Evaluating the Effectiveness of Oral Communication Skills: A Study of Grade IX PCTB English Textbook

Ayesha Shakeel[1]
Dr. Ali Hussain Bin Sadiq [2]
Corresponding Author: ayeshashakeel1012@gmail.com

Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of oral communication activities in the Grade 9 English textbook used in the conviniently selected public schools in Lahore. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research gathered data from 150 participants, including 120 students and 30 teachers, through structured questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative data analysis shows that 80% of students and teachers agree that the textbook's oral activities enhance speaking skills. Qualitative insights reveal improvements in student confidence, fluency, and class participation. However, the study identifies challenges such as inadequate teacher training in communicative language teaching (CLT) and a need for more engaging speaking tasks.The findings underscore the importance of incorporating practical and communicative approaches in ESL education. Recommendations include revising the textbook to include a broader range of interactive speaking activities, integrating technology, and implementing comprehensive professional development programs for teachers. This study contributes to the understanding of ESL education in Pakistan, highlighting critical areas for curriculum and instructional improvement to support oral communication skills development.

Keywords: *Oral communication, ESL education, Grade 9 English textbook, Pakistan, communicative language teaching (CLT), teacher training, language proficiency, mixed-method approach.*

1. Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively in English is increasingly crucial in today's globalized world. As a lingua franca, English serves as the primary medium of international communication and is essential for academic and professional success. In countries like Pakistan, where English is taught as a second language (ESL), the effectiveness of English language teaching (ELT) methodologies significantly influences students' proficiency and their ability to engage in global discourse.

The historical context of English language teaching in Pakistan is deeply rooted in the colonial legacy of the British Empire. Post-independence, English retained its prestige and significance,

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[1]MPhil Scholar, DLC,UMT Sialkot, Pakistan.
[2]Assistant Professor, DLC, UMT Sialkot, Pakistan.

particularly in higher education, government, and the judiciary (Rahman, 2002). This historical backdrop has shaped current educational policies and practices, making English a crucial component of the national curriculum. However, the traditional approach to language teaching in Pakistan has been largely characterized by rote memorization and grammar-translation methods, which do not adequately address the development of communicative competence (Mansoor, 2003).

Oral communication skills are essential for language learners, particularly in the context of English as a global language. Effective oral communication involves not only linguistic competence but also the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts. According to Brown (2007), speaking is often the most challenging skill for language learners to acquire due to its spontaneous and interactive nature. Harmer (2001) emphasizes that active use of language in communicative contexts significantly enhances learning.

Textbooks play a pivotal role in language teaching, serving as the primary resource for both teachers and students. They provide a structured framework for language instruction, encompassing vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, and speaking activities. Cunningsworth (1995) highlights that an effective textbook should offer a balanced approach to all language skills, with a particular emphasis on communicative activities that promote real-life language use. In the Pakistani context, where resources and training may be limited, the quality and content of textbooks become even more critical in shaping the language learning experience (Ahmad & Rao, 2012).

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which emerged in the 1970s, revolutionized language teaching by shifting the focus from rote learning and grammatical accuracy to meaningful communication. CLT posits that the primary function of language is communication, and therefore, language instruction should prioritize interaction and the practical use of language in real-life situations (Savignon, 2002). This approach aligns with the goals of developing oral communication skills, as it emphasizes fluency, appropriateness, and the ability to convey meaning effectively.

Despite theoretical support for communicative approaches, practical challenges often impede the effective implementation of CLT in Pakistani schools. Rahman (2002) identifies several barriers, including large class sizes, limited resources, and the prevalence of traditional teaching methods. Additionally, many teachers lack the necessary training and experience to effectively implement communicative activities in the classroom (Mahmood, 2009). These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive teacher training programs and the development of supportive teaching materials that facilitate the use of communicative approaches.

