
Exploring the Impact of Task-Based Language Teaching on English Communication Competence among Undergraduate ESL Learners

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Abstract

English communication competence has become an essential skill for academic achievement, professional development, and participation in global communication networks. However, many English as a Second Language (ESL) learners continue to experience difficulties in achieving effective communication despite years of formal language instruction. Traditional approaches that emphasize grammatical knowledge, memorization, and teacher-centered classroom practices often provide limited opportunities for learners to use English meaningfully in real-life contexts. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a learner-centered pedagogical approach that promotes authentic language use through purposeful tasks, interaction, collaboration, and problem-solving activities. The present study examines the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching on learners' English communication competence through a mixed-method research design. The study proposes a quasi-experimental framework involving undergraduate ESL learners divided into an experimental group receiving TBLT-based instruction and a control group receiving conventional English instruction. Quantitative data are collected through pre-test and post-test communication assessments, while qualitative data are obtained through learner questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The study focuses on the influence of TBLT on speaking fluency, linguistic accuracy, vocabulary development, interactional competence, and learner confidence. The research is theoretically grounded in Communicative Language Teaching, Long's Interaction Hypothesis, Swain's Output Hypothesis, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasize the importance of interaction, meaningful language production, and social learning processes in second language acquisition. The findings are expected to provide insights into the effectiveness of TBLT as a practical approach for enhancing English communication competence and offer pedagogical recommendations for English language educators, curriculum developers, and higher education institutions.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching; English Communication Competence; ESL Learners; Speaking Skills; Communicative Language Teaching; Second Language Acquisition; Learner-Centered Pedagogy.

Introduction

English has emerged as one of the most influential global languages, functioning as a medium of communication in education, science, technology, business, diplomacy, and international collaboration. In contemporary higher education and professional environments, English proficiency is no longer limited to knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; rather, effective communication ability has become a crucial competence that enables individuals to express ideas, participate in discussions, negotiate meanings, and engage confidently in diverse social and academic contexts. For learners of English as a Second Language (ESL), developing communication competence remains a major educational goal. However, despite extensive exposure to formal English instruction, many learners continue to face difficulties in speaking fluently, expressing opinions, participating in conversations, and using English appropriately in real-life situations.

Traditional English language teaching practices in many educational contexts have historically focused on grammatical accuracy, translation methods, vocabulary memorization, and examination-oriented learning. Although these approaches contribute to developing linguistic knowledge, they often provide limited opportunities for learners to actively use English for meaningful communication. The separation between knowing the language rules and being able to communicate effectively has created a significant challenge in English language education. Learners may possess theoretical knowledge of grammar structures but hesitate to communicate because of limited practice, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and insufficient exposure to authentic language situations.

To address these challenges, modern approaches to language education have increasingly shifted from teacher-centered instruction toward learner-centered methodologies that emphasize communication, interaction, and practical language use. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) introduced a significant change by emphasizing the functional use of language rather than merely focusing on structural accuracy. Within this broader communicative framework, Task-Based Language

Teaching (TBLT) has developed as an influential pedagogical approach that organizes language learning around meaningful tasks. Unlike traditional classroom activities that often isolate language forms, TBLT encourages learners to use English as a tool for completing purposeful activities, solving problems, sharing information, and achieving specific communicative outcomes.

Task-Based Language Teaching is based on the principle that language acquisition occurs more effectively when learners are engaged in meaningful communication. According to Ellis (2003), tasks provide learners with opportunities to focus primarily on meaning while naturally using linguistic resources to achieve communicative goals. A task may involve activities such as group discussions, role plays, information-gap exercises, decision-making activities, simulations, and real-world problem-solving situations. Through these activities, learners are encouraged to negotiate meaning, interact with peers, receive feedback, and modify their language production.

The theoretical foundation of TBLT is closely associated with major theories of second language acquisition. Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis emphasizes that interaction facilitates language acquisition by creating opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning and receive comprehensible input. When learners encounter communication difficulties, they modify their language, seek clarification, and adjust their expressions, which supports linguistic development. Similarly, Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis highlights the importance of producing language, arguing that learners develop greater awareness of linguistic gaps when they attempt to express their ideas. TBLT provides extensive opportunities for such language production through collaborative and communicative tasks.

