



**Promoting Student Engagement and Oral Proficiency in English Through the  
Implementation of Task-Based Learning(TBL)**

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### **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my family, whose unwavering support has been a constant source of strength and inspiration throughout my life. In every step I have taken, their encouragement, love, and belief in me have guided my journey. Thank you for always being by my side, in one way or another, supporting all that I do and all that I have achieved. This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine

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### **Abstract**

This action research project explored the impact of implementing a Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach to foster oral proficiency and engagement in English among 11th-grade students in a public school in Medellín, Colombia. Data collection instruments included research journals, student surveys, classroom observations, and oral presentations.

The findings revealed that the TBL approach effectively increased student engagement by creating a collaborative and supportive environment. Activities aligned with real-life contexts, such as discussing future plans, significantly enhanced students' motivation and oral proficiency. While collaborative tasks promoted confidence and reduced anxiety, teacher interventions played a vital role in encouraging students to take risks and actively participate in speaking activities.

Despite the improvements, the study highlighted challenges, such as disengagement during transitions or tasks with unclear instructions, emphasizing the need for well-structured activities and consistent scaffolding.

*Keywords:* task-based learning, student engagement, oral proficiency

## Resumen

Este proyecto de investigación-acción tuvo como objetivo explorar el impacto de la implementación del enfoque de Aprendizaje Basado en Tareas (TBL, por sus siglas en inglés) en el desarrollo de la competencia oral y la participación activa de los estudiantes en la clase de inglés en un grupo de estudiantes de 11° grado de una escuela pública en Medellín, Colombia. Los instrumentos de recolección de datos incluyeron diarios de investigación, encuestas a estudiantes, observaciones en el aula y presentaciones orales.

Los resultados revelaron que el enfoque TBL incrementó de manera efectiva la participación activa de los estudiantes al fomentar un entorno colaborativo y de apoyo. Las actividades contextualizadas en situaciones reales, como la discusión de planes futuros, promovieron significativamente la motivación y mejoraron las habilidades orales de los estudiantes. Además, las tareas colaborativas facilitaron la confianza y redujeron la ansiedad, mientras que las intervenciones del docente desempeñaron un papel esencial para estimular la participación activa y el aprendizaje a través de la toma de riesgos.

A pesar de los avances observados, el estudio identificó desafíos relacionados con la falta de implicación durante las transiciones o en tareas con instrucciones poco claras, lo que resalta la importancia de diseñar actividades estructuradas y de proporcionar un acompañamiento constante.

*Palabras clave:* aprendizaje basado en tareas, competencia oral, participación activa

## **Introduction**

The development of oral proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a critical focus in language education, particularly in contexts where students face limited exposure to English and lack dynamic resources. In Medellín, Colombia, public school students often encounter challenges such as traditional grammar-focused teaching methods and minimal opportunities for meaningful interaction. This action research was conducted at the Héctor Abad Gómez educational institution with a group of 18 11th-grade students aged 16 to 18. These students exhibited low levels of English proficiency and reluctance to participate in oral activities, underscoring the need for innovative strategies to foster language use and engagement.

The research followed a structured action research process. The first phase focused on identifying the main problem: students' difficulties in speaking English and disengagement in traditional classroom settings. Based on these observations, an action plan was developed to implement the Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach. This methodology prioritizes real-life, meaningful tasks to encourage active participation, collaborative learning, and the use of English for authentic communication.

The second phase involved implementing the TBL-based action plan and collecting data through research journals, student surveys, classroom observations, and oral presentations. This phase aimed to evaluate the impact of TBL on students' oral proficiency and engagement.

Finally, the study will conclude by analyzing and interpreting the findings, discussing the effectiveness of the intervention, and providing recommendations for incorporating TBL



into similar educational contexts. This research aims to offer valuable insights into promoting oral skills and participation in EFL classrooms.

### **Description of the context**

This research was conducted at the Héctor Abad Gómez educational institution, which has two campuses in Medellín. Specifically, the study took place at the downtown campus, located in a dynamic and diverse environment characterized by a mix of commercial, residential, and governmental buildings. During peak hours, the area is bustling with activity, with significant vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The vicinity features street vendors, flower vendors, street artists, tourists, and locals. However, it is also marked by social issues such as crime, drug use, and homelessness, influenced by poverty, lack of opportunities, and social inequality. Despite these challenges, the institution offers four academic shifts: morning, afternoon, night, and Saturday. It serves preschool to eleventh grade students during the morning and afternoon sessions and employs the CLEI methodology for the evening and Saturday sessions.

