FROM TEXT TO TALK: HOW EFFECTIVE ARE CLASSROOM MATERIALS IN ENHANCING SPOKEN ENGLISH?

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of prescribed textbooks and supplementary materials in fostering spoken English proficiency among postgraduate students in English-medium institutions in India. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 46 participants via a structured questionnaire comprising both closed- and open-ended items. Results indicate that while textbooks provide a foundation for grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, their impact on speaking skills is limited: only 2% of students found the current textbook helpful "to a large extent," 30% "to some extent," and 67% "not at all" helpful. Although 54% acknowledged the presence of some speaking activities, 43% considered them inadequate. A significant 91% of respondents expressed a demand for more practical, speech-oriented tasks such as group discussions, role-plays, and peer-feedback sessions. Analysis of supplementary material use revealed that video clips (63%) and audio recordings (37%) that serve key resources for authentic language exposure were underutilised compared to test papers (20%) and readymade notes (30%), reflecting an assessment-driven classroom culture. The findings underscore that bridging the "text-to-talk" gap requires textbook redesign, purposeful integration of multimedia, greater emphasis on interactive activities, and assessment reforms that formally evaluate oral communication skills. Such measures are crucial to prepare graduates for academic, professional, and social communication demands.

Keywords: Spoken English, Proficiency, Exposure, Communication Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

In many English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classrooms, particularly in postcolonial contexts such as India, the pathway from mastering the written language to acquiring functional spoken competence remains a persistent educational challenge. English in these settings is not only a subject of academic study but also a gatekeeper to social mobility, higher education, and professional opportunities. Yet, despite the centrality of oral communication in real-world contexts, classroom instruction in many English-medium institutions continues to privilege text-based learning over interactive, speech-oriented practice. This imbalance is often rooted in the historical trajectory of English education in India. Since its institutional introduction during the colonial period, English teaching has been dominated by grammar–translation and literature-focused approaches, where written comprehension and examination performance were prioritised over spoken fluency. While communicative methodologies have gained theoretical recognition in recent decades, the actual classroom reality, particularly at the postgraduate level, often still reflects a predominantly text-centric orientation. Prescribed textbooks are designed with reading comprehension, grammar accuracy, and writing tasks in mind, while speaking activities, if present, are frequently superficial, under-supported, or treated as optional.

The gap between reading and speaking is further complicated by the sociolinguistic environment. Students in English-medium institutions may have adequate exposure to written English through academic work, but their oral interactions (both inside and outside the classroom) are often mediated by regional or first languages. This results in limited opportunities for spontaneous, structured, and feedback-oriented speaking practice. As Richards (2006) observes, "Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies." a principle that requires well-designed materials to scaffold speaking skills in realistic contexts. In this light, the role of classroom materials, particularly textbooks and supplementary resources, becomes central to bridging the "text-to-talk" divide. Materials are not neutral; they reflect pedagogical priorities, shape student engagement, and signal to both teachers and learners what is valued in the language-learning process. Where textbooks provide structured, contextualised speaking activities, students have a greater chance of developing fluency. Conversely, when materials are heavily weighted toward reading and writing, spoken English becomes a peripheral skill, cultivated informally rather than systematically.

This study investigates the extent to which classroom materials in postgraduate English-medium settings foster spoken English proficiency. It pays particular attention to how prescribed textbooks incorporate (or neglect) speaking activities, the nature of supplementary resources used, and the degree of pedagogical support available to students during speaking tasks. By focusing on postgraduate learners, the research also addresses a less-discussed but important point: even advanced students, despite years of formal English education, may remain underprepared for communicative demands if classroom resources are not aligned with oral proficiency goals. Ultimately, this research seeks to highlight the pedagogical implications of material design in ESL contexts. If the aim is to produce graduates capable of participating confidently in academic discussions, professional interviews, and public discourse, then teaching materials must be deliberately oriented toward speech as much as text. The transition from "text to talk" is not incidental—it requires intentional planning, appropriate resources, and sustained classroom practice.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overarching purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which classroom materials, particularly prescribed textbooks and supplementary teaching aids, contribute to the development of spoken English proficiency among postgraduate students in English-medium institutions. While the general assumption is that English-medium education naturally facilitates oral fluency, preliminary observations and prior research suggest that this may not be the case when instructional materials remain predominantly text-based.

To address this gap, the study has the following specific objectives:

1) **To evaluate the perceived usefulness of classroom textbooks in enhancing spoken English skills.**

This involves exploring student perspectives on whether the structure, content, and activities embedded within prescribed materials effectively support oral communication, or whether they remain limited to reading, grammar, and writing tasks.

