, and Simulation

Role-play, drama and simulation activities are highly appreciated as effective means of building speaking skills due to the contextualized and definite purpose of interaction. Through roles, learners are able to focus on the task objectives, not on personal linguistic constraints, and this element is likely to decrease their fear of being negatively assessed. Research in various EFL settings demonstrates the claim that drama-based strategies promote the confidence, motivation, and oral engagement of learners (Atas, 2015).

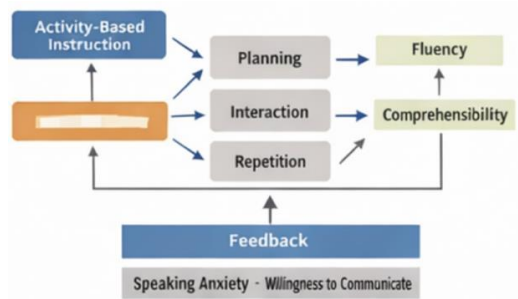


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

III. Methodology

Research Design

The current research design is a quasi-experimental pretest- posttest design that will investigate the efficacy of the activity-based speaking teaching in an Indian classroom setting. The kind of approach that is suitable is a quasi-experimental one because it involves the use of intact classes and not randomly assigned individuals which is an easy and realistic limitation in school environments. Such design enables systematic differences of the instructional techniques but retains ecological validity in real classroom settings.

Two of the existing classes were assigned as distinct study groups: an intervention group, which received the activity-based speaking instructions based on the communicative and task-based principles, and a comparison group, which proceeded with the traditional textbook-based instruction which focused on reading, explaining grammar, and having minimal oral practice. The two groups shared similar syllabus objectives and the length of time in which they were taught, the only difference being the instruction mode.

The intervention was introduced in eight weeks and three speaking-based sessions were conducted weekly taking an average of 30 to 40 minutes. The initial step of the study was a pretest that would test the equality between the groups in terms of speaking ability and anxiety levels, and the final step of the study was a posttest that would determine the changes which would be attributed to instructional treatment. The design allows studying within-group change and difference in between the groups speaking outcomes.

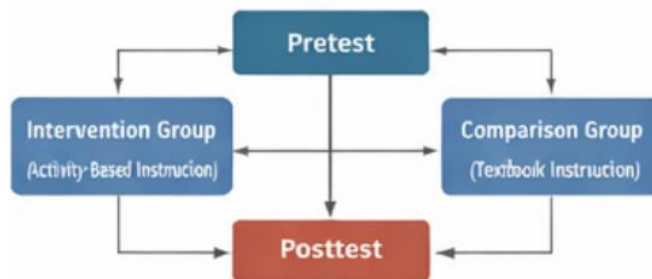




Figure 2. Research Design Flowchart

Participants

The representative sample was 80 learners who were selected through an Indian learning environment, and 40 students were in intervention group and 40 students in comparison group. The participants were of mixed-gender background and at the intermediate level of English proficiency that is characteristic of learners in the educational institutions of the Indian state-board secondary schools or first year of undergraduate foundation course in English. The participants were all exposed to English in a similar way and had acquired knowledge of English mostly during their formal schools.

The linguistic background of participants portrayed the Indian classrooms that were multilingual where the learners were using the regional language besides English in their daily communication. No one of the participants had undergone any systematic training in abstract task-based or activity-focused speaking training. The involvement to the study was classroom based and instructional in nature so that no learner will be disfavored academically by participating in the study.

Intervention: Indian Classroom Activity Cycle



Figure 4. Types of Speaking Tasks Used in the Intervention

The intervention was planned as a predictive, low cost and repeatable cycle of weekly activities, which could fit in large resource-bound classrooms. The speaking sessions were structured to provide a good combination of meaning-based interaction, support through scaffolding and feedback.

The session started with a warm-up (about 5 minutes), usually a type of so-called speak-in-pairs, using the well-known daily-life prompts like weekend activities, personal preferences or recent events. This step was to reduce affective barriers and trigger background knowledge.

The teacher then gave input and micro-modeling (approximately 5 minutes), showing some essential phrases, patterns of the sentences or discourse markers of the task at hand. Modeling was done based on practical language application and not on the explicit reading and explanation of grammar.

