



## The Impact of Task-Based Instruction on Tabuk University EFL Students' Speaking Skills

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to examine the impact of Task-Based Instruction (TBI) on Tabuk University EFL students' speaking skills and usage of tasks. The experimental design was applied to investigate the impact of TBI on students' speaking skills and uses of the tasks. Two classes were purposely selected for the study based on their mean score registered at first-semester English subject result and assigned as control and experimental groups. Both groups were given speaking pre-tests at the beginning of the study. The experimental group was taught through TBI for four weeks while the control group studied the same unit in a conventional way in which TBI was not implemented. After four weeks of implementing the program for two periods of 50 minutes a week, students were given the speaking test as a post-test similar to the pre-test to assess the effect of the program on participants' speaking skills before and after the implementation. In addition, students responded to a questionnaire after the post test. Paired T-test was employed to investigate if the results of the tests were statistically significant or not. The results of the tests ( $t=7.605$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) showed that the experimental group had better score gains over the control group as a result of applying Task-Based Instruction on their speaking skills. Furthermore, the data collected from the questionnaire proved that students' usage of tasks was also encouraging to say that tasks were interesting for students. The results of the current study showed that TBI had a positive impact on students' speaking skills and uses of tasks.

### 1. Introduction

English language has an essential role in various aspects throughout the world. English as a language of instruction in teaching and learning at general and language teaching in specific is among these important roles. Macaro (2018) presents his idea on English teaching and learning as at its most productive, energizing, purposeful and imaginatively vital experience for all involved, expanding students' competence, confidence, and creativity as well as building positive attitudes toward learning. Therefore, Schoepp (2018) claims that in order to create a positive image for students, there is a need to teach them in a better language learning method.

By using English as a method of instruction, we are supposed to know how to use language. Lycan (2018)

indicates that there is a need to know the words that convey our meanings and how to put these words together to make sense. In this regard, TBI enables learners to engage in situations similar to those found in the real world. To learn English better, Namaziandost, et.al (2019) indicates that employing task-based instruction in language teaching is a successful method since it deals with how languages are learned. For the better use of English language as a medium of instruction, Task-Based Instruction plays an important role. The reason is that task-based language education starts from the basic idea that students learn a language by performing tasks (Skehan, 2018; Lee, 2016; and Ellis, 2017). They define the ‘task’ as an activity in which people engage to attain an objective, which involves a meaningful use of language.

Similarly, the need for effective teaching and learning leads to the TBI method, which creates a better opportunity for learners. Hence, TBI helps language learners to attain the minimum learning goals. Bygate (2016) claims that TBI has various roles like an educationally sound, practical and dynamic strategy for delivering proper education.

Moreover, TBI provides students with the opportunity to focus on classroom activities or tasks while the language is used by students as an instrument to complete these tasks (Plonsky and YouJin, 2016). Furthermore, a task is an activity in which students use language to reach a specific goal. In other words, playing a game, solving a problem or sharing information or experiences, can all be considered as relevant and authentic tasks as part of TBI.

When it comes to speaking skills, TBI has its own effect on students’ language skills (Norris, 2016). In addition, Leong and Seyedeh (2017) discuss that the TBI approach has a positive influence on students’ language competence, and it helps them improve their speaking skills.

## **2. Literature Review**

Task-based instruction (TBI) is considered to be a new teaching method in which functional communicative language use is strived for (Ellis, 2017). Moreover, TBI is regarded to be an active approach that cultivates a learning environment in which learners feel free to select the target language forms to accomplish the defined communicative goals (Willis, 2013). In the previous studies, two programs applying task-based instruction within a communicative framework for language teaching were implemented. The first was the Malaysian Communicational Syllabus in 1975. The second was the Bangalore Project (Renau and Luisa, 2017). Despite the short period of these instructional programs, they received a huge attention in the language teaching field to create similar programs (Renau and Luisa, 2017).

