



# A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH ON UNDERGRADUATES' ORAL PERFORMANCE

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## ABSTRACT

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) represents an innovative method of language instruction where learners acquire language skills indirectly by engaging in purposeful tasks. Despite its popularity in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) circles, particularly in the realms of reading and writing, there has been a notable scarcity of research on TBLT concerning the interplay between theoretical concepts and practical application, particularly in the domains of listening and speaking skills. This research initiative delved into the impact of the TBLT approach on enhancing the oral performance among undergraduate students. The study also examined students' perception of TBLT approach as a tool for English learning. This study implemented a quantitative method to explore the effect of TBLT on undergraduates' oral performance after exposed to TBLT approach for 12 weeks. The research instruments include test papers and a survey questionnaire. The results were reported a significant effect of TBLT on improving students' oral performance.

**KEYWORDS:** Task-based Language Teaching, undergraduate, oral performance.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's context, English remains highly important as a common language and is playing an increasingly crucial role in all levels of education in China. This encompasses primary and secondary schooling, as well as higher education institutions such as colleges and universities (Gay & Airasian, 2011). Across a spectrum of academic entrance exams, spanning from primary to college levels, English is obligatory. Its significance for students' academic growth has been acknowledged by teachers and parents alike.

English has gained paramount importance for global communication and academic exchange, being compulsory not only in China's colleges but also in many other countries, and while its teaching hours, particularly for oral communication, have been reduced in some Chinese universities, educators are now challenged to effectively impart these skills within the limited time frame.

Globalization and the "Belt and Road" initiative have led to increased communication between China and the world, underscoring the need for effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Within the college education system, speaking competence is crucial, evident from the Ministry of Higher Education's focus on English oral skills through assessments like CET-4 and CET-6 Oral Tests.

Various language teaching methods exist, including the widely adopted Task-based Language Teaching Approach (TBLT), which has gained popularity due to its alignment with societal needs; however, traditional methods like oral teaching are prevalent, leading to challenges in College English education, prompting a shift towards student-centered, practical, and communicative approaches advocated by the College English Curriculum Requirement (CECR).

In conclusion, the evolving significance of English in China's education system, propelled by global communication demands, necessitates a shift from traditional teaching methods to more practical and communicative approaches. The Task-based Language Teaching Approach (TBLT) offers promise in addressing these challenges, aligning with the changing needs of students in an interconnected world. The focus on fostering effective



communication skills, as emphasized by the College English Curriculum Requirement (CECR), underscores the ongoing transformation in English education, aimed at equipping students for success in a diverse and dynamic international landscape.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTION

This study attempts to answer the following two research questions:

Research question 1: Is there a significant effect of Task-based Language Teaching Approach on improving undergraduates' oral performance?

Research question 2: What is the perception of undergraduates' on TBLT Approach?

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section outlines the approach of oral teaching in Second Language education and offers an overview of oral communication teaching and learning within College English Courses, encompassing the teaching context, challenges, and aspirations. It conducts the research context of TBLT over the past few decades, encompassing both domestic and international studies.

### A. Audio-lingual Method

The Audio-lingual Method (ALM) is a prominent language teaching approach that emerged during World War II, initially for German and French instruction, emphasizing oral communication due to wartime needs. Rooted in behaviorist theories, it focuses on habit formation through repetitive practice, emphasizing pronunciation, grammar patterns, and vocabulary drills. ALM's basis in the structural linguistic theory evolved into a stimulus-organism-response model. It has been supported by the USA government for scientific competency development and is critiqued for its potential lack of communicative context. ALM prioritizes teacher-led learning, repetition, and over-learning, employing supplementary materials like tape recordings to reinforce oral skills and stimulate productive reinforcement. Its role in fostering oral language skills, repetition, and teacher-centered learning makes it a practical approach, particularly where oral communication is a priority.

