

Development of Oral Communication Skills in English using the FIRST Framework among Students of Selected Urdu Medium Schools in Beed District

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Abstract:

The present study investigates the effectiveness of the FIRST Framework in developing oral communication skills in English among students of selected Urdu medium schools in Beed District. Urdu medium learners often experience difficulties in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, interaction and communicative confidence due to limited exposure to spoken English and teacher-centred classroom practices. The study aimed to design and implement a structured, learner-centred intervention to address these challenges. The FIRST Framework - Focusing, Interacting, Reviewing, Sequencing and Transforming, served as the pedagogical foundation of the study. Each domain of the framework incorporates learner-centred principles intended to promote engagement, collaborative learning, meaningful classroom interaction and the transformation of classroom learning into real-life communicative performance. A total of 320 students from selected Urdu medium secondary schools participated in the study. Thirty multimedia-based English lesson plans were designed and implemented using the experimental method with a pre-test and post-test design. Data were collected through speaking tests, classroom observations, interviews and interaction records. The statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement in the oral communication skills of the experimental group in comparison with the control group. The findings demonstrate notable gains in fluency, pronunciation, clarity of expression, interactional competence and communicative confidence.

Keywords: Oral communication skills, FIRST Framework, ESL, Urdu medium schools, learner-centred pedagogy, communicative competence.

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1. Introduction

Oral communication skill is a central component of communicative competence in English as a Second Language (ESL). In multilingual educational contexts such as India, learners studying in Urdu medium schools frequently encounter limited opportunities for authentic spoken interaction in English. Classroom instruction often prioritises reading and writing, while speaking remains underdeveloped.

In Beed District, students from Urdu medium backgrounds face specific challenges such as lack of exposure to spoken English, hesitation, low confidence, restricted vocabulary use and difficulties in pronunciation and interaction. These challenges hinder learners' academic participation and future professional prospects.

The present study responds to this educational need by introducing a structured and learner-centred pedagogical intervention, the FIRST Framework, to enhance oral communication skills among secondary school students.

2. Rationale of the Study

Existing classroom practices in Urdu medium schools are largely textbook-oriented and examination-driven. Teachers have limited structured pedagogical support for conducting interactive speaking activities and sustaining learners' motivation. Moreover, classroom instruction often remains teacher-dominated, offering minimal opportunities for learners to practice authentic spoken communication.

The present research was undertaken to design a systematic, classroom-friendly and performance-oriented framework that supports both teachers and learners in developing spoken English proficiency.

3. The FIRST Framework

The FIRST Framework is a holistic and learner-centred instructional framework developed to improve classroom interaction and transform learning into performance. The framework comprises five interrelated domains:

F – Focusing on learner behaviour

This domain emphasises individualisation, continuous probing and assessment, and trusting learners' prior experiences, emotions and potential contributions.

I – Interacting within positive group dynamics

This domain promotes learning as a social event, encourages positive classroom spirit, and sustains learners' motivation and attention through collaborative activities.

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R – Reviewing activities within RAR (Readiness–Activity–Review)

This domain ensures learner readiness, active facilitation of tasks and reflective review to consolidate learning outcomes.

S – Sequencing within session flow

This domain focuses on logical structuring and sequencing of activities, repetition without boredom, and systematic linking and summarising of learning points.

T – Transforming learning into performance

This domain emphasises reflection on real-life situations, practice through experiential learning, and continuity through follow-up activities.

The framework is designed as a holistic pedagogical approach usable across disciplines, although the present study applies it specifically to ESL oral communication instruction.

4. Objectives of the Study

- 1.To assess the oral communication skills of Urdu-medium secondary and higher secondary students.
- 2.To design and implement FIRST Framework and ADLX-based lesson plans to develop vocabulary, idioms, grammar, pronunciation, and body language.
- 3.To evaluate the impact of FIRST Framework-based instruction through pre- and post-test comparison of experimental and control groups.
- 4.To examine the role of FIRST principles in promoting interactive, reflective, and learner-centred speaking practices.
- 5.To analyse students’ feedback on the usefulness and motivational value of the FIRST Framework for developing oral communication skills.

5. Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis (H₀)

There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of oral communication skills of students in the experimental group.

Alternative Hypotheses (H₁)

- 1.Urdu-medium ESL learners show low oral fluency in English at the outset.
- 2.FIRST Framework and ADLX-based instruction significantly improves learners’ vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and oral communication confidence.
- 3.FIRST Framework and ADLX lesson plans significantly enhance learners’ motivation, engagement, and participation in speaking activities.

