

Investigating the Development of Speaking Skill through Language Games in Technologically Underequipped EFL Classroom¹

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Abstract

In recent years, language games have become a matter of interest for educators not only because of their potential to enhance language learning experiences, but also in the support they give towards creating a multimodal and interactive classroom environment that leads children towards perceptual, behavioural, emotional and cognitive development (Reinders, 2016). The researchers in the present study have used various language games in the EFL classroom to investigate the effectiveness of language games to develop the speaking skill of learners, especially in a vernacular medium school using Action Research Model. The results of the study showed that there is a positive change in the classroom atmosphere where learners get opportunities to speak as well as develop the learners' speaking skill. The result is discussed using action research cycles. This particular study addresses the effectiveness of games to develop the speaking skill of learners in a vernacular medium school, located in Murshidabad, India.

Resumen

En los últimos años, los juegos de idiomas se han convertido en un tema de interés para los educadores no solo por sus potencialidades para mejorar las experiencias de aprendizaje de idiomas, sino también por su apoyo para crear un ambiente de aula multimodal e interactivo que lleve a los niños hacia la percepción, el comportamiento, afectivo y la motivación, y desarrollo cognitivo (Reinders, 2016). Los investigadores han utilizado varios juegos de lenguaje en las aulas de EFL para investigar la efectividad de los juegos de lenguaje para desarrollar la habilidad de hablar de los estudiantes, especialmente en la escuela media vernácula utilizando el Modelo de investigación de acción. Los resultados del estudio mostraron que no solo sugieren que hay un cambio positivo en la atmósfera del aula donde los alumnos tienen la oportunidad de hablar y también desarrollan la habilidad de hablar de los alumnos. El resultado se analiza en este documento utilizando ciclos de investigación-acción. Este estudio en particular aborda la efectividad de los juegos para desarrollar la habilidad de hablar de los estudiantes en una escuela media vernácula, ubicada en Murshidabad, India.

Introduction

In the field of language pedagogy, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was adopted as the most suitable language pedagogy in many parts of the world in the late 1980s, but it was adopted in West Bengal decades later after the Department of Education started modifying the school curriculum. Learning a language is not only about learning grammar and vocabulary; it also means becoming fluent in that language. This language fluency refers to the development of communicative competence (Hymes, 1966) among the learners. Communicative competence is the synthesis of an underlying system of knowledge of linguistic structures and functions in a specific communicative context, which enables the learners to use the language efficiently. A speaker needs to use a language correctly by mastering its four competencies: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Learners' fluency and accuracy in language use determine their language level. However, being fluent and accurate in language use depends on the development of learners' language skills (Avinash & Samson, 2016; Sasikala, 2014). This creates a strong need for the development of the basic language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) of the learners in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom by incorporating effective language teaching pedagogy in the teaching-learning process.

However, the real teaching-learning process in the EFL classroom is different from theory. Generally, the objective of learning a language is to understand the spoken language and speak the language fluently. But in the teaching-learning process of EFL, grammar becomes the priority for language teachers. For example, in India, they often try to make the learners proficient in English language grammar. For language teachers, it is necessary to learn and master grammar to learn a language. Grammar-based translation and memorization of various grammatical concepts using the first language (L1) have been used to learn the grammar

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of the second language (L2). Grammar is an important aspect to achieve accuracy in language learning, but overemphasis on grammar is a hindrance to developing language skills.

In our context here in India, there is a lack of motivation in classrooms for both the teachers and the learners. Innovative pedagogy is not encouraged, and the interest of learners is ignored. Even the prescribed texts and answers to the questions at the end of each chapter are explained and dictated by the teachers using the L1. Learners read texts, memorize the dictated answers and practice grammar lessons, but they seldom get a chance to speak English. During the class, learners' L1 is the language of communication between the teacher and learner. The condition of the classroom shows the disparity between theory and actual classroom practices that create hindrance in language learning. These conditions create a trauma of learning English among the learners in these classrooms. Students treat English as a grammar subject; they think that they must study it just to pass the examination.

This is especially true in vernacular⁴ medium schools where native or local languages have been used as a medium of instruction to impart education in the large classes that are heterogeneous and technologically under-equipped. The condition of the EFL classes selected for this study in one of the Bengali medium schools in West Bengal, a state in India is similar. However, this kind of situation is not static; it may vary from context to context. The most common scenario in Bengali medium schools, especially in rural areas, is that learners can read and write in the English language with proper grammatical knowledge after several years of learning English, but they cannot communicate orally in English. Speaking and listening skills are neglected in these classrooms. Such is the case with the school selected for this study. This school is located in Murshidabad district of West Bengal, India. It is an overpopulated school with more than six hundred enrolments from varied socio-economic backgrounds. Most of the students are first-generation learners.

These classroom situations force us to rethink our pedagogy of language teaching by bringing some innovativeness in teaching in EFL classrooms. Language games have become a matter of interest for educators not only because of their potential to enhance language-learning experiences but also for their potential to create a multimodal, interactive, and popular classroom environment. If the concept of the game in physical form is integrated into classroom pedagogy, playing will be integrated with learning. In the same way, language learning can be amalgamated with the daily reality of a learner through games.

To date, most research on the use of games in the language classroom has been conducted in the EFL context outside India. These studies mostly address the issue of teaching grammar and vocabulary using games in language classes instead of focusing on the development of speaking skills. There is a lack of full-length studies on game-based language learning and its effect on the development of speaking skills in the Indian EFL context particularly focusing on Bengali medium school in India. The hypothesized possibility in the present study is that the use of language games in elementary EFL classrooms will help to enhance the speaking skill of learners by creating a positive learner-centric atmosphere in the Indian EFL classroom. The result of the study will arouse interest among the teachers, educators, and researchers to look at the use of games in the classroom as one of the innovative instructional techniques to provide good learning experiences in language classrooms.

