Developing Speaking Skills in English among School Children Using Technology Support

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Abstract

This paper is based on an experimental type of research work. It aimed to see the effectiveness of using technology support in classroom situation to develop speaking skills of learners studying in Class VI in a Bengali medium school in Malda district of West Bengal. The researcher used animated videos of Panchatantra tales as technology supportive materials in her study. The researcher had used two groups pre-test and post-test design and followed the purposive sampling method. Experimental and controlled groups were formed before giving them the treatment. The data were collected through administering various exercises and tasks requiring the learners to provide short answers, retelling a story, etc. The data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantified data demonstrate that students from the experimental group did better than the controlled group in terms of development of speaking skills. Therefore, we can say that technology support rendered English language learning interesting and motivating.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant concerns for teaching English to our school students is to develop their speaking skills. Since English is taught as a second language, it's very important that all our students especially at school level should have enhanced speaking skills in English. Speaking is the productive skill in the oral

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mode. Unlike other skills, it is more complicated because it involves more than just pronouncing words. Speaking skills in English refer to the process of verbally exchanging information/ideas from one person to another. Speaking is a two-way process between the speaker and the listener and involves the productive skills of speaking and the receptive skills of understanding. Speaking takes place in the presence of a listener because listener responds to the speaker's communication. From daily communication point of view, speaking is possibly the most essential skill. But it is found that the students fail to develop enough competence in speaking skills in English as their mother tongue is not English and they are not yet skilful in using English at the school level. Hence, it is very important to direct our attention towards the development of speaking skills in English specially among our students at the school level. Now a days, the use of technology in language learning is well reported (Brandal, 2005). But, it is found that the development of speaking skills in English is not properly cared at our school stage.

Therefore, the researcher is keen to see the effectiveness of using technology support for developing speaking skills in English among school students.

WHY USING TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT?

Textbook is considered the main supply of knowledge. Textbook writers write textbooks keeping the National Curriculum Framework in their minds. They follow the recommended aims and objectives of language teaching given in the National Curriculum Framework. But, a textbook ceases to sustain the interest of the learners when every unit or lesson in the textbook has a predictable structure. As a result, there remains no element of surprise, novelty and curiosity. The textbook acquires the status of a ritual. However, it is very difficult to develop curriculum and syllabus which cater to the needs of all kinds of learners. In the second langue classroom, especially in Indian context, it is observed that students come from different socio-economic and socio-cultural background. Their language needs vary accordingly. It becomes very difficult to the English teacher as well as the textbook to satisfy the language needs of all the learners. Here comes the need for the supplementation. Teacher uses different kinds of supplementary material to quench the thirst of knowledge.

Using only course books in the classroom makes teaching and learning boring, so sometimes teacher should use visual, audio, audio-visual materials in the classroom to motivate students. On the other hand, supplementary materials always carry an element of unfamiliarity and unpredictability. Therefore, we need to bring in variety in the form of types of exercise/material/method, etc. So, the researcher is keen to use

technology support for developing speaking skills in English among school students.

Purpose of the Study

As behaviourists strongly believe in the role of 'stimulus' in eliciting 'response', modern ELT experts believe in the role of learners' interest, attitude, and motivation as instrumental to effective learning. It can be strongly argued that materials used in language classroom ought to be interesting and also thought-provoking. In this context, animated tales may be considered as a source of productive materials for promoting language learning. When English is taught through structural approach or form-focused activities, students find it very difficult and boring. Though students master the rules of grammar in due course, but they are unable to communicate using the language in real life situations. Hence, the teaching method should involve creation of communicative situations and students should be encouraged to interact in those situations using the target language.

The current study aims at developing speaking skills using '*animated tales*' as supplementary texts. According to the National Curriculum Framework 2005, language teaching should promote values and culture. Animated tales used in the study are sources of moral values which represent Indian culture. These tales will, however, be used to supplement the prescribed course book and enable learners to think beyond the texts and the four walls of the classroom. In other words, these tales are expected to engage learners in meaningful language use and keep the class environment enjoyable and active.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the present study is:
- To study the effect of using technology support for the development of speaking skills in English with regard to pre-test and post-test scores.