The school's philosophy aims to become the leading comprehensive educational center in the city by 2025, fostering inclusion and offering innovative pedagogical approaches inspired by the values of Héctor Abad Gómez. They aim to promote inclusion and support students in building their life projects and transforming their environment with a committed interdisciplinary team. The pedagogical model is holistic, incorporating humanistic, traditional, and constructivist approaches. Teachers adapt their practices to the institutional context, valuing their knowledge and experience. The institution aims to implement inclusive educational policies, selecting a flexible model that grants students autonomy, consistent with the constructivist approach where students build knowledge through analysis and conceptual networks, guided by teachers.

The institution provides a well-structured physical environment with essential facilities, but limited access to interactive resources and the socioeconomic challenges faced by its diverse student body significantly impact the learning experience. It boasts 23 spacious and well-lit classrooms equipped with whiteboards and student desks, yet it lacks interactive tools such as projectors, speakers, or televisions. While a computer lab is available, its internet access is intermittent, restricting its functionality. Additional facilities include a renovated auditorium with a capacity for 130 people, three mini-soccer courts, a library, a cafeteria, and small open spaces for student use. The student body is predominantly composed of individuals from socioeconomic strata 1, 2, and 3, many of whom face challenges such as displacement, domestic violence, and extreme poverty. Furthermore, the community is notably diverse, with 40% of students being immigrants and 10% identifying as Afro-Colombian, which enriches the cultural environment while also presenting unique educational needs.

The focus of this study was an 11th-grade class attending English classes twice a week, totaling three hours per week. The study participants included 18 students, 12 female and 6 male, aged 16 to 18 years. Generally, students show a lack of engagement in learning English, attributed to traditional methodologies that demotivate and discourage progress. Additionally, the lack of resources limits dynamic and structured classes, as no guide or didactic material is provided.

The English teacher's diverse academic and professional background highlights his dedication to education; however, the lack of established teaching guidelines and limited resources significantly hinder the effectiveness and progress of English instruction at Héctor Abad Gómez School. He graduated from the translation program at the University of Antioquia and initially owned a translation agency. He transitioned to education, working as an English teacher in academies and pre-university programs. To qualify for teaching

positions, he pursued a bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages with an emphasis on English at the Universidad Luis Amigó and obtained a master's degree in digital media in education from the Área Andina Foundation. Four years ago, he secured a government teaching position and has since been teaching at Héctor Abad Gómez School. When teaching English, the educator lacks established guidelines, resulting in similar topics being covered in the tenth and eleventh grades. He identifies and addresses students' learning gaps, limiting course progress. The student's English proficiency is generally low. The teacher strives to teach all competencies (speaking, writing, listening, and reading), but this is challenging due to limited materials. Consequently, he uses online materials and sends activities via WhatsApp.

### **Statement of problem**

The English learning process in an EFL classroom should include the four skills—listening, writing, reading, and speaking—for comprehensive language development. However, particular emphasis should be placed on the improvement of oral skills, as these are crucial for enabling students to communicate effectively in the language they are learning. Without sufficient speaking practice, students may struggle to engage fully in English classes and may lack confidence in using the language. In order to enhance this skill, it is important to promote an environment of active participation surrounding listening and talking within the classroom. Furthermore, encouraging speaking activities not only enhances language proficiency but also boosts students' engagement and self-confidence, helping them to express their thoughts, collaborate with peers, and prepare for real-life communicative situations through interactive tasks. This active participation fosters a supportive learning environment where students feel empowered to communicate effectively in English, ultimately strengthening their language skills and confidence levels.

After observing an 11th-grade English class for three months, several issues became evident. One of the concerns refers to the limited language proficiency of students at Hector Abad Gómez School is influenced by their minimal exposure to the target language. This issue aligns with Krashen's (1985) theory, which states that comprehensible input is crucial for language acquisition. He argues that learners need to be exposed to language slightly above their current proficiency level. The minimal exposure to English in the classroom restrains students' ability to acquire the language naturally.

Furthermore, the teacher predominantly conducts classes in Spanish, which reduces the presence of English-speaking activities. According to Long (1996), language development is facilitated through interaction and negotiation of meaning. By teaching primarily in Spanish and focusing solely on grammar, the teacher limits opportunities for interactive practice in English, which is essential for language acquisition. Additionally, the teacher's exclusive focus on grammar topics further restricts students' opportunities to practice and improve their English oral skills (Journal entry 1, March 14th, 2024). This approach neglects Brown's (2007) state that mentioned the importance of balanced language instruction, which should include listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities to foster comprehensive language development.

