

A Study On Enhancing The Speaking Skill By Using Group Discussion Strategy Among The Upper Primary Students

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Abstract: The present study is conducted for improving the speaking skills of upper primary students of Solmara High School, Sonitpur, Assam. Speaking is considered one of the most essential skills for an individual for making fruitful adjustments in various life situations. It is the most important one among the four aspects of language skills that are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Speaking is the skill that implies expressing one's thoughts and feelings by using components of verbal languages i.e. words, sentences and phrases, etc. For the purpose of the present study, the researcher has used group discussion as a strategy for improving speaking skills among the students. In this study, the researcher has conducted a pre-test and after that, interventions are given by employing group discussion as a technique for improving the skills. Then a post-test is conducted and found that after the interventions the students were able to improve in various components of speaking skills such as pronunciation, organizing ability, language proficiency etc. Moreover, the students' self-confidence level also increased largely that will also be useful for their progress in different life spheres.

Index Terms: Speaking skill, group discussion, upper primary students.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Only by speaking out can we create lasting change and that change begins with coming out.”

—DaShanne

Stokes

Speaking skill is one of the most essential skills in an individual's life. It is considered as the act of making vocal sounds with the use of different body parts such as- limbs, vocal tracts, vocal cords, tongue, teeth, and lips. With the help of it one can express his or her own ideas, views, opinions, thoughts and feelings or make conversations with others. Speaking is often used to convey information by involving spoken languages. For making verbal communication effective, a speaker can use his or her speaking skills and convey the message in a passionate, thoughtful and convincing manner. As speaking is the most prominent of all the four language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, etc., hence it can be said that the ability to speak efficiently and effectively can add immense value to an individual. It can also provide the speaker with important advantages like the ability to inform, develop contacts with others, persuade and direct, provide own viewpoint on various matters, stand out from the rest, career enhancement, the fulfillment of needs, personal satisfaction, proper and adequate adjustment according to the environmental demands, etc. Speaking and human beings both can be compared to having flower-fragrance relationships, due to their interconnections and interrelatedness. As learning is a process of development of various skills in the learners so that we can consider speaking skills as one of the most important aspects of the learning process. The skill of speaking requires that the learners must know the use of words, grammar, sentences and pronunciations, etc. in the correct time and correct context in an effective manner. Therefore, it is very essential to teach the students how to speak well by using the components of speaking skills such as rules of grammar, correct vocabulary, comprehension, fluency in

pronunciation, etc. Action research is one of the most important types of research work. It plays a great role in solving various problems that arise in the field of education and improves the process of education to a possible extent. Teachers and practitioners for solving the problems or improving the status of education generally use this type of research. Classroom action research is a process, which is the result of experiences and challenges felt by the teachers and their willingness to overcome those obstacles. Classroom action research helps to find out the best possible ways of tackling classroom issues and making the teaching-learning process effective. It is said that classroom action research is more of informal research work than other systematic and formal kind of research works. According to Good, “Action research is research used by teachers, supervisors, and administrators to improve the quality of their decisions and actions”. According to J.W. Best, “Action research is focused on the immediate application, not on the development of theory. It has placed its emphasis on real problem-here and now in a local setting.” In educational institutions, various kinds of problem situations arise now and then. Like that, the problem of the lower level of speaking ability among the students of class 7 at Solmara High school, Sonitpur, Assam is one of the most vital ones that is felt by most of the teachers of the school. There are many complaints regarding this problem on the part of the teachers. The researcher has faced the problem during her internship period and decided to conduct action research for coming out from this problem. Then action research on majority of students of the class is conducted by the researcher with the help of respected guide and peer interns. Here the researcher has discussed about the study which can be of great help for other teachers or researchers to use this great tool as a part of educational process.

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2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Speaking Skill