The term ‘task’ is one of the key concepts in task-based learning and teaching. It is defined in different ways in the literature and instructional tasks are used for a variety of purposes. In everyday usage, tasks are seen as the commonplace goal-directed activities of everyday life such as cooking dinner and writing a letter (Ellis, 2017). Tasks became more formalized as part of various kinds of vocational training in the 1950’s and became popular in schools in the 1970s (Albino, 2017). Major programmatic proposals for Task-Based education in language teaching appeared in the 1980’s and 1990’s (Ellis, 2017). Nowadays, tasks are seen as important research tools as well as the foundations for language instructional methods (Bygate, 2016). In second language education, a task is defined as an activity that focuses on meaning in which the learners engage using the target language to achieve a specific goal (Bygate, 2016). Tasks should be used to help learners strive to complete the activity communicatively (Lee, 2016). In task-Based Instruction, students are provided with a “purpose” to encourage them to practice the target language (Lycan, 2018).

Furthermore, to promote the communicative and meaning-focused nature of tasks, Ellis (2017) suggests that tasks be designed in a way to make them resemble those found in the real world. This makes them more meaningful

and of authentic focus. According to Ellis (2017), authentic tasks are those whose interactional patterns simulate those in real life situations. Pedagogic tasks resemble authentic tasks. However, they do not necessarily aim at having interactional patterns that occur in the real world. These real world and pedagogic tasks are called goal-oriented but they are “form-unfocused” tasks that increase comprehension and language production for communicative purposes.

Previous studies on tasks usage show particular application of tasks in the development of oral skills (Bygate, 2016; Lee, 2016, Arefeh and Gilakjani, 2016). Bygate (2016) proposes that tasks should be evaluated in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity of language. For Bygate (2016), skills can best be obtained in a balance of these three areas. Arefeh and Gilakjani (2016) suggest that speaking tasks are important to use the target language communicatively.

When designing tasks for speaking classes, fluency should be achieved, and accuracy can be developed through these instructional tasks (Ellis, 2018). It is very important to consider the difficulty level of the tasks when designing the speaking tasks. The complexity is necessary to diversify the level of language used so that students practice challenging communication (Skehan, 2016). According to Skehan, the appropriate level of task complexity may enable learners to equally focus on fluency, accuracy and complexity.

One of the most challenging tasks that face language teachers is how to capture the interest of their learners' and engage them in classroom activities. About this, Poonpon (2017) highlights that the problem is generally caused by students' lack of interest in lessons. Campo and Carolina (2016) have done their research on the relationship between task-based instruction and the improvement of students' communicative competence. They found that TBI has a positive impact on learners' communicative skills. Though many researchers have been conducted studies on TBI, TBI, and motivation in Saudi Arabia, it does not mean that they comprehensively studied the area. Thus, the current researcher would like to explore the effect of TBI on students' speaking skills, motivation, and usage of tasks in the case of Tabuk University Preparatory year EFL students.

### **3. Statement of the Problem**

Many studies have been conducted on the impact of TBI in EFL contexts in general and speaking skills in specific (Campo and Carolina, 2016; Poonpon, 2017; Elmahdi, 2016). Campo and Carolina (2016) note that students who practice TBI in their EFL classroom situations become motivated and engage well in the classroom speaking activities. Carrero and Nubia (2016) indicate that using TBI in English language classrooms can positively influence the spoken interaction and motivation in English Language Learners.

In a Saudi context, we can find different studies in relation to speaking skills at large and task-based instruction as well as motivation in specific. Alshammari, et, al (2017) discussed the effect of task-based instruction on developing Speaking Skills of EFL Learners. His findings indicated that students who experienced task-based Instruction were better in speaking than those who did not.

However, those mentioned above, foreign and local, researchers did not tackle the impact of learners' use of task on students' speaking skills in the University of Tabuk context. Therefore, the researcher conducts the current research on The Impact of Task-Based Instruction on the Preparatory Year Program EFL Students' Speaking Skills at the University of Tabuk.

### **4. Research Questions:**

The researcher formulated the following research questions:

- i.** Does TBI have an impact on students' speaking skills?
- ii.** To what extent are students satisfied with tasks?