Furthermore, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) provides another important foundation for TBLT by emphasizing the social nature of learning. According to this perspective, knowledge develops through interaction with others, and learners progress through collaborative activities supported by teachers and peers. Task-based classrooms reflect this principle by promoting cooperation, peer learning, and learner autonomy.

Although TBLT has gained considerable attention internationally, its effectiveness in improving different dimensions of English communication

competence requires further investigation. Communication competence is a multidimensional concept that extends beyond grammatical knowledge. Canale and Swain (1980) proposed that communicative competence includes grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Therefore, evaluating the impact of TBLT requires examining not only language accuracy but also fluency, confidence, interactional ability, and the capacity to use English appropriately in different contexts.

Previous studies have reported positive outcomes of TBLT in improving speaking performance, learner motivation, and classroom participation. However, several research gaps remain. Many existing studies have focused on short-term interventions, specific language skills, or limited learner populations. Additionally, fewer studies have combined quantitative measurement of communication improvement with qualitative exploration of learners' experiences and perceptions. In many ESL contexts, particularly in higher education settings, questions remain regarding how TBLT influences overall communication competence and what factors affect successful classroom implementation.

Another important issue concerns the practical challenges associated with implementing TBLT. Although the approach encourages active learning, teachers may face difficulties related to large classroom sizes, limited instructional time, examination-based educational systems, lack of teacher training, and learner expectations shaped by traditional teaching methods. Therefore, understanding both the benefits and limitations of TBLT is essential for developing realistic and effective English teaching practices.

The present study aims to investigate the influence of Task-Based Language Teaching on English communication competence among undergraduate ESL learners. By adopting a mixed-method research approach, the study seeks to measure changes in learners' communication abilities while also exploring their attitudes, experiences, and challenges during task-based learning. The research contributes to English Language Teaching (ELT) scholarship by providing evidence on how meaningful tasks can support language development and by identifying strategies for integrating TBLT into higher education English classrooms.

The significance of this study lies in its potential contribution to teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers. For teachers, the findings may provide practical insights into designing effective communication-oriented activities. For institutions, the study may support the development of learner-centered English curricula. For researchers, it may provide further understanding of the relationship between classroom interaction, task-based learning, and communication competence development.

Overall, this research positions Task-Based Language Teaching as an important approach for bridging the gap between English language knowledge and actual communicative ability. By creating opportunities for meaningful interaction and purposeful language use, TBLT has the potential to transform English classrooms from passive learning environments into spaces where learners actively construct, practice, and develop communication competence.

Review of Literature

Ellis (2003) highlighted that task-based instruction creates favourable conditions for acquisition by combining meaningful communication with opportunities for language development. His work demonstrated that tasks encourage learners to process language deeply rather than mechanically memorize structures.

Nunan (2004) emphasized that TBLT promotes learner autonomy by encouraging students to actively participate in communication. According to Nunan, successful tasks should have clear objectives, appropriate difficulty levels, and relevance to learners' needs.

Skehan (1998) examined the cognitive dimensions of task performance and suggested that task design influences learners' balance between fluency, accuracy, and complexity. He argued that carefully designed tasks can enhance different aspects of language performance.

Research Gap

Although previous studies have established the potential benefits of TBLT, several gaps remain. First, many studies have examined individual language skills such as speaking or vocabulary rather than overall communication competence. Communication ability involves multiple dimensions, including linguistic accuracy,

interactional skills, confidence, and strategic communication. Second, limited research has combined quantitative performance measurement with qualitative exploration of learner experiences. Understanding learners' perceptions is essential because motivation, anxiety, and classroom engagement influence the success of TBLT. Third, implementation challenges require further investigation. While TBLT is theoretically effective, practical barriers such as large classrooms, limited teaching time, examination pressure, and insufficient teacher training may restrict successful application. Therefore, the present study attempts to address these gaps by examining the influence of TBLT on comprehensive English communication competence using a mixed-method approach.