Human beings are social being i.e. they have to live in a society by interacting with one another. In the process of interaction, they need to make conversations by using language through their skill of speaking. Speaking is a productive activity that helps to express one's thoughts and feelings. It is the process through which information can be shared and communications can be carried out in a civilized word. Speaking is also a mode of language learning that reflects one's ability or proficiency in particular language. For earning mastery in a language, speaking skill is must. It is an interactive process that can be used for sharing ideas or delivering lectures in a public domain. The habits of speaking and exchanging ideas or information can have a great impact on determining one's success in life. Lewis and Hill (1998:54) state that speaking is a process that covers many things in addition to the pronunciation of individual sounds. Widdowson (1996:54) believes that speaking is simply the physical embodiment of abstract system or of the grammatical system of language or both. Burkart (1998:11) says that speaking is an activity which involves the areas of knowledge, they are the mechanics (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary; it is the use of right words in the right order with the right pronunciation. The functions (transaction and interaction); it is to know the clarity of message is essential (transaction/ information exchange) and when precise understanding is not required (interaction/ relationship building). And the social and cultural rules and norms (turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pause between speakers, relative roles of participant); it is understanding how to take into account who is speaking to whom in what circumstances, about what, and for what reason. Mackey (2001:79) defines that speaking is an oral expression that involves not only the use of right patterns of rhythm and intonation but also right order to convey the right meaning. Thornbury (2005: IV) says that speaking is an interactive and requires the ability to co-operate in the management of speaking turn. Thus, it can be concluded that speaking is an activity which involves right pattern of rhythm and intonations for expressing thoughts and feelings in oral mode by using words, phrases and sentences.

Group Discussion

Kidsvatter (1996:242) states that a small-group discussion dividing the large classroom into small groups of students to achieve specific objectives permits students to assume more responsibilities for their own learning, develop social and leadership skills and become involved in an alternative instructional approach. According to Hoover (1997:13), discussion is the process of talking things over among two or more persons, preferably face to face. He adds that the total discussion process ideally is a cooperative effort on the part of a number of individuals to work together as a group, through the exchange of thought orally, toward some group objectives. Risk states that discussion means thoughtful consideration of the relationship involved in the topic or problem under study. Ur (1997:2) says that thinking out some problems and situations together through verbal interchange of ideas is simply called as to discuss. From those above-mentioned definitions, it can be concluded that discussion is the process of exchanging views, ideas,

information among two or more persons on some relevant topic or problem situations. The positive effect of group discussion is explained by Ornstein. He states that dividing students into small group seems to provide an opportunity for students to become more actively engaged in learning and for teacher to monitor students' progress better. It can also enhance students' cooperation and social skills (2000). Penny Ur (1998: 3) states that a discussion that works is primarily one in which as many students as possible say as much as possible. A further characteristic of a successful discussion is the apparent motivation of the participants: their attention to the speaker(s), their expression- that they are reacting to the humour, seriousness or difficulty of the ideas being expressed.

3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Studies Conducted Abroad

Wang Shuqin, June 2004 has conducted a study on "How can I help the students improve their speaking ability in the speaking and listening part in the class of integrated skills of English?" The researcher provided the students more topics and chances for them to work in pairs, in groups and using and participating in activities. As a result of all these activities the students' ability of speaking along with their active engagement with the vocabulary, interest, confidence, thinking ability etc. were all improved. M Afraizal has conducted a study on "A classroom action research: improving speaking skills through information gap activities." The research was based on a preliminary study on the causes of problems related to the student's inability to speak English. One of the research objective is to describe the atmosphere in improving speaking by using activities in the information gap technique. The research findings showed that IGT activities were effective in improving the speaking abilities of the students in the class. Ratna Sari Devi, Ummi Kultsum, and Ari Amadi have conducted a study on "Using communicative games in improving students' speaking skills." The aims of the study are to know whether communicative games have an impact on teaching speaking skills and describe how communicative games give an influence on speaking skills of students at junior high schools. It was found that the communicative games have contributed a positive impact on teaching-learning process. This also implies that the communicative games expected to enhance students' enthusiasm and motivation. Clearly, it gives positive improvement on students' active participation, confidence and their fluency in speaking skill. It can be described that the strategy of teaching and learning creates good, enjoyable circumstances and reduces the boredom and stress of learning process. Dwi Nurul Fazariyah has conducted a study on "Improving students' speaking proficiency by using games". The action research study is designed to improve students' speaking proficiency by implementing games. The aims of this research are to describe whether or not and to what extent games improve speaking proficiency, and to identify the situation when games are implemented in the speaking class. The research findings shows that students' speaking proficiency improved in terms of ability in answering the teacher's questions orally, identifying the words and grammar used in the expression, making sentences using appropriate

grammar and vocabulary, joining the activities, discussing the tasks with their friends and increasing their motivation to learn. Olmedo Bula Villalobos has conducted a study on "Fostering students' oral production in the EFL class." The study reflects upon the experience of using three speaking activities that is role-play, an interview, and speaking workstations to foster students' oral production in the EFL class. It was found that all these speaking activities and real-life tasks fostered students' oral production in the EFL class.

