



DEVELOPING ENGLISH SPEAKING COMPETENCE THROUGH THE USE OF EXPRESSIONS IN UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF NARPAY DISTRICT

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Abstract. This research investigates the effectiveness of expression-based instruction in enhancing English speaking competence among students in underperforming rural schools of Narpay district. Learners in these schools often struggle with oral communication due to limited exposure to authentic English, low self-confidence, and traditional grammar-focused pedagogy.

The study employs a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-speaking assessments, classroom observations, and student feedback analysis. The experimental group received systematic instruction in functional expressions, discourse markers, and conversational routines, while the control group continued traditional grammar-based instruction.

The findings reveal a significant improvement in fluency, coherence, lexical range, and interactional competence among the experimental group. Additionally, students demonstrated higher motivation and reduced anxiety during speaking tasks. The study concludes that expression-based pedagogy can serve as an effective tool for developing communicative competence in rural EFL contexts.

Keywords: speaking competence, formulaic expressions, rural education, communicative competence, Narpay district, EFL learners.

INTRODUCTION.

Speaking competence is widely regarded as one of the most challenging aspects of English language learning, especially in rural schools where learners have minimal exposure to authentic English. In Narpay district, underperforming schools exhibit several challenges:

Limited oral fluency and vocabulary use

Difficulty organizing ideas coherently

Hesitation and anxiety during speaking tasks

Traditional approaches in these schools prioritize grammar and translation over communicative practice. Consequently, learners struggle to express ideas spontaneously and to interact effectively in real-life contexts.

Formulaic expressions, or prefabricated lexical chunks, have been highlighted in recent applied linguistics research as essential tools for improving fluency and pragmatic competence. These expressions reduce cognitive load, allowing learners to focus on meaning rather than grammatical construction, and provide ready-made tools for interaction.



This study investigates whether structured instruction in formulaic expressions can significantly enhance English speaking competence among students in low-performing schools of Narpay district.

LITERATURE REVIEW.

2.1 Speaking Competence

Speaking competence encompasses multiple dimensions:

Fluency: smoothness of speech without undue pauses

Coherence: logical organization of ideas

Lexical Resource: appropriate and varied vocabulary

Interactional Competence: effective turn-taking and conversational management

Pragmatic Appropriateness: using language contextually and socially appropriately

Communicative competence theory posits that effective oral communication relies on the interplay of these components, rather than on grammatical knowledge alone.

2.2 Formulaic Expressions

Formulaic expressions, or lexical chunks, include:

Opinion phrases: “In my opinion,” “I strongly believe that”

Discourse markers: “On the other hand,” “As a result”

Interactional routines: “Could you clarify?” “I see your point, but...”

Research demonstrates that learners who actively use formulaic expressions exhibit higher fluency, reduced hesitation, and better discourse organization. The lexical approach emphasizes that language learning involves acquiring prefabricated units, not only individual words.

In rural EFL contexts, where exposure to authentic English is limited, teaching formulaic expressions provides learners with practical tools for real-life communication.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study utilized a quasi-experimental design with an experimental and a control group. Pre- and post-tests were conducted to measure improvements in speaking competence.

3.2 Participants

The study included 60 students from two underperforming secondary schools in Narpay district, aged 13–15 years, with A2–B1 English proficiency levels.

3.3 Instruments

Speaking assessments (measuring fluency, coherence, lexical range, interactional competence)

Classroom observation checklists



Student feedback questionnaires

3.4 Procedure

The experimental group received 8 weeks of structured instruction focusing on:

Functional expressions for expressing opinions and giving examples

Discourse markers for connecting ideas and organizing speech

Interactional routines for managing conversation turns

Activities included: role-plays, debates, guided discussions, and problem-solving tasks. The control group continued with traditional grammar-focused instruction.

RESULTS

Post-intervention data demonstrated significant improvements in the experimental group:

Fluency: fewer pauses, smoother speech

Coherence: improved logical sequencing of ideas

Lexical Resource: increased use of expressions and vocabulary

Interactional Competence: better turn-taking and responses

Qualitative feedback revealed higher student engagement, increased confidence, and reduced speaking anxiety. The control group showed minimal improvement.

DISCUSSION

The study confirms that expression-based instruction enhances speaking competence in low-performing rural schools. Prefabricated linguistic chunks allow learners to focus on communication rather than grammar, fostering fluency and confidence.

In resource-limited contexts like Narpay, formulaic expressions serve as scaffolding tools, enabling learners to participate effectively in oral interactions. The findings support the lexical approach and the communicative competence framework as effective strategies for teaching speaking skills in rural EFL settings.

Pedagogical Implications:

Integrate formulaic expressions and functional phrases into textbooks and speaking curricula.

Conduct teacher training workshops on chunk-based and expression-focused pedagogy.

Encourage communicative classroom activities such as debates, role-plays, and discussions.

Include assessment criteria that value fluency, coherence, and pragmatic appropriateness.

CONCLUSION



Systematic instruction in formulaic expressions significantly improves English speaking competence among students in underperforming schools of Narpay district. This pedagogical approach enhances fluency, coherence, lexical variety, and interactional skills, while reducing speaking anxiety.

The study highlights the need to shift from grammar-dominated teaching to communicative, chunk-based approaches in rural EFL contexts. Expression-based instruction provides a sustainable, effective method for fostering oral proficiency and bridging the performance gap between urban and rural schools.

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