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the English textbook for 9th-grade students in promoting oral communication skills. The textbook, recommended by the Punjab Text Book Board and published by Jadeed Book Depot, serves as the primary instructional material for English

language teaching at this level. Given the critical role of textbooks in shaping the language learning experience, it is essential to assess whether the current textbook adequately addresses the development of speaking skills.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

i. To evaluate the content of the English textbook for 9th grade with a focus on oral communication skills.
ii. To analyze the effectiveness of oral communication activities included in the textbook.
iii. To assess the practical implications of these activities for teachers and students.
iv. To identify areas for improvement and suggest enhancements for future editions of the textbook.

1.2 Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following research questions:

i. How effectively does the 9th-grade English textbook integrate oral communication skills?
ii. What types of oral communication activities are included in the textbook, and how do they align with CLT principles?
iii. What are the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the usefulness and practicality of these activities?
iv. What improvements can be made to enhance the textbook's effectiveness in promoting speaking skills?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research provides an in-depth analysis of the current textbook, identifying strengths and weaknesses in the context of oral communication skills. It offers practical recommendations that can be utilized by educators and curriculum developers to enhance the effectiveness of English language teaching. Additionally, it contributes to the broader discourse on second language acquisition, particularly in the context of secondary education in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

Oral communication is a crucial component of language proficiency, enabling students to express ideas, participate in discussions, and engage in real-world interactions (Brown & Yule, 1983). Effective ESL curricula integrate listening and speaking skills to develop learners' oral communication abilities (Nunan, 1999). In Pakistan, where English proficiency is closely linked to career opportunities, developing strong oral communication skills is particularly critical (Mansoor, 2003).

2.1 Challenges in Teaching Oral Communication

Despite the recognized importance of oral communication, traditional language teaching methods in Pakistan, such as rote memorization and grammar-translation, often fail to develop communicative competence (Mansoor, 2003).Many teachers in Pakistan lack adequate training in communicative language teaching (CLT) techniques, which hinders the effective teaching of oral skills (Richards, 2006). Schools often face resource constraints, limiting access to materials and technologies that support oral communication activities (Bashir, Azeem, &Dogar, 2011). Additionally, cultural attitudes towards language learning and communication styles can impact the effectiveness of oral skills instruction (Kramsch, 1993).

2.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its Effectiveness

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It involves tasks that require meaningful communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Studies have shown that CLT can significantly improve students' communicative competence, especially when implemented effectively (Littlewood, 1981). However, the practical application of CLT in Pakistani schools faces several challenges. Rahman (2002) identifies barriers such as large class sizes, limited resources, and the prevalence of traditional teaching methods. Additionally, many teachers lack the necessary training and experience to implement communicative activities effectively (Mahmood, 2009). These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive teacher training programs and the development of supportive teaching materials.

2.3 Studies on English Language Teaching in Pakistan

Several studies have examined English language teaching in Pakistan. Mansoor (2003) found that while students recognize the importance of English for their future careers, many feel that current teaching methods are outdated and inadequate for real-world communication. Ahmad and Rao (2012) explored the impact of communicative activities on students' speaking skills, finding significant improvements in students taught with communicative methods compared to traditional methods.

2.4 Textbook Evaluation in Language Teaching

Textbooks play a pivotal role in language teaching, serving as the primary resource for both teachers and students. An effective textbook should offer a balanced approach to all language skills, with a particular emphasis on communicative activities that promote real-life language use (Cunningsworth, 1995). In Pakistan, where resources and training are limited, the quality and content of textbooks are critical in shaping the language learning experience (Ahmad & Rao, 2012). Studies have found that while some Pakistani textbooks include speaking activities, these are often limited and do not fully engage students in communicative practice (Sarwar, 2001).

2.5 Integration of Oral Communication Skills in Textbooks

The integration of oral communication skills in English textbooks is a critical factor in their effectiveness. Tomlinson (2011) emphasizes the need for textbooks to include activities that promote meaningful interaction and real-life communication. Textbooks should provide a variety of speaking tasks, such as role-plays, discussions, and presentations, which help students practice and develop their oral skills in a supportive environment. Sarwar (2001) found that while Pakistani textbooks include some speaking activities, these are often limited and do not fully engage students in communicative practice.