Research Objectives, Research Questions, and Hypotheses

Research Objectives

1. To examine the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on learners' English communication competence.
2. To analyze the influence of TBLT on speaking fluency, linguistic accuracy, vocabulary development, pronunciation, and interactional skills.
3. To compare the effectiveness of TBLT-based instruction with traditional English teaching methods.
4. To investigate learners' perceptions and attitudes toward task-based English learning activities.
5. To identify challenges faced by teachers and learners during TBLT implementation.
6. To develop pedagogical recommendations for effective integration of TBLT in English language classrooms.

Research Questions

RQ1: How does Task-Based Language Teaching influence learners' English communication competence?

RQ2: Does TBLT improve speaking fluency, accuracy, vocabulary usage, and confidence compared with traditional English teaching methods?

RQ3: What are learners' perceptions toward Task-Based Language Teaching in English language learning?

RQ4: What challenges affect the successful implementation of TBLT in ESL classrooms?

RQ5: Which components of TBLT contribute significantly to the development of English communication competence?

Research Hypotheses

H₁1: Task-Based Language Teaching significantly improves learners' English communication competence.

H₁2: Learners receiving TBLT-based instruction demonstrate significantly better speaking fluency, accuracy, and interactional skills than learners receiving traditional instruction.

H₁3: Learner motivation, confidence, and classroom interaction positively influence the effectiveness of TBLT.

8. Research Methodology

8.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a mixed-method quasi-experimental research design to investigate the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on learners' English communication competence. The quantitative component focuses on measuring changes in learners' communication performance through pre-test and post-test assessments, while the qualitative component explores learners' perceptions, experiences, and classroom interactions through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. This combination enables a comprehensive understanding of both measurable learning outcomes and the factors influencing TBLT implementation.

8.2 Research Approach

A mixed-method research approach is employed to examine the effectiveness of TBLT from both statistical and experiential perspectives. The quantitative approach evaluates improvements in learners' speaking fluency, accuracy, vocabulary usage, and interactional competence. The qualitative approach provides deeper insights into learners' attitudes, motivation, confidence, and challenges associated with task-based English learning. The integration of both approaches strengthens the validity and interpretation of the research findings.

8.3 Participants and Sampling

The participants of the study will include undergraduate ESL learners enrolled in higher education institutions. A total sample of 100 students will be selected for the study using a purposive sampling technique. The participants will be divided into two groups: an experimental group consisting of 50 learners who will receive Task-Based Language Teaching instruction and a control group consisting of 50 learners who will receive conventional English language instruction. The selected

participants will have similar educational backgrounds and levels of English proficiency to ensure comparability between the groups.

8.4 Study Duration

The intervention will be conducted over a period of 12 weeks. During the first week, learners' initial English communication abilities will be assessed through a pre-test. The experimental group will then participate in task-based learning activities from the second to the eleventh week, while the control group will continue with traditional classroom practices. At the end of the intervention period, both groups will undergo a post-test to evaluate changes in their communication competence.

8.5 TBLT Intervention Design

The experimental group will receive instruction based on Task-Based Language Teaching principles. The intervention will include a variety of communicative activities such as information-gap tasks, group discussions, role plays, simulations, problem-solving activities, presentations, and real-life communication tasks. These activities will encourage learners to use English actively for exchanging information, expressing opinions, negotiating meanings, and completing meaningful objectives. The tasks will be designed to promote learner interaction, collaboration, and authentic language use.

8.6 Data Collection Instruments

Data will be collected using multiple research instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of TBLT. An English communication competence test will be administered before and after the intervention to assess learners' speaking fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, pronunciation, and interactional skills. A learner questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale will be used to examine students' perceptions, motivation, confidence, and attitudes toward task-based learning.

In addition, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with selected teachers and learners to explore their experiences with TBLT implementation. Classroom observations will also be carried out to analyze learner participation, peer interaction, communication patterns, and engagement during task-based activities.

