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The role of task-based language teaching (TBLT) in enhancing students' speaking skills in English as a second language

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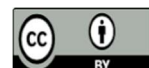
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Abstract

This is a qualitative, explorative research study in nature to determine the effect of TBLT on the speaking skills of ESL learners. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, as well as classroom observations and documents that contain material used in the course. This is much in line with the present study that found out TBLT to bring positive impacts on the speaking ability of learners through opportunities to talk in real, meaningful communicative activities in English, which promote fluency, accuracy, and interactional competence. In the same line, the research has presented some challenges: the overwhelming, up to a point of feeling anxious, of the student with the tasks. It happens in a more frequent way when working in a group. There should be an equilibrium between the demands of the tasks and the use of correct grammar and vocabulary. In general, the study presents TBLT as an effective approach to enhancing students' speaking in ESL but agrees that some ways of mitigating the challenges arising from implementing TBLT are needed.

KEYWORDS

Task-based language teaching, TBLT approach, language instruction, realistic situations, learner needs and interests



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Introduction

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a theory of practice in language teaching that focuses on the use of language to do authentic and realistic tasks typically aimed at communication in problem solving. TBLT develops the learners' ability in the use of language appropriately and effectively, irrespective of the context. That is an inevitable component of TBLT, only because learners have the possibility to try their speaking activity, namely to express their ideas, opinions, and feelings. This research paper will focus on the role of TBLT in enhancing the speaking skills of second-language students. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is the approach to the use of tasks in second or foreign language learning, which emphasizes the primacy of tasks, using language for communication and solving problems in realistic, real-life domains. It is based on the strong belief that the learning of language should base on learners' interest and needs; it calls for the active involvement of the learner in the learning process. TBLT aims to promote students' ability to use language appropriately and efficiently in different communicative purposes, among which are social, academic, and professional uses. Among the most important skills in this method is speaking, which makes it possible for a student to give ideas and opinions, among other thoughts. TBLT puts much emphasis on ensuring that there is adequate development of the speaking skills of the learners by giving them plenty of opportunities to engage in actual and meaningful communication through role-play, debate, and discussion, among other speaking activities. These are meant to make the students able to put to use the language they

have learned in lessons in real-life experiences, thus building up their confidence, fluency, and fluency. In TBLT, a teacher is only a facilitator but not a transmitter of knowledge. He will help the learners know the language, support where necessary, and give feedback. He would design tasks that are meaningful and relevant to the learners in advancing their language skills. The tasks are designed to be "task-what-to-do"; hence, they are appropriate to be intrinsically motivated and communicative, eliciting language use observable in the real world. TBLT tasks are usually, therefore, designed with authenticity and relevance to the learners' lifeworld. Their task is real world context-based and may involve problem solving, decision-making, or information collection. An example would be a learner planning a trip, organizing a social event, or carrying out a survey. All these tasks will require learners to apply all the language skills practically, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The rationale involved with the learners during authentic and purposeful communicative activities, thus realizing that the way to develop speaking skills was done more effectively. TBLT focuses on the active role of learners in the learning process. It allows learners an opportunity to set their learning goals, be involved in the course of action for their learning, and acquire strategies for both self-managing their learning and reflection. This approach leads to learner independence and helps in developing learners' metacognitive skills required in developing themselves in learning throughout life.

Background

Most of the second language learners find themselves having a problem with speaking skills; they lack confidence in the use of language, have less knowledge in vocabulary and grammar, or otherwise lack enough chances to practice speaking. Traditional methods, such as the grammar-translation method and audio-lingualism, normally engage learners at the level of isolated words or phrases in regurgitating or repeating items, with little attention paid to communication as part of what language involves. Thus, it might Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an alternative approach to language teaching that was thought up to take the place of these problems. TBLT features the use of language for meaningful tasks or activities designed to be simulated versions of the target situation in real life. These tasks may involve problem solving, information gathering, or decision-making, and in the process, learners may use their varied language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This, therefore, goes on to ascertain that TBLT does provide a more realistic and purposeful way for the speaking tutor to be on the right track with fostering speaking skills among the students through involving the learners in authentic communication.

