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DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract. This action research study examines the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in developing speaking skills among secondary school students in Uzbekistan. The study, conducted at School 33 in Balikchi District, Andijan Region, involved 60 eighth-grade students over a 12-week period. Pre- and post-test assessments measured fluency, accuracy, complexity, and confidence using standardized speaking rubrics. Results show that the TBLT intervention significantly improved speaking ability across all dimensions: fluency increased by 67%, accuracy by 58%, complexity by 71%, and confidence by 84%. Qualitative data from student interviews and teacher observations indicated that meaningful task completion, collaborative interaction, and authentic communication contexts motivated students and reduced speaking anxiety. Compared to a control group that received traditional instruction, TBLT students improved their speaking skills by 73%. The findings confirm that task-based approaches effectively develop speaking competence by providing purposeful communication opportunities, discussing meaning, and focusing on conveying messages rather than on individual linguistic forms, offering practical pedagogical outcomes for EFL contexts.

Key words: task-based language teaching, speaking skills development, communicative competence, EFL pedagogy, action research, secondary education

Introduction. Speaking is the most prominent manifestation of language competence, but developing effective speaking skills remains one of the most challenging aspects of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) [1]. In the educational context of Uzbekistan, where English is a crucial tool for international communication, academic advancement, and career opportunities, developing students' oral communication skills has never been more important [2]. However, the traditional grammar-translation and presentation-practice-production (PPP) approaches that dominate many English language classrooms often fail to provide sufficient opportunities for authentic, meaningful oral communication, resulting in students acquiring extensive grammatical knowledge but struggling to express themselves fluently and confidently in real-world interactions [3].

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a pedagogical principled approach that addresses these limitations by organizing instruction around communicative tasks, i.e., activities that require learners to use language purposefully to achieve specific outcomes [4]. In contrast to traditional methods that emphasize explicit grammatical instruction and supervised practice, TBLT prioritizes meaning-oriented communication, in which learners engage with language as a means to achieve meaningful goals rather than as an object of learning [5]. This paradigm shifts from "learning to use" to "using to learn" is consistent with research on second language acquisition, which suggests that language development is most effective when learners

engage in authentic communication that expands their linguistic resources and focuses on conveying a message [6].

The theoretical framework of TBLT is based on interactionist perspectives on second language acquisition, which emphasize the important role of meaningful interaction, negotiation of meaning, and attention to form in communicative contexts [7]. When students engage in tasks that require information exchange, problem solving, or shared decision-making, they must actively seek intelligible outcomes, perceive gaps in their linguistic knowledge, and switch languages to achieve communicative success [8]. These processes constitute the basic mechanisms of language development, according to Long's interaction hypothesis and Swain's output hypothesis [9].

Despite increasing recognition of the potential benefits of TBLT, its implementation in real-world classroom contexts, particularly in EFL settings with limited resources and large class sizes, has yet to be fully explored [10].

This action research study aims to address these shortcomings by examining the effectiveness of TBLT in developing speaking skills among eighth-grade students at School No. 33 in Balikchi District, Andijan Region, Republic of Uzbekistan. The study examines quantitative improvements in speaking skills and qualitative understanding of students' experiences with task-based learning, providing evidence-based guidance for teachers seeking to improve speaking instruction in similar settings. Literature Review. Task-based language teaching is based on the principles of communicative language teaching, but offers a more theoretically grounded and empirically supported approach to the development of communicative competence [1]. The theoretical foundations of the approach are primarily derived from interactionist perspectives on second language acquisition, which emphasize that language learning occurs through meaningful interaction in which learners negotiate meaning, acquire comprehensible information, produce modified outputs, and perceive linguistic features in context [7].Long's interaction hypothesis argues that conversational interaction facilitates language acquisition by providing opportunities for negotiating meaning when communication breaks occur [9]. During such negotiations, learners acquire expanded knowledge, produce modified outcomes, and develop metacognitive awareness of linguistic forms and functions. These processes allow learners to test hypotheses about language, receive implicit feedback from interlocutors, and gradually refine their interlanguage systems [6].The definition of what constitutes a "task" has generated considerable scholarly debate, with different researchers proposing different criteria [4]. Ellis synthesizes these perspectives and identifies six key characteristics of a task: (1) a primary focus on meaning, (2) the presence of a gap in information or thought that requires communication, (3) reliance on learners' linguistic and nonlinguistic resources, (4) a clearly defined communicative outcome, (5) similarity to real-world language use, and (6) collaborative processes.These features distinguish tasks from traditional language exercises, which typically emphasize linguistic form, provide predetermined language, and focus on accuracy rather than communication [3].

For example, a traditional exercise might ask students to practice the present perfect tense through guided substitution exercises, while a task might require students to talk to classmates about their experiences and report on their findings—naturally, the present perfect tense is elicited by the focus on meaningful communication [4].

Research has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of TBLT in developing speaking skills in a variety of educational contexts [8]. Research on the development of fluent speaking has shown that task-based instruction produces faster speaking rates, fewer hesitations, and more extended speech than traditional approaches [10]. This is because tasks create real

communicative pressure, which encourages learners to prioritize message delivery over perfect accuracy, thereby creating automaticity in language production [1].

