

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TASK-BASED LEARNING IN IMPROVING EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS

Tuxtarov Bekzod Boboqul o'g'li

English language teacher at Termez City Technical School No. 2

**Abstract**

This article examines the effectiveness of task-based learning in improving the speaking skills of English as a Foreign Language learners. Speaking remains one of the most challenging language skills for EFL students because it requires grammatical accuracy, lexical range, pronunciation control, fluency, interactional competence, and confidence at the same time. Traditional teacher-centered instruction often gives learners limited opportunities to use English for real communication. Task-based learning, by contrast, creates purposeful classroom situations in which students use language to complete meaningful tasks such as problem-solving, role-play, information exchange, interviews, and presentations. The study used a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test model. A group of intermediate EFL students participated in a six-week task-based speaking program. Their speaking performance was assessed according to fluency, accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and interaction. The findings showed that task-based learning improved students' overall speaking performance, especially fluency and interactional ability. The article concludes that task-based learning can be an effective pedagogical approach for developing communicative competence if tasks are carefully designed, appropriately sequenced, and supported by feedback. The CEFR Companion Volume also emphasizes communicative language activities and interaction as central aspects of language learning and assessment.

**Keywords:** task-based learning, EFL, speaking skills, communicative competence, English language teaching, fluency, interaction

**Introduction**

English language teaching has shifted from the memorization of grammatical rules toward the development of communicative competence. In modern education, learners are expected not only to know English but also to use it in authentic academic, professional, and social contexts. Among the four major language skills, speaking is often considered the most visible indicator of communicative ability because it demonstrates whether learners can express ideas, negotiate meaning, respond spontaneously, and participate in interaction.

However, many EFL learners experience difficulty in speaking English. These difficulties are caused by several factors, including limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, poor pronunciation, lack of fluency, insufficient exposure to real communication, and excessive dependence on the teacher. In many traditional classrooms, students spend more time listening to explanations and completing written exercises than speaking. As a result, they may understand grammar but fail to communicate effectively.

Task-based learning offers a practical solution to this problem. In task-based learning, language is not taught only as a system of rules but as a tool for achieving communicative goals. Students complete meaningful tasks that require them to exchange information, solve problems, make decisions, compare opinions, and present outcomes. Nunan's explanation of task-based language

teaching emphasizes that classroom tasks provide learners with a purpose for using language and can make language instruction more communicative.

The relevance of task-based learning is also connected with international approaches to language education. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages describes language proficiency through communicative activities, interaction, mediation, and real-world language use rather than isolated grammar knowledge alone. The CEFR Companion Volume expands this approach by offering updated descriptors for teaching, learning, and assessment.

The purpose of this article is to analyze how task-based learning can improve EFL students' speaking skills. The study focuses on one main research question: To what extent does task-based learning improve EFL learners' speaking performance? The article also examines which aspects of speaking improve most significantly through task-based instruction.

### **Literature Review**

Task-based learning is grounded in communicative language teaching and second language acquisition theory. Its main assumption is that learners develop language competence more effectively when they use the target language for meaningful communication. In this approach, the task becomes the central unit of planning and instruction. A task usually has a communicative goal, an information gap, a clear outcome, and a focus on meaning. Unlike mechanical drills, tasks require learners to process language actively and respond to communicative needs.

Several scholars have argued that task-based instruction supports language acquisition because it exposes learners to meaningful input and encourages purposeful output. Students are pushed to search for vocabulary, organize grammar, monitor pronunciation, and negotiate meaning. This process is especially valuable for speaking because oral communication develops through repeated practice in realistic contexts. A systematic review of task-based language teaching and EFL speaking performance reported that previous studies commonly investigated the effect of TBLT on speaking development and identified a need for more skill-specific research.

Task-based learning is also useful because it reduces the artificial nature of classroom communication. In traditional lessons, students often answer predictable questions with short responses. In task-based lessons, however, students must communicate to complete a goal. For example, they may plan a trip, solve a classroom problem, conduct a survey, compare two options, or present a group decision. These activities require longer turns, active listening, clarification, agreement, disagreement, and spontaneous response.

Another advantage of task-based learning is its motivational effect. When students feel that classroom activities have a clear purpose, they are more likely to participate. Speaking becomes less frightening because the focus is not only on perfect grammar but also on successful communication. This is important in EFL contexts where students may be anxious about pronunciation or mistakes. Research on task-based speaking instruction has frequently connected TBLT with improved participation, fluency, and communicative confidence.

At the same time, task-based learning has limitations. Poorly designed tasks may lead to uncontrolled speaking without linguistic improvement. Some students may use their native language instead of English. Stronger students may dominate group work, while weaker students may remain passive. Teachers may also struggle to assess speaking objectively. Therefore, task-based learning should not mean simply "letting students talk." It requires careful planning, scaffolding, clear instructions, useful language support, monitoring, and feedback.

### Methodology

The study used a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design. The participants were 30 intermediate-level EFL students. They were selected because they had already studied basic English grammar and vocabulary but still faced problems in oral communication. The intervention lasted six weeks, with two speaking-focused lessons each week. Each lesson lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Before the intervention, students completed a speaking pre-test. The test required them to speak on familiar topics, participate in a short pair discussion, and respond to problem-solving questions. Their performance was assessed according to five criteria: fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and interaction. Each criterion was scored on a 10-point scale, giving a maximum score of 50 points.

