

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## A study on developing speaking skills through techno-driven tasks

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### ABSTRACT

English is an important language to be learnt in classrooms in most of the developing and third world countries. English language teachers play a vital role in making their students to communicate well in English. They should abreast with new and innovative teaching methodologies in the classroom to enhance the skills of students significantly. This paper is based on the study conducted at five Arts and Science colleges in Chennai, India to test learners' communicative efficiency and the result is widely applicable to all the second (foreign) language learners. It further discusses the techniques of teaching speaking skills for EL (English Language) learners in second (foreign) language learning countries, like India or Brazil. It highlights the technology-based teaching techniques and methods that help students to develop speaking skills and confidence to face real-life communicative situations.

**KEYWORDS:** English language teaching; communicative efficiency; real life communication.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In English language learning process, listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) skills should be taught effectively through proper implementation of techniques and strategies. In LSRW skills, speaking is considered to be the most difficult skill for learners to develop because it requires them to think and utter sentences correctly and coherently within a stipulated time. To develop speaking skills, teachers should improve the grammatical and lexical aspects of learners so that they can handle linguistic challenges globally. Such challenges are maneuvered in English speaking countries. Countries like India, Brazil use English extensively for educational purposes and business purposes; as a result English language upholds the status of economical condition of the countries. Such countries give importance to English at school and college levels because many of their nationals strive to pursue their higher education or for higher prospects in other foreign countries especially English speaking countries. Understanding the importance of English in countries like India, Brazil, the study is predominantly suggested that various tasks can be used to develop speaking skill of second language learners.

The aim of teaching speaking skills is to improve the communicative competency of learners. Learners should be efficient and confident to learn and acquire the language to improve their communicative efficiency. Introducing tasks in the classroom will help learners to improve their pronunciation, grammar, and the right usage of words. Skehan (1996) defines a task as 'an activity in which: meaning is primary; there is some sort of relationship to the real world; task completion has some priority; and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome'. Tasks can involve listening, speaking, reading or writing or any combination of these skills. Task based approach strongly believes that language can be learnt through communication, as in first language acquisition and naturalistic L2 acquisition. Krashen (1981) proposed that learners would acquire language when they are exposed to 'comprehensible input' and are motivated to attend to the input. Long (1996) has argued that acquisition is best served when learners participate in the negotiation of meaning. (i.e. the process by which two or more interlocutors identify and then attempt to resolve a communication breakdown. However, negotiation of meaning may or may not result in mutual understanding). He also suggested that task-based teaching creates opportunities for learners to 'focus on form' and constitute them to acquire the language. Task based learning (TBL) provides a comprehensible structure that allows students to take on in tasks, while learning English as a second language. Task based language teaching and learning was originally inspired by N. Prabhu (1987) in Bangalore, Southern India. Willis and Willis (2007) have explained to allow learners to feel prepared for the task particularly as far as language needed is concerned. To improve skills, teachers should use or introduce many skill oriented technology based activities to make learners explore varied learning environment to learn English interestingly.

Students should be made to understand that errors are inevitable in a language learning process. Deliberative education should be given importance through which many tasks can be implemented in the classroom for the students to overcome communicative errors. Tasks are helpful to understand

the proficiency of learners, through which learners can be categorized and motivated in their own level of understanding and acquiring the language. Accuracy oriented tasks and fluency oriented tasks can be compartmentalized according to the need and knowledge of students.

Linguistic competence should be improved using tasks so that learners' language learning ability can be enhanced. Teachers should encourage learners to learn and teachers should not categorize learners on the basis of scores that they had secured in the examination. English teachers should always have edgy oriented teaching methodologies to cope with the level of students' exposure and intelligence. Teachers should identify effective methods to teach English in innovative ways. The teaching methods should develop interpersonal skills of students for their better speaking competency. To avoid the fear of making mistakes in their communication, learners should be given enough space to speak in the classroom. Communicative oriented tasks should be used such as click a picture task, Zig Zag task, advertisement task, vlogging etc. Using multimedia in the classroom will substantiate the stand of making the modern method very interesting and innovative in the teaching process.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The research study has the following objectives:

- to examine the speaking skills of students in Arts and Science Colleges, Tamil Nadu
- to find out the errors occurred by learners while communicating in English
- to analyze the reasons of these errors
- to enhance speaking skills through tasks.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on 500 BA/Bsc students who were selected from five Arts and Science colleges in Chennai. All the respondents had English as a medium of instruction. English is a foundation subject in all the colleges. It is taught in the first (B.A, B.Sc, & B.Com) and second year as a subject (B.A/ B.Sc) along with soft skills as a term paper.

Methodological steps:

- a. analyze the speaking skill through tasks
- b. evaluate students' performance through oral tasks
- c. capture the students' performance on various aspects of communication such as fluency, cohesion, and use of lexical aspects
- d. understand the fluency level of the participants as weak, average, satisfactory, good and excellent.

**Table 1:** Demographic data about the respondents

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Female	500	100
Age	17-18	500	100
Educational level	Bachelor degree (1 year)	500	100
Duration of English learning	1 to 5 years	350	70
	6 to 12 years	100	20
	13 years and over	50	10
Engaged in tasks before	Yes	20	4
	No	480	96

The colleges were selected by keeping the background of the students’ family, teaching methodology and the amount of exposure offered to the learners. This study is divided into three phases:

- i) The first phase was a pre-test to test students’ existing knowledge on speaking skills.
- iii) The second phase was the distribution of tasks (pre-task).
- iii) The third phase was to examine the level of improvement in speaking skills by conducting a post test.

### 3.1. The Pre-test Framework

The pre-test enabled the researcher to get more reliable results and made sure that in terms of assessment everything went on the right track. The goal of the pre-test was to understand the respondents speaking skills. The pre-test helped the researcher to evaluate their narrative competence. The pre-test was conducted to test the basic knowledge of students in narrative skill. The result obtained in the test was helpful to modify the tasks for the respondents. The pre-test is an important part of the research as the respondents learning method is to be investigated to design tasks for them.

Tests are mostly used for assessment. Image stories were used to understand the narrative competency of the respondents

The following points were examined in the pre-test:

Objective	Items tested	Task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To test the language competency in story narration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verb</li> <li>• Tense</li> <li>• Article</li> <li>• Preposition</li> <li>• Vocabulary</li> <li>• Lexicon</li> <li>• Narration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Image story</li> </ul>



Figure 1: Sample of image story

### 3.1.1. Analysis of the Pre-test

The study used quantitative methods for comparing test data in the research. The pre-test data were analyzed to understand respondents' speaking skills. The respondents had the language transfer and the quantity and quality of transfer varies from one time to another. The positive impact happens at the college level was that the respondents possessed a relatively extensive knowledge of the second language which made them to mix up with both the source and target languages.

## 3.2. Pre-task Framework

The students performed pre- tasks individually as well as in pairs. The purpose of using pre-task in the classroom is to promote proper environment for acquisition and learning among students. Tasks help students to get motivated to learn English in an experiential way. Pre-task was carried out as a whole-class activity with the researcher and it involved the learners in completing a task of the same kind as and with similar content to the main task. Thus, it served as a preparation for performing the main task individually.

The study has showed that the respondents' level of speaking skills is low. The situation was gradually improved as the researcher introduced techno-tasks among the respondents. . To speak English fluently is a dream for many youth but due to lack of English language exposure most of the learners are unable to improve their oral competency. In this techno-era, learners know the mechanism of mobile phones and modern technology gadgets as a result, teachers should start using gadgets as teaching tools to improve their students' oral proficiency.

### 3.2.1. Distribution of Tasks

Using technology has become an indispensable tool in English teaching classrooms. Teachers can be well equipped with more information at a click. Pronunciation, accent, vocabulary, reading, writing, listening and speaking skills can be taught using multimedia. Visuals can be used to develop the correlative thinking skills of students. In most of the classes teachers do the talking and students do a little talking, this situation prevails in most of the educational institution. Students' creative, analytical and productive skills can be honed by showing zigzag task, click a picture, advertisement task and vlogging (video+blogging). These techno-driven tasks help students to improve their speaking skill.

