

ENHANCING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING IN UZBEK EFL CLASSROOMS

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Annotation: This article explores the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in improving the speaking skills of secondary school students in Uzbekistan. In many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, learners face challenges in expressing their ideas fluently and confidently due to limited exposure to real-life communication. This study is based on classroom practices conducted with B1–B2 level students in a secondary school setting. The paper highlights how structured pre-task, task, and post-task stages can create meaningful opportunities for interaction and language use.

The findings suggest that task-based activities significantly enhance learners' motivation, participation, and communicative competence. Students become more engaged when they are involved in problem-solving, discussions, and collaborative tasks that reflect real-world situations. Furthermore, the role of the teacher shifts from a knowledge provider to a facilitator, supporting learners in developing autonomy and confidence.

The article concludes that Task-Based Learning is an effective and practical approach for improving speaking skills in Uzbek EFL classrooms. It also provides pedagogical recommendations for teachers who aim to implement learner-centred strategies in their teaching practice.

Keywords: Task-Based Learning, speaking skills, EFL, learner-centred to approach, Uzbekistan, communicative competence

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the importance of developing communicative competence in English has increased significantly, particularly in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. In Uzbekistan, English has become a key subject in secondary and higher education due to growing international collaboration and academic opportunities. Despite this emphasis, many students still experience difficulties in speaking, especially when expressing their ideas spontaneously and confidently in real-life situations.

One of the main challenges in EFL classrooms is the dominance of teacher-centred instruction, where learners have limited opportunities to actively use the language. Traditional approaches, which focus heavily on grammar instruction, often fail to develop learners' ability to communicate effectively. As Moore(2018) notes, TBLT represents an approach where communication becomes “the major driving force in language learning”. This highlights the need to shift from form-focused instruction to meaning-based interaction. Similarly, Moore(2018) explains that tasks reflect real-world language use, allowing learners to engage in meaningful communication. This is particularly relevant in EFL settings such as Uzbekistan, where exposure to authentic language is limited. TBLT emphasizes the use of authentic tasks that encourage students to communicate for real purposes. Instead of focusing solely on language forms, learners engage in activities such as problem-solving, discussions, and role-plays, which require them to use English in a natural and purposeful way.

This article aims to explore how Task-Based Learning can enhance speaking skills among B1–B2 level students in an Uzbek EFL context. It also examines the role of structured task stages—pre-task, task cycle, and post-task—in promoting active participation and improving learners' confidence in speaking. The study is based on classroom practices and observations, providing practical insights for teachers seeking to implement more effective and engaging speaking activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Task-Based Language Teaching is grounded in communicative and experiential learning principles. According to Moore (2018), TBLT is based on the concept of “learning by doing,” which encourages learners to actively participate in language use. This approach aligns with the idea that language is best learned through interaction rather than passive instruction.

Ellis (2003) argues that tasks should involve a primary focus on meaning and require learners to use language to achieve specific outcomes. He further emphasizes that meaningful interaction contributes to both fluency and accuracy development. In addition, Long (2015) highlights that real-world tasks provide learners with opportunities to engage in authentic communication, which is essential for language acquisition.

Willis and Willis (2007) propose a widely used task cycle consisting of pre-task, task, and post-task stages. This framework helps structure lessons in a way that promotes both communication and reflection. As they suggest, the post-task stage is particularly important for focusing on language forms that emerge during communication.

A key feature of TBLT is its strong focus on meaning. Unlike traditional methods that prioritize grammar instruction, task-based approaches require learners to use language to solve problems or complete meaningful activities. As highlighted by

Moore(2018), tasks typically involve “a primary focus on meaning” and encourage learners to engage in real-world communication. This makes language learning more relevant and practical, especially for students who need to use English beyond the classroom.

Another important characteristic of TBLT is its connection to real-life language use. Tasks are designed to reflect authentic situations, enabling learners to practice language in contexts similar to those they may encounter outside the classroom. For example, activities such as discussions, problem-solving tasks, and role-plays simulate real communication and help students develop fluency and confidence.

In addition, TBLT promotes cognitive engagement. Learners are required to think critically, make decisions, and collaborate with others during task performance. These processes—such as reasoning, selecting information, and negotiating meaning—play a crucial role in language development. As noted by Moore(2018), tasks engage learners in cognitive processes that contribute to both linguistic and communicative growth.

