

Background Research

As part of a previous pilot program, I interacted closely with a group of girls from underserved communities in South Delhi through a local NGO-supported after-school initiative.

Though these specific girls are not part of the current campaign, the insights gathered around confidence, language comfort, storytelling ability, and motivation directly shaped the design of this initiative.

The following are the observations noted by me after interacting with the following girls (all currently in 11th grade):

Kritika (Click [here](#) to listen to the conversation)

- Struggles with vocabulary and sentence formation.
- Says she "can't speak English," understands it, but prefers longer sentences in Hindi.
- Has difficulty interacting with new people; basic introduction needs work.
- Loves storytelling and sharing details; talkative once comfortable.
- Finds it hard to make friends but tries and expresses a desire to speak in English.

Saloni (Click [here](#) to listen to the conversation)

- Enthusiastic and cheerful; greets well and leaves a good first impression.
- Makes good conversation; has poor sentence formation but tries longer English sentences.
- A people person; likes to read and understands English well.
- Wants to improve fluency and stop stuttering.
- Can thoughtfully articulate goals and values.
- Has a strong presence and confidence; creates a pleasant atmosphere.

Diksha (Click [here](#) to listen to the conversation)

- Hobby: cooking; pleasant and talkative.
- Switches to Hindi; sentence formation is weak, but she can speak in long paragraphs.
- Extroverted and likes interacting with people; has strong social awareness.
- Unsure of her goals; basic self-introduction is present.
- Like Kritika, she opened up more during experience-based questions and became more engaging.
- Gets bored by monotony; responsive and authentic.
- Understands the value of presentation and is a good listener.

Nidhi

- Better sentence formation than most; very talkative.
- Tells stories and details independently, often in Hinglish.
- Uses mid-level vocabulary; confident and extroverted.
- Shares opinions willingly; makes a good impression.
- Didn't understand abstract or complex questions (e.g., Udayan Scholarship questions).

Sheetal (Click [here](#) to listen to the conversation)

- Hobby: painting; reserved and quiet.
- Switches to Hindi quickly.
- Struggles with spontaneous storytelling.
- Lacks confidence and wants to improve that aspect.

Common Themes Observed

1. **Strong expressive instincts-** Most girls enjoy storytelling and talking about people or themselves, even if not fluently.
2. **Comfort in Hindi-** They understand English and want to use it more, but are more fluent in Hindi or Hinglish.
3. **Confidence-** Some (e.g., Saloni, Nidhi) are naturally confident, while others (e.g., Sheetal, Kritika) take more time to open up.
4. **Clear thoughts, weak grammar/sentence formation-** They struggle with sentence structure and grammar, but not with ideas.
5. **Peer energy matters-** They engage more when the atmosphere is warm and fun; monotony makes them withdraw.
6. **High motivation to improve-** They are eager to speak better, present more confidently, and connect effectively.

Program Design Principles based on the above

1. Use **Hindi-English mix freely**, make English optional at first, but present.
2. Prioritize pair or **small group formats**, especially for quieter participants.
3. Focus on **expression and phrasing** rather than grammar.
4. Anchor every session in **real-life usefulness**, experience sharing, goals, and introductions.

5. **Let them speak** before refining, focus on fluency, then technique.
6. Give narrative ownership, **help shape, not correct their stories**.
7. Use **low-pressure, performance-like formats**, storytelling circles, mirroring, and short builds.

Basic Outline (TENTATIVE)

1. **Building Comfort and Trust-** Creating a safe space, warming up to self-expression
2. **Speaking About Myself-** Introducing yourself with confidence in Hinglish
3. **Telling Personal Stories-** Turning lived experiences into stories worth sharing
4. **Improving Body Language and Voice-** Posture, tone, and non-verbal confidence
5. **Thinking and Responding on the Spot-** Handling impromptu questions and quick conversations that leave an impact
6. **This Is Me** - Crafting and delivering a short self-introduction or personal speech

Now, Why Debate and Drama Students?

1. **Structuring thoughts clearly under pressure (Debate)-** helps participants begin, build, and close their thoughts effectively.
2. **Using phrasing and emphasis for impact (Debate + Drama)-** Guides participants on persuasive phrasing, pauses, and tone variation.
3. **Managing body language and stage presence (Drama)-** Builds posture, expression, and projection for non-verbal confidence.
4. **Bringing authenticity and emotion to delivery (Drama)-** Encourages expressive, believable storytelling.
5. **Engaging with an audience (Debate + Drama)-** This technique teaches connection techniques, such as eye contact, voice modulation, and relatability.
6. **Offering constructive feedback (Debate)-** Trains participants to observe, reflect, and improve in a supportive way.