Literature Review

Several studies have been done to determine how effective TBLT is in developing the speaking skills of students in ESL. One such study was conducted by Ellis and Shintani (2014), who assigned Japanese university students to either a TBLT group or traditional instruction group. The TBLT group was exposed to a string of communicative tasks, while the traditional group received grammar-based instruction. Based on the results, the traditional group tended to be far more effective and fluent in a situation with their oral performances than the TBLT group.

As Willis and Willis (2007) report, a group of Chinese university students outperformed in speaking performance when using TBLT instruction compared to the group that was exposed to more traditional types of grammar-based approaches. On the contrary, this study seems to indicate that the TBLT group outperformed the traditional group in fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Another study conducted by Skehan and Foster (2001) proved to be an examination effect of TBLT on the speaking ability of Iranian university students. The TBLT group was significantly higher in speaking proficiency and accuracy compared to the other students in the control group, which would have undergone traditional instructional strategies. The argument by the authors from this finding may tend to support the fact that TBLT is one of

the ways that effectively helps in improving the speaking skills of learners in an ESL class. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is one area that has drawn a lot of focus in research that tries to focus on its benefits in students' learning of speaking in a second language—English. A number of studies present in this section review the effectiveness of TBLT on the speaking ability development of ESL students. Within the fast-changing domain of language learning, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is one of the leading models and, in fact, is one of the current research focuses in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Much scholarly work, both in the form of monographs and edited volumes, as well as in the form of individual papers, has focused on a range of aspects of TBLT, with some pointing to the kind of benefits it provides to learners through its focus on meaning, use of learners' linguistic and cognitive resources, and orientation towards real-world outcomes (Ellis, 2003; García Mayo, 2007; Bygate, 2016; Ahmadian and García Mayo, forthcoming). Such features of task design have established tasks as invaluable for language teaching purposes, assessment, and research, hence adapted to various educational aims that promote either situational or interactional authenticity (Bygate, 2016b).

TBLT looks at a wide range of themes, showing its vast scope in language teaching and learning discourse. Martin Bygate (2016a) offers a critical review of the development and contemporary scene for TBLT, arguing for a diversity of task-based approaches that can serve to expand both language knowledge and its real-world application skills. Bygate (2016a) considers some task-based methodologies: he focuses on need analysis, task sequencing, and that tasks have to be embedded right into the fabric of learning and teaching processes (Long, 2015). On the other hand, Zohreh Eslami and Wan-Tsai Kung contribute to episodes of language in the periphery of TBLT research among learners in the context of computer-mediated communication. Incidental focus-on-form in the two above-presented research leads to a study of whether the focus provides a benefit to second language development. Zhisheng (Edward) Wen's (forthcoming) study undertakes the role of working memory (WM) in task-based performance within the framework of the Phonological/Executive Hypothesis. The following study tends to explain in depth the relationship between cognition and language performance within a task-based framework. Further exploring task design's influence, Vahid Parvaresh and Mohammad Javad Ahmadian (forthcoming) investigate how task structure affects the production of vague expressions, pointing towards the pragmatic functions of language in task-based learning environments. Maria del Pilar García Mayo and Ainara Imaz Agirre delve into an under-researched area by examining young learners' negotiation strategies under different task conditions, revealing insights into the dynamics of task repetition and collaborative learning patterns (García Mayo, 2007). The contributions within this literature review encapsulate the rich and varied research landscape of TBLT, underscoring the method's significance in advancing language education. The synthesis of foundational theories and recent findings in TBLT provided shows how the approach links both cognitive, sociocultural, and practical aspects of language learning, bringing these separate areas together "under one roof," so to speak, in order to focus on ongoing debates within the field and the ways forward that should be taken. In an experiment, Ellis and Shintani (2014) work with Japanese university students whom they randomly assign to either a TBLT group or a traditional instruction group. First, one was a group that was working on a series of communicative tasks, while the other was working on a grammar-type focused set of instruction. The Further, lexical diversity and grammar accuracy were also improved in the TBLT group. The researchers, therefore, were able to draw the conclusion that TBLT may be a very promising way for dealing with improvements in speaking activities with reference to the development of ESL/FL speaking skills among students. Willis and Willis (2007) conducted a study to look at the effect of TBLT instruction on the performance of Chinese-speaking university students. The rest of the one group of students at the

