



## RESEARCH PAPER

# Developing speaking skills through task-based learning in English as a foreign language classroom

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## Abstract

When it comes to communication, speaking is a popular way to express oneself. The continuous experience of researchers involved in this study has shown that most students are unsuccessful or face problems with speaking skills. They encountered difficulties communicating themselves effectively and efficiently or even communicating in simple day-to-day English. This emphasizes the need for the active participation of learners in the process of learning. One such learner-centric and learning-centric method is Task-Based Language Teaching, which requires students to finish tasks that are significant to them as a part of the learning process. Learning through tasks emphasizes the utilization of language for the sake of meaningful communication. A communication method called task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been extensively used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. It has been demonstrated to be of considerable use in enhancing the communication abilities of students receiving instruction. Trying to understand better how tasks influence students' desire to speak English and their spoken engagement with one another in the classroom, this research set out to answer these questions. The sample size of participants in the study included ninety adolescents who were students at Parul University. Their feedback indicated that the tasks were beneficial, both in terms of increasing their oral interaction in English and their enthusiasm to speak English in class.

**Keywords:** Student perspectives, task-based learning, Task-based language teaching, Tasks, spoken interaction, English language proficiency, motivation.

## Introduction

The increased importance of English in many facets of society's development in recent years has sparked a renewed enthusiasm for the language's study among developing nations. As a result of this feature, continuing research is being conducted to determine whether or not it is possible to employ an approach that assists students in improving their conversational abilities while they are studying English. For the most part, speaking has been the focal point of EFL programs at the tertiary level as it is the area that gets the least amount of practice overall.

It is mostly feasible to learn a foreign language within the confines of a classroom environment when learners are exposed to the language often during supervised class sessions, and this is a practically possible option. A language that is not spoken in the near or local area is referred to as a foreign language.

According to those who made this finding argument that "the explicit teaching of speaking and listening has been neglected" is reinforced by then. Conducted a needs analysis of stakeholders, which included learners, teaching staff, and staff in leadership positions, where they also found through collected data that all stakeholders agreed with the fact that speaking is the primary language skill expected from and to be learned by graduates that they had chosen as a sample of their research. In settings in which students have only little interaction with the English language, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been recognized as one of the communicative methods that have received a lot of favorable results. On the other hand, TBLT is the method that should be utilized when the goal is to increase the number of possibilities for oral engagement in classes. It has been established through study that TBLT is beneficial in addressing issues pertaining to motivation, communication,

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and oral engagement that are associated with the process of learning a foreign language. Thus, in order to improve the spoken English interaction of university students taking English as a foreign language, this research set out to find a way that is effective and efficient. The question of whether or not communicative tasks have an effect on the oral interaction of adolescents and whether or not tasks have an effect on the motivation of adolescents to speak English in the classroom was thereby prompted by this investigation.

### **Research Questions**

- In EFL classrooms, how do students' spoken interactions change after participating in communicative group activities?
- How might students' motivation to speak English in class be affected by communicative group activities?

### **Literature Review**

Research documents the use of the TBLT strategy at higher education institutions in underdeveloped nations that provide English as a second language programming. Thus, the same lines, perspectives of students, second language acquisition, student motivation and communication, and similar themes make up the foundation of this study.

In general, educators have seen TBLT as an effective method of teaching for the purpose of enhancing students' intrinsic desire, involvement, and ability to communicate with one another collaboratively and communicatively. A number of researches have shed light on the connection that exists between individuals' levels of motivation and the activities that include communication.

Furthermore, argues that teachers believe in providing students with opportunities to collaborate on the completion of projects, which helps to keep students motivated and actively participating in the learning process. Based on their findings, they discovered that learners exhibited a high level of motivation when they were working towards personally meaningful goals and demanding activities that were yet within their reach.