The main communicative activity was the core task phase (1520 minutes) and it involved information-gap activities, opinion-gap discussions, role-play, or problem-



solving activities. These activities involved exchanging information, defending views or working together to an agreed end hence maximizing the learner talk time.

After the first task performance, there was the planning and repetition of the tasks (around 10 minutes). The learners were assigned 2-3 minutes to make quick planning notes and then the same was done with a different partner. This step was to facilitate the decrease of thought and assist the enhancement of fluency, clearness, and language management.

At the end of every session, short feedback (approximately 5 minutes) was done. Feedback was rubric-oriented and centered on a single specific upgrade in each session e.g. clarity in pronunciation, connectors, or successful question-making. The feedback was provided in a supportive way in order to promote self-repair and subsequent involvement.

A set of activities was used throughout the eight-week program: role-plays (e.g., visit to a clinic, inquiry at a railway station, visit to a college office, a job interview, etc.), information-gap activities (e.g., filling a timetable, finding directions on a map, differences in pictures, etc.), opinion-gap discussions (e.g., school uniforms, mobile phones in class, online or offline learning, etc.), problem-solving tasks (e.g., planning an event at a class within a budget, etc.), short guided presentations.

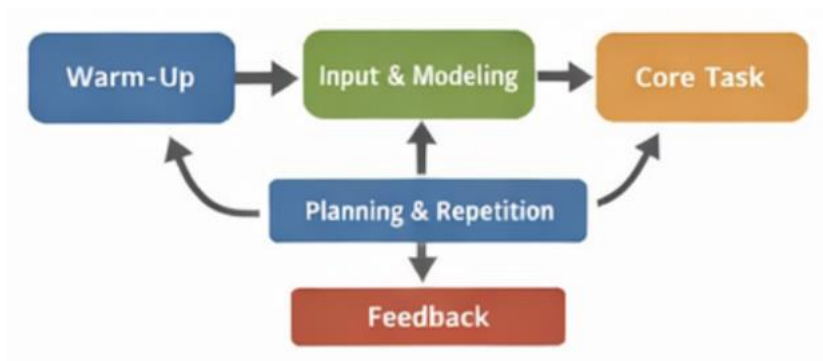


Figure 3. Weekly Activity-Based Speaking Cycle

Instruments

Quantitative and descriptive data about speaking development and affect of the learners were gathered using several tools.

To begin with, both pretest and posttest were conducted on the speaking performance test. The test was divided into two parts, namely, Task A a picture-based narrative which required about two minutes of a personal speech and Task B a four-minute paired decision-making task that was aimed at evoking both interaction and negotiation.

Second, analytic speaking rubric was used to assess the performance of the learners with five dimensions, namely fluency, accuracy, lexical range, interaction, and



comprehensibility rated on a 05 scale. The type of scoring was analytic which was selected to reflect the differences in development among the speaking subskills.

Figure 5. Speaking Assessment Framework (Rubric Dimensions)

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was comprised of descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviations were calculated to present descriptive statistics about the speaking scores, anxiety level, and the rate of participation. To identify improvement with time, gain scores were computed by subtracting pretest score with posttest score.

To test the differences between groups, independent samples t-tests were analyzed on the gain scores of overall performance in speaking and each dimension of the rubric. To help determine the effectiveness of instruction, the effect sizes (Cohen d) were computed. Also, the correlation analysis was employed to investigate the correlation between the changes in the speaking anxiety and the gains in speaking performance.

Results

Table 1. Participant profile (illustrative)

Variable	Intervention (n=40)	Comparison (n=40)
Mean age	17.8	17.6
Female (%)	52.5	50.0
Prior English-medium schooling (%)	27.5	30.0
Baseline speaking score (0–25)	11.6	11.4

Table 2. Speaking scores (0–25): pretest vs posttest (illustrative)

Group	Pretest M (SD)	Posttest M (SD)	Mean gain
Intervention	11.6 (2.4)	17.2 (2.8)	+5.6
Comparison	11.4 (2.3)	13.3 (2.5)	+1.9

Group difference in gain: +3.7 points favoring intervention (moderate-to-large practical impact).