Another issue that became evident included the students' resistance to participating in speaking activities such as formulating sentences orally in English (Journal entry 3, April 4th, 2024). This reluctance stems from a lack of vocabulary, and they also acknowledge "not knowing English"; therefore, they are hesitant to read English text aloud (Journal entry 5, April 22nd, 2024). This fosters feelings of fear, discomfort, and shyness. Tokoz-Goktepe (2014) refers to this problem asserting that students commonly face challenges in speaking English due to personal factors, including inadequate language and content knowledge, limited exposure to English, and the deficiency of teaching methods and materials.

The students' lack of engagement in English class emerged as a significant concern. Many students appeared disinterested, often distracted by their phones, chatting with peers, or ignoring the teacher's explanations (Journal entry 2, March 14th, 2024). This disengagement seems to stem from the teacher's traditional methodology, where students passively listen without opportunities to actively participate or speak in English. Lessons are predominantly focused on grammar exercises, such as filling in blanks and constructing sentences, which do not encourage oral language use. Consequently, many students rely on phone translators to complete tasks, making the learning process less meaningful and relevant to real-world communication. As Littlewood (1981) emphasizes, language instruction should prioritize practical skills and meaningful communication over rigid grammar-focused approaches. By integrating speaking activities, students can engage in cooperative learning, build self-esteem, and develop social relationships, transforming the learning experience into a more dynamic and effective process.

To address the problems mentioned above, this research focused on promoting student's engagement and speaking skills in the EFL classroom through a Task-Based Learning Approach (TBLA). According to Willis (1996), TBLA allows students to construct meaning and use the language to exchange for real purposes. In this sense, TBLA seems to be an appropriate way to enhance students' oral skill since regular interaction between them and their teachers, as well as through extensive exposure to the target language will be a permanent class action.

### **Theoretical framework**

This section aims to define the concepts that support my research study. First, I present the definition of communicative competence and speaking skills. Second, I explain the engagement in the educational field, especially in the EFL classroom. Finally, I introduce the definition of task-based learning (TBL) and the stages to define the tasks.

**Communicative competence**

Communicative competence represents the essential skills necessary for effective communication and expressing ideas or needs to others. These skills cover both receptive abilities (such as reading and listening) and productive skills (such as speaking and writing). According to Hymes (1972), communicative competence extends beyond the mere knowledge of grammatical rules to include the social knowledge required to use language appropriately in various contexts. The author introduced this concept to address the limitations of the then-prevailing focus on grammatical competence, emphasizing the correct formation of sentences without considering their appropriate use in communication. Hymes' concept of communicative competence revolutionized language teaching by shifting the focus from rote learning of grammatical rules to the ability to use language effectively in real-life situations. This approach has influenced various teaching methodologies, including communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL), which emphasize interaction and meaningful communication.

**Speaking skill**

Speaking is a fundamental activity for language learners, extending beyond mere repetition of language patterns. It encompasses both speaking and listening, forming a dynamic two-way process where active responses are expected. According to Byrne (1991), oral tasks involve not only the productive skill of speaking but also the receptive skill of understanding. Therefore learners must be taught not only how to express themselves verbally but also how to listen actively.

Nevertheless, in daily routines, speaking and listening are commonplace activities; however, it is often mistakenly assumed that regular use of language makes one an expert. When learners recognize the distinction between hearing something and truly listening—attentively engaging with someone—they can navigate various communication

demands. These demands range from transactional interactions, such as addressing an audience, to interactional tasks where discourse evolves naturally during conversations. Indeed, in oral communication, both transactional and interactional skills play crucial roles. According to Nunan (1993), these skills encompass the ability to take short and long speaking turns, manage interactions, negotiate meaning, and engage in effective conversational listening. By understanding and practicing these skills, learners can enhance their overall language proficiency and effectively respond to different communication contexts.

Successful conversations require not only proficient speakers but also attentive listeners. Brown and Yule (2001) distinguish between the transactional aspect, which involves information transfer, and the interactional aspect, which is essential for maintaining social relationships. This distinction aligns with Nunan's (1993) differentiation between monologue (uninterrupted oral presentations) and dialogue (interacting with one or more speakers). While everyday communication typically involves interactional language use (dialogue), delivering an uninterrupted oral presentation (a transactional skill) demands training and preparation even for native speakers.

In educational contexts, learners participate in both transactional and interactional communication tasks. Observing their performance in these situations provides valuable insights. However, it's essential to recognize that achieving effective oral performance requires time, collaboration between students and teachers, and attitudinal adjustments. Brown and Yule (2001) caution against solely training students to produce short turns, as this won't automatically lead to proficiency in longer turns. Balancing teaching practices to avoid frustration and overload is crucial. The Task-Based Learning Approach offers a helpful framework for achieving this balance.

### **Engagement through TBL**

Engagement in educational settings, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, is a multifaceted construct that plays a critical role in student learning outcomes. Engagement encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, each contributing to the overall learning experience and proficiency development.