According to a study that was conducted, the aspect of task-based language teaching that students enjoyed the most was the fact that they were able to communicate and exchange information with their partners. Additionally, they seemed to be interested in engaging in exciting interactive group work and imaginative role-playing. In addition to being interested in learning in an active rather than passive manner, they enjoyed the sense of accomplishment that came with completing the activity. Moreover, they appreciated the assignments since they were applicable and comparable to circumstances that students would encounter in real life. A number of the participants mentioned that the exercises that were centered on tasks helped them improve not only their oral abilities but also their ability to solve problems and their critical thinking skills.

Students also report a preference for TBLT over traditional methods of instruction Thanh & Huan (2021). Students in this research were enthusiastic about improving their English skills, driven to complete assignments, and told that "classes are full of activities and play" as an excuse to get together and work on projects. The students' outlook on studying English also improved. They appreciated the chance to work in small groups and highlighted the significance of language in context assignments.

### **Learning the Foreign Language**

TBLT offers a range of learning possibilities for students with different levels and skills, and this has been proven through multiple research studies. While merging the development of language skills and learning techniques, it also found that TBLT gives relevance to students' needs. Found that TBLT makes students feel at ease, which in turn promotes speaking the target language, identifying their needs, and enhancing their abilities via interaction. On top of that, it seemed that learning the four language skills via social contact was compatible with a proper implementation of TBLT. Found that students with lower levels of competence struggled to complete activities. In contrast, students with greater levels of proficiency completed all of them. On the other hand, another research found that tasks were more likely to impede the progress of talented students.

For a variety of reasons, learners began to speak and use English. Further, they mention that due to the teacher's feedback and the challenging nature of the classes, a number of students thought their writing improved. Also, according to previous research, instructors saw their students' vocabulary grow, and their self-assurance in public speaking improved after using TBLT. Based on the experiences of other educators, TBLT has been shown to help students improve their performance, vocabulary, and fluency. According to Tabatabaei and Atefeh (2020), language instructors praised their students' improved interpersonal skills as a result of the student's exposure to a wide range of group activities followed by instructional methods and the classroom's dynamic, collaborative atmosphere.

Students were able to take advantage of communicative TBLT activities to express what they wanted to say spontaneously because they negotiated meaning while interacting in class during activities, as reported. The students "practiced the language and improved their oral skill, although many of them had several problems with grammar and sentence building," according to, "the students interacted among themselves or with the teacher in most of the cases" while performing classroom assignments.

In spite of the advantages of TBLT and its focus on students' autonomy in language usage, some educators have expressed concerns about students' competence in the target language, their self-confidence, and the influence of grammar on their task development. Most instructors,

in accordance with this, thought their students had trouble putting their thoughts into whole sentences or figuring out how to put their concepts into concrete terms. Teachers blamed students' inadequate vocabulary and grammatical skills as well as TBLT's failure to teach grammar adequately. In addition, more than half of the teachers polled were dissatisfied with TBLT's presentation of language skills as an instructional tool. Thus, this research considers both sides of the findings of the researchers discussed above to execute TBLT in the classroom as a core part of finding out the outcome of TBLT as a pedagogical approach.

### **Methodology Research Design**

In order to explain and analyze social realities, the researchers are immersed in the actual world and observe everyday events in order to look into behavioral patterns. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the possible effects of communicative group activities on students' willingness to speak English in class and their competency in verbal engagement in English. In order to understand this impact, researchers advocated for an action research approach, which focuses on problem-solving via intervention design, execution, assessment, and evaluation. Triangulation of techniques of data gathering involves using more than one approach to seek answers to specific goals. Triangulation provides the researcher with considerable assurance via the use of more contrasting methodologies.

Findings from research on how to enhance Foreign Language oral contact center on two main points: the need to provide opportunities, such as tasks, for Foreign Language speakers to practice speaking the target language and the intrinsic desire that students feel when given a chance to do so. The literature establishes these variables and others like them. Still, it does not provide detailed instructions on how to use them. Therefore, the purpose of the planned data collection was to determine how communicative group assignments impacted students' willingness to speak English in class and how much they talked during group discussions.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Three qualitative methods were used i.e., testing, observation, and interviewing, in order to collect the data. About 90 students were administered an oral domain-referenced exam both before and after the intervention as part of the current investigation. A series of questions, some basic and others more advanced, covering the candidate's biography and educational history, made up the English-language oral interview portion of the test. More difficult questions were given to those who could keep answering the simpler ones. There was no additional question pool for those who struggled with more complex or fundamental questions. The A2 scale from the Common European Framework of

Reference was used to assess student's performance in the spoken interaction area.

