



**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

Trabajo de investigación presentado como requisito
parcial para optar al título de:

Licenciada en Lenguas Extranjeras

Autora

Yasmin Daniela Díaz Lemus

Universidad de Antioquia
Escuela de Idiomas
Medellín, Colombia
2022



Speak Our Minds: Using Task-Based Learning to Enhance the Development of Oral
Production in Fifth Graders.

Yasmin Daniela Diaz Lemus
Universidad de Antioquia

Thesis, Research and Practicum Advisor
Marlon Vanegas Rojas
Magister in Education

Medellín

June 2022

Abstract

This action research aims to describe how task-based learning implementation enhances the development of oral production in a fifth graders group. The participants were 40 students from La Salle Campoamor, a public school in Medellín - Colombia. The actions/tasks implemented during the project were focused on promoting language interactions among the students. Some tasks implemented were planning a birthday, talking about your classmate, and guessing who is. The data collection instrument included journals, a focus group, and an interview with the cooperating teacher. The findings of this research demonstrated that Task-based learning implementation helps students to enhance oral production abilities, and it also helps to encourage students' participation and engagement.

Keywords: Task-based learning (TBL), oral production, tasks.

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement for the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my family, boyfriend, and friends for their support and love during this long journey; it would have been impossible to finish this career without their motivation. Secondly, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Marlon Vanegas for his patience and support during the planning, implementation, and writing process. Finally, I would like to thank Universidad De Antioquia for its quality of education that allows the students to be better professionals in society.

Table of contents

Preface	7
Description of the context	8
Statement of the Problem	10
Theoretical Framework	12
Research Question	14
Objectives	14
Action Plan	15
Development of Actions	15
Data Analysis	17
Findings and Interpretations	18
Conclusions and Suggestions	21
Reflection	22
References	23

Preface

This text shows the results of an action research project carried out during my first experience as a service teacher in La Salle Campoamor, a public school in Medellin-Colombia. This research aims to describe how Task-Based learning implementation enhances the development of oral production in fifth graders. The participants were 40 students between ten to twelve years old. Most of this group's students were active, always participated in the class, and saw English as a tool to achieve their professional goals.

For this research study, I decided to implement Task-based language teaching to enhance the development of students' oral production. The first time I observed their English class, I could evidence the cooperating teacher focused the course on teaching vocabulary and filling the gaps. However, she never asked the students to use the target language to communicate messages. During my project implementation, I carried out some tasks that helped the students to work and enhance their oral production.

School context

“Institución Educativa La Salle Campoamor” is a public school located in Campoamor Guayabal, a medium-class neighborhood in Medellín, Antioquia. This institution offers official programs from kindergarten to high school. The school has two schedules, students from secondary attend classes in the morning, and primary students attend classes in the afternoon.

The school is a two-story building divided into two sections; in the first section - on the first floor, there was a patio used by the students to take their recess, practice sports, and attend cultural events, some classrooms, and two bathrooms. There are some administrative offices, a library, and a computer room on the second floor. In the second section, on the first floor, there was a patio, a cafeteria, a scholar restaurant, two bathrooms, and some classrooms. On the second floor, there were only classrooms. The classrooms were large; they have two or three windows. Each classroom had around 40 to 45 chairs, a desk for the teacher, a computer, one board, and a video beam.

The students.

This action research project was carried out with a group of 40 fifth graders; the students were fifteen girls and twenty-five boys; they live near the school, and the age range is between 10 to 12 years old. For most students, it was the first time they had an English teacher, which is why they are interested in learning. Most perceived English as an excellent tool to achieve their professional goals. The students' previous experiences with the language outside the school were different; some have studied the language independently, others have learned in a bilingual school, and others had a low level because they have contact with English only in the school. One aspect they have in common is that they can understand the meaning of some words but only in a written way. Due to the pandemic situation (Covid-19), since 2020, they had been

studying in a virtual environment. However, in September 2021, they started face-to-face classes with some regulations. They attended English classes on Thursdays from 3 pm to 5 pm.

