

Effects of Task - based Learning on English Speaking Abilities for Grade 7 Students

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Abstract

This study purposed to 1) compare grade 7 students' speaking abilities before and after using Task-based Learning 2) explore grade 7 students' perception towards Task-based Learning explores students' perceptions of Task-based Learning among Grade 7 learners at Bandonkloy School. A one-group pretest-posttest design was utilized, with thirty students participating in Task-based Learning activities across six sessions. The research tools included an English-speaking test and a semi-structured interview. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired sample t-tests to assess changes in speaking proficiency before and after the intervention. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were subjected to thematic analysis to elucidate students' attitudes and experiences. Findings indicated a statistically significant improvement in speaking scores post-intervention ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, students expressed positive perceptions of Task-based Learning, highlighting increased motivation, enjoyment, and confidence in speaking English. These results underscored the efficacy of Task-based Learning for both enhancing communicative competence and fostering positive learning environments.

Keywords: Task-based Learning, English Speaking Abilities

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language has become a critical skill, offering opportunities for personal, educational, and professional growth. Mastery of a foreign language, particularly English, not only facilitates access to a wealth of global knowledge but also promotes intercultural understanding and collaboration. For young learners, developing communicative competence is especially important, as it lays the foundation for future academic achievement and participation in the global community. However, among the core language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking remains one of the most complex and challenging to acquire. Many language classrooms, especially in the Thai context, continue to place greater emphasis on reading and writing, often at the expense of speaking and communicative ability (McLaren, Madrid, & Bueno, 2005).

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Traditional English language teaching methods in Thailand frequently rely on rote memorization and teacher-centered instruction, which may limit students' opportunities to engage in authentic communication. This approach can lead to a lack of confidence in speaking, as students often fear making mistakes or being perceived as different by their peers. Furthermore, teachers may resist adopting innovative methodologies, believing that existing practices are adequate and require no modification. As a result, students are not sufficiently encouraged to practice speaking or to develop the confidence necessary for effective communication in real-life situations. The need for more dynamic and student-centered teaching approaches is therefore evident, particularly those that can bridge the gap between theoretical language knowledge and practical language use.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has attracted attention as a pedagogical framework that actively engages students in meaningful tasks that are designed to simulate real-world communication (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996). This transition from traditional grammar-focused instruction to intentional task completion fosters a more interactive learning environment by improving both receptive and productive skills. This demonstrates that conventional methods may not be sufficient to assist students in enhancing their speaking abilities or utilizing language in real-world scenarios, underscoring the significance of implementing more communicative approach. TBLT's emphasis on practical communication has the potential to enhance students' speaking abilities and foster positive attitudes toward language acquisition, while simultaneously redefining the roles of teachers as facilitators in student-centered environments. Consequently, this investigation is significant in that it aims to evaluate the efficacy of TBLT. In response to these needs, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching in improving the English-speaking skills of Grade 7 students at Bandonkloy School and to explore students' perceptions of this approach. The study attempted to answer the following question Does Task-Based Language Teaching have any effect on developing the speaking skills of grade 7 students?

Research Objectives

1. To compare grade 7 students' speaking abilities before and after using Task-based learning.
2. To explore grade 7 students' perception towards Task-based learning.

Research Methodology

This study employed a pre-experimental using a one-group pretest-posttest design to investigate the effects of Task-based Learning (TBL) on the English-speaking abilities of Grade 7 students, and to explore their perceptions of this instructional approach. The independent variable was the implementation of Task-based Learning on English speaking teaching, while the dependent variables were students' speaking abilities and their perceptions of Task-based Learning.

1. Population and samples

1.1 Population: The population comprised 62 Grade 7 students enrolled in an additional English course at Bandonkloy School during the second semester of the 2024 academic year.

1.2 Samples: A purposive sampling technique was used to select one intact class of 30 students for participation in the study. All participants were part of the school's 'Reduce Classroom Time, Increase Learning Time' initiative.

