Investigating Task Based Language Teachingin the EFL Context: Impacts on Speaking Performance and Learner Motivation

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Abstract:

This study examines the impact of the Task-Based Approach(TBA) on speaking performance and motivation among 80 first-year EFL learners at Biskra University. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from control and experimental groups through pre- and post-tests, motivation questionnaire, and a focus-group discussion. The findings showed significant improvement in the experimental group's speaking performance and motivation, highlighted appreciated task authenticity, increased autonomy, and enhanced confidence. The study concludes with pedagogical implications emphasizing the importance of carefully designed tasks and equitable classroom interactions to maximize instructional benefits.
Keywords:EFL speaking performance; motivation; Task-BasedApproach.

Résumé:

Cette étude analyse l'impact de l'approche par la tâche sur la performance orale et la motivation de 80 étudiants de première année en anglais langue étrangère à l'Université de Biskra. Les données ont été recueillies à l'aide de pré- et post-tests, d'un questionnaire de motivation et d'une discussion de groupe. Les résultats révèlent des progrès significatifs en fluidité, précision et motivation dans le groupe expérimental, ainsi qu'une valorisation de l'authenticité des tâches, de l'autonomie et de la confiance. L'étude souligne l'importance de tâches précisément conçues et d'interactions équitables en classe**.**
Mots-clés:approchepar la tâches; motivation; performance orale.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fostering learners' motivation in the foreign language classroom (EFL) is one of the most persistent challenges facing teachers today in the language classroom. While this issue can be attributed to a variety of factors, a major factor can be related to the fact that learners perceive disconnect between what they are learning in class and its relevance to their lives. In other words, learners often fail to see how classroom content connects or relates to real-world situations. Learners struggle to see the value of content delivered through traditional, teacher-centred methods which results in passive engagement and diminished interest and motivation (Littlejohn, 2001; Ushioda, 2011).

Thus, engaging students through contemporary methods, tools and teaching materials that relate to their daily experiences can significantly enhance learning outcomes and increase classroom involvement. Consequently, there is an increasing consensus within the field of education to adopt learner-centred pedagogical frameworks that promote active engagement through purposeful and contextually relevant tasks. To this end, it becomes essential for teachers to design instruction that cater for learners' individual needs, preferences, and motivations. That is, a shift towards more learner-centred classroom that actively involves learners in meaningful, goal-oriented tasks is imperative.

As long as developing EFL learners' communicative competence requires meaningful exposure to the target language across all four skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing, practicing communication and real-world application is essential. Learners need to be provided with opportunities to use the language authentically and purposefully (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). One effective approach to achieving this is Task-Based Approach (TBA) which is closely linked to the evolution of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1980s. The latter, shifted attention toward the development of communicative competence and prioritizes functional language use and learner interaction.

TBA has gained prominence in second language acquisition as a learner-centred approach and shares the focus of CLT in prioritizes meaningful communication and real-world language use (Ellis, 2003;

Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2006). Although the concept of "task" was underexplored before Prabhu's influential work in 1987, it has since then become central to both pedagogical practice and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research.

Central to this approach is the idea of learning through experience, where students actively use the language in authentic contexts rather than simply memorizing rules (Nunan, 2006). Key studies have recognized TBA is grounded in purposeful, outcome-oriented tasks that reflect authentic language use (Skehan, 1998; Nunan, 2004). It promotes student engagement through goal-directed procedures, emphasizes meaning over form, and aligns with constructivist, learner-driven educational philosophies (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Ellis, 2003). Research in language pedagogy suggests that TBL not only enhances learners' linguistic abilities and improves learners' communicative proficiency but it also encourages students to use language creatively and independently, connects classroom content with real-world applications, and fosters crucial 21st-century competencies, including collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Ellis, 2009; Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2006; Willis & Willis, 2007). When learners engage in purposeful tasks, they are more likely to internalize language concepts and develop a deeper understanding of the content which enhances the overall learning experience (González-Lloret& Ortega, 2014; East, 2012).

This study explores the integration of TBA, an innovative instructional model, within the EFL classroom at the tertiary level. Increasingly recognized by researchers, scholars and educators, TBA offers a comprehensive and effective framework for language exposure and use. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) emphasize, engaging learners through task-based activities significantly stimulates the learning process and enhances fluency by encouraging active participation. These features make the task-based approach especially effective for promoting students' English language proficiency in a way that is both practical and engaging. As such, integrating TBA in the language classroom offers a compelling solution to the problem of learner disengagement by making the learning process both relevant and cognitively stimulating.