Tasks are helpful to improve the speaking skill of learners in learning English in a classroom setting. The researcher had used the following tasks to evaluate speaking skill of the respondents.

#### 3.2.1.1. Zig zag Task

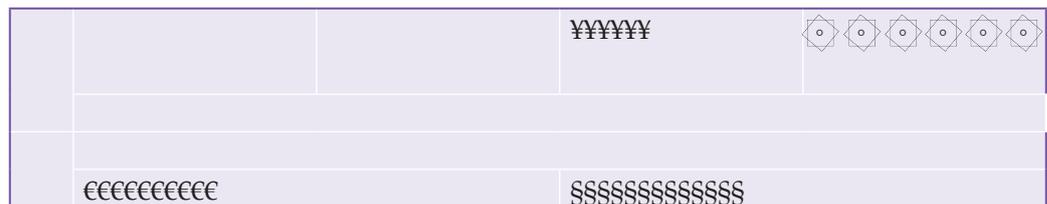
**This task can be used at any level of students with the class time of 7-10 minutes:**

<b>Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop reference skills</li> <li>• To enhance communicative skills</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation time</b>	5-7 minutes
<b>Resources</b>	A computer with MS word

Creativity is a part of language learning. To enable fluency, accuracy, complexity in language among learners, meaning based tasks with a specific short-term goal need to be used. Learners create different sequences according to the level of their creativity. Creative skill of learners is developed by making the narrative entertaining. Eclectic process of exchanging and sharing ideas with others in diverse is the essential requirement of the task. Zigzag can be designed with the help of learners to create on their own on an MS word sheet. Learners can use color filler to make it very attractive and the self-made task can be exchanged among learners for different and interesting narrations.

**Procedure:**

1. Teacher can instruct students to open MS word with table tool.
2. Instruct students to design a picture using symbols provided on MS word.
3. The class can be divided into small group of two or three each.
4. The level of reference skills will aid them to create unique design with a message or story.
5. Instruct students to narrate the symbols as a story or message.



**Figure 2:** Sample of zigzag task

The speaking level of the respondents was categorized as Weak, Satisfactory, Good and Excellent. The table below discusses the criteria of assessment.

**Table 2:** Assessment obtained after the completion of the task

Assessment items	No of respondents / 500	Percentage	level
Enrichment of vocabulary	300	60%	Good
Development of reference skills	400	80%	Excellent
Improvement of communicative skills	375	75%	Excellent
Having a striking resemblance to real-life contexts	100	20%	Weak
Improvement of speaking skill	375	75%	Excellent

**3.2.1.2. Click a Picture**

**This task can be used at any level of students with the class time of 8-10 minutes:**

<b>Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop narrative skill and imaginative skills</li> <li>• To enhance speaking skill</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation time</b>	2-3 minutes
<b>Resources</b>	A smartphone

Learners want to learn everything in an interesting way especially a second language, as everyone is a mobile savvy, learners can be instructed to click a picture on their mobile to be used in the class for an interesting narration. This confidence will help them to erode their fear as they come prepared for their own created task to be presented in the classroom. Their creativity and imaginative skills are unleashed as their ideas and conceptual approach are appreciated by their classmates and teacher.

#### Procedure:

1. Teacher can instruct students to click a picture of their choice using a mobile.
2. If possible, the picture can be transferred to the class room computer via mail or USB memory card.
3. Instruct each student to narrate his/her picture freely.
4. Critical thinking is mooted when other participants share their views on a picture other than theirs.