Research questions

This study investigates the effectiveness of games in developing speaking skills in the EFL classroom. This study also investigates how games help in creating a child-centric atmosphere and opportunities for speaking in the classroom. This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. *Does the use of language games increase the confidence of the learners to speak in English? Here, confidence refers to self-confidence, which is the primary need of a person to speak any language. The development of confidence helps to remove shyness and fear of humiliation, which are the prime hindrances to speaking.*
2. *Does the use of language games create opportunities for speaking in an EFL classroom? These questions are interrelated. More opportunities for speaking in the classroom provide a context for practicing, which in turn removes shyness and fear and develops confidence.*
3. *Does the use of language games bring any change in learners' speaking skills in the research context?*

⁴ In India, regional language and English in most of the places are treated as L1 and L2. Each state has its own language. There are schools in each state where medium of instruction is the regional or state language.

The next section deals with specific literature related to this work and concepts, such as communicative competence, speaking competence, games, and speaking skills.

Literature Review

Effective speaking in any language requires a good understanding of the linguistic, social, and cultural aspects of the language. The learners become communicators through effective speaking. One of the primary requirements for effective speaking is communicative competence which Hymes (1966) defined as “the tacit knowledge” of the language and “the ability to use it for the communication” (p. 16). This definition was further developed and explained by Canale and Swain (1980) as the synthesis of a hidden system of knowledge and skills needed for communication: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. For them, grammatical competence includes mastery of verbal and non-verbal linguistic code including knowledge of vocabulary and morphological, syntactic, semantic, and phonetic rules. They defined sociolinguistic competence to include knowledge of sociocultural rules of language use, i.e., knowledge of using language in communication and responding appropriately. Canale and Swain (1980) argued that while discourse competence deals with the knowledge of producing and understanding oral and written texts, strategic competence includes knowledge of verbal and non-verbal strategies for communication including paraphrasing, circumlocution, repetition, guessing, changes of register, and style.

Nevertheless, communication skills refer to language skills, which include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The development of speaking skills is one of the primary requirements for the development of communicative competence. Speaking is “a highly complex and dynamic skill that involves the use of several simultaneous processes—cognitive, physical and socio-cultural—and a speaker’s knowledge and skills have to be stimulated rapidly in real-time” (Burns, 2012, p. 166). In second language learning, speaking competence refers to language and discourse awareness, core-speaking skills, awareness of techniques for asking information, explaining ideas or instructions, providing orders or guidance, and so on (Goh & Burns, 2012). Teachers must know speaking competence before teaching it.

From birth, games or play is an integral part of human life. Children consider every event in their life as a part of a game or vice-versa. Games as an innovative pedagogy have recently become a matter of interest in the classroom. Hadfield (1998) defined a game as “an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun” (p. 4). Rixon (1981) defined a game as a rule-based activity with a pre-defined objective for children in a cooperative and competitive environment. Apart from making classes interesting, games are used to assist students in the process of learning. They create an atmosphere of meaningful communication and decrease learners’ nervousness and shyness. In this context, Wright et al. (2006) considered “the word ‘game’ to mean an activity which is entertaining and engaging, often challenging, and an activity in which the learners play and usually interact with others” (p. 16). Hays (2005, as cited in Butler, 2016) defined a game as “an artificially constructed, competitive activity with a specific goal, a set of rules and constraints that is located in a specific context” (p. 3). The terms ‘language games’ and ‘gamification’ are often used interchangeably, but they have different connotations. Gamification is “the use of game mechanics and experience design to engage and motivate the people to achieve their goals” (Rossi, 2014). The concept of gamification is new in the field of language education and it refers to the use of game elements and game design techniques in non-game contexts (Werbach & Hunter, 2012, p. 26). A game is an organized activity involving a particular task with pre-designed goals and a set of rules, for entertainment, competition, cooperation, and communication between the co-players in spoken or written language (Greenall, 1990).

Various research studies have reported that games not only work as an effective energizer that provides enjoyment, pleasure, and motivation inside the classroom but also help in the acquisition and reduce learners’ anxiety (Kapoor, 2006; Mahmoud & Tanni, 2014; Rixon, 1981; Ubermann, 1998; Wang et al., 2011). The benefits of games are not limited to the child’s physical and mental development; games may also lead the learners towards the process of language acquisition and socialization by achieving communicative competence. Playing games in a repeated fashion provides opportunities for the learners to use specific structures and vocabulary in the ESL classroom. Changing the vocabulary and language structure with games provides input to the learners in a personalized and contextualized manner, which helps them to generate output in the target language (Fernandez, 1997 as cited in Ojeda, 2004).

To practice speaking in the classroom, there is a need for situations where learners can interact with each other. Implementation of games in the classroom creates such situations. Lengeling and Malarcher (1997) pointed out that games create a situation in the class where creative and spontaneous use of language is

encouraged. These kinds of interactive situations, where learners can practice and develop sub-skills of speaking, are created through engaging the learners in various collaborative tasks (Bisai & Singh, 2019). Speaking contexts created by games in the classroom, facilitate the practice of the speech function skill, which is one of the four categories of core speaking skills. This practice in the classroom helps to enhance micro-skills, such as requesting, explaining, giving instructions or directions, and describing (Goh & Burns, 2012).

