

Enhancing Learners' Speaking Abilities Utilizing an Eclectic Approach- A Study in Kerala

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Abstract

Students in Kerala have a strong desire and zeal to develop their speaking abilities and to communicate clearly in English. The researcher frequently observes undergraduate students struggling to communicate effectively, which inspired her to develop modules based on an eclectic approach to enhance oral capabilities of undergraduate learners through the development of vocabulary and pronunciation. An experimental method using a pretest test and posttest among the experiment and control groups is employed to investigate the efficacy of the approach. SPSS is used to analyze the collected data from both the experiment and control groups. The findings revealed a considerable improvement in oral abilities among learners in the experimental group, demonstrating the efficacy of the eclectic method.

Key words Eclectic approach, pronunciation, undergraduate learners, speaking skills, vocabulary

Introduction

English language has evolved as a life skill rather than just a communication tool. The increasing demand for English language has made it an invaluable skill to acquire. (Sooria & Saravana, 1666). Kerala, like many other places, sees the capacity to communicate in English as a bridge that connects them to the rest of the world as Brown and Lee (2015) claims "English is increasingly being used as tool for interaction among non-native speakers". According to the Kerala census, there are more than 4 million expats from Kerala. Every family supposedly includes at least one person who lives abroad. This might be cited as one of the factors that contributed to Kerala being a state with a 100% literacy rate. The extensive foreign exposure that the expatriates received helped them to understand the value and importance of education. Education was intended to foster economic success and stability. As the state and educated community grow, people will eventually find themselves in a job market, economic or social setting where they will have to relate to people of diverse linguistic backgrounds, necessitating a greater need for the link language. As a result, being able to converse or talk successfully in English is much more important among Keralites.

Though English is taught in practically all educational institutions in Kerala, from kindergarten to postgraduate courses, learners' capacity to communicate effectively in English remains a challenge, even after knowing English for more than 10 years.

"It has been generally observed that English has become the medium of all relevant social interactions, and the ability to use English effectively is considered essential for honorable existence" Khattak et al. (2011). Hence, equipping students with good speaking abilities will allow them to communicate with others confidently, whether they are attending interviews, competitive examinations such as IELTS, OET, or TOEFL, or international communication prompted by travel or immigration. The teaching and learning technique should encourage learners to actively participate in oral communication activities without fear of making mistakes. The activities should enhance the participants' confidence while also making them interested in studying. As a result, the current study evaluates the efficacy of the Eclectic approach in improving learners' speaking skills through strengthening pronunciation and vocabulary.

Indeed, developing English-speaking skills among learners in Kerala is a difficult task. The inability to use the language outside of instructional settings is one of the key causes of this. From her experience teaching undergraduate students, the researcher has frequently witnessed the difficulties that students have in effective communication and how language training is frequently constrained to the syllabus in textbooks. As a result, to address the issue, an effective teaching or learning technique is required in arts and sciences colleges, where students represent a cross-section of society. Furthermore, teaching the syllabus by itself is insufficient to improve the speaking skills of undergraduate students in Arts and Science colleges.

The learners confirmed this viewpoint via their survey. Although most students aspire to enhance their speaking skills, several obstacles prevent them from doing so. However, the researcher has also seen the opening of more than 100 academies in the Ernakulum district alone to strengthen students' language proficiency. As a result, the researcher concentrates the investigation on Ernakulum district. Ernakulum, the commercial center of Kerala, has served as a cultural melting pot where residents from various regions of the state come to live for a variety of reasons. As a result, the district is seen by the researcher as a good representation of Kerala and a suitable setting for the study.

Following a review of pertinent literature and enhancing the background, the researcher gains a strong desire and motivation to investigate into how students perceive their speaking abilities and the challenges they face in developing them and secondly, to be among the few researchers to analyze the effectiveness of the Eclectic approach in developing pronunciation and vocabulary to enhance the speaking skills of undergraduate learners of the Arts and Science College in the Ernakulam district in Kerala.