Studies Conducted in India

Dhaniram Sharma has conducted a study on "Action research on improving students' speaking proficiency in using cooperative story telling strategy." The research was a collaborative action research whose main purpose was to know whether or not storytelling strategy could improve the students' speaking skill. Meanwhile, the specific purposes consisted of describing to implement storytelling strategy in 11th graders students at the school to improve the students' speaking skill, to enhance their confidence in speaking skill and create fluency in speaking. The research showed that there was an improvement on students' speaking proficiency after the implementation of storytelling strategy. The students' speaking aspect got good progress and it improves their comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Thus, it can be said that the research found that the storytelling strategy could improve students' speaking skill. S. Rasheedha Banu and Rajathurai Nishanthi have conducted a study on "difficulties faced by college students in speaking English- a sociological reflection" The study revealed that students have limited time to learn English inside the class and still they do not have enough encouragement to practice outside the class in order to get familiar with that language. Next, the environment is another leading cause for the problem of learning English.

4. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

The social science teacher of a particular school finds out that some of the students of her class are not willing to speak in front of the whole classroom during the teaching-learning process and it is seen that their active participation is also very poor, in spite of the fact that:

- The teacher treats each and every student equally.
- The teacher always encourage the students to speak in the classroom by asking them to share their viewpoint, opinions regarding different relevant matters of the topics being taught.
- Ask questions to the students to make them active participant in teaching-learning process.
- Organize such kind of activities that have the provisions of providing equal opportunities and engaging students in the classroom.

5. DEFINING THE PROBLEM

As the problem goes on increasing, the teacher decided to go to the root of the problem that is "why the class vii students of that particular school are not being able to speak in the teaching-learning process?" and tried to implement group discussion as a strategy for enhancing their speaking skills.

Thus, the problem is identified and further specified as:

"A study on enhancing the speaking skill by using group discussion strategy among the upper primary students"

6. LISTING OF PROBABLE CAUSES OF PROBLEM

- Students are not that much fluent in speaking Assamese language that is the medium of instruction in the school.
- Lack of self-confidence stands as a hamper for the students' speaking skill.
- Students are too shy to speak in front of their peers.
- No proper incentives given by the teachers while students do well in speaking in the classroom.

7. NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The skill of speaking is one of the most prominent among all the four skills of language learning i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing and these are essential part of teaching- learning process. Through speaking skill, one can share his or her ideas, viewpoints, opinions, thoughts, and feelings and communicate with one another in an effective manner. Like other spheres of life, speaking skill plays a great role in teaching- learning process. The skill provides opportunity for the learners to express their thoughts and feelings regarding various topics or matters in the classroom situation. It can be claimed that without speaking skills, students will be lagging behind in their career enhancement process or they will not be able to get personal satisfaction, which has utmost importance in living a healthy life. Without this skill, progress in the field of education or life is not possible. The students of Solmara High School are lagging behind in this important skill and it is very important to understand the problems that the students are facing in speaking and solve those through systematic study for their improvement in this necessary skill and in life in a wider view. That is why the study is taken up in this area.

8. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is based on the following objectives:

- To study the problems that are facing by the students regarding speaking skill.
- To find out the causes for which the students are lagging behind in speaking skill.
- To provide remedial measures for solving the problem of speaking difficulty.
- To enhance the speaking skill of the students and help them to progress in their educational, vocational and personal life.

9. ACTION HYPOTHESES

- If the students get good command over Assamese language then they will be able to speak fluently.
- If the confidence level of the students could be increased then they will be able to speak in front of the whole class.
- If the teacher provide proper guidance on speaking skill then the students will be able to increase the skill.
- If proper opportunities or practice of speaking is given to the students then they will be able to improve their skill.

- If the students get proper incentives then they will be willing to enhance their skill of speaking.

10. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study is confined to a selected sample of 20 students which is drawn from the total population of about 50 students of class 7, section (A) of Solmara High School, Sonitpur district, Assam. The limitations of the study included limited number of action strategies adopted by the researcher for the purpose of the study. Moreover, the findings of the present study may not be generalized since the results could vary depending on the sample, class, course, approach, attitude, locality of the teachers and the taught, and on the educational background of the students.

11. SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

All the students of class vii (A) (i.e. 50) of Solmara High School are the population for the present study. But for the limited time period and for the convenience and purpose of the study, the researcher has taken only 20(twenty) students of the class as sample by using purposive sampling strategy and from these samples the data will be collected and needed intervention will be provided as per the requirements of the study.

12. METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on primary data source. The researcher has used Participatory Observation as a method of collecting data from the intended sample for studying the problem. The methodology adopted for carrying out this analysis could be categorized into 5 steps (Fig 1) as follows:

- Identify the problem
- Devise plan
- Act to implement the plan
- Observe, collect and analyze the data
- Reflect and share

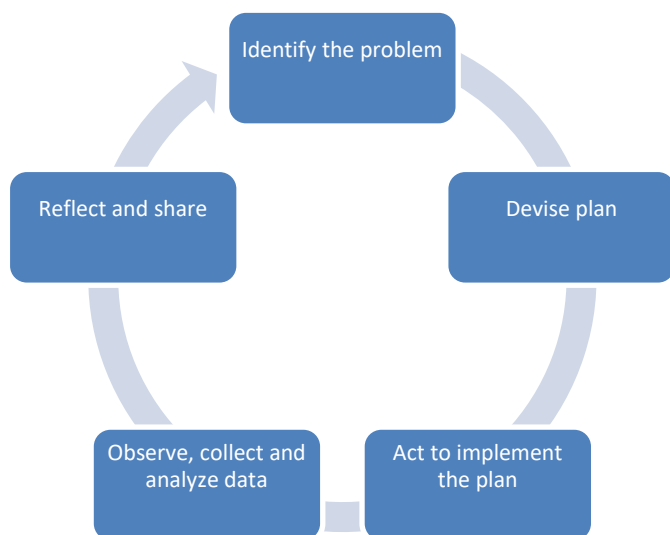


Fig 1: Methodology of the study

The researcher has evaluated the performance of the students on both pre test and post tests depending on quantitative assessment based on the predetermined

criteria. Evaluation of students' performance is done in terms of Marks Scored by the students in Tests conducted, prior to and post strategies- the test papers administered to the subjects were comprehensively marked by the researcher- by properly allocating marks for the steps carried in the answer and discussions.

13. PROCEDURE FOR PRE-TEST AND ITS ANALYSIS

After making all the necessary arrangement required for the study, the researcher has started the action pre-speaking test. At first, twenty students of class vii (A) have selected and divided them into four groups. After that the researcher prepared necessary questions for the speaking test. Especially, two types of activities have designed for speaking test. First, general introduction and then group discussion and presentation on certain topics determined by the researcher by keeping in view students' age level and their mental abilities. The researcher has provided as much flexibility as she can regarding the choice of topics for group discussion and presentation purpose. After that through the speaking test, the following criteria were tested:

- Pronunciation
- Self-confidence
- Organization
- Deliver
- Fluency

The researcher has administered the pre-test and analyzed the results of pre-test as follows:

Speaking Criteria	Percentage
Pronunciation	23%
Self-Confidence	20%
Organization	27%
Deliver	31%
Fluency	33%

The result showed that the students scored 23 % in pronunciation, 20% in self-confidence, 27% in organization, 31 % in delivering and 33 % in fluency aspect in speaking pre-test.

14. IMPLEMENTATION OF GROUP DISCUSSION STRATEGY

After the completion of the pre-test, the researcher implemented the cooperative group discussion technique as a strategy to improve the speaking skill of the students of that particular class. At first, the students were divided into 4 groups in equal number in each group. Then, a picture of a great man was presented before the students and asked them to tell about him in groups in chain. After that, the students discussed in groups, told and retold about him. After the completion of the task of each group, the researcher provided valuable remarks such as good, very good, excellent for their presentations. Then, students were presented on different issues and topics every day for about 3 days. Then I realized that they are being able to

overcome their shyness to a satisfactory level and enough motivated and encouraged to speak in front of their peers. Then the researcher changed the style of giving them the topics n what she did that she asked every group to collect some topics familiar to them and exchange those topics among other groups. After that they were required to discuss on those topics and present in front their friends. It was continued for about 4 days. They were asked to discuss and present on different topics every day. No repetition was made in the discussion and presentation of topics. The researcher also provided incentives to the students in the form of praise depending on their level of performance.