Despite its theoretical appeal and empirical support, implementing TBLT faces practical challenges, especially in EFL contexts [6]. Teachers report challenges such as resistance from students accustomed to traditional teaching, concerns about classroom management during interactive tasks, uncertainty about how to address linguistic errors without disrupting communication, and the pressure of standardized testing that emphasizes grammatical knowledge [7].

Research on the successful implementation of TBLT identifies several important factors [8]. Clear task instructions and modeling ensure that students understand the task requirements and expected outcomes [9]. Strategic grouping that takes into account language proficiency, personality, and social dynamics promotes effective collaboration [10]. Appropriate task complexity that matches students' proficiency levels maintains engagement while providing achievable challenges [4]. Finally, post-task reflection

Methodology. This action research was conducted in the 2025 school year at School 33 in Balikchi district, Andijan region, Republic of Uzbekistan. The school serves a semi-rural community with approximately 500 students in grades 1-11. English instruction begins in the first grade, with students learning English for 3-4 hours per week in the middle grades.

The participants consisted of 60 eighth-grade students (aged 13-14) who were divided into experimental (n=30) and control (n=30) groups. Both groups demonstrated intermediate proficiency (CEFR A2-B1) based on the school placement assessment. The experimental group received TBLT-based speaking instruction, while the control group continued with the traditional PPP methodology. All participants had studied English for at least seven years and came from households with limited Uzbek-speaking English outside of school.

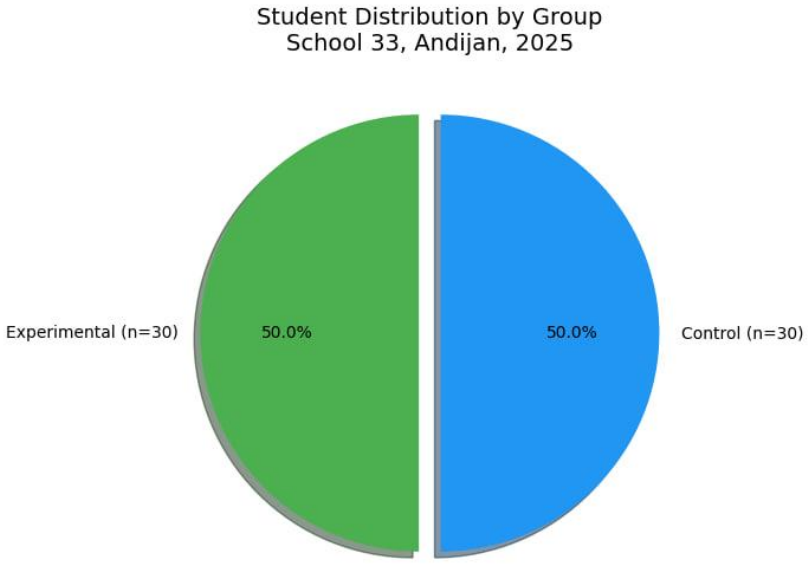

Fig.1. Distribution of 8th Grade Students by Group, School 33, Andijan, 2025

The study used a mixed-methods action research design that combined quantitative assessment of speaking skills with qualitative study of student experiences and teacher observations. The 12-week intervention period (September–December 2025) included two 45-minute speaking lessons per week for the experimental group.

Experimental group intervention:

Weeks 1–2: Introduction to task-based learning; simple information-gap tasks

Weeks 3-4: Feedback tasks involving discussion and decision-making

Weeks 5-6: Reasoning-gap tasks requiring problem-solving and inference
Weeks 7-8: Complex collaborative tasks involving planning and negotiation
Weeks 9-10: Creative tasks requiring the use of imaginative language
Weeks 11-12: Review and integration of task types; autonomous task design
Control group instructions:
Traditional PPP approach with production activities based on grammar presentations, supervised practice exercises, and textbook dialogues.

Conclusion. The research of this study show that Task-Based Language Teaching significantly improves the speaking skills of English language learners in secondary schools in Uzbekistan. Students in the experimental group achieved 67 percent increases in fluency, 58 percent in accuracy, 71 percent in complexity, and 84 percent in confidence over 12 weeks, representing a 73 percent improvement in overall proficiency compared to their traditionally taught peers. Qualitative evidence suggests that meaningful task completion, collaborative interaction, and a focus on message rather than form create a stimulating learning environment that reduces speech anxiety and facilitates authentic communicative practice. The findings confirm that the theoretical principles of TBLT translate effectively to Central Asian educational contexts when tasks are strategically designed, clearly structured, and systematically implemented.

The results provide an evidence-based rationale for using task-based approaches in Uzbek language teaching and suggest a practical pedagogical model that emphasizes communicative authenticity over linguistic accuracy. Future research should explore long-term retention effects, optimal task sequences for different proficiency levels, and teacher training approaches that support the widespread use of TBLT in different educational contexts.

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