Eclectic approach

Eclecticism emphasizes the use of a variety of English language teaching and learning approaches. "The justification for the eclectic approach lies in the weaknesses of the single approach because a single method has a narrow theoretical basis and has a delimited set of activities and is therefore inflexible" Gilliland et al. (1994). The Eclectic approach allows the teacher to employ a variety of

methods and approaches. The methodology is determined by the teacher based on the class objectives and the learner's needs. It makes the class livelier. Learners become more alert and respond well. It increases their level of active participation. Learning becomes more enjoyable when the monotony and boredom of the typical classroom are broken. The strategy is helpful for students of all ages. Using multiple strategies creates variety in the classroom. The technique allows the teacher to shape their teaching methods, allowing them to develop and own their instruction.

Given that it encourages various activities, meaningful interaction, objective correlation, dynamic learning, and quick results, the strategy can be enthusiastically recommended. The Eclectic approach to teaching English as a second language has gained a lot of popularity in recent years, and numerous studies have been done to determine how well it works to improve language proficiency in students.

Objective

The primary goal of the study is to comprehend the learners' perspectives on their English-speaking abilities and the challenges they confront in developing the skill. The researcher also intends to investigate the efficacy of the Eclectic approach in improving learners' pronunciation and vocabulary to improve their speaking skills.

Research question

The researcher wishes to investigate into the following research questions based on the study's objective:

- a) How do the students perceive their English-speaking abilities and the challenges they face in mastering the language?
- b) How successful is the eclectic approach in helping undergraduate students enhance their speaking skills by developing vocabulary and pronunciation?

Research Method

For researchers, selecting an acceptable method is a difficult decision. The nature of the subject, the research question and purpose, the data, and the sample all play a role in determining the best method to use. The current study uses a method that combines experimental method and descriptive method because its goals are to understand learners' perspectives on their speaking abilities along with the challenges they encounter, as well as to investigate the effectiveness of the eclectic approach on the learners' oral communication.

Population

The undergraduate students in Arts and Science Colleges in the Ernakulam district were selected as the study's target demographic. A survey was done in various colleges in the Ernakulam district, and 699 samples were gathered, to better understand how students perceive their speaking abilities and the challenges they face. The participant samples were selected and divided into two intact groups, the experimental and the control groups for conducting the treatment to gauge the effectiveness of the Eclectic approach. 43 students were in the experimental group and 70 were in the control group out of a total of 113 students in both groups. There were 40 females and 30 males in the control group

compared to 27 females and 16 males in the experimental group. Before, during, and following the implementation of the strategy, both groups are accessible and readily reachable.

Data collecting instruments

The data-collection tools used for the current study are compatible with the objectives of the investigation, the data needed to complete the study, and the methodologies used. The study's varied tools included questionnaires, tests with written and audio assessments. To understand more about how learners perceive speaking abilities and associated challenges, a survey questionnaire was used. Using SPSS, 699 collected samples were quantitatively evaluated. With the help of a pretest and posttest, the learners' oral skills were evaluated.

Students' questionnaire

The survey questionnaire aims to elicit learners' perspectives on their speaking abilities and the obstacles they face when speaking English. The questionnaire also sought the need to develop effective techniques to increase the learners' speaking skills. The questionnaire was distributed to 699 students from various colleges in the Ernakulam area. The researcher herself visited various colleges, engaged with students, and discussed the importance of the survey and its goals.

To analyze the data, SPSS 20.0 for Windows was used. The characteristics of the vast amount of information gathered from the respondents were summarized and described using descriptive statistics. For comparison of the factors considered between various levels of the demographic data Z-test was used. Prior to evaluating statistical significance, a level of 0.05 was established.

Learners' perspective of their speaking skill and the challenges they face

Respondents were asked to answer seven questions on a five-point Likert scale to determine the level of learners' perception of their English-speaking skills and eight questions to understand the challenges they face in developing their speaking abilities.

The replies of the learners are rated on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being assigned to the option "Strongly agree," 4 being assigned to "Agree," 3 being assigned to "Neutral," and 1 being assigned to "Strongly disagree." Later, the mean% score of the learners' perspective is derived using the total score supplied by all 699 respondents for the questions asked.

