DEVELOPING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS BY TASK BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

In today's world, effective methods for developing speaking skills are increasingly important. This research explores the role of Task-Based Language Teaching in enhancing oral communication among students and highlights the significance of this approach.

Hilma Safitri, Zainal Rafli, and Devanti (2019) conducted research on enhancing speaking competence and building confidence among students through task-based learning activities. Other Western researchers have explored similar approaches with high school students, employing task-based activities such as monologues and dialogues to facilitate conversations on various topics. This highlights that speaking is not only about daily conversations but also about expressing opinions on diverse subjects (Afria Nita, Yenni Rosimella, Ratmanida, 2019). The significance of this method lies in its student-centered approach, which fosters communicative skills through group debates where students express their agreement or disagreement on various topics. These interactive activities form the foundation of task-based teaching.

Our findings indicate that engaging in oral communication through open-sharing tasks helps students become more confident while enabling them to share ideas on various topics. This approach enhances their critical thinking skills, particularly in relation to controversial opinions, and promotes effective communication. The target audience for this research consists of senior high school students. The study was conducted over four weeks with 10th and 11th grade students from Uzbekistan. Throughout this period, the research assessed both successes and challenges.

Keywords: Task-Based Learning (TBL), Speaking Skill Development, Open-Sharing Tasks, Beginner-Level English Learners, Controversial Statements, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Critical Thinking in Language Learning.

Introduction

Task-based learning (TBL) is widely regarded as an effective method for enhancing students' speaking skills. This study explores how TBL not only facilitates daily communication but also supports the expression of opinions in both spoken and written forms across various genres and texts. The research highlights the significant opportunity TBL offers for students to speak with confidence, without anxiety, by completing tasks. However, the study is limited to two specific text genres—historical recounts and narrative texts—and does not fully investigate the development of students' speaking skills. To achieve more comprehensive results, it would be beneficial to incorporate additional genres of texts (Afria Nita, Yenni Rosimella, Ratmanida, 2020).

In related research, Hilma Safitri, Zainal Rafli, and Devanti focused on improving speaking competence across five key areas: grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and pronunciation. Their findings indicate that engaging in a variety of tasks provides significant benefits for students' speaking skill development. However, this research is primarily applicable to students at intermediate and advanced levels. As a result, it may not be as suitable for beginner students, who may struggle with these tasks and face difficulties in developing their oral communication skills in the five key areas as effectively as their more advanced peers. This current article explores the use of open-sharing tasks as a key strategy in developing speaking skills for beginner-level learners. Specifically, it focuses on utilizing controversial statements to spark discussions and engage students in authentic communication. By encouraging learners to share their opinions, agree or disagree with their peers, and articulate their thoughts, this approach not only builds speaking fluency but also fosters critical thinking and active participation. The article also examines the challenges and benefits of implementing open-sharing tasks and provides insights into their practical application in a language learning context.

Literature review

The ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language is one of the most important goals for language learners, yet developing speaking skills at the beginner level can be particularly challenging. Limited vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, and a lack of confidence often hinder students from expressing themselves in spoken interactions. Task-Based Learning (TBL), a method grounded in communicative language teaching, offers a practical solution by emphasizing the use of real-life tasks that encourage meaningful communication. According to Ellis (2003), TBL provides learners with opportunities to engage in natural language use through carefully designed tasks.

A central feature of TBL is its focus on interactive, student-centered activities. As Willis (1996) highlights, tasks that involve collaboration and problem-solving motivate learners to communicate effectively while working towards a shared goal. Among these, open-sharing tasks are especially effective for promoting oral communication. These tasks invite students to share their ideas freely, negotiate meaning, and build confidence in speaking (Skehan, 1998). Incorporating controversial statements into open-sharing tasks has proven particularly valuable in stimulating discussion and critical thinking. Thornbury (2005) suggests that debates around

such topics encourage active participation, even among beginner learners. While beginners may have limited language resources, well-structured tasks can provide them with the support needed to communicate successfully and develop fluency (Nation & Newton, 2009).

Research conducted in Uzbekistan has also emphasized the importance of interactive methods for teaching speaking. Karimova (2019) advocates for the use of debates and discussions to engage beginner-level students and help them overcome language barriers. Similarly, Rakhimov (2021) highlights the role of communicative tasks in fostering confidence and fluency, particularly when students are encouraged to express personal opinions. Studies from Tashkent State Pedagogical University (2020) further support the idea that culturally relevant and thought-provoking topics can create meaningful learning experiences for Uzbek students. Overall, the literature demonstrates that task-based learning and open-sharing activities are effective strategies for enhancing speaking skills in beginners. By integrating controversial statements into these tasks, teachers can create a dynamic and engaging classroom environment that promotes both communicative competence and critical thinking.