### B. Competency-based Language Teaching

Competency-based Language Teaching (CBLT) is a contemporary instructional approach that departs from traditional methods by prioritizing learners' ability to perform tasks over mere knowledge acquisition. It centers on developing practical competencies for real-world scenarios, integrating language skills, and treating errors as integral to learning. With a focus on communication, CBLT reshapes the roles of both learners and instructors, promoting learner autonomy and tailored teaching. While lauded for its emphasis on practical language use, CBLT faces criticism for its perceived lack of structured teaching plans and suitability for younger learners. Despite critiques, the focus of CBLT is on practical skills and learner engagement continues to shape modern language education, warranting further exploration across learner populations.

### C. Task-based Language Teaching Approach

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an approach that advocates language learning through real-world tasks, originating from Prabhu's work in the communicative language teaching movement. It asserts that meaningful tasks replicating genuine situations should be the focal point of instruction. Tasks encompass problem-solving, projects, and assignments, emphasizing language as a tool for communication rather than rote memorization. TBLT enhances functional language acquisition, fluency, and spontaneous language use, promoting active communication and collaboration. It follows a cycle of pre-task, task, and language focus. A key tenet of TBLT is the task's centrality, which should involve meaningful communicative functions and mirror real experiences, making students engaged and purposeful in their language use. The unique role of tasks within TBLT sets it apart from other language teaching approaches.

### D. Studies of TBLT on Oral Teaching

As educational reforms prioritize quality over test-oriented approaches, the adoption of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is seen as effective in fostering students' cooperative skills, motivation, empathy, teamwork, and self-control. TBLT's acclaim extends beyond China to English-speaking countries like the United States, Canada, and Singapore, recognized for its role in enhancing students' foreign language proficiency.

Originally emerging from Western countries, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has seen more extensive research abroad compared to its relatively later adoption in China. Xia (1998) introduced TBLT to China, highlighting the incorporation of tasks. The implementation of TBLT in China encompasses task-based activities, effective task utilization, and performance assessment. Tan and Liu (2019) underscored the importance of comprehensive and objective understanding and assessment of TBLT. Luo (2019) delved into task authenticity, considering textual,



practice, interpretation, and situational meaning categories within TBLT.

In the 1990s, TBLT-related works and articles gained traction in China, sparking a surge in publications. Initially focusing on theoretical exploration, attention gradually shifted towards practical implementation (Tan & Qi, 2019). Following its introduction, TBLT garnered significant interest from Chinese researchers and English teachers, prompting theoretical and practical studies. Notably, in 1996, the Hong Kong Education Bureau integrated TBLT as the primary instructional approach in the English Course Syllabus for primary and middle schools (Zhang, 2014).

In the realm of task-based language teaching (TBLT), various scholars have contributed significant insights. Xia (2003) delineated task assessment standards centered on opportunity inclusion, real-life applicability, and language learning benefits. Han (2003) explored task assessment in his work on Task-based Language Teaching. Cheng (2004) underscored the importance of encompassing both formative and summative assessment within well-designed tasks.

Prabhu (1987) conducted an experimental study in a secondary school in Bangalore, India, in 1979, introducing tasks into language teaching, which garnered significant attention. According to Skehan (1998), in the process of engaging in task activities, learners should focus their attention on comprehending meaning, phrases, and interpersonal interactions rather than on linguistic forms. In a study by Ellis (2003) involving 42 Chinese undergraduate students, the objective was to assess their oral proficiency. Students were assigned an oral task involving picture narration, with variations of guided and unguided attempts. The findings indicated that students provided with careful guidance exhibited increased fluency in their English production.

In summary, the aforementioned reviews indicate that numerous scholars have extensively examined variables within task-based activities, including accuracy, fluency, and complexity. However, there has been limited discussion regarding the impact of task activities on enhancing undergraduates' oral performance and meanwhile examine the learners' perceptions of TBLT approach.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research to explore students' oral performance using oral test papers and questionnaire to examine their perception towards TBLT approach.

This research has been applied in a public university in North China. It is one of the 10 key universities of Hebei Province, China. Students arrived at this university come from all over China, with the majority comes from the Northern provinces. A total number about 10,000 (including postgraduates) students were enrolled includes about 170 international students each year. The sample size of the study is 120 undergraduates of non-English majors.

