



IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.

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Abstract

This article examines the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in improving speaking skills among secondary school students. Drawing on scientific research, theoretical frameworks, and classroom-based evidence, the paper explores the principles of TBL, its pedagogical benefits, and challenges associated with its implementation. The study concludes that TBL is an effective, learner-centered method that promotes communicative competence, fluency development, and learner autonomy. Recommendations for teachers and implications for further research are also presented.

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the fundamental skills in foreign language learning, particularly for secondary school students who require communicative competence to interact in academic and real-world contexts. Traditional teaching methods often emphasize grammar translation and teacher-centered instruction, which limits students' opportunities to develop oral fluency. In contrast, Task-Based Learning (TBL) positions communication and meaning-focused interaction at the center of language learning.

TBL is grounded in communicative language teaching (CLT) and emphasizes the use of authentic language tasks that reflect real-life communication. Researchers



such as Nunan (2004) and Willis (1996) argue that TBL enhances fluency, accuracy, and motivation, making it particularly suitable for adolescent learners.

This paper provides a scientific analysis of TBL and its impact on speaking skills among secondary school students. It reviews theoretical foundations, empirical studies, classroom applications, and pedagogical implications.

2. Theoretical Background of Task-Based Learning

Task-Based Learning is based on the interactionist theory of language acquisition, which asserts that learners develop language competence through meaningful communication and negotiation of meaning. Long (1985) suggests that interactional modifications during communication—such as clarification requests and comprehension checks—promote language development.

Willis (1996) defines a task as an activity where the focus is on meaning and learners use the target language to achieve a communicative goal. Ellis (2003) further distinguishes between focused tasks (which target specific linguistic features) and unfocused tasks (aimed at general communication). These theories form the foundation for using TBL in speaking instruction.

The TBL framework typically includes three stages:

1. Pre-task: introducing topic, vocabulary, and strategies;
2. Task cycle: performing the task, planning, and reporting;
3. Language focus: analyzing and practicing target forms.

This model supports both fluency-oriented and accuracy-oriented aspects of speaking.

3. The Importance of Speaking Skills for Secondary Students

Speaking is essential for academic success, social interaction, and future career opportunities. Secondary school students often face challenges such as limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes. Enhancing their speaking competence requires teaching approaches that provide:

- authentic communication,



- meaningful interaction,
- reduced anxiety,
- opportunities for collaboration.

TBL creates an environment where students are encouraged to communicate using language that is purposeful rather than controlled or memorized. This supports both cognitive and affective aspects of speaking development.

4. TBL and Its Role in Developing Speaking Skills

A growing body of empirical research demonstrates the effectiveness of TBL for improving speaking skills. Studies by Carless (2007), Shintani (2016), and Samuda & Bygate (2018) show that TBL increases students' oral output, confidence, and ability to negotiate meaning.

Key benefits of TBL for speaking include:

4.1. **Authentic Communication.** TBL encourages students to use language in realistic scenarios such as problem-solving, planning, interviewing, and role-playing.

4.2. **Fluency Development.** During task performance, the emphasis is on conveying meaning rather than accuracy, allowing learners to speak more freely.

4.3. **Interaction and Negotiation.** Pair and group work create natural interaction, enabling learners to ask questions, clarify misunderstandings, and expand their utterances.

4.4. **Learner Autonomy.** Students make decisions, share responsibilities, and collaborate, making the learning process more meaningful.

4.5. **Reduced Speaking Anxiety.** Because the focus is on completing a task rather than producing perfect grammar, students feel less pressure and more motivation.

5. Types of Tasks Suitable for Secondary Students

Different types of tasks can be used to develop speaking abilities:



5.1. Information-Gap Tasks. Learners exchange missing information.

Examples: picture comparison, “Find someone who,” and survey tasks.

5.2. Problem-Solving Tasks Students discuss solutions and justify decisions.

Examples: planning a school event, choosing travel routes, and solving environmental issues.

5.3. Role-Play Tasks Students simulate real-life conversations such as hotel booking, doctor visits, and shopping.

5.4. Opinion-Exchange Tasks Learners express and defend their views on topics like technology use, school rules, and social issues.

5.5. Project-Based Tasks Longer tasks involving posters, presentations, or videos promote extended speaking practice and creativity.

6. TBL Lesson Structure

According to Willis (1996), a TBL lesson consists of three stages:

6.1. Pre-task Phase. The teacher introduces the topic, activates prior knowledge, and provides useful vocabulary and expressions.

6.2. Task Cycle

- Task performance: Students work in groups to complete the activity.
- Planning: Learners prepare a short report or presentation.
- Reporting: Groups present their results to the class.

6.3. Language Focus

The teacher provides feedback on grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, helping students refine accuracy after completing the task. This structure balances fluency and accuracy, making it highly effective for speaking development.

7. Challenges in Implementing TBL and Possible Solutions

Although TBL has many benefits, teachers may face several challenges:

7.1. Overuse of Native Language. Students sometimes rely on their mother tongue during tasks. Solution: Provide English expressions, set expectations, and assign roles (e.g., “English Monitor”).



7.2. Uneven Participation . Stronger students may dominate discussions.

Solution: Use small groups and assign rotating roles such as leader, timekeeper, and presenter.

7.3. Time Management. Interactive tasks may exceed lesson time.

Solution: Use short, manageable tasks with clear time limits.

7.4. Assessment Difficulties. Evaluating speaking during tasks can be challenging.

Solution: Use rubrics focusing on fluency, interaction, pronunciation, and task completion.

8. Conclusion

Task-Based Learning is a scientifically supported approach that significantly enhances speaking skills for secondary school students. By promoting meaningful communication, learner autonomy, and natural language use, TBL helps students become confident and competent speakers. Despite some implementation challenges, TBL remains one of the most effective pedagogical methods for improving speaking abilities in modern language classrooms.

Future research may focus on digital TBL tasks, online collaboration tools, and their influence on adolescent learners' speaking proficiency.

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