How to Develop Communication Skills in School Students? A Case Study on Primary, Middle, and High School Students in Hyderabad Institute of Excellence

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Abstract: *In today's competitive world, communication skills are essential for students to develop a successful future career. To make this achievable, we encouraged students to work hard on improving their ability to communicate. Students should be able to interact with the teachers without fear. The study was carried out at the Hyderabad Institute of Excellence, Chitampally, Vikarabad District, Telangana State, India. A case study was used as a method, and qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to collect data. Various competitions like Reading, Elocution, and Extempore were conducted. Instant feedback empowered students to improve their confidence by reinforcing their knowledge. Gamification elements like points, prizes, and trophies were used to motivate students. The results revealed that the reading, writing, and listening competitions enabled students to enhance their ability to exhibit outstanding performance in elocution and extempore competitions. The guidelines of the competitions were certainly followed by the students, which helped them to gain points, prizes, and trophies.*

Keywords: Reading, Listening, Speaking, Communication, Gamification

1. Introduction

The study was carried out in Hyderabad Institute of Excellence, Mudgula Chitampally, Vikarabad District, Telangana State, India, which is located in a rural area. The school is coeducational and has classes from one to ten with a strength of 243 students. The school is affiliated with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) holding affiliation number 3630213 [1]. The medium of instruction in the school is English. It is an important language that learners should acquire because it is an official language, and has an essential role in language communication. It connects people with other states and countries to make a deep conversation as well as create an instrument for utilizing modern educational technology [2].

According to [3] "Reading is the recognition of words, understanding what we are reading is the key and is certainly the main point of teaching reading in a class". The author [4] states that "Reading is a multifaceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation", which requires that to identify the words in print form – a process called word recognition, construct an understanding of the text – a process called comprehension, coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate – an achievement called fluency, and appreciate the pleasures of reading to explore their interests – which creates motivation for the reader. According to [4] students should learn to apply their knowledge of letter-sound relationships to sound out the words that are new to them, it will help them to decode. To develop word recognition, the student should need to learn how to break apart and manipulate the sounds in words, certain letters are used to represent certain sounds.

Speaking in English is very essential, it should be enhanced well because many sources related to the education field are written and described in English. It has four primary skills; named speaking, listening, reading, and writing. These four skills have different characteristics [2]. According to [5] written communication skills are very important because they're a fundamental component of effective communication both professionally and personally. The more students write, the more proficient they will become. Students should practice writing and proofread their work aloud to ensure that it is coherent and well-structured. Reading skills can make a better writer and speaker. It will take them a step ahead and help them achieve their objectives by customizing the way they read. Choosing an appropriate reading skill, will enhance the reading process and help them to achieve their goal, it keeps their mind agile and young. [6]. Listening is one of the essential soft skills. which indicates a person's ability to receive and interpret information in the communication process, active listening skills help to receive and interpret the message [7].

As the regional languages are Telugu and Hindi, students were finding it difficult to communicate their ideas in the English language during regular class hours. Even though they were conversing in English, it was observed that their reading comprehension was below their grade levels. It was also observed that the students were getting opportunities only from the school to practice their reading skills. The majority of parents have hectic work schedules that prevent them from paying enough attention to their children, fostering local language use in Telugu and Hindi, and communicating with them at home.

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On 26th July 2023, Parents Teachers Meeting (PTM) was conducted to announce the results of the first periodic test in the academic year 2023- 2024. Feedback was collected from parents who attended the meeting. 36 percent of parents attended the primary school PTM for grades one to five, in that 15 percent of parents mentioned that their children need improvement in reading, 28 percent of parents stated need improvement in writing, and 9 percent of parents specified that their children need to communicate well in English.

In middle school, only 33 percent of parents attended the PTM, in that 15 percent of parents stated they needed improvement in reading, 22 percent of parents mentioned improving handwriting, and 7 percent of parents specified developing communication skills. In high school, 26 percent of parents attended the PTM, 33 percent of parents mentioned improving writing skills, and 22 percent of parents specified to develop communication skills.

