

EFFECTIVENESS OF DISCOURSE-BASED PEDAGOGY IN DEVELOPING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRODUCTIVE SKILLS OF STUDENTS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study investigated the effectiveness of Discourse-Based Pedagogy (DBP) in enhancing the English language productive skills – specifically speaking and writing – of standard IX students using a pre-test – post-test control group design. The sample consisted of 35 students each in the experimental and control groups. Using the lesson ‘*The Price of Flowers*’ as the instructional unit, the experimental group received intervention through the Teaching-Learning Cycle (TLC), focusing on genre awareness, cohesion, and social context, while the control group was taught using the traditional method.

The findings of the study revealed a statistically significant improvement in the productive skills of the students in the experimental group compared to the control group. The results suggest that shifting from sentence-level instruction to discourse-level analysis fosters greater communicative competence and student agency. The study concludes with recommendations for curriculum designers and teacher educators to integrate discourse-centred strategies into the secondary English framework to better equip learners for real-world linguistic challenges.

Keywords: *Discourse-Based Pedagogy (DBP), Productive Skills, Standard IX students.*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of global connectivity, the mastery of English language productive skills – specifically speaking and writing – is indispensable for secondary level students navigating increasingly complex academic and professional landscapes. Traditionally, language instruction has been dominated by a structural approach that focuses on isolated grammatical rules and vocabulary lists; however, this bottom-up method often fails to equip learners with the ability to communicate fluently or coherently in real-world contexts. Discourse-Based Pedagogy (DBP) emerges as a transformative alternative, shifting the instructional focus from fragmented sentences to the study of language within continuous, meaningful stretches of communication. By emphasizing the social context, genre awareness, and the logical flow of ideas (cohesion and coherence), DBP encourages students to perceive language as a functional tool for social interaction rather than a static set of rules.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The mastery of English language productive skills – speaking and writing – is a cornerstone of academic success and global mobility for students at the secondary level. However, traditional pedagogical frameworks often prioritize linguistic competence (grammar and vocabulary) over communicative competence, leaving a noticeable gap in students’ ability to produce coherent and contextually appropriate discourse. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), the over-reliance on rote memorization and isolated sentence structures fails to prepare learners for real-world interactions. There is, therefore, an urgent need to shift toward a Discourse-Based Pedagogy (DBP) that treats language not as a set of rules, but as a social tool used to construct meaning in specific contexts.

In the context of Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching (ELT), Discourse-Based Pedagogy (DBP) is an instructional approach that shifts the focus of language learning from isolated sentences and grammatical rules to the study of language as it is used in continuous, meaningful stretches of communication (discourse). DBP assumes that meaning is never neutral; it is always influenced by the relationship between the speaker and the listener, the setting, and the cultural background. It teaches students how to use transition

words (cohesion) and how to organize ideas logically (coherence) so the listener or reader can follow the train of thought. Students learn that different genres have different rules for how language should be structured.

For students at the secondary level, DBP is particularly effective for developing Speaking and Writing (the productive skills). Instead of practising ‘canned’ dialogues, students analyse real-world texts (blogs, news reports, debates) to see how native speakers actually negotiate meaning. It gives students the tools to fix communication breakdowns – such as knowing how to rephrase a thought or use ‘fillers’ naturally during a speech. Students stop writing ‘choppy’ sentences and start producing ‘flow’, understanding how the end of one sentence must provide a ‘hook’ for the beginning of the next.

The significance of this study lies in its departure from ‘form-focused’ instruction to a ‘meaning-focused’ approach. Discourse-based pedagogy emphasizes the importance of cohesion and coherence, enabling students to understand how sentences interlock to form meaningful wholes (McCarthy, 1991). By implementing DBP, educators can help students move beyond the production of correct sentences to the creation of effective communication. This shift is vital for secondary students who are expected to produce more complex texts, such as argumentative essays and formal presentations, which require an advanced understanding of genre and social register (Hyland, 2007).

Furthermore, this research is necessitated by the cognitive demands placed on learners during the transition from Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) to Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). As Cummins (2000) posits, secondary education requires a higher level of academic language that is inherently discourse-dependent. A discourse-based approach provides the necessary scaffolding for students to internalize the rules of the game in academic speaking and writing. This study is significant because it explores how DBP fosters critical thinking, allowing students to analyse the power dynamics and social intentions behind language use, thereby enhancing their agency as communicators (Gee, 2014).

