

Building Speaking Ability among Elementary ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper is to learn about the pedagogical strategies used by the teacher. The topic of Jammu and Kashmir kids' proficiency in English has been brought up and discussed a great deal. They clearly lack proficiency in speaking, one of the language abilities. They might have done well on the final exam's English Language section. However, a lot of people fail during interviews that are held in English. This issue is ascribed to a number of causes. The weak foundation set at the elementary level is one of the causes. In this essay, an elementary school English teaching and learning case study is presented. It focuses on helping students in Primary 2nd class of speech development. Although speaking is the ability that is emphasized, other language skills are also used. In actuality, they are combined to strengthen speaking ability. Several theories are offered to back up and justify the project. These theories help us understand how young English language learners pick up speaking skills. This paper looks at a number of aspects that help students learn a language in a classroom setting to encourage students to speak English, as well as to learn about their perspectives.

Keywords: Speaking ability, Elementary ESL Learners

I. INTRODUCTION

There are many difficulties in teaching novices English as a second language. Teaching the language to very young students whose command of the first language is still very fragile is more difficult. Getting them to use the language both vocally and in writing is a more difficult task. Since English is exclusively taught as a topic in schools, many kids only have very little exposure to it. The poor language development in primary schools may be the root cause of the low proficiency displayed by many pupils in secondary schools and occasionally at the tertiary level. The four language skills—listening, speaking, reading,

and writing—are all crucial, but speaking is the most crucial since, according to Ur (1996), only those who are fluent in a language are deemed speakers of that language. For many Jammu and Kashmir students, speaking appears to be a challenge. A report states that students who performed well on written English Language exams but fail in interviews attests to this (Rodrigues, 2006). For those learning English as a second or foreign language, speaking English seems to be challenging. The majority of English language learners, according to Zhang (2009), find it most challenging to master speaking. When the language is only used in lectures and not in actual conversations, the issue is compounded. Lack of support for its use outside of the classroom also exacerbates the issue. The argument presented here seems reasonable. The answer to this question depends on a lot of things, though. Inhibition, silence, poor or uneven engagement, and the usage of one's mother tongue are only a few of the elements cited by Ur (1996) as contributing to the issues. According to Rababa'h (2005), the environment, curriculum, teaching methods, and learners themselves all have a role in the challenges of speaking. The usage of the first language for classroom management is to blame for the student's failure to communicate in English (Littlewood, 1981). Learners are denied the chance to speak English in such a circumstance. Since it serves as the starting point for language development, the initial phase of language learning is significant. If this base is inadequate, the development will suffer. It is anticipated that the students will learn what is taught. However, how it is taught and learned also plays a role.

Focus on the speaking skill.

The goal of the speaking skill is to accelerate elementary students' language acquisition of the English language. This must happen because modern human advancement in a number of fields, particularly science and

technology, depends on the ability to communicate in English. Basic speaking skills include greeting others, introducing oneself, making polite requests, saying thank you, and expressing a straightforward apology, according to the primary school curriculum published by JKBOSE. The main goal of the English Language Curriculum is to "provide students with fundamental language skills to enable them to communicate successfully in a range of contexts that are suitable to the students' level of development." The purpose of emphasizing speaking ability is to let learners communicate in English using basic structures that are based on relevant settings. Since all of the students in this study are from Jammu and Kashmir, they are more likely to speak Dogri, Kashmiri, or Bhaderwahi in class. In schools, English language instruction is offered as a subject. Naturally, the students feel at ease speaking their native tongue. This makes the job of the English language teacher difficult. It should not be the sole responsibility of teachers to provide youngsters with the necessary linguistic abilities. For this task, teachers do not have to assume total responsibility. Some elements taken from theoretical literature can lessen the issue. Regarding language development and acquisition, they hold various opinions.