The TBA is structured around goal-oriented tasks that prioritize meaning-making, interaction, and communication. Such tasks are designed not only to support comprehension but also to improve learners' ability to express themselves orally and develop essential communication skills. Through engagement in authentic, real-world tasks, students are empowered to take greater responsibility for their language learning, thereby enhancing autonomy, motivation, collaboration, and critical thinking. Accordingly, the present research seeks to examine the impact of TBA implementation on EFL students' speaking skill and motivation. It attempts to address the following questions:

1. To what extent does the TBA enhance EFL students' speaking fluency and accuracy?
2. How does task-based instruction influence students' motivation to participate in speaking activities?
3. What are the students' attitudes towards the effect of task-based learning on their oral communication skills and motivation?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Considering that the primary objective of this study was to investigate the effect of the Task-Based Approach on EFL learners' speaking performance and motivation, the methodological choices were carefully made to ensure full alignment with these aims. Defining the selected methodology is essential for establishing the study's credibility and coherence. Guided by Creswell's methodological framework, the research adopted an embedded mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide both numerical evidence and deeper contextual insights.

The quantitative strand, consisting of pre- and post-tests of speaking performance and a motivation questionnaire, offered statistical evidence of TBA's impact. On the other hand, the qualitative strand, comprising post-intervention semi-structured focus-group discussion, explored students' attitudes toward speaking tasks, their motivational orientations, and their perceptions of the instructional methods implemented. Consistent with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) typology, the qualitative component

functioned as a supportive element, enriching the interpretation of quantitative results and providing a more comprehensive understanding of how TBA influences speaking development and motivation in the EFL classroom. The embedded design was chosen to enable qualitative insights to capture attitudinal and experiential dimensions, thereby deepening the interpretation of quantitative findings.

2.2 Participants

The study recruited 80 first-year EFL students from Biskra University, all of whom shared a comparable intermediate level of English proficiency. 40 participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups: a control group receiving traditional, form-focused instruction and an experimental group engaged in learning through the TBA. This grouping structure enabled the research to draw direct comparative analysis of the impact of different types of instructional tasks on students' speaking performance and motivation. Additionally, a purposive subsample of 10 students from the experimental group took part in a focus group discussion to provide qualitative insights into their learning experiences and perceptions of TBA.

2.3 Instruments

To investigate the effect of the TBA on EFL learners' speaking performance and motivation, three instruments were employed. These instruments were designed to capture both the linguistic and affective outcomes of the intervention, thereby providing comprehensive data for analysis.

2.3.1Speaking Performance Test

An oral proficiency test was administered to all participants immediately before and after the intervention in a form of pre and post tests. The test adopted a task-based format to ensure alignment with the instructional approach in the experimental group. Tasks required participants to engage in interactive speaking activities, such as role-plays, problem-solving discussions, or information-gap exchanges, simulating real-life communicative situations. Speaking performance was scored on established criteria for fluency, accuracy, and complexity, producing a total score on an 18-point scale. The students' recordings were assessed by both

the researcher and another expert teacher. Before scoring, both raters reviewed the assessment rubric together to ensure a shared understanding of the criteria for fluency and accuracy. A sample of the recordings was scored by both raters to check for consistency. Any differences in scoring were discussed and agreed upon to maintain fairness and reliability in the evaluation.

2.3.2 Motivation Self-Report-Questionnaire

A structured, Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from validated language learning motivation measures was used to capture motivation-related constructs. The instrument includes items addressing learners' interest in speaking activities, self-confidence in oral communication, perceived value of speaking in English, and willingness to engage in communicative tasks. The questionnaire is administered to all participants prior to the intervention (pre-test) and immediately after the intervention (post-test).