Language users are required to do the following at this level, according to this scale: Delighted by common vocabulary and expressions relating to current concerns (such as extremely fundamental personal and family information, shopping, local geography, and employment). Skilled in basic, everyday activities that call for the sharing of basic, straightforward information about common, everyday topics. Able to provide a basic account of one's history, current surroundings, and urgent needs. From the first to the tenth session, the students' verbal interaction was recorded using field notes and video. Under the guidance of, students worked through a variety of communicative activities throughout these sessions. Students' motivation to use English, their interactions with one another while accomplishing the tasks, and whether or not they utilized the target language were all monitored by this instrument.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Content analysis of interviews, classroom observations and exploratory data analysis of pre-and post-tests were among the methods utilized to examine the gathered data.

### **Pre- and Post-test Analysis**

The purpose of administering this test to these ninety students was to gauge their level of competence in speaking according to the A2 scale that the Council of Europe created in 2001 for the Common European Framework of Reference. Twenty questions, including both personal and academic information, were given to each student independently. Students who did well on easier or more basic questions were given more complicated ones. In contrast, those who failed to solve any problems at all were not given any more questions.

The CEFR A2 scale served as the basis for the rubric that was developed for both the pre-and post-test. This rubric categorizes users into three groups based on the number of questions answered properly and the quality of those answers: PROFICIENT A2 USER, ADEQUATE A2 USER, and USER IS BELOW A2. For this research, "correct" refers to students' ability to provide suitable responses in the form of individual words, phrases, or full sentences. A further ten questions were posted on the educational domain, covering topics such as school activities, parts/places, friends, favorite subjects/teachers, feelings, and hobbies/sports. The personal domain questions covered topics such as family, friends, hobbies, sports, favorite music/singer/band, and daily activities. After adding up each student's accurate responses from the pre-and post-tests, we tallied the results using an Excel database. Exploratory data analysis was used to examine the entered data since it is a type of analysis that works well with descriptive, self-explanatory, and easily understandable data.

**Classroom Observations and Interview Analysis**

The data from the interviews and classroom observations are examined using content analysis. By reducing and analyzing texts and analyses into summary form using both pre-existing categories and emergent themes, content analysis may either produce or test a theory. As part of this study, content analysis was conducted once all interviews and classroom observations had been completed and transcribed. A special code was assigned following the selection and categorization of the units of analysis. A chart with the category descriptions was shown. By combining the information from the interviews and classroom observations, they were able to summarize the main findings.

Two or three communication exercises, such as sorting, matching, ordering, comparing, making a mental map, assembling a jigsaw puzzle, or sharing anecdotes, were included in each of the ten classes. Observations from the classroom supplemented these exercises, and the assignments addressed both the educational and personal spheres. The personal domain encompassed a wide range of things, including one’s routine, favorite activities, sports, musicians, bands, and loved ones. Asking students about their feelings and thoughts regarding the communicative activities, their opinions on how the tasks could improve oral contact and motivation to speak the target language, which tasks they liked and why, and their overall impressions of the tasks’ usefulness were all part of the interview questions.

**Results**

According to the findings of the examination, pupils were able to provide accurate responses to twice as many questions on the post-test as they did on the pre-test. The outcomes of the pre-test and the post-test are depicted in Figure 1, which represents the average percentage of right responses that were provided to the twenty questions. The bar graph for the pre-test reveals that 45 students out of a total of 90 students provided the correct answers. In contrast, the bar graph for the post-test reveals that 75 students out of a total of 90 students provided the correct answers.

