

***Task-Based Instruction (TBI) to Motivate Elementary Students in Ghizer, Gilgit-Baltistan to Improve English Language Speaking Skills***

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**Abstract**

Public sector schools in Pakistan experience difficulties in teaching English, particularly spoken skills, owing to instructors' unfamiliarity with current language teaching techniques. This research, done in Gilgit-Baltistan, investigates the use of task-based instruction (TBI) to motivate and improve the English-speaking abilities of sixth-grade pupils. Pragmatic action study consisted of three data gathering phases: reconnaissance, intervention, and post-intervention. Observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom teaching reflections were some of the tools employed. A grade 6 language instructor and five specially chosen pupils took part. The reconnaissance phase indicated challenges with student motivation for learning spoken English, which were impacted by elements such as foreign language anxiety, confidence, readiness to communicate, and a propensity to code-switch to local languages. Teachers focused largely on writing and reading abilities, using the grammar-translation technique, which restricted possibilities for speech practice. The research discovered that involving students in activities, alleviating language anxiety, and creating a favourable language learning atmosphere dramatically increased their confidence and desire to speak English. The findings imply that increasing exposure to spoken English via task-based training may help students improve their language abilities and motivation.

Keywords: Task Based Instruction, English Language, Ghizer GB

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## **Introduction**

English is a language that is of global significance and is essential for global communication (Zeng, 2024). The goal of English instruction should be to develop proficient English language communicators among students (Zeng J, 2023). Pakistani students regard English as a second language that is primarily employed for academic and administrative purposes in accordance with predetermined standards (Baig, 2019). Consequently, students are experiencing challenges and are making an effort to refrain from articulating themselves in a language that is not their native dialect (Wang Z, 2020). The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is the primary method employed by the majority of language instructors in Pakistan to emphasize writing abilities. The students' exposure to the target language is restricted by this method, which positions the teacher as the primary communicator and the students as followers (Smith LE, 2019).

Language instructors in both the private and public sectors in Pakistan tend to neglect the development and evaluation of speaking abilities, despite the importance placed on them in the National Curriculum of 2006 (Baig, 2019). The limited exposure of instructors to language instruction is the reason for their interest in enhancing the writing abilities of their students. (Adibah Sulaim, 2016). By using various language teaching methodologies, students acquire the ability to establish associations between diverse concepts by means of hearing and reading. Furthermore, they develop the capacity to articulate their thoughts via writing and speaking, as stated in Pakistan's National curriculum for English language in 2006 (Yang, 2019). The English language has unique characteristics and necessitates a distinct approach to instruction compared to other disciplines. Language instructors must possess suitable pedagogies and experiences connected to speaking, as well as the ability to effectively incorporate new approaches and tactics (Daud Ismail, 2014). Teachers may inspire their pupils by involving them in purposeful activities that promote linguistic discussion (Rahim, 2014).

An action research study was conducted on a sample of five sixth-grade kids from a private school in Ghizer Gilgit, District. The purpose of the study was to investigate:

- 1- How may task-based instruction (TBI) be used to enhance the motivation of grade VI pupils at a government school in Ghizer District, Gilgit-Baltistan, to speak the English language?
- 2- How can the English language speaking abilities of primary-level children in government institutions be bolstered and encouraged through TBI-related activities?
- 3- What exercises, objectives, or tactics may be used to improve the English language speaking abilities of primary students?

## **Methodology**

Pragmatism is concerned with action and change, and knowledge and action. This study is located within pragmatism as its aim is to explore issues in society where different perceptions, experiences and practices exist (Creswell, 2003). Focus of the pragmatist paradigm is action, bringing about change and role of the researcher as a change agent in generating data and theories. Within the pragmatic paradigm, action research was carried out to explore how different activities can be used to build students' motivation in improving their engagement with speaking skills. Action research helped in developing and changing plans according to the need and situation (Kemmis, 2014). Lewin's cyclic model was used in

data collection phases which allowed moving forward and backward according to the situation. See Figure 1:

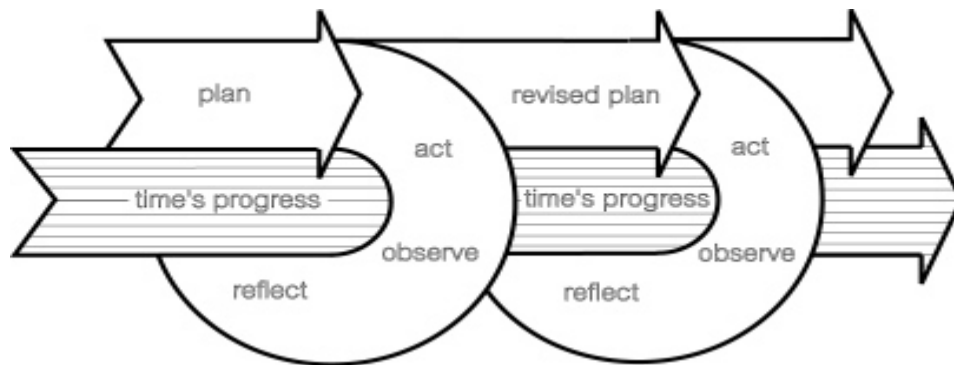


Figure 1: Lewin's Model

Source: <http://www.berylgraham.com/asunder/mods/met3dvd1.htm>

The research included five pupils from grade 6 in a government school located in Ghizer, a district in Gilgit-Baltistan. This group consisted of individuals with varying levels of proficiency in the English language, including high-achievers, average-achievers, and struggling pupils. The whole sixth-grade class served as secondary participants. The omission of real school names and participant identities was done to ensure confidentiality. Participants' replies were quoted using pseudonyms, which is an ethical practice in research. The data sets for this investigation were gathered in three distinct stages: reconnaissance, intervention, and post-intervention. The reconnaissance phase was specifically meant to serve as a phase for gathering factual information. The study used three passive observations and a focus group discussion (FGD) to analyse students' perspectives on the language education process, specifically the methods used to develop speaking skills. The semi-structured interview with the language instructor facilitated the identification and resolution of concerns by gathering data on the specific tasks and activities used to encourage students' proficiency in speaking their second language (L2).

Based on the obtained data on areas that needed improvement, an intervention was carried out by performing three cycles of action research. During each cycle, three sessions of 40 minutes each were done. There were a total of nine sessions that spanned over a period of fifteen days. A checklist was used throughout each of the nine sessions to document problems requiring development that impede students' participation in speaking their second language (L2). After each session, compile thoughtful notes on inquiries such as: to what extent are students actively engaging in classroom activities? What is the frequency of their code-switching? After the session, I discussed and analysed the participants and sessions with a critical friend (CF). After analysing the ongoing shared reflections, relevant adjustments were made for both the future sessions.

Conducted a focused group discussion (FGD) with main participants to explore how the intervention has influenced them in terms of improving their motivation level to learn English language speaking skills as well as to find out their perceptions about the teaching strategies used in the intervention stage. Comparing results of after-intervention FGD with reconnaissance phase FGD helped to see if there has been a change in students' use of English as it relates to level of confidence, willingness to speak and their general use of English in terms of vocabulary use. Semi-structured interview with CF was aimed at

capturing CF's reflections and retrospective perspective about the challenges and issues she faced in language teaching, especially in enhancing speaking skills of ESL students.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Reconnaissance Phase***

The reconnaissance phase data suggested that the instructor exclusively employed the grammar-translation technique to instruct the English language. This was apparent as she read the text, identified verb forms within it, and provided explanations for some of the more difficult terms. The instructor participated in a limited number of activities during classroom observations, with the primary focus on enhancing the writing and reading skills of the students. The teacher's use of the English language was severely restricted, and the classroom instruction was conducted in two languages. It was determined that learners were not actively engaged in the language learning process and were not actively participating in a classroom where the instructor is the primary focus of instruction. The language instructor's primary objective was to complete the coursework. The FGD data facilitated the determination that students had a sense of difficulty when prompted to communicate in the English language. The language instructor was correlating the pupils' speaking abilities with their understanding of grammar. The motivation for providing grammatical modifications was to enable pupils to speak English in accordance with the norms of grammar. In first session during an informal discussion, the teacher said:

“You know exams are going on, I would request you to take those topics which I have not taught yet. Or focus on exercises which have been taught. It will be kind of revision for them.” (Rubina, 2020)

The FGD also gave the impression that the teachers focus is on reading and writing skills.