Teachers also brought to notice that students have challenges in reading, writing, and communicating. Based on the parents' feedback, and teachers' observations, the Hyderabad Institute of Excellence decided to conduct competitions to improve reading, writing, and communication skills. The gamification elements were used in competitions like points, prizes, and trophies to motivate students. A case study was used as a method, and qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to collect data. This paper addresses the reading, elocution, and extempore competitions in the methodology, with outcome discussions and a conclusion that follows.

2. Methodology

The study was focused on developing students' communication skills in primary, middle, and high school. To organize the competitions a committee was formed consisting of Paul Joseph Lawrance, the Vice principal, Samreen Begum, the English teacher, and Jaseena Beegum M M, the Librarian, and it planned and conducted the competitions during the library period.

During the first term, a reading competition was conducted at the Hyderabad Institute of Excellence. A strategic plan was designed to evaluate the students as shown below.

Reading the text in a loud voice – which allow the student to listen and understand what they read.

Pronouncing the words clearly – to check whether the student was able to pronounce the words correctly.

Reading the text fluently – to know to what extent the student can able to identify the words and read them fluently.

Pausing on punctuations and giving appropriate stress to the words – to test students' understanding of punctuations and to identify whether they can apply the pause on commas, full stop, and giving appropriate stress on the exclamatory words.

Construct an understanding from the text – a process called comprehension based on the reading.

Points were assigned for each rubric on a scale of 1 to 3 where 1 = needs improvement, 2 = good, and 3 = excellent. The first round of competition was conducted in the month of August 2023 for primary, middle, and high school students, clear instructions were given to students. According to [8] students who follow the instructions can influence their grades by learning the subject materials, and correctly executing the skills related to the subject.

In primary school, it was observed that students were not able to read the text loudly, most of them did not recognize the words and some of them were pronouncing the letters separately to spell a word. While reading the textbook, it was noticed that some students are skipping the words if they are not able to read and some students are not reading the correct word, instead, they are creating their word based on the first letter of the word.

In grade one, when we started the second round of the reading competition, we observed that the students were again struggling to read two and three-letter words. So, we planned to create a new strategy only for grade one students to improve their reading skills. The English Teacher of grade one Miss Rinumol, used two and three-letter words to build a story, which she subsequently instructed the students to read in the classroom. To enhance the reading practice, she assigned the story to read as homework.

The results of round one of the reading competitions are shown below in Table 1, 65 percent of students need improvement in reading the text in a loud voice whereas in round 2 it has shown overall 55 percent of students improved. In the case of pronouncing the words only 46 percent of students were able to pronounce them clearly and 36 percent of students were able to pause on punctuations and give appropriate stress to the words. Only 39 percent of students were able to understand the meaning of the text that they read.

Table 1: Results of Reading Competition for Primary School Students

Primary School Students- Grades 1 to 5 – Total number of Students = 127						
Rubrics & Scale	Needs Improvement		Good		Excellent	
	Round1	Round2	Round1	Round2	Round1	Round2
Reading the text in a loud voice	82	47	45	70	-	10
Pronouncing the words clearly	98	66	29	59	-	2
Reading the text fluently	103	66	24	56	-	5
Pausing on punctuations and giving appropriate stress to the words	105	78	22	46	-	3
Construct an understanding of the text	84	69	43	49	-	9

It was observed, that the students are getting the opportunity only from the school to practice their reading skills. Most of the parents have busy job schedule, which lacks attention to their children. Even their communication at home depends on

their local languages like Hindi and Telugu. Looking into these factors the school instructed teachers to include more reading activities during their regular sessions.

In middle school, students were able to read the text but their pronunciation and fluency of reading need more improvement. The results shown below in Table 2, specify that 66 percent of students need improvement in reading the text in a loud voice, whereas in round 2 it has shown overall 72 percent of students improved and 10 percent of students performed excellently. In the case of pronouncing the words, 44 percent of students were able to pronounce them clearly, and only 6 percent were able to perform excellently.

Table 2: Results of Reading Competition for Middle School Students

Middle School Students- Grades 6 to 8 – Total number of Students = 82						
Rubrics & Scale	Needs Improvement		Good		Excellent	
	Round1	Round2	Round1	Round2	Round1	Round2
Reading the text in a loud voice	54	24	28	51	-	8
Pronouncing the words clearly	71	46	11	31	-	5
Reading the text fluently	62	41	20	37	-	4
Pausing on punctuations and giving appropriate stress to the words	74	37	8	44	-	1
Construct an understanding of the text	47	31	35	47	-	3

45 percent of students were able to read the text fluently and 5 percent of students showed excellent performance in reading the text fluently. 54 percent of students were able to pause on punctuations and give appropriate stress to the words. Only 57 percent of students were able to understand the meaning of the text which they read.