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4. FIRST Framework-based learner-centred and reflective practices promote intrinsic motivation and self-directed learning in spoken English.

5. FIRST Framework-based instruction provides greater opportunities for meaningful and interactive oral communication.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design

An experimental research design with pre-test and post-test control group structure was adopted.

6.2 Population and Sample

The sample consisted of 320 secondary school students selected from Urdu medium schools in Beed District. The students were divided into experimental and control groups.

6.3 Instructional Intervention

Thirty multimedia-based ESL lesson plans were developed by the researcher using the principles of the FIRST Framework. The intervention focused on:

- Guided and free speaking tasks,
- Role-plays and real-life communication activities,
- Vocabulary-supported speaking practice,
- Pronunciation and clarity drills,
- Collaborative and reflective classroom interaction.

Teachers of participating schools were oriented and supported during the implementation period.

6.4 Tools for Data Collection

The following tools were employed:

- Oral communication skill tests (pre-test and post-test),
- Classroom observation schedules,
- Interview schedules for teachers and students,
- Classroom interaction records.

6.5 Procedure of the Experiment

The students were administered a pre-test to assess their initial oral communication skills. The experimental instruction was conducted using the thirty lesson plans based on the FIRST Framework. After the intervention, a post-test was administered. Observations were carried out during the implementation and interviews were conducted to gather qualitative feedback.

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6.6 Statistical Techniques

School-wise paired sample t-tests were employed to examine the significance of the difference between pre-test and post-test scores of students in each participating school. The analysis was carried out separately for each of the eight schools included in the study, as the data were organised and analysed school-wise. The level of significance was fixed at 0.05 (and 0.01 where applicable) to test the hypotheses. This school-wise analytical approach enabled the researcher to determine the consistency of the effectiveness of the FIRST Framework across multiple institutional contexts.

7. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics including mean, standard deviation, variance and t-tests.

School-wise paired sample t-tests were conducted for eight Urdu medium schools in Beed district to compare students' pre-test and post-test scores. The results showed statistically significant improvement in all schools, with t-values ranging from 7.83 to 25.28. Post-test mean scores (18.50–25.55) were markedly higher than pre-test mean scores (7.20–14.75), while standard deviation values indicated acceptable score dispersion across schools.

These findings confirm that the FIRST Framework was effective in improving learners' oral communication skills, including fluency, vocabulary use, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy and confidence, across different institutional contexts. Classroom observations and student interviews further supported the quantitative results, showing increased participation, reduced hesitation and greater willingness to communicate in English.

8. Findings of the Study

The findings indicate a statistically significant improvement in the oral communication skills of students in the experimental group compared to those in the control group. Learners exposed to the FIRST Framework demonstrated:

- Increased fluency and reduced hesitation,
- Improved pronunciation and clarity of speech,
- Better vocabulary usage in contextual situations,
- Enhanced interaction with peers and teachers,
- Greater communicative confidence.

Classroom observations and interviews further revealed positive changes in learners' attentiveness, willingness to participate, collaborative behaviour and self-expression.

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10. Educational Implications

The study offers the following pedagogical implications:

- Teachers can employ the FIRST Framework as a holistic classroom strategy for enhancing interaction and learner engagement.
- The framework supports structured integration of speaking activities within regular syllabus requirements.
- Teacher training programmes may incorporate the FIRST Framework for strengthening communicative language teaching practices.
- The framework can be adapted for other subjects and learning contexts due to its holistic and learner-centred design.

11. Limitations and Scope for Further Research

The study was confined to selected Urdu medium schools in Beed District and focused on higher secondary school learners. Future research may examine the applicability of the FIRST Framework across different educational levels, subjects and multilingual contexts. Longitudinal studies may further investigate the sustained impact of the framework on learners' communicative development.

12. Conclusion

The present study establishes that the FIRST Framework is an effective pedagogical model for developing oral communication skills in English among Urdu medium secondary school students of Beed district. The school-wise experimental evidence obtained through paired sample t-tests indicates statistically significant improvement in learners' oral communication performance across all participating schools. The learners exposed to the framework demonstrated substantial development in fluency, pronunciation, interactional competence and communicative confidence.

The framework successfully bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-life communication by transforming learners into active participants and confident speakers. The study therefore recommends the systematic integration of the FIRST Framework into ESL instruction, particularly in educational contexts where learners have limited exposure to spoken English.

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