The instrument of this study concludes oral test papers, i.e. pretest paper and posttest paper. The primary objective of the oral assessment is to evaluate students' spoken language abilities, focusing on aspects like pronunciation, precision, fluency, management of conversation, and the complexity of their speech. The preliminary test serves the purpose of comparing the proficiency levels of two sets of students and determining if any significant disparity exists between these classes prior to the formal study. The posttest aims to gauge the impact of TBLT on both the Experimental Group (EG) and Control Group (CG), while also quantifying the effectiveness of the TBLT approach. The oral examination materials were adapted from the CET-4 Oral Test and comprise four sections:

- 1.Introduction: students introduce the basic information, such as their hometown, age, family and major.
- 2.Read Aloud: Students review a brief passage for 45 seconds and then read it aloud for a minute.
- 3.Questions and Answers: Students respond to two questions based on the previous passage from task one.
- 4.Pair Work: Students collaborate in pairs, engaging in a conversation within assigned groups of two.

In essence, the language of the provided sentences has been rephrased while retaining the core information and context.

The other instrument of the study is a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was delivered to TBLT class only, which aims to examine their perception of task-based approach. The questionnaire consisted of 14 items, initially derived from Webster' s Perception Questionnaire (as referenced in Egbert, 2003), which was employed by Baris (2005) to assess learners' viewpoints encompassing attitudes and emotions. The original questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert Scale, featuring five levels ranging from strongly disagree (SD) and disagree (D) to neutral (N), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA). Baris (2005) adapted Webster' s questionnaire, employing it to investigate students' perspectives regarding Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Within the realm of perception, the questionnaire focused on two specific aspects: attitude and belief.

#### V. RESULTS

This section is organized into two segments. The initial section presents the results of research question one. The subsequent section illustrates the outcomes of second research question.

Research question 1: Is there a significant effect of Task-based Language Teaching Approach on undergraduates'



oral performance?

The results of first research question was derived from the statistical analysis conducted to examine the effect of TBLT on oral performance. It was analyzed by using an independent sample t-test through SPSS.

Students' oral tests which consist pretest and posttest, 12 weeks teaching experiment have been delivered to two classes, one experimental class which accepted the TBLT method and the other regarded a traditional class, which used the traditional method in oral teaching. In this regard, an independent sample t-test was performed to distinguish the significant difference in the pretest scores between TBLT class and Trad class. The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Group Statistics of Pretest Score*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	TBLT	60	76.75	2.706
	Trad	60	77.17	2.215

**Table 2**  
*Independent T-test of Pretest Score*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	4.953	.037	.819	110	.426	.382	.467	-.542	1.306
	Qual Variances Not Assumed			.815	102.612	.418	.382	.470	-.549	1.315

As shown in 1 and 2, there is no significant difference in the pretest score between TBLT (M=76.75, SD=2.706) and Trad (M=77.17, SD=2.215) class,  $t(110) = 0.819$ ,  $p = 0.426$ . Table 3 presents the results of t-test for the pretest score of each construct.

**Table 3**  
*Descriptive Group Statistics of Posttest Score*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Posttest	TBLT	60	79.77	2.526
	Trad	60	82.35	2.017

**Table 4**  
*Independent T-test of Posttest Score*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	5.382	.021	3.666	110	.001	1.595	.436	.737	2.457
	Equal variances not assumed			3.642	103.061	.001	1.595	.439	.726	2.463



As shown in Tables 3 and 4, there is a significant difference in posttest score between TBLT (  $M=79.77$ ,  $SD=2.526$ ) and Trad ( $M=82.35$ ,  $SD=2.017$ ) class,  $t(110)=3.666$ ,  $p=0.001$ .

In conclusion, TBLT method has a positive effect on students' oral performance. Additionally, both of TBLT class and Trad class obtained progress on the process on oral learning. The results of the independent sample t-test indicated significant differences in the posttest scores between TBLT and Trad class. Specifically, the TBLT class showed higher mean scores in posttest ranging from 0.42 to 2.58 points. In summary, the study found that TBLT had a positive impact on improving undergraduates' oral performance.