In the first round of the reading competition, it was observed that high school students lacked proficiency in reading. Despite their lack of practice, the students attempted to read aloud, but they struggled to identify and pronounce the words accurately, even when they were not pausing on punctuations. In round two of the reading competition results shown in below Table 3, specify that 74 percent of students performed well in reading the text in a loud voice and 15 percent of students performed excellently. In the case of pronouncing the words clearly and reading the text fluently 44 percent of students performed well, and 12 percent of students performed excellently. 65 percent of students were able to pause on punctuations and give appropriate stress to the words. Only 41 percent of students were able to understand the meaning of the text that they read.

Table 3: Results of Reading Competition for High School Students

High School Students- Grade 9 – Total number of Students = 34						
Rubrics & Scale	Needs Improvement		Good		Excellent	
	Round1	Round2	Round1	Round2	Round1	Round2
Reading the text in a loud voice	23	4	11	25	-	5
Pronouncing the words clearly	25	11	9	15	-	4
Reading the text fluently	27	14	7	15	-	4
Pausing on punctuations and giving appropriate stress to the words	32	9	2	22	-	2
Construct an understanding of the text	26	15	8	14	-	4

Following the two rounds of the reading competition, the top three winners of each class were announced, and prizes were distributed during the assembly. As part of the competitions, we continued to develop students' communication skills in the second term. A new strategy was planned to develop students' speaking skills in the form of Elocution. The following rubrics in Table 4 were used to test students' skills. Points were awarded based on their performance, 3 points for excellent, 2 points for good, and 1 point for needs improvement for each rubric.

Table 4: Rubrics for Elocution Competition

How the speech is organized?	The speech should contain an introduction, body, conclusion, and supporting points presented logically.
Content and supporting materials	Content directly responds to the topic; ideas are well developed with the use of examples.
Language is appropriate, professional, and convincing to the audience	Students should use appropriate vocabulary, pronounce the words clearly, and convince the audience with meaningful sentences.
Method of Presentation, Volume, Tone, and Rate of Speech	The presentation is varied and dynamic the rate of speech, volume, and tone should enhance the listener's understanding and interest.
Non-verbal communication (Gestures and movements)	The student should appear to be confident and in control, make eye contact, and purposeful gestures and movements.

Topics were given to students a week before for preparation. It was noticed that the students had prepared by writing their ideas on a piece of paper and they used it during the presentation. A majority of the students used the piece of paper just for reading the text. In the first round of primary-level students, we noticed that 47 percent of students presented with a good introduction, content, and conclusion. Only 19 percent of students were able to relate their presentation to the topic and included some examples. 41 percent of students were able to use appropriate vocabulary pronounce it clearly and convince the audience reasonably. 21 percent of students maintained the tone, rate of speech,

and volume to enhance the listener's understanding and interest. Only 12 percent of students appeared to be confident and they used proper gestures and movements during their presentation.

In middle school, it was observed that 50 percent of students presented with a good introduction, content, and conclusion. 40 percent of students were able to relate their presentation to the topic and included some examples. 40 percent of students were able to use appropriate vocabulary pronounce it clearly and convince the audience reasonably. 26 percent of students maintained the tone, rate of speech, and volume to enhance the listener's understanding and interest. Only 21 percent of students appeared to be confident and they used proper gestures and movements during their presentation.

In high school, it was found that 40 percent of students presented with a good introduction, content, and conclusion. 46 percent of students were able to relate their presentation to the topic and included some examples. 43 percent of students were able to use appropriate vocabulary pronounce it clearly and convince the audience reasonably. 37 percent of students maintained the tone, rate of speech, and volume to enhance the listener's understanding and interest. Only 17 percent of students appeared to be confident and they used proper gestures and movements during their presentation.