“Then she makes us read, later on she asks us to do exercises.” (Surya, 2020)

Language confidence (L2) is defined by (Clement, 2005) as the anxiety-free belief of a learner about his ability to communicate in the second language or in the target language. During the reconnaissance phase, it was determined that there is a need for improvement in the area of L2 confidence observations. During the classroom discussion, it was noted that pupils were actively engaging in the use of the Urdu language. Several individuals did not exhibit any response in Urdu. The task of speaking in the English language seemed to be difficult for the kids. Students were unable to publicly present and communicate their thoughts or ideas to their peers. Whenever someone attempted to communicate in English, their peers would immediately engage in hushed conversations and laughter.

Therefore, it was crucial to assist students in overcoming this unfavourable self-perception in order to enhance their confidence and strengthen their drive. The analysis of the data from the reconnaissance phase indicated that students' desire to engage in English language activities is an area that needs development. Students were reluctant to engage in debates. During the non-participatory observations, it was noted that when students were prompted to verbally present their group assignments to the class, just two students were willing to do so. Rest of the class refused to take part in the discussion by sharing “miss we do not know.] It seemed that there was lack of students' willingness (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement & Donovan, 2002) to

participate in English language because most of the students did not participate. The language teacher perceived it as students' lack of interest in one-way teaching process.

As she commented:

“In one way teaching one teacher use to speak. It means only teacher works and students are supposed to be silent listeners.” (Rubina, 2020)

During the second session, it was noted that pupils were not engaging in any discussion with their partners, causing the instructor to feel ashamed. During the teacher's assignment of group exercises, only a small minority of the pupils presented their work in front of the whole class. This data indicates that the reason for this may be because pupils were unable to overcome their apprehension while speaking in the English language. According to the language teacher's view, this anxiety is related to public speaking and involves the dread of making errors. During the reconnaissance phase, a semi-structured interview was conducted, she said: “I think it is speaking because students like to think, if they will speak, they commit mistakes” (Rubina, 2020).

This area was decided to be worked further as it is interlinked with the issue of willingness to communicate and the overall issue of language confidence. Classroom observations indicated that code-switching is an area that needs improvement. The classroom education was conducted in many languages, including English, Urdu, and Shina (the indigenous language). The English language class did not include any group discussions or pair conversations. During the third session, the instructor posed inquiries to the pupils, who then provided answers in Urdu. Students seemed to be unable of sustaining their discourse in the English language. Both the instructor and pupils often switched to using Urdu language in the lesson. Neither of them have confidence in speaking English.

### ***Data Analysis Intervention-Phase***

There were three intervention rounds in this phase. During the first cycle, after analysing observations and engaging in formal and informal talks with the CF, the areas for development that were highlighted were the students' level of confidence, their participation in classroom activities, and their ability to use the target language in real-world situations. Three language training sessions were scheduled based on areas that needed development. Imagination, collaboration, and classroom environment were used as educational settings. The intended classroom activities to engage students included group work, pair tasks, and solo tasks, such as dialogue delivery, presentations, and image reflections. To facilitate pupils' learning, grammatical or structural errors were overlooked to avoid undermining their confidence (Oradee, 2012).

Reconnaissance phase data indicated that when pupils attempted to answer in English, their peers would ridicule them. The students were unable to go up and express their thoughts. Students' nervousness was evident in their body language, as their eyes would shift downwards when the teacher posed a question. A set of regulations was established, mandating that all individuals communicate only in English and prohibiting others from mocking them. Every student's engagement in the classroom was guaranteed, including those who did not participate willingly. Nevertheless, the major emphasis remained on the key participants of the research. In the first session, a warm-up exercise was carried out with the kids where they were required to discuss the hobbies they love doing at home.