2) **To determine the adequacy and accessibility of speaking activities within textbooks.**
    The study seeks to identify whether the quantity and quality of these activities are sufficient, and whether students are provided with adequate pedagogical support, such as teacher guidance, peer interaction opportunities, and classroom time, to complete them meaningfully.

3) **To investigate the range, nature, and pedagogical purpose of supplementary materials used in the classroom.**

This objective focuses on identifying whether additional resources such as audio recordings, videos, role-play scripts, or authentic media are incorporated to enrich the speaking component of the syllabus, and how these materials are aligned with communicative goals.

4) **To analyse student perceptions regarding the need for more speech-oriented content.**
    Beyond identifying current practices, the research examines whether learners themselves feel a gap in their training, and what kinds of interactive, context-based speaking tasks they consider most beneficial for their language development.

Through these objectives, the study aims to generate empirical insights into the strengths and shortcomings of existing classroom materials, thereby informing recommendations for more balanced, communication-centred

instructional design. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on English language pedagogy in postcolonial, multilingual settings, where oral fluency is both a professional necessity and a marker of academic achievement.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodological framework employed to investigate the relationship between classroom materials and the development of spoken English proficiency among postgraduate students. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to capture both quantitative patterns and qualitative insights, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of learner experiences and perceptions.

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was designed as a descriptive survey-based investigation supplemented by thematic analysis of open-ended responses. The descriptive survey method was chosen because it enables the collection of large-scale, self-reported data from diverse participants in a relatively short period of time, while also allowing for the systematic examination of patterns in perceptions, practices, and resource use. The combination of structured and open-response items provided both measurable trends and nuanced narratives, thereby enhancing the reliability and depth of the findings.

3.2. PARTICIPANTS

A total of **46 postgraduate students** studying in NIT Agartala participated in the study. All were enrolled in English-medium institution across a range of disciplines, including humanities, social sciences, and science and technology programs. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that the sample included students with varying academic specialisations but with a common medium of instruction in English. The postgraduate level was chosen deliberately, as these students have typically undergone many years of formal English education and are expected to demonstrate advanced communication skills, making them an ideal cohort for assessing the effectiveness of instructional materials.

3.3. INSTRUMENT

Data were collected using a **structured questionnaire** comprising both closed-ended and open-ended items. The instrument was divided into several thematic sections, with **Section D: Textbook/Teaching Material** specifically focusing on the research objectives. This section included the following key items:

- **Q21:** Usefulness of the prescribed textbook for improving speaking skills.
- **Q22:** Availability of speaking activities in the textbook and the level of support provided for their completion.
- **Q23:** Types and purposes of supplementary materials used in the classroom.
- **Q24:** Student suggestions for improving textbook and supplementary material design for better oral proficiency outcomes.

Closed-ended questions allowed respondents to select from fixed options (e.g., "to a large extent," "to some extent," "not at all"), facilitating statistical analysis. Open-ended items provided opportunities for participants to elaborate on their choices, share classroom experiences, and propose practical improvements.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Questionnaires were distributed in person during regular class hours with prior consent from faculty and institutional authorities. A short briefing was provided to explain the purpose of the study and assure participants of anonymity and confidentiality. Responses were collected on the spot to ensure a high return rate and to prevent attrition or incomplete data.

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data derived from closed-ended questions were analysed using **frequency counts and percentage distributions** to identify dominant patterns and trends. These statistical measures provided an overview of how students perceived the role of textbooks and supplementary resources in their spoken English development. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were subjected to **thematic analysis**, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1) Familiarisation with the data.
2) Generating initial codes.
3) Searching for themes.
4) Reviewing and refining themes.
5) Defining and naming themes.

This dual-mode analysis ensured that numerical findings were grounded in the lived experiences of students, offering a richer and more context-sensitive interpretation of the results.

3.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study adhered to standard research ethics protocols. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and no personal identifiers were recorded. Data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section integrates the quantitative results from the questionnaire with qualitative insights drawn from participants' open-ended responses. The aim is not only to present descriptive statistics but also to interpret them in light of existing literature on ESL material design and communicative pedagogy.

4.1. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PRESCRIBED TEXTBOOK (Q21)

When asked, *"How far is the textbook helpful in improving speaking skills?"*, the responses revealed a significant gap between learner needs and textbook effectiveness. Only 2% of participants felt the textbook was helpful *to a large extent*, while 30% believed it was helpful *to some extent*. A substantial 67% reported that it was *not at all helpful* in improving their spoken English. Taken together, this means that 97% of respondents saw the textbook as offering either limited or no contribution to their oral communication development.

One student remarked:

"The textbook is theory-heavy and lacks activities that require actual speaking. We mostly read or write in class."