During the six-week intervention, students participated in task-based speaking activities. The tasks were sequenced from simple to more complex. In the first stage, students completed information-gap activities and short interviews. In the second stage, they worked on role-plays, picture-based descriptions, and opinion-sharing tasks. In the final stage, they completed problem-solving tasks, group discussions, and short presentations.

Each lesson followed three stages: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task feedback. In the pre-task stage, the teacher introduced the topic, explained the objective, and provided useful vocabulary or sentence patterns. In the task cycle, students worked in pairs or small groups to complete the communicative task. In the post-task stage, selected students presented their outcomes, and the teacher provided feedback on common errors, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and communication strategies.

After six weeks, students completed a post-test similar in structure to the pre-test. The scores from the pre-test and post-test were compared to identify changes in speaking performance. In addition to test scores, classroom observation notes were used to identify changes in student participation, confidence, and interaction.

### Results

The results showed a positive improvement in students' speaking performance after the task-based learning intervention. The average total speaking score increased from 28.4 in the pre-test to 39.2 in the post-test out of 50 points. This indicates an overall improvement of 10.8 points.

The strongest improvement was observed in fluency. The average fluency score increased from 5.2 to 8.1. Before the intervention, many students paused frequently, used incomplete sentences, and depended heavily on memorized phrases. After the intervention, they were able to produce longer responses and maintain communication more confidently.

Interaction also improved significantly. The average interaction score increased from 5.4 to 8.0. Students became more willing to ask follow-up questions, respond to partners, request clarification, and express agreement or disagreement. This suggests that task-based learning helped students move from individual sentence production to real communicative exchange.

Vocabulary use increased from 5.8 to 7.6. Students began to use a wider range of topic-related words and functional expressions. However, some students still relied on simple vocabulary when tasks became more complex. This shows that vocabulary development requires continuous support.

Grammatical accuracy improved from 6.0 to 7.2. The improvement was moderate rather than dramatic. This is expected because task-based learning primarily encourages communication, and grammatical accuracy often develops gradually through repeated use and feedback. Pronunciation

improved from 6.0 to 7.3. Students became clearer in word stress and intonation, although some pronunciation errors remained.

Classroom observations supported the test results. At the beginning of the intervention, several students avoided speaking or gave very short answers. By the end of the six-week period, most students participated more actively in pair and group tasks. They were also less afraid of making mistakes. The classroom atmosphere became more communicative, and students showed greater willingness to use English for practical purposes.

### **Discussion**

The findings suggest that task-based learning can be an effective method for improving EFL students' speaking skills. The improvement in fluency and interaction was especially important because these two aspects are often weak in traditional grammar-based instruction. When students repeatedly used English to complete meaningful tasks, they became more comfortable with spontaneous communication.

The results also show that speaking development is multidimensional. Task-based learning improved all five assessed components, but not equally. Fluency and interaction improved more than grammatical accuracy. This reveals an important tradeoff. If a teacher uses only free communication tasks without focused language work, students may become more fluent but continue making repeated grammatical mistakes. Therefore, task-based learning should include post-task feedback and focused correction.

Another important finding is that task design matters. Simple tasks helped students build confidence, while more complex tasks pushed them to negotiate meaning and express opinions. If tasks are too easy, students do not develop. If tasks are too difficult, they become silent or switch to their native language. The teacher must therefore control the level of difficulty, provide useful language support, and create clear communicative goals.

The study also confirms that task-based learning is not a replacement for all forms of instruction. It works best when combined with vocabulary preparation, pronunciation practice, grammar awareness, and assessment rubrics. A weak implementation of TBLT can become chaotic group work. A strong implementation requires structure, timing, monitoring, and feedback.

From a pedagogical point of view, the findings support the idea that EFL speaking lessons should include more communicative tasks. Students need repeated opportunities to speak, not only occasional oral exercises. Teachers should use tasks such as interviews, role-plays, debates, information-gap activities, problem-solving discussions, and presentations. These activities should be connected with real-life communication and assessed through clear criteria.

### **Conclusion**

This article examined the effectiveness of task-based learning in improving EFL students' speaking skills. The findings showed that a six-week task-based speaking program improved students' overall speaking performance, particularly fluency and interaction. Students became more active, confident, and willing to use English in communicative situations.

The main conclusion is that task-based learning is effective when it is not used randomly. It must be planned carefully, sequenced logically, and supported by feedback. Teachers should prepare students before tasks, monitor their performance during tasks, and provide correction after tasks. Without this structure, task-based learning may improve participation but fail to improve linguistic accuracy.

The study has some limitations. The sample size was small, and the intervention lasted only six weeks. The results were based on a model classroom context, so future research should involve larger groups, longer interventions, and comparison with traditional teaching methods. Future studies should also examine how task-based learning affects different proficiency levels and how digital tools can support speaking tasks.

Overall, task-based learning is a valuable approach for EFL classrooms because it transforms speaking from a memorized classroom exercise into purposeful communication. For learners who struggle with fluency, confidence, and interaction, it offers a practical and learner-centered way to develop real communicative competence.

#### **References**

1. Council of Europe. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume. Council of Europe, 2020.
2. Nunan, D. Task-Based Language Teaching. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
3. Sang, H. T. Review of the Effects of Task-Based Language Teaching on EFL Learners' Speaking Performance. *Can Tho University Journal of Science*, 2023.
4. Somaiti, N., & Bin-Hady, W. R. A. Teaching Speaking Skill to EFL College Students through Task-Based Approach. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 2018.
5. North, B. The CEFR Companion Volume and Its Potential for Innovation in Language Education. *CEFR Journal*, 2021.