Student engagement is crucial in an EFL classroom because it can improve the effectiveness of language learning through tasks that actively involve learners and use everyday life situations. Behavioral engagement refers to the observable actions and behaviors that indicate a student's involvement in learning activities. This type of engagement is often characterized by interactions with the academic setting that are active, goal-driven, flexible, constructive, and persistent. According to certain authors (Hughes, Wu, & West, 2011; Martin, 2008; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012), some indicators of behavioral engagement in academic contexts are planning, effort, on-task attention, concentration, hard work, persistence, time expended, attendance, voluntary participation, task involvement, and following classroom rules and norms. Frequently, this behavior was accompanied by emotions such as enthusiasm, interest, enjoyment, satisfaction, pride, and vitality. In EFL contexts, behavioral engagement is crucial as active participation in language exercises, such as speaking and listening activities, directly influences language acquisition. Researchers such as Skinner and Belmont (1993) emphasize the importance of student involvement in instructional activities, suggesting that higher levels of behavioral engagement lead to better academic performance.

Affective or emotional engagement encompasses both positive and negative responses towards teachers, classmates, academic tasks and activities, as well as the school environment. These reactions are typically classified into two categories: affective responses within the classroom, which include emotions such as interest, enjoyment, happiness, or anxiety during academic activities; and students' feelings of identification and connection



with their school peers, teachers, and the school as a whole (Lawson & Lawson, 2013). In EFL classrooms, emotional engagement can be fostered through a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. Pekrun's (2006) control-value theory of achievement emotions posits that positive emotions such as enjoyment and pride enhance students' motivation and learning, while negative emotions like anxiety and boredom hinder it. Therefore, creating a positive emotional climate is essential for sustaining engagement and motivation in EFL learners.

Finally, cognitive engagement refers to the extent of students' mental effort and investment when tackling academic tasks. It encompasses activities such as deep thinking about complex concepts, seeking clarification through questions, going beyond assigned readings, and employing cognitive, self-regulatory, and metacognitive strategies (Lawson & Lawson, 2013). In EFL education, cognitive engagement is evident when students employ metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating their language learning processes. Research by Pintrich and De Groot (1990) suggests that cognitive engagement is closely linked to self-regulation and intrinsic motivation, which are critical for language learners to achieve proficiency and autonomy in language use.

### **Task-based learning**

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), Task-Based Learning (TBL) is a method where students learn a language through tasks, focusing on promoting communication in the target language and using tasks as a means to teach and improve students' language levels. Nunan (2004), states that the purpose of TBL is to get students to explore spoken and written language through activities created to actively involve students in functional, practical, and authentic language use for meaningful purposes. The goal is for learners to use the language in a way similar to how they would in real-life contexts, making it an authentic learning

experience. Bearing this in mind, learners will have a clear objective to achieve at the end of each task.

The term “task” frequently refers to a distinct category of activities conducted within a classroom context. These activities are characterized by their emphasis on meaning and the significance attributed to the process of carrying out tasks (the “how”) as opposed to the predominant focus on content (the “what”) in teaching practices (Sanchez, 2004, p. 41). Prabhu (2004) defines a “task” as an activity that compels learners to arrive at an outcome based on provided information through cognitive processes while allowing teachers to guide and regulate this cognitive journey (p. 47). Additionally, Lee in Sae-ong (2010) describes a task as a classroom activity or exercise with an objective achievable only through interaction among participants (p. 7). Essentially, a task serves as a mechanism for structuring and sequencing interactions, emphasizing the exchange of meaning. Skehan (1996) further characterizes language learning tasks as activities primarily focused on meaning, evaluated in terms of outcomes, and grounded in real-life language use.

Despite variations in the definitions mentioned above, they converge toward a common understanding. All these definitions underscore the importance of purposeful practice guided by instruction, creating meaningful contexts that foster positive communication conditions among participants. In essence, tasks represent a concerted effort to establish the essential conditions necessary for language development.

Regarding this approach, each classroom activity is purposefully designed with a specific goal and outcome. Learners are aware of their objectives for each task, which provides clarity and motivation. These tasks typically unfold in three phases, as outlined by Willis (1996): The first one is the *pre-task* where the teacher introduces and defines the topic and the learners are required to do activities that help them to recall words and phrases that will be useful for the realization of the main task. The second phase is the *during-task* which

involves students using their previous knowledge (including their mother tongue, gestures, and other grammar structures) to perform the task. The last stage is the *post-task* where the activities are reviewed and reflect on the task performance, including feedback and language focus exercises.