The classroom

The fifth-grade B classroom is located on the school's second floor. This classroom was spacious and very well equipped. It has Internet, a TV, one video beam, speakers, microphone, markers, and a blackboard. Therefore, some ventilators and lights help the students have a good learning environment. There were four chairs divided into eight lines; the cooperating teacher organized the students considering their behavior, and the more active ones were always in the first line.

The cooperating teacher.

My cooperating teacher was charming and respectful. She has a degree in Early Childhood Education and twenty years of experience teaching primary school students. Concerning the fifth grade B, she has to teach all the subjects: Spanish, Math, English, and others. She does not know many things about English pronunciation or grammatical rules, but she had to teach them. For this reason, her teaching strategy is to take activities from the internet to teach vocabulary.

The English Syllabus and class methodology.

The methodology used by the teacher was the lexical approach since the main objective of the class was to learn vocabulary. The development and class activities were focused on teaching and learning new vocabulary and then completing sentences by filling the gaps with the previously presented language. The teacher assesses the students considering their class participation and the score obtained from Live Worksheets activities.

Regarding the school's syllabus for fifth-grade students had to learn: the English alphabet, comparatives, superlatives, adjectives, nouns, verbs to be in present and past, frequency adverbs, conditionals, professions, numbers from 1 to 100, and WH questions.

Problem statement

According to the information gathered from the journal. I found that the class's activities were focused on teaching vocabulary and asking students to fill gaps to complete sentences. The main problem was that the students could not use spoken language since they identified the meaning of many words but did not know how to use them. As evidenced during my observations: "To verify students' comprehension of the vocabulary previously presented. The students have to complete ten sentences by using an image and considering prepositions of place." (Journal excerpt, August 18, 2021). It demonstrated that students were often asked about meaning but could not interact using the language because the class methodology did not allow it. The lack of communicative situations during the class's development is evident. *"The teacher presents a video about means of transport. Students have to pay attention because the teacher will create a list with the vocabulary presented in the video."* (Journal excerpt September 22, 2021). All the time, the teacher focused the class on teaching vocabulary. There was no evidence that the students developed activities that promote oral communication.

Considering this lack of communicative situations during the class development, the central aspect that caught my attention was the students since they had the abilities and resources to learn the language differently. It means students could develop class activities that help them be more active in learning and practicing the speech focused on oral communication. For this reason, this research project was carried out to enhance students' development of oral production.

It means they were learning the language in an environment that allows them to learn vocabulary and how to use it orally.

This research project was developed by implementing the Task-Based learning approach (TBL). I chose this teaching method because it allows students to acquire the language by following a process (Pre-task, task, and language focus). According to Richards 2006, TBL emphasizes learning by task implementation. This research's main objective was to describe how Task-Based learning implementation enhances the development of oral production in fifth graders. The TBL approach implementation helps teachers create an environment where students can develop different tasks focused on improving speaking abilities; according to (Willis, 1996), *"A task is an activity where the learner uses the target language for a communication purpose to achieve an outcome."*

A task is the best way to promote language learning and interaction because it can be modified considering the teaching purpose. According to Nunan, 1989." A task is a piece of classroom work involving learners comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting with the target language. At the same time, their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form."

Theoretical background

The student's progress in acquiring oral abilities in a foreign language is determined by external and internal factors like teacher preparation, the methodology implemented, and students' previous knowledge and experience with the target language. In this section, I am going deep into the main concepts of this research: Task-based learning, task, and oral production.

Task-based learning approach

Task-based learning is a teaching method that allows the students to access knowledge by completing tasks. The task completion involves three phases: the pre-task, task cycle, and language focus (D. Willis & Willis, 2007.) Pre-task is the stage in which the teacher presents the language the students will need to complete the task, introduce the main topic, and activate students' linguistic resources to develop the main task and task cycle. In this stage, students are active participants; they work in pairs and start to implement different communicative strategies to plan and develop the task. Finally, in language focus, the students present and assess tasks.