15. POST-TEST: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

After the implementation of the technique of group discussion to develop the speaking proficiency of the students for about 7 days, the researcher conducted a competition among the groups in the form of speaking test to observe their speaking proficiency and the improvements that they have made in it. After that, the researcher has analyzed the result and found out that the students have made significant improvements in their speaking skill. After using this technique, the researcher has got to know that the students were motivated and interested enough to speak in correct and fluent Assamese language both inside and outside the classroom environment. The shy and under confident students were also encouraged enough to speak in the classroom in front of the teachers and their peer members and they have become active participant in the teaching-learning process of the classroom.

The results of the post-test are as follows:

Speaking Criteria	Percentage
Pronunciation	60%
Self-Confidence	54%
Organization	58%
Delivering	49%
Fluency	50%

The result shows that the students scored 60 % in pronunciation, 54% in self-confidence, 58% in organization, 49% in delivering and 50% in fluency. It was found that the student's speaking skill was increased using group discussion strategy to a great extent than ever before.

16. COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS OF PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

Speaking criteria	Results of pre-test in percentage	Results of post-test in percentage
Pronunciation	23%	60%
Self- confidence	20%	54%

Organization	27%	58%
Delivery	31%	49%
Fluency	33%	50%

Before the researcher conducted the treatment, the students were only the passive listeners in the classroom and their active involvement or interaction in the teaching-learning process was too poor. The students only silently listened to what the teacher was delivering in the form of lecture in the classroom. The students did not even know how to put their thoughts in an organized way and express their feelings or ideas in a meaningful and effective way in front of their teachers and peers. But while they were encouraged and required to indulge in group activities then they have improved a lot in their speaking skill. This may be due to their sense of responsibility in the group work and being able to work together with their peer members through which they were able to derive fun and immense pleasure. It is seen that working together in groups through group discussion strategy did not only provide the students motivation but their level of confidence also increased to a great extent. The students also developed a rich vocabulary in Assamese language and learned to organize their thoughts and present it in a correct way. From the above discussion, it is clear that group discussion is a very prominent strategy for improving students' efficiency in speaking skills. The improvement in the students' score in speaking skills is not only showing the success of the research work but their motivation and interest to participate in the classroom interaction process have given the researcher satisfaction for her work. Hence, it can be said that group discussion provides the students with more opportunities to speak from their minds.

17. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

From the above analysis, it is clear that group discussion is one of the most prominent strategies for enhancing students' speaking skills. It is the strategy that helps in removing shyness and increasing their level of confidence. The strategy also helps the students' in developing their vocabulary and increasing fluency in the language concerned. The students are able to remove their mistakes in pronunciation with the help of the concerned teachers and peer members. The topics of group discussion enhance the creative thinking capacity of the students. Moreover, students are also able to develop their sense of cooperativeness and togetherness and spirit of working in a group. The researcher will definitely use the above-mentioned strategy in further classes for improving students' abilities. The experiences will also be shared with the fellow mates both inside and outside the school. The aim of the study was to improve the speaking skills of the students of a particular grade and after the analysis of the result of both pre-test and post-test, it is found that the students were able to improve themselves to a great extent in that particular skill. The researcher realizes that the present study has contributed a little to the knowledge paradigm and hence further research is required in the

concerned field. Further studies can be conducted on different courses and batches of students, which will not only be beneficial for the students but this will contribute to the entire knowledge community. Moreover, the study can also be enlarged by adopting the strategies, which were not used in the present study by the researcher. A comparative study can also be conducted by taking similar kinds of strategies with different groups of students.

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APPENDIXES



Fig: Students participating in group discussion and presentation

Questions for Speaking Test- Part 1

General Introduction

1. Tell me your name and address.
2. Where is your hobby?
3. Tell me about your home.
4. What do you like to do in your free time?
5. What is your favourite subject in school?
6. What is your least favourite subject in school?
7. Can you briefly describe about your school?
8. How would your best friend describe you?
9. Can you tell me on what kind of things you discuss with your friends?
10. Tell me about your classroom.

Questions for speaking test- part 2

Our India	Health and hygiene
Bihu of Assam	The school environment
North-East India	

Group Discussions Topics

The School campus	Your Village	Democracy
The beauty of your classroom	Our State	Television
Need of trees in your school campus	Our Country	Historical place of Assam
Your favourite Subject	School annual week	Tezpur

Holidays	Friendship	Kanaklata
Mahatma Gandhi	Morning assembly	Jyoti Prasad Agarwala
Your school environment	Pollution	Brahmaputra River
Resources at your locality	Punctuality	Lakshinath Bezbaruah
Mobile Phone	Discipline	North-East India
Our earth	Importance of Education	Aim in life