2. Research instruments

The following instruments were used to collect data:

2.1 Students' Topic of Interest Survey: A survey was administered to identify students' preferred topics for speaking activities. The six most popular topics, which included Holidays, Modern Living, My Home and My Castle, Glory Days, In All Weathers, and The Animal Kingdom, were selected as the basis for the Task-based Learning lesson plans.

2.2 Task-based Learning Lesson Plans: Six lesson plans were developed, each focusing on one of the selected topics. The plans followed Willis's (1996) Task-based Learning framework, consisting of Pre-task, Task Cycle, and Language Focus stages. Lesson content and activities were validated by three experts in English language teaching, yielding an average evaluation score of 3.63 ("Very Good"). Drawing upon the Sequence of Task - based Learning on English Speaking Abilities in the lesson plans, the researcher designed and implemented the instruction following the Task-based Learning (TBL) steps proposed by Willis (1996). The sequence of instructional stages was as follows.

1) Pre-task Stage: In this stage, the researcher introduced the topic and objectives of the task to ensure student comprehension. Various methods were employed, such as using pictures, mime, or linking to students' personal experiences, to activate prior knowledge related to the topic. The task itself was introduced to the students. The researcher might highlight useful vocabulary or phrases relevant to the task without explicitly pre-teaching new grammatical structures. Additionally, students might listen to an audio recording of a similar task being completed (provided it did not reveal the solution to the main task).

2) Task Cycle Stage: This stage represents the core of Task-based Learning, where students used language to complete the actual task. It was divided into three sub-stages:

Task: Students worked collaboratively (in pairs or groups) to complete the assigned task. In this phase, students had the opportunity to freely use their existing linguistic resources to communicate and successfully achieve the task outcome. The researcher monitored and provided support only as necessary, without interfering with the students' independent language use.

Planning: After completing the task, each group of students planned how they would present the outcome of their task to the whole class. This stage involved preparing both the content and the necessary language for their report.

Report: The researcher selected representative pairs or groups to present their task outcomes to the class. Other class members listened, compared findings, or added further comments. This stage provided an opportunity for students to use language in a more structured manner to communicate more complex information.

3) Language Focus Stage: This final stage focused on the linguistic features relevant to the task. It comprised two sub-stages:

Analysis: The researcher guided students to analyze language features that emerged during the task cycle or from the reports presented, such as interesting vocabulary, sentence structures, or expressions. This step aimed to raise students' awareness of language forms and functions.

Practice: The researcher conducted further practice task based on the language points analyzed. This task could range from controlled practice to more open-ended exercises, providing students with opportunities to systematically apply what they have learned, then students implementing task outcome (Oral).

2.3 Speaking Test: Students' speaking abilities were measured using two tests: (a) a question-answer section focusing on direct responses, and (b) a picture description section related to the lesson topics. Each test was scored on fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and coherence which is an analytic rubric scoring consisting of 30 points totally. The content validity for these tests was confirmed by 5 expert review (IOC = 1.00), and interrater reliability was high ($r = 0.970$).

2.4 Semi-Structured Interviews: After the intervention, semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit students' perceptions of Task-based Learning. The interview protocol consisted of six validated questions covering students' attitudes, perceived benefits, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

3. Data collection

3.1 Obtained permissions from school authorities and informed consent from students and parents.

3.2 Administered pretest speaking tasks to establish baseline speaking abilities.

Implemented the Task-based Learning intervention over 12 instructional hours, distributed across six sessions.

3.3 Conducted posttest speaking assessments after the intervention.

3.4 Interviewed a representative sample of students regarding their perceptions of Task-based Learning.

3.5 Fifteen representative students were interviewed with six validated questions. All quantitative and qualitative data were anonymized and prepared for analysis.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Speaking Ability (Pretest and Posttest Scores): Students' English-speaking abilities were assessed using pretest and posttest scores. The mean scores, standard deviation (S.D.) and **dependent sample t-test**, for both pretest and posttest were calculated to summarize students' performance before and after the Task-based Learning (TBL) intervention. To determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in

speaking abilities as a result of the intervention, a dependent (paired) sample t-test was conducted comparing pretest and posttest mean scores.