2.6 Technological Integration in Language Teaching

The integration of technology in language teaching has also been explored as a means of enhancing oral communication skills. Technology can offer learners additional opportunities to practice speaking in a low-pressure environment, which can be particularly beneficial for shy or anxious students (Warschauer, 2000). In Pakistan, the integration of technology in language teaching is still in its early stages. However, studies by Ali (2011) and Khan (2013) suggest that there is growing interest among educators in utilizing digital tools to support language learning. These studies highlight the potential of multimedia resources, such as videos and interactive exercises, to enhance students' engagement and provide additional speaking practice.

2.7 Teacher Training and Professional Development

The effectiveness of oral communication activities in textbooks also depends on the teachers' ability to implement them effectively. Teacher training and professional development are crucial for equipping educators with the skills and knowledge needed to facilitate communicative activities. Richards and Rodgers (2001) emphasize that teachers need ongoing training and support to adopt and sustain communicative language teaching methods. In Pakistan, Mahmood (2009) found that many English teachers lack sufficient training in CLT and rely heavily on traditional, teacher-centered methods. Mahmood advocates for comprehensive professional development programs that focus on communicative approaches and provide teachers with practical strategies for promoting oral communication skills in the classroom.

2.8 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in Language Learning

Vygotsky's theory posits that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Language learning occurs through collaborative activities that involve social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the importance of scaffolding in language learning, where more knowledgeable others (teachers or peers) help learners perform tasks they cannot accomplish independently (Tharp &Gallimore, 1988).

2.9 Innovative Approaches and Technological Integration in ESL

The integration of digital tools and resources, such as language learning apps, online forums, and interactive software, can enhance oral communication skills (Blake, 2013). Combining traditional classroom methods with online learning can provide flexible and interactive opportunities for practicing oral communication (Graham, 2006). Recent studies by Smith (2021) and Kumar (2020) demonstrate that innovative approaches, such as the use of gamification and virtual reality, have shown significant improvements in student engagement and proficiency.

Despite the evident importance of oral communication skills in ESL contexts, there is limited research specifically focusing on the integration and effectiveness of these skills within the secondary education curriculum in Pakistan. Previous studies have highlighted the general inadequacy of traditional language teaching methods but have not thoroughly examined how structured oral communication activities can enhance language proficiency in this specific educational setting.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction, and CLT, which focuses on meaningful communication. This combination provides a comprehensive basis for evaluating the effectiveness of oral communication activities in the Grade 9 textbook. The study is grounded in the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which prioritizes interaction and the practical use of language in real-life situations. CLT's emphasis on meaningful communication aligns with the study's focus on evaluating the effectiveness of oral communication activities in the Grade 9 English textbook. The questionnaire-based assessment of students' and teachers' perceptions mirrors CLT's learner-centered approach, highlighting the importance of practical language use and the development of communicative competencies.

Complementing CLT, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory posits that learning is fundamentally a social process, with cognitive development intricately intertwined with social interaction. The study's methodology, which involves collaborative learning activities and peer interactions, reflects Vygotsky's belief that learning occurs within a social context. The involvement of teachers and peers in providing feedback is indicative of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners advance through guided interaction and support. This approach stresses the importance of meaningful discussions and collaborative tasks in learning language and cultural norms. CLT complements this by focusing on real-life communication skills like role-plays and problem-solving, promoting fluency and confidence through interactive activities that mimic everyday language use.

By integrating these frameworks, the study aims to analyze how the oral communication activities in the textbook foster social interaction, provide necessary support (scaffolding), and encourage authentic language practice. It evaluates whether these activities effectively prepare students for

practical communication in real-world situations. Teachers play a crucial role in scaffolding students' participation, gradually stepping back as students gain proficiency, which aligns with Vygotsky's idea of instructional support. This approach ensures that students develop their speaking abilities in a supportive environment that mirrors natural language learning contexts.

4. Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively assess the impact of oral communication activities within the Grade 9 English curriculum in the public schools conviniently selected in Lahore, Pakistan. This approach aimed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to offer a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of these activities.

4.1 Participants

A total of 150 participants were selected, consisting of 120 students and 30 teachers. The sampling strategy ensured representation from three diverse towns within Lahore, encompassing varying socio-economic backgrounds and educational settings. The selection of schools is based on the convinient sampling technique. This sample size was chosen to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives on the integration of oral communication skills in the curriculum.

4.2 Data Collection

4.2.1 Instrument Development:

A structured questionnaire was developed based on Alan Cunnings' checklist for language evaluation, adapted to suit the context of Grade 9 English education in Pakistan. The questionnaire comprised 25 questions designed to gauge perceptions on the efficacy of oral communication activities. It included Likert scale items to measure agreement, as well as open-ended questions to solicit qualitative feedback.

4.2.2 Pilot Study:

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted with a small subset of participants to refine the questionnaire. Feedback from the pilot study was used to improve question clarity and relevance, ensuring the validity and reliability of the instrument. The pilot study involved 20 participants and revealed that certain questions were ambiguous, leading to revisions for clarity. The final questionnaire included 25 items validated through expert reviews and a reliability test (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85).

4.2.3 Data Collection Procedure:

The finalized questionnaire was distributed to students and teachers across selected public schools in Lahore. Participants were instructed to respond honestly and comprehensively, reflecting their experiences with oral communication activities as outlined in the Grade 9 English textbook.

4.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was performed using statistical tools such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequency distributions, and percentages, were computed to summarize responses and identify patterns.

Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to extract key insights and enrich understanding of participants' perceptions.

5. Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented below based on key research questions, supported by both quantitative data and qualitative insights obtained from participants.

5.1 Improvement in Speaking Skills

Students:

50% of students agreed, and 30% strongly agreed that oral communication activities improved their speaking abilities. 15% were neutral, and 5% disagreed.

Qualitative feedback highlighted increased confidence and fluency in speaking tasks, with students expressing greater comfort in participating in class discussions and presentations.

Teachers:

53.3% of teachers agreed, and 26.7% strongly agreed that oral communication activities enhanced students' speaking skills. 16.7% were neutral, and 3.3% disagreed.

Teachers observed improved articulation and engagement among students during oral communication exercises, indicating positive outcomes from the curriculum's emphasis on speaking skills.

Table 1: Improvement in Speaking Skills

Response Category	Students (%)	Teachers (%)
Strongly Disagree	0.0	0.0
Disagree	15.0	3.3
Neutral	15.0	16.7
Agree	50.0	53.3
Strongly Agree	30.0	26.7

5.2 Understanding Academic Targets

Students:

42.5% of students agreed that oral communication skills played an active role in understanding academic targets, while 43.3% remained neutral, and 14.2% disagreed.

Qualitative responses indicated that oral activities helped clarify academic concepts and fostered deeper understanding among students.

Teachers:

46.7% of teachers agreed, 36.7% were neutral, and 16.7% disagreed on the impact of oral communication activities on academic understanding.

Teachers emphasized the role of oral skills in reinforcing lesson comprehension and supporting academic achievement.

Table 2: Understanding Academic Targets

Response Category	Students (%)	Teachers (%)
Strongly Disagree	0.8	0.0
Disagree	13.3	16.7
Neutral	43.3	36.7
Agree	42.2	46.7

5.3 Enhancing Confidence Levels

Students:

44.2% of students agreed, and 6.7% strongly agreed that oral communication skills enhanced their confidence levels. 40.8% were neutral, and 8.3% disagreed.

Students cited increased self-assurance in speaking tasks and a greater willingness to participate in oral exercises as outcomes of the curriculum's focus on communication skills.

Teachers:

60% of teachers agreed, 20% strongly agreed, 16.7% were neutral, and 3.3% disagreed on the confidence-enhancing impact of oral activities.

