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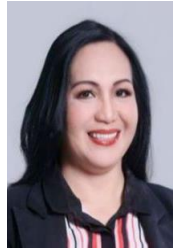
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IMPROVING ENGLISH SPEAKING ABILITIES OF ESL LEARNERS THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION (INTERNATIONAL APPROACH)

POPRAWA UMIEJĘTNOŚCI KOMUNIKOWANIA SIĘ W JĘZYKU ANGIELSKIM UCZNIÓW ANGIELSKIEGO JAKO DRUGIEGO JĘZYKA (ESL) POPRZEZ KOMUNIKATYWNE INSTRUKCJE ZADANIOWE (PODEJŚCIE MIĘDZYNARODOWE)

Abstract

Speaking is one of the most exploited skills. However, despite the many endeavors conducted by English teachers, speaking proficiency remains poor among tertiary students. This qualitative-phenomenological study aimed to determine the experiences of the students on the use of communicative task-based instruction in improving their speaking abilities. Using the focus group discussion, the researcher found that generally, the participants believed that the communicative task-based instruction provided them opportunities to enhance their communicative abilities; let them overcome the fear of speaking; gave them a lot of fun; and allowed them to apply the tasks even outside their classrooms.

The participants suggested that exposure to real conversation tasks might be done; design individual tasks would be interesting, and that technology might be used in doing the tasks. Thorough discussions and conclusion were provided.
Keywords: English speaking skills; second language learners; communicative task-based instruction, qualitative-phenomenology

Streszczenie

Mówienie jest jedną z najczęściej wykorzystywanych umiejętności. Jednak pomimo wielu starań prowadzonych przez nauczycieli języka angielskiego, poziom znajomości języka wśród studentów wyższych uczelni pozostawia wiele do życzenia. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia badanie jakościowo-fenomenologiczne, które miało na celu określenie doświadczeń uczniów w zakresie korzystania z komunikatywnych instrukcji zadaniowych w celu poprawy ich umiejętności mówienia. Korzystając z dyskusji badanych grup, zauważono, że uczestnicy wierzyli, że nauczanie oparte na komunikatywnych instrukcjach zadaniowych zapewniło im możliwości zwiększenia ich zdolności komunikacyjnych; pozwoliło przezwyciężyć strach przed mówieniem, dało im wiele radości a także pozwoliło im zastosować wykorzystywane podczas lekcji zadania nawet poza klasą. Uczestnicy sugerowali, że podczas lekcji można wykorzystać rzeczywiste konwersacje; interesujące byłoby zaprojektowanie indywidualnych zadań; a także, że warto wykorzystać nowe technologie do wykonywania zadań podczas lekcji. W artykule przedstawiono szczegółowe dyskusje i wnioski.
Słowa kluczowe: umiejętności mówienia w języku angielskim, nauczanie drugiego języka; komunikatywna nauka zadaniowa, fenomenologia jakościowa

Statement of the problem in general outlook and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks.

Speaking is one of the most exploited skills. However, despite the many endeavors conducted by English teachers, speaking proficiency remains poor among tertiary students (San Jose A., 2011). This poor proficiency may be attributed to the way the English teachers planned and delivered their lessons. The approach used may not fit the learners' level of abilities, interests, and needs. Thus, English teachers need to pay great attention to more effective and successful approaches in delivering their lessons in the classrooms.

Several researchers have been conducted about the speaking skills of second language learners. H. Alharbi (Alharbi H., 2015) mentions that the absence of authentic language learning situations influences learners' in obtaining oral proficiency. In the same vein, M. Abrar, A. Mukminin, A. Habibi, F. Asyrafi, M. Makmur, and L. Marzulina (Abrar M., Mukminin A., Habibi A., Asyrafi F., Makmur M., Marzulina L., 2018) state that language barriers such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency; psychological factors such as anx-