2.3.3 Focus-Group Discussion

To obtain in-depth qualitative evidence regarding learners' experiences with TBA, a focus-group interview was conducted with a purposive subsample of 10 students from the experimental group following the post-test. The discussion explored participants' perceptions of task design, perceived changes in motivation and speaking ability, the role of task complexity, and any barriers encountered. The focus-group discussion was audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed verbatim, and analysed using thematic analysis. Findings from the focus group were triangulated with the quantitative results to explain mechanisms of change and to contextualise observed performance and motivation outcomes.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

2.4.1 Pre-test

Before the instructional intervention, all participants in both the control and experimental groups completed a speaking performance test and a motivation questionnaire. These pre-tests established initial measures for fluency and accuracy and motivational levels, ensuring comparability

between the groups prior to treatment. The control and experimental groups' results were analysed and compared using the t-test for statistical difference significance.

2.4.2 The Treatment (Intervention)

Over a seven-week period, the control group hadreceived traditional instruction. In contrast, the experimental group was taught using the TBA, engaging in communicative speaking tasks designed to reflect real-life interaction scenarios. Instructional activities for the experimental group emphasised meaningful communication, problem-solving, and collaborative speaking practice, in line with TBA principles.

2.4.3 Post-test

Following the intervention, both groups completed the speaking performance test and motivation questionnaire. The post-test data were analysed using a t-test to compare the outcomes of the two instructional approaches, enabling the detection of variations in speaking proficiency and motivation associated with the TBA.

3. Findings

This study investigated the effects of TBA on EFL learners' speaking performance and motivation. To ensure the suitability of parametric tests, the normality of motivation questionnaire scores and speaking performance results was assessed for both control and experimental groups at pre- and post-intervention stages using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Results indicated no significant deviations from normality (all p-values > 0.05), confirming that the data were normally distributed. Descriptive statistics showed comparable means and standard deviations between groups at pre-test for both speaking performance (Control: M = 12.28, SD = 1.42; Experimental: M = 12.45, SD = 1.38) and motivation (Control: M = 3.42, SD = 0.41; Experimental: M = 3.47, SD = 0.39). These results justified the use of independent samples t-tests to examine group differences and the effects of the TBA following the intervention.

Following confirmation of normality, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the control and experimental groups'

motivation and speaking performance prior to the intervention, establishing baseline equivalence.

3.1 Pre-Test Findings

3.1.1 Speaking Performance Test

The control group achieved a mean pre-intervention speaking score of 12.28 (*SD* = 1.42) out of 18, while the experimental group recorded a mean score of 12.45 (*SD* = 1.38). An independent-samples t-test indicated that this difference was not statistically significant, $t(78) = 0.51$, $p = .61$ (Sig. 2-tailed = .61), suggesting that both groups demonstrated comparable speaking proficiency prior to the intervention.

Table 1. Pre-Test Results of the Speaking Performance

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	Df	P
Control Group	40	12.28	1.42	0.51	78	0.61
Experimental Group	40	12.45	1.38			

3.1.2 Pre-Treatment Motivation Questionnaire Results

In the pre-treatment phase, the control group obtained a mean motivation score of 3.42 (*SD* = 0.41) on the Likert-scale questionnaire, while the experimental group scored 3.47 (*SD* = 0.39). These results indicate comparable motivation levels before the intervention. An independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between the control group (n = 40) and the experimental group (n = 40), $t(78) = 0.62$, $p = .54$ (Sig. 2-tailed = .54), indicating that the observed difference is not significant at 0.05 level.

Table 2. Pre-Treatment Results of the Motivation Questionnaire

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	P
Control Group	40	3.42	0.41	0.62	78	0.54
Experimental Group	40	3.47	0.39			

These results confirm that, at the outset of the study, there were no significant differences between the control and experimental groups in terms of motivation or speaking performance, ensuring equivalence before the intervention phase.

3.2 Post-Test Results

3.2.1 Speaking Performance Test

The control group achieved a mean post-intervention speaking score of 13.05(*SD* = 1.36) out of 18, while the experimental group obtained a mean score of 15.10 (*SD* = 1.22). An independent-samples t-test indicated that this difference was statistically significant, $t(78) = 6.69$, $p < .001$ (Sig. 2-tailed < .001), indicating that the intervention had a significant effect on learners' speaking performance.