8.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected from communication assessments and questionnaires will be analyzed using statistical techniques, including mean, standard deviation, paired sample t-test, independent sample t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), correlation analysis, and effect size measurement. These statistical methods will determine whether significant differences exist between the experimental and control groups.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews and classroom observations will be analyzed through thematic analysis. The analysis will identify major themes related to communication improvement, learner confidence, motivation, classroom interaction, and challenges associated with implementing TBLT.

8.8 Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of research instruments will be ensured through expert evaluation, pilot testing, and statistical reliability analysis. The questionnaire and assessment tools will be reviewed by experts in English Language Teaching and applied linguistics to establish content validity. A pilot study will be conducted before the main research to identify possible limitations and improve the instruments. Internal consistency of the questionnaire will be measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a value of 0.70 or above considered acceptable.

8.9 Ethical Considerations

The study will follow ethical research principles throughout the research process. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation will be ensured through informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity of participant information will be maintained. The collected data will be used only for academic research purposes, and participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

8.10 Expected Research Outcome

The study is expected to demonstrate the influence of Task-Based Language Teaching on improving English communication competence among ESL learners. It is anticipated that learners exposed to TBLT will show improvement in speaking fluency, vocabulary development, language accuracy, interactional ability, and communication confidence compared with learners receiving traditional instruction. The findings may provide valuable implications for English teachers, curriculum

designers, and educational institutions seeking effective approaches for developing practical communication skills.

9. Results and Discussion

9.1 Improvement in English Communication Competence

The findings of the study are expected to demonstrate that learners who receive Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) show significant improvement in overall English communication competence compared with learners receiving traditional English instruction. The experimental group is anticipated to achieve higher post-test scores in speaking performance, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and interactional ability. The improvement may be attributed to increased exposure to meaningful communication activities that require learners to actively use English rather than only study linguistic forms.

The task-based learning environment provides learners with repeated opportunities to practice English in authentic situations. Through discussions, role plays, problem-solving activities, and collaborative tasks, learners engage in spontaneous communication, which helps them develop greater confidence and flexibility in language use. These findings support previous research suggesting that meaningful interaction contributes significantly to second language development.

9.2 Impact of TBLT on Speaking Fluency

The implementation of TBLT is expected to positively influence learners' speaking fluency. Learners participating in task-based activities receive frequent opportunities to express their ideas, exchange information, and participate in conversations. Regular communication practice reduces hesitation and improves learners' ability to produce language more naturally.

Unlike traditional classroom approaches where speaking practice may be limited, TBLT creates learner-centered environments where students become active participants. The repeated use of English during tasks encourages faster language processing, improved confidence, and reduced dependence on memorized expressions.

9.3 Influence of TBLT on Linguistic Accuracy

Although TBLT primarily emphasizes meaning-focused communication, it also contributes to improvements in linguistic accuracy. During task completion, learners

encounter situations where they need to adjust their language use according to communicative requirements. Teacher feedback and post-task discussions help learners recognize grammatical errors and improve their language production. The combination of communication practice and corrective feedback allows learners to develop both fluency and accuracy. This supports the argument that effective language learning requires a balance between meaningful interaction and attention to language form.

9.4 Vocabulary Development through Task-Based Activities

The study is expected to show that TBLT enhances vocabulary development among ESL learners. Since tasks are often based on real-world contexts, learners encounter vocabulary in meaningful situations rather than isolated word lists. Contextual learning enables learners to understand word meanings, usage patterns, and appropriate communication contexts.

Activities such as group discussions, presentations, and problem-solving tasks encourage learners to actively use newly acquired vocabulary. This active involvement improves vocabulary retention and supports effective communication.

9.5 Enhancement of Learner Confidence and Motivation

One of the significant outcomes of TBLT is expected to be increased learner confidence and motivation. Many ESL learners experience speaking anxiety due to fear of making mistakes or being judged by others. Task-based activities create supportive learning environments where learners can practice English collaboratively without excessive focus on errors.

Participation in meaningful tasks provides learners with a sense of achievement and encourages greater involvement in classroom communication. As learners observe their own improvement, their motivation toward English learning is likely to increase.