iety, attitude, and lack of motivation; learning environment such as lecturers, peers, and topics of speaking lessons; and practicing the language such as self-practice, practicing the language with tutors and peers, practicing the language with media and technology, and maintaining a positive motivation are linked with the improvement of learners' speaking abilities. On the other hand, A. Derakhshan, A. Khalili, F. Beheshti (Derakhshan, A, Khalili, A, Beheshti, F., 2016) believe that the learners' lack of listening and reading skills affect their speaking skills. Likewise, S. Jindathai (Jindathai S., 2015) finds that students' English speaking difficulties are influenced by management in teaching and learning, exposure to English as a second language, and students' personality (Orbeta E., San Jose A., 2013) aver find that students' anxiety specifically their apprehension contributes to their oral performance. Furthermore, A. San Jose (San Jose A., 2011) mentions that students' speaking abilities are directly affected by the learners' excessive use of their dialects while A. San Jose and J. Vicencio (San Jose A., Vicencio J., 2018) say that the learners' inhibition, ability to deliver and develop a topic affects greatly influence their oral skills. Lastly, R. Sosas and A. San Jose (Sosas R., San Jose A., 2016) point out that contextualization of the lessons influences students' active oral participation. Learning English as a second or foreign language is best done through a communicative approach. The main goal of this approach is to enhance the ability of the learners to communicate meaningfully in different settings, with different people, on different topics, for different purposes M. Celce-Murcia, Z. Dörnyei, S. Thurrell (Celce-Murcia M., Dörnyei Z., Thurrell S., 1997). Thus, language learners engage in meaningful tasks, goal-oriented communication to solve a problematic situation, complete activities, and come up with. Similarly, task-based instruction focuses on the learners' ability to execute the given tasks without considering the explicit rules in grammar (Rahimpour M., 2008). Likewise, task-based instruction provides advantages for the development of second language skills, in the sense, because it emphasizes on the explicit teaching and learning (Long M., 1985; Prabhu N., 1987; Robinson P., 2001).

On the other hand, the tasks-based approach utilizes an extensive range of instructional objectives. This means that in the course syllabus, activities are for functional practice and enhancement to content-based curricula. Further, it means that a task can be constructed in order to achieve its objectives which depend on linguistics requirement on the use of specific grammatical structures (Ellis R., 2003; Loschky L., Bley-Vroman R., 1993). Thus, the methods of teaching English as a second language become the central tenet of task-based pedagogy' since the goal is to allow learners to discover their own directions to learning. The comprehensive understanding of how to utilize the communicative task-based approach in speaking class gave the researchers inspiration to embrace proactive activities for the students. These activities aim to let the students actively participate in different English language activities not only to help them enhance their speaking skills but also to find meaning in the activities. Moreover, this qualitative study would also provide general information for program planners at the college or university level by providing an additional tool for the improvement of students' speaking skills. Additionally, this may contribute to the curriculum re-thinking and re-designing of

speaking courses. Therefore, teachers have the accessibility in designing more focused tasks on the specific needs of their students

as well as assist them in modifying such tasks in mid-stream as particular students' needs are identified.

Analysis of latest research where the solution of the problem was initiated.

Research Questions
This main aim of this qualitative study was to determine the experiences of the students on the use of communicative task-based instruction in improving their speaking abilities. Particularly, this study sought to answer how the communicative task-based instruction was employed as an approach in improving the speaking skills of students; how the participants find the communicative task-based instruction; and what are the participants' suggestions to enhance the utilization of the communicative task-based instruction in the classroom.

Theoretical Lens
Various theories substantiate language pedagogies which give account to this study. Hence, this study was anchored on the Model of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which explains that real and meaningful communications are fundamental features of learning the target language (Richards C., Rodgers T., 2001; Willis J., 1996). Moreover, in task-based approach, the activities given to the second language learners are described as authentic where students could use the target language by focusing on the meaning in order to reach the intended outcome (Bygate M., Skehan P., Swain M., 2001; Canale M., 1983; Lee J., 2000; Nunan D., 1987; Prabhu N., 1987; Richards C., Rodgers T., 2001; Skehan P., 1996). Therefore, communicative task-based instruction is very appropriate in the speaking class.

Aims of paper. Methods

Research Design
This action research utilized the qualitative-phenomenological method. J. Creswell (Creswell J., 1998) states that qualitative research involves clear methodological tradition whereby investigators build up a complex, holistic framework by analyzing narratives and observation. On the other hand, A. Bryman (Bryman A., 2004) avers that qualitative research deals more on verbal and visual than numeric form. K. Charmaz (Charmaz K., 2006) explains that qualitative method uses coding process, interpreting the analyzed text and attributing meaning to the themes while N. Wallen (Wallen N., 2006) mentions that qualitative method draws more attention to the examination of individual's character. The qualitative method was appropriate to this study because it culled the participants' individual experiences in the use of the communicative task-based approach in improving their speaking skills in English.

On the other hand, general phenomenology is utilized if researchers wanted to lend ears to the participants' personal stories (Clandinin, D., Connelly, F., 1994); to identify the essence and meaning of the experience (Creswell J., 1998; Rossman G., Rallis S., 2011); to look into the individuals' experiential insights (Patton M.,1990); and find the worth of the experiences of the persons (San Jose A., Bahket R., Ali Alsalhi H., 2017). Phenomenology was suitable for this study because it looked into the essence of the experiences of the participants in the

communicative task-based approach. Likewise, it also obtained the participants' essential suggestions for the improvement of the communicative task-based approach.

