



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TASK-BASED LEARNING IN IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG EFL LEARNERS IN UZBEKISTAN

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 14 th August 2025 Accepted: 11 th September 2025	This paper explores the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in developing speaking competence among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Uzbekistan and in wider global contexts. Drawing upon both theoretical perspectives and classroom-based observations, the study analyses how task-based instruction promotes communicative competence, learner engagement and fluency in diverse proficiency groups. It also considers the challenges of implementing TBLT in Uzbek educational institutions, where traditional grammar-focused instruction and exam-oriented attitudes still dominate. The findings suggest that while TBLT is highly effective for developing real-life communication skills, its success depends on teacher training, appropriate task design and institutional support. The paper concludes by highlighting pedagogical implications for both school and university contexts in Uzbekistan and provides recommendations for integrating TBLT more effectively within national curricula.

Keywords: Task-Based Learning, speaking skills, EFL, Uzbekistan, communicative competence, classroom practice

INTRODUCTION

In Uzbekistan, English has become an essential subject for academic and professional advancement. Developing speaking skills has long been recognized as one of the most complex yet vital aspects of language learning. In Uzbekistan, where English is taught as a foreign language from early grades, the ability to communicate effectively remains a major challenge for many learners. Despite years of study, a significant number of students still struggle with fluency, pronunciation and confidence in speaking. As a practising TESOL teacher at both secondary and tertiary levels in Tashkent, I have observed that many students possess solid grammatical knowledge but lack the ability to use English naturally in real-life contexts. This gap has led me to explore more communicative, student-centred methodologies, particularly Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), as a means to enhance speaking skills and bridge the divide between classroom learning and authentic communication.

The Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of Uzbekistan has made noticeable reforms to improve English instruction, promoting interactive methods and communicative competence (MHSSE, 2020). However, the implementation of these reforms often remains superficial, as many institutions continue to rely on traditional, teacher-fronted approaches (Tursunova, 2022). Within this context, the introduction of TBLT represents a potential paradigm shift. Based on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching

(CLT), TBLT places meaningful communication at the core of instruction and encourages learners to complete authentic tasks rather than merely practise isolated language forms (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007).

The present paper aims to provide a theoretical and analytical overview of how TBLT can be effectively used to develop speaking proficiency among EFL learners in Uzbekistan. It draws on international and local research, professional experience and classroom realities to argue that task-based learning can significantly improve learners' oral communication abilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of speaking competence has been a central concern in TESOL research for decades. Scholars such as Long (1985) and Nunan (2004) conceptualized tasks as communicative activities that engage learners in using language for meaningful purposes.

According to Ellis (2003), a task is "a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically to achieve an outcome," which naturally promotes interaction and negotiation of meaning. Similarly, Willis (1996) emphasized that task-based learning encourages learners to use language creatively and spontaneously, leading to more natural acquisition.

Globally, studies have shown that TBLT effectively enhances learners' speaking fluency and accuracy. For instance, Carless (2007) found that task-based lessons increased student motivation and oral participation in Hong Kong secondary schools. Bygate (2016) highlighted how task repetition allows learners to



improve both fluency and complexity of speech. Furthermore, Samuda and Bygate (2008) argued that tasks provide rich opportunities for cognitive engagement, helping learners to internalize grammatical structures while focusing on meaning. In the Central Asian context, the adaptation of TBLT faces specific challenges. Research conducted in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (Makhmudova, 2021; Abdulkarimova, 2020) indicates that teachers often find it difficult to shift from grammar-based instruction to communicative, task-oriented pedagogy. Many cite large class sizes, limited instructional time and exam-oriented curricula as key barriers. Nonetheless, several studies (Tursunova, 2022; Muminova, 2023) report positive outcomes when TBLT principles are integrated gradually, especially in speaking classes where students engage in pair and group tasks, role-plays or project-based speaking activities. Moreover, Skehan (2018) suggested that the success of TBLT depends on balancing focus on meaning with attention to form. In EFL contexts where exposure to English outside the classroom is minimal, tasks must be carefully scaffolded to ensure that learners not only communicate meaningfully but also notice and internalize correct forms. This principle is particularly relevant in Uzbekistan, where students rarely encounter authentic English input beyond the classroom. Research also underscores the importance of teacher preparation. East (2017) emphasized that teacher beliefs and training strongly influence TBLT implementation. Without adequate understanding, instructors may revert to traditional drills under the guise of "tasks." Therefore, professional development in task design, classroom management and assessment is crucial for achieving the communicative goals of TBLT. Finally, local educational policies in Uzbekistan now promote student-centred methodologies (Presidential Decree No. PQ-2909, 2017), encouraging communicative activities across all levels of instruction. Yet, the realization of these policies requires practical adaptation to contextual realities. For example, while TBLT has proven effective in smaller, interactive classes, it remains underused in state schools with 30–40 students per group. This tension between policy and practice illustrates the need for continuous research on how TBLT can be optimally integrated into Uzbekistan's language education system.

DISCUSSION

Drawing on both international theory and classroom observations in Uzbekistan, it is clear that Task-Based Language Teaching offers a powerful framework for

developing students' speaking proficiency. The approach fosters not only linguistic competence but also learner autonomy and confidence - two elements often lacking in traditional EFL classrooms.