When enforced to share in English she replied “ok miss I like ... I like watch TV. I also like to play ... hmm ... playing cricket and go to prayers” (Atiqa, 2020).

Students were uncomfortable sharing their thoughts in English. For the sake of creating a supportive environment for language learning, they were engaged in pairs so that they would improve their confidence level (Brilianti, 2023). Tasks are more encouraging for students to use the target language confidently. Following was the response of primary participant group when they are assigned a task to task to recall and describe a “clean environment”.

Areej responded like “the environment in mosque is very beautiful” (Areej, 2020).

Suriya responded like “I go to public school. I see very clean playground in school. There are many classes and many students but they do not through garbage in the school” (Surya, 2020).

Suraiyya used to participate very little but at this time, as can be seen from the extract, she tried to take part in discussion which indicates that this first teaching cycle was helping to somewhat address issues such as language confidence and WTC. On the whole, it seems that the intervention was successful in bringing about a slight improvement in students’ behaviour and confidence level as compared to the beginning. Students were able to stand up and share few lines in English in front of their class maintaining eye contact. Students started to share fun they had with their fellows while doing tasks which showed that they are trying to overcome their fear. Students’ involvement in the tasks seemed to raise their confidence. The more actively they took part in the conversations, the more their confidence level seemed to increase. However, it was still challenging for some of the students to communicate their message in English language.

The primary goal of this cycle was to increase the level of engagement of students in tasks and activities, thereby allowing them to engage in more interpersonal interactions. During the reconnaissance phase, it was observed that a substantial number of students in the language classroom were not actively engaged as a result of the language teacher's limited use of instructional activities. Students engaged in collaborative activities in both pairings and groups during the initial phase. Students who were not actively engaged in the discussions were subjected to additional questions. The goal was to guarantee their active participation in group discussions (Kamarudin Salleh, 2016).

The repeated attempts to contact Atiqa and Resham, who were initially non-participating students, served to make them aware that they could not remain inactive indefinitely. Consequently, they began to make an effort to engage and react. By the conclusion of this cycle, their engagement in the tasks was noticeably enhanced. For example, in the third lesson of this cycle, a group-task was assigned to describe two types of environments: clean environment and dirty environment. Resham presented her group work like:

She replied Miss .....we are discussing about clean environment. I further probed ok tell me something more she added “like our school environment is clean and it is very beautiful. Students took care then switched to local language of Pakistan like Urdu.

She transitioned to the Urdu language when she was unable to continue in English. The active participation of students in any language was highly regarded as a means of fostering a comfortable environment for speaking and enhancing their level of comfort. For the

subsequent sessions, the objective was to meticulously select lessons, assignments, and activities that are compatible with the cognitive capabilities of sixth-grade students, are feasible for them to complete, and encourage their active engagement.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in the target language is defined by McIntyre, Baker, Clement and Donovan (2002) as the readiness or the intention to communicate with a particular person in L2 when choice of languages given to them. In the reconnaissance phase, it was observed that few students were talkative and most of them were reticent during the language teaching process. Both reticence and talkativeness are constructs of WTC (McIntyre, 1998). Except for a few students, most of the class was reluctant to speak in L2. It was important to make sure all students show their willingness to take risk to communicate in L2. For this purpose, tasks of students' interest were assigned to students so that they themselves wanted to respond without teacher's interference. It was included an individual task in the second session, which was "guessing the word". A tag of "NIGHT" was pasted on the back of a student (Shahida) without showing the word to her. Students were supposed to share their ideas about the word and Shahida was supposed to guess the word. Students' responses were like:

"It is dark miss" (Areej, 2020)

"I sleep in ...." (Surya, 2020)

