

## ENHANCING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING IN UZBEK EFL CLASSROOMS

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**Abstract:** This study explores the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving speaking skills among Uzbek university EFL students. A quasi-experimental design was implemented, comparing a TBLT-based instruction group to a traditional grammar-based group over 8 weeks. Quantitative results demonstrated significant gains in speaking proficiency in the TBLT group, supported by qualitative data indicating enhanced learner motivation and reduced anxiety. The study recommends wider adoption of TBLT in EFL curricula to foster communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Task-Based Learning, Speaking Skills, EFL, Uzbekistan, Language Pedagogy

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu tadqiqot O'zbekiston oliy ta'lim muassasalaridagi ingliz tili (EFL) talabalari og'zaki nutq ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishda topshiriqqa asoslangan o'qitish (TBLT) metodining samaradorligini o'rganadi. 8 haftalik eksperiment davomida an'anaviy grammatika asosidagi yondashuv bilan TBLT asosidagi ta'lim natijalari taqqoslandi. Natijalar TBLT guruhida og'zaki nutq darajasida sezilarli ijobiy o'sishni ko'rsatdi. So'rovnomalar va kuzatuvlar o'quvchilarda motivatsiya oshgani va qo'rquv kamayganini tasdiqladi. Tadqiqot EFL kurslarida kommunikativ yondashuvni kuchaytirish maqsadida TBLT metodini keng qo'llashni tavsiya etadi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Topshiriqqa asoslangan o'qitish, og'zaki nutq, chet tili sifatida ingliz tili, O'zbekiston, til o'qitish metodikasi

**Аннотация:** Данное исследование направлено на изучение эффективности обучения, основанного на выполнении заданий (Task-Based Language Teaching — TBLT), в развитии разговорных навыков у студентов вузов Узбекистана, изучающих английский язык как иностранный. В течение 8 недель проводился квазиэксперимент, в ходе которого сравнивались результаты традиционного и TBLT-подходов. Количественные данные показали значительное улучшение разговорной речи в экспериментальной группе, а качественные данные подтвердили рост мотивации и снижение тревожности. Рекомендуется внедрение TBLT в учебные программы по английскому языку для повышения коммуникативной компетенции.

**Ключевые слова:** обучение на основе заданий, разговорные навыки, английский как иностранный, Узбекистан, методика преподавания языка

### I. INTRODUCTION

In Uzbekistan, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction often centers around grammar rules, vocabulary memorization, and translation activities, with a predominant reliance on traditional methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and the Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) model. While these methods may aid in form-focused knowledge, they often fail to promote communicative competence—one of the core objectives of modern language learning. Consequently, many students in Uzbek higher education institutions can demonstrate strong passive knowledge of grammar but struggle to communicate fluently or spontaneously in real-life situations.

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition among language educators and policymakers in Uzbekistan of the need to shift toward more communicative, learner-centered approaches. This shift aligns with global pedagogical reforms that advocate for the integration of authentic communication tasks in the classroom. One such approach gaining international and regional traction is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which prioritizes meaningful interaction and the completion of real-life tasks over isolated language drills. Unlike PPP, which typically moves from controlled to freer practice, TBLT begins with a task that simulates authentic use and then supports language development in context.

TBLT is underpinned by theoretical foundations in cognitive and sociocultural learning theories. According to Ellis (2003), tasks in TBLT serve as both input and output-driven mechanisms that naturally engage learners in language processing. Tasks such as interviews, role plays, and problem-solving activities encourage learners to negotiate meaning, formulate output, and reflect on language use—thus supporting both fluency and accuracy over time. This pedagogy is particularly relevant in EFL contexts like Uzbekistan, where students have limited opportunities for authentic English interaction outside the classroom.

Despite its proven benefits in international contexts, research on the implementation of TBLT in Uzbekistan remains limited. There is a noticeable gap in empirical studies exploring its effectiveness in developing specific skills, particularly speaking, which is often cited as the most challenging and anxiety-inducing skill among Uzbek EFL learners. Existing instructional models typically focus on written accuracy and examination preparation, neglecting the spontaneous and interactive nature of oral communication.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching on the speaking proficiency of undergraduate EFL students in Uzbekistan. By comparing a TBLT-based intervention with traditional instruction over the course of eight weeks, the study seeks to determine whether task-based approaches can effectively enhance learners' ability to communicate more confidently, fluently, and accurately in English. The findings are expected to provide practical implications for curriculum developers, teacher trainers, and policymakers aiming to modernize language education in the Uzbek context.

## II.METHODS

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group pre-test and post-test structure. This approach was chosen to measure the causal effect of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on the speaking proficiency of Uzbek university students while accounting for natural classroom settings.

The participants consisted of 60 second-year undergraduate students enrolled in the English Philology department of a state university in Uzbekistan. All participants were at an

intermediate level (B1 according to CEFR) based on institutional placement tests. The students were randomly divided into two equal groups:

Experimental Group (n = 30): Received instruction using TBLT strategies.

Control Group (n = 30): Received instruction using traditional grammar-based methods.

Demographic variables such as age (18–20), gender, and English placement scores were balanced across groups to ensure baseline equivalence.

Group	Number of Students (n)	Instructional Approach	Average CEFR Level (Pre-test)
Experimental Group	30	Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)	B1
Control Group	30	Grammar-Based Traditional Instruction	B1

To ensure triangulation and reliability, a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools were used:

#### **Pre-test and Post-test Speaking Assessments:**

These tests were designed according to CEFR B1-B2 descriptors and administered at the beginning and end of the 8-week instructional period. The responses were scored independently by two certified EFL raters using CEFR-aligned analytic rubrics focusing on fluency, coherence, accuracy, pronunciation, and lexical range.