4.2 Student Perceptions (Interview Data): Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The procedure involved systematically coding and categorizing the interview responses to identify key themes reflecting students' perceptions, experiences, and suggestions regarding the use of Task-based Learning in English speaking instruction.

Results

Objective 1: To compare grade 7 students' speaking abilities before and after using Task-based learning.

The results of the speaking test before and after the Task-based Learning (TBL) intervention on speaking teaching from 30 grade 7 students are showed in Table 1.

Table 1 Results of the speaking test

	n	M	SD	Mean	t	p
				differences		
Pretest	30	21.26	7.99	5.36	12.46	.000*
Posttest	30	26.62	8.66			

*p<0.05

Table 1 shows that all students demonstrated substantial improvement in their scores. The mean posttest score was 26.62, which was higher than the pretest mean score of 21.26, out of a possible total of 30 points. The t-value was 12.46, indicating a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest mean scores ($p < .05$). These results clearly demonstrate that all students improved their speaking abilities after participating in the Task-based Learning intervention.

Objective 2: To explore grade 7 students' perception towards Task-based learning.

The second objective of the study was to explore Grade 7 students' perceptions towards the use of Task-based Learning (TBL) in English speaking instruction. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, with students responding to a set of questions designed to elicit their attitudes, experiences, and suggestions regarding the intervention. The interview data were transcribed and categorized thematically.

The findings from the interviews revealed that all students expressed positive attitudes toward Task-based Learning. Their responses indicated increased motivation, enjoyment, and perceived improvement in their English-speaking abilities. Three main themes emerged from the analysis:

1. Positive Feelings and Classroom Enjoyment

Students reported a sense of happiness and enjoyment when participating in the Task-based Learning classroom activities. They noted that although speaking English was initially challenging, their skills improved over time and the learning process became more enjoyable. As S1 stated:

"I become happy every time I participated in this class. At the beginning, I could not communicate well but my speaking skill gradually developed. I really enjoyed the entire course."

2. Improved Speaking Skills and Self-confidence

Many students acknowledged that their English-speaking abilities had noticeably improved because Task-based Learning provided opportunities for repeated practice and rehearsal, which increased their self-confidence. For example, S2 observed:

"My speaking has been improved because I have chance to rehearse my script until I feel self-confident."

3. Value of Authentic Communication and Supportive Environment

Students appreciated the opportunity to use English for real communication within the classroom, especially since such opportunities were limited outside of school. They also highlighted the supportive role of both peers and the teacher in helping them improve. As S3 explained:

"We don't really use English outside the classroom. So, to use speaking task to communicate with friends and you (the teacher) can help me improve speaking a lot."

Furthermore, S4 commented on the practical benefits of the tasks for learning content and seeking teacher assistance:

"The speaking task helps us to catch up with the content and allows us to ask the teacher for help."

In summary, the interview results demonstrated that Task-based Learning was well-received by the students, contributing to their motivation, engagement, and English-speaking ability. The positive classroom environment and authentic communicative practice were particularly valued by the participants.

Discussion

Objective 1: To compare grade 7 students' speaking abilities before and after using Task-based learning.

The primary objective of this study was to examine the effect of Task-based Learning (TBL) on the English-speaking abilities of Grade 7 students. The findings clearly indicate a statistically significant improvement in students' speaking scores following the Task-based Learning intervention. Specifically, the mean posttest score (26.62) was notably higher than the mean pretest score (21.26), with a t-value of 12.46 ($p < .05$). This demonstrates that Task-based Learning had a substantial positive impact on students' English-speaking proficiency.

Several factors may explain these results. First, Task-based Learning provides learners with opportunities to engage in authentic, purposeful communication, which is fundamental for language acquisition. Unlike traditional methods that often focus on rote memorization or isolated grammar exercises, Task-based Learning immerses students in real-world tasks that require meaningful language use. This aligns with previous studies indicating that Task-based Learning not only motivates learners but also mirrors natural language development, fostering both linguistic competence and communicative confidence (Nunan, 2004; Willis, 1996).