Games provide a positive and competitive environment by unifying bond identity with co-learners within a class (Fontier & Le Cunff, 1976). Gamified instructional environment enhances learners' motivation when the performance of the learners is recognized through a reward system (Buckingham, 2014). This is partially because of the failure of existing instructional materials and tasks to cater to the genuine interest of the learners and to invoke intrinsic motivation for learning (Prosic-Santovac, 2016). The use of games in the classroom moves the students from extrinsic motivations toward intrinsic motivation because participation in games leads the students to experience the satisfaction of achievement and mastery (McGonigal, 2012, as cited in Hanson-Smith, 2016, p. 231).

Games are not only effective and efficient to motivate the learners but also create opportunities for speaking the target language in a language classroom. While participating in games, learners have to instruct, listen, and follow each other's instructions to complete the task, which helps them to practice the language. However, this kind of scope for speaking in the target language is not available in the traditional language classroom in the research context. The teaching-learning process in conventional classrooms is organized in such a way that the primary responsibility of students is to memorize and correctly bring back the information given by the teacher during evaluation.

The practice of speaking through participation in games helps develop sociolinguistic and discourse competence among the learners in a multimodal and interactive classroom environment (Zhu, 2012). In Chen's (2005) study, learners' anxiety was reduced in the game-oriented context, which enhanced the speech fluency to achieve socio-linguistic and discourse competence. Likewise, a framework for teaching language at the primary school through the amalgamation of game-based learning and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) was implemented in the EFL classroom of a Greek primary school. In their study, Kyriaki et al. (2014) claimed that integration of other subjects in the language class through the use of games helped the learners in learning a foreign language. The philosophical foundation of games can be traced back to Suggestopedia where games both in physical and virtual mode are considered and explored as the main strategy but not as a device just for entertainment (Birova, 2013). While games primarily seem to be interesting to kids, Palánová (2010) argued that adults are as interested in games as kids are. Learning grammar is one of the most important aspects in language learning to develop accuracy in language but most boring, 'uninteresting' and 'tedious.' The use of games in the classroom can transform the learning grammar classroom from most boring, 'uninteresting' and 'tedious into fun, relax, and interesting (Pathan & Zamzam, 2014). Games both in the virtual and physical forms not only help to reduce anxiety about speaking English in class but also create a lively and interesting ESL classroom environment (Hung, 2018).

Practicing and developing language skills are an essential requirement of a language teaching class. Games are designed to practice language skills in the classroom. Hwang et al. (2015) conducted a study to facilitate listening and speaking skills through game-based activities in a situational context in a girl's school. They found that students in the experimental group performed better in speaking than in listening and changed the perception towards game-based teaching. Urrutia León & Vega Cely (2010) conducted action research to study the improvement of speaking skills through games in a school in Bogota and claimed that students gained confidence in speaking by overcoming fear of making mistakes and perceived speaking as a natural process when they were playing. Several studies didn't consider games as a waste of time but considered playing games as a beneficial activity that leads children towards perceptual, behavioural, affective cum motivational, and cognitive development (Reinders, 2016).

None of these studies were conducted in an Indian EFL context. To our knowledge, no research has been conducted to examine the development of core speaking skills using games in the Bengali EFL context. To examine the impact of games on core speaking skills, we conducted action research in a bilingual large classroom with a rural setting in the Bengali context.

Methodology

Context

India has different vernacular languages in which people of a particular community speak. It uses a different vernacular as a medium of instruction. To make learning easy and unburdening for the learners, each state provides education to its learners using vernacular or local language as a medium of instruction. These schools not only focus on vernacular languages but also other languages like English, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Arabic.

This research work was conducted in a Bengali medium school, which is situated in Murshidabad, India. These are schools in a rural setting with limited technological equipment. These schools are provided financial and technical aids along with human resources by the government. English is taught in these schools as a second language, but the reality is different. English is taught as a subject like math or history, not as a second language. In India, teachers of the vernacular medium school have just 45 minutes of class time per day to conduct a lesson in English; learners get the limited scope to practice the language they have learned during the short time. Textbooks contain limited activities for developing language skills, prescribed by the board to which the school is affiliated. Apart from the textbook, the grammar book is used as a supplementary reader. Instead of focusing on oral communication, English language teachers devote a significant amount of time to writing activities. The learners and teachers mostly practice grammatical rules in order to master the English language. In our context, teaching is based on filling the students with information.

Participants

For this exploratory study, students in grade seven (age between 12-13 years) were selected as a research sample from a Bengali medium co-ed school with multi- socio-economic enrolment, located in Murshidabad district. Although there are multiple sections of grade seven, only one section of grade seven was selected for this study because of the time limit. The selected section has an enrolment of more than a hundred students.

Students of grade seven were selected for this study due to several reasons. Learners of this stage can form their own opinion about their learning experiences. Most of the learners of this age group are always interested in games. The implementation of language games was not feasible in the primary class, as they cannot form their own opinion about their learning experiences. Learners from grades nine to twelve were not selected for this study because of their upcoming board examination.

A diagnostic test was conducted to ascertain the learners' language learning level and the problems related to the teaching-learning process in the English classroom. The researchers designed this diagnostic test as they were working as teachers in the classroom. This test was designed by focusing on four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results of the test placed the students at the level somewhere between Pre-A1 and A1 of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2018). In CEFR, these levels relate to the following skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Most of the students cannot use daily expressions but they can understand these expressions or phrases. They cannot introduce themselves using the English language but they can answer the questions asked by others using simple words or broken phrases. Some other students lag far behind these students. They cannot understand or use simple expressions.

