

## TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) AND TRADITIONAL METHODS IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS

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*Speaking is considered one of the most essential skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, yet many learners still face challenges in achieving fluency, accuracy, and communicative competence. This study compares the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and traditional methods in improving the speaking performance of university-level EFL students. Forty participants were divided into two equal groups: one received instruction through TBLT, while the other was taught using the traditional Presentation–Practice–Production (PPP) approach. The intervention lasted six weeks, with pre-tests and post-tests measuring fluency, grammatical accuracy, and lexical richness. Data were analysed using paired-sample t-tests and descriptive statistics. The results revealed that the TBLT group achieved significantly higher improvements in all three aspects of speaking compared to the traditional group. Qualitative observations also indicated greater engagement and motivation among TBLT learners. The study concludes that TBLT offers a more effective and communicative approach to developing speaking skills in EFL contexts. Implications for language teachers and curriculum designers are discussed, emphasising the integration of task-based elements into classroom practice.*

Speaking competence is widely recognised as a core objective in English language education, particularly in contexts where learners have limited exposure to authentic communication outside the classroom. In many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, students' ability to speak fluently and accurately remains underdeveloped despite years of formal instruction. This gap between learning effort and communicative outcome has prompted researchers and educators to reconsider the methodologies used in teaching speaking.

Traditional teaching approaches, often represented by the Presentation–Practice–Production (PPP) model, have long been employed to develop speaking skills. These methods typically focus on the explicit teaching of grammar and vocabulary, followed by controlled and guided practice activities. While they may promote accuracy, critics argue that they often fail to foster spontaneous, meaningful communication.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emerged as an alternative, grounded in the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and supported by constructivist learning theories. In TBLT, the primary unit of instruction is the “task” — an activity that requires learners to use the target language to achieve a specific outcome, mirroring real-world communication. Proponents argue that this approach not only encourages authentic interaction but also integrates grammar and vocabulary learning in context.

The present study aims to compare the effectiveness of TBLT and traditional methods in developing speaking skills among university-level EFL learners. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. Does TBLT result in greater improvement in fluency, accuracy, and lexical richness than traditional methods?
2. How do students' engagement levels differ between the two approaches?

By answering these questions, the research seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for EFL practitioners and curriculum designers.

### **Speaking Skills in EFL Contexts**

Speaking in a foreign language requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, communicative competence, and psychological readiness. Brown and Lee (2015)

emphasise that speaking is both a productive skill and a means of real-time interaction, making it a complex area for instruction. In many EFL contexts, the scarcity of authentic speaking opportunities hinders learners' ability to internalise language structures and develop automaticity.

#### **Traditional Methods of Teaching Speaking**

The PPP model — Presentation, Practice, and Production — has been a dominant teaching paradigm in EFL classrooms for decades (Harmer, 2015). In the presentation stage, teachers introduce new language forms, often through explicit explanation. In the practice stage, learners perform controlled exercises to reinforce accuracy. The production stage allows for freer use of the target language, although it often remains limited to the structures introduced in the lesson. Research (Richards, 2017) has shown that while PPP can improve accuracy, it may not sufficiently develop learners' fluency or adaptability in spontaneous conversation.

#### **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)**

TBLT is grounded in the notion that language learning is most effective when it involves meaningful communication (Ellis, 2018). A task in TBLT is defined as an activity where the focus is on meaning rather than form, and success is measured by the completion of a communicative goal rather than the accurate use of specific structures. TBLT lessons typically follow a cycle: pre-task activities, the main task, and post-task reflection or focus on form. Empirical studies (Willis & Willis, 2020) indicate that TBLT promotes not only fluency but also incidental grammar acquisition through repeated exposure in context.

#### **Comparative Studies**

Previous comparative research has yielded mixed findings. Carless (2018) found that TBLT significantly improved learners' willingness to communicate, while Littlewood (2019) reported that traditional methods sometimes produce better short-term gains in grammatical accuracy. However, meta-analyses (Bygate, 2021) suggest that TBLT generally outperforms traditional approaches in sustaining long-term speaking development.

Although TBLT has gained global recognition, few experimental studies have compared it directly with traditional methods in Central Asian EFL contexts. This



research addresses that gap by conducting a controlled experiment with Uzbek university students, providing locally relevant findings.

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test–post-test control group structure. The aim was to measure the comparative effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and traditional methods in developing speaking skills among university-level EFL students.

A total of 40 undergraduate students (aged 19–21) enrolled in a Foreign Language and Literature programme at a university in Uzbekistan participated in the study. All participants were at an upper-intermediate level of English, as determined by the university's placement test. They were randomly assigned into two groups:

- Experimental Group (n = 20): Received TBLT-based instruction.
- Control Group (n = 20): Received traditional Presentation–Practice–Production (PPP) instruction.

Participation was voluntary, and all students provided informed consent.