Methodology

This study aimed to examine the use of open-sharing tasks featuring controversial statements within a Task-Based Learning (TBL) framework to develop speaking skills in beginner-level English learners. Previous research has shown that task-based approaches, which focus on communication through real-world tasks, can foster language proficiency (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996). However, there is limited research on applying such tasks with beginner learners, particularly in contexts like Uzbekistan. This gap prompted the investigation of how controversial statements could be used to encourage speaking practice and enhance language skills at lower proficiency levels.

The choice to use Task-Based Learning is based on its student-centered nature and its emphasis on real-world interaction, as highlighted by Ellis (2003) and Skehan (1998). Controversial statements were selected as the focal point of the tasks because they encourage debate, stimulate critical thinking, and promote speaking practice, even for learners with limited language proficiency (Thornbury, 2005).

A mixed-methods design was chosen for this study to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The study took place over four weeks and involved participants engaging in open-sharing tasks that required them to express their opinions on controversial topics. Both pre- and post-intervention assessments were conducted to measure the impact of the tasks on students' speaking skills, specifically focusing on fluency, confidence, and the ability to engage in discussions.

The study included 20 beginner-level students, aged 14-16, from an English language program at an educational center in Uzbekistan. These students were classified at the A1-A2 proficiency level of the CEFR, possessing limited vocabulary and basic grammar knowledge. The students were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study and their similar proficiency levels, as determined by pre-tests .

The study began with a pre-test conducted for both the control and experimental groups to assess their initial speaking skills, interest, and background knowledge. The pre-test consisted

of discussions where general questions were posed to students. These discussions were recorded for later analysis. Based on the results of the pre-test, students were divided into two groups: the control group and the experimental group.

The control group followed traditional language teaching methods, focusing on repetitive tasks such as reading dialogues and repeating sentences provided by the teacher. This approach did not involve engaging or critical topics, limiting students' opportunities for meaningful oral communication.

In contrast, the experimental group used the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach. They participated in open-sharing tasks that allowed them to express their opinions on various topics, providing a platform for developing fluency and critical thinking. The tasks encouraged students to engage actively in discussions, improving both their speaking competence and confidence.

In the first week, controversial questions were introduced to the experimental group to stimulate discussion. For example, the group was asked, "Are video games the best way to learn new skills?" The students were divided into smaller groups and tasked with discussing both sides of the issue. To support their vocabulary acquisition, relevant terms were provided to help them articulate their ideas during the discussion. These discussions were recorded to monitor progress. Meanwhile, the control group continued with traditional tasks, such as repeating teacher-provided sentences and reading dialogues.

In subsequent weeks, the experimental group continued using the same method but with new topics and vocabulary to maintain engagement. The students' responses were consistently recorded for analysis. The control group, on the other hand, continued with repetitive speaking exercises, offering limited opportunities for spontaneous speaking practice.

By the final week, the experimental group showed increased enthusiasm and confidence in speaking. Despite making mistakes, they actively participated in discussions, expressing their ideas and defending their opinions. In comparison, the control group maintained a more passive approach to speaking tasks. At the end of the study, both groups completed a post-test, which included similar questions to those in the pre-test, allowing for a direct comparison of their improvement in speaking skills.

All recordings from both groups were carefully analyzed to assess the effectiveness of the TBLT approach in enhancing speaking competence. The analysis focused on students' fluency, participation, and ability to articulate ideas, providing insight into the impact of task-based learning on language acquisition.

Data were collected through a combination of classroom observations, student self-assessments, and audio recordings of group discussions. Classroom observations allowed the researcher to assess students' participation and behavior during the tasks. After each lesson, students completed self-assessment surveys to evaluate their confidence and perceived improvements in speaking. Additionally, the group discussions were recorded to analyze the students' language use, including fluency, vocabulary, and coherence.

A mixed-methods approach was selected to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the data, combining both numerical and qualitative insights. By utilizing various data collection techniques, the study aimed to provide a robust understanding of the effectiveness of

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controversial statement tasks in improving speaking skills. The decision to use controversial statements was driven by the goal of creating engaging discussions that prompt critical thinking, even for beginner learners.

