AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG 8TH GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract:
This experimental study explores the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in enhancing the English speaking skills of 8th-grade students at Horizon Science High School, Dera Ismail Khan. Grounded in communicative language teaching principles, TBLT emphasizes real-life communication through interactive tasks, moving beyond traditional grammar-focused methods. The study employed a pretest-posttest control group design, involving 60 students divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received TBLT-based instruction over six weeks, incorporating tasks such as role plays, problem-solving, interviews, and storytelling, while the control group was taught using traditional methods. Data were collected using speaking proficiency rubrics assessing fluency, coherence, accuracy, and pronunciation. Results revealed a statistically significant improvement in the speaking performance of the experimental group compared to the control group. The findings suggest that TBLT is a highly effective strategy for developing spoken English skills in secondary-level learners. The study recommends integrating task-based activities into the English language curriculum to foster communicative competence and learner engagement in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, Speaking Skills, Communicative Competence, Experimental Study, EFL, Secondary Education, Pakistan

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of English language teaching, there is a growing emphasis on methods that actively engage learners in authentic communication. Traditional grammar-based instruction, while foundational, often fails to equip students with the necessary fluency to interact confidently in real-life situations. This gap is particularly evident in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms where learners may be proficient in written skills but struggle with oral expression. The global shift toward communicative competence has led educators to explore pedagogical frameworks that prioritize interaction, spontaneity, and learner-centered practices.

Among these, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a promising approach that redefines how speaking skills are taught and practiced in the classroom (Ellis, 2003).

TBLT is grounded in the idea that language acquisition is most effective when learners are engaged in meaningful tasks that simulate real-world communication. Unlike traditional approaches that isolate grammar and vocabulary instruction, TBLT integrates these elements into functional, purpose-driven activities. Learners are encouraged to focus on conveying meaning rather than producing grammatically perfect sentences, which in turn supports natural language development (Willis & Willis, 2007). Tasks such as group discussions, information gap activities, interviews, and role plays offer students opportunities to negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and build fluency through repetition and interaction. This method aligns with communicative language teaching (CLT) but places a stronger emphasis on task completion as the central unit of instruction (Nunan, 2004).

Fluency in speaking is a key indicator of language proficiency, yet it remains one of the most challenging skills to develop in EFL contexts, especially in under-resourced or exam-oriented systems. In many Pakistani classrooms, including those in Dera Ismail Khan, English is often taught with a focus on reading and writing due to examination demands, leaving speaking skills underdeveloped (Rahman, 2002). Moreover, socio-cultural factors such as fear of making mistakes, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and teacher-centered instruction contribute to learners' reluctance to speak. The need for pedagogical strategies that foster a supportive environment for spoken language practice is therefore urgent, particularly at the middle school level where language habits begin to solidify.

Research has shown that TBLT can be particularly effective for young learners when implemented systematically with attention to task design, sequencing, and scaffolding. Studies conducted in various EFL settings have demonstrated that TBLT not only improves fluency but also enhances learners' confidence and motivation to speak (Skehan, 1998; Shintani, 2012). By participating in communicative tasks, students are given the space to experiment with language without the fear of constant correction. This creates a more relaxed atmosphere where oral interaction becomes a natural part of the learning process. Furthermore, task repetition and reflection, common components of the TBLT cycle, contribute to increased fluency and accuracy over time. The present study investigates the effectiveness of TBLT in developing English speaking skills among 8th-grade students at Horizon Science High School, D.I. Khan. It aims to measure the impact of task-based instruction on learners' oral fluency, accuracy, and coherence through a controlled experimental design. By comparing the outcomes of a TBLT-based approach with those of a traditional instructional method, this research seeks to contribute empirical evidence to the ongoing discourse on effective language pedagogy in the Pakistani context. It also offers practical insights for teachers and curriculum designers aiming to cultivate communicative competence in middle school learners. The current study aimed to investigate the an experimental study on task-based language teaching (tblt) in developing english speaking skills among 8th grade students. The objectives of the study were:-

1. To investigate the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in developing students fluency.

Literature Review
Theoretical Foundations of TBLT

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has gained considerable attention in the field of second language acquisition due to its focus on communicative meaning rather than isolated grammatical instruction. It draws heavily from the interaction hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of meaningful interaction in promoting language learning (Long, 1996). By incorporating tasks that resemble real-life communicative events, TBLT provides learners with opportunities to engage in language use that reflects authentic discourse. This shift from rigid instructional practices to more flexible, communicative ones aligns with the broader movement toward learner-centered education.