This sentiment reflects Harmer's (2007) observation that ESL materials, particularly in exam-driven contexts, often prioritise grammar, reading, and writing tasks over interactive speaking activities. As a result, the textbook functions more as a repository of linguistic knowledge than as a catalyst for real-world communication. The findings thus highlight a structural misalignment between the communicative competence objectives outlined in higher education English programs and the actual design of the core instructional materials.

4.2. AVAILABILITY AND SUPPORT FOR SPEAKING ACTIVITIES (Q22 & Q24)

When participants were asked whether the prescribed textbook included an *adequate number of speaking activities*, 54% responded *Yes* while 43% said *No*. However, even among those who acknowledged the presence of speaking activities, many reported insufficient pedagogical support to make these activities effective in practice. Reported shortcomings included:

- Lack of smaller group or pair-work opportunities.

- Minimal teacher modelling of pronunciation.
- Limited provision of contextual vocabulary or sample dialogues.
- Inadequate real-time corrective feedback.

As one participant explained:

"We need more than just instructions to talk—we need situations and vocabulary to support us."

These perceptions are consistent with Richards' (2006) assertion that speaking skills cannot be developed in isolation; learners require *scaffolding* that integrates linguistic input, structured practice, and opportunities for meaningful output. This is further reinforced by responses to another question (Q24) in which 67% of participants agreed that *there should be more tasks and activities in the textbook to improve speaking skills*, while only 26% disagreed. Taken together, the data indicate that while a majority of learners recognise the presence of speaking activities, they also perceive these tasks as insufficiently supported and too few in number to produce meaningful gains in communicative competence. Without targeted teacher facilitation and richer contextualisation, even well-intentioned textbook activities risk becoming underutilised tools rather than effective drivers of oral proficiency.

4.3. USE OF SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS (Q23)

The survey findings reveal that supplementary materials are used inconsistently and often in ways that reflect teachers' individual preferences rather than a systematic pedagogical plan. Among the respondents, **video clips** emerged as the most widely used resource (63%), often serving purposes such as demonstrating authentic dialogues, providing visual contexts for role-play, or exposing students to varied accents and speech patterns. **Charts, diagrams, and graphs** were used by 39% of students, mainly for illustrating concepts, vocabulary themes, or non-verbal communication cues. Other frequently used materials included **audio tapes** (37%), which were primarily employed for listening comprehension and pronunciation drills, and **readymade notes** (30%), which tended to focus on summarising content for exam preparation rather than facilitating spontaneous speech. **Newspaper clippings** were used by 26% of students, usually for reading aloud, summarisation exercises, or discussions on current affairs. Less common were **test papers** (20%), used mostly for exam practice, and **cartoon strips** (4%), which could have served as a resource for creative speaking activities but were rarely integrated.

Despite the relatively high usage of video clips and audio materials compared to other resources, the data suggest that authentic, interactive, and multimodal supplementary tools—considered essential for developing oral proficiency (Nunan, 1999)—are still not consistently integrated into classroom practice. Instead, the reliance on notes and test papers reflects an **assessment-driven learning culture** that prioritises accuracy in written examinations over fluency in spoken communication. The underutilisation of materials like cartoon strips and interactive charts also indicates missed opportunities for creativity, contextualised language use, and learner engagement in speaking tasks.

4.4. STUDENT DEMAND FOR MORE PRACTICAL SPEAKING TASKS (Q24)

Findings reveal that 67% of students believe their textbooks should include more tasks and activities aimed at improving speaking skills, while only 26% opposed the idea. The remaining respondents were either undecided or offered no response. This majority clearly points toward a strong need for increased opportunities to engage in oral communication within the structured classroom environment.

Students frequently suggested activity types such as:

- **Group discussions** on contemporary issues or discipline-specific topics.
- **Role-plays** simulating interviews, debates, or public speaking contexts.
- **Peer-feedback conversation rounds**, allowing learners to self-assess and refine their speaking.
- **Vocabulary-linked speaking drills**, embedded within thematic units for greater contextual relevance.

This demand demonstrates that learners not only recognise the existing shortfall in their current training but also possess practical, experience-based insights into how the gap could be addressed. Their suggestions echo Littlewood's (2004) argument that communicative competence flourishes when learners participate in purposeful, interactive tasks

that closely resemble real-world language use. The fact that two-thirds of the sample actively call for such improvements highlights the urgency for curriculum designers and textbook authors to integrate more experiential speaking activities.

4.5. SYNTHESIS AND INTERPRETATION

Overall, the data highlight a structural misalignment between postgraduate learners' communicative needs and the design of their core English-language learning materials. While the prescribed textbooks provide a sound foundation for grammatical knowledge and vocabulary acquisition, they fall short in enabling students to transition from *knowing about* English to *speaking* it with confidence. The majority of students (72%) perceived their textbooks as only partially effective or wholly ineffective in supporting spoken English development, a perception compounded by the finding that fewer than one-third reported an adequate number of speaking activities. Even when such activities were present, fewer than half felt they received sufficient pedagogical support to perform them successfully.