Research Participants

The participants involved in this study were 20 third year education students enrolled in the Speech and Oral Communication. In particular, the participants were purposely chosen from the Bachelor of Elementary Education-Generalist, Bachelor of Elementary Education-Special Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education-Math, and Bachelor of Secondary Education-English. Each course was considered as a focus group. Thus, each focus group was composed of four members. A. Gibbs (Gibbs A., 1997) suggests that a focus group needs to have a manageable number of participants while G. Guest, E. Namey, K. McKenna (Guest G., Namey E., McKenna K., 2017) mention that three focus groups may be enough to identify all the most prevalent themes. Moreover, it was made sure that only those who participated in communicative-task-based classrooms were included in the focus groups. As F. Derksen, T. Hartman, A. van Dijk, A. Plouvier, A., J. Bensing, A. Lagro-Janssen (Derksen F., Hartman T., van Dijk A., Plouvier A., Bensing J., Lagro-Janssen A., 2017) point out a focus group should only compose of persons who can give comments, opinions and views, from their personal experiences, about the topic under investigation

Research Instruments

In the quest of the researchers to answer the research questions, they crafted the interview guide questions as the main instrument to obtain the essential information. A. DBM, A. San Jose (DBM A., San Jose A.,

2015) point out that interview guide questions are usually used in a focus group to 'cull information' necessary to the study. It is also a way, J. Seidel (Seidel J., 1998) says for the interviewees to give a report of their experiences. The interview guide questions underwent validity. They were given to three expert validators to verify their veracity, reliability, and credibility. The interview guide questions were composed of three main questions and five probe questions which sought to determine the participants' experiences in the application of the communicative task-based approach in the English class.

Research Procedures

In conducting this study, the following procedures were carefully observed: firstly, permission to conduct the study was sought from the school head. The researcher wrote a letter to the Assistant Vice President of Academics and Dean of the College of Teacher Education to allow the conduct of the research. Secondly, the researchers requested the English teachers who were handling English 3 subjects to excuse the participants who will be involved in the study. Thirdly, the researchers explained to the participants the purpose; read to them the consent; and followed the ethical protocols. For the purpose of confidentiality, the researchers were requested not to write their real names on the consent form. Fourthly, the focus group interviews were conducted. The recorded information was then transcribed. The same was given back to the participants for self-verification and review of their answers. Lastly, the verified transcription was given to the data analyst for the thematic analysis and interpretations.

Table 1. Themes and Core Ideas of Implications of Task-Based Instruction.

Major Theme	Frequency of Responses	Core Ideas
Consequences on the Use of the Communicative Task-Based Approach	General	• Enhancing English speaking skills of L2 learners because the tasks given are focused on meanings and communication rather than grammar forms. • Involving all L2 learners in the tasks to try their best to communicate in English • Practicing a variety of linguistic structures that L2 learners choose to complete the given task
	Typical	• Using authentic materials in every task given • Making instructions clear to complete the task and achieve the objectives • Interesting tasks • Focusing on promoting L2 learners' communicative skills
Expansion on Use of the Target Language	General	• Using L2 outside the classroom • Meaningful learning L2 • Inter-acting with other learners
Suggestions in Improving the Task-Based Approach	General	• Practicing L2 through independent learning • Integrating technology in everyday life • Providing authentic situations • Relating tasks to real-life situations

Source: Thematic Analysis of information

Consequences on the Use of Task-Based Approach

Generally, the participants believe that the communicative task-based instruction used in the classroom provided them the opportunity to enhance their communicative abilities. In the tasks, the emphasis was on the meaning of the conversation not on grammatical forms. Thus, students could freely express themselves. Specifically, the dramatization and advertising tasks challenged them to communicate with each other. Positively, the tasks gave them self-confidence. "…the usual strategies our teacher used is dramatization or role-playing, there were also instances that we made an advertisement which was very challenging for us. It is because with the activity given, we were able to practice our English skills and at the same time we boost our confidence to face other people (FGD[1]A[3])."

Through the interactive activities given by the teacher, students were able to develop their interpersonal skills which gave them esteem to speak in English in their own way. The interactive tasks also encouraged students to show their best outcomes. Moreover, some tasks become memorable to the students because through the tasks they were above to realize their shortcomings and strengths in communication.