Views of language acquisition and development

From a variety of angles, language development and acquisition have been studied. According to behaviourists, learning happens as a result of numerous inputs and reactions. Through the repetition of structures, language production in learners is induced naturally. Reward and reinforcement both contribute to the formation of habits. Chomsky opposed the notions associated with behaviourism (1986). Chomsky asserts that children are naturally capable of learning any language. According to Chomsky, every kid is born with a language acquisition disorder (LAD). Language that they hear around them is simple for them to understand and process. Due to some shared characteristics among all languages, they can also learn grammar. Chomsky explains this ability using his Universal Grammar concept (UG). Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, vowels, and consonants are the universal building blocks of all languages. However, when learning a second language, learners could come up with linguistic constructions that are different from those used by native speakers. According to Schachter (1990), second language learners do not employ UG concepts on their own without consulting their primary language. The human brain creates networks of associations based on the input it

receives, according to the cognitive and information processing theories, which explain how people acquire languages. According to Piaget's (1959) theory, children interact with their surroundings to learn about and comprehend the world around them. The viewpoint of Vygotsky (1962) is similar to Piaget's. According to him, a youngster learns language through dialogue with adults. Children are taught by the adults about their surroundings. A psycholinguist named Lenneberg (1967) proposed the Critical Age Hypothesis for language learning. This idea states that language learning can happen effortlessly between the ages of two and puberty, or around the age of twelve. The acquisition process slows down beyond this age. The rationale appears to be that during the crucial age, both the right and left sides of the brain can process language. Language processing moves to the left side of the brain after maturation. Lateralization is alleged to have occurred. After this point, acquisition is allegedly slower and less effective than typical first-language learning (Krashen, 1975; Lenneberg, 1969; Scovel, 1969). The existence of the CPH is supported by several scholars (DeKeyser & Larson-Hall, 2005; Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003). However, some research indicates that children over the age of 12 acquire second language morphology and syntax more quickly than younger ones (Ervin-Tripp, 1974; Fathman, 1975). Authors who support this theory include Bialystok (2001) and Birdsong (2005). The findings of this study may indirectly support this idea even if that is not its primary goal. Krashen (1982) advanced the notion of understandable input. His input hypothesis states that the most crucial element in the amount of language learned is the amount of understandable input. According to McLaughlin (1992), acquiring a second language can be difficult, even for adults. Although it is generally accepted that children are "facilitative second language learners," it can nonetheless be frustrating for them (ibid. pp. 129). According to Finocchiaro (1994), the best time to establish a solid foundation for oral fluency is throughout childhood. In their study, Hakuta, Butler, and Daria (2000) found that it took young children two to five years to master oral English.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Turkish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students were found to be apprehensive and reluctant to communicate in English sessions, according to a 2009 study by Dil. They feared making mistakes would lead to a poor evaluation of them. Hakuta, Butler, and Witt (2000) conducted a research on English language learners in Grades 1

through 6 in the San Francisco Bay Area. The goal was to determine how long it took English language learners to become proficient in speaking. Since Kindergarten, the samples had been present. The researchers came to the conclusion that learning conversational English required between two and five years. Al-Hosni (2014) looked into grade 5 students at an Omani basic education institution. Three classrooms from one school and four teachers were involved. She found that the students struggled with three main speaking issues. They were inhibition, mother tongue use, and linguistic challenges. The teachers' judgments and implicit attitudes regarding speaking instruction, instructional methodologies, curricula, extracurricular activities, and assessment guidelines were blamed for these shortcomings. The study literature in this area is still in its infancy, despite increased efforts to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) or second language (ESL) at the primary school level in Europe and Asia (Tucker, 2001). (Cameron, 2001).

Objectives

This study intends to investigate many elements that help students pick up the language in a classroom setting

The objectives of the paper are:

1. to find out the teacher's pedagogical practices that encourage students to speak in English;
2. to find out the views of students regarding the learning of English;
3. to evaluate the activities used to promote the speaking skill;
4. to find out the difficulties faced by the language teacher.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a smaller study that is a component of a larger investigation on how primary school students acquire English language proficiency.

Sample population

The study details a situation where one teacher was instructing English Language to a primary 2nd class, in a primary school (ALPHA +). The school is situated in the little town of Bhalla, which is about 20 kilometers from the district's administrative centre in Doda. The students were all Kashmiri or Bhaderwahi students. They all came from surroundings of Bhalla. These students were seven years old on average. In the class, there were 11 boys and 13 girls. Their guardians or parents were employed by the public or private sector. The majority of the parents or guardians had

modest incomes. The students had just enrolled in 2nd class (Primary). Using a pre-test, their English proficiency was determined. The majority of them could write their names, match similar words, and fill in the blanks with the proper alphabet letters (Appendix A).