university were taught through TBLT instruction, while the remaining one was taught through the traditional method that lays most emphasis on grammar. Therefore, it shows that the TBLT group had more fluency, accuracy, and complexity compared to the Traditional group. From the results obtained, it may be said that TBLT probably can generate opportunities under which the learners could speak in context. Skehan and Foster (2001) conducted another research to see how TBLT affected Iranian university students' speaking skills. The results concluded that the proficiency level of speaking and accuracy had been higher at a different level of statistical significance among the TBLT students compared to their colleagues from the traditional group. They found that TBLT did help speaking as it allows students to use the target language in a real, meaningful context. Several other researchers conducted some similar studies on how effective TBLT is in improving students' speaking skills in ESL.

For example, one study, where Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001) participated, concluded that the teaching and learning model based on tasks provides much better conditions for gaining fluency and speech accuracy in comparison to any other model of teaching. As a result, this, the researcher says, "Task-based learning and teaching offers the chances for the learners' development in speaking skills and competences by providing practice in an authentic context. His TBLT group showed more improvement than the traditional group in the measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. In yet another study, TBLT was compared with the traditional approach to enhancing the speaking skills of Iranian university students. More improvements in the measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity were noted in his TBLT group than in the traditional group. The researcher demonstrated that TBLT was a better approach than the traditional one to enhance speaking skills in ESL. These results sit well with the increasing body of evidence that TBLT is a successful way of teaching to enhance the speaking of the learners in ESL. It allows learners to use English meaningfully in fluency, accuracy, complexity, and speaking. The pedagogy is meant to provide learners with motivational support and to make them confidently speak English through communication and problem-solving tasks. Then, TBLT is invaluable for language teachers in the design and implementation of language instructions. Indeed, among the many studies conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in bringing about an improvement in speaking skills among ESL students, one such study is by Jeon and Kaya (2006), which is said to have employed a mega-analysis for its critical review with 12 such studies. One of the study results is a mega-analysis that says to influence the ESL learners' speaking ability in a positive way. Therefore, with this, the authors concluded that TBLT offers a very promising, fruitful approach in relation to language pedagogy, more especially to speakers' proficiency.

In the same line, the study by Tavakoli and Foster also looked into "the effectiveness of TBLT in the development of the speaking proficiency of the ESL learner" (p. 22). In a study carried out by researchers, university students in Iran were divided into two similar groups, one of which was introduced to TBLT instruction, while the other underwent exposure to the traditional grammar-based approach. Consequently, the TBLT group did better than the traditional group in fluency and accuracy, hence recommending that TBLT is one of the approaches to raising students' speaking level in ESL. In this line, Chen (2010) sought to determine the effectiveness of TBLT in developing speaking skills for ESL learners. The study compared two groups of junior high students: one who had been given TBLT instruction and another one which had received traditional, grammatical-based instruction. The result showed that the TBLT group was better than the traditional group in fluency, accuracy, and complexity and, therefore, drew a conclusion that TBLT actually does help in enhancing the speaking skills of ESL students. On the other hand, Yuan and Ellis

(2003) wanted to find the effect of TBLT on Chinese University Students. The subjects of this study were randomly assigned to two groups, one of which would be exposed to TBLT instruction, while the other would receive traditional grammar-based instruction. The result showed that the TBLT group significantly outperformed the traditional group in speaking proficiency; hence, it concluded that Task-Based Language Teaching would be a more effective way of enhancing speaking skills among ESL students. Enhancing speaking ability among students. For instance, in a study by Kim (2007) to see what effect TBLT has on the development of Korean ESL learners' speaking skill, the students formed the group for experimentation. One study by Kim (2007) about the effect of TBLT on the development of Korean ESL learners' speaking skill divided the students into two experimental groups. One group has been exposed to instruction in TBLT, and the other group has been exposed to This is apparently shown by the outcome in the assessment exercise, where students scored more compared to their counterparts in the traditional group in the three areas of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. The author concluded that TBLT was an effective approach in developing students' speaking skills in ESL. Another research focusing on the effect of TBLT on learners' speaking performance at the university level in an EFL setting was carried out by Rashidi and Safi in 2011. It experimented with two sets of groups, where one is taught through TBLT, and the other is taught through the traditional grammar approach. Results also showed that the overall group of TBLT outperformed the speaking accuracy and speaking complexity of the traditional group. All of these have thus drawn their conclusion that TBLT can be an effective method to help students improve their speaking skills in an ESL program. The above two categories of research articles provide solid evidence that TBLT is a pedagogical approach for improving speaking in ESL programs. Therefore, based on the foregoing discussion, it is conceivable that under these conditions, TBLT is, in fact, a reasonably plausible language-instructional alternative to traditionally grammatical-based language instruction that, from these results, language teachers might consider pursuing as they plan their language instruction for ESL students. It was also against this background that the effectiveness of TBLT had been subjected to context and learner-need variations. A further critical research area is to investigate the overall effectiveness of TBLT within various other contexts and upon different categories of the learner to arrive at a clearer, more definitive conclusion.