The theoretical foundation of TBLT is also supported by both cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. From a cognitive viewpoint, interaction during tasks provides opportunities for learners to receive feedback and modify their language use. From a sociocultural perspective, learning occurs through social interaction, where learners co-construct meaning and support each other’s development. This highlights the importance of collaboration and peer interaction in the classroom.

A widely used pedagogical framework for implementing TBLT is the three-stage model: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task. This model helps structure lessons in a way that prepares learners, engages them in meaningful communication, and provides opportunities for reflection and language focus. Although this framework is practical and widely adopted, it also allows flexibility for teachers to adapt tasks according to their classroom context.

Overall, the literature suggests that Task-Based Language Teaching is a powerful approach for developing speaking skills, as it encourages meaningful interaction, promotes learner autonomy, and creates opportunities for authentic language use. These features make it particularly suitable for EFL contexts such as Uzbekistan, where students often have limited exposure to real-life English communication.

METHODOLOGY

(Participants and context)

The class consists of 14 pupils, including 8 girls and 6 boys. The learners are between 13 and 14 years old and study in the sixth form of a secondary school. In terms of language proficiency, some pupils demonstrate an upper-intermediate level of English. These students show strong motivation and the ability to work independently; therefore, they often require more challenging tasks to support their continued

development (Habibova, 2023). The rest of the class demonstrates a lower level of proficiency, generally corresponding to a modest ability to understand and communicate basic meanings in English.

The learners can be characterized as a mix of auditory and visual learners. They have been studying English as a foreign language (EFL) for approximately six years, beginning in primary school. Although English is used as the main medium of instruction during lessons, the teacher occasionally employs the learners' first language (Uzbek) to clarify complex grammatical concepts. In this context, the use of L1 supports comprehension, particularly when applying grammar-translation techniques.

An inductive approach is frequently used in teaching, allowing students to discover language rules through guided practice. It has been observed that female students tend to participate more actively than male students and show a higher level of engagement in learning English. In terms of language skills, the pupils demonstrate relative strength in listening and reading. They often develop these skills through exposure to authentic materials such as songs with lyrics, films, and cartoons with subtitles (Habibova, 2023). Additionally, elements of peer feedback are incorporated into classroom practice, where students assist each other in identifying and correcting mistakes. This collaborative interaction contributes to the development of their communicative competence. However, learners show some limitations in productive skills, particularly in speaking and writing. They are able to communicate using basic vocabulary and simple structures, especially in familiar, everyday contexts, but lack confidence and fluency in more extended communication. To support writing development, structured guidance and model texts are provided initially, followed by tasks that encourage independent production, such as writing short summaries based on audiovisual input.

Overall, these learners represent a typical group of EFL students in a secondary school context, where English is a compulsory subject and plays an important role in academic advancement and access to higher education. The lesson design in this study follows the task cycle proposed by Willis and Willis (2007), including pre-task, while-task, and post-task stages. This structure allows learners to prepare for communication, engage in meaningful interaction, and reflect on their performance. The use of communicative tasks is also supported by Ellis (2003), who states that tasks should require learners to use language for real purposes. In this study, students were encouraged to share ideas, solve problems, and collaborate, reflecting authentic language use.

Task 1 – Speaking: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Aims of the Task

Students will be able to:

- develop critical thinking skills
- share ideas collaboratively
- participate in group interaction
- improve speaking fluency
- provide and receive peer feedback

Materials: Blackboard, cue cards, note papers

Time : 25 minutes

Procedure:

Pre-task Stage (Brainstorming) – Speaking [7 minutes]

Students work in pairs or small groups and discuss questions provided on cue cards:

1. Why do people need markets?
2. Can markets be entertainment centres?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of markets?

Students share their ideas orally, while the teacher monitors and provides brief feedback.

While-task Stage – Interactive Speaking [10 minutes]

Students are introduced to short descriptions of different city markets. Instead of focusing on reading comprehension, they:

- discuss key features of each market in groups
- match descriptions with market names through discussion
- explain and justify their choices orally

Students use target vocabulary to compare markets and express opinions. The teacher facilitates interaction and ensures equal participation.

Post-task Stage – Discussion and Presentation [8 minutes]

Students:

- present a brief spoken summary of selected markets
- compare similarities and differences between markets
- express preferences and justify their opinions

Peer feedback is encouraged, and the teacher provides final comments on fluency and accuracy.