Hypothesis of the Study

The hypothesis of the present study is:
- There is a significant difference between mean scores of overall speaking skills developed through using technology support and mean scores of overall speaking skills developed through ULM in English with regard to pre-test and post-test scores.

Profile of the Study Area

The present study was concerned with the school level and more specifically it was conducted on Class VI students of a Government school of Malda district, West Bengal. The study was conducted in the context of rural and Bengali medium schools in West Bengal.

Methodology of the Study

The present piece of research was a quasi-experimental research. The

researcher had used two groups pre-test and post-test design in the present study. The relative effectiveness of using technology support and Usual Learning Method (ULM) for the development of speaking skills in English of Class VI students was studied in the present study. In this study, use of technology support and usual learning method were considered as the independent variables; and development of speaking skills in English was considered as the dependent variable.

Sample

The study has been carried out in Golapganj High School, Malda. It was established in 1944. At present, there are three thousand students studying in this school. It is a Bengali medium school where students can continue till higher secondary level. There are forty teachers teaching different subjects. Among them, eight teachers teach English. There are three hundred students in the eighth standard. Most of the students come from the local area and share middle class socio-economic background.

The learners are chosen from Class VI. The class has been divided into five sections (A to E). The students taken for the study are from sections A and B. They come from similar socio-economic background, i.e., middle class families. In most of the families, only mother tongue (here Bengali) is used as a means of communication. Classroom is the only place where they get a chance to listen to English and use it. Most of the times, they do not get chance to speak in the class itself because of the huge number of students in the class and lack of classroom management skills of teachers. On the other hand, they hardly speak English outside the English language classroom.

In the present study, the researcher had followed the purposive sampling method in order to select the sample. Section A of Class VI of Golapganj High School formed the controlled group while the other section i.e. Section B of Class VI of Golapganj High School formed the experimental group in the present study. Total 128 students were there in the entire sampling group at the beginning of the experiment. However, 122 students were present

Description of the sample

Sl. No.	Purposively selected schools	Name of the learning stage	No. of the sections/ classes taken for experiment	Name/ category of sections	No. of students	Sections forming the treatment groups
1.	Golapganj High School (MALDA)	Class VI	2	Sec- A	60	Controlled group
				Sec- B	62	Experimental group

in all the stages of experiment. The details of the sample of the present study are given below.

Materials Used for the Intervention

Here animated *Panchatantra* tales were used for developing speaking skills. These animations are available on the website *www.youtube.com.* The selected animated tales are designed by Rajashree Production especially for kids. The selected animated tales are very much culture-specific and apt for Indian ESL learners. They do not represent or criticise any religion. Most of the characters are animals which are metaphors of human kind. They represent human sentiments, intelligence, stupidity, and many abstract qualities and vices. Every animated story used in the study ends with a moral lesson which helps students to grow as clever, emotional and rational human beings. The language used in the animation has a neutral Indian accent. The delivery of dialogues, sentences, phrases are intelligible. Stress and intonation are properly maintained. The delivery of animation which includes speed of the audio-visuals, clarity of the video and plain audio is very believable.

The length of the tales is moderate. It is neither lengthy nor too small.
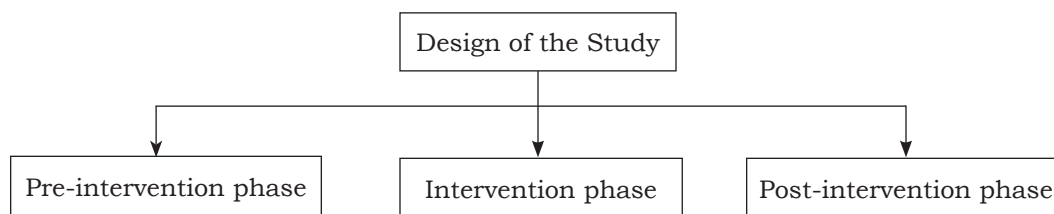
Design of the Study

The study is divided into three phases which are as follows:

Pre-intervention phase

The controlled group and the experimental group were given a pre-test with a view to measuring their level of proficiency in speaking skills. The test was same for both the groups, but it was given separately to each group. In the pre-intervention phase, the tasks given included blanks-filling, comprehension questions, and situations those demand speaking.