Research Instruments

Interviews, document analysis, and lesson observation were the research tools employed in this study. Field notes were obtained during three observations to document the teacher's teaching tactics and the students' participation. It took an hour for each lesson. Three informal interviews with the teacher and one with a few of the observed students were undertaken. After each lesson, a casual conversation or interview was held with the instructor. The purpose of the interviews was to learn about the teacher's issues in teaching English to Primary 2nd students. The pupils were interviewed to ascertain their level of English they had attained after six weeks of schooling. The documents examined were the module used by the teacher to teach in the classroom and the pupils' written work. Examination of the module was based on the teacher's comments and opinions after he had used the first few units in his teaching.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from observations, interviews, and document analysis were analyzed qualitatively following the thematic approach (Holliday, 2012). The data obtained were taken holistically and organized under themes according to the research questions and issues raised.

IV. FINDINGS

Pedagogical Strategies

The teacher's pedagogical tactics were disclosed by data gathered through observation, and they were found to consist of three key stages: introduction, engagement activity, and practise. Depending on the topic, each stage's techniques changed from session to lesson.

a. Introduction

By having his students follow his instructions, such as "Put your eraser in your bag," "Put your eraser on your bag," and "Put your eraser under the bag," the instructor in the first lesson observed demonstrated how to utilise the prepositions "in," "on," and "under." The teacher verified that the students were appropriately following the instructions by repeating the instructions and activities and checking for understanding. The teacher used "a/an" and "some" to teach the students how to utilise the single and

plural forms in the second lesson. He displayed a pen to the class and instructed them to repeat after him, "a pen." A pencil was said after that, and the students echoed "a pencil." The instructor then displayed two pens. The teacher corrected the students when they said "two pen." Students responded "three pens" after the teacher displayed three pens. The teacher then stated, "Some pens," to introduce "some." The instructor displayed four pens. The teacher corrected the students after they stated "pens" by saying "some pens," which was then repeated by the students. The teacher focused on the letter "s" in "some pens." Following the teacher, the students repeated. To persuade the students to say "a pen" and "some pens," the teacher went through the entire process again while holding up one, two, three, and four pens. The third lesson covered the proper context for using the word "some." He gave the students picture cards that featured images of foods like fried chicken, cupcakes, vegetables, eggs, ice cream, and coconuts. Every student had a card. When he announced their names, he instructed them to hold up the cards. They were instructed to say, "I have some." Students had to say aloud the food item in the photo to finish the phrase. He called one student, "Aliya" and showed his card to her. Aliya: I have some..... (Unable to complete) Teacher:

fried chicken. Aliya: fried chicken. Teacher: I have some fried chicken. Aliya: I have some fried chicken.

b. Engagement activity

This portion of the lesson was designed to reinforce what was first taught and assess how much the students had retained. The teacher was using her laptop notebook as a teaching tool at this point. Using some vibrant images, the teacher demonstrated some prepositional usage in the first lesson. The teacher demonstrated the construction "There is" that came up on the screen using a computer notebook and a projector. The instructor then displayed an image of an egg and questioned the students, "Is there an egg or is there an egg?" The teacher asked the question again when a student responded, "A egg." The teacher read aloud the phrase "There is an egg in the egg-cup" when another student responded, "an egg." After the teacher, the students repeated the structure. The instructor reminded the students of the guidelines for using "a" and "an." He even provided another example of how to use prepositions. In the second lesson, the instructor used photos from her notepad to demonstrate the singular and plural forms. He concentrated on the words "a/an" and "some."

