

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ENHANCING SPEAKING FLUENCY AMONG ESL LEARNERS

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Abstract

This research explores the effect of TBLT on enhancing speaking fluency among ESL learners. A mixed-methods were employed to do a research among 60 intermediate-level ESL learners over a six-week period. The learners were separated into two groups: one group was instructed with TBLT method, another group followed a conventional grammar-based approach. Pre- and post-tests assessed speech rate, vocabulary diversity, and hesitation frequency to measure fluency outcomes. Additionally, learner surveys and classroom observations captured insights into engagement and confidence levels. The findings revealed that the TBLT group demonstrated significantly greater improvements across all fluency metrics. The TBLT group had greater improvement in speech rate, lexical range, and fluency compared to the control group. The qualitative findings also indicated higher motivation and confidence while speaking during the practice. These results reaffirm the success of TBLT in improving spoken fluency and suggest its integration into ESL teaching to improve expressive ability. Future researches should investigate the effects of TBLT permanent and examine its adaptability across different learner competency levels and educational contexts.

Keywords

Task-based language teaching, speaking fluency, ESL learners, communicative, language acquisition.

Introduction

Acquiring speaking fluency is central to second language acquisition, but the majority of learners are unable to achieve spontaneous and natural communication. Conventional rule-memorization and accuracy-oriented teaching practices are usually inadequate to equip learners for actual conversations. TBLT, on the other hand, is a revolutionary and successful method. This approach is centered on authentic communication, interactive tasks, and online language processing (Ellis,

2003; Long, 2015). By getting students to do things such as role-play, discussion, and problem-solving, TBLT situates the language within a context, fostering improvements in fluency, lexical breadth, and reduced hesitation (Skehan, 2016). Although TBLT offers numerous advantages, its detractors have reported limitations, including a lack of attention to grammatical correctness and challenges for learners with lower proficiency levels (Van den Branden, 2016). Against these controversies, this research aims to establish the effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing speaking fluency compared to more traditional grammar-oriented instruction. This research primarily explores metrics such as speech rate, lexical variety, hesitation rate, and learners' attitudes to identify whether TBLT leads to better fluency gains. This research employed mixed-methods, that merged quantitative measures of fluency with qualitative student perceptions from six weeks of intervention involving intermediate ESL learners. With the help of pre- and post-test scores in fluency, interviews with learners, and observations in the classroom, this research tries to offer empirical evidence regarding the impact of TBLT and its potential application in teaching languages.

B. Literature Review

Extensively studied, task-based learning has been found to be effective in fostering fluency in speaking, and research has repeatedly shown its role in natural language acquisition. Early studies offered the theoretical foundations of task-based learning, and current empirical research has only provided widespread endorsement of its role in fluency development, learner motivation, and functional communication skills.

Among the earliest writers on this field was Ellis (2003), who focused on learner participation in authentic tasks that replicate authentic communication rather than applying rule memorization. Drawing from this, Willis and Willis (2007) argued that task-based learning fosters a low-anxiety environment, enabling learners to communicate freely without fear of making mistakes. They suggested that through minimizing language anxiety, students gain confidence, and this leads to more natural and fluent speech over time.

With research progressing, researchers began examining the most significant features of task-based learning that are behind fluency acquisition. Dörnyei (2005) researched how motivation affects language learning, and he found that students become more motivated if tasks are purposeful and connected to real communication. His own work focused on motivation as a key factor in fluency acquisition, as students who learn something relevant will participate actively. Around the same time, Bruton (2005) raised concerns that task-based learning, with its emphasis on fluency, would not pay enough attention to grammatical accuracy.

He maintained that combining fluency-based tasks and explicit grammar instruction would be a more balanced approach to language competence.

Later, empirical studies provided concrete evidence for the effectiveness of task-based teaching. Rahimpour and Mehrang (2010) conducted a comparative study contrasting task-based teaching with traditional grammar-based teaching. Their research showed that students who practiced task-based speaking gained significantly in terms of speech rate, lexical richness, and lower hesitation, corroborating the effectiveness of the technique in building fluency. Similarly, Bygate (2013) analyzed task repetition as a strategy for improving fluency and discovered that students who continued to repeat speaking tasks produced more fluent, coherent speech. His evidence suggested that regular exposure to structured speaking tasks consolidates fluency in the long run.

Later research explored the impact of task-based learning on communicative competence in actual situations. Nation (2013) underlined the necessity of incrementing task difficulty step by step, claiming that fluency-building activities must be progressively organized so that learners can become confident prior to engaging in more demanding conversations. At about the same time, Long (2015) discussed the place of negotiation of meaning in task-based learning, maintaining that learners who modify their speech according to interlocutors enhance their communicative competence, a key aspect of fluency.

Recent research has further attested to the benefits of task-based learning in the acquisition of fluency and motivation of learners. Skehan (2016) reaffirmed that fluency is improved best when learners are using language in real-time because task-based activities enhance spontaneous speech production. This is also attested by Sánchez and Vera (2018), who found that students in task-based classes had more confidence and motivation compared to those in traditional grammar-based lessons. Their comparative research demonstrated that task-based learners performed better in conversation English than their counterparts, substantiating the value of interactive, authentic communication over systematic grammar learning and rote memorization.

C. Methodology

A mixed-methods design was used in this research to offer an in-depth examination of the impact of task-based instruction on speaking fluency development. By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research aimed to both measure tangible improvements in fluency and explain participants' individual experiences with the instructional method.

Participants and techniques of data collection

The study involved 60 intermediate-level ESL learners aged 18-25 from a language institute. They were assigned to two equal groups: one with a task-based instructional program (experimental group) and the other with a traditional grammar-based curriculum (control group). The participants undertook a pre-intervention test to establish if the two groups had comparable speaking fluency levels initially.