2. TBLT and Speaking Fluency Development

A central strength of TBLT is its potential to enhance speaking fluency among EFL learners. According to Ellis (2009), tasks that require learners to complete specific communicative goals encourage spontaneous language use, which is critical for developing fluency. These tasks prioritize meaning over form, thereby lowering learners' anxiety and increasing their willingness to speak. In addition, Willis and Willis (2007) emphasize that the iterative nature of tasks—often involving cycles of planning, interaction, and reflection—provides repeated opportunities to use language, which reinforces fluency through practice.

3. Empirical Studies Supporting TBLT in EFL Contexts

A number of studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of TBLT in improving learners' speaking abilities. For example, Shintani (2012) found that young EFL learners who engaged in task-based activities showed measurable gains in oral language proficiency. In a similar vein, Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2011) observed that task repetition significantly improved learners' fluency and linguistic complexity. These findings support the notion that well-structured tasks facilitate language acquisition by creating meaningful and interactive learning environments where students can practice and refine their speaking skills.

4. Gaps in the Pakistani EFL Classroom

Despite global advancements in communicative language teaching, many schools in Pakistan continue to rely on traditional methods that prioritize grammar and written skills, often at the expense of oral proficiency (Rahman, 2002). Learners are typically exposed to limited speaking opportunities, particularly in exam-oriented classrooms where verbal expression is undervalued. However, emerging studies in the South Asian region have begun to show the positive impact of TBLT on speaking fluency and learner confidence. For instance, Ali (2018) found that Pakistani learners participating in task-based lessons exhibited improved oral performance and increased willingness to speak.

5. Relevance and Contribution of the Present Study

Building upon the theoretical and empirical foundations of TBLT, the current study investigates its effectiveness in the context of Pakistani secondary education. Specifically, it evaluates whether task-based instruction can improve the English-speaking skills of 8th-grade students at Horizon Science High School, D.I. Khan. Given the documented gap between theory and practice in the local context, this study aims to bridge that divide by offering data-driven insights into how TBLT can be integrated into mainstream language instruction. It also contributes to the growing call for evidence-based reform in EFL teaching methodologies within underrepresented regions.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quasi-experimental research design utilizing a pretest-posttest control group framework to examine the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on the English-

speaking proficiency of 8th-grade students at Horizon Science High School, Dera Ismail Khan. The design was chosen to allow comparison between two groups—experimental and control—under controlled conditions. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 60 students, who were then randomly assigned to either group with 30 students in each. Both groups were balanced in terms of age, gender, and academic background to minimize extraneous variables. Prior to the intervention, a standardized speaking test was administered to assess baseline oral proficiency, using a rubric that evaluated fluency, coherence, pronunciation, and grammatical accuracy. The experimental group received a six-week instructional program based on TBLT principles, incorporating communicative tasks such as role plays, interviews, group discussions, and problem-solving activities designed to foster real-world communication. Each lesson followed a TBLT sequence comprising pre-task preparation, task performance, and post-task reflection. Meanwhile, the control group was taught through conventional grammar-translation methods, emphasizing accuracy and rote learning. Data collection involved recording and evaluating student responses using inter-rater assessment by experienced language instructors. After the intervention, a posttest identical to the pretest was conducted to determine progress. The data were then analyzed using SPSS (Version 26), with descriptive statistics summarizing performance trends and independent-sample t-tests employed to identify statistically significant differences between the groups. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was maintained to validate the findings, and effect size calculations were used to measure the practical impact of the TBLT intervention on students' speaking outcomes.

Data Analysis

Table 1

Pretest Descriptive Statistics: Speaking Skills Scores (Control vs Experimental Group)

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control Group	30	58.43	6.27
Experimental Group	30	59.20	5.98

Prior to the intervention, the control group had a mean speaking score of 58.43, while the experimental group recorded a mean of 59.20. The standard deviations indicate relatively consistent performance within each group. Since both groups display closely aligned mean scores at the pretest stage, this suggests baseline equivalence in speaking proficiency, ensuring that any observed change in posttest results can be attributed to the instructional intervention rather than initial disparities.

Table 2:

Posttest Descriptive Statistics – Speaking Skills Scores (Control vs Experimental Group)

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control Group	30	62.80	5.65
Experimental Group	30	71.10	6.13

After six weeks of instruction, the experimental group demonstrated a substantial increase in mean speaking scores, rising to 71.10 compared to 62.80 for the control group. The difference in performance indicates that students exposed to TBLT outperformed those who received traditional instruction. The relatively low standard deviations suggest that the results are consistent across both groups, further validating the reliability of the improvement in the experimental cohort

Table 3:

Paired Sample t-Test – Within-Group Improvement (Experimental Group

Test	Mean Difference	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre–Post 11.90		10.37	29	.000

The paired sample t-test for the experimental group revealed a mean gain of 11.90 in speaking scores from pretest to posttest. The t-value of 10.37 is highly significant (p < .005), indicating that the TBLT intervention had a statistically significant positive effect on students' speaking skills. The result confirms that students made considerable progress in their oral communication abilities due to the task-based instructional approach.