Students' presentations show that their overall performance is less than 50 percent, and they were reading the content that they wrote on a piece of paper. Throughout the first round, it was noticed that the students were consciously aware of common sounds of words, and spelling patterns, and they grammatically structured the sentences well. [2] states that writing and speaking are called productive abilities, and they produce communication. To develop their speaking skills such as expressing their words, and articulating their thoughts and feelings, we decided to conduct extempore as a second round of the competition. An individual's idea of the self comes from consciousness, which also promotes the recall of memories, present-moment understanding, and preparing for the future [9]. Extempore is a speech, that allows students to give on-the-spot speech without preparation. It allows students to share their knowledge on the topic and they can express it in good words. It develops agility in students to think, organize, and then speak.

The extempore topics were selected for the competition according to students' grades, for primary school following topics were Water, Vehicle, Teacher, Mother, Place, Toy, Book, Vegetable, Fruits, School, Food, Animal, Plants, Cartoon, Flower, Pollution, Reading, My dream job, My birthday, Festival, India, and My home.
The above topics were picked randomly by the students and provided five minutes for preparation. The results of round two as shown below for primary school.

Table 5: Results of Extempore Competition for Primary School Students

Primary School Students- Grades 1 to 5 – Total number of Students = 127			
Rubrics of Expectations & Scale for Evaluations	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent
The speech should contain an introduction, body, conclusion, and supporting points presented logically.	13	80	34
Content directly responds to the topic; ideas are well developed with the use of examples.	68	42	17
Students should use appropriate vocabulary, pronounce the words clearly, and convince the audience with meaningful sentences.	34	59	34
The presentation is varied and dynamic the rate of speech, volume, and tone should enhance the listener's understanding and interest.	67	45	15
The student should appear to be confident and in control, make eye contact, and purposeful gestures and movements.	80	32	15

Under primary school extempore statistics, 63 percent of students can organize a speech by providing a topic introduction, developing the main ideas with examples, and concluding with an overview. Remarkable performance with smooth transitions between the introduction, body, and conclusion was displayed by 27 percent of the students. Comparing round one and round two, it was found that 43 percent of students improved in organizing a speech.

Thirty-three percent of students made a strong correlation between their ideas and the material and the topic at hand. Thirteen percent of students exhibited exceptional performance by drawing the audience's attention to the issue with relevant examples. It was shown that in the competition's second round, 27 percent of students had improved their critical thinking abilities. Additionally, it was observed that students were able to construct their statements when certain related topic clues were given.

46 percent of students were able to pronounce the words clearly and convey the topic to the audience with meaningful sentences. In addition, 27 percent of students showed

excellent performance by using appropriate vocabulary related to the topics. By comparing with round one, 32 percent of students showed improvement by creating their sentences meaningfully.

A good presentation was demonstrated by 35 percent of the students, who spoke at different and dynamic volumes, speeds, and tones. In their presentations, 12 percent of the students exhibited outstanding voice modulation, which pricked the attention and understanding of the audience. In the second round of competition, it was observed that 26 percent of students had improved their presentation abilities.

Only 12 percent of students used purposeful motions and movements during their presentation, but 25 percent of students seemed to be self-assured, in control and made good eye contact. It was noted that throughout their presentation in the second round of competition, 25 percent of students displayed improved body language.

The students of primary school were aware of the points for each rubric and they were very excited to know their total points after their performances.

In middle school, students performed well in extempore competitions. The following topics like Deforestation, Hobbies, Movies, Bullying in school, Junk food, India, Dream, World, Globe, Earth, Telangana, Farmer, Ozone layer, Books, Education, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Arts, Sports, the Importance of Time, the Solar System, and Success v/s Failure were given to students and they picked randomly. Table 6 shows the results of the extempore competition of middle school.

Table 6: Results of Extempore Competition for Middle School Students

Middle School Students- Grades 6 to 8 – Total number of Students = 82			
Rubrics & Scale	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent
The speech should contain an introduction, body, conclusion, and supporting points presented logically.	19	43	20
Content directly responds to the topic; ideas are well developed with the use of examples.	46	20	16
Students should use appropriate vocabulary, pronounce the words clearly, and convince the audience with meaningful sentences.	21	45	16
The presentation is varied and dynamic the rate of speech, volume, and tone should enhance the listener's understanding and interest.	40	30	12
The student should appear to be confident and in control, make eye contact, and purposeful gestures and movements.	56	23	3

According to middle school improvised statistics, 52 percent of students can structure a speech by providing an overview of the topic, developing the main ideas with examples, and providing a summary at the conclusion. Among those who performed well, 24 percent had flawless transitions between the introduction, body, and conclusion. Comparing round one results, it was found that 26 percent of students improved in the second round of competition.