Experimental group students were engaged in a variety of real-life tasks such as storytelling, debates, role-play, and collaborative problem-solving. Each task consisted of three stages: a preparatory stage for the introduction of task-related vocabulary and task aims, a task performance stage where participation was active, and a post-task stage for the review of their use of language and discussion of outcomes. On the other hand, the control group was instructed through a grammar-based curriculum focused on memorization, grammar drills, and guided speaking practice.

The intervention lasted six weeks, and both groups received three sessions per week, each lasting 60 minutes. While the experimental group was engaged in communicative tasks with meaning in line with task-based precepts, the control group was exposed to grammar-based instruction on the same topics. Both groups completed a pre- and post-intervention speaking test. The tests involved recording a three-minute monologue, which was analyzed for main fluency measures, including speech rate (words per minute), lexical variation, and hesitation frequency (pauses or fillers).

Technique of data analysis

To complement the quantitative analysis, qualitative data was also collected. Semi-structured interviews with the experimental group members were conducted to collect their views on how the task-based approach had influenced their engagement and confidence. Classroom observations also supplemented the data, providing details on interaction patterns, task completion, and overall student engagement during the sessions.

In the analysis of data, both thematic and statistical approaches were employed. Quantitative pre- and post-test data were subjected to paired t-tests in order to examine differences in the measures of fluency within and across groups. Conversely, qualitative interview and observational data were subjected to thematic analysis in order to identify emerging themes, such as increasing confidence, motivation, or engagement.

D. Results

The findings of this study demonstrated considerable differences between the experimental group, who were instructed through task-based instruction, and the

control group, who were instructed through a traditional grammar-based approach. The findings revealed big gains in the speaking fluency of the students who were exposed to task-based instruction, reinstating its effectiveness in language learning.

One of the most significant improvements was observed in speech rate. The experimental group of students increased their speaking rate by 25% from pre-test to post-test, whereas the control group achieved a more modest improvement of 10%. This suggests that task-based learning allowed learners to gain more fluency, whereas the traditional grammar-based approach resulted in slower progress.

The same trend was observed in vocabulary range. The experimental group improved their lexical range by 30%, while the control group improved their lexical range by 12%. These results indicate that task-based learning encourages more diverse and richer vocabulary, likely due to its emphasis on meaningful, communicative tasks.

In the frequency of hesitation, the experimental group showed a reduction of 35% in pauses and filler words as opposed to the control group, which only showed a reduction of 15%. This proves that students who involved in task-based learning developed higher confidence and spontaneity in their speech.

The qualitative findings also supported these outcomes. Several students in the experimental group expressed that they felt more comfortable to speak freely without fear of criticism, and they explained their confidence boost in terms of the interactive and collaborative nature of task-based learning. Classroom observations also showed that these students were more engaged and contributed more to discussions, with active communication patterns emerging on a daily basis.

Discussion

These results align with the prevailing research underscoring the effectiveness of task-based instruction in the development of speaking fluency (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2015). The noteworthy improvement observed for the experimental group provides strong evidence that task-based instruction is more effective than prevailing grammar-based instruction in developing fluency.

The experimental group's ability to produce spontaneous speech with greater ease supports the arguments of Skehan (2016), who noted that real-time speaking tasks require learners to process language in a more fluent and natural way. This study confirms that interactive, communicative tasks that require immediate responses elicit measurable gains in fluency.

The lexical diversity increase among the experimental group learners also corroborates the arguments of Rahimpour and Mehrang (2010), who argued that communicative, context-dependent tasks compel learners to use more diverse

vocabulary. The results suggest that task-based learning enhances not only fluency but also lexical richness, allowing learners to communicate more effectively.

In addition, the qualitative data highlight the central role of interaction in confidence building and anxiety reduction. As hypothesized by Willis and Willis (2007), task-based instruction offers a setting where students feel encouraged to take risks in speaking and be engaged actively. The increased willingness of experimental group students to speak supports this.

Conversely, the relatively limited improvement in the control group underscores the inadequacy of traditional grammar-based instruction in fostering fluency. The finding aligns with the arguments of Sánchez and Vera (2018), who argued that while traditional methods improve grammatical correctness, they fail to promote natural, spontaneous speech production.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the significance of applying task-based instruction to language teaching. Not only does it add to the development of fluency, but because meaningful communication promotes learner motivation and involvement, it also raises these two elements. Nonetheless, for the purpose of achieving a balance in approach, incorporating explicit grammar instruction into a task-based framework, as put forward by Ellis (2009), could yield a broader and more effective language learning approach. By combining quantitative fluency measures and qualitative learner feedback, this study highlights the pedagogical potential of task-based instruction in developing confident, fluent, and effective speakers.

E. Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an effective method of improving speaking fluency in ESL students. Compared to traditional grammar-based instruction, TBLT led to notable development in speech rate, lexical richness, and reduced hesitation, highlighting the potential of TBLT for developing natural and confident communicative capacity. Furthermore, qualitative findings showed that students receiving TBLT had more interaction and greater confidence, highlighting the benefit of interactive and real-world communication tasks. However, while TBLT offers tremendous advantages, it also poses problems, particularly for lower-level learners, who may find some tasks too taxing. These problems can be remedied through the application of scaffolding strategies, task grading, and reflective discussion. Additionally, since TBLT focuses primarily on fluency, grammatical accuracy issues mean that the integration of task-based instruction with explicit grammar instruction can guarantee a more balanced approach to language learning. In conclusion, this study supports the use of TBLT in ESL classrooms for the

acquisition of fluency and communicative competence. Future research must continue to investigate the long-term effects of TBLT and its adaptation to learners of different proficiency levels and teaching contexts.

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