Intervention phase

Enhancing speaking skills through animation was a month-long programme which excluded pre-test and post-test hours. Everyday, forty-five minute periods were allotted by the school for the above mentioned purpose. The controlled group was taught for forty-five minutes using usual traditional method in their regular classroom while the experimental group was also taught for forty-five minutes but in the computer laboratory. The school

had big computer laboratory with a LCD projector. Here, the students would watch the animation carefully. They worked on comprehension and vocabulary tasks individually. To start with, speaking tasks were made into group tasks. Later, students performed speaking tasks in pairs. The stories chosen for the intervention were The Talkative Tortoise; Monkey and Crocodile; Blind Vulture; Grapes are Sour; The Clever Son; and Mice and The Elephant.

Post-intervention phase

The controlled group and the experimental group were given a post-test with a view to measuring their level of proficiency in speaking skills after giving them intervention for a period of one month. The test was the same for both the groups, but it was given separately to each group. Various tasks given in the post-test included blanks-filling, comprehension questions, and situations those demand speaking.

Data Collection Procedure

In the beginning of the present research, a pre-test was conducted in the classroom to know the present level of proficiency in speaking. After the results of the pre-test, a twenty-day teaching course was designed. It includes the use of animated tales to improve the speaking skills so that the students are able to comprehend speeches and try to speak English in their everyday life. At the end of the course, a post-test was conducted

and the results of the pre-test and the post-test were compared.

Data Analysis

For the present piece of research work, the researcher has used descriptive statistics like mean, standard deviation, graphical representation of data, etc. and the inferential statistics like 't' test for the analysis of data.

CG- Controlled group

EG- Experimental Group

SD- Standard Deviation

SEM- Standard Error of Mean

DF- Degree of Freedom

* - Not Significant

\# - Significant

Table I is concerned with 't' value showing the effect of using technology support over ULM for the development of speaking skills in English with regard to pre-test and post-test levels separately.

The Section A of Table I states that there exists no significant difference between the pre-test results of the controlled group and the experimental group. Because, from the same section (i.e. Section A) of Table I, it is evident that the obtained 't' ratio between the pre-test scores of the controlled group and the experimental group is 1.861; and this 't' ratio is less than the table value of 't' at 0.05 level of confidence for 120 DF. For 120 DF, the table value of 't' at 0.05 level of confidence is 1.98. Since, the table value of 't' is more than the obtained 't' ratio between the pre-

Table I

Table showing the effectiveness of using technology support over ULM for the development of speaking skills in English with regard to the Pre-test and Post-test scores

TABLE-I									
't' value showing the effectiveness of using technology support over ULM for the development of speaking skills in English at the Pre-test and Post-test level separately									
SEC-A of TABLE-I									
't' test results of control and experimental groups at Pre-test level.									
Level of test	**Groups**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**SEM**	**'t' value**	**Table value of 't' at 0.05 level**	**DF**	**Sig**
Pre-test level	CG	62	52.23	13.912	1.767	1.861	1.98	120	*
	EG	60	52.28	8.824	1.139				
SEC-B of TABLE-I									
't' test results of control and experimental groups at post-test level.									
Level of test	**Groups**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**SEM**	**'t' value**	**DF**	**Sig**	
Post-test level	CG	62	55.28	12.393	1.574	2.840	120	#	
	EG	60	58.13	8.963	1.157				

test scores of the controlled group and the experimental group, the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, it is concluded that at the initial stage of treatment there exists no significant difference between mean speaking skills in English (m=52.23) of the controlled group and mean speaking skills in English (m=52.28) of the experimental group.