From a practical perspective, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of DBP in diverse classroom settings, particularly at the secondary level where curriculum constraints often dictate teaching styles. This study addresses the need for evidence-based instructional strategies that can be integrated into existing frameworks to improve student output. According to Swain’s (1985) Output Hypothesis, the act of producing language (speaking and writing) under meaningful conditions constitutes a unique part of the learning process. Investigating DBP’s role in this process provides valuable insights for teachers seeking to optimize the pushed output necessary for linguistic accuracy and fluency.

Review of related literature revealed that there are several studies on the effectiveness of discourse based pedagogy. Yimam and Dagne (2022) in their experimental study concluded that discourse-based instruction enables students to develop a better understanding of mathematical topics when appropriately orchestrated interactive discourse practices occur. Qiann, Mat and Marie (2025) studied the effectiveness of discourse based instructional model and found that integrating discourse analysis allowed teachers to adopt more responsive and student-centred questioning techniques, fostering dialogic and inclusive learning environments. But Indian studies on discourse-based pedagogy are very few.

The findings of this study will be of significant value to curriculum designers, policymakers, and language practitioners. As global educational standards move toward 21st-century skills, the ability to negotiate meaning through discourse becomes a non-negotiable asset. By validating the effectiveness of discourse-based pedagogy, this research offers a roadmap for modernizing English language teaching (ELT) curricula. It moves the conversation from ‘what’ to teach (grammar) to ‘how’ to communicate (discourse), ensuring that secondary school students are not just linguistically literate, but communicatively empowered for higher education and the professional world (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000).

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To test the comparative effectiveness of the Discourse-Based Pedagogy (DBP) and the traditional method in enhancing the productive skills of Standard IX students. .

HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in their adjusted post-test scores in productive skills.

METHOD USED

Research Design

This study employed a Quasi-Experimental, Pre-test/Post-test Control Group Design. This design was selected because it allows the researcher to measure the gain scores in productive skills after the intervention while accounting for the students' initial proficiency levels. The study involved two groups: an Experimental Group, which received instruction through Discourse-Based Pedagogy (DBP) and a Control Group, which continued with the traditional method. 'The Price of Flowers' by Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay was the lesson used for the experimental treatment.

Participants and Sampling

The participants consisted of standard IX students from two intact classrooms from a school in Kottayam district (35 students from each class). Purposive sampling was utilized to ensure that the groups are comparable in terms of age, socio-economic background and previous English language exposure.

Research Instruments

To measure the effectiveness of the pedagogy on productive skills, two primary instruments are used:

1. **Writing Proficiency Test:** A standardized test requiring students to produce a coherent text (e.g., a persuasive essay). Results are evaluated using a validated Discourse-Based Rubric focusing on cohesion, coherence, and genre appropriateness.
2. **Speaking Assessment Task:** An oral production task (e.g., a structured debate or role-play) recorded and scored based on fluency, interactional strategies, and the logical organization of spoken discourse.

The Intervention (Discourse-Based Pedagogy)

The Experimental Group underwent a 12-week intervention centred on the Teaching-Learning Cycle (TLC). Unlike traditional methods that start with grammar rules, this DBP intervention followed these stages:

- **Building the Context:** Exploring the social purpose of the communication.
- **Modelling:** Analysing mentor texts to see how discourse is structured.
- **Joint Construction:** The teacher and students co-create a text or dialogue.
- **Independent Construction:** Students produce their own discourse-level output.

Before and after the intervention, a writing proficiency test (15 marks) and speaking assessment task (10 marks) were administered to students from both the experimental and control groups. The total score obtained by the students in the writing proficiency test and speaking assessment task were used for statistical analysis. The details of the analysis are given below.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The pre-test and post-test scores obtained by standard IX students in the experimental group and control group before and after the treatment using Discourse-Based Pedagogy (DBP) were analysed using Analysis of Covariance to determine the comparative effective of DBP and traditional method.

The sum of squares, mean square variances and F-ratios for the pre-test and post-test scores of standard IX students in the experimental and the control groups were computed and the details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of ANOVA of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Standard IX Students in the Experimental and Control Groups

| Source of Variation | df | SSx | SSy | MSx | MSy |
|---------------------|----|--------|---------|------|--------|
| Between Means | 1 | 2.41 | 521.16 | 2.41 | 521.16 |
| Within Groups | 68 | 362.57 | 1103.14 | 5.33 | 16.20 |
| Total | 69 | 364.99 | 1624.30 | | |

$$F_x = 0.45$$

$$F_y = 32.13$$

$$F \text{ at } 0.01 \text{ level} = 6.81$$

From table F for df 1/68

$$F \text{ at } 0.05 \text{ level} = 3.90$$

The F-ratios for the two sets of scores were tested for significance. Since the table value of F for df 1/68 is 3.90 at 0.05 level and 6.81 at 0.01 level, the obtained F_x value of 32.13 is not significant. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups. The F_y obtained is significant at 0.01 level ($F_y = 32.13$; $p < 0.01$). The analysis of variance of the 'y' means indicate that there is significant difference between the experimental group and control group in their post-test scores.