Table 3. Post-Test Results of the Speaking Performance

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Control Group	40	13.05	1.36	6.69	78	<.001
Experimental Group	40	15.10	1.22			

3.2.2 Post-Treatment Motivation Questionnaire Results

In the post-treatment phase, the control group obtained a mean motivation score of 3.50 (*SD* = 0.40), while the experimental group scored 4.02 (*SD* = 0.36). This shows a noticeable increase in the experimental group's motivation levels compared to the control group after the intervention. An independent samples t-test revealed that the difference between the control group (n = 40) and the experimental group (n = 40) was statistically significant, $t(78) = 6.07$, $p < .001$ (Sig. 2-tailed < .001), indicating that the intervention had a substantial effect on learners' motivation.

Table 4. Post-Treatment Results of the Motivation Questionnaire

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	P
Control Group	40	3.50	0.40	6.07	78	>.001
ExperimentalGroup	40	4.02	0.36			

These post-test findings demonstrate that the experimental group exhibited significantly greater improvements in both speaking performance and motivation compared to the control group, indicating the positive impact of the TBA on learners' oral proficiency and motivational engagement following the intervention.

3.2.3 Focus Group Findings

To obtain in-depth qualitative evidence regarding learners' experiences with the TBA instruction, a focus-group interview was conducted with a purposive subsample of 10 students from the experimental group following the post-test. The discussion took place in a classroom setting within the university and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The discussion was guided by a semi-structured protocol exploring participants' perceptions of task design, changes in motivation and speaking ability, encountered barriers, and their overall attitudes toward TBA.

With participants' consent, the focus group was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were then subjected to thematic analysis, allowing for systematic identification and interpretation of key patterns and themes related to learners' experiences and perceptions. Thematic analysis revealed several salient themes:

A. Positive Perceptions of Task Design

Participants valued the authentic, real-life relevance of the tasks, describing them as engaging and meaningful. The tasks promoted active participation and collaborative interaction, creating a supportive learning atmosphere.

B. Enhanced Motivation and Confidence

Most students reported heightened motivation to practice speaking, attributing this to the emphasis on meaningful communication rather than rote drills. This shift helped reduce anxiety and increased their confidence in using English orally.

C. Perceived Improvement in Speaking Ability

Learners noticed clear improvements in fluency and spontaneity, crediting the repeated exposure to communicative tasks requiring real-time

language processing.

D. EncounteredBarriers

Time constraints and limited vocabulary were cited as obstacles. Additionally, some participants noted uneven group dynamics, with dominant peers occasionally overshadowing quieter members.

E. Attitudes toward Task-Based Approach

The overall attitude toward TBA was positive, with students appreciating its focus on practical communication and learner autonomy. The approach was perceived as more motivating and relevant than traditional methods. Although some initial apprehension about task difficulty was reported, most students embraced these challenges as growth opportunities. Frustration occurred mainly when tasks felt excessively difficult or group participation was unbalanced.

These qualitative insights complement quantitative findings, elucidating how task authenticity, engagement, and positive learner attitudes collectively contributed to improved speaking performance and motivation. The results highlight the importance of carefully designed tasks and balanced group interaction for optimizing TBA effectiveness.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant evidence supporting the effectiveness of the TBA in enhancing EFL learners' speaking fluency, accuracy, and motivation. The significant development in speaking performance observed among the experimental group highlight the pedagogical strength of engaging learners in authentic communicative tasks that simulate real-world language use. This outcome aligns with Ellis's (2003) foundational assertion that task-based instruction facilitates meaningful interaction, thereby fostering both linguistic form and communicative function. By shifting the instructional focus from isolated language forms to purposeful task completion, learners are afforded ample opportunities to produce spontaneous, contextually grounded speech, consistent with Long's (2015) interaction hypothesis, which posits that negotiation of meaning during interaction is crucial for second language acquisition.

The qualitative insights gleaned from the focus group provide a

richer understanding of the mechanisms underlying these quantitative improvements. Participants emphasized that the authentic nature of tasks, combined with collaborative group work, created an engaging and supportive learning environment that mitigated anxiety and promoted active participation. These findings corroborate Samuda and Bygate's (2008) perspective that meaningful task engagement heightens cognitive involvement and enhances language development by encouraging learners to process language deeply and creatively. Moreover, the iterative practice inherent in task cycles appeared influential in helping learners progressively improve fluency and accuracy, echoing Willis and Willis's (2007) emphasis on task repetition and scaffolded interaction as critical facilitators of oral proficiency.