Based on the number of right answers they got on the pre-and post-tests, students were categorized as Below A2 User, Adequate A2 User, or Proficient A2 User according to the criteria, as shown in Figure 2. Out of 90 pupils, 75 were deemed to have User is Below A2 proficiency. In contrast, 15 were deemed to have Adequate or Proficient A2 proficiency based on the results of the pre-test. Out of 90 pupils, 27 were deemed to be either proficient or adequate A2 users. At the same time, 63 were evaluated as users below A2 on the post-test.

The pre-test and post-test findings, which show how many children were placed in each of the three rubric levels,

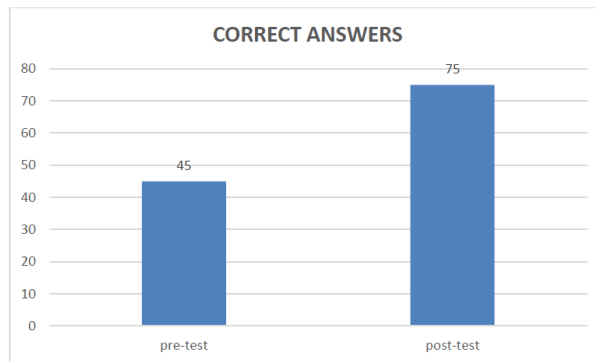


Figure 1: Number of accurate responses on the pre-and post-testing periods

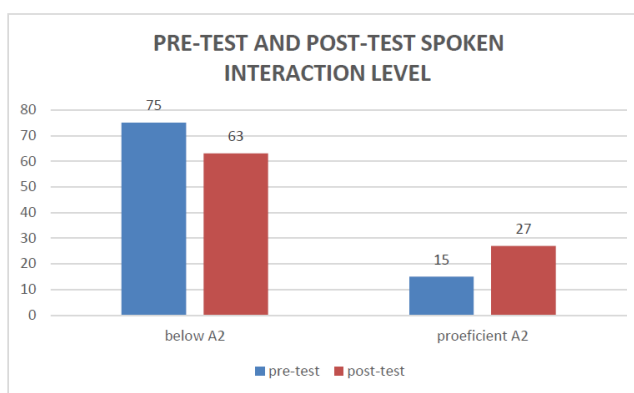


Figure 2: Pre and post-test spoken communication

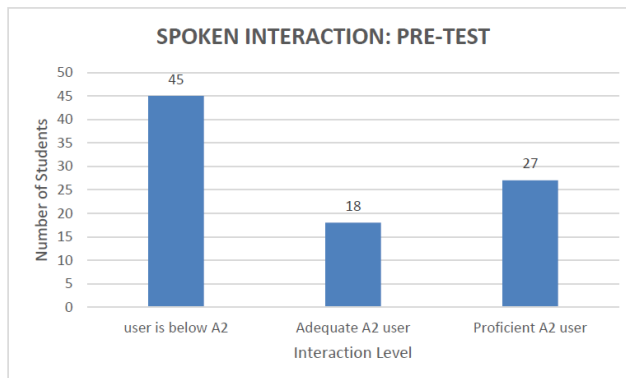


Figure 3: Pre-test spoken interaction

are shown in Figures 3 and 4, respectively. About 45 students were categorized as having a user level below the A2 level of competence during the pre-test, 18 as having an adequate level of proficiency, and 27 as having a proficient level of proficiency at the A2 level. About 20 students were categorized as adequate A2 users, 35 students were categorized as proficient A2 users, and the number of students classed as below A2 users dropped to 35 in the post-test. Figure 4 displays this information.