In the task-based learning (TBL) approach, tasks play a crucial role in developing speaking skills by promoting authentic language use, encouraging active participation, and providing frequent practice opportunities. Tasks simulate real-life situations, fostering the use of authentic language and engaging learners in interactive activities that motivate them to participate actively (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996). Furthermore, tasks often require collaboration, where learners work in pairs or groups, facilitating interaction and negotiation of meaning essential for developing speaking skills (Long & Crookes, 1993). By integrating multiple language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—within a single activity, tasks enhance overall communicative competence (Nunan, 2004). Additionally, tasks encourage spontaneous speech by prompting learners to respond in real time, thereby developing their ability to speak naturally and fluidly (Skehan, 1998). Constructive feedback provided during and after tasks helps learners reflect on their performance, understand their strengths and areas for improvement, and guide their progress in speaking (Willis & Willis, 2007). Moreover, well-designed tasks are engaging and interesting, intrinsically motivating learners to participate actively and sustain effort in improving their speaking skills (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). Thus, tasks in the TBL approach are instrumental in promoting authentic language use, fostering collaboration, integrating skills, encouraging spontaneous speech, and motivating learners to develop their speaking abilities.

### **Research question**

How could the implementation of task-based learning contribute to engaging students in their English oral production?

### **Objectives**

#### **General objective**

Engaging students in oral production through the implementation of TBL in English classes.

#### **Specific objectives**

- To increase students' confidence and fluency in oral production through communicative tasks.
- To design and implement TBL activities that stimulate students' interest and participation in English classes
- To explore how TBL promotes collaborative learning and interaction among students

### **Action plan**

To conduct this action research, the Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach was implemented over four weeks to address the low levels of oral proficiency and student engagement observed in an 11th-grade English class at the Héctor Abad Gómez educational institution in Medellín, Colombia. This intervention involved 18 students aged 16 to 18 and focused on fostering authentic communication and collaborative learning through contextually relevant and meaningful tasks.

The first week of the intervention was dedicated to introducing students to the linguistic structures and vocabulary necessary for discussing future plans, such as "I want to be..." and "After graduation, I will...". Students conducted peer surveys, asking questions

about their classmates' aspirations, and subsequently shared their findings through oral reports. This activity aimed to create an initial low-stakes environment for oral interaction, enhancing students' confidence in using English communicatively.

In the second week, students engaged in activities that introduced and reinforced vocabulary related to careers, job descriptions, and required skills. A career-matching activity allowed students to connect job titles with their corresponding descriptions, followed by discussions where they articulated their choices and rationales. These activities encouraged collaboration and the practical application of career-related vocabulary, thereby enhancing oral engagement.

The third week emphasized decision-making processes, where students prepared and presented a pros and cons list for their preferred careers. Using conditional structures such as “If I pursue engineering, I will...”, students articulated their decision-making processes through structured oral presentations, promoting critical thinking and purposeful language use.

The final week culminated with a detailed presentation task where students shared their future plans, integrating the vocabulary, grammatical structures, and skills acquired throughout the unit. To ensure active participation and engagement during this task, a peer questionnaire was implemented, requiring students to evaluate their classmates' presentations. Additionally, peer and self-assessment activities were conducted, enabling students to reflect on their own performance and their peers' efforts. A survey with two reflective questions was administered to gather insights into how students felt about presenting in English, helping to understand their perceptions of the experience.

The final presentations were assessed using a detailed rubric evaluating key aspects: the content of the presentation (greeting, introduction, development, and closing), fluency,

body language, and speaking skills (pronunciation, volume, and clarity). These measures provided a comprehensive evaluation of both language use and presentation delivery.

Throughout the implementation, data were collected through research journals, surveys, classroom observations, and assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the TBL approach in enhancing oral proficiency and fostering a more engaging and participatory learning environment.

### **Development of actions**

The first action was carried out during the pre-task phase and focused on introducing students to the vocabulary, phrases, and grammatical structures necessary for discussing their future plans and aspirations. In the initial classes, students were taught expressions such as "I want to be...", "I plan to study...", and "After graduation, I will...", and were guided to construct sentences using these phrases. Following this, students participated in a survey activity where they engaged in peer-to-peer interactions, asking questions about their classmates' future plans. This activity not only encouraged the use of the target language in an authentic context but also helped reduce anxiety by creating a collaborative and supportive environment. In subsequent lessons, students were introduced to vocabulary related to careers, job descriptions, and required skills. They engaged in a matching activity where they paired career titles with corresponding descriptions and discussed their choices in pairs. This activity reinforced their understanding of career-related vocabulary and fostered oral interaction through collaborative problem-solving. These pre-task activities served as a foundation for students to build confidence and prepare for the final task.