## 5. Methodology

### 5.5. Participants

The experimental design was used to answer the research questions and meet the objectives of the study. In this research, students were not selected randomly. There were 800 students in the preparatory year program at faculty of Business Administration at the University of Tabuk. Students were distributed into 16 groups. Each group had from 40-55 students. Two groups (A & B) of them were purposefully chosen based on their mean score in the first-semester English subject results. Of the two groups, group 'B' was chose purposely based on students' positive feeling to the program than section 'A'. Each group had 42 students and score an average point among 16 groups.

### 5.6. Instruments

To answer research questions and objectives, test and questionnaire were employed in the study. After gathering all the necessary information, the collected data from speaking tests were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. A t-test was used to test the difference in the adjusted mean scores between the two groups to find out if there were any statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups.

Questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively using frequency and percentage to know the level of students' usage of tasks.

### 5.7. Data Collection & Analysis

The pre-test (which was given to identify the targeted groups' general speaking skill) and the post-test (administered to measure the development of students' speaking skill after implementing TBI) were analyzed quantitatively through T-test to measure the mean difference between the two tests. Then, the data gathered through questionnaire were calculated through percentage and frequency to know the level of the learners' motivation and usage of tasks in the experimental group.

#### 5.7.1. Analysis and Findings of Data Collected Using Speaking Test

An important objective of current study was to explore the impact of TBI on students' speaking skills. Thus, T-test was used and the results were as the following.

#### 5.7.2. Statistical Analysis of Control Group Pre-Post Tests

Table 1 Mean scores of speaking proficiency pre-post tests for the control group.

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)
Pre-test	3.6548	42	1.32742	-2.154	41	.037
Post-test	37619	42	1.35807			

Paired sample T- test is employed to investigate if there was any statistically significant difference in means between the pre-test and post-test of the control group. The statistical results in Table 1 show that the mean scores of speaking pre-test and post-test of the control group are almost similar. As illustrated in the above table, the control group has M=3.6548 in speaking pre-tests and M= 3.7619 speaking post-test. The results show that there is no statically significant difference between the groups ( $t = -2.154$ ,  $df=41$ ,  $p>0.05$ ).

### 5.7.3. Statistical Analysis of Experimental Group Pre-Post Tests

Table 2 Mean scores of speaking proficiency pre-post tests for the experimental group

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	3.7143	42	1.23042	-16.420	41	.000
Post-test	5.7024	42	1.01248			

Paired sample T- test was also employed to find out if there was any statistically significant difference in means between the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group. The illustrated results in Table 2 show that there is a statistically significant mean difference between the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group ( $t=-16.42$ ,  $df=41$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The mean score of the experimental group increases from ( $M=3.7143$ ,  $S.D=1.23042$ ) in the pre-test to ( $M=5.7024$ ,  $S.D=1.01248$ ) in the post-test.

### 5.7.4. Statistical Analyses of Pre-Post Tests of the Experimental and Control Groups

Table 3 Mean scores of speaking proficiency pre-test and post-test for the control and experimental groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Df	Sig
Pre-test	Experimental	42	3.7143	1.23042	.212	82	.833
	Control	42	3.6548	1.32742			
Post-test	Experimental	42	5.7024	1.01248	7.605	82	.000
	Control	42	3.7619	1.35807			

Paired t-test was employed to know whether there would be any statistically significant mean difference between the experimental and control groups of pre-test and post-test results. The results illustrated above show that there is no significant mean difference between the two groups pre-test ( $t= .212$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). But, the results in post-test indicate that there is a statistically significant mean difference between the experimental and control groups ( $t= 7.605$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In addition, as illustrated in table 3, there is almost no significance difference in the mean score between the two groups in their speaking pre-test ( $M=3.7143$  experimental and  $M=3.6548$  control group). Thus, there is a greater mean difference among the two groups in their post-test ( $M=5.7024$  experimental and  $M=3.7619$  control group).