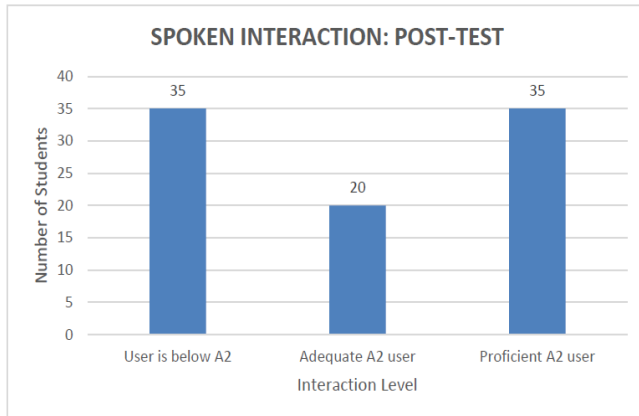


Figure 4: Verbal communication for the post-test

## Conclusion

The goals of this research were to assess students' desire to use English in class and their level of spoken engagement in English as a foreign language. Jigsaw puzzles, matching, arranging, comparing, mind mapping, and sharing personal experiences were some of the communicative group exercises engaged during pedagogical TBLT practices. Consistent with the reviewed literature, the results show that students' speaking abilities improved after completing communicative group activities, which also encouraged students to engage in natural, unprompted conversation as they worked together to discover solutions. Students who were questioned expressed their gratitude for the activities, stating that they were a useful instrument for achieving the desired increase in their ability to engage in spoken English.

The results of the tests proved that this conclusion was correct. This finding is in line with the claims made in the literature, which argue that assignments help students improve their communication abilities by integrating the development of language. Participants gain self-assurance while speaking, and assignments assist students in developing their social skills. According to research, TBLT activities help students improve their communication, analytical, and problem-solving abilities. Tasks in the current study that required students to think through doing, group vocabulary, solve jigsaw puzzles or mind maps, organize and join parts, and so on all served to reinforce these abilities, according to the students who reported that they had improved their performance.

Students of varying abilities and levels benefit from the range of learning possibilities provided by TBLT. Students' active participation and best efforts in utilizing English were evident in all activities, including the "sharing personal experience" tasks, according to the present study. This was true regardless of students' performance level. According to Choo and Too (2022), instructors saw that pupils with lower levels couldn't handle the tasks, while

only exceptional students managed to accomplish the objectives. These results contradict their claims.

Tasks provide a natural environment that not only facilitates the communicative practice of language objects but also stimulates the use of the target language, fosters the stimulation of learners' needs, and allows them to interact with one another. This is also borne out by the results of the current research, which show that students had difficulty communicating in the target language and relied on one another for assistance with things like pronunciation, vocabulary, and answering questions. Regardless of the consequences, several students risked using the terminology, asking questions, or providing answers of their own will.

In addition, the students who participated in the interviews had positive things to say about the tasks: they encouraged open communication, expanded their vocabulary, and found the exercises helpful for improving their English language skills. According to both the present research and the literature review, the types of activities, the degree of group interaction, and the nature of the themes covered in the activities had a substantial impact on the student's motivation and engagement in classroom speaking English. Students valued the opportunity to collaborate and exchange knowledge with their partners the most when it came to assignments. Many studies have shown that activities may increase students' intrinsic motivation, involvement, and collaborative learning. The participants in this research enjoyed assisting one another with language items and activities, and they felt that working on projects with friends made them better. In addition, students' enthusiasm for sharing knowledge and their willingness to work together to complete various assignments were clear.

Students were extremely motivated to strive towards objectives that were relevant to them and that were both tough and doable. Participants in this research were shown to have a positive attitude toward assignments that dealt with inspiring themes, including friends, music, hobbies, and music. There was evidence that students liked jigsaw puzzles and mind maps, which both posed challenges to their problem-solving abilities. All students were eager to engage and didn't feel embarrassed to do so, proving that the activities encouraged interaction. According to the students who participated in the interviews, the activities encouraged them to use their English language skills and got them involved in the class.

According to the latest findings, students are more likely to use their English in class when given tasks that are both realistic and different from classroom instruction. Students' desire to speak English as a foreign language in class and their ability to converse verbally in English were both examined in this research. In spite of their best

efforts, the students encountered a number of obstacles in the classroom, most notably when attempting to enforce spoken exercises. The classroom was already somewhat noisy, and the outside world's ambient noise just made matters worse for their ability to concentrate. Further complicating matters was the fact that several places had restrictions on the usage of audiovisual devices, making them harder to access. As a result, many felt compelled to change or postpone several of their planned activities to fit those unfavorable circumstances.

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