9.6 Learners' Perceptions toward TBLT

Qualitative findings from questionnaires and interviews are expected to show positive learner perceptions toward Task-Based Language Teaching. Students may consider TBLT activities more engaging, interactive, and useful compared with traditional classroom methods. Learners are likely to appreciate the opportunities

provided by TBLT for expressing personal opinions, collaborating with classmates, practicing real-life communication, and developing confidence in speaking English. However, some learners may initially face difficulties due to unfamiliarity with learner-centered approaches and the increased responsibility required for active participation in classroom tasks.

9.7 Comparison Between TBLT and Traditional Teaching Methods

Traditional English teaching methods mainly focus on grammar, vocabulary, and teacher-centered instruction. Although they help learners develop language knowledge, they provide fewer opportunities for practical communication. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) focuses on meaningful tasks, interaction, and real-life language use. It encourages learners to actively participate and apply English in authentic situations. The TBLT group is expected to show greater improvement in speaking fluency, communication confidence, interaction skills, and strategic language use compared with the traditional teaching group. Overall, TBLT supports the development of practical communication competence by connecting classroom learning with real-world language application.

9.8 Challenges in Implementing TBLT

Despite its benefits, successful implementation of TBLT may involve several challenges. Teachers may experience difficulties in designing appropriate tasks, managing classroom interaction, and evaluating learner performance. Large class sizes and limited instructional time may restrict effective task implementation. Some learners may also initially prefer traditional teacher-centered methods because they are accustomed to examination-focused learning environments. Therefore, successful adoption of TBLT requires teacher training, institutional support, and gradual adaptation of learners to communicative learning approaches.

9.9 Overall Discussion

The findings of this study are expected to support the view that Task-Based Language Teaching provides an effective framework for developing English communication competence among ESL learners. By integrating meaningful tasks, interaction, collaboration, and feedback, TBLT creates conditions that promote both linguistic development and communicative ability.

The results highlight that effective English learning requires opportunities for learners to actively use the language in realistic contexts. While TBLT does not eliminate the importance of grammar instruction, it provides a balanced approach where linguistic knowledge is developed through purposeful communication. Therefore, integrating task-based approaches into English language curricula may contribute significantly to improving learners' practical communication skills.

13. Conclusion

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) represents a significant shift from traditional language teaching approaches by emphasizing meaningful communication, learner participation, and authentic language use. The present study highlights the potential of TBLT as an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing English communication competence among ESL learners. By engaging students in purposeful tasks such as discussions, problem-solving activities, role plays, simulations, and collaborative projects, TBLT creates opportunities for learners to actively use English in realistic communication contexts.

The study demonstrates that communication competence involves more than grammatical knowledge and vocabulary acquisition. Effective communication requires the ability to express ideas clearly, interact appropriately, negotiate meaning, and overcome communication difficulties. TBLT supports these dimensions by encouraging frequent interaction, language production, peer collaboration, and feedback-based learning.

The proposed mixed-method investigation suggests that learners exposed to task-based instruction are likely to experience improvements in speaking fluency, linguistic accuracy, vocabulary development, interactional competence, and communication confidence. The learner-centered nature of TBLT also promotes motivation, autonomy, and active classroom participation, enabling students to become more independent users of English.

However, successful implementation of TBLT requires careful consideration of contextual factors such as teacher preparedness, classroom size, available resources, assessment practices, and institutional support. Although TBLT offers considerable advantages, it should be adapted according to learners' needs,

educational settings, and curriculum requirements rather than applied as a universal method.

The findings of this study contribute to English Language Teaching (ELT) research by emphasizing the importance of moving beyond form-focused instruction toward approaches that integrate language knowledge with practical communication skills. For English educators, TBLT provides a framework for creating interactive classrooms where learners develop confidence and competence through meaningful language experiences.

Future research may explore the long-term effects of TBLT, its effectiveness across different educational levels and cultural contexts, the role of digital technologies in task-based learning, and the influence of individual learner differences on task performance. Overall, Task-Based Language Teaching offers a valuable pathway for developing competent, confident, and effective English communicators in contemporary educational environments.

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