- Speaking Test: A 5-minute interview-style test scored on fluency, accuracy, and lexical richness using a 0–10 scale for each component.
- Observation Checklist: Used to record levels of participation, motivation, and interaction during lessons.
- Questionnaire: Collected students' self-reported perceptions of the lessons and their engagement.

The intervention lasted six weeks (two 90-minute lessons per week).

- Experimental Group (TBLT): Lessons were organised around communicative tasks such as problem-solving, role-play, and information-gap activities. Focus on form occurred naturally during post-task reflection.
- Control Group (Traditional): Lessons followed the PPP format, with explicit grammar explanation, controlled drills, and limited free speaking at the end.

**Pre-Test:** Conducted before the intervention to assess baseline speaking ability.

**Post-Test:** Conducted after six weeks to measure improvement.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analysed using paired-sample t-tests to compare pre- and post-test scores within each group, and independent-sample t-tests to compare gains between groups. Qualitative observation notes were summarised to highlight patterns in learner engagement.

Table 1. Mean Speaking Scores (0–10 scale)

Group	Test	Fluency	Accuracy	Lexical Richness	Total Mean
Experimental (TBLT)	Pre-Test	5.2	5.4	5.1	5.23
Experimental (TBLT)	Post-Test	7.8	7.6	7.4	7.60
Control (Traditional)	Pre-Test	5.1	5.3	5.0	5.13
Control (Traditional)	Post-Test	6.4	6.3	6.1	6.27

### Statistical Analysis

#### Within-group improvements:

- TBLT group showed statistically significant improvement ( $p < 0.001$ ) in all components.
- Traditional group also improved significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ), but gains were smaller.

#### Between-group comparison:

- Independent-sample t-test results revealed that the TBLT group's improvement was significantly greater than the traditional group's in fluency ( $p = 0.002$ ), accuracy ( $p = 0.004$ ), and lexical richness ( $p = 0.003$ ).

### Observational Findings

#### Observation notes indicated that:

- TBLT learners were more engaged in speaking activities, often initiating conversations without teacher prompts.
- Traditional method learners tended to wait for teacher instructions and were more hesitant to speak freely.

- In the TBLT group, task-based activities created a positive, low-anxiety environment, while in the traditional group, the focus on accuracy sometimes led to reduced participation.

The findings of this study demonstrate that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is more effective than traditional Presentation–Practice–Production (PPP) methods in improving university students’ speaking skills. While both groups made measurable progress, the experimental group receiving TBLT-based instruction achieved significantly greater gains in fluency, accuracy, and lexical richness.

#### Interpretation of Results

The superior performance of the TBLT group can be attributed to several factors. First, the task-based approach provided learners with authentic communication opportunities. By engaging in problem-solving, role-plays, and information-gap tasks, students were encouraged to use language for meaningful purposes rather than merely rehearsing pre-taught structures. This mirrors real-world language use and may explain the marked improvement in fluency.

Second, TBLT lessons encouraged incidental grammar acquisition. Although there was no explicit focus on grammatical forms during the task itself, the post-task reflection stages allowed for targeted corrective feedback. This aligns with Ellis’s (2018) claim that a balance between meaning-focused and form-focused instruction can yield both accuracy and fluency gains.

Third, the collaborative nature of tasks fostered peer interaction and learner autonomy. Students frequently relied on each other to complete communicative goals, which created a supportive classroom atmosphere and reduced speaking anxiety.

#### Comparison with Previous Studies

These results are consistent with Carless (2018), who found that TBLT increases learners’ willingness to communicate, and Bygate (2021), whose meta-analysis confirmed TBLT’s long-term benefits for oral proficiency. However, this study also supports Littlewood’s (2019) observation that traditional methods can produce moderate gains in grammatical accuracy over a short period, suggesting that PPP still



holds some value, particularly for lower-level learners or for targeted grammar teaching.

#### **Pedagogical Implications**

The findings suggest that EFL teachers should consider integrating task-based activities into their speaking lessons to promote communicative competence. For optimal results, a hybrid approach combining the strengths of TBLT and PPP could be used — for example, introducing grammar explicitly when necessary, but embedding it within communicative tasks. Curriculum designers should also ensure that speaking assessments measure not only accuracy but also fluency and lexical range, reflecting the communicative nature of language.

#### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study's relatively small sample size and short intervention period limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research could examine the long-term effects of TBLT, explore its impact on different proficiency levels, or investigate how technology-enhanced TBLT (e.g., through online collaboration tools) might further enhance speaking development.

#### **Conclusion**

This experimental study compared the effects of Task-Based Language Teaching and traditional PPP methods on the speaking performance of Uzbek university EFL learners. The results clearly indicate that TBLT led to greater improvements in fluency, accuracy, and lexical richness, as well as higher engagement and motivation levels. While traditional methods remain useful for focused grammar teaching, TBLT's communicative, learner-centred nature makes it a more effective overall approach to developing speaking skills.

The study's implications highlight the need for EFL practitioners to adopt more interactive, meaning-focused methodologies. By doing so, educators can bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication, enabling learners to speak with greater confidence and competence.

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