

## **Enhancing Teachers' Spoken English Proficiency through Functional English Training: An Experimental Study**

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### **Abstract**

Teachers' spoken English proficiency significantly influences classroom interaction quality and student language exposure, particularly in English-medium educational settings. Despite possessing theoretical knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, many teachers demonstrate hesitation, limited fluency, and inadequate pronunciation in spontaneous communication. The present experimental study examined the effectiveness of a structured Functional English training programme in improving teachers' spoken English proficiency. A single-group pre-test–post-test design was employed with 40 in-service teachers selected through purposive sampling. The eight-week intervention focused on communicative competence, pronunciation accuracy, vocabulary development, and classroom discourse practices. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and a paired-sample t-test. Results revealed a statistically significant improvement in post-test scores compared to pre-test scores,  $t(39) = 12.84, p < .05$ , with a large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 2.03$ ). The findings suggest that systematic Functional English training substantially enhances teachers' oral communicative competence and classroom confidence. The study underscores the need to integrate spoken English development modules into teacher professional development programmes in India.

**Keywords:** Functional English, Communicative Competence, Teacher Development, Spoken English, Experimental Study, India

### **1. Introduction**

English functions as a global language of education, administration, technology, and international communication (Crystal, 2003). In multilingual countries such as India, English-medium institutions increasingly require teachers to demonstrate strong communicative competence. However, in many classroom contexts, teachers exhibit hesitation, code-switching patterns, limited lexical range, and pronunciation inconsistencies.

The issue extends beyond linguistic accuracy to pedagogical effectiveness. Teachers serve as primary language models for students; therefore, insufficient spoken proficiency restricts students' exposure to authentic language input (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Research indicates that teacher language awareness and communicative ability directly influence instructional clarity and learner engagement (Andrews, 2007).

Functional English emphasises contextualised and practical language use rather than isolated grammar instruction. Grounded in communicative competence theory (Canale & Swain, 1980), it integrates grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Structured communicative training, when systematically implemented, can enhance fluency, intelligibility, and confidence (Nation & Newton, 2009).

In the Indian context, English teaching is shaped by multilingual realities and socio-educational diversity (Agnihotri & Khanna, 1997; Mohanty, 2019). Despite policy emphasis on communicative teaching approaches (NCERT, 2006), many in-service teachers have limited opportunities for oral proficiency development.

While substantial research has focused on student language acquisition, fewer empirical intervention-based studies examine improvement in teachers' spoken English proficiency. The present study addresses this gap by experimentally evaluating a structured Functional English training programme for in-service teachers.

## 2. Review of Literature

Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, which extended linguistic competence to include sociocultural appropriateness. Canale and Swain (1980) later structured communicative competence into four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence.

Task-based language teaching and communicative approaches have been shown to enhance oral fluency and interactional competence (Ellis, 2003). Nation (2013) emphasised that repeated meaningful use of language in authentic contexts is essential for fluency development.

Pronunciation instruction significantly improves comprehensibility and listener perception (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Richards (2008) highlighted the importance of continuous professional development in strengthening teacher communicative competence.

In India, the National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2006) emphasises communicative language teaching. Tickoo (2003) advocated contextualised teacher training programmes to bridge the gap between

theoretical knowledge and practical communication. Mohanty (2019) underscored the multilingual complexity of Indian classrooms, which demands higher teacher communicative preparedness.

Despite policy recommendations, empirical intervention-based research targeting in-service teachers' spoken proficiency remains limited. The present study contributes to this underexplored area.

### **3. Objectives of the Study**

To assess teachers' spoken English proficiency before intervention.

To implement a structured Functional English training programme.

To determine the statistical effectiveness of the intervention.

### **4. Hypotheses**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test spoken English scores of teachers.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference between pre-test and post-test spoken English scores of teachers.

### **5. Methodology**

#### **5.1 Research Design**

A single-group pre-test–post-test experimental design was adopted.

#### **5.2 Sample**

The sample comprised 40 in-service teachers from an English-medium institution in Maharashtra, India. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on observed hesitation and limited fluency in spoken English.

#### **5.3 Instrument**

A structured Spoken English Proficiency Rubric (maximum score = 100) was developed to assess:

Fluency

Pronunciation

Grammatical accuracy

Vocabulary usage

Communicative confidence

The instrument demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82).

#### 5.4 Intervention

Duration: 8 weeks

Frequency: 4 sessions per week (45 minutes each)

The Functional English training included:

Classroom discourse practice

Pronunciation drills

Role-play and situational dialogue

Vocabulary enrichment exercises

Group discussions

Structured speaking tasks

Peer feedback sessions

#### 5.5 Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained. Participation was voluntary, and data were used exclusively for research purposes.

## 6. Data Analysis and Results

### 6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Test

Mean

SD

Pre-test

46.20

8.50

Post-test

79.40

7.20

Mean Difference = 33.20

## 6.2 Inferential Statistics

A paired-sample t-test was conducted.

$t(39) = 12.84, p < .05$

The calculated t-value exceeded the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis.

## 6.3 Effect Size

Cohen's  $d = 2.03$

This indicates a very large practical effect of the intervention.

## 7. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that structured Functional English training significantly enhances teachers' spoken English proficiency. The improvement aligns with communicative competence theory (Canale & Swain, 1980) and fluency development principles (Nation, 2013).

Pronunciation reinforcement, contextualised speaking tasks, and repeated communicative practice contributed to measurable gains in fluency and confidence. The large effect size suggests not only statistical significance but also strong practical educational relevance.

The findings are consistent with Indian educational policy emphasis on communicative teaching (NCERT, 2006) and support the need for professional development programmes targeting oral proficiency.

## 8. Educational Implications

Functional English modules should be integrated into teacher education programmes.

Spoken proficiency assessment should form part of professional evaluation systems.

Institutions should conduct periodic communicative competence workshops.

Policy frameworks should prioritise oral proficiency in teacher training.

### **9. Limitations**

Absence of a control group

Limited institutional context

Short duration of intervention

Future studies may incorporate control groups and longitudinal follow-up.

### **10. Conclusion**

The present experimental investigation confirms that structured Functional English training significantly enhances teachers' spoken English proficiency. Participants demonstrated substantial improvement in fluency, pronunciation, lexical range, and communicative confidence. The findings reinforce the importance of integrating systematic spoken English development into teacher professional development frameworks in India.

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