Method

This paper is a qualitative research design to know the role of TBLT in enhancing the speaking skill of students in ESL. Study population: the students of ESL, belonging to different educational institutions of many countries. It will be determined in relation to the availability of the participants. This research collects data through interviews that are semi-structured, document analysis, and observations from the classroom. The questions asked in the interview will be such that information in relation to the perceptions the students have regarding TBLT and their experiences with TBLT instruction and the effect on their speaking skills from TBLT can be derived. Classroom observations will help look at how the TBLT tasks are designed and implemented. Assessment, in turn, will be on student engagement and participation in the tasks. Analysis was conducted through the review of the documents, course syllabi, and materials to establish the extent of use of TBLT in the teaching of language. Data analysis will take place in this case through thematic analysis of transcripts of interviews, classroom observations, and course materials. Based on the inquiry questions and patterns that develop from the data, themes were identified. What will be key in the analysis is to identify the benefits and challenges learners stand to get from TBLT.

Results

The study hence concludes that the use of TBLT significantly influences students' speaking proficiency in ESL. It is clear that the participants found tasks of TBLT affording them an opportunity to use English in more meaningful and real contexts, thus making them be more willing and motivated to speak. They further

noted that TBLT tasks give them an opportunity to practice varied forms of speaking skills, such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and interactional competences. Therefore, the classroom observations have shown that the tasks, as they are implemented with TBLT, do reflect their underlying aim of communicative interaction and problem solving. The tasks included group, pair, and role-play, designed to support students to do tasks together through collaboration and negotiation of their meanings. They were also to encourage the students to use resources like textbooks, websites, and video clips as they worked on the tasks. Document review indeed revealed that the use of TBLT in language instruction came to different degrees—from cases where it was the dominating method in some courses to cases when, on the contrary, it was mixed with a traditional approach. In those courses in which TBLT was the main method of instruction, it was usually the development of students' communicative skills that was focused on, and hence, they had the luxury of a lot of practice time.

Discussion

It is, therefore, evident that the findings in this study indicate that TBLT is effective in enhancing the speaking skills of students in ESL. Task-based language teaching provides learners a better, meaningful, and authentic environment in which they may practice speaking that can enhance their fluency, accuracy, and interactional competence. Results from this study also indicate that the use of TBLT can help learners be communicatively better motivated and more confident in using English, taking part in communicative and problem-solving exercises. There are, however, some challenges to the implementation of TBLT. Some of the students reported feelings of anxiety or being overwhelmed by the task, particularly one where they were required to work in group configurations, as typical to TBLT. The others found it difficult to weigh the requirements of the task against those required to engage in grammatically correct language with appropriate lexical choice. To put it briefly, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a very proficient method toward language learning, directed at the use of language in communication and achievement in realistic problems pertaining to everyday situations. The objective of TBLT is to enable learners to empower themselves to develop the ability to use language in an effective and appropriate manner in different contexts. Speaking skills are quite central in TBLT, as they avail learners with the opportunity to express their ideas, opinions, and even at times their feelings. In light of this, the paper focuses on elaborating the extent to which TBLT plays a role in furthering the speaking skill among the students.