Task-based learning is a method by which the students learn by doing and are expected to experience the language by completing real-world tasks. During Task-based learning implementation, the learning is focused on the use of tasks, negotiation of meaning, and the use of target language for meaningful communication Ellis (2003).

Task-Based Learning is a method that can respond to different students' needs and language objectives. It may be beneficial for developing the oral production of English as a foreign language due to the stages in the class development that allow the students to have accurate contact with the language. Task-based learning allows teachers to modify tasks considering students' objectives. Willis and Willis (2007) suggest some tasks to be implemented

during TBL development: ordering, matching, comparing, project and creative tasks, sharing personal experience, and problem-solving.

To implement teaching based on tasks is essential to consider some conditions: the ones Richards, 2006 cited by Safitri, H., Rafli, Z., & Dewanti, R. 2020, states are: to know the course contents and objectives, select appropriate materials and resources, and keep in mind the evaluation and assessment procedures since, with these conditions, Task-based learning can positively enhance language skills. The task-based learning approach is connected with oral development; by implementing Tasks, learners are exposed to the language in real-world situations. Jeon & Hahn, 2006 cited by Safitri, H., Rafli, Z., & Dewanti, R. 2020, " TBL indicates that language learning is a dynamic procedure facilitating communication and social interaction rather than a product acquired by practicing language items. Moreover, students learn the target language more effectively when naturally exposed to meaningful tasks."

Task

The main purposes of tasks are to promote language interaction and achieve a goal. According to Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001), a task is "an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective." A task allows learners to work in pairs or groups and use the target language to communicate messages that help them achieve real-world goals.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) define Tasks as helpful in learning the target language since tasks provide both the input and output necessary for language acquisition. Ellis (2003) identified a task as a world plan focused on meaning and designed to use/practice the target language in real-world situations; it involves one language skill and always has a communicative outcome.

Oral production

Oral production is one of the most critical skills while learning a new language; it is an ability to communicate messages, ideas, and thoughts in different contexts. According to Huebner (1960), "speaking ability is the process of sharing and building meaning while using verbal and non-verbal symbols, in different situations." Enhancing the development of oral production demands an exchange of meaning and understanding that involves an interactive process and requires understanding what to say and how to say it.

According to Bygate (2009), oral production demands knowing the vocabulary and producing and adapting discourses to different circumstances. Once people get the knowledge and skill to use them, they will make decisions and manipulate their conversation/discourse in a spontaneous interaction.

Language is used by members of a social group or culture in either spoken, manual, or written ways to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings for communication purposes. Oral production is crucial to language development; it allows social interaction and meaning negotiation. According to Chaney (1998), oral production is the process of sharing and building meaning by using verbal and nonverbal symbols in different situations, considering the sociocultural rules.

Considering the context, the classroom dynamics during the observations I conducted, and having established the theoretical background for this action research project. I will continue by presenting the research question, the objectives, and the research plan.

Research Question

How can the implementation of Task-based Learning enhance the development of oral production in a group of fifth-graders at La Salle de Campoamor institution?

Main objective

- To describe the way Task-Based learning implementation enhances the development of oral production in fifth graders from La Salle Campoamor.

Specific objectives

- To identify task-based activities that can enhance the development of oral production.
- To define the way Task-based activities enhance oral production.
- To relate Task-based activities with the oral development enhancement.

Action plan

Different actions were planned from February to May to answer the research question stated for this project. The first action was to organize the class's topics that had to be developed during the course. Secondly, I planned the lessons carefully to connect the class subjects and activities with the Task-Based learning stages, and finally, the class implementation. During this time, I developed the following tasks: Talk about your classmate, Guess who is, and plan a birthday party. These tasks were developed in groups; in this way, they could interact among themselves using the target language.

Development of actions

This section describes the actions developed during the implementation of the communicative tasks aiming to meet the research objectives.