#### **Classroom Observations and Video Recordings:**

Weekly classroom sessions were observed and recorded for both groups. Observation checklists were developed to track student interaction, task engagement, and teacher-student dynamics. Videos were later analyzed for discourse patterns and speaking opportunities.

#### **Student Feedback Surveys:**

Post-intervention surveys containing both Likert-scale and open-ended questions were distributed to evaluate student attitudes, motivation, and perceived improvements in speaking skills.

The study was conducted over eight consecutive weeks during the spring semester. The instructional approach varied between groups:

#### **Experimental Group (TBLT):**

Students in this group engaged in a series of progressively complex speaking tasks. Each week featured a different communicative activity designed to simulate real-world language use. These included:

Week 1–2: Paired role-plays (e.g., at the doctor's office, ordering food)

Week 3–4: Information gap and storytelling tasks

Week 5–6: Group problem-solving and decision-making tasks

Week 7–8: Simulated interviews and class presentations

Each task was structured according to Ellis's (2003) three-phase TBLT cycle: Pre-task, Task performance, and Post-task reflection. Error correction was conducted reactively after tasks to maintain communicative flow.

#### **Control Group (Traditional Instruction):**

Students in this group continued with teacher-led lessons focusing on explicit grammar explanations (e.g., present perfect, reported speech), vocabulary drills, and sentence translation exercises. Speaking activities were limited to controlled repetition or substitution drills, with minimal authentic interaction.

The instructional procedures for both groups were supervised to maintain fidelity to the treatment design. All instructors involved had a minimum of five years of teaching experience and were briefed to avoid methodological crossover.

### III. RESULTS

This section presents both quantitative and qualitative findings derived from pre- and post-test assessments, classroom observations, and student surveys. The results indicate that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) had a positive and statistically significant impact on students' speaking proficiency, classroom participation, and learner attitudes. To analyze the statistical significance of speaking score improvements, a paired-sample t-test was conducted within both groups. The results showed a significant improvement in the experimental group, with  $p < 0.05$ , indicating that the observed difference was unlikely due to chance.

Group	Pre-Test Mean Score	Post-Test Mean Score	Average Improvement (%)	p-value
Experimental (TBLT)	58.2	84.5	+26.3%	< 0.05
Control (Traditional)	59.0	64.3	+9.0%	n.s. (not significant)

These findings suggest that students taught through TBLT significantly outperformed their peers in the control group in terms of overall speaking proficiency. The 26% average improvement in the TBLT group highlights the effectiveness of task-based instruction for enhancing fluency, accuracy, and communicative competence.

Post-intervention feedback from students further supports the quantitative outcomes. The survey, completed by all participants, included Likert-scale and open-ended questions regarding their experiences, challenges, and perceived improvement.

Indicator	Experimental Group (TBLT)	Control Group
Felt more confident speaking English	87% agreed	42% agreed
Reported lower anxiety in speaking	76% agreed	39% agreed
Preferred interactive learning methods	92% agreed	47% agreed
Found lessons enjoyable and meaningful	88% agreed	40% agreed

Open-ended responses highlighted that students appreciated the practical relevance of tasks, peer collaboration, and real-life communication practice. Several students in the TBLT group stated that they "no longer fear making mistakes" and feel more prepared for oral exams or job interviews.

### IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study substantiate the growing body of evidence that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can significantly improve speaking proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly in environments such as Uzbekistan where traditional, teacher-centered methods still predominate. The statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's post-test scores (+26%) affirms TBLT's effectiveness in facilitating oral fluency, lexical diversity, and communicative competence, aligning with previous studies (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007).

One of the most notable advantages observed in the current study was the increased student engagement and motivation within the TBLT group. Students exposed to meaningful tasks such as role-plays and problem-solving activities demonstrated higher levels of participation, self-expression, and spontaneity in classroom discourse. This supports the

premise that authentic communicative contexts, when integrated into instruction, promote more effective language internalization than rote memorization or isolated grammar drills (Littlewood, 2011).

Additionally, survey results revealed notable improvements in learners' confidence and reduced speaking anxiety, two affective variables that are frequently cited as barriers to L2 oral performance. These psychological benefits reinforce the claim that TBLT, by prioritizing communication over perfection, creates a low-anxiety environment conducive to language acquisition (Krashen, 1985). Students' qualitative feedback highlighted that they found task-based lessons more meaningful and enjoyable, which may translate into increased learner autonomy and sustained language use beyond the classroom.

In conclusion, this study contributes valuable insight into the applicability and impact of TBLT in a Central Asian EFL context. With adequate training and institutional backing, TBLT has the potential to transform speaking instruction and align language education in Uzbekistan with global communicative standards.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in enhancing speaking skills among Uzbek university students in EFL settings. The results provide clear empirical support for TBLT as a pedagogical strategy capable of producing significant improvements in learners' oral proficiency. Compared to traditional grammar-focused instruction, TBLT yielded higher test score gains, greater classroom participation, and enhanced learner confidence. Furthermore, qualitative insights from classroom observations and student surveys demonstrate that task-based activities promote active engagement, foster learner autonomy, and create a low-anxiety learning environment conducive to oral language development. These outcomes are particularly relevant in the Uzbek context, where communicative competence often receives less attention in formal curricula.

Nevertheless, the findings also highlight key implementation challenges, such as the need for teacher training, curricular adaptation, and alignment of assessment methods with communicative outcomes. To ensure the sustainable adoption of TBLT in Uzbekistan's higher education system, institutional reforms and professional development initiatives are essential. In conclusion, TBLT should be considered a viable, evidence-based alternative to traditional methods for developing speaking skills in EFL contexts. Its alignment with real-world communication makes it not only effective but also highly relevant in preparing learners for academic, professional, and social success in the globalized world.

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