Analyzing Data

The audio recordings of the discussions were transcribed and analyzed for several key aspects of speaking: fluency (e.g., the number of words spoken per minute), vocabulary diversity (e.g., range of words used), and coherence (e.g., clarity and logical flow of ideas).

Quantitative data collected from the self-assessment surveys were processed using SPSS 16.0. Paired t-tests were performed to compare students' confidence and speaking fluency before and after the task-based intervention. Qualitative data from observations and surveys were coded to identify common themes, such as engagement levels, difficulties encountered, and students' perceptions of the tasks' usefulness.

Paired t-tests were chosen for the quantitative data analysis to evaluate within-group changes over time, ensuring that any improvements in students' speaking skills could be attributed to the intervention. The thematic coding approach was applied to the qualitative data to capture the range of student experiences and to identify patterns regarding how the tasks influenced their speaking development.

Results

The results of this research show that while there were slight improvements in the students' fluency and vocabulary, the overall effect on their speaking skills was limited. Specifically, students at the beginner level (A1-A2) faced significant difficulties in engaging with the controversial statements in a productive way.

 • **Confidence:** The self-reported confidence levels increased slightly over the course of the study, with an average pre-task confidence score of 2.5 and a post-task score of 3.5. However, this increase in confidence did not result in improved speaking performance, as students continued to struggle with expressing themselves clearly in the tasks.
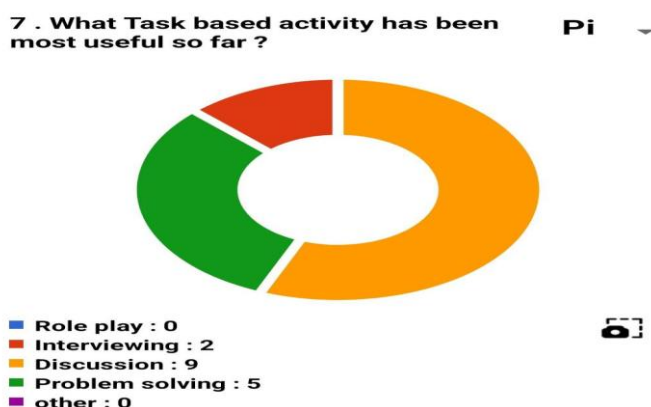
 • **Fluency:** The average fluency, measured by the number of words spoken per minute, showed a small improvement, from 45 words per minute pre-task to 65 words per minute post-task. However, this increase was more a reflection of the students speaking more rather than speaking more effectively or coherently. Their language use remained simplistic, and many hesitated or repeated phrases during discussions.

• **Vocabulary Range:** The students' vocabulary range showed a slight improvement, from an average of 13 unique words per student before the tasks to 21 unique words afterward. However, this improvement was insufficient to enable the students to engage in deeper, more nuanced conversations. Many students continued to rely on basic vocabulary, which limited their ability to discuss the controversial statements meaningfully.

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Data Source	Participant	Pre-Task Confidence (1-5)	Post-Task Confidence (1-5)	Pre-Task Fluency (words/min)	Post-Task Fluency (words/min)	Pre-Task Vocabulary (Range)	Post-Task Vocabulary (Range)
Self-Assessment Survey	Student 1 experemental	2.0	2.5	45	65	13	21
Self-Assessment Survey	Student 2 experemental	3.0	3.5	40	60	12	20
Self-Assessment Survey	Student 3 control	1.0	2.0	30	45	10	15
Observation	Student4 control	1.0	1.5	45	50	16	20

This survey was conducted among teachers who have extensive experience working with students. The purpose of the survey is to analyze each question in detail and share ideas about tasks designed for students.

7 . What Task based activity has been most useful so far ?   Pi

- Role play : 0
- Interviewing : 2
- Discussion : 9
- Problem solving : 5
- other : 0

The chart illustrates the usefulness of various task-based activities as perceived by participants. "Discussion" is identified as the most useful activity, with nine responses. "Problem solving" follows, with five responses, while "Interviewing" received two responses. "Role play" and "Other" received no votes, indicating minimal perceived utility.