In February, we had the first two classes. In those classes, I introduced the first topic: personal presentation; during the lesson plan development, students passed on the three task-based learning stages, and they learned how to ask and answer questions about personal information through some examples. During the task, students had the opportunity to work in pairs to exchange in a presentation basic details of their lives by using the target language.

In March, we had three classes; I introduced a new topic for the third and fourth-class sections. The class objective was to learn how to describe a person. Task-based implementation demands three stages. In the first part of the class, I introduced the verb to be formation, I shared some examples, I also introduced the most common adjectives to describe a person, and finally, I showed an example of how to describe a classmate. Then, in groups of three or four students, they randomly selected a classmate to be described. They have to draw and talk about the person using previously learned adjectives. Once they completed the task, we played Guess who; in this activity, some students talked about a person, and the others had to guess who the described person was. In this way the students put into practice the linguistic knowlegde that was introduced.

During April, the students had two class sections in these classes; students learned comparatives and superlatives. In the first part of the class, I elaborated on comparatives and superlatives use; I showed a video with some examples. From this video, they create a list of the most common comparatives and superlative adjectives. In the second part of the class, I shared a short reading in which students had to underline the comparatives and superlatives they found. In the third part of the class, students were at a round table with some images; we played "Tingo tango," and each selected student had to choose two images and create a sentence using comparatives and superlatives.

The last two class sections were in May. In those classes, the main topic was WH questions, so I decided to implement the following task: Planning a birthday party. I introduced the main subject to start the class, shared some examples, played the five W's song, and asked the students to create their samples. In the next stage of the class, I shared the reading "My birthday" we read in common, and they answered some questions about it. Students were asked to work in groups to plan a birthday party; they had to think about the invitation list, the food, the music, and the theme. In the last stage of the class, they have to present their plans for the party, and we choose the best one.

Data collection techniques

To answer the research question, I collected data through three different instruments: first of all, I recorded the class observations in a journal at the end of each class to register all the actions, outcomes, and situations that happened during the research. Observation is a way of gathering data by watching behavior and events during class development. According to Burns (2009), in action research, observations are important because they allow for recording vital information and creating reflections. The main idea of this data collection method was to collect information about students' language development from the first to the last class and define how task-based activities enhance oral production. Second, I conducted a focus group with the students in the first and the last class sections; the focus group's main objective was to define how task-based implementation helps students enhance their oral production. According to Margaret (1984), focus groups are a qualitative method for gathering data that bring together several participants to discuss a topic of mutual interest to themselves and the researcher. Finally, I interviewed the cooperating teacher to relate Task-based activities with the oral development

enhancement. The main objective was to know the teacher's perception of the effectiveness of the teaching method implemented.

Findings and interpretations

I used a triangulation method to analyze the data gathered throughout this action research; I checked the data collected through journals, interviews, and surveys. According to Noble and Heale (2019), research triangulation is the process that helps increase the credibility and validity of the research. To collect and triangulate the information I started by reviewing the important events registered in my journal during the task implementation. After carefully reading each diary entry, I selected the most relevant information considering my research question and objectives. Once I found the information, I read the focus group answers and I analyzed the interview with the cooperating teacher.

The steps I followed to reveal this research's main categories were those proposed by Burns (1999). Firstly, I assembled the data by rereading the journals, focus groups, and interview answers to find and underline the most common patterns. Secondly, I coded the data and assigned categories to the data; in this way, I could identify the most relevant and repeated subjects. Thirdly, I underline the most relevant concepts/categories to be developed, these are Oral production, benefits of Task-based learning stages, and engagement.

Benefits of Task-based learning stages

Data collection demonstrates that most students consider that all the activities developed during the class were useful in learning the language. As it was expressed by one of the participants in the focus group session. “ they found the class amazing, and they considered the

tasks were well planned/structured” (focus group answer). It means that the class activities based on task-based learning helped the students to enhance their language learning. The advantage of TBL over other teaching methods is that it allows students to focus on real communication and needs by putting them into communicative situations and using all their language resources to communicate messages.