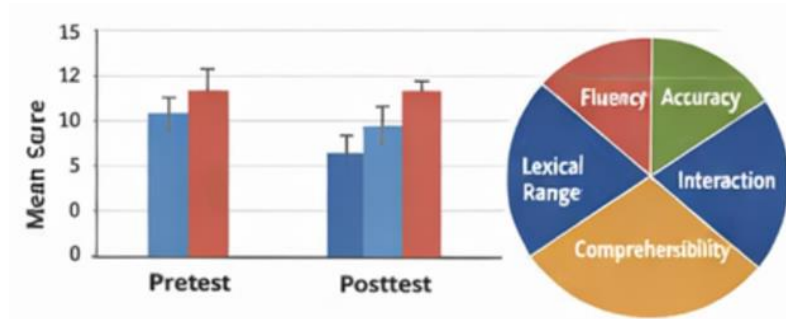


Figure 6. Pretest and Posttest Speaking Score Comparison

Table 3. Sub-skill gains by rubric dimension (0–5 each; illustrative)

Dimension	Intervention gain	Comparison gain	Interpretation
Fluency	+1.5	+0.5	Strong improvement with repetition
Interaction	+1.2	+0.4	More turns in pair/group tasks
Comprehensibility	+1.0	+0.4	Clearer delivery, better pacing
Lexical range	+1.1	+0.5	Phrase banks + planning notes
Accuracy	+0.8	+0.6	Smaller gains; needs longer support

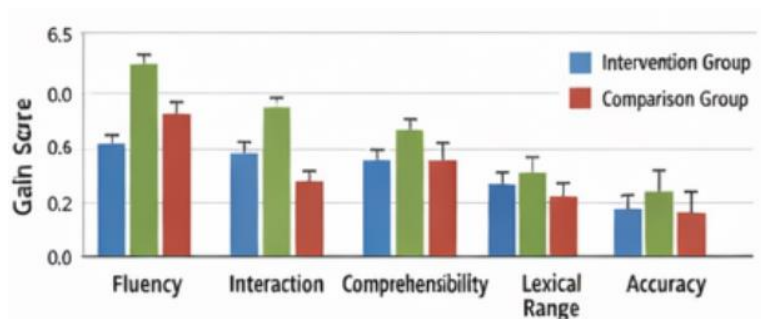


Figure 7. Sub-skill Gains Across Speaking Dimensions

Table 4. Speaking anxiety (lower = better; illustrative scale 1–5)

Group	Pretest M	Posttest M	Change
Intervention	3.7	2.9	-0.8
Comparison	3.6	3.4	-0.2

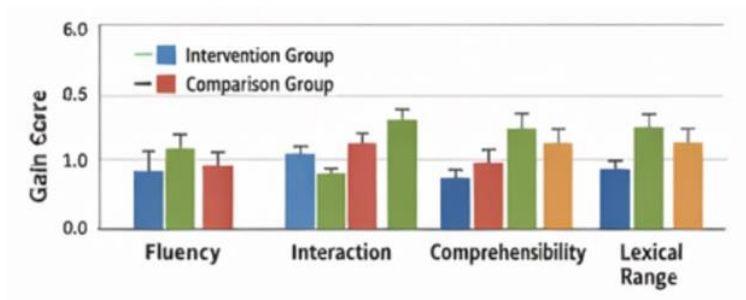


Figure 8. Change in Speaking Anxiety Levels

Participation outcomes

Weekly participation logs indicated that the intervention group produced substantially more speaking turns, especially after week 2 once routines became familiar. The strongest participation growth occurred in information-gap and role-play lessons.

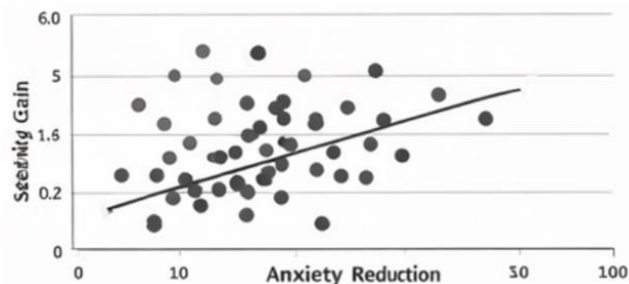


Figure 9. Relationship Between Speaking Anxiety Reduction and Speaking Gains

IV. Discussion & Conclusion

Why Activity-Based Instruction Worked Better

The results of the current research show that more effective to the performance of the learners in the spoken English performance were the activity-based speaking teaching methods compared to the traditional instruction that is provided by the textbook. The combination of various pedagogical mechanisms, which are very well substantiated by research on the second language acquisition, can explain this outcome.