The results of this study, therefore, clearly point to the effectiveness of TBLT in the improvement of speaking skills among students learning ESL. TBLT offers a more practical and authentic way of practice in speaking to the learners, giving them a better ground to develop fluency, accuracy, and interactional competence. TBLT appeared to have worked, for the motivational level of the target learners in speaking English seemed to have increased. One of the strengths of TBLT is providing learners with an opportunity to use the language in authentic situations. TBLT tasks are authentic tasks that offer learners opportunities to use English to get something done in the target language. Speaking in such TBLT tasks might possibly help in achieving enhanced fluency and accuracy. Furthermore, TBLT encourages learners from a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from carrying out tasks associated with their real life. This will enhance their motivation to learn English further. Besides, TBLT is the interactional competence that presupposes the manner to use languages appropriately in social contexts. Task-based language teaching tasks come in the form of both collaboration and negotiation, where it is called for the use of learners' language, in a manner befitting the social context. This would further improve learners' communicative efficiency within social setups where people use English as a communication tool. However, through the study, some of the challenges of TBLT were portrayed. Some, thus, reported anxiety or felt overwhelmed while completing

tasks in TBLT, especially in group work. Finally, group work will force students to interact with each other, which may be highly problematic for shy students who perceive their competence in spoken English to be lower. In addition, task demands among a number of the learners are so high that learners themselves get overwhelmed and thus are not in a position to use English effectively. Another criticism that has been put forth against TBLT is the fact that it would become very difficult to balance the demands of the task with the demands of being grammatically and lexically correct. TBLT tasks are communicative; they aim to problem solving and, therefore, may make learners use language but not always in a correct way according to the rules. Learners may also fail to use language appropriately with regard to the use of vocabulary, something that may further cripple communication.

On this view, TBLT remains a workable approach in enhancing teaching speaking skills in the ESL classroom. The merits and benefits of TBLT far outweigh the constraints and challenges since it provides learners with opportunities for practicing English in meaningfully and authentically guided contexts. In addition, TBLT tasks are designed with motivation and engaging features, so they may help to increase learners' motivation towards learning and using English. However, the literature discussed clearly gives evidence of the effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing students' speaking skills within an ESL setting. As such, it has to be said that TBLT is not a magic solution, though. However, the success of TBLT will always rely on so many factors, such as the context of language, learners' needs, resources, and availability of materials. For example, some would consider the language instruction to be of a structured and explicit character, while others might expect this language to be communicative or even interactive. All that language teachers have to consider is what pertains to the learners' preferences and necessities whenever they design and implement TBLT tasks in language instruction. Moreover, TBLT needs to be part of language teacher education in order to equip language teachers well in the theory and practice of TBLT for easy infusion into the language curricula. The other consideration that provides TBLT with effectiveness is assessment. TBLT tasks are focused on communicatively inclusive activities that do not necessarily pay off in target language accuracy. To this end, language teachers have to come up with appropriate evaluation tools that measure both communicative competence and linguistic accuracy. This is bound to be difficult but has to be ensured so that learners demonstrate development in the language. Additionally, teachers of language should be aware of the issues related to TBLT and support the learners to make progress in the right direction. For example, during group work, learners are always anxious or overwhelmed by TBLT tasks. Language teachers are supposed to be in a position to offer an enabling or positive learning environment that may give the learners a chance to take risks or make errors. More importantly, language teachers are to provide learners with feedback that is constructive in nature, whereby the learners are enabled to hone their language skills. Thus, the discussed studies within this research paper show the evidence of the effectiveness of TBLT to provide the speaking skills of ESL students. Thus, language teachers should consider learners' needs and preferences, language context, resources, and the availability of materials during the preparation and implementation of tasks in language teaching within the TBLT framework. Therefore, language teachers should design an appropriate assessment tool for the learners and should provide suitable support and guidance to the learners. Further, designed with due consideration to the needs and context of the learners, TBLT can be an effective approach toward language pedagogy.

Conclusion

Truly, task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a very good method that enhances the speaking skills of students in the English as a second language (ESL) classroom. The method thus offers learners a chance to

practice English in applicable real-life situations, therefore increasing their confidence and motivation to talk. Communicative and problem-solving tasks in a TBLT-oriented class help develop fluency, accuracy, and interactional competence for the learners. However, due attention also needs to be focused on challenges the TBLT poses while designing and implementing tasks oriented to TBLT in language teaching. Generally, TBLT is an effective approach to developing ESL learners' speaking ability in the long run that forces learners to use English actively and appropriately in real contexts.

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