Furthermore, by Following Task-Based Language stages, teachers can contextualize better the students about what and how to develop the class activities, and it represents the accomplishment of the class goals easily. As was evidenced in my journal: ”The lesson's purpose was accomplished because most of the students learned how to ask and answer questions about personal information, and they could put into practice what they were learning during the task cycle.” (Journal excerpt, April 7th, 2022). It means that the TBL stages are very important during the class section because they allow teachers to have a lesson plan organized. In this way, students can receive better contextualization about what to do and how to do it during the class section and task development.

Oral production

As a result of task implementation focused on enhancing oral production, data revealed that students acquired oral production abilities. Although it was the first time the students had contact with the target language orally, the students and cooperating teacher identified that the activities/tasks developed during the class section helped increase oral production. During the interview with the cooperating teacher, she said: “the teacher achieved the main goal, students had significant learning since the children make short sentences but with fluency” (Interview answer, May 20th, 2022). It means that oral production was enhanced during the course development because their progress is evidenced. Goh and Burns (2012) define oral production

as an individual endeavor; every learner's development of second language speaking can be greatly facilitated through working collaboratively with his or her peers.

Students' opinions also show that oral production was enhanced during the development of this action research. In the answers from the focus group, I found that the whole student group identified their progress concerning oral production. For example, 100% of the students affirmed they enhanced their oral production during the English class.

In this sense, we can say that the TBL implementation is a good teaching and learning approach to enhance the development of oral production. This finding shows the positive impact that TBL has on young learners. As the cooperating teacher mentioned, this progress represents an advantage for the students during the process of acquiring the target language.

Finally, I will elaborate on the last main category: Engagement. It is important to mention that Task-based learning implementation helped fifth-grade B acquire oral production skills and increased students' motivation to learn and have contact with the target language.

Engagement

In regard to this category, data revealed that TBL implementation creates in the student a different perception about language learning, data demonstrate that students were always willing to get involved in-class activities by answering and asking questions as was registered in my journal (..) "They are always open to asking and participating during the class section." (Journal excerpt, April 7th, 2022). It means that when students positively respond to class activities, the purpose of the lesson is easily accomplished. According to Willis and Willis (2007,) "a good task generates interest and creates an acceptable degree of challenge, opportunities for learners to experience and activate as much language as possible." This finding revealed that Task-based

learning implementation is a complete teaching method because it gives students access to the language knowledge but also promotes a good teaching and learning environment.

During the class development, all the activities were motivational for the students, and each one had a goal, but the best one was: Planning a birthday. As was evidenced during the interview, the cooperating teacher's perception: "I consider all the activities were motivational for them, they enjoyed each one, but the best one was the birthday party." According to Finn and Rock (1997), Engagement implies psychological and behavioral characteristics. It means the main motivation during the development of the tasks was the student's involvement, and students love the idea of being active participants during the learning process. In this case, learners were engaged by the interest and enjoyment that represents for them the task development.

Conclusions and suggestions

This research project was set out to describe how Task-Based learning implementation enhances the development of oral production in fifth graders. The results suggest that TBL is a teaching method that can allow students to access knowledge through developing tasks. In these tasks, the students improve their learning skills, have a good relationship with the target language, and see it as a valuable tool to communicate messages and interact worldwide.

Additionally, group work was another tool for the students and the teacher. It was fascinating and satisfying to see that this action research achieved the main goal. It was demonstrated that English lessons helped fifth grade B acquire oral production abilities and establish better relationships among the students.

To conclude, I could say Task-based language is the best teaching method to be implemented with young learners to promote oral production. This approach admits the task modification by

considering students' interests and needs. I believe that if we as teachers can call students' attention and motivation, teaching and acquiring the target language will be easier for both teachers and students.

Reflection

To carry out this action research was an enriching experience for me as a person and as a future teacher. It was my first experience being a service teacher of a group of 40 students, and I can say that during this time, the students and I both were learning. They learned about the language and me about them. We, as a group established a good relationship and class environment that allowed us to be free to share, express, and make mistakes without being judged or rejected. I am grateful to the school, the cooperating teacher, and the students. There was not one day in which I did not enjoy being in the classroom with this beautiful group of students; they were friendly, respectful, and always open to participating during the class section.