$[MPS = \frac{MeanScore \times 100}{Maximumpossible\ score}]$ [Equation]

The obtained mean% score is divided into four categories. The mean percent score is considered outstanding or high if it is above 75%, medium or decent if it is between 50% and 75%, average if it is between 35 and 50%, and low or poor if it is below 35%. The following table includes the results of the variable's scores considered and follows the sample Z test that was used to test for significance.

Table 1. Mean, Standard deviation and z value for learners' perspective on the speaking skills

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean % score	CV	z	p value	Level
Q1 I am satisfied with the English language teaching that I have been receiving	699	3.40	0.97	68.10	28.61	24.557	<0.001	Good or medium
Q2 Educational institutions need to give importance to improve speaking skills of the learners	699	4.30	0.74	85.95	17.17	64.402	<0.001	Good or medium
Q3 I always wanted to improve my English language speaking skills.	699	4.31	0.73	86.18	16.83	65.936	<0.001	Good or medium
Q4, I think speaking with good pronunciation is important	699	4.17	0.87	83.46	20.84	50.857	<0.001	Good or medium
Q5, I make a list of new vocabulary or phrases and use them while speaking	699	2.82	1.37	56.45	48.54	6.226	<0.001	Good or medium
Q 6 I make conscious effort to practice speaking	699	3.67	1.05	73.39	28.71	29.351	<0.001	Good or medium
Q7 ability in speaking	699	3.12	0.79	62.49	25.24	20.934	<0.001	Good or medium

The table indicates that the test is significant because the Z value is positive, and the p value is less than 0.05. It is also determined that the extent of the students' perspective of their English-speaking skills is greater than 50% which is good. A considerable portion of participants aspire to enhance their English language speaking skills, according to the analysis of the learners' perspectives on their English-speaking abilities. Additionally, learners have mentioned how crucial clear pronunciation is when speaking. However, the student makes only a small amount of effort to enhance their spoken communication, such as noting new terminology. However, the participants have said that to develop their oral abilities, they need assistance from educational institutions. Most learners regard instructors as an important source where they can use English, even though a large percentage of teachers only use the language "occasionally."

Furthermore, many students claim that the curriculum they were taught did not provide them with adequate language abilities. Despite the availability of several resources, academies, and Apps to aid in the language learning process, learners have demonstrated a disinterest in enrolling themselves due to the high cost.

Table 2. Mean, Standard deviation and z value of learners' challenges

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean % score	CV	z	p value	Level
Q1, I have knowledge in English language but is unable to hold conversation	699	3.69	0.91	73.88	24.69	34.612	<0.001	Medium
Q2, I think my friends who have difficulty in speaking English language face the same problems as I do.	699	3.90	0.84	78.08	21.56	44.102	<0.001	Medium
Q3, I think my friends with skilful writing skills and knowledge in English language have difficulty	699	3.81	0.88	76.22	23.14	39.300	<0.001	Medium

when it comes to speaking								
Q4 While speaking I think of what I want to say in my mother tongue and then translate it in to English	699	3.81	1.01	76.14	26.47	34.284	<0.001	Medium
Q5, I need to improve the way I pronounce words	699	4.07	0.85	81.34	21.01	48.482	<0.001	Medium
Q6, I do a mental practice of what I want to say before I talk it out	699	3.46	1.03	69.18	29.92	24.505	<0.001	Medium
Q7 The thought of speaking with someone in English makes me anxious	699	3.61	1.06	72.22	29.39	27.674	<0.001	Medium
Q8, I think I need a speaking partner wherein I can practice speaking	699	3.88	1.03	77.57	26.52	35.426	<0.001	Medium

The table indicates that the test is significant because the Z value is positive, and the p value is less than 0.05. It is found that the learners' perception of their challenges is more than 50%.

The results of the questionnaire enabled the researcher to identify some important aspects that is helpful in the discussion of the topic under inquiry. Participants have noted that, despite their understanding of the English language, a large proportion of them are unable to engage in oral conversation. They've noticed a similar difficulty among their friends. Several students engage in mental practice in their mother tongue before engaging in conversation, which reduces speaking fluency. Anxiety, fear of making mistakes, insufficient vocabulary, and poor pronunciation is among issues that people

encounter when engaging in oral communication. Furthermore, a significant proportion of participants seek to increase their speaking skills in compared to other English language skills.