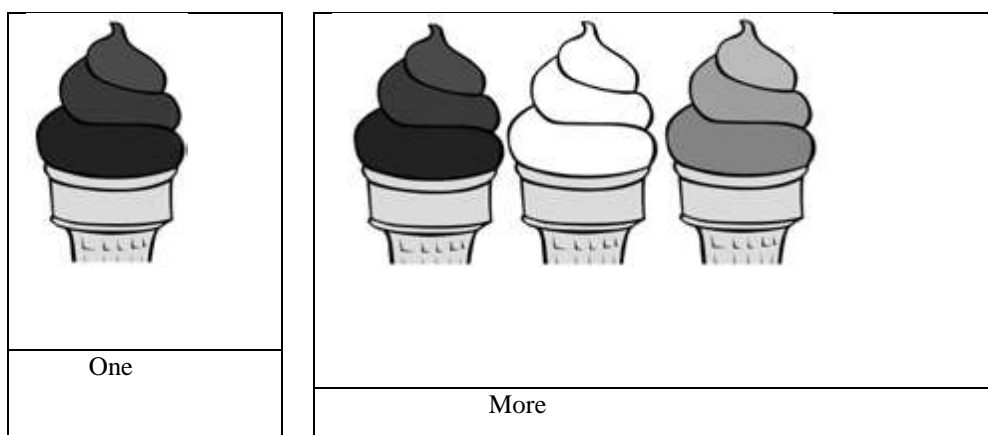


Figure 1 Pictures showing 'one' and 'more' .

In order to illustrate "one" and "more," he displayed two images concurrently. The instructor then reminded the students of the guidelines for using "a" and "an." The students would either answer "one ice cream" or "more ice creams" as he pointed to each photo. The teacher continued by displaying further food-related images that prompted the students to utilise "a/an" or "some." He paid recognition to students who provided the right responses. The last "s" was difficult for some

students to pronounce. The teacher assigned terms like "nuggets," "biscuits," and "buns" for the students to practise the "s" sound. The instructor instructed Arjun to point out a female student in the third lesson. A girl presented her picture while standing up. "I have some..." was repeated by the student. Student: I have some.....Teacher: I have some cupcakes, Student: I have some cupcakes. The student was then instructed by the teacher to indicate a student of the opposite gender. For

roughly thirty minutes, the identical teaching and learning process took place. Students repeated the structure while showing images of the food items.

c. Practice

During this portion of the class, students were supposed to try using the materials on their own. Students collaborated in small groups at individual tables. Worksheets were provided for them to complete in class (Appendix B). The instructor kept an eye on the students' work. He gave each student his undivided attention. He made sure the less capable students received adequate instruction. The more capable students were urged to assist the less capable ones (Appendix C). Some students found it difficult to understand the directions and match the photos to the relevant text. The teacher made the students repeat the words from the module numerous times so that they could pronounce it without too much help from him or her.

Views of pupils

The students' engagement in class during English lesson demonstrated their interest in the subject. The rate of learning varies, though. Some students picked up information more quickly than others. Six of them were interviewed, and the results showed different levels of mastery. The questions "What is your name?" and "How old are you?" were asked of six participants. Four students answer the question. Though two of them comprehended the questions, their answers lacked proper grammar. They only provided their names and ages. Two students had trouble understanding the English-language questions. One of the six students said he found it tough and did not enjoy learning English. The others said they liked to learn English but could not give any reason.

Activities used to promote the speaking skill

According to the teacher, the activities provided in the module were suitable for the pupils. The first lesson dealt with introducing oneself. Pupils merely had to learn how to answer questions such as "What is your name?" and "How old are you?" These questions were considered suitable for pupils to learn in view of their first week at school. They were not familiar with one another in the classroom. The related questions and answers were meaningful in the classroom context. The teacher, however, supplemented the activity with that of her own, especially where phonics was concerned. In addition, he added more images from the notebook because they were more vivid and substantial than those in the module. Grammatical structures were

used in the context of the exercises in the module to give them meaning for the students. The unit of the taught module includes oral exercises like question-and-answer sessions, poems, songs, and brief dialogues.

Challenges experienced by the language teacher

The teacher explained that both the students' linguistic competency and their reading skills needed to be strengthened. The students' reading proficiency would enable them to talk with assurance. The instructor concurred that the English language module could aid in raising the students' proficiency. Using creativity and resourcefulness in the classroom would help inspire students to learn English more effectively. The instructor noted that he needed to plan engaging lessons that would meet the students' demands and their level of English language proficiency. The teacher found it extremely difficult to introduce the subject of each lecture to the students. Certain concepts, such as the articles "a" and "an," were challenging to get the students to understand. Regarding their usage, the students were still unsure. The teacher thought that because the English language modules given to the students were photocopied and unclear, it might discourage them from learning the language. In order to help the classroom's weaker students understand the material being taught, the teacher shifted to L1. One of the causes the teacher used L1 in the classroom was the students' poor competency. Making the students comprehend English-language instructions presented to them by the teacher was another difficulty. He had to make the wording and directions simpler the majority of the time. He frequently turned to gestures to help children understand concepts like the word "like." He displayed a thumbs-up sign for "like" and a thumbs-down sign for "don't like." He had to code-switch at other times, speaking Bhardwahi or Kashmiri, the mother tongue of the students.