To conclude, being a teacher represents a lot of work, discipline, and commitment. As foreign language teachers, we must understand that teaching is not only about grammar or vocabulary. We must change the way of teaching to allow students to be active participants in their learning process. We have the power and responsibility to do it, and they can respond to everything that moves their feelings.

References

Burns, A. (1999). Collaborative action research for English teachers.

Bygate, Martin. (2009). Teaching and Testing Speaking. 10.1002/9781444315783.ch23.

Ellis, R. (2003). Designing a Task-Based Syllabus. *RELC Journal*, 34(1), 64–81.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/003368820303400105>

Elmahdi, O. E. H. (n.d.). *The impact of task-based approach on EFL learner's performance*.

Core.Ac.Uk.

Finn, J. D., & Rock, D. A. (1997). Academic success among students at risk for school failure.

Journal of Applied Psychology, 82(2), 221–234. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.82.2.221>

Goh, C. C. M., & Burns, A. (2022). *Teaching Speaking: A Holistic Approach (Cambridge Language Education) by Dr Christine C. M. Goh (2012–01-31)*. Cambridge University Press.

Krebt, D. M. (2017). The Effectiveness of Role Play Techniques in Teaching Speaking for EFL College Students. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(5), 863.

<https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0805.04>

Morgan, D. L., & Spanish, M. T. (1984). Focus groups: A new tool for qualitative research.

Qualitative Sociology, 7(3), 253–270. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00987314>

Mackey, Alison. (2004). Task-based language learning and teaching. *Studies in*

Second Language Acquisition. 26. 480 - 482. [10.1017/S0272263104293056](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263104293056)

Noble, H., & Heale, R. (2019b). Triangulation in research, with examples. *Evidence Based*

Nursing, 22(3), 67–68. <https://doi.org/10.1136/ebnurs-2019-103145>

- Peña, M., & Onatra, A. (2009). Promoting oral production through the task-based learning approach: A study in a public secondary school in Colombia. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, 11(2), 11–26.
- Rahman, Md. (2010). *Teaching Oral Communication Skills: A Task-based Approach*. English for Specific Purposes World. 9.
- Richards, J., & Rodgers, T. (2001). Task-Based Language Teaching. In *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (Cambridge Language Teaching Library, pp. 223-243). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511667305.022
- Rojas, M. A., & Villafuerte, J. (2018). The Influence of Implementing Role-play as an Educational Technique on EFL Speaking Development. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 8(7), 726. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0807.02>
- Richards, Jack. (2006). *Communicative Language Teaching Today*.
- Safitri, H., Rafli, Z., & Dewanti, R. (2020). Improving Students' Speaking Skills through Task-Based Learning: An Action Research at the English Department. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 7(6), 88. <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v7i6.1647>
- Siskin, H. J., & Nunan, D. (1990). Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 74(1), 89. <https://doi.org/10.2307/327949>
- Task-Based Language Teaching and Implementing Consciousness-Raising Tasks. (2018). *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 6(5). <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.0605004>

Task-Based Learning: An Effective Way of Developing Communication Skills. (2017).

International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies, 4(2).

<https://doi.org/10.23918/ijsses.v4i2sip104>

Thompson, C., & Millington, N. (2012). Task-Based Learning for Communication and Grammar Use. *Language Education in Asia*, 3(2), 159–167.

https://doi.org/10.5746/leia/12/v3/i2/a04/thompson_millington

Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing Task-Based Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yuan, F., & Willis, J. (1999). A Framework for Task-Based Learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(1), 157. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588204>

Yuan, F., & Ellis, R. (2003). The effects of pre-task planning and on-line planning on fluency, complexity and accuracy in L2 monologic oral production. *Applied Linguistics*, 24(1), 1-27.