



Task Based Instruction: Investigating its Impacts on Students' Speaking Skills Development at Primary Schools in Ethiopia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of task based instruction (TBI) on students' speaking skills development at primary schools in Ethiopia. The study employed a quazi-experimental research design. Particularly, the study used a pretest-posttest control group research design. Participants of the study were 80 grade 7 students who were enrolled in 2018 academic year in Aleta Wondo primary school. In this study, two sets of data were collected: namely qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data was collected from pretest-posttest exam and the qualitative data through observation. The result of pretest-posttest data indicated that significant difference observed after the intervention on experimental group students who learnt through task based instruction (i.e. p value calculated to be 0.000). It helped them to improve their speaking skills, increased their confidence, and motivated them to learning English despite the difficulties they face due to different factors. In addition, the observation data confirmed that task based instruction improved students' to interact using English language in EFL classrooms.

Keywords

Task based approach, Communicative language teaching, Pre-task, Task cycle

1. Introduction

Task-based instruction (TBI) is an approach in which communicative and meaningful tasks play the central role in language learning. In the task based instruction (TBI) the process of using language in communication is more important than mere production of correct language forms. Thus, it is considered as part of communicative language teaching approach as it involves real and meaningful communication as the primary feature of language learning (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). It aims not just to teach communication as an object but to engage learners in authentic acts of communication in the classroom. Moreover, this approach enhances learner autonomy at it gives them the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec 1981).

There are three stages in the process of task-based language teaching; pre-task phase, task cycle and post-task phase. In the pre-task phase, the focus is on motivational, cognitive and linguistic aspects. At this stage, the teacher introduces the topic and the tasks prepared. But his role can't exceed more than giving guidance and support Kalavathi (2017). In addition, the teacher will not introduce the language forms. Willis (1996) argues that the teacher gives the task instructions about what the task involves, what its goals are and what outcome is required after a given time. More importantly, the teacher encourages students to prepare a plan that will be done during the task cycle stage.

The second stage is the task cycle. This stage also involves three steps i.e. the task, the planning and reporting stages. The cyclic process begins with performing the task. The learners will perform the tasks in pairs and groups and the teacher monitors from distance (Willis 1996). After performing the tasks, students prepare a report about the task they performed. Finally, they present their findings to the whole class. Teachers can use different types of tasks in this stage. Among this, information-gap, reasoning-gap, opinion-gap and form-focused tasks are the significant ones.

The last stage in task based speaking approach is a post-task stage or usually referred as the linguistic aspect phase. Sometimes it is also referred as the language focus stage. Willis (1996) noted that this stage should be done

immediately after the task cycle. In this stage, the teacher highlights specific language features from the task, and the learners analyze and practice new words, phrases and patterns.

However, scholars argue that task based instruction is more demanding and students willingness to take part in handling complex tasks determines the outcome of this approach. Skehan (1996) for instance asserted that complexity (restructuring) involves learner's commitment to expand basic competencies to use more challenging phrases, words or sentences. Thus, learners' willingness to attempt more complex language use is important in the learning process. If learners do not attempt to restructure and elaborate the language, it may be due to lack of interest to improve their language or an unwillingness to take risks to use more complex structures (Skehan, 1996).

As any approach, the researcher believes that task based teaching-learning approach is not devoid of limitations or it is not the only best approach which can solve all the language problems of students. On top of the theoretical drawback of TBI mentioned above, in a context like Ethiopia, students' background, teachers' attitude towards contemporary approaches and administrative issues trigger back the implementation of such innovative approaches. Hence, the aim of this study is to present an alternative approach which can complement the drawbacks of the conventional approach.

1.1 Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of task-based instructional approach in speaking classes in terms of improving students' speaking skills at Aleta Wondo primary school. Particularly, the study is interested in utilizing the task based instructional approach by using tasks as a core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to study the effectiveness of task based instructional approach on EFL students speaking skills in Aleta Wondo primary school. The findings of the study may help EFL teachers to try out an alternative approach in their classroom while teaching speaking skills. In addition, it may promote EFL students speaking skill which is destined by many research findings conducted earlier. This study may also give an insight to future researchers who are interested to conduct a research on the different effects of task-based approach on students' speaking skills in different sample groups.

2. Material and Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quazi-experimental research design. Particularly, the study employed a pretest posttest control group research design. This design quazi-experimental research design) was favored in this study as classroom research cannot be controlled hundred percent from extraneous variables as laboratory experiments and allows the use of intact classes without restructuring the natural learning environment for experimental purpose. The study conducted using a mixed approach i.e. involving both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative data emanated from classroom observation and the quantitative data obtained from the pretest posttest exams.