**Figure 3:** Sample of click a picture

**Table 3:** Assessment obtained after the completion of the task

Assessment items	No of respondents / 500	Percentage	Level
Enrichment of vocabulary	250	50%	Satisfactory
Development of critical thinking skills	425	85%	Excellent
Improvement of communicative skills	350	70%	Good
Improvement of reference skills	375	75%	Excellent

#### 3.2.1.3. Dubsmash task

**This task can be used at any level of students with the class time of 10-15 minutes:**

<b>Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop creativity</li> <li>• To enhance narrative skill and artistic skill</li> <li>• To encourage collaborative learning in the classroom</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation time</b>	5-7 minutes
<b>Resources</b>	Internet

Movie clippings or visual advertisements can be used to make learners to give voiceover to the prescribed clippings. Learners interpret them in hilarious ways as a result a positive energy would be engulfed in the classroom. They dub each scene or advertisement according to their capability and the narration should be done under the guidance of teacher so that their errors and sentence structure can be corrected smoothly.

#### Procedure:

1. Teacher should download visual (motion) advertisement or movie clippings using internet.
  2. Play advertisement or clipping of students choice.
  3. Divide the class into a small group of two or four each.
  4. Provide 3 minutes as preparation time.
  5. Instruct students to give a voiceover to the clipping played on the computer or smart board.
  6. All the participants in the team should equally participate in the performance.
5. Water is the secret of my energy but I am thirsty.

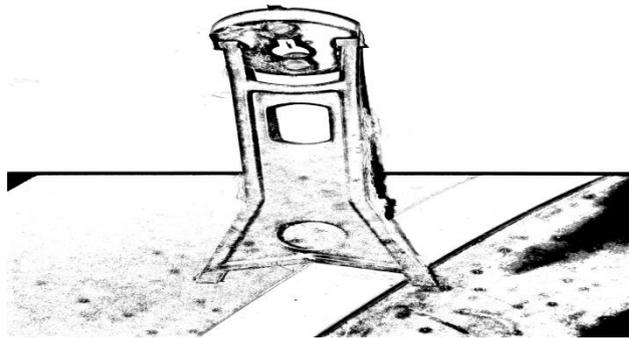


Figure 4: Sample of Dubsmash

Table 4: Assessment obtained after the completion of the task

Assessment items	No of respondents / 500	Percentage	Level
Enrichment of expressive skills	360	72%	Good
Development of conscious raising narrative skills	425	85%	Excellent
Use of LTM (long term memory)	350	70%	Good
Improvement of creativity	460	92%	Excellent
Improvement of speaking skill	400	80%	Excellent

#### 3.2.1.4. Advertisement task

This task can be used at any level of students with the class time of 10-15 minutes:

Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop creativity</li> <li>• To enhance narrative skill</li> <li>• To develop speaking skill</li> </ul>
Preparation time	5-7 minutes
Resources	Internet

Advertisements can be used as a teaching material in the English teaching classroom. Learners are fond of watching advertisements on TV. This task helps them to correlate their cognitive skill, reference skill and critical thinking skill to design a caption or speak a few sentences about the advertisements given as tasks. In this task, advertisements can be designed with a humor touch to make learners to sustain the attention and interest. Advertisements can be used to enhance syntax, grammar, morphology, phonology and semantic knowledge.

**Procedure:**

1. Teacher can download print advertisement from the internet.
2. Divide the class into a small group of two or three each.
3. Provide 3 minutes as preparation time for students.
4. Instruct students to give a suitable caption and create a story related to the given advertisement.
5. Instruct students to explain the advertisement with a essence of humor to make the presentation lively.
6. Instruct students to relate the provided advertisement task to a real life situation.