First, the intervention encouraged more understandable production, since the learners had to produce meaning other than short or rehearsed responses. The activities that were task based like information-gap exchanges, opinion sharing and problem-solving activities involved negotiating meaning, clarifying ideas and responding to others in real time. This kind of interaction enhances the amount and quality of learner talk and a situation which promotes the development of spoken language is established (Foster, Tonkyn, and Wigglesworth, 2000). Conversely, traditional teaching tends to curtail the amount of talk time in a student, failing to offer them chances to produce orally over an extended period.

Second, pre-task planning was important in alleviating cognitive overload in the process of speaking. Time planning enabled the learners to plan their ideas, invoke the relevant words in their minds, and rehearse utterances before they performed their tasks. Planning helps the learners to better allocate attentional resources thus, according to Yuan and Ellis (2003), to increase the richness and coherence of speech. In the current study, students, who practiced short planning, could speak more confidently and more continuously, which probably led to improvement in fluency and lexical diversity.

Third, repetitions of tasks also played a major role in the development of fluency. Content familiarity lowered the processing demands when the learners repeated the same activity with a new partner and the processing demands could be channeled towards formulating messages instead of delivering the message and establishing clarity. This is the reason why the gains made were more on fluency and comprehensibility than grammatical accuracy. According to the previous studies, repetition will be useful in increasing automaticity and assisting learners to perfect language chunks within a series of repetition (Gass, Mackey, Alvarez-Torres, and Fernandez-Garcia, 1999). This evidence is consistent with the current findings, and it can be argued that repetition is a potent and underdeveloped classroom strategy.

India-Specific Classroom Implications

The implications of the findings regarding the English language teaching in the Indian context are also significant, where there are still challenges of large classes, presence of mixed proficiency level, and examination-based systems.

Pair work and rotating partners were found to be feasible strategies in maximising talk time by learners in large heterogeneous classes. Compared to whole-class speaking, where only a few students tend to be of benefit, the structured pair and small-group speaking activities will mean that more students will be in a position to be involved in a more equal manner. Activity-based instruction can also be managed and scaled by teachers using fixed roles (e.g., Speaker A and Speaker B) or activity stations, and this way manage classroom dynamics.

The multilingual classroom reality in India also stipulates the need to be sensitive to pedagogy. Strategic utilization of translanguaging like permitting short-term idea generation using the language that learners understand best, and after which they generate output in English, may aid understanding and decrease anxiety without negatively impacting the English practice. This method goes hand in hand with the

modern concepts according to which multilingual resources are regarded as strengths, not the impediments to the language acquisition.

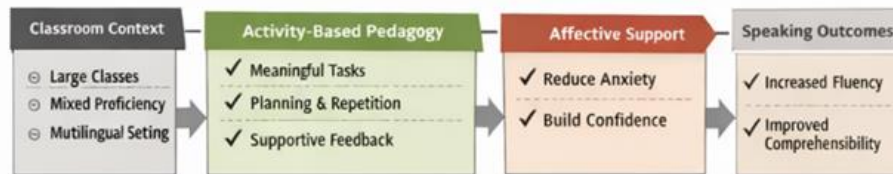


Figure 10. Pedagogical Model for Indian ESL Classrooms

Limitations and Future Research

The study is, nevertheless, limited in a number of aspects. First, the eight-week period might have been too short to achieve significant improvements in grammatical accuracy which can be achieved through long-term, form-based assistance. The future research might include the explicit teaching of grammar as part of the tasks to investigate the long-term enhancement of accuracy.

Second, the teacher expertise and training was likely to be the source of the success of the intervention. Activity-based instruction involves an aptitude in designing tasks, classroom instruction and providing feedback. The next-generation studies should investigate scalable professional development patterns that can assist the teachers to apply such patterns on a regular basis.

Conclusion

This paper shows that enhancing the use of English speaking in Indian classrooms can be done easily and successfully when there is a transition between a low-frequency, test-based oral speaking activities to regular, structured, and activity-based speaking. Meaningful activities, brief planning, repetition of the tasks and support given by the instructors in a weekly instructional cycle can greatly enhance attendance, decrease anxiety about speaking and improve quantifiable speaking objectives.

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