For correcting the final y-scores for the difference in the pre-test scores, the adjusted sum of squares and adjusted mean square variances for post test scores were computed and F- ratio was calculated and given in the Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of ANCOVA of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Standard IX
Students in the Experimental and Control Groups

| Source of Variation | df | SSx | SSy | SSxy | SSyx | MSyx | SDyx |
|---------------------|----|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|------|
| Between means | 1 | 2.41 | 521.16 | 35.47 | 472.77 | 472.77 | 3.76 |
| Within groups | 67 | 362.57 | 1103.14 | 236.43 | 948.97 | 14.16 | |
| Total | 68 | 364.99 | 1624.30 | 271.90 | 1421.75 | | |

$F_{y.x} = 33.38$

From Table F for df 1/67

F at 0.05 level = 3.90

F at 0.01 level = 6.81

The obtained $F_{y.x}$ ratio is significant ($F_{y.x} = 33.38$; $p < 0.01$) since it is higher than the table value at 0.01 level. It is clear from result that the final means differ significantly after they have been adjusted for initial differences in pre-test scores.

The adjusted means of post test scores of students in the experimental and control groups were computed. The difference between the adjusted y-means was tested for significance. The results of the adjusted means for post test scores of the experimental and control groups are given in Table 3.

Table 3
Adjusted Means of Post-test Scores of Standard IX
in the Experimental and Control Groups

| Groups | N | M_x | M_y | $M_{y.x}$ (adjusted) |
|---------------|----|-------|-------|----------------------|
| Experimental | 35 | 10.17 | 17.63 | 17.51 |
| Control | 35 | 9.80 | 12.17 | 12.29 |
| General Means | | 9.99 | 14.90 | 14.90 |

$t = 5.80$

From the table $df = 67$

t at 0.05 level = 1.98

t at 0.01 level = 2.61

The obtained adjusted means for the post-test scores were tested for significance. The 't' value obtained is significant ($t = 5.80$; $p < 0.01$). This means that the experimental group and control group differ significantly in their adjusted mean scores. As the adjusted mean score for the experimental group is higher than that of the control group, it can be inferred that the experimental group is superior to the control group. The significant difference in the adjusted mean scores shows that the Discourse-Based Pedagogy (DBP) is more effective than the traditional method in enhancing their productive skills.

Thus, the hypothesis formulated in this context "There is no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in their adjusted post-test scores in productive skills" is not accepted.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study clearly proved that Discourse-Based Pedagogy is more effective in enhancing the productive skills of standard IX students when compared to the traditional method.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the finding that Discourse-Based Pedagogy (DBP) significantly outperforms traditional structural methods, the following suggestions are offered to enhance English language instruction at the secondary level:

First, curriculum designers should move beyond the bottom-up approach of teaching isolated grammar rules and instead integrate genre-based instruction across all units of the English Reader. By structuring the syllabus around the social purpose of language – such as persuading, narrating, or reporting – students can see the immediate relevance of linguistic structures. This shift requires textbooks to provide more ‘mentor texts’ that showcase how cohesive devices and register vary across different real-world contexts.

The teacher training and professional development programmes must be restructured to equip educators with the skills of a discourse analyst. In-service training should prioritize workshops on the ‘Teaching-Learning Cycle’, moving teachers away from being mere lecturers of grammar to facilitators of meaningful interaction. Educators need to be trained in providing ‘scaffolded feedback’ that prioritizes a student’s ability to maintain the flow of a conversation or the logical coherence of an essay over simple sentence-level accuracy. Empowering teachers to design their own discourse-rich tasks will ensure that classroom communication remains authentic and student-centred.

There is an urgent need for assessment reform that reflects the holistic nature of language production. Traditional examinations often reward rote memorization of ‘canned’ responses for discourses like diary entries or letters. Instead, assessments should utilize dynamic rubrics that specifically measure communicative effectiveness, interactional strategies, and the use of cohesive markers. By introducing more performance-based speaking assessments such as debates, role-plays, and group discussions as part of the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE), the education system can ensure that students are not just ‘grammatically correct’, but ‘communicatively competent’ for the demands of the 21st century.

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