### 5.7.5. Analysis and Findings of Data on Students Usage of Task

One of the major objectives of the study was to evaluate the impact of TBI on students' reaction on the usage of the tasks in the experimental group. In order to find out whether Task-Based Instruction was manifested in the classes; the questionnaire was designed in accordance with the usage of tasks on TBI. The results and analysis of students' questionnaire are presented as follows:

Table: 4. Frequency and Percentage Related to Task Usage (N=42)

R. No	Statement	Response											
		Strongly Agree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree		Total	
		Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%
1	After listening to traditional songs, discussing them was interesting	-	-	4	9.1	2	4.8	17	40.5	19	45.2	42	100

2	While reading the newspaper, preparing yourself for the questions was enjoyable	1	2. 4	3	7. 1	2	4. 8	16	38. 1	20	47. 6	42	10 0
3	In general, group work was fun	-	-	2	4. 8	3	7. 1	21	50	16	38. 1	42	10 0
4	Asking for clarification while the students are drawing a picture was interesting	1	2. 4	1	2. 4	3	7. 1	15	35. 7	22	52. 4	42	10 0
5	Presenting the main idea of discussions was interesting	-	-	1	2. 4	5	11 .9	17	40. 5	19	45. 2	42	10 0
6	All discussions and presentations provided the opportunity of speaking with peers	1	2. 4	2	4. 8	7	16 .8	15	35. 7	17	40. 5	42	10 0
7	Debating in groups with peers after discussions was enjoyable	-	-	1	2. 4	8	19	16	38. 1	17	40. 5	42	10 0
8	Asking questions and getting answers from peers was interesting	1	2. 4	-	-	2	4. 8	14	33. 3	25	59. 5	42	10 0
9	Expressing opinion after discussions was interesting	-	-	2	4. 8	2	4. 8	17	40. 5	21	50	42	10 0
10	Interviewing peers was interesting	-	-	1	2. 4	2	4. 8	18	42. 8	21	50	42	10 0
11	Practicing pronunciations was interesting	1	2. 4	2	4. 8	-	-	16	38. 1	23	54. 7	42	10 0

As illustrated in table 4, the results of frequency and percentage showed that students enjoyed tasks and found them interesting. Consequently, students were satisfied with tasks ranging from 76.2% on item six to 92.8% on items ten and eleven.

On the whole, results indicate that students were interested and enjoyed discussions after listening to traditional songs, preparing themselves for questions, working in groups, asking for clarification while drawing pictures, presenting the main idea of discussions, debating with peers after discussions, asking questions and getting answers from peers, expressing opinions after discussions and interviewing.

## 6. Study Summary

According to the data obtained from the Test and questionnaire, the researcher attained the following findings.

- The result of the test showed that students in the experimental group scored higher than students in the control group. Add to that, there was a statistically significant difference before (post-test) and after the implementation of TBI in students' speaking skills.
- The research found that students were very satisfied with tasks while implementing the Task-Based Instruction.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the study results, the current study provides a proof regarding the positive impact of Task-Based Instruction to develop students' speaking skills. Because of the implementation of TBI in this EFL context, students were able to communicate and speak inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, the study also gives evidence

that TBI can create a positive as well motivating environment for students to use and practice the language communicatively. In other words, tasks give students the opportunity and motivate them to speak and practice the target language. To sum up, results of the present study showed that the applying the Task-Based Instruction helped students enjoy interacting with their peers as well as their.

## 8. Recommendations

According to the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following.

- The concept of ‘tasks’ should become an essential part in syllabus design and language teaching because it leads to improving students’ speaking skills.
- Teachers should pay more attention to level of difficulty and focus more on tasks that appeal to students.
- While teaching, language instructors should focus on group discussions more than individual activities.
- Teachers should create a friendly environment for their students. This encourages students to ask questions and interact with their teachers comfortably.
- Teachers should familiarize themselves more with the TBI.
- The educational administrations should provide teachers with more professional development training courses on Task-Based Instruction.
- Syllabus designers should pay more attention on TBI while preparing English Language Teaching (ELT) materials.
- Finally, further studies should be conducted to investigate the impact of TBI on speaking and other skills.

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