Only twenty-four percent of students were able to make a strong correlation between their ideas and the information. Twenty percent of students performed exceptionally well by drawing the audience's attention to the topic with appropriate examples. It was observed that in the second round of competition, just 4 percent of students showed an improvement in their critical thinking abilities. It was also noted that students were able to construct their phrases when we gave topic-related hints.

Fifty-five percent of students were able to use meaningful sentences to explain the topic to the audience and pronounce the phrases effectively. Furthermore, 20 percent of pupils performed exceptionally well by utilizing topic-related terminology. Thirty-five percent of students improved their meaningful sentence creation from the initial round.

A good presentation was demonstrated by 37 percent of the students, who spoke at different and dynamic volumes, speeds, and tones. In their presentations, 15 percent of students demonstrated outstanding voice modulation, which increased the audience's curiosity and improved comprehension. In the competition's second round, it was observed that 26 percent of students had improved their presentation abilities.

Just 4 percent of students used conscious motions and movements during their presentation, but 28 percent of students seemed self-assured, in control, and made good eye contact. In the competition's second round, it was noted that just 11 percent of students had improved their body language during their presentation.

In High School students performed well in the Extempore competition following topics are Don't Judge a Book by its Cover, Reading and Mental Health, Book versus Movies, Make Public Transport Free, and What Value Have I Learned from Homework? Indian festivals, the Indian constitution, Newspapers, Extracurricular activities, Hard work is the key to Success, Deforestation, Ozone layer, bullying in school, Farmers are the backbone of India, India of my dreams, and Knowledge is Power. Students were given these themes, and they were selected at random from the list. The results of the competition are shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Results of Extempore Competition for High School Students

High School Students- Grade 9 – Total number of Students = 33			
Rubrics & Scale	Needs Improvement	Good	Excellent
The speech should contain an introduction, body, conclusion, and supporting points presented logically.	7	15	11
Content directly responds to the topic; ideas are well developed with the use of examples.	12	12	9
Students should use appropriate vocabulary, pronounce the words clearly, and convince the audience with meaningful sentences.	5	19	9
The presentation is varied and dynamic the rate of speech, volume, and tone should enhance the listener's understanding and interest.	13	13	7
The student should appear to be confident and in control, make eye contact, and purposeful gestures and movements.	20	10	2

Studies on high school student's ability to organize speeches reveal that forty-five percent of them can do so by introducing the subject, developing the main ideas with examples, and concluding with a quick summary. 33 percent of students

performed exceptionally well, demonstrating seamless transitions between the introduction, body, and conclusion. By comparing round one with round two, it was possible to see that 38 percent of students had improved.

Thirty-six percent of students made a strong correlation between their ideas the topic and the content. By including appropriate examples to draw the audience's attention to the topic, 27 percent of students demonstrated great performance. It was observed that in the second round of competition, 17 percent of students showed an improvement in their critical thinking abilities. It was also noted that kids were able to construct their phrases when given certain topic-related ideas.

Fifty-eight percent of students were able to use meaningful sentences to explain the subject to the audience and pronounce the phrases effectively. Furthermore, by using topic-appropriate vocabulary, 27 percent of students demonstrated exceptional performance. In comparison to round one, 42 percent of students demonstrated growth by constructing meaningful statements.

A good presentation was demonstrated by 39 percent of the students, who spoke at different and dynamic volumes, speeds, and tones. In their presentations, 27 percent of students demonstrated outstanding voice modulation, which pricked the attention as well as understanding of the audience. It was observed that in the second round of competition, 23 percent of students made improvements in their presentation abilities.

Just 6 percent of students used deliberate motions and movements during their presentation, while 30 percent of students seemed to be in control, confident, and made good eye contact. In the competition's second round, it was noted that just 19 percent of students had improved their body language during their presentation.

