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## **IMPROVING EAP SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING**

**MEJORA DE LA COMPETENCIA ORAL EN IFA  
MEDIANTE EL APRENDIZAJE  
BASADO EN TAREAS**

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## Improving EAP Speaking Skills through Task-Based Learning

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the efficacy of Task-Based Learning (TBL) as a strategic framework to enhance oral proficiency and mitigate foreign language anxiety among students of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). In professional and academic contexts, the fear of making errors often inhibits communication; therefore, this research aims to demonstrate how TBL—by focusing on the logical sequencing of tasks and meaningful interaction—optimizes communicative performance and improves students' emotional well-being. A descriptive quantitative methodology was employed, utilizing oral assessment rubrics and Likert-type scales for data collection regarding the effectiveness and acceptance of the methodology applied within the study group. The results demonstrate a significant improvement in both fluency and accuracy, alongside a notable reduction in communicative stress levels. It is concluded that the design of authentic tasks creates a secure practice environment that minimizes the affective filter, allowing students to transfer their technical knowledge into English more naturally. This research confirms that the TBL approach is a superior, comprehensive tool for EAP (English for Academic Purposes), as it not only develops technical speaking skills but also effectively manages the psychological barriers that impede learning.

**Keywords:** tasks, language anxiety, effectiveness, appraisal

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## **Mejora de la competencia oral en IFA mediante el Aprendizaje Basado en Tareas**

### **RESUMEN**

El presente estudio analiza la eficacia del Aprendizaje Basado en Tareas (TBL) como estrategia para fortalecer la competencia oral y reducir la ansiedad lingüística en estudiantes de Inglés con Fines Académicos (IFA). En el ámbito profesional, el temor al error suele inhibir la comunicación; por ello, el objetivo de esta investigación es demostrar cómo el TBL, al centrarse en la secuenciación lógica de tareas y el significado, optimiza el desempeño comunicativo y mejora el bienestar emocional del alumno. Se empleó una metodología cuantitativa descriptiva, utilizando rúbricas de evaluación oral y escalas de tipo Likert para la recolección de datos referentes la efectividad y aceptación de la metodología aplicada en el grupo de estudio. Los resultados demuestran una mejora significativa en la fluidez y precisión, junto con una reducción notable en los niveles de estrés comunicativo. Se concluye que el diseño de tareas auténticas crea un entorno de práctica seguro que minimiza el filtro afectivo, permitiendo que el estudiante transfiera sus conocimientos técnicos al inglés de forma más natural. Esta investigación ratifica que el enfoque TBL es una herramienta integral superior para el IFA, pues no solo desarrolla la habilidad técnica del habla, sino que gestiona eficazmente las barreras psicológicas que limitan el aprendizaje.

**Palabras clave:** tareas, ansiedad lingüística, efectividad, valoración

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## INTRODUCTION

The pedagogical paradigm of English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone a continuous transformation, shifting its emphasis from methodologies rooted exclusively in structural and grammatical components towards approaches that prioritize communicative competence and pragmatic application.

Within this evolving framework, Task-Based Learning (TBL) has achieved prominence as a notably efficacious and broadly implemented pedagogical model. TBLT is an approach to language teaching that provides opportunities for students to engage in the authentic use of the target language through tasks. (...) *students learn language and develop skills as they work toward completing the task, which motivates them to stretch their available language resources* (Ellis, 2003a, p. 45). TBL is fundamentally characterized by its focus on employing authentic, real-world tasks as the central mechanism for second language acquisition. This stands in stark contrast to conventional instructional models, wherein the discrete components of the target language are often presented and mastered in disaggregated isolation. Task-Based Learning (TBL) is a pedagogical approach that places the task—a goal-oriented activity with a clear outcome—at the center of the learning process. In the context of English language acquisition, a task requires learners to use language meaningfully to achieve a specific, non-linguistic purpose, much like they would in the real world. This emphasis on meaning over form encourages learners to spontaneously draw upon and develop their existing linguistic resources.

*“EAP is an approach to language education based on a close identification of the specific language features, discourse practices, and communicative skills of target academic groups, recognizing their particular subject-matter needs and expertise”* (Hyland, 2006). EAP is a specialized form of language instruction designed specifically to meet the demands of higher education. It focuses on equipping college students with the precise communication skills, linguistic tools, and discourse practices they need to succeed in their specific fields of study. Essentially, EAP recognizes that students require language training tailored directly to the academic tasks and subject-matter knowledge they encounter at university



The necessity of TBL becomes particularly pronounced within English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP instruction is not merely about teaching general English grammar and vocabulary; rather, it is a specialized field that focuses on equipping non-native English speakers with the specific linguistic, cognitive, and social skills necessary to succeed in higher education settings. (...) *TBL enhances not only linguistic competence but also critical thinking and problem-solving skills* (Mudinillah et al., 2024).