V. DISCUSSION

The results of this study's data show amply that it is challenging to help young learners pick up a second language in a short period of time. According to Espinosa, a specialist in early childhood education, "learning a language is a complicated and rigorous process that takes several years" (2015). However, in this study, a few students were able to pick up some English language skills in just a few weeks. However, several people refused to reply in the language. They struggled to speak clearly in English and were shy. Al-Hosni (2014), who looked into grade 5

students, also found a similar issue. Due to inhibition and mother tongue, the students experienced this issue. They were probably concerned of producing errors like to one revealed by Dil's (2009) research, which is an issue. Additionally, different students' learning rates were observed. The following elements appeared to have an impact on language acquisition:

a. Teaching strategies

It was noticed during the lessons the teacher provided:

1. Useful and meaningful circumstances for teaching new linguistics concepts were seen during the lectures. Images and objects were included in the context.
2. extensive practise with the taught structures.
3. Understandable input The students could easily understand the linguistic components.
4. Starting a lesson with controlled activities, followed by guided work, and eventually more independent work.
5. enough linguistic information. Neither too few nor too many brand-new concepts were covered in a single class.
6. a range of methods to help the students understand the language. The method involved speaking Bhaderwahi/Kashmiri, the children's native language.
7. words of encouragement when students provided the right answers.
8. observation of students' work throughout practise exercises.

b. The teacher

Children were being taught English by the teacher with enthusiasm. In the classroom, he spoke mostly in English. Only when students were unable to understand the examples or directions offered he resort to Bhaderwahi/Kashmiri. For example when a student remarked, "Mayan hunacanteeni maa ek cake khawo," he translated it into English as "I just ate a cake in the canteen," the teacher instructed the student to repeat after him.

c. Pupils

Despite not being able to speak English, the students could understand it. The exercises that were presented in class could be finished by them. The majority of the time, students were also able to respond to the teacher's display questions by accurately answering "Yes" or "No." Other times, they provided very succinct responses. For instance, the teacher in a class on food products posed a question. Teacher: Where in the school do

you notice apples? Students: Canteen. The fact that the students could grasp the teacher's question despite it being in English shows that the context was familiar to them. The essential components for students to respond to the teacher's queries include words like "apples" and "school."

d. Topic

The subjects discussed were relevant to the students' lives. Introducing oneself and culinary products were among them. The students could respond to inquiries like "What is your name?" and "How old are you?" The lesson units' visuals allowed the students to recognise the foods even before the teacher named them.

e. Activities

The students could successfully complete the tasks. This was consistent with the input hypothesis, which holds that students will be able to acquire a language if the information is understandable. Additionally, the activities were brief. They didn't take the students very long to finish in class. This made it possible for the teacher to assess the students' comprehension of the lessons. The language was taught more meaningfully as a result of the integration of grammar in context.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is clear that there is no single straightforward approach to helping young learners improve their speaking abilities, particularly when the language they are learning is not their mother tongue. The many theories that were previously discussed all have an impact on how children learn English as a second language. Every one of the hypotheses advances knowledge of how children learn languages. The study's data was sufficient to draw some conclusions regarding how young learners' speaking abilities improve. They appear eager to pick up the English language. Outside of the classroom, however, there was no encouragement for using English. At recess, the students conversed in their native tongues. It is believed that adding more interactive exercises to the curriculum will enable students to speak English with one another.

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Appendix-A Test

English Language
Test-1

1. Copy the words in the sentences

My name is Atharv Singh

a. My name is Atharv Singh.
b. My name is Atharv Singh.
c. My name is Atharv Singh.