Table 4:

Paired Sample t-Test – Within-Group Improvement (Control Group)

Test	Mean Difference	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre–Post 4.37		3.21	29	.003

In the control group, the mean improvement in speaking scores was 4.37, which is statistically significant (p < .05). While this indicates some level of progress, the smaller mean difference and lower t-value suggest that traditional teaching methods led to limited improvement in speaking performance. The contrast with the experimental group highlights the relative effectiveness of TBLT in promoting more substantial gains in speaking fluency.

Table 5:

Independent Samples t-Test – Posttest Score Comparison Between Groups

Group Comparison	Mean Difference	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental – Control	8.30	5.01	58	.000

An independent samples t-test comparing posttest scores revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups (p < .005), with the experimental group outperforming the control group by a mean margin of 8.30 points. The t-value of 5.01 strongly supports the conclusion that TBLT had a meaningful and measurable impact on improving students' speaking proficiency compared to conventional instruction.

Discussion

The findings of this experimental study offer compelling evidence in support of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an effective instructional approach for improving the speaking skills of secondary school learners. Students who received instruction through task-based strategies demonstrated significantly higher gains in posttest speaking performance compared to their peers who were taught using traditional grammar-translation methods. This suggests that the communicative and interactive nature of TBLT offers more meaningful engagement with language, thereby promoting fluency and confidence in oral expression.

The observed improvement in the experimental group's scores aligns with prior research emphasizing the transformative effect of task-based approaches in second language classrooms. For instance, Ellis (2009) posits that tasks requiring learners to convey meaning under real-time

conditions stimulate more authentic language use and foster automaticity, which is essential for developing fluency. Similarly, Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2011) found that learners who engaged in repeated task performance showed measurable increases in fluency, coherence, and lexical diversity—findings that are echoed in the current study. These outcomes highlight how TBLT facilitates the development of communicative competence through structured, goal-oriented interaction.

Moreover, the results substantiate claims by Shintani (2012), who observed that young learners exposed to input-rich, task-based instruction exhibited stronger oral output than those receiving form-focused instruction. The improvement seen in the present study's experimental group—both in terms of statistical significance and effect size—supports the view that integrating real-world communicative tasks into language lessons creates a more dynamic and learner-centered classroom environment. The gains made by students in fluency and coherence, as measured through posttest scores, validate the pedagogical value of tasks that mimic authentic communication rather than artificial language drills.

It is also noteworthy that the control group, though showing some progress, did not reach the level of improvement observed in the experimental group. This limited gain could be attributed to the lack of interactive opportunities and the passive learning structure of traditional teaching methods, which typically restrict students' speaking time and do not encourage spontaneous speech production (Rahman, 2002). In contrast, TBLT offers repeated exposure to language use in meaningful contexts, which appears to be more conducive to oral language development, especially in EFL environments like Pakistan where exposure to spoken English outside the classroom is minimal.

The findings from this study also offer practical implications for language teachers and curriculum developers in Pakistan and similar contexts. Given the clear advantages of task-based instruction, schools should consider revising their English language syllabi to include more communicative tasks that actively involve students in language use. Teachers must also be trained to design and facilitate task-based lessons that challenge students to speak purposefully and collaboratively. While the study is limited in scope—focused on one grade level in a single institution—the outcomes suggest that broader implementation of TBLT could significantly enhance language learning outcomes in under-resourced and exam-oriented educational settings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the statistical findings, students in the experimental group who received TBLT-based instruction showed significantly greater improvement in speaking skills than those taught through traditional methods. The consistent rise in mean scores and the strong significance level in t-tests confirmed the effectiveness of task-based instruction. This suggests that structured communicative tasks foster better fluency, accuracy, and confidence among learners. Therefore, it is recommended that English language teachers adopt TBLT strategies in classrooms, especially at the middle school level. Educational institutions should revise their curricula to include interactive speaking activities. Additionally, teacher training programs must focus on equipping educators with practical skills in task design and execution. Adopting TBLT widely could lead to measurable improvement in English language proficiency in similar EFL contexts.

Research Implications

The results of this study have valuable implications for English language instruction at the elementary level, where foundational communication skills are being developed. The significant improvement in speaking fluency among students taught through TBLT highlights the

importance of introducing interactive, task-based activities early in a learner's academic journey. At this stage, children are more receptive to language input and benefit from engaging tasks that encourage real-life use of English, such as storytelling, role-play, and picture-based conversations. These findings suggest that curriculum designers should embed age-appropriate TBLT activities into early language programs to foster both confidence and oral proficiency. Furthermore, elementary teachers should be trained to apply task-based strategies in classrooms, enabling a shift from passive learning to active language use. Implementing such approaches at the elementary level can lay a strong foundation for lifelong communicative competence.

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