The Section B of Table I states that there exists significant difference between the post-test results of the controlled group and the experimental group. Because, from the same section (i.e. Section-B) of Table I, it is found that the obtained 't' ratio between the results of the controlled group and the experimental group is 2.840; and this 't' ratio is more than the table value of 't' at 0.05 level of confidence for 120 DF. For 120 DF, the table value of 't' at 0.05 level of confidence is 1.98. Since the calculated 't' ratio between the mean results of the controlled group and experimental group is more than the table value of 't' at 0.05 level of confidence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, it is inferred that at the post-test stage of treatment there exists significant difference between

the mean speaking skills in English (m=55.28) of the controlled group and mean speaking skills in English (m=58.13) of the experimental group.

From Part-I of the Table I, it is found that at the pre-test level there exists no significant difference between the controlled group and experimental group with regard to their speaking skills in English but at the post-test level, there exists significant difference between the controlled group and experimental group with regard to their same speaking skills in English.

CONCLUSION

After carefully analysing the data, it became evident that the experimental group had shown improvement in speaking skills over a month. Students from the experimental group had performed well in comprehension skills, because they could relate the spoken words with the visual form of animation. Animation helped them understand the tales better. On the other hand, students from the controlled group did not show as much improvement in the comprehension as the students from experimental group. Moreover, lack of support through animation resulted into lack of proper understanding of the theme, the characters and the implied moral that the story intends to convey. This difference between the understanding and performance of the controlled group and that of the experimental group is indicative
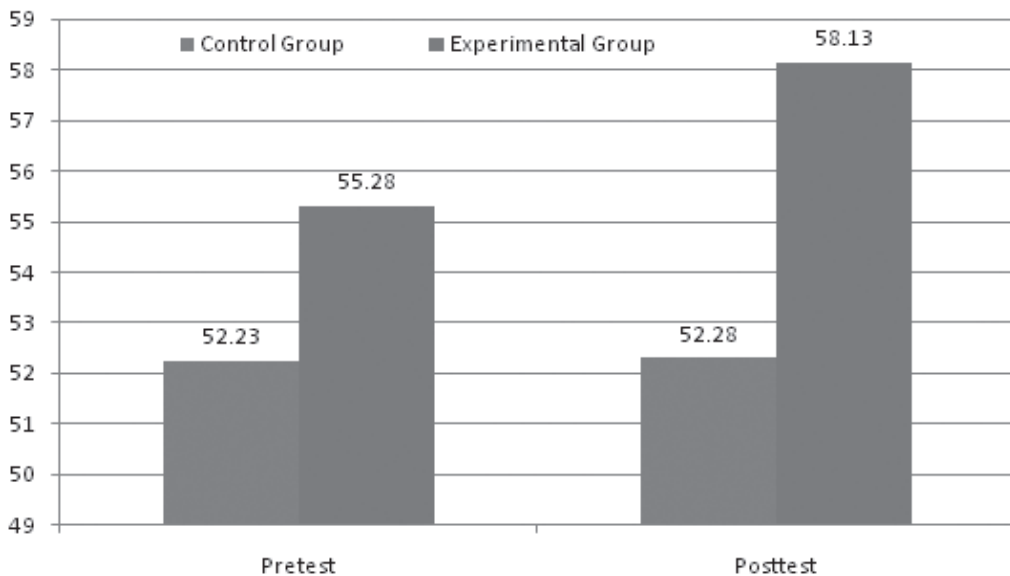

Fig. 1: Mean level performance of controlled group and experimental group showing the development of speaking skills in English

of the effectiveness of using animated tales in language learning.

The experiment demonstrated that animated tales helped the students understand and remember new words better. The visual images of words made them comprehend difficult vocabulary, for example, 'famine', 'graveyard', 'crocodile', 'majesty', 'assembly', 'rose apples', etc. It was observed that use of animated tales motivated the students to participate in group works. They learnt the skills of turn taking, responding to questions, asking questions, debating, making decisions, and listening to others and respecting their opinions. Such skills would definitely enable them to communicate with more confidence in their day-to-day life. The tasks designed on the animated tales were based on their personal experience sharing, so they were able to involve themselves completely in doing the tasks. It seemed to make them feel more comfortable. Taking into consideration all these inferences, it is summarised that use of technology support is a better method than ULM for developing oral skills in English at the elementary stage.

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