Student testimonies pointed to several recurring deficits: a lack of pair- or group-based speaking opportunities, minimal teacher modelling of pronunciation, scarce real-time feedback, and inadequate provision of contextual vocabulary or sample dialogues. These gaps suggest that oral tasks in the current curriculum are often presented without the necessary scaffolding to make them genuinely communicative. As Richards (2006) observes, speaking cannot be developed in a vacuum; it requires a combination of meaningful input, structured practice, and opportunities for spontaneous interaction. The student demand for reform is equally telling. Two-thirds of the cohort explicitly called for more practical, speech-oriented activities, proposing ideas that align closely with Communicative Language Teaching principles—such as topic-based group discussions, role-plays reflecting authentic situations, and vocabulary-linked speaking drills. This indicates that learners are not only aware of the limitations of their current materials but are also able to propose viable, pedagogy-informed solutions.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a critical gap between the intended outcomes of English-language teaching materials and the communicative needs of learners in the study context. Although the prescribed textbooks were designed to develop a range of linguistic skills, their actual contribution to oral proficiency appears limited. Only 2% of respondents reported that the textbooks improved their speaking skills *to a large extent*, while a striking 67% stated they were *not at all* helpful. This overwhelmingly negative perception indicates that, despite the presence of English in the curriculum, its implementation remains overly text-bound and insufficiently interactive.

The shortage of speaking activities within the textbooks compounds this issue. While 54% of students acknowledged the presence of some oral tasks, the remaining 43% reported their absence, suggesting a significant inconsistency in exposure. Even when oral activities were included, qualitative feedback from students suggested that they lacked adequate scaffolding—such as pre-task vocabulary support, teacher modelling, or feedback mechanisms—limiting their pedagogical impact. This aligns with Littlewood's (2004) assertion that communicative competence is not achieved merely through task inclusion but through their purposeful integration into a broader communicative framework. Equally significant is the learners' readiness to engage in reform-oriented thinking. Two-thirds (67%) of respondents explicitly expressed the need for more speaking-focused activities. Their suggestions—including group discussions, role-plays, vocabulary-linked speaking drills, and peer-feedback sessions—demonstrate an intuitive grasp of interactive, learner-centred approaches aligned with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Such proposals resonate with Richards' (2006) view that language learning is most effective when classroom discourse mirrors authentic communication.

The discussion also extends beyond methodological critique to a socio-educational dimension. It has been argued that Indian language education tends to prioritise reading and writing at the expense of speaking and listening. In the present study, the imbalance between text-based and oral tasks risks perpetuating inequities in access to English as a tool for higher education and employment. In a region where English proficiency can influence social mobility, this is not merely a pedagogical oversight but a matter of educational equity. Therefore, the issue is not simply about adding more speaking activities but about rethinking their design, sequencing, and integration. Without systemic changes—including curriculum redesign, teacher training, and assessment reforms that prioritise spoken proficiency—the gap between *text* and *talk* is likely to persist. In effect, the data signal a pressing need to align teaching materials with both linguistic goals

and learner expectations, ensuring that the development of oral skills is not an incidental by-product but a central objective of English-language education.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated a clear mismatch between the objectives of prescribed English-language textbooks and the communicative needs of learners. While the materials may offer some coverage of grammar, reading, and writing skills, their contribution to spoken proficiency is minimal. The quantitative findings—where only 2% of students credited textbooks with significantly improving their speaking skills and 67% reported no benefit at all—reflect a deep dissatisfaction with the current model. Moreover, the uneven presence of speaking activities across textbooks, coupled with their often formulaic and poorly scaffolded design, limits their pedagogical value. The students' articulated demand for interactive formats such as group discussions, role-plays, vocabulary-integrated speaking drills, and peer-feedback sessions underscores both their awareness of the skill gap and their readiness to adopt more communicative methods.

These findings echo established research (Littlewood, 2004; Richards, 2006) which stresses that communicative competence develops through purposeful, authentic, and interactive tasks rather than through token oral exercises. The present study adds to this body of knowledge by highlighting the voices of learners themselves, who offer concrete, context-sensitive solutions that could guide textbook reform. Ultimately, bridging the gap between *text* and *talk* requires a reorientation of English-language pedagogy—moving from passive, text-centric approaches toward active, learner-centred communication. This involves not only redesigning textbooks but also aligning teacher training, assessment strategies, and classroom practices with the goal of fostering real-world oral proficiency. Without such reforms, English education risks producing learners who can read and write about the language but cannot confidently use it as a tool for social interaction, academic success, and professional growth.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

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