Data Collection Procedures

We selected the "action research model" for this study to identify the problems and bring modifications in the classroom atmosphere; these modifications were brought by creating opportunities for speaking the target language in the language classroom. In this context, Carr and Kemmis (1986) define action research as "simply a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations to improve the rationality and justice of their practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (p. 162). It is done by systematically collecting data on everyday practice and analysing it to come to some decisions about what the future practice should be (Wallace, 1998, p. 4).

Our action research began in June 2017 and concluded in February 2018. It consisted of two cycles; each cycle consisted of four months. In each cycle, we worked as teachers in the selected classroom. Before starting our project, we observed the classroom and the teaching-learning process in the selected classroom; we noted our observations in the teacher journal, which was completed in May 2017. Then we conducted a diagnostic test for pre study, which was based on their completed syllabus and focused on all the

language skills; the purpose of the diagnostic test was to identify the problems of the learners related to language learning (see Appendix 1).

We analysed the result of the pre-study test and found the major problems: the students were weak in all four language skills but their weakest skill was speaking. Then we planned to teach speaking with games in the classroom. We modified the activities prescribed in their textbook by adding game mechanics to it and collected different types of games from various authentic sources (see Appendix 3). Then we started implementing the games in the classroom every day in the selected classroom in June 2017 and continued until September 2017. While implementing games in the classroom, we tried to observe and note every incident in the classroom. We designed a questionnaire based on a Likert five-point scale to collect the learners' opinions related to classroom activities, which was administered at the end of the first AR cycle (see Appendix 2).

In the first AR cycle, which ended in September 2017, we implemented small and easy games for practicing speaking. After a month's break, in November 2017, we moved on to the next AR cycle; we planned to use moderate speaking games mainly collected from authentic sources. We encouraged the learners to participate in games and observed whether they were actively participating or they were facing any problem. We administered the same questionnaire in February 2018 when the second cycle of AR was completed. We also conducted a post-study test at the end of the second cycle of AR. In the post-study phase, a speaking test was given in an informal setting to assess the learners' changes in speaking ability, with a particular focus on one of the key speaking abilities, speech function skill. This test was not conducted using pen and paper. Students actively participated in games; participation was recorded using the audio-visual recording. Consent for recording was taken from the students as well as the school authority.

Multiple research instruments were used in this action research to ensure the accuracy of the results. Teacher journals were used to take notes of the classroom observation; it was used not only for exploring classroom problems but also for reflecting on the effects of the implementation of language games and identifying other emergent issues. While writing in the teacher's journal, we did not use a checklist. We wrote everything as open notes related to the teaching-learning process and learners in the classroom. The opinion of students related to classroom activities was collected using a questionnaire on a Likert five-point scale and the same questionnaire was used at the end of each cycle to find out changes in the opinions of the learners (see Appendix 2). Pre-study and Post-study tests were used in this research to collect the data.

Data Analysis

The data collected through various research instruments were analysed using the descriptive analysis model. Two types of data were collected in this research: written and recorded. Recorded data was transcribed in written form and analysed in descriptive mode. Data collected using questionnaires were presented in graphical form and analysed by comparing the result of the first cycle with that of the second cycle using a descriptive analysis model.

Results

Pre-Study Findings from Exploration Stage

In general, students were very energetic in school but became passive in English class. English is a matter of fear for them. While participating in classroom activities, they remained passive. Very few of them showed a quick response to the activities. This classroom had heterogeneous learners with a single mother tongue, where the teaching of the English language was not different from non-language subjects. In the teaching-learning process, the teacher provided an explanation of English texts by translating them into the students' mother tongue. Teachers used their version of language pedagogy with features similar to the grammar-translation method.

We observed that a text was summarised by the teacher completely using mother tongue without providing a single chance for the students to read the text. Most of the time the teacher read the text, translated it, and solved certain comprehension questions related to reading and writing skills. No initiative was taken by the teacher to develop the listening and speaking skills of the learners. Reading and writing skills were most focused upon but only reading and grammar items were the most practiced in this classroom. It was observed in the teaching-learning process that students appeared more comfortable in writing and reading but they did not speak in English. The classroom atmosphere was not supportive of speaking in English because

speaking was not practiced in the classroom. The authoritative way of teaching was practiced in this classroom. Fear of making errors, shyness in speaking, and fear of being humiliated were the most cited reasons for students not to speak English.

To identify the language learning level and problems of the students, we conducted a pre-study diagnostic test that was designed to measure learners' ability in all four language skills. The analysis of the result showed that learners were good at reading comprehension of short passages and answered the post-reading activity but they were not rapid readers. Thus, it can be said that they were average in reading and writing; they were very poor in listening and speaking skills. During the pre-study test, we observed that students frequently asked for word meaning. This pattern showed that learners lacked not only speaking and listening abilities but also lacked a sufficient vocabulary to be spontaneous. The result of the pre-study test is presented in the following Figure 1:

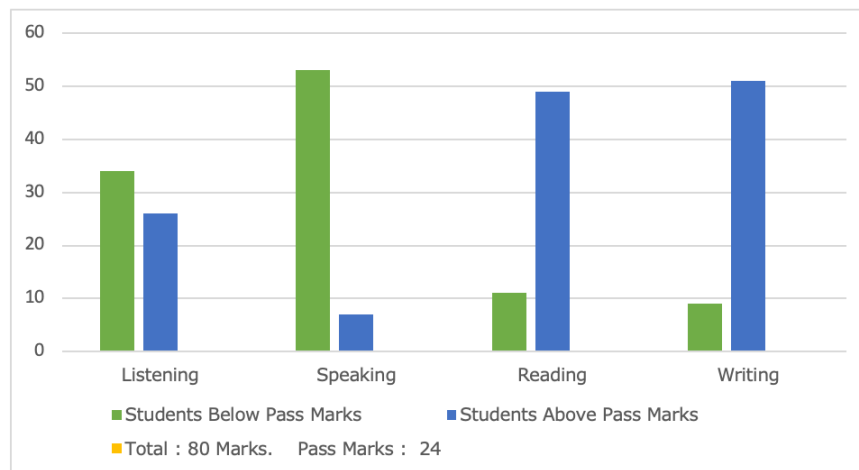


Figure 1: Result of pre-study test

In reality, learners' language level was not developing according to the language learning level of grade seven and prescribed syllabus for them. They were lagging behind. They knew that they have to read and write in English, as they have to face tasks related to reading and writing in the examination. However, they were not able to form complete sentences to express their ideas in the English language because speaking was hardly practiced in the classroom. The teacher told students that listening and speaking would not be tested in the examination.

Action Research Cycle One

Intending to change the classroom environment and innovate the teaching pedagogy, we decided to implement games in the classroom. Games create an atmosphere of fun and enjoyment. In the initial days of the study, we introduced short vocabulary games in the classroom to make the learners familiar with the change in classroom activities. Every day we conducted lessons with different kinds of games in the classroom, which helped to develop a supportive culture by lessening shyness.

During the initial days of the study, our classroom became chaotic and disorganized as most of the students start talking at the same time and did not want to wait their turn. The implementation of unexpected activities like games in the classroom transformed the learners into energetic learners. However, a few students were still not actively participating in the games. This problem of a chaotic classroom and management difficulties continued for seven to ten days, which forced us to stop the study. To gain control of the classroom, we divided the class into different groups and assigned a group leader to each group for one week. After one week, the group leader was changed. The group leader acted as a monitor of the group and also noted down the names of those who attempted to disrupt the classroom environment. Indeed, the problem of a chaotic classroom was solved in due course when they started believing that this kind of activity would be continued in their classroom.

Students' participation in games was observed and researchers noted down their attentiveness, behaviours, interest, and response in the teachers' journal. Participation in vocabulary games not only removed their shyness and fear but also developed a supportive classroom culture and improved the students' vocabulary. While active participation of the learners was taking root, we decided to implement short speaking games

by ensuring active participation in classroom work. The period of action was shaped and developed according to authentic learning needs and interests of learners. Short speaking games used in this stage were mainly selected from authentic sources or simple activities from textbooks were transformed into games by adding game mechanics (See Appendix 3). These speaking games created the context for information exchange, use of daily expression, descriptions, and introducing self, things, etc. The use of such vocabulary and short-term speaking games not only helped to create a situation where learners could participate and perform in a relaxed mood but also developed confidence and interest among the learners to participate in language learning activities. The use of games in the classroom enabled the learners to interact with each other and these interactions helped them to practice speech function skills, one of the core speaking skills.

A questionnaire was administered at the end of this cycle to collect learners' responses related to confidence building, classroom atmosphere, and developing speaking skills (see Appendix 1). Various kinds of speaking games were used during the intervention study (see Appendix 2).

The use of games in the classroom showed a positive effect on developing speaking skills. One of the effects was a decrease in shyness and fear of humiliation among the learners. Not all the students of our class started speaking. However, most of the students showed some positive attitudes towards classroom activities with active participation. Once we began vocabulary games, students' participation increased and their shyness and fear decreased. The performance of the students increased to some extent as compared to the exploration stage. It was evident that vocabulary games created a supportive culture in the classroom and enhanced the vocabulary of the students to some extent. This change in the classroom brought changes in learners' speaking skills. At the end of the first cycle, they were able to express not only daily expressions, their likes, and dislikes but also introduce themselves using broken phrases and sentences. This environment in the classroom pushed the learners towards forming small or broken sentences to communicate with each other. The positive change in the students' speaking skill is visible in the transcription of their participation in a game. One of the transcriptions provided here shows the progress of the study.

Transcription 1

Students 1: I like to watch playing football

I like to eat...noodles.

I like to watch

I like video watch.

I like watch cinema.

Student 2: I like to play football

I like eat food.

I like to Islamic.

I like subject gyan.

Note. Transcription of the performance while playing the game: likes and dislikes

This cycle presented a different aspect in a teaching-learning situation where learners actively engaged in classroom activities for speaking in the classroom. However, this situation was not created in a single day but developed by using games regularly in the classroom. Participation in classroom activities fostered the development of the sub-skills of the learners' speaking skills by forming simple sentences, which is evident in Transcription 1. Although these sentences are broken and not grammatically correct, they are good enough to express the intended meaning. We did not interrupt the learners for making incorrect sentences but encouraged them to speak whatever they wanted to speak. We suggested to the learners that they need not worry about grammatical correctness or what others will think of their speaking. In the initial days, they were encouraged to write down their ideas before speaking which helped them feel confident. We observed that they felt confident by doing this. Participation in these games for speaking generated a sense of communication in the English language among the learners. Group and pair participation in language games developed collaborative work culture among the learners that helped them to move towards the process of socialization. It is evident from responses to the questionnaire administered at the end of the AR cycle that learners got many opportunities in the classroom to show off their creative minds; this was reflected in a decrease of fear, shyness, and an increase in active participation of learners in a learner-friendly and trauma-free environment.