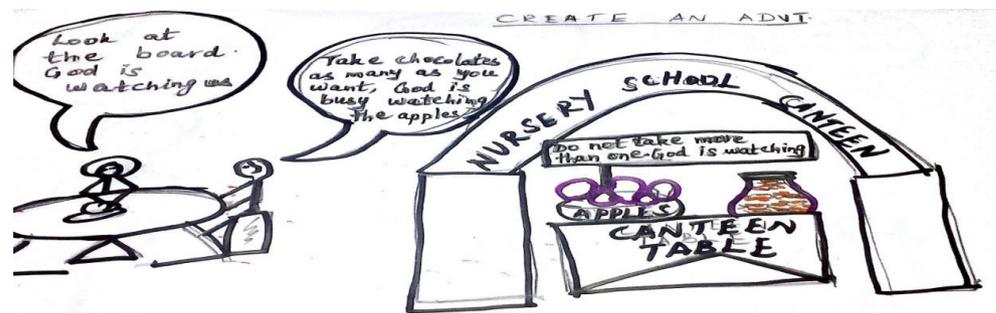


Figure 5: Sample of Advertisement task

Table 5: Assessment obtained after the completion of the task

Assessment items	No of respondents /500	Percentage	Level
Enrichment of grammatical aspects	375	75%	Excellent
Development of analytical skills	450	90%	Excellent
Use of reasoning skill	420	85%	Excellent
Improvement in creativity	450	90%	Excellent
Involvement in performance	475	95%	Excellent
Involvement in speaking skill	450	90%	Excellent

**3.2.1.5. Vlogging (Video + blogging)**

This task can be used at any level of students with the class time of 10-15 minutes:

<b>Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop computational skill</li> <li>• To enhance confidence and collaborative learning</li> <li>• To develop speaking skill</li> <li>• To help students to self-monitor and self-evaluate</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation time</b>	5-7 minutes
<b>Resources</b>	Mobile with Internet or computer with internet

The advent of technology in the educational arena is a boon to English teachers to improve the speaking skill of students. Vlog is a blend of video and blog that can be used in the classroom. Vlog helps students to get feedback from teacher even post class hours.

**Procedure:**

1. Teacher can advise students to perform this task individually.
2. Instruct them to select a thematic concept to speak on or give a topic to each team.
3. Teacher can suggest students to free download version of
  - NCH Debut Video that can transfer videos from a camera device to a hard drive (NCH software, n,d)
  - Smartphones with VLC which is an open source media player to play video files
  - Window movie maker with Microsoft Windows can be used on computer
  - Youtube
  - Facebook
  - MailUV.com
  - Dropbox.com
  - Whatspp (which has limited Video storage).
4. Instruct students to share their video with teacher or the class.
5. In case of non-availability of internet USB memory cards can be used.
6. Students can be instructed to edit or modify the video on a topic before they upload to the group

This task can be used to measure the error occurrence and speech fluency so that students' development can be enlightened and worthy of undertaking their language progress.

**Table 6:** Assessment obtained after the completion of the task

Assessment items	No of respondents / 500	Percentage	Level
Improvement of computational skill	450	90%	Excellent
Enhancement of speaking skill	450	90%	Excellent
Development of collaborative learning	460	92%	Excellent

### 3.3. Analysis of Tasks

All the narrations of the tasks were recorded on a Samsung mobile for evaluation. The data collected and were analyzed quantitatively. Using tasks in the classroom shows that cognitive 'contextualization' and memorization were the most frequently used strategies in connection with the development of speaking skill. The distribution of cognitive factors (resourcing, repetition, interference) shows that active participation of performing the tasks was high as well as the English learning ability of the respondents was appreciable. Meta cognitive factors show that monitoring others and planning were high in the learning process. Tasks were used to evaluate the respondents' learning of functional and lexical aspects of English. The evaluation was based on the responses given by the learners. The data were analyzed quantitatively.

These techno-tasks were performed to encourage respondents' cognitive skills. Cognitive and metacognitive strategies were examined in connection with learning with the aid of tasks. Narration exhibited different profiles. Some respondents were weak in lower level skills such as phonological awareness, decoding and semantic processing. Some respondents were weak in higher level narrative skills such as working memory, inferencing and integration. The poor knowledge in morphological and semantic aspects made the respondents to use wrong word structure and less coherent narration. The result of the output of students was high on one variable, and then they were likely to score high on the other variable.