Teachers noted significant improvements in students' verbal expression and overall confidence, attributing these gains to structured oral communication practice.

Table 3: Enhancing Confidence Levels

Response Category	Students (%)	Teachers (%)

Disagree	8.3	3.3
Neutral	40.8	16.7
Agree	44.2	60.0
Strongly Agree	6.7	20.0

5.4 Achieving Goals in Speaking

Students:

53.3% of students agreed, and 19.2% strongly agreed that oral communication skills helped them achieve their speaking goals. 23.3% were neutral, and 4.2% disagreed.

Students highlighted the practical benefits of oral practice in meeting communication objectives and improving their ability to express ideas effectively.

Teachers:

56.7% of teachers agreed, 26.7% strongly agreed, and 16.7% were neutral regarding the effectiveness of oral communication activities in achieving speaking goals.

Teachers underscored the importance of oral skills in preparing students for real-world communication scenarios and fostering communicative competence.

Table 4: Achieving Goals in Speaking

Response Category	Students (%)	Teachers (%)
Disagree	4.2	0.0
Neutral	23.3	16.7
Agree	53.3	56.7
Strongly Agree	19.2	26.7

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the positive impact of structured oral communication activities on students' speaking skills, confidence, and academic understanding. Both students and teachers perceive these activities as beneficial for achieving communication goals and enhancing overall language competence. This aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasize meaningful interaction and practical language use. The improvement in students' speaking skills and confidence highlights the effectiveness of the CLT approach in promoting communicative competence. This is consistent with previous studies that have shown the benefits of CLT in enhancing students' oral communication abilities (Littlewood, 1981; Savignon, 2002). The positive perceptions of teachers regarding the oral communication activities further validate the importance of incorporating communicative methods in language teaching. However, the study also identifies several challenges that need to be addressed to maximize the benefits of oral communication activities. The limited training and resources

available to teachers are significant barriers to the effective implementation of CLT. This finding echoes the concerns raised by Rahman (2002) and Mahmood (2009) about the need for comprehensive teacher training programs. Providing ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers is crucial for equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to facilitate communicative activities effectively.

6. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the efficacy of oral communication activities in Grade 9 English education:

i. **Curriculum Enhancement:** Revise the curriculum to include diverse and engaging oral communication activities aligned with global standards for language proficiency and communication skills.
ii. **Professional Development:** Provide continuous professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills in teaching oral communication.
iii. **Assessment Integration:** Incorporate oral communication skills into formal assessments to incentivize student engagement and monitor skill development over time.
iv. **Resource Allocation:** Allocate resources such as language labs, multimedia tools, and extracurricular speaking clubs to support and enrich oral communication practice within schools.

7. Limitations

The study is limited by its geographical focus on Lahore, which may not represent the entire Pakistani context. The sample size, though adequate, could be expanded in future research to include a more diverse demographic. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, and observational studies could complement the findings to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of oral communication activities.

8. Conclusion

The study conducted on the effectiveness of oral communication activities in the Grade 9 English textbook used in Lahore's public schools reveals significant positive outcomes. Quantitative data indicates that 80% of students and teachers agree that the textbook's oral activities enhance speaking skills, while qualitative insights reveal improvements in student confidence, fluency, and class participation. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating practical and communicative approaches in ESL education, in alignment with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).However, the study also highlights challenges, such as inadequate teacher training in CLT and a need for more engaging and varied speaking tasks. These challenges suggest that while the current curriculum is effective, there are opportunities for further enhancement through comprehensive professional development programs for teachers and the integration of more interactive and technology-based speaking activities. Overall, the research contributes to the understanding of ESL education in Pakistan, emphasizing the critical need for

curriculum and instructional improvements to better support the development of oral communication skills. Future efforts should focus on addressing the identified challenges to maximize the benefits of oral communication activities, ensuring that students are well-prepared for real-world communication scenarios.

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