



ENHANCING PROFICIENCY IN EVERYDAY ENGLISH COMMUNICATION: STRATEGIES AND OUTCOMES IN ESL LEARNERS

*Srianthie Salgado**

Department of English Language Teaching, The Open University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka

This action research was directed to enhance the communicative ability in English of a selected group of adults. The research and the background information for the research originated through the inspiration of the researcher, due to the necessity of acquiring the communicative ability of English for adults. The main objective of this Action Research was to examine the effectiveness of an intervention program implemented to improve the communication skills of a selected group of adults. In accordance the sub-objectives were to identify the existing levels of communication skills of the sample and to design, implement and evaluate an intervention program. The data collection instruments used to gather information were a needs survey questionnaire, a pre-test, to ascertain the level of the sample, a post-test, interviews, participant observation while the intervention program was implemented and the researchers reflective notes. In the data analysis, the existing levels of the sample were measured by a pre-test which was in four different parts of grammar, reading, writing and speaking. As this research was mainly based on the speaking ability of the sample the speaking component was given high priority. An intervention program was completed in sixteen sessions of two and a half hour duration each. The final outcomes of this invention program were assessed by comparing the pre-test and post-test marks. A comparative analysis of the total marks as well as the speaking ability was done to ascertain the improvement of the sample. It was observed in the analysis that the marks obtained had a very positive increase and therefore the conclusion was that the intervention program was a success. Suggestions for future improvement are noteworthy especially on the addition of all four skills. This in turn would have an impact on the time duration of the course. The final conclusion is that a well-planned intervention program which is monitored and evaluated could be used successfully to enhance the communicative ability of English in adults.

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT), English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

*Corresponding Author: srianthie.salgado@gmail.com



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INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become a crucial skill, particularly for those engaged in international socio-economic activities. As the most widely spoken global language, English serves as a bridge for communication across diverse cultures and industries. This reality has heightened the demand for proficiency in English, not only in formal academic settings but also in everyday interactions. The importance of everyday English communication is especially pronounced in countries where English is not the first language, as it directly impacts individuals' employability, career advancement, and social mobility.

In many contexts, including Sri Lanka, the accessibility and quality of English language education have been uneven, particularly in rural and remote areas. This disparity has contributed to significant challenges for graduates and professionals who lack proficiency in English, often limiting their opportunities for employment and advancement. Studies, such as those by Jayaweera and Sanmugam (2002), have highlighted the struggles of arts graduates with insufficient English skills, leading to underemployment and a reliance on low-income occupations in the informal sector.

To address these challenges, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs have been developed to tailor language teaching to the specific needs of adult learners in various fields. However, beyond ESP, there is a pressing need to enhance everyday English communication skills, particularly oral communication, to better equip individuals for real-world interactions. This study focuses on evaluating the implementation of an intervention plan designed to improve the oral proficiency of a selected group of ESL learners.

The intervention plan emphasizes the development of practical oral skills, tailored to the learners' needs and proficiency levels. The curriculum includes functional language use, such as basic greetings, social interactions, and everyday tasks like shopping or giving directions. Major activities include discussions, speeches, role plays, and accuracy-based exercises, all aimed at enhancing the learners' confidence and ability to communicate effectively in everyday situations.

By exploring the outcomes of this intervention, the research aims to provide insights into the most effective strategies for enhancing everyday English communication among ESL learners. The findings will contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve English language teaching and support learners in achieving greater fluency and confidence in their daily interactions.

Research Objectives and Questions

Based on the importance of enhancing everyday English communication skills among ESL learners, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of a targeted intervention plan in improving the oral proficiency of ESL learners in everyday English communication.
2. To identify the most effective strategies within the intervention plan that contribute to enhanced speaking skills in real-world situations.
3. To measure the impact of improved everyday English communication skills on the learners' confidence and ability to engage in daily interactions.



4. To explore the specific challenges faced by ESL learners in acquiring practical oral communication skills and how these challenges can be mitigated through tailored instruction.

To achieve these objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How effective is the intervention plan in enhancing the oral proficiency of ESL learners in everyday English communication?
2. Which specific strategies within the intervention plan most significantly improve the learners' ability to communicate in real-world scenarios?
3. What changes in learners' confidence and communication ability are observed as a result of the intervention?
4. What are the key challenges faced by ESL learners in improving their everyday English communication, and how does the intervention address these challenges?

METHODOLOGY

To address the specific needs of ESL learners in enhancing everyday English communication, a targeted intervention plan was developed and implemented. The study began with a comprehensive needs analysis of the participants, focusing on their current proficiency levels and specific requirements for improving oral communication in daily interactions. This needs analysis included a questionnaire that assessed the learners' self-perceived weaknesses, their goals for language use, and the specific contexts in which they needed to improve their English speaking skills.

A sample group of 30 learners was selected to participate in the intervention program, which was designed based on the results of the needs analysis. The intervention plan included 16 intensive lessons, each lasting 2½ hours, conducted three times a week over a six-week period. The curriculum was carefully structured to prioritize the development of speaking skills, with 40% of each lesson dedicated to oral communication. The remaining time was allocated to the other three language skills: reading (20%), writing (30%), and listening (10%).