Outcome:

Students improve their speaking skills through meaningful interaction, collaborative problem-solving, and real-life communication tasks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the speaking lesson demonstrated several positive outcomes in terms of student engagement, interaction, and language development. During the lesson, most students actively participated in group discussions and showed increased willingness to express their ideas in English. The use of communicative tasks encouraged learners to focus on meaning rather than form, which helped reduce anxiety and improve fluency. One of the most noticeable results was the improvement in students' confidence. Learners who were previously hesitant to speak began to contribute more actively, particularly during pair and group work.

The pre-task brainstorming stage played an important role in activating background knowledge and preparing students for meaningful communication. As a result, students were better able to generate ideas and participate in discussions during the main task.

The while-task stage promoted collaborative learning and critical thinking. Students worked together to analyze and compare different market descriptions, which required them to negotiate meaning and justify their opinions. This interaction created opportunities for natural language use and peer support. Higher-level students took on supportive roles within their groups, helping less proficient learners and contributing to a more dynamic learning environment.

In the post-task stage, students demonstrated their ability to summarize information and express comparisons between different markets. Although some learners still relied on simple sentence structures, their overall fluency improved. The task also encouraged the use of new vocabulary in context, which contributed to better retention and understanding.

However, several challenges were observed. Some students, particularly those with lower proficiency levels, experienced difficulty in expressing complex ideas and

required additional support from peers or the teacher. Occasional use of the first language (Uzbek) was noted during group discussions, especially when students struggled to find appropriate vocabulary. Despite this, such use of L1 also served as a scaffolding tool that facilitated comprehension and task completion.

Overall, the findings indicate that TBLT is an effective approach for enhancing speaking skills in an EFL classroom. The use of structured task stages, collaborative activities, and meaningful communication creates a supportive environment where students can develop both fluency and confidence. The findings of this study support previous research on TBLT. As noted by Long (2015), interaction during task performance plays a key role in language development, particularly through feedback and negotiation of meaning. In this study, students actively engaged in discussions and supported each other during group work, which contributed to improved speaking fluency.

Furthermore, Moore(2018) highlights that tasks engage learners in cognitive processes such as reasoning and problem-solving. This was evident in the lesson, where students analyzed and compared different market descriptions, demonstrating both critical thinking and communicative ability. Willis and Willis (2007) also emphasize the importance of meaningful communication in developing fluency. The results of this study confirm that students became more confident and willing to speak when engaged in interactive tasks.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving speaking skills among secondary school learners in an EFL context. The findings indicate that task-based activities create meaningful opportunities for communication, encourage student participation, and enhance learners' confidence in speaking. By focusing on real-life tasks and collaborative interaction, students were able to use language more naturally and purposefully. The structured stages of TBLT—pre-task, while-task, and post-task—proved to be effective in guiding learners through the learning process. The pre-task stage helped activate prior knowledge, the while-task stage promoted interaction and critical thinking, and the post-task stage allowed learners to reflect and improve their language use. This sequence supported both fluency development and communicative competence.

Despite these positive outcomes, some challenges were identified. Lower-level students required additional scaffolding, and occasional use of the first language was observed during group work. However, these factors did not significantly hinder learning; instead, they highlighted the need for balanced teacher support and task adaptation according to learners' proficiency levels.

Based on the findings, several pedagogical recommendations can be made. First, teachers should incorporate more task-based speaking activities into their lessons to

promote active learning. Second, tasks should be carefully designed to match students' proficiency levels and interests. Third, peer collaboration should be encouraged, as it enhances interaction and supports language development. Finally, teachers should adopt a facilitative role, guiding learners while allowing them autonomy in communication.

In conclusion, Task-Based Language Teaching offers a practical and effective approach for improving speaking skills in EFL classrooms. Its emphasis on meaningful interaction and learner engagement makes it particularly suitable for contexts where students have limited exposure to authentic language use. The effectiveness of TBLT observed in this study aligns with the views of Ellis (2003) and Long (2015), who argue that meaningful interaction and real-world tasks are essential for language acquisition. As Moore(2018) suggests, TBLT successfully integrates communication, cognition, and real-life language use, making it a powerful approach in EFL contexts.

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