The analysis of the tasks proved that the respondents had a reflective moment to analyze their self performances, enable them to develop their critical faculties and motivate them to take greater responsibility in their performance. Techno-driven tasks had helped the respondents to develop language through cognition. The analysis of the tasks has proved that such tasks have helped the respondents to enhance their speaking skill. Further, the analysis of the tasks has proved that respondents learnt English language explicitly after gaining the knowledge of grammar implicitly. Their learning capacity, analytic ability, pragmatic skills and real world communicative knowledge had improved evidently through the techno-driven tasks.

### 3.4. The Post-test Framework

In the post-test, inkblot task was used to test the speaking skills of the respondents. Tasks make the classroom livelier. The respondents were given various opportunities to create conversation and share with other groups or individual.

Post-test was administered to evaluate the knowledge processed by the students after administrating the pre-task to the respondents.

The following points were examined in the post-test:

Objective	Items tested	Task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To evaluate respondents' speaking skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grammatical categories</li> <li>Lexical categories</li> <li>Narrative competency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inkblot task</li> </ul>



Figure 6: Sample of inkblot test

### 3.4.1. Analysis of the Post-test

The post-test was conducted to evaluate the speaking skill of the respondents. The test was conducted through inkblot task that helped to assess and evaluate the respondents' grammatical, lexical and semantic skills. The difficulty of tasks was reduced as the researcher offered assistance to ensure that mixed ability learners could understand what was required.

The pre-task created a great deal of interaction, negotiation, collaboration and communication in the classroom. These were done to help students reflect on the language they were familiar with and also build up their self-confidence. N. Prabhu (1987) emphasized that the pre-task was not a demonstration but a task in its own right. The researcher used the pre-task to scaffold learners' performance of the task with the expectancy that the learners would perform the post test on their own.

### 3.5. Statistical Analysis of Pre-test and Post-test

Statistical calculations had been used to know the progress of the respondents' speaking skill. The data had been analyzed and the output data of the SPSS Version 17 software is presented below:

Correlations			
		Pre-test	Post-test
Pre-test	Pearson Correlation	1	.320**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	500	500
Post-test	Pearson Correlation	.320**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	500	500

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	4.37	500	2.334	.233
	Post-test	9.60	500	2.889	.289

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-test & Post-test	500	.320	.001

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test & Post-test	-5.230	3.078	.308	-5.841	-4.619	-16.994	99	.000

The analysis of the pre test and post test proved that tasks helped the respondents to perform well in their post test.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study analyzed a wide range of factors related to teaching of English through tasks. In particular, it shows that many of the factors are common in any of the places whether it is Brazil or India where English is taught as a second language. The following recommendations are based on the findings of the study:

- a) Teachers should involve actively in designing tasks considering the level of knowledge and interest of their students in the classroom.
- b) Introducing tasks in the classroom will promote interactive teaching, autonomous discussion, cooperative and collaborative learning for students.
- c) Developing students' speaking skills and argumentation skills.
- d) Developing students' critical thinking, research skills (traditional and computational) and evaluative skills.
- e) Enhancing students' rights of learning and promoting their application oriented knowledge in various real life situations.
- f) Tasks encourage cooperation and teamwork. It shifts teacher-specific teaching to learner-specific learning activities.
- g) Tasks help students to improve their sharing responsibilities in learning new things and their outcomes. This approach reproduces the demands of the real world scenario where students most often work together to achieve the general goal.
- h) Tasks help to build on different learning styles. Students varying essential abilities and learning styles are categorically scrutinized and relevant tasks can be implemented for a good response.
- i) Tasks aid students to understand how to iron out differences and misunderstandings and how they are created because students monitor, widen and adopt suitable mechanisms for successfully networking and collaborating with their team mates.

## 5. CONCLUSION

A few respondents, in this study, could not speak English accurately due to their limited exposure to the language. The research helped the researcher to comprehend that the positive learner with positive attitude can achieve effective communicative skills. Adult learners should be motivated to speak English flawlessly by introducing many tasks in the teaching and learning process. Modifying the exiting tasks like word building, dumb charades in interesting ways will help learners to enhance their speaking skill and the will aid them to have an active participation in the English learning process.

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