During my teaching experience at both the secondary and tertiary levels, I have implemented TBLT in mixed-proficiency groups, where some students were at beginner level and others intermediate. Tasks such as information-gap activities, problem-solving discussions and role-play simulations encouraged interaction between students of different abilities. While stronger learners naturally took leadership roles, weaker learners gained exposure to richer input and gradually became more active participants. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development, in which collaborative interaction supports language growth.

Moreover, tasks motivated students to speak spontaneously rather than rely on memorised scripts. For example, in a "Travel Agency" simulation task, students had to negotiate holiday plans, compare destinations and make decisions using functional language. This required authentic communication, critical thinking, and vocabulary expansion. As Ellis (2009) noted, such meaning-focused interaction drives acquisition more effectively than form-focused drills.

However, the analysis also reveals several challenges specific to the Uzbek context. Firstly, students are accustomed to teacher-centred instruction and may initially feel uncomfortable with open-ended communicative tasks. Secondly, assessment systems still prioritize written exams over oral performance, which discourages teachers from allocating sufficient class time to speaking practice. Finally, the lack of authentic materials and exposure to natural English limits learners' ability to engage meaningfully.

Despite these challenges, I have observed measurable improvement in learners' oral fluency and confidence when TBLT is applied consistently. Peer feedback and self-assessment have been particularly effective in raising students' awareness of their progress. As Willis and Willis (2007) suggested, reflection after each task helps learners consolidate language knowledge and internalize speaking strategies.

Quantitative and qualitative research also supports these observations. Tursunova (2022) reported a 20% increase in students' speaking scores after six weeks of task-based instruction compared to traditional methods. Muminova (2023) found that students who regularly participated in task cycles developed better turn-taking skills and pragmatic awareness. These findings confirm that TBLT not only develops linguistic fluency but also



fosters communicative competence essential for real-world interaction.

Pedagogical Implications for Uzbekistan and Global EFL Contexts

Curriculum and Task Design

Tasks must be authentic, level-appropriate and linked to learners' real needs. In Uzbekistan, where English is often taught as an academic subject rather than a communication tool, it is essential to design tasks that simulate real-life situations: such as ordering food, conducting interviews or giving presentations. Nunan (2004) emphasized that meaningfulness and learner relevance are the core principles of effective task design. Therefore, each task should include a clear outcome, such as solving a problem, making a decision or producing a product like a presentation or dialogue.

A practical adaptation for large classes is to divide learners into small groups and assign role-specific sub-tasks. For example, in a "City Development Meeting" scenario, some students could act as city planners, others as residents or business owners. This approach not only maximizes participation but also mirrors authentic social communication.

Teacher Training and Support

Teachers play a central role in mediating tasks and facilitating communication. Without adequate preparation, however, they may revert to traditional lecturing styles. Therefore, universities and teacher-training centres should include TBLT methodology in pre-service and in-service training programs. Workshops should focus on designing task sequences, scaffolding communication and assessing spoken outcomes. East (2017) argues that teachers must develop a dual awareness of form and meaning: knowing when to limit and when to let learners negotiate language independently.

In Uzbekistan, continuous professional development remains uneven. Many teachers express enthusiasm for communicative methods but lack practical models for implementation (Makhmudova, 2021). Collaborative peer observation, microteaching and mentorship can provide valuable support for those transitioning toward TBLT.

Assessment and Feedback

Assessment practices must also evolve. Current national examinations focus largely on grammar and reading comprehension, offering limited need to develop speaking. A more balanced evaluation system should incorporate performance-based assessment - evaluating learners through presentations, group discussions or oral projects. Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) noted that communicative assessment better

reflects students' real communicative ability and provides more meaningful feedback.

Peer and self-assessment are particularly beneficial in TBLT, as they promote reflection and learner autonomy. In my classes, students complete short reflection forms after each task, identifying new vocabulary, expressions, and challenges encountered. Over time, this metacognitive awareness leads to greater self-regulation and motivation.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Uzbekistan's EFL classrooms represents both an opportunity and a challenge. As global pedagogical trends move toward communicative and learner-centred approaches, Uzbekistan's education system is also undergoing a gradual transition from grammar translation to more interactive, skill-based instruction. Yet, this transformation requires more than adopting Western methodologies, it demands careful adaptation to the local academic culture, institutional structures and student expectations.

This theoretical-analytical paper has shown that while TBLT promotes meaningful language use, collaboration and learner autonomy, its success in Uzbekistan depends heavily on contextualization. The combination of theoretical frameworks from international TESOL research and observations from Uzbek classrooms underscores the need for hybrid approaches, those that maintain form-focused learning while expanding opportunities for authentic communication.

From a teacher's perspective, especially one who has experienced both Uzbek and Western educational systems, this transition requires continuous professional growth, creative adaptation and resilience. Institutional support must also evolve: class sizes should be reduced, syllabi revised and teacher training enhanced. If universities and institutions across the region integrate these reforms, Uzbekistan can develop a more dynamic, communicatively competent generation of English users ready for global engagement.

Ultimately, the broader implication for TESOL practice in Central Asia is clear: effective language teaching does not lie in replicating foreign models but in constructing context-sensitive pedagogies. TBLT, when aligned with local realities, can empower both teachers and learners, bridging global innovations with Uzbek cultural and educational traditions.

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