The speaking component of the lessons focused on practical, everyday English usage, including activities such as role-plays, discussions, and accuracy-based exercises. These activities were designed to simulate real-world scenarios, such as shopping, asking for directions, and engaging in social conversations, thereby helping learners build confidence and fluency in their daily interactions. The effectiveness of the intervention was assessed through pre- and post-intervention evaluations, measuring improvements in the learners' oral proficiency, confidence, and ability to communicate effectively in everyday situations.

This methodology was selected to provide a holistic approach to language learning while ensuring that the primary focus remained on enhancing the practical speaking skills of the participants. The findings from this study will contribute to the ongoing development of effective strategies for teaching everyday English communication to ESL learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The intervention was evaluated through pre- and post-tests, focusing on the four language skills, with a particular emphasis on speaking. The pre-test results revealed that the learners had varying levels of proficiency, particularly in grammar and speaking. Grammar scores ranged from 25 to 9, indicating significant gaps in grammatical knowledge among the participants. Speaking scores, which ranged from 22 to 8, demonstrated a broader distribution, suggesting diverse oral communication abilities within the group.

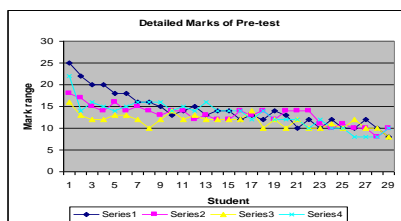


Figure 1 – Detailed Mark range of Pre-Test

Following the six-week intervention, the post-test results showed notable improvements across all skills, particularly in speaking. The average increase in speaking scores was 12 points, reflecting a substantial enhancement in the learners' oral communication abilities. Importantly, the gap between the highest and lowest scorers narrowed, indicating that the intervention was effective for learners of varying initial proficiency levels.

The qualitative feedback from the learners also supported these findings. Many participants reported increased confidence in their ability to engage in everyday English conversations, and they appreciated the practical focus of the course. The positive shifts in speaking performance were particularly evident among learners who initially scored lower, demonstrating the effectiveness of the role-plays, discussions, and accuracy-based exercises included in the curriculum.

Figure 2 depicts the improvement in overall test scores, while Figure 3 highlights the specific gains in speaking proficiency. These visual representations underscore the success of the intervention in achieving the primary research objectives: enhancing oral proficiency and boosting learner confidence in real-world communication scenarios.

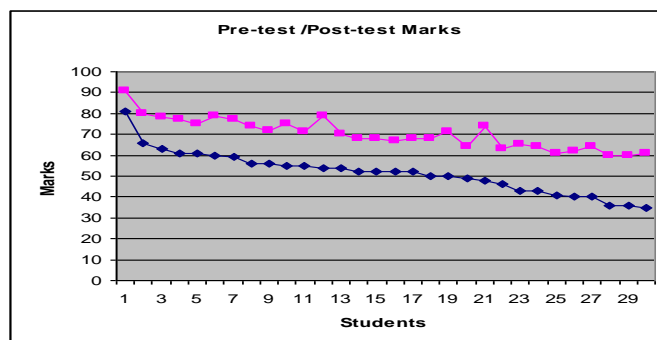


Figure 2 - Pre-test and Post-test marks

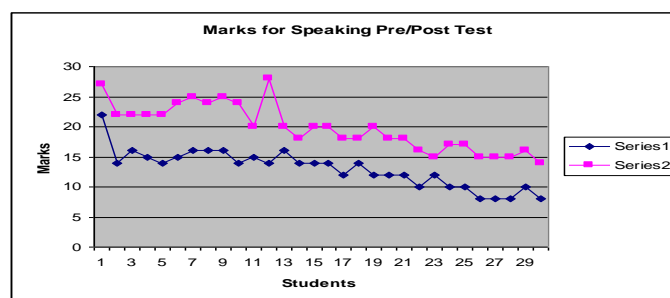


Figure 3 Marks for Speaking Pre-test and Post-test



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The intervention demonstrated significant success in enhancing the everyday English communication skills of ESL learners. The tailored approach, focusing on practical, real-world speaking activities, proved effective in not only improving oral proficiency but also in building the learners' confidence to use English in daily interactions. This aligns with the study's objectives and research questions, confirming that targeted, practice-oriented instruction can yield substantial gains in communication skills, particularly for those with lower initial proficiency.

However, the study also revealed certain challenges, such as the initial reluctance of adult learners to participate in speaking activities and the limitations of physical classroom spaces for interactive exercises. To further enhance the effectiveness of such programs, it is recommended that future interventions include more opportunities for public speaking and presentations from the outset, helping learners to develop not only their language skills but also their public speaking abilities. Additionally, ensuring that classroom environments are conducive to group work and active learning will be crucial in supporting the learners' progress.

For future courses, implementing a tiered system based on initial proficiency levels—basic, intermediate, and advanced—could further optimize the learning experience by tailoring content more closely to the specific needs of each group. This approach would enable more targeted instruction and potentially lead to even greater improvements in communication skills.

Key words – English language Teaching (ELT), English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

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