RQ2: What are the students' perceptions of TBLT activities in improving their English oral communication skills?

The students' perceptions of TBLT activities on improving their English oral communication skills was presented through descriptive statistics. The students' perceptions of TBLT activities is measured by the following two dimensions: Attitude and Belief.

A questionnaire consisting of 14 items was utilized to measure students' perception of TBLT activities, employing a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Table 5 further presents the overall mean score of students' perceptions of TBLT activities.

**Table 5**  
*Mean Score of Students' Perceptions Category of TBLT*

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Level
Attitude	3.97	0.4327	High
Belief	4.15	0.5846	High

As seen in Table 5, the overall mean scores of the student's perception of TBLT activities for the two dimensions ranged from 3.97 to 4.15 at a high level, i.e., with a mean difference of only 0.18 points. This indicates that students showed a positive attitude toward TBLT.

Of the two dimensions, Belief recorded a higher mean ( $M=4.15$ ,  $SD=0.5846$ ), followed by Attitude ( $M=3.97$ ,  $SD=0.4327$ ).

## VI. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of this study, which includes a significant effect of TBLT on improving undergraduates' oral performance and a positive perception of TBLT approach.

### A. A significant effect on improving undergraduates' oral performance

The primary outcome of the first research question revealed that the implementation of TBLT led to a noticeable enhancement in the oral proficiency of undergraduate students. This conclusion was drawn from the analysis of oral test results, encompassing both pretest and posttest evaluations. Notably, no significant disparity was observed in the initial oral communication performance scores between the TBLT and traditional instruction (Trad) groups during the pretest phase. Nonetheless, a substantial discrepancy emerged between these two groups based on their posttest scores ( $p=0.001$ ).

This discovery aligns with the outcomes of previous studies by Quinn (2018) and Zhang (2014), both of which similarly affirmed the efficacy of TBLT in enhancing students' spoken language skills. Furthermore, the current research' s findings are in accordance with those of Leni (2014), who also demonstrated the importance of tasks in positively influencing speaking performance.

### B. A Positive Perception Towards TBLT

The research outcomes conveyed favorable results concerning students' viewpoints regarding TBLT, revealing that their attitudes and beliefs were inclined towards positivity regarding the approach. These conclusions were derived from quantitative analyses, indicating that students held predominantly positive overall perspectives on TBLT. Both the attitude aspect ( $M=3.97$ ) and the belief component ( $M=4.15$ ) were assessed at a notably elevated level.

One main finding of current research is students' attitudes toward TBLT and task activities were positive, i.e., tasks triggered my curiosity, aroused my interest and made language learning meaningful. This finding is consistent with several types of researches, in which explored the effect of TBLT on students' attitudes. The previous key findings indicated that learners' perception of the teaching method predicts learners' language performance, positively correlates with learners' oral achievements, and played a crucial role in communicating in the target language (Mona, 2019).



A possible explanation for this might be task activities are designed to be interactive, practical, and relevant to students' daily lives. The use of real-life tasks and scenarios triggers students' curiosity and interest, making language learning more engaging and enjoyable. This variety keeps the learning experience dynamic and prevents monotony, contributing to sustained interest and motivation.

An alternative rationale for this phenomenon could be attributed to the emphasis of TBLT on employing language within practical contexts, necessitating students to communicate to achieve concrete objectives. This pedagogical approach establishes a link between language acquisition and authentic applications, augmenting its significance and usefulness for learners. Moreover, TBLT promotes students' proactive involvement in language tasks through collaborative endeavors such as group and pair work. This active participation enables students to engage directly with the language and employ it across diverse scenarios, consequently fostering a more profound comprehension and proficiency in the language.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to investigate the effect of TBLT on improving students' oral performance, which is measured by pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, discourse management and complexity. The findings of the study provide an exploration of TBLT on students' oral communication skills performance in English. The study successfully addressed its research objectives and answered its research questions through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The two research questions have been achieved and answered via quantitative research methods. The findings offered serious recommendations and suggestions to future study.

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