For the development of oral skills in non-native speakers, TBL in EAP is crucial because the core academic activities students must master are inherently task-oriented to achieve the objectives of the lesson. As Ok (2024) states *"TBL is inherently outcome-oriented, with each task designed to achieve a specific, measurable goal."*

TBL provides a relevant and engaging context for EAP students to practice and refine the complex oral communication skills essential for academic success. The learning focus shifts from simply knowing grammatical rules to the effective, functional use of language to achieve a clearly defined academic goal.

This article explores the utility and instructional effectiveness of implementing Task-Based Learning (TBL) within the EAP course focused on improving speaking skills. The power of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is fully realized when tasks seamlessly connect receptive skills to productive outcomes. This synergy is supported by research indicating that *"not only did the students perform better in reading and writing by studying with TBL, but it was found in this study that they also performed better in speaking"* (Viriya, 2018, p. 343).

Crucially, TBL in EAP offers a powerful mechanism for developing oral skills by naturally and intentionally integrating them with previous reading and listening comprehension activities. The 'task' itself provides the communicative need, but the successful completion of academic tasks requires prior input processing.

The integration achieved through TBL addresses a key limitation of traditional methods, which often treat the four skills (reading, listening, and speaking) in isolation, failing to prepare non-native speakers for the real-world demands of academic study, where skills are always intertwined.



## **Purpose of the study**

The objective of this study is to evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness of the Task-Based Learning (TBL) framework within an EAP context, specifically focusing on its impact in enhancing the oral proficiency and communicative competence of second-language learners

## **Research questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide the investigation:

- **Instructional Scaffolding Effectiveness** To what extent does the sequential integration of receptive-to-productive tasks effectively prepare students for the cognitive demands of oral academic output?
- **Affective Impact and Anxiety Mitigation** How effective is the TBL methodology in reducing foreign language speaking anxiety and fostering communicative confidence among students during peer-to-peer interaction?
- **Synthesis and Productive Competence** What is the measurable effectiveness of the TBL cycle in enhancing students' speaking skills?
- **TBL Validation:** What is the pedagogical effectiveness of the TBL scaffolding sequence in mediating student confidence and performance during complex academic speaking tasks?

## **Task-based Learning Approach in English for Academic Purposes Teaching.**

Task-based methodology is fundamentally underpinned by constructivism, which Fosnot (2005) characterizes as a theory of knowledge and learning. It posits that learning occurs as students synthesize previous and new experiences, thereby establishing themselves as the central active participants in the language learning journey. *“Teaching a lesson using TBLT considers the lesson's elements with the task as its important element”* (Willis & Willis, 2007). In order for students to achieve the designated learning objectives, the instructor must implement the three phases of this methodology: Pre-task, Task-cycle, and Language focus (Willis, 1996). This instructional framework serves to guide classroom tasks, ensuring that linguistic development is systematically supported throughout the pedagogical process.

The *Pre-task* phase aims to motivate and engage students with the intended learning outcomes and results of the final task. *“The purpose of the pre-task phase is to prepare students to perform the task in ways that will promote acquisition”* (Ellis, 2006, p. 21).



The ultimate goal of this study is evaluate TBLT effectiveness to improve speaking skills. To achieve this, the instructor designs a task sequence that students must navigate to reach their objectives.

In this study, the *Pre-task phase* focused on vocabulary building related to the topic of study. Its implementation involved various tasks designed to promote the acquisition of meaning and contextual usage. These included matching exercises, gap-filling, crosswords, brainstorming, and gamified activities. Furthermore, tasks aimed at vocabulary identification and recognition were incorporated through audio and video comprehension. The primary purpose of these activities was to ensure students could accurately identify and employ the lexicon within each task.