During Cycle two, two more areas requiring development were identified: students' proficiency in code-switching between Urdu and English, and their Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA) skills. These areas played a crucial role in enhancing and developing students' English communication abilities. The objective was to reduce the quantity of assignments and extend the length of each work, allowing students enough time for contemplation, practice, and response. The exercises were carried out in groups, pairs, and individually, with minor modifications in their form and content, such as focusing on conversation delivery and reflecting on observations. Initially, the kids exhibited shyness and hesitancy while providing responses. Despite first exchanging a few lines in English, they nevertheless had a fear of making errors. They seemed to have a dread of being incorrect. During the first session of this cycle, a task for individual completion was scheduled. Two images depicting contrasting environments were affixed on a whiteboard. Beneath the images, there was also a list of words provided. Students were expected to carefully examine and contemplate both images while using the assigned terminology. Students were given enough opportunity to contemplate and exchange ideas. Resham remained silent when she was called upon to go up and express her thoughts. Subsequently, a casual dialogue with Resham revealed the reason for her silence. She was unable to share her ideas in English language. She replied, "I am afraid of speaking in English language that it will be incorrect. I don't know how to respond in English" (Resham, 2020).

During the most recent session of this cycle, the assignment was to "attempt to remember a narrative in which one of your pets fell ill." Communicate it to your partner using your own language. The students started their conversation with great enthusiasm. During this cycle, it was seen that despite their apparent reluctance, they actively engaged in allocating some time. Despite their awareness of their improper speech, the students nevertheless actively participated in the conversation. Each of their attempts at involvement was commended in order to alleviate their language anxiety and apprehension about making errors. At first, the students displayed anxiety, but as the cycle advanced, their anxiety around making errors diminished. Nobody was speaking perfectly as these tasks were equally difficult for

everyone. By the end students seemed to have overcome this issue as compared to the beginning.

“Miss there is a cow in my home. She gives milk to us and my mother like the cow very much.” (Resham, 2020)

Another need-improvement area was students’ tendency to code-switch from English to other languages. Students were unable to continue their discussion in the English language and started to speak in Urdu. Rules were implemented to handle this:

- 1- We will not switch to any other language very frequently.
- 2- We will try and speak in English language only.

In the second session, a presentation was given to students to explain the meaning of transitive and intransitive verbs with examples and assigned them an individual-task:

Go outside and observe the surrounding for three minutes. Make notes on the surrounding through making sentences and find out any example of transitive and non-transitive verbs from the sentences you made. You can also discuss it with the people outside and make sentences of these verbs. It was a different type of instruction for them. Their discussions were very interesting because they were speaking in English fairly. The fear of being observed and being wrong seemed to have disappeared. I noticed that they were enjoying conversing without switching to Urdu. They were exchanging sentences like:

“Zahida Miss is writing on the blackboard. Miss writing is a transitive verb because it has an object” (Rasheeda, 2020). The students engaged in thoughtful contemplation and articulation of their thoughts, although they refrained from using Urdu or the vernacular language. Resham was using the term 'lines' to refer to 'sentences'. The presence of speech fillers and pauses indicates that kids are encountering trouble and need a pause to gather knowledge in their minds. By the conclusion of the cycle, pupils seemed to have engaged in the English language without apprehension of committing errors. While not all students showed improvement, there was a noticeable beneficial shift in their behaviour in terms of increased confidence, willingness, reduced fear, and better code-switching. The students exhibited inappropriate speech, although they made an effort to communicate in English. Despite their errors, they remained steadfast in using Urdu.

## **Conclusion**

TBI is an effective method to motivate their students for learning English language speaking through lowering learners’ anxiety and boosting their confidence (Lopes, 2004). Teachers have the ability to create and execute tasks and activities that may enhance students' engagement in speaking and improve the current methods of teaching and learning language (Noor Syafiqah, 2016). Methodologies and approaches such as Task-Based Instruction can be employed to accomplish this (TBI) (Özdoğru, 2022). The data from this action study were examined using a combination of triangulation, reflection, and reflexivity. To get a comprehensive grasp of the problems, it is advisable to use both qualitative and quantitative techniques of data collecting.



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