Motivation emerged as a central theme influenced by the implementation of TBA. The considerable increase in motivation scores for the experimental group emphasized the role of autonomy-supportive instruction in fostering learner engagement. Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory provides a comprehensive explanatory framework, suggesting that fulfilling learners' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness promote intrinsic motivation. The learner-centred, meaningful nature of tasks in TBA inherently supports these psychological needs, offering learners a sense of agency and relevance that traditional, form-focused instruction often lacks (Nunan, 2004). In addition, the focus group participants' responses affirmed this connection, highlighting enhanced enthusiasm and self-confidence during speaking activities, which aligns with Dörnyei's (2001) assertion that motivational strategies embedded within communicative tasks significantly boost learners' willingness to communicate.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also shed light on several challenges that require careful attention. Learners reported difficulties related to task complexity, time constraints, and uneven group participation. These barriers reflect concerns raised in the literature about the potential for cognitive overload and reduced motivation if tasks exceed learners' current proficiency levels (Skehan, 1998). Furthermore, issues with group dynamics, such as dominant participants overshadowing quieter peers, point

to the necessity of intentional classroom management to foster equitable participation (Willis, 1996). Addressing these challenges requires instructors to carefully scaffold task difficulty, provide lexical and strategic support, and actively monitor group interactions to create an inclusive learning environment conducive to all learners' growth.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data in this study offers a comprehensive view of how TBA operates to enhance both the cognitive and affective domains of language learning. The significant improvements in oral proficiency are closely intertwined with learners' positive perceptions of task relevance, autonomy, and motivational engagement. This dual impact accentuates the importance of designing instructional tasks that are not only linguistically challenging but also psychologically motivating, supporting Lai and Gu's (2011) and Al-Zahrani's (2018) findings that learner attitudes and task acceptance are critical mediators of TBA's effectiveness.

Pedagogically, these findings advocate for the wider adoption of TBA in EFL contexts, particularly for speaking instruction. The approach's emphasis on authentic, meaningful communication and learner empowerment aligns with contemporary communicative language teaching frameworks, facilitating both linguistic competence and motivational resilience. However, successful implementation hinges on thoughtful task design and classroom dynamics management, ensuring tasks are appropriately challenging and that all learners are afforded opportunities to contribute fully. Teachers should consider incorporating scaffolding techniques, vocabulary pre-teaching, and group roles to optimize participation and task success.

In summary, this study affirms that TBA represents a powerful instructional model for promoting EFL learners' speaking skills and motivation. By situating language use within purposeful, socially relevant tasks, learners develop oral proficiency in a manner that is both cognitively engaging and affectively supportive. The observed positive attitudes and motivational increase further confirm TBA's capacity to transform language learning into an empowering experience. Future research might expand on these findings by exploring longitudinal impacts of TBA, investigating the

interplay between task complexity and learner autonomy, and developing strategies to foster equitable participation in diverse classroom settings.

5. Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for EFL teaching and curriculum design. Firstly, the demonstrated effectiveness of the TBA in enhancing speaking fluency, accuracy, and motivation suggests that language educators should integrate authentic, communicative tasks into their instructional practices. Such tasks not only develop linguistic competence but also foster learner autonomy and engagement, which are crucial for sustained language learning success.

Secondly, the challenges related to task complexity and group dynamics highlight the need for careful task selection and scaffolding. Teachers should tailor task difficulty to learners' proficiency levels and provide necessary lexical and strategic support to prevent cognitive overload. Furthermore, fostering equitable participation through structured group roles or teacher mediation can mitigate the risks of dominant learners overshadowing others, ensuring inclusive and effective speaking practice.

At the curriculum level, these results advocate for a shift away from traditional, form-focused approaches toward more interactive, task-centred syllabi that emphasize meaningful communication and learner-centeredness. Training programs for language teachers should also incorporate TBA principles and equip educators with strategies to manage task complexity and group interactions effectively.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence that the Task-Based Approach significantly benefits EFL learners by improving their speaking performance and enhancing motivation. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data offers a comprehensive understanding of how authentic, collaborative tasks foster oral proficiency and learner engagement. While some challenges remain, particularly regarding task difficulty and classroom dynamics, these can be addressed through thoughtful instructional design and facilitation. Overall, TBA represents a viable and valuable framework for promoting effective and motivating language

learning experiences. Future research could explore longitudinal effects and develop best practices for optimizing task complexity and learner interaction in diverse educational contexts.

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