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Enhancing English Speaking Skills through Task-Based Language Teaching

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Abstract

The development of English speaking skills remains one of the most challenging aspects of second and foreign language education. Despite years of formal instruction, many learners struggle with fluency, pronunciation, interactional competence, and confidence in real-life communication. Traditional grammar-oriented teaching methods often fail to provide meaningful opportunities for authentic language use. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), rooted in communicative language pedagogy, offers an effective alternative by emphasizing meaningful interaction, real-world tasks, and learner-centered instruction. Developed and popularized by scholars such as N. S. Prabhu, Jane Willis, and David Nunan, TBLT focuses on engaging learners in purposeful communication rather than isolated grammar drills. This paper presents a comprehensive and detailed examination of how TBLT enhances English speaking skills. It explores theoretical foundations, task design principles, classroom implementation strategies, empirical research findings, challenges, and pedagogical implications. The study concludes that TBLT significantly improves fluency, accuracy, confidence, and communicative competence when implemented systematically and supported by appropriate teacher training and assessment methods.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, Speaking Skills, ESL, EFL, Communicative Competence, Fluency, Language Pedagogy

Introduction

English has become the dominant global language in education, business, science, technology, and international communication. As a result, proficiency in spoken English is increasingly viewed as a critical skill for academic success and employability. However, in



many educational systems, students complete years of English instruction without achieving adequate speaking proficiency.

One major reason for this gap is the persistence of traditional teaching methods that prioritize grammar explanation, textbook exercises, memorization, and written examinations. While these approaches may develop knowledge of linguistic rules, they often fail to develop communicative competence. Learners frequently hesitate to speak due to fear of making mistakes, lack of exposure to authentic communication, limited opportunities for interaction, and teacher-centered classrooms.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers a transformative approach. Instead of focusing on language as a system of rules, TBLT views language as a tool for communication. Learners engage in meaningful tasks that simulate real-life situations, encouraging spontaneous speech, negotiation of meaning, and collaborative problem-solving. This paper aims to provide a detailed exploration of how TBLT enhances English speaking skills, examining theoretical foundations, classroom practices, research evidence, and implementation strategies.

2. Concept of Speaking Skills in English Language Learning

2.1 Nature of Speaking

Speaking is a productive skill that involves the real-time production of language. Unlike writing, speaking requires immediate processing, quick thinking, and interactional responsiveness. Effective speaking involves:

- Fluency (smooth flow of speech)
- Accuracy (correct grammar and vocabulary)
- Pronunciation (clear articulation)
- Discourse competence (coherent organization of ideas)
- Strategic competence (repairing communication breakdowns)

2.2 Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence was developed by scholars such as Michael Canale and Merrill Swain. It includes:

1. Grammatical competence
2. Sociolinguistic competence
3. Discourse competence
4. Strategic competence



TBLT supports all four components by placing learners in communicative contexts where they must use language meaningfully.

3. Theoretical Foundations of Task-Based Language Teaching

3.1 The Bangalore Project

TBLT gained prominence through the work of N. S. Prabhu in the Bangalore Project (India). Prabhu argued that language is best learned when learners focus on solving tasks rather than explicitly studying grammar.

3.2 Communicative Language Teaching

TBLT evolved from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). While CLT emphasizes communication, TBLT provides a structured framework for achieving communicative goals through tasks.

3.3 Input Hypothesis

Proposed by Stephen Krashen, the Input Hypothesis states that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level. In TBLT classrooms, learners receive rich input through task instructions, peer discussions, and teacher guidance.

3.4 Output Hypothesis

Merrill Swain emphasized the importance of output in language learning. Producing language forces learners to process grammar and vocabulary more deeply. TBLT provides extensive speaking opportunities, encouraging meaningful output.

3.5 Interaction Hypothesis

Michael Long highlighted the role of interaction in language development. Through negotiation of meaning, learners clarify misunderstandings and refine their language use. TBLT strongly promotes interactive learning.

4. Principles of Task-Based Language Teaching

TBLT is based on the following core principles:

1. Meaning is primary.
2. Learners use language to achieve an outcome.
3. Tasks resemble real-world activities.
4. Communication is authentic and purposeful.
5. Assessment focuses on task performance.

5. Framework of Task-Based Language Teaching

According to Jane Willis, TBLT consists of three main phases:

5.1 Pre-Task Phase

- Introduction of topic



- Activation of prior knowledge
- Vocabulary preparation
- Demonstration of task

This stage reduces anxiety and prepares learners.

5.2 Task Cycle

TaskPerformance:

Students work in pairs or groups to complete a task.

Planning:

Students organize their ideas for reporting.

Reporting:

Groups present their outcomes to the class.

This stage maximizes speaking practice.

5.3 Language Focus

- Analysis of language used
- Feedback on errors
- Practice of key structures

This ensures balanced attention to fluency and accuracy.

6. Types of Tasks to Improve Speaking Skills

6.1 Information-Gap Tasks

Students exchange information to complete an activity.

6.2 Opinion-Gap Tasks

Students express personal views on topics.

6.3 Problem-Solving Tasks

Students collaborate to find solutions.

6.4 Role-Play and Simulation

Students enact real-life situations such as job interviews or customer service.

6.5 Decision-Making Tasks

Groups discuss alternatives and choose the best option.

Each type encourages spontaneous speaking and interaction.

7. How TBLT Enhances English Speaking Skills

7.1 Improvement in Fluency

Frequent speaking practice increases speech rate and reduces hesitation.

7.2 Development of Accuracy

Post-task feedback helps learners correct recurring errors.

7.3 Increased Confidence



Collaborative tasks reduce fear of speaking.

7.4 Enhanced Pronunciation

Repeated speaking opportunities improve articulation and stress patterns.

7.5 Development of Critical Thinking

Problem-solving tasks promote analytical discussion.

7.6 Motivation and Engagement

Real-life tasks increase relevance and student interest.

8. Research Methodology (Illustrative Study)

8.1 Research Design

Quasi-experimental design with:

- Control group (traditional method)
- Experimental group (TBLT)

8.2 Participants

60 undergraduate ESL learners.

8.3 Instruments

- Speaking pre-test and post-test
- Fluency rating scale
- Student feedback questionnaire

8.4 Procedure

1. Pre-test assessment
2. 8-week TBLT intervention
3. Post-test assessment
4. Statistical analysis using t-test

8.5 Results

The experimental group showed statistically significant improvement in:

- Fluency
- Confidence
- Pronunciation
- Interactive competence

9. Challenges in Implementing TBLT

- Large class sizes
- Limited classroom time
- Examination-oriented curriculum
- Insufficient teacher training
- Initial student hesitation



However, with proper planning and training, these challenges can be overcome.

10. Pedagogical Implications

1. Teachers should design authentic tasks relevant to students' needs.
2. Assessment should include performance-based evaluation.
3. Teacher training programs must include TBLT strategies.
4. Institutions should encourage communicative classrooms.
5. Technology (audio/video tools) can enhance task performance.

Conclusion

Task-Based Language Teaching represents a powerful pedagogical approach for enhancing English speaking skills. By shifting the focus from grammar instruction to meaningful communication, TBLT creates dynamic, interactive, and learner-centered classrooms. It improves fluency, accuracy, confidence, and communicative competence. Although challenges exist, the benefits significantly outweigh the limitations. Educational institutions aiming to develop effective English speakers should integrate TBLT into their language curriculum.

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