2. Match the words in part A with those in part B. The first one is done for you

Part A		Part B
What	→	your
Is	→	name
Your	→	what
Name	→	is

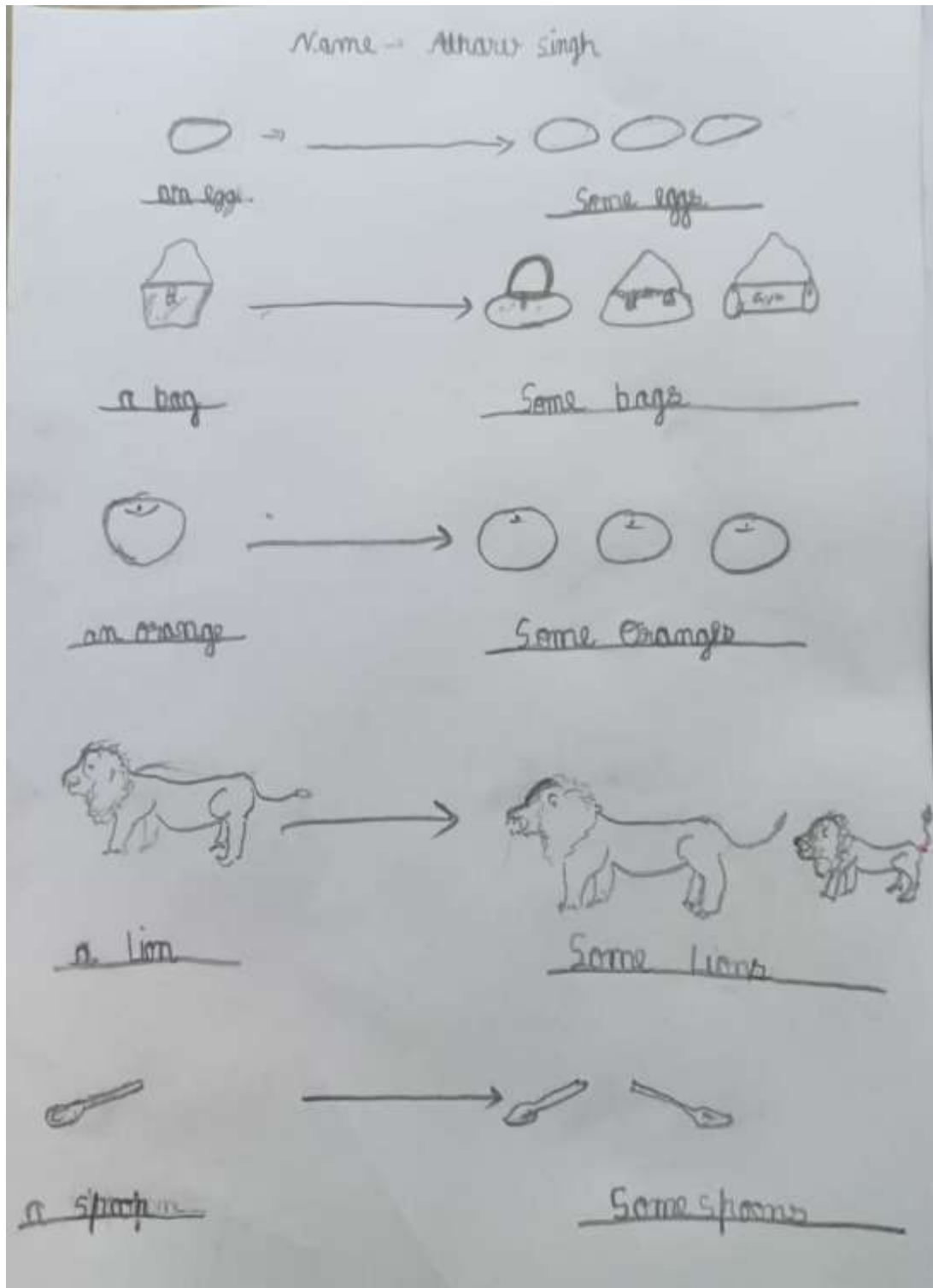
3. Fill in the blanks with your name

My name is Atharv Singh

Appendix-B Worksheets

Activity: Write the plural form of each of these words

A cake	Some <u>cakes</u>
A biscuit	Some <u>biscuits</u>
A Coconut	Some <u>coconuts</u>
An Apple	Some <u>Apples</u>
An Egg	Some <u>Eggs</u>



Appendix- C Classroom activity