The second action was conducted during the during-task phase, which centered on the culminating activity where students presented their future plans to the class. This task required students to synthesize the knowledge and skills acquired in previous activities,

integrating vocabulary, grammatical structures, and presentation strategies. To prepare, students created an outline for their presentations, ensuring that essential components such as greetings, introductions, the development of their ideas, and a closing were included. They rehearsed their presentations in pairs or small groups, allowing for peer feedback and practice in a less intimidating setting. During the final presentations, students were encouraged to focus on fluency, pronunciation, and clarity, while demonstrating the ability to organize and communicate their ideas effectively. This activity provided a real-world context for language use, fostering confidence in public speaking and enabling students to demonstrate their progress.

The third action was carried out during the post-task phase, where feedback and reflection played a central role in consolidating students' learning. Each student received individualized feedback from the teacher, who evaluated their presentations based on specific criteria, including content (greetings, introduction, development, and closing), fluency, body language, and speaking skills such as pronunciation, volume, and clarity. This feedback highlighted both strengths and areas for improvement, offering students a clear path for further development. Additionally, a peer feedback activity was conducted, where students used a simplified rubric to evaluate their classmates' presentations. This activity encouraged active listening and promoted a sense of collaboration within the group. Finally, students engaged in a reflective session where they discussed their experiences during the task, shared challenges and achievements, and identified goals for future oral tasks. This reflective process allowed students to internalize their learning and recognize their progress, fostering motivation and a sense of accomplishment.

### **Data Analysis**

For the data analysis, I followed Burns' (2009) proposal, which consists of five stages: assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building memos or interpretations,

and reporting the outcomes. First, I gathered the data by collecting students' journals, surveys, self-assessments, oral presentations, and my research journal. These data sources were then uploaded to the ATLAS.ti software for systematic organization and analysis.

In this section, I describe the data collection and analysis process implemented in this action research project. Action research is conceptualized as “the ability to daily recognize areas in your classroom that need improvement and then seeking to discover methods that will help make a needed change” (Phillips & Carr, 2010, p. 13). Guided by this principle, this study addressed a real problem observed in the classroom and implemented a targeted strategy to resolve it.

The data analysis process began with coding, using a color-coded system within ATLAS.ti to identify recurring patterns and themes related to oral production, engagement, and the effectiveness of the implemented strategies. The coded data were then compared to measure progress in fluency, pronunciation, and clarity from the diagnostic task to the final presentation.

To ensure the validity and reliability of findings, I utilized triangulation, analyzing data from multiple sources, including research journals, student surveys, peer and self-assessments, and oral presentation evaluations. Triangulation, as defined by Phillips and Carr (2010), involves “seeking multiple perspectives, insights, or ‘voices’ [to provide] layers of interpretation the teacher-researcher could not attain in isolation” (p. 92). This approach enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings by corroborating patterns and insights across various datasets.

Finally, I synthesized the coded data into broader interpretations and conclusions, highlighting key patterns and progress observed throughout the implementation. These results were reported in a structured format to illustrate the impact of the TBL approach on students'



oral production and engagement, providing valuable insights and implications for future practice.

### **Findings and interpretations**

#### **From Resistance to Exploration of Speaking Skills:**

At the outset, students' reluctance to engage in spoken English was predominantly rooted in a lack of confidence, which led them to resist oral activities in the target language. This resistance manifested as a strong reliance on their native language, not only as a means to articulate their anxieties but also as a coping mechanism to create an immediate comfort zone. For instance, during one class, students expressed their apprehension with comments such as, "How are we going to do that in English if we don't know any English?" and "Teacher, we don't know English; how are we going to do that in English if we have never spoken English?"(Journal entry 2, September 2nd, 2024). These statements reflect a pervasive fear of speaking in English and a deep-seated concern about potential errors in front of their peers. This aligns with Horwitz's (2001) and Ellis's (2003) when suggesting that fear of speaking a second language often stems from anxiety about making mistakes in social settings.

Task-based learning activities gradually encouraged students to transition from this avoidance behavior to a more exploratory stance. Students became more interested in participating in the activities. This could be observed in different classes where they asserted "How do you say [word] in English?" and "Is it okay if I say it like this?"(Journal entry 1, March 14th, 2024), reflecting a growing interest in attempting English expressions. This transition from native-language comfort to cautious exploration in English suggests that students were beginning to confront their language fears through a "trial and error" mindset,

as they tried out phrases and vocabulary in a low-stakes environment. Willis & Willis (2007) discuss how task-based learning, by lowering affective barriers, encourages students to explore new linguistic territory with greater confidence, which was evident here as students gradually allowed English to take a more prominent role in their interactions.

