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Topic of the Research: Developing and Using Tasks to Enhance Listening and Speaking Skills in English of Students of Government Schools, Delhi.

FINDINGS

In the Indian context, English as a language is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and its role has grown due to globalisation in the recent decades (National Curriculum Framework NCERT, 2005). The status of English has risen to being a 'common' second language across the country (NCF, NCERT, 2005). English is now being introduced from grade one onwards in almost all states of India (Meganathan, 2011; NCERT, 2006a). Popularity and demand for the English language has made it one of the relevant languages in the Indian context (Learning Outcomes at the Secondary Stage, NCERT, 2019).

English language proficiency in general and speaking proficiency in particular increases employment opportunities in India. The ability to speak English yields greater returns in employment (Azam et al., 2011). The higher economic returns to English speaking skills has pushed the market demand for enhancement of these skills in the society. A person on the street aspires to communicate orally in English, as opposed to merely passing the English language exam or knowing its grammar part (NCF, NCERT, 2005). This is clearly evident from mushrooming of 'English speaking institutes' in every nook and corner of big and small cities. In public perception, the quality of English language teaching in a school has become one of the prime indicators for judging the overall quality of education of that school.

The researcher decided to enhance the oral-aural skills of students through Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Framework. TBLT is a teaching method that focusses on creating a real purpose for language use for learners, by providing them real life context through various tasks.

To foster the oral-aural skills of students, it was imperative for the researcher to remove the fear, hesitation and anxiety the students faced in the classroom. For this, the researcher developed a fear-free classroom culture where the students were encouraged to ask questions to her. The researcher acted as a guide on the side to her students and not merely as a sage on the stage. She encouraged pair work and group work in the classroom to enhance students' oral communicative competence. Research studies have highlighted that face to face communication in pairs and in a small group provides a natural setting to the students for conversation in the classroom. Working together enables them to produce a cohesive sequence of utterances and not just limit themselves to producing isolated sentences in a hurry.

To enhance the listening skills of the students, audio recordings were played followed by listening comprehension worksheet tasks. Initially, listening to audio recordings was a surprise for them. Further, they were even more surprised to learn that they would be assessed for their listening comprehension. This caused listening anxiety to the students. To reduce their listening anxiety, the researcher provided them listening support by giving repeated input. Each audio recording was played 3 times. Before playing the recording the third time, the students were given worksheets to preview the questions. 'Previewing questions' helped listeners to listen selectively thereby reducing their anxiety levels.

The researcher initiated this study with the objective of enhancing the oral-aural skills of students of a section of Class VII studying in a Delhi Government school. These skills were enhanced through the Task-Based Language Teaching framework. By developing tasks and transacting the same in the classroom, the researcher made efforts to enable students to speak English in real life situations. The findings of the study helped the researcher conclude that there was a marked improvement in the listening comprehension and speech fluency of the students. From witnessing the students trying to escape the classroom in fear and anxiety when asked to speak English, to them being active and excited about participating in English speaking tasks; the researcher found her research journey satisfying. From witnessing reticence in the classroom, to cherishing her students' joy in speaking English, the researcher found her journey gratifying. The researcher feels that this is just the beginning. There is a long way to go.