Action Research Cycle Two

AR Cycle One (AR1) showed how the use of short games modified the classroom environment and developed the sub-skills of speaking; in AR Cycle Two (AR2) the study focused on the use of speaking games in the classroom to provide context for more practice in speaking which was not available outside the classroom. The development of sentence forming ability among learners in AR1 led learners towards developing more thinking ability and confidence of speaking in the English language in AR2. Language games for speaking were selected and modified to meet the need and interests of the learners by adopting the feedback of the learners. Different kinds of speaking games were implemented in the classroom on regular basis to provide enough practice in speaking.

In this period, group or pair performances were in demand from the students' side. Games in which learner could participate in pairs or in groups were selected and implemented. We observed and noted down the participation of students in these games. Initially, learners faced problems in speaking for a long duration. They started asking for time to write down their ideas before speaking. This practice of writing took extra time in implementing the games in the classroom, but it helped to enhance the self-confidence of the learners. This use of writing ideas before speaking was not a permanent activity. A few days later, one by one most of the students started participating in games without writing their ideas in the notebook. Their sentence forming ability developed in this stage; they could converse with each other, during participation in games, in English. At this stage, a few more specific skills of speech function such as request, explanation, giving instructions, giving directions, and describe events, were developed. Evidence was recorded in the teacher's journal along with the audio recording of the conversation to track the progress of the study.

Participation in games during the last few days of the study was recorded and these recordings were used for evaluation in the post-study test. This test was conducted informally by recording the activity of the students, while they were participating in a game namely Perform the Situation in AR2 (see Transcription 02). Participation in games developed not only sub-skills of their core speaking skills but also their social communication skills through participation in groups or pairs.

AR1 helped the students to form simple sentences for speaking which was further developed in AR2 by practicing speaking skills in the classroom. Decreased shyness and fear helped to develop the confidence of participation in games for speaking among the learners. Students started feeling more confident in this stage as they could form sentences to interact with each other for a greater duration. These positive changes in the classroom and the learners are visible in the transcription of the performances of the students in games. Transcription of recordings showed the progress in the study starting with decreasing shyness and fear and vocabulary development to making the students confident in speech function skill.

Transcription 2

Student E: Mother.... Mother.....open the door.

Student F: I'm coming what happen my son!!

Student E: I'm feeling uneasiness

Student F: You have taken drug.... I have warned u again & again to avoid your drug-addicted friends but u never listen to my advice but why

Student E: Stop mother Please take me to my bed let me sleep.

Student F: Pinki come here and take your brother to bed he is not feeling well...

Student G: what are doing brother.... why don't u listen to mother advice...you are getting rubbish and you have enough and totally drug-addicted!!!

Student E: Stop pinki stop.... who r u to teach me. If u will not stop ...I will throw you out of that and m...repeating that....

Student G: How dare you to say.... Please brother try to understand taking drug is dangerous... you are bringing your own drain ...

Student E: No, I'm quite aware of my self

Note. Transcription of the performance while playing the game: Perform the Situation

The confidence developed during AR1 led the learners towards speaking in English in AR2. The evidence collected from the notes in the teacher's journal and the audio recordings of the conversations showed how the classroom environment and the learners' speaking skill had changed. The classroom where learners felt frightened earlier was now a place of joy. Learners who were shy and unable to use English in speaking were now able to express themselves in English. They started using multiple sentences instead of a single sentence or broken sentences; now they did not write down sentences before speaking. Increased self-

confidence helped the learners to speak without any fear of humiliation, shyness, or hesitation. Responses in the questionnaire by the students, administered at the end of this cycle, showed the changes in the students' perception related to the classroom situation, self-confidence, and error correction.

The first positive change among the learners is visible in Figure 2. We can see that the comfort of students in speaking in English class increased from rarely and never to always and often in AR2 in respect of AR1. The number of students who felt always and often comfortable in the English class increased from 7 and 8 in AR1 to 18 and 16 in AR2.

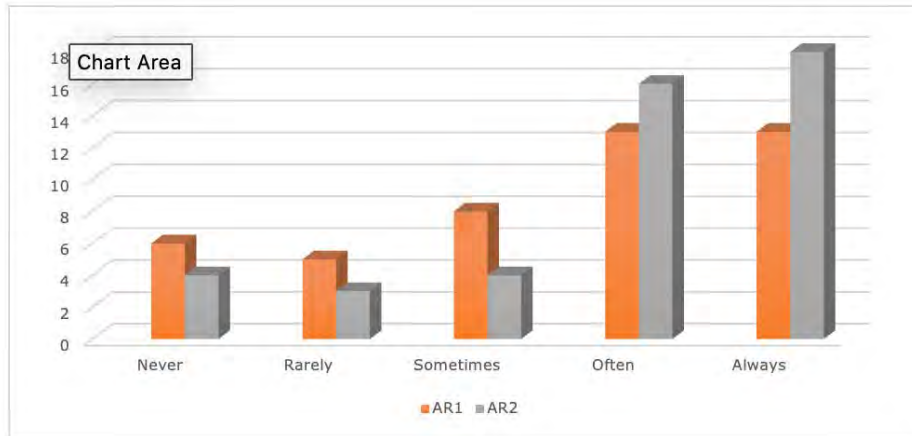


Figure 2: Statement: I feel comfortable speaking in English.