The researcher's study of the data provided her with insightful information that allowed her to draw the conclusion that it was important to develop a strategy to help learners enhance their oral communication while considering the challenges they were experiencing.

Treatment phase

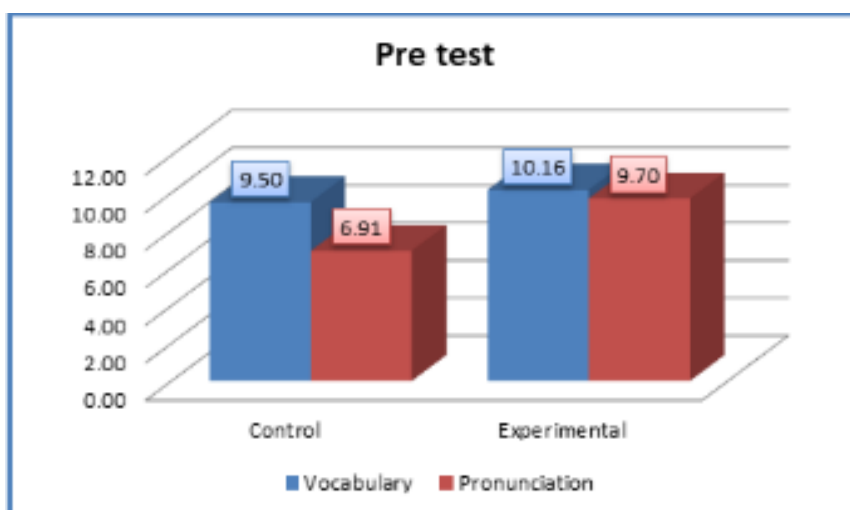
To assess the efficacy of the Eclectic approach, the experimental group received a treatment based on the approach.

Pretest

The table below depicts the relative similarity of the learners' speaking skills in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation to highlight the comparison between the two groups in the pretest.

Table 3. Pretest results of control and experimental group

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p value</i>
Vocabulary	Control	70	9.50	4.68	-0.653	0.515
	Experimental	43	10.16	6.06		
Pronunciation	Control	70	6.91	1.96	-6.685	0.076
	Experimental	43	9.70	2.43		
Total	Control	70	16.43	5.23	-0.175	0.861
	Experimental	43	16.63	6.85		



Bar graph 1 Pretest

The findings of the Z test, which was used to compare the mean scores of variables between the experimental and control groups. As the p value is more than 0.05, the result shows that there isn't much of a difference in the pronunciation and vocabulary scores between the experimental and control groups. Therefore, it can be inferred that the experiment and control groups' mean scores are equal.

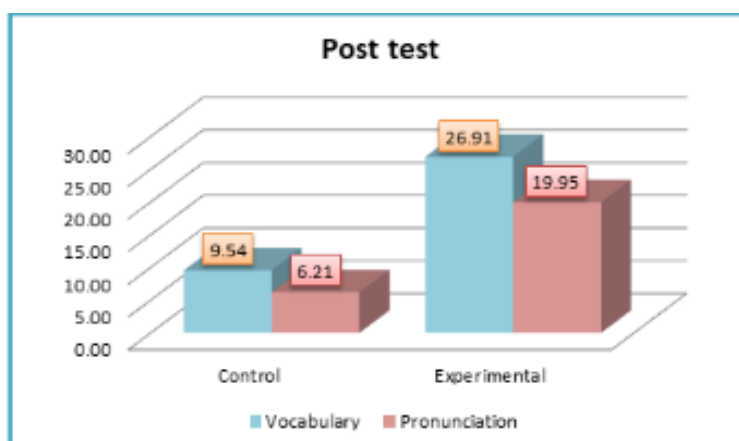
The numbers unequivocally provide proof of the observed situation under study's reality. The outcomes also point to the need for a new pedagogical method and technique to help learners improve their oral performance. Additionally, the results of the pretest are very important since they will let the researcher attribute any advancements made by the experimental group following the application of the eclectic strategy.

Post test

Following the pretest, the experimental group received treatment utilizing modules created using an eclectic approach, whereas the control group received regular standard lessons. A post-test was undertaken with the groups following the treatment period to examine any appreciable changes in the experimental group.