Second, the incorporation of student-selected topics within the Task-based Learning framework likely increased student engagement and relevance. According to Han (2021), when learners are allowed to make choices and engage with topics relevant to their interests, their motivation and involvement in language learning increase, leading to more meaningful language development. In this study, allowing students to participate in selecting topics may have contributed to their active involvement and willingness to communicate, further supporting the effectiveness of Task-based Learning.

Moreover, the collaborative nature of Task-based Learning, which emphasizes peer interaction and group problem-solving, is known to lower affective barriers to speaking and create a supportive learning atmosphere (Ladousse, 1987; Nunan, 2004). Students in this study benefited from working together to complete tasks, which not only encouraged risk-taking but also provided opportunities for negotiation of meaning. This negotiation of meaning is an essential component of communicative competence.

Additionally, the structured stages of Task-based Learning, which include the pre-task, task cycle, and language focus, helped scaffold students' learning and allowed them to gradually build their speaking skills. This scaffolding supports learners as they move from controlled practice to more spontaneous language use, ultimately improving their fluency and accuracy (Willis, 1996).

In summary, the significant gains in students' speaking scores following the Task-based Learning intervention can be attributed to the meaningful, interactive, and student-centered nature of the approach. These findings support previous research advocating for the integration of task-based methods in language classrooms to promote practical language use and communicative proficiency, especially among young learners. The results also highlight the importance of making learning personally relevant and engaging in order to maximize student progress.

Objective 2: To explore grade 7 students' perception towards Task-based learning.

The findings regarding grade 7 students' perceptions toward Task-based Learning (TBL) revealed that all students expressed positive attitudes after participating in Task-based Learning English speaking lessons. Through semi-structured interviews, students consistently reported higher levels of motivation, enjoyment, and confidence in their speaking abilities. These results align with previous studies highlighting the benefits of Task-based Learning in promoting learner engagement and positive attitudes toward language learning (Cook, 1993; Han, 2021; Lynch, 2000).

A key theme that emerged was the students' enjoyment and increased motivation in class activities. Many students noted that, although speaking English was initially difficult, their skills gradually improved, making the learning process more enjoyable. This aligns with the findings of Song (2024), who emphasized that when learners experience enjoyment and perceive classroom activities as engaging and supportive, their motivation and willingness to participate increase, leading to greater language development and overall satisfaction in learning.

Additionally, students reported that Task-based Learning provided valuable opportunities for repeated practice, which enhanced their self-confidence and speaking proficiency. This observation supports Cook (1993), who found that Task-based Learning tasks foster a sense of accomplishment and help students overcome anxiety related to speaking in a foreign language.

Furthermore, the value of authentic communication and a supportive classroom environment was highlighted by students. They appreciated being able to use English for real communication within the context of meaningful classroom tasks, especially given the limited opportunities to speak English outside school. This finding is echoed by Lynch (2000), who emphasized the importance of authentic interaction and peer support in developing communicative competence.

In summary, the interview data demonstrate that Task-based Learning positively influenced students' attitudes towards learning English, improved their engagement, and enhanced their confidence in speaking. The positive perceptions expressed by students in this study are in agreement with existing literature, indicating that Task-based Learning is an effective and well-received approach in the language classroom (Cook, 1993; Lynch, 2000; Nunan, 2004)

Recommendations

Policy Implications

1. Educational institutions should promote the use of Task-based Learning (TBL) in English classrooms to improve students' speaking skills and support communicative, student-centered learning.
2. Schools and curriculum developers should support the integration of technology in Task-based Learning to enhance learning and align with modern educational practices.
3. Policymakers should encourage the use of experimental and longitudinal research designs to better understand the effectiveness of Task-based Learning.

Practical Implications

1. Teachers should design Task-based Learning activities that focus on real-life communication to improve students' speaking skills.
2. Teachers should select or allow students to choose familiar topics, as this study found that relevant topics increased motivation and participation.

3. Teachers should provide more practice opportunities and a supportive environment, as students reported increased confidence through repeated speaking practice.

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