The modification in the self-confidence level of students as the AR cycle progressed is shown in Figure 3. Confidence is an important factor in language learning and it is related to speaking skills. A person cannot speak a language if s/he lacks self-confidence. This study shows that shyness, fear, and confidence cannot move side by side. Confidence level increases when shyness and fear start decreasing. It is visible that the number of students, who felt confident and very confident, almost doubled from AR1 to AR2. The students who felt nervous and very nervous considerably decreased in AR2 in respect to AR1.

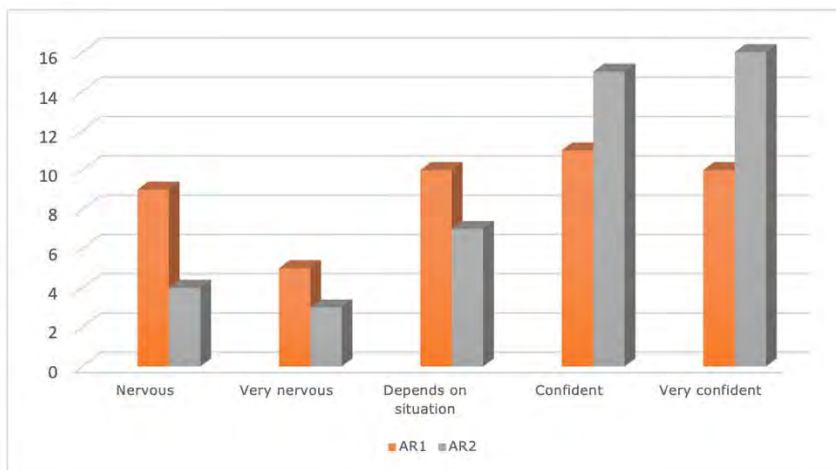


Figure 3: Statement: How do you feel while participating in classroom work in English?

Prior to the study, there were hardly any opportunities for speaking in our EFL classroom. Moreover, the intervention study using language games created opportunities for speaking in the classroom. This is visible in the responses of students in the questionnaire presented in Figure 4. Students responded that they found opportunities for speaking in the classroom during these AR cycles. Consequently, the number of students who considered language games as a context for speaking always and often increased rapidly in AR2 as

compared to AR1. In contrast, the number of students who found opportunities for speaking in the classroom through the use of games rarely or never decreased in AR2 as compared to AR1.

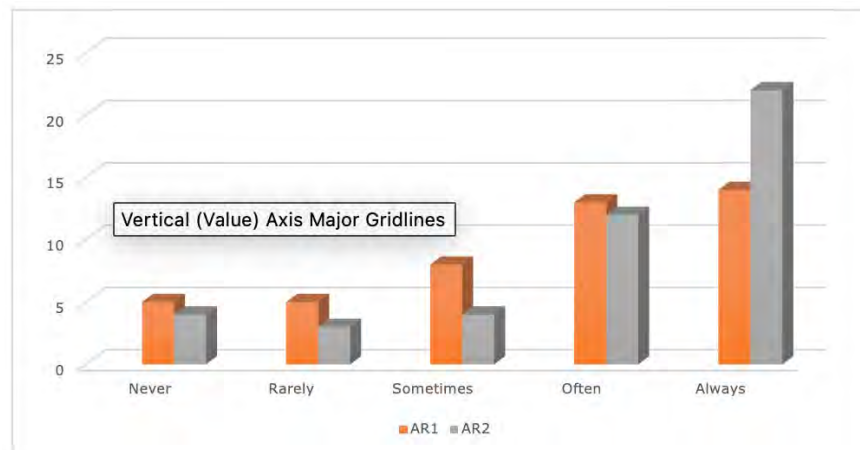


Figure 4: Statement: There are opportunities to speak English in class during these days.

Reflecting on the evidence critically and comparing it with other collected evidence, we observed a significant change in the students' participation. This study modified the classroom situation from teacher-centric to learner-centric and increased the self-confidence of the students. Though they have not become fluent speakers of English, they can speak in English and express themselves. However, the learners are still reliant on the teacher for correction and feedback. They progressed from short simple sentences to long simple sentences to express themselves. This study showed the change in the classroom situation, confidence, and comfortability, which is noticeable in the presented figures but the change in speaking skill from nothing to something, is visible in transcriptions of AR2.

Conclusion

In the EFL classroom in rural settings, teaching of speaking is often neglected; this study presents an innovative pedagogy of teaching speaking, by using games in the classroom to reduce learners' shyness and fear in speaking. In this study, one can observe that a classroom with games is more effective for the learners because of fun and enjoyment than traditional ways of teaching in the classroom. It is found that the use of games has changed the classroom environment from teacher-centric to learner-centric. With progress in the study, there is progress among the learners too; progress can be seen in their move from learning vocabulary towards speaking through participation in games.

The result of the study shows that the use of games not only provides fun to the students but also engages them in the classroom by creating contexts for speaking which helped them to use the language in communication. These activities have transformed the learners from silent listeners into speakers by developing self-confidence. Students have developed the ability to introduce themselves to each other, answer questions asked by others, provide instructions and respond to instructions. In short, they have practiced and mastered a few speech function skills. This result has answered the research questions of the study, that is development of one of the core speaking skills-speech function skill by removing shyness and creating opportunities for speaking. This study helps to embrace the idea of the practitioner, teacher, researcher, and learner not individually but all at the same time. However, this study is not free from limitations. This study focuses on Bengali medium classrooms within rural settings. Classrooms in an urban setting have not been considered in this study. The result of a study, if conducted in an urban setting with technological advancement, may vary from this study. The researchers faced some problems related to permission of accessing the school during the initial days but it was resolved with proper approval from the competent authority.