It was observed from the results that the primary and high school students showed better performance as compared to middle school students. The top three winners from each class for the extempore competition were awarded trophies during the assembly. Overall, the average score of the reading competition shows that 29 percent of students showed improvement in reading. In elocution and extempore competitions, the average score is 26 percent of students showed improvement in communication. Such competitions enable students to develop communication skills.

The study enlightens five key characteristics that were followed towards the development of communication skills in students.

Instructions – According to [8] the instructor should provide instructions in both written and verbal, which should be concise, student-friendly language, and given in order of operations, which should minimize errors resulting from not paying attention or insufficient working memory. Clear instructions were given to students about the competitions, rubrics, and awarding points. Some of the instructions helped students to focus on developing their reading, presenting, and communication skills. This has been followed strictly during the competition.

1) The audience must listen to the presenter while presenting.
2) The presenter can ask for any clarification from the organizer before going to present the topic to avoid any mistakes.
3) The audience can ask questions one at a time to the presenter after the presentation.

Instant Feedback – It serves to reinforce knowledge by correcting mistakes, affirming competence, improving learners' confidence, and motivation to learn, and ultimately making learners' achievement [10]. Instant feedback was given to individual students after his/her performance. On following each presentation, the second and third authors solicited feedback from peers based on predetermined rubrics. Peers were asked to evaluate the speakers on criteria such as coherence, clarity, delivery, and engagement. Subsequently, they provided additional feedback, incorporating insights from both their own observations and peer evaluations.

The dual feedback approach proved highly effective in helping students internalize the evaluation criteria outlined in the rubrics. By receiving assessments from both peers and judges, participants gained valuable insights into their performance, including areas of strength and areas needing improvement. This feedback mechanism not only reinforced the importance of the evaluation criteria but also fostered a deeper understanding of effective communication practices among the students.

Listening – According to [11] active listening brings enormous benefits, it is one of the skills that children and adolescents need to prosper in this 21st century, there are four top steps to be followed
1) Students should prepare to listen to match their goal with the speaker's goal.
2) Engaging in active listening to focus attention and concentrate on the speaker
3) Asking open-ended questions and providing feedback to help them to understand better.
4) Deconstruct the listening experience by reflecting on what they listened to.
During the competitions, we firmly informed students should listen, while the presenter was presenting. This enabled students to comprehend and retain information to present their topics effectively.

Gamification- To increase engagement and encourage particular behaviors, this technique incorporates engaging and immersive gaming features into non-gaming environments. Gamification encourages active involvement and makes tasks pleasurable by utilizing game elements and design, such as leaderboards, points, incentives, and badges [12]. To motivate students in the competitions, we included game elements like points, prizes, and trophies. Based on the student's performance on each rubric, points were awarded on a scale of 1 to 3, where 1 – Needs improvement, 2- Good, and 3 – Excellent. Prizes were given to the first three winners of reading competitions and trophies were awarded to the first three winners of elocution and extempore competitions.

Friendly approach- A friendly attitude was maintained towards students, which created a learning environment that is

ideal for growth and instruction. Teachers can build rapport and trust with students by creating a friendly and warm environment, which will encourage them to participate fully in their learning experience. A sense of support and belonging is fostered in the classroom by promoting open communication and demonstrating a sincere concern for the welfare of the students for effective participation in competitions. Teachers showed personable and sympathetic to grasp the unique needs of each of their students and gave them individualized assistance, which ultimately helped them to realize their full potential. This kind of approach fosters mental and emotional development in addition to academic success, creating a foundation for lifetime learning and meaningful relationships through effective communication.

3. Conclusion

Communication skills are essential for students to develop a successful future career. The school Hyderabad Institute of Excellence took the initiative to develop communication skills in students by conducting various competitions like reading, elocution, and extempore based on the parents' feedback, and teachers' observations. The gamification elements were used in competitions like points, prizes, and trophies to motivate students. A case study was used as a method, and qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to collect data. The overall results of the reading competition's average score demonstrate that 29 percent of students improved their reading skills. Students showed improvement in communicating with an average score of 26 percent in elocution and extempore competitions. The student's performance was highlighted by following the five key characteristics Instructions, Instant feedback, Listening, Gamification, and Friendly approach. Such competitions ought to be held more often in schools to create a habit in the lives of the students.

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