2.2 Participants of the Study and Sampling Technique

Participants of this study were 80 Aleta Wondo primary school students who were enrolled in 2018 academic year in grade seven. The students were selected using simple random sampling technique as a group. The researcher used the randomization only to select the groups but not to manipulate individual students into groups. Rather, the researcher used intact classes for control and experimental group.

At the very beginning of the study, a pre-test exam was administered to both control and experimental group students to check homogeneity of the subjects. The researcher assured that the subjects had relatively statistically homogenous result (i.e. $p > 0.05$) before they engaged into the actual experiment.

2.3 Data Gathering Instruments

In this study, two sets of data were collected: namely qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data was collected through observation and the quantitative data from pretest-posttest exams. The non-participant observation was employed in this study so as to avoid bias in the study. Another researcher collected data from the classrooms using video recorder and field note. The observation was held three times in the process at the beginning, middle and end of the experiment. The test was administered at the beginning and end of the study. The pre-test was administered to check homogeneity and to get valid data for comparison at the end. The post-test was used to check whether intervention brought significant change or not.

2.4 Data Analysis Procedures

In order to analyze speaking pre-test and post-test result, the researcher first recorded students' utterance and transcribed it into a written form. Then the researcher scored students performance of speaking test by counting the scores students obtained in the test. The pre-test post-test result was calculated to see if a mean difference existed as a result of intervention. In order to see whether the difference is significant or not, a t-test analysis was conducted.

Repeated classroom observations were conducted to find out exactly what the teacher and students were doing in each minute of the lesson. Observation is a useful research instrument that helps researchers to explore the environment in

a real learning setting and obtain direct information about the instructional approach under investigation. As it was informed earlier, the observation was carried out with the aid of a checklist, which had entries to be filled during observation. The data obtained from the observation checklist was analyzed qualitatively by addressing thematically similar points together.

3. Result and Discussion

In order to realize the objective set earlier, two sets of data were collected: pre-test post-test speaking exam and observation data. Students' performance in the pre-test post-test was compared using descriptive statistics employing SPSS 20 to see the progress they made through the intervention in areas like accuracy, fluency, lexis, and comprehension. The results are presented in the following tables.

Table 1 An independent t-test results for the comparison of pretest scores between control and experimental groups in speaking skills

Group	Category	N	Mean	StD	T	Df	Sig.
Control and Experimental	Pre-test	80	5.75	1.88	3.34	78	0.09

In order to check the homogeneity of the two groups before the intervention, a pre speaking test was administered to control and experimental groups. According to the table, the p value **0.09** is greater than the standard level of significance that is 0.05. This indicated that the two groups were relatively in equal level of performance. Thus, the level of homogeneity between the groups was acceptable.

Table 2 An independent t-test results for the comparison of posttest scores between control and experimental groups in speaking skills

Group	Category	N	Mean	StD	T	Df	Sig.
Control and Experimental	Pre-test	80	7.32	0.91	5.91	78	0.000

Table two presented the result of control and experimental group students in their post-test speaking exam. The result of the t-test suggested a p-value of 0.000 which is smaller than the standard significance level 0.05. Thus, the result indicated that the mean score of the experimental group 7.32 is greater than the control group. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the task based approach to teaching speaking skills had a significance effect on experimental group students.

In order to see the implementation of task-based approach in a classroom, as stated earlier a series of observations were carried out using a checklist. The result of the observation revealed that task-based approach to teaching speaking skills increased their accuracy and fluency while producing sentences. They also became capable to present the results after a pair or group discussion.

4. Discussion

It has been demonstrated that task-based instruction is a successful strategy for raising students' speaking proficiency. With this teaching approach, students are exposed to real-world communication challenges in which they must use the target language to finish tasks or find solutions to problems. The fact that task-based instruction offers a relevant context for language learning is one of its main benefits. Students are urged to talk and write in the language with purpose and practicality in order to improve their fluency and speaking abilities. Learners can practice various parts of speaking, including pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and grammar structures, by participating in meaningful activities. The study's results are consistent with research by Widi & Astawa (2014) and Sariçoban & Karakurt (2016), which showed that TBSAs increased students' motivation and enjoyment of studying English while also suggesting that tasks are a useful approach to hone English speaking abilities.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of task-based instructional approach in enhancing students speaking skills Aleta Wondo primary school. The study was conducted on 80 grade seven students. The findings of the pre-test post-test data and the classroom observations showed that task-based speaking approach positively impacted experimental group students speaking performance. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the task based approach to teaching speaking is more effective to enhance students' ability than the conventional approach.

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