Effective teacher interventions are essential for creating a supportive classroom environment that reduces anxiety, builds confidence, and encourages active participation in language learning. Specifically, teacher interventions often included assurances delivered in the student's native language to reduce stress and promote participation. This was evident when the teacher addressed students' concerns by emphasizing a non-judgmental environment, reassuring them with statements such as, "Don't worry, just try; no one will laugh at anyone" (Journal entry 3, September 14th, 2024). These interventions helped create a safe space where students felt comfortable attempting to speak English without fear of criticism. This approach aligns with Skehan's (1998) assertion that task-based learning promotes risk-taking in a supportive atmosphere, enabling students to experiment without fear of failure. Furthermore, using the native language for instructions or clarifications provided cognitive clarity, allowing students to approach English speaking tasks with greater confidence while feeling supported by the familiarity of their first language.

The intervention demonstrated that task-based learning activities significantly increased students' confidence and willingness to speak in English. As the intervention progressed, students showed an increased willingness to speak, often moving between English and their native language as they navigated new vocabulary or grammar structures. Some students started to rely less on Spanish, which became evident as they asked fewer questions in their native language and began experimenting with English sentences. For example, one student, initially hesitant, approached the teacher and said, "Teacher, how do you say this in English?"

(Journal entry 4, September 16th, 2024) but soon followed up by repeating the phrase entirely in English, reflecting growing confidence. This change illustrates how task-based activities can effectively scaffold students' language use, moving them from native-language dependency toward English engagement (Willis & Willis, 2007).

### **Ups and Downs in Class Engagement:**

This category refers to the fluctuations in student engagement observed during the intervention, highlighting both moments of improvement and factors that affected sustained focus. Engagement was not a static phenomenon; rather, it shifted depending on the nature of the activity, its structure, and the students' comprehension of the task. While structured and purposeful tasks often promoted active participation, transitions between activities or tasks perceived as unclear or overly challenging led to disengagement.

Instances of disengagement were primarily observed during transitional moments or activities lacking clarity or structure. During these periods, "several students were doing other things like being on their phones, talking to their classmates, or doing homework for other subjects," indicating a loss of focus on the task. These behaviors, point to a connection between unclear instructions or insufficient scaffolding and diminished focus. This pattern aligns with Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), who argue that poorly organized tasks or activity shifts can negatively impact student engagement.

In contrast, collaborative and goal-oriented tasks consistently re-engaged students, demonstrating the importance of clear and purposeful activities. For example, "students began to ask each other about vocabulary," and others used their phones to "look up words and check pronunciation." (Journal entry 4, September 16th, 2024). These behaviors illustrate how dynamic and interactive learning contexts can refocus students' attention. This

observation supports Skehan's (1998) assertion that task-based learning encourages engagement by structuring activities around meaningful objectives, fostering both participation and collaboration.

Overall, the fluctuations in engagement during the intervention illustrate the importance of task design and classroom management. Structured and dynamic activities with clear goals appeared to sustain student interest, while unstructured moments revealed the need for improved transitions and scaffolding to maintain focus. These findings underscore the critical role of purposeful tasks in promoting and sustaining engagement in the classroom.

### **Collaborative work promoting engagement:**

Collaborative activities were integral to sustaining engagement. Group work provided students with a sense of mutual support, allowing them to feel less anxious and more willing to participate. For instance, students demonstrated support through actions such as "helping each other, asking questions about vocabulary, and sharing markers and colored pens" (Journal entry 4, September 16th, 2024). These actions reflect a willingness to assist one another, which fostered a collaborative atmosphere and minimized students' fears about speaking.

Collaborative group dynamics played a vital role in fostering a supportive environment that encouraged students to engage in speaking tasks confidently. Evidence from classroom observations highlighted how students no longer viewed speaking as an isolated task but rather as a shared responsibility within their groups. For instance, students with higher English proficiency often assisted their peers with pronunciation and sentence construction, motivating less confident classmates to participate actively (Journal entry 5, September 23rd, 2024). This aligns with Storch's (2005) findings, which suggest that collaborative learning enhances motivation by creating a sense of community and shared

goals. These interactions not only built a supportive atmosphere but also promoted a cooperative learning culture, enabling students to engage more comfortably in English speaking activities.

The effectiveness of collaboration in language learning was evident in how it encouraged student engagement and experimentation with English. Swain (2000) highlights that collaborative settings promote language experimentation by providing social encouragement and alleviating the pressure to perform perfectly, a dynamic reflected in students' reactions. For instance, one student remarked, "It was easier to speak in English because my friend helped me," (Journal entry 5, September 23rd, 2024) illustrating how peer support contributed to reducing anxiety. This collaborative environment not only diminished students' apprehension but also reframed speaking tasks as shared efforts, fostering a greater willingness to participate and engage actively in class.