"There was a certain activity that I couldn't forget because I was able to discover my

strengths and weaknesses in terms of speaking English the time we listened to a certain dialogue from the native speaker then after which we created our own dialogue then we performed it in a group (FGD^{1}A^6)."

Other students found the communicative tasks enjoyable because those activities allowed them to exercise their speaking skills particularly in proper pronunciations and enunciations of English words. The knowledge they gained gave them the courage to overcome their fear of facing the audience.

"I really enjoyed the activities given by our teacher it is because I was able to practice my speaking skills at the same I practiced the correct pronunciation and enunciation of the words and I learned to overcome my stage fright (FGD^{1}A^8)."

Moreover, the subject-teacher had oriented the students on the importance of the tasks given to the students. This was to let the learners value the relevance of the tasks.

"Our teacher gave those activities for us to improve our English skills such as pronunciation, articulation, and enunciation. Most of all, the purpose of our teacher since we will become teachers soon, it would help us to improve our communication skills (FGD^{2}A^{14})."

Generally, the students found the task-based approach effective in developing their communicative skills. The teacher allowed the learners to practice on varieties of linguistic structures that the students were familiar with. As a result, learners gained trust in themselves and confidence in speaking.

"I could really say that the activities given were very effective because we were able to improve our weaknesses in English (FGD^{2}A^7)."

"Another purpose of our teacher is to have confidence in speaking English (FGD^{1}A^{115})."

Also, the teacher contextualized and used authentic materials. This was to let the learners connect with the tasks and constructively learned; thus, students applied what they learned even outside the classrooms. More importantly, the teacher made the instructions clear and understood by the learners to obtain the objectives of the tasks.

"Additionally, it would somehow give us the encouragement to practice the language in our own way not only in school but also outside the school (FGD^{2}A^{117})."

To put into practice in terms of speaking the language; through practical tasks given by our teacher (FGD2A8).

Typically, some participants found the tasks interesting and fun because those activities tickled and challenged their communicative skills. The tasks somehow forced them to apply simultaneously their acting and speaking skills.

"We found the activities such as role-play interesting because we need to think about what to do and make dialogue at the same time. We need to speak in English (FGD^{2}A^{12})."

Expansion on Use of the Target Language

The tasks given by the teacher were realized even outside of the classroom. Students found it advantageous on their part because it gave them opportunities to practice the target language at home when talking to their siblings and parents and even communicating with their close-friends.

"For me, there is really a great advantage because I could practice how to speak English in front of many people (FGD^{1}A^{12})."

Interestingly, students found the tasks meaningful and significant in their quest for

developing their speaking skills in the use of the target language.

"For me, it is very effective and useful because I did not only learn the subject matter, but I also practice English in my own way (FGD[2]A[6])."

Suggestions for Improving the Task-Based Approach

Despite the benefits obtained by the students in the use of task-based approach, the students generally offered suitable recommendations which would fit their needs in learning the target language.

First, teachers may design individual tasks. Through the individual tasks, the learners can use his/her creativity in performing the activity aside from self-teach practice learning. One example of independent learning could be done through the use of the English module.

"I hope our teacher would give us more individual activity so that we have enough chance to practice the target language (FGD[1]A[19])."

"I would suggest that we are provided with the module so that as we finished the course we could still review the things that we have learned (FGD[1]A[21])."

Second, students suggested that they should be exposed to real conversation and real-life situations. Teachers may use recordings of actual conversations in English. By this, students may hear proper pronunciation and enunciation, delivery, usage, and other aspects of the target language.

"My suggestion is to expose us into a more realistic or practical situation wherein we could use and practice the language (FGD[1]A[20])."

"For me, I would suggest more exposure on how to use the language not only inside the classroom but another place for us to expose into another environment and we could improve more our communicative and social skills (FGD[2]A[12])."

Lastly, other participants suggested that technology may be used in the task-based approach. It was a fact that in public colleges and universities, interactive software like Dynamic Education which combined speaking with reading and listening were not availed due to its cost. However, in the absence of this software, language teachers may resort to the YouTube channel for alternative tasks and activities.

"For me, I would suggest that teachers who are handling the Speech Communication class would avail the integration of technology in helping the students to improve English skills. In this way, it would have more interesting activity and I am very much sure that students like it very much (FGD[2]A[13])."

Exposition of main material of research with complete substantiation of obtained scientific results. Discussion.