Table 4. Post test results of the control and experimental group

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p value</i>
Vocabulary	Control	70	9.54	4.23	-25.030	<0.001
	Experimental	43	26.91	2.12		
Pronunciation	Control	70	6.21	1.84	-36.731	<0.001
	Experimental	43	19.95	2.07		
Total	Control	70	15.81	4.81	-39.683	<0.001
	Experimental	43	46.86	2.24		

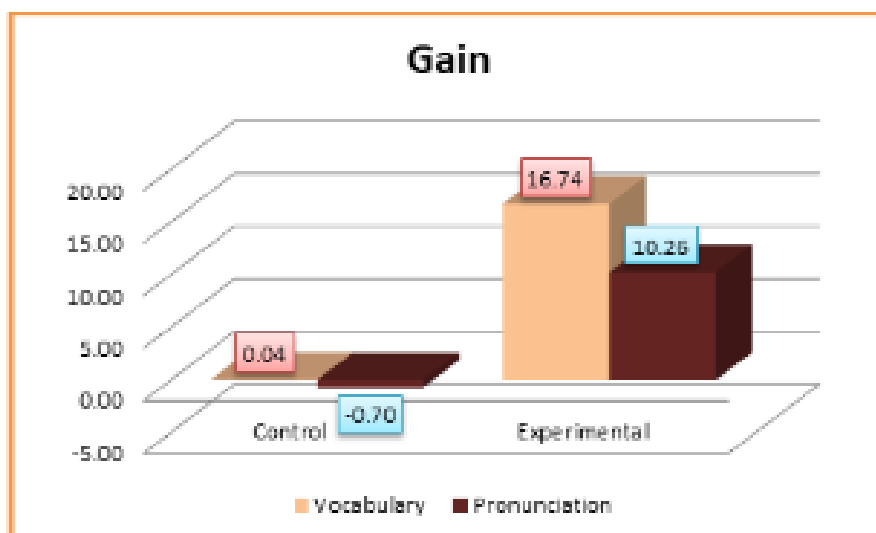


Bargraph 2 Post test

The results reveal that there is a significant difference in post-test vocabulary and pronunciation scores between the control and experimental groups, since the p value is less than 0.05.

Table 5 Mean Scores of Experimental and Control groups on Vocabulary and Pronunciation

Variable	Group	N	Mean Score		
			Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
Vocabulary	Control	70	9.50	9.54	0.04
	Experimental	43	10.16	26.91	16.74
Pronunciation	Control	70	6.91	6.21	-0.70
	Experimental	43	9.70	19.95	10.26



Bar graph 3 Gain

The table suggests that learners in both the experimental and control groups saw a significant change. When the mean scores of both groups in the pretest and posttest are compared, it is found that in the pretest, the Experimental group Vocabulary M=10.16 and Pronunciation M=9.70, however in the post test, Vocabulary M=26.91 and Pronunciation M=19.95. In the controlled group, Vocabulary M=9.50 and Pronunciation M=6.91 in the pretest and Vocabulary M=9.54 and Pronunciation M=6.21 in the post test.

Discussion of the results

The Eclectic approach was used to build the vocabulary and pronunciation of the learners during the treatment, which was designed to enhance their speaking abilities. The experimental group went through these modules. The control group, however, received instruction using the conventional

approach. There is a considerable difference between the experimental and controlled groups, according to a study of the data gathered during the pretest and posttest. Students in the experimental group demonstrated noticeable improvement in their speaking skills. Hence, it can be established that the significant difference in the experimental group is attributable to the novel teaching approach adopted.

Conclusion

It is essential to be able to converse in English effectively. The researcher has frequently observed the challenges that undergraduate students experience when speaking effectively. Following the collection of necessary data from the learners regarding the perception of their speaking abilities and the challenges they face in developing them, the researcher gains a strong desire and motivation to design modules based on an Eclectic approach to improve the learners' pronunciation and vocabulary, thereby enhancing their oral capabilities. A pretest and posttest were administered to the experimental and control groups to determine the effectiveness of the eclectic approach. The statistics demonstrated a significant improvement in the experimental group's speaking skills, which can be attributed to the novel teaching approach used.

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