### **Collaborative tasks and Contextualized Content Improving Engagement and Speaking Confidence**

Collaborative tasks and contextualized content played a crucial role in enhancing student engagement and building speaking confidence during the intervention. The alignment of language tasks with students' realities, such as discussing future plans and career aspirations, significantly increased their motivation to participate. Students described speaking about their future in English as "cool," despite initial nervousness, reflecting a positive response to relevant topics (Journal entry 2, August 26th, 2024). These activities provided a sense of purpose, connecting language learning to students' personal goals and professional aspirations, which fostered intrinsic motivation and meaningful communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Discussing relatable scenarios, like "talking about their dream job," further emphasized the importance of contextualized content by making tasks feel

relevant and applicable to their lives (Journal entry 2, August 26th, 2024). Brown (2007) supports this, noting that students are more inclined to participate when they see the practical value of language tasks in their personal and professional futures.

The collaboration further enhanced this engagement by creating a supportive environment where students viewed speaking as a shared responsibility rather than an individual challenge. Peer interactions, such as helping each other with vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence construction, encouraged students with lower confidence to participate actively. These actions fostered a cooperative learning culture, reducing anxiety and promoting a willingness to experiment with the language. For instance, students who initially avoided speaking began approaching peers or the teacher for assistance, signaling a progression from resistance to curiosity and engagement (Journal entry 4, September 16th, 2024).

Teacher interventions also played a pivotal role in promoting participation. By normalizing mistakes and providing reassurance, the teacher created a low-pressure environment conducive to language experimentation. Statements like, “Don’t worry, just try; no one will laugh at anyone” (Journal entry 3, September 2nd, 2024), encouraged hesitant students to take risks and practice speaking. This aligns with research by Ellis (2003) and Willis & Willis (2007), who emphasize that task-based learning fosters confidence by providing safe spaces for linguistic exploration.

The combination of contextualized content and collaborative work proved highly effective in transforming students’ attitudes toward speaking. By connecting tasks to their interests and fostering supportive group dynamics, students experienced a notable increase in motivation and confidence, actively engaging in meaningful and authentic communication.

## Conclusions

The implementation of task-based learning (TBL) proved to be a valuable approach for engaging students in English oral production. The findings revealed that collaborative tasks and contextualized content were instrumental in fostering student engagement and reducing anxiety. Collaborative activities created a supportive environment where students viewed speaking as a shared responsibility rather than an individual challenge. This dynamic enabled students to experiment with English through peer interactions, increasing their confidence and willingness to participate. Peer support and teacher interventions further reinforced this environment, encouraging students to overcome their initial resistance to speaking by normalizing mistakes and providing reassurance.

Additionally, the integration of contextualized content aligned with students' personal interests and real-life aspirations, makes tasks more relevant and meaningful. Topics such as future plans and career aspirations enhanced intrinsic motivation, as students perceived the activities as applicable to their lives and futures. This relevance not only increased engagement but also facilitated authentic communication, as students were eager to express their ideas in English within purposeful contexts.

The findings also highlight the importance of structured and purposeful task design. While unstructured transitions or unclear instructions occasionally led to disengagement, tasks with clear objectives and collaborative components successfully refocused students' attention and maintained their interest. These structured activities provided low-pressure opportunities for students to engage in trial-and-error learning, gradually improving their oral production skills.

In conclusion, the implementation of TBL significantly contributed to engaging students in their English oral production by addressing key barriers such as anxiety, lack of

motivation, and resistance to speaking. Through collaborative work, contextualized content, and effective teacher interventions, students developed greater confidence and participation in oral tasks. These findings suggest that TBL is a practical and effective approach to promoting student engagement and language use in EFL classrooms.

### **Recommendations**

To address the challenges encountered during this action research project, it is essential to refine task instructions and scaffolding strategies. Providing clear and structured instructions, supported by visual aids and step-by-step demonstrations, can help minimize confusion and disengagement during transitions or complex tasks. Additionally, incorporating activities that align with students' interests and real-life contexts, such as role-plays, simulations, or multimedia resources, can enhance engagement and motivation. Managing distractions, such as cell phone usage or off-task behavior, requires consistent classroom management strategies, including setting clear expectations, maintaining task-focused goals, and actively monitoring the classroom.

Peer collaboration proved to be an effective tool for fostering engagement and confidence, and it should be an integral part of future tasks. Assigning specific roles within groups ensures accountability and balanced participation. Simultaneously, teacher feedback must remain supportive and immediate, helping students to overcome language anxiety and encouraging them to take risks in speaking tasks. Offering opportunities for self-assessment and reflection, such as journals or guided reviews, can also enable students to track their progress and build a sense of accomplishment.



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