Although this study does not provide a final solution to the problems of weak speaking skills, it has created a scope for the use of games in the classroom as an innovative pedagogy of language teaching where access to technology is limited. We are planning to provide open access to the action research for other researchers who are working in a similar context. They may get motivated to undertake action research projects emerging from their own micro-contexts embedded in their immediate classroom settings. Finally, one can say that games not only encourage learners to participate in classroom activities, but also help them to feel confident and free especially when these games include group work and competition.

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Appendix 1

Diagnostic Test

Time: 1 hour 30 minutes

Max. Marks: 20

A. Listen to the audio clip and fill in the blanks:

My Name is Madhavi,

I am from _____ I _____ Malayalam,

But I am just like you My Name is Natwar,

I am from Srinagar I speak _____,

But I am just like you My Name is Shubratha,

I am from _____ I speak _____,

But I am just like you My Name is Vasundhara,

I am from Vadodara I speak Gujarathi,

But I am just like you My Name is Shamsher,

I am from Ajmer I speak _____,

But I am just like you My Name is Arundhathi,

I am from Guwahati I speak Assamese,

But I am just like you. My _____ is Benjamin,

I am from _____ I speak Konkani,

But I am just like you My Name is Rani mai,

I am from Chennai I speak Tamil, But I am just like you

B. Read the passage carefully and answer the following questions:

In those days, there lived an old woman. She was the oldest woman in the village. She lived in a little mud hut. Her hut was beside a paddy field. There were coconut trees at a distance. She had very little work to do. She had nowhere to go. So all day long, she cleaned her hut.

One hot summer day, there was dust everywhere. People were coughing and sneezing with the dust. Even the sky coughed and sneezed. The old woman's hut was also covered with dust. She swept and swept the little hut. She swept the inside of her hut. She swept the outside of her hut. Dust rose all around her in brown clouds.

1. Complete the following sentence with words from the text:

- a) The old woman lived in ahut.
- b) The hut was beside a paddy.....
- c) One hot summer day there was everywhere.
- d) The old woman swept her hut with a.....

2. Complete the following table. One is done for you:

Who/What	Did following
(i) The old woman	Cleaned her hut
(ii)	Coughed and sneezed
(iii)	Rose all around in brown clouds

C. Write some sentences to describe any animal like Tiger/ Lion/ Horse or any other object.

D. Students will be asked one by one to tell something about their hobbies, their likes, and dislikes.

Appendix 2

Students' Questionnaire

Dear students,

I would be very grateful if you answer the following questions for the sake of my study.

Please provide a tick mark on any response of your choice to each statement.

Statements:

a). There are opportunities to speak English in class.

1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Always

b) I feel worried about making mistakes when speaking English in class.

1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Always

c). I get ample talk time in English class

1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Always

d). How often does the teacher invite you to speak?

1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Always

e). How often does the teacher correct your mistakes?

1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Always

f). How often does he interrupt you to correct your mistakes?

1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Always

g). I feel motivated to speak English in class.

1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Always

h). I feel comfortable speaking in English.

1. Never 2. Rarely 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Always

i). How do you feel while participating in classroom work in English during these days?

1. Nervous 2. Very nervous 3. Depends on
situation 4. Confident 5. Very
confident

j). How do you describe the atmosphere of your class during these days?

1. Boring 2. Very boring 3. Depends on
situation 4. Interesting 5. Very
interesting

Appendix 3

Sample Games used in Action Research Cycles

1. Game: Who, Where, and What?

Purpose: Describe & Guessing

Procedure: The teacher will instruct the students to describe any object of their choice in the classroom without mentioning the name of the object. The teacher will also instruct that they can write down whatever they want to guess. Other students will try to guess the object. Then the game moves on to describe another person who is known to the students.

2. Game: Likes and dislikes

Purpose: Forming sentences for expressing ideas

Procedure: The teacher will instruct the students to think about their likes and dislikes, for example, what they like to do and what they don't like to do, and write down whatever they want to speak. Students will be instructed to write down to four or five likes and dislikes. They must write true likes and dislikes. The teacher will provide a demo to the students by writing his or her likes and dislikes. For example, I don't like loud noise, particularly if it's unnecessary. If it's necessary 'I can put up with it' etc.

3. Game: Neighbours and neighbourhoods

Purpose: Description

Procedure: The teacher will divide the class into different pairs and ask each pair at a time to close the eyes of one of the members and that person will try to describe the appearance of his or her neighbours. For example, student A will describe student B from memory. If there is time, reverse roles out so that student B cannot see. In the same way student B will describe his or her neighbours.

4. Game: Describing friends

Purpose: Describing

Procedure: Students will be instructed to form a group of three to four members and asked to look at the appearance and dress of their members carefully. Then the teacher will instruct the students to come to stage group by group and group members will stand with their back towards each other. A group member will try to describe their peer, their appearance, and dress code one by one.

5. Game: Getting to know someone

Purpose: sharing information and getting to know other students

Procedure: Students will try to know each other by listing three or four things that they want to know about a person they have just met. Students will be instructed to work in pairs to one area of their choice from the list of students and ask them questions about it.

5. Game: Perform the situation

Purpose: acting according to the roles.

Procedure: The teacher will plan certain situations for role-playing meeting the learners' level and interest. The teacher will prepare some chits for distributing the situations. The teacher will ask the students to read the situation and decide which group members will enact the situation. They will be instructed to note down their ideas or dialogue to build up their confidence level. Time will be provided to the students to prepare themselves and then the group will be asked to come on the stage and perform.