During the *Task-cycle phase*, efforts were directed toward strengthening and consolidating reading comprehension. Both collaborative and individual tasks were generated. The former focused on literal information retrieval through open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires, as well as the characterization of study topics and text completion exercises. "*Skimming is reading a text quickly to get to the heart or point... allowing them to understand its main idea and find certain details efficiently*" (Pido & Mubarakah, 2024). "The objective was to facilitate intensive group reading and to identify the main ideas within the information provided.. *"The task cycle offers learners the chance to use whatever language they already know in order to carry out the task, and then to improve that language under teacher guidance"* (Willis, 1996, p. 53)

Individual reading tasks promoted reading comprehension focused on scanning for specific ideas and key details within the information. *Scanning is a quick-reading technique to find certain information or specific information in a reading "Scanning involves searching for specific information in a text... allowing readers to identify significant details and find certain data efficiently without reading the entire passage"* (Nur wahida et al., 2022; Ansari & Bakar, 2021). To this end, questionnaires were administered featuring open-ended questions, true/false items, and tasks requiring contrast and comparison, as well as activities focused on the evaluation and critical analysis of information.

*"Input elaboration in task-based materials maintains complexity while increasing regularity and redundancy, supporting learner decoding during the task cycle"* (Long, 2022). Receptive tasks sought to strengthen reading and listening comprehension through the identification of information in authentic audio and video materials related to the topics of study.



These included gap-filling exercises, multiple-choice questions, as well as activities for the repetition and reproduction of pronunciation, intonation, and vocalization of both the lexicon and the content.

### **Leveraging Task-Based Learning (TBL) for Speaking Skill Development**

Among the communicative language skills, speaking demands the greatest effort and has the most significant impact on second language acquisition. Speaking activities involve not only phonological and grammatical aspects but also carry a high emotional stakes; in this regard, Ramírez-García and Thompson (2025) argue that emotional stability is a prerequisite for fluency, as the cognitive impact of anxiety can actively inhibit the retrieval of complex grammatical structures during real-time interaction. Foreign language anxiety plays a pivotal role in the quality of oral production. It is a persistent challenge for learners, encompassing stage fright and the fear of negative evaluation, which are manifested through the frequent use of fillers, hesitation, and stuttering. Furthermore, Bennett and Zhao (2025) highlight that these stressors often escalate into physiological symptoms, including palpitations and diaphoresis, which compromise the learner's cognitive capacity to retrieve language structures under pressure."

The significant impact of Task-Based Learning (TBL) on the development of speaking skills is rooted in its pedagogical scaffolding structure. By progressing through preliminary stages of vocabulary acquisition, group and individual reading, and listening activities, learners do not encounter oral production in a communicative vacuum. This systematic process reduces cognitive load and language anxiety, enabling students to recycle comprehensible input and transform it into productive output. The integration of these sub-tasks ensures that, upon reaching the final speaking activity, the student possesses both the lexical tools and the psychological confidence required for authentic and fluent communication

In this study oral production tasks were developed starting from vocabulary familiarization through its use in short sentences. The speaking sequence was consistently scaffolded, ranging from isolated definitions focused on technical terminology to general descriptions of the subject matter. This process encompassed the improvement of pronunciation, tone, and vocalization through both group and individual repetition activities. *"To improve speaking skills, the task cycle must allow for an internal planning phase where the student organizes their discourse, thereby balancing fluency with accuracy."*



(Skehan, 2023). Videos were utilized as a primary tool to promote speaking skills. The voice-over dubbing strategy consisted of replacing the original audio track of the video. Additional strategies involved replacing the original script, which required collaborative writing through collective student participation. Furthermore, both individual and collaborative oral presentations were conducted.

Simultaneously, efforts were directed toward minimizing language anxiety (LA) during speaking tasks. To achieve this, dubbing tasks were recorded asynchronously, thereby mitigating performance anxiety while promoting repetition and autonomous refinement. As noted by Guanuche (2025), “The use of dubbing can help reduce Language Anxiety (LA) by providing a secure environment where students can practice speaking without the fear of being judged for their errors. “Individual and small-group presentations were conducted solely in front of the instructor to mitigate stage fright and the fear of peer judgment. Subsequently, students progressed to delivering presentations before larger audiences. This sequenced approach allowed for a gradual exposure to public speaking, building learner confidence before they faced a full-scale audience.

Task sequencing allows learners to navigate from simple to increasingly complex tasks in a logical progression. This process facilitates a cognitive shift from the comprehension of meaning toward the practical use and linguistic form of the language. By doing so, it consolidates the learning process through the stages of familiarization, reproduction, production, and creative language use, ultimately fostering long-term memory retention. *“A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on meaning rather than form”* (Nunan, 1989, p. 10).

## **METHODS**

The methodology of this study is grounded in a quantitative descriptive approach. The primary objective was to evaluate the perceived efficacy of Task-Based Learning (TBL) among EAP students, as well as its impact on developing speaking skills.