Consequences on the Use of Task-Based Approach

The use of varieties of tasks in language teaching is said to make teaching more communicative since it provides learners a purpose for classroom activities. Generally, the participants viewed the task-based instruction as an effective and meaningful method because it enhances their English speaking skills. Moreover, the classroom becomes interactive which lead the learners to develop connections with their colleagues. Further, the activities give learners to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in communication. Moreover, the students find the communicative tasks are fun because they are encouraged to perform the tasks in simulation with other skills. Thus, they develop self-confidence. Interestingly, if materials used for the tasks are authentic,

learners can learn independently.

Researchers and educators suggested that task-based activities are an effective method in improving the learners' communicative abilities (Aliakbari M., Jamalvandi B., 2010; Ellis R., 2000; Rahmn M., 2010; Zhu D., 2012). On the other hand, G. Pongsawand (Pongsawang G., 2014) affirms that task-based instruction positively changed the learners' communicative attitude. Richards, Platt, and Weber (1986) add that the use of a variety of tasks in language teaching provides a purpose for classroom activities to go beyond the practice of language for its own sake. In the same vein, specialists in the field of language teaching (Brumfit C., 1984; Littlewood W., 1981; Willis J., 1996) mention that task-based gives many benefits including opportunities to use the language in real-life situations; developing confidence in speaking; solving problems, and interacting with others.

Expansion on Use of the Target Language

Teaching L2 speaking is a challenging task a language teacher may face. Thus, a teacher needs to think innovatively on how he or she can make the students learn to speak. In the Philippines, although English is considered a second language, it remains a fact that college students' English speaking proficiency is poor (San Jose A., 2011). Moreover, M. McLean, D. Murdoch-Eaton, S. Shaban (McLean M., Murdoch-Eaton D., Shaban S., 2013) mention that the decline of spoken English proficiency is rooted in part from the nationalist campaigns in promoting the Filipino languages and from inattention in schools. M. Madrunio, I. Martin, S. Plata (Madruno, M., Martin, S., Plata S. (2016); I. Martin (Martin I., 2018); M. Paterno (Paterno M., 2018) add that the

other contributory factor is Philippine's bilingual policy. Thus, A. San Jose, J. Galang (San Jose A., Galang J., 2015) offers that language teachers need to adapt language strategies to promote language learning.

The results of this study reveal that task-based instruction brings a positive effect on students' English speaking abilities because they can apply their learned speaking skills outside of the classroom. Thus, they experience meaningful conversations with others. M. Phisuthangkoon (Phisuthangkoon M., 2012) avers that communicative tasks potentially develop students' speaking ability. J. Willis (Willis J., 1996) also stipulates that any communicative tasks used in language classroom bring advantages to the learners because task-based instruction provides students' with the opportunities to utilize the language creatively.

Suggestions for Improving the Task-Based Approach

Task-based instruction is characterized by activities that engage language learners in meaningful, goal-oriented communication to comply with the tasks, to complete the activities, and to reach decisions. The participants on this study offer three relevant suggestions which they think can improve the implementation of the task-based approach. They prefer to have individualized activities for them to have ample time to practice the language tasks; to be exposed to real-life communication encounters, and to associate speaking tasks with technology. The participants' suggestions imply that language teachers need to develop plan thoroughly if they want to use the task-based instruction in their classrooms. The suggestions also show that language teachers should consider other sources of materials to be utilized in a task-based classroom. Teachers may expose the learners to argumentation and debate, public speeches,

tourists guiding, front desk entertainer, hosting, and many more. Also, language teachers may consider the use of technology in the performance of the tasks.

Communicative tasks-base instruction is characterized by the objectives and outcomes that are reflected in the authentic experience (Mourssi A., 2012). For L. Lee (Lee L., 2002) mediated communication tasks using more open-ended exchanges have a great impact on the process of students' language learning. For H. Isleeem (Isleem H., 2012) individualized speaking tasks mean doing the activity without much direct control of the teacher, thus, allowing the learners to be constructive and creative. Moreover, L. Lee (Lee L., 2016) says integrating technology in task-based instruction results in autonomous and independent learning. On the other hand, R. Blake (Blake R., 2016) mentions that technology can productively enhance the results of the tasks.

Conclusions.

The teaching of speaking in the language classroom will continue to be a challenge if language teachers will remain stagnant in innovating their approaches. Communicative task-based instruction in the language is not new; however, if tapped, it can offer many possible changes in the classroom teaching environment and learners' learning. Just like any other approaches, communicative task-based instruction needs thorough planning and preparations. The success of the approach depends heavily on the execution of the planned tasks. Moreover, contextualization of the tasks may give more meaningful experiences to the students because they are able to feel the situations they are familiar of. Thus, developing the students' speaking skills partly or greatly depends on the English teachers' creativity and innovativeness in delivering and facilitating the lessons inside the classroom.

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