5. What challenges do you face during speaking English?   Pi

- Lack of vocabulary : 5
- Be unconfident : 2
- Problem with pronunciation : 1
- Low Improvisation skill : 2

The chart illustrates the challenges students face in speaking English. "Lack of vocabulary" is the most significant issue, with five responses. "Being unconfident" and "Low improvisation skills" are tied, each receiving two responses. "Problems with pronunciation" is the least common challenge, mentioned by only one respondent**.**

10. What kind of speaking topics can be interesting for students

- Traveling : 4
- Beauty : 2
- Medicine : 0
- AI : 0
- Games : 3
- Sport : 1
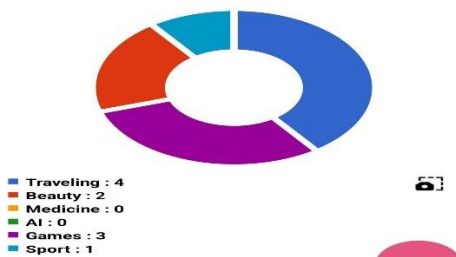
The chart presents students' preferences for speaking topics. "Traveling" is the most popular topic, with four responses, followed by "Games," which received three votes. "Beauty" garnered two votes, while "Sport" received one. Topics like "Medicine" and "AI" were not chosen, suggesting limited interest in these areas**.**

9.How often do you use activities to check your students speaking

- Always : 6
- Sometimes : 3
- Rarely : 1
- Never : 0
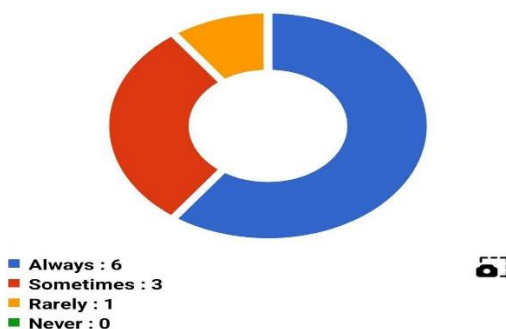
The chart reflects how often activities are used to check students' speaking skills. The majority, six respondents, indicated they "Always" use such activities. Three respondents chose "Sometimes," while only one selected "Rarely." No respondents indicated "Never," showing a consistent emphasis on speaking activities.

2. Can u rate your speaking level?

- A2 : 0
- B1 : 1
- B2 : 7
- C1 : 2

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This chart shows participants' self-rated speaking levels. Most are at B2 (7) or C1 (2), with only one at B1 and none at A2. It highlights that most participants rate their speaking skills as upper-intermediate or advanced.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to assess the use of open-sharing tasks featuring controversial statements within a Task-Based Learning (TBL) framework to develop speaking skills in beginner-level English learners. While the tasks were designed to encourage student engagement, critical thinking, and improvements in fluency and confidence, the findings suggest that the approach did not lead to significant improvements for learners at the A1-A2 proficiency level.

One of the primary reasons for the limited success of the study was the students' low proficiency in English. As indicated by the data, participants struggled with both fluency and vocabulary, making it difficult for them to fully engage in meaningful discussions, particularly when confronted with complex or controversial statements. Despite modest improvements in fluency, the students were often unable to articulate their opinions clearly, indicating that they lacked the necessary vocabulary and language skills to engage with the task effectively. This suggests that for tasks involving debates and discussions, a higher proficiency level, such as B1 or B2, is required for the learners to benefit from such activities.

The use of controversial statements as discussion topics, while an effective tool for stimulating critical thinking, may have been too challenging for students at this proficiency level. These students often found it difficult to form coherent arguments or counterarguments, primarily due to their limited vocabulary and lack of confidence in spontaneous speech. The pre- and post-assessment results showed only minor increases in speaking fluency, with little progress in the ability to maintain logical and coherent conversations. This suggests that tasks requiring higher cognitive and language skills may be more appropriate for learners with intermediate proficiency.

These results align with previous research, which emphasizes the importance of aligning task complexity with students' language proficiency (Skehan, 1998). For lower-level learners, task-based activities should provide sufficient support and be carefully designed to accommodate their current language abilities. Tasks involving controversial topics may require a more advanced vocabulary and a better understanding of argumentation, which might not be achievable at the A1-A2 level. But many students still found it challenging to organize their thoughts clearly during discussions. This indicates that fluency improvements did not necessarily translate into more logically structured or articulate speech.

Conclusion

In summary, while there were some minor improvements in fluency and vocabulary, the open-sharing tasks were not as effective as anticipated for beginners. The results indicate that such tasks may be more suitable for students at an intermediate level (B1-B2), who have a more developed language foundation. To enhance the effectiveness of similar studies, future research should consider adjusting the complexity of tasks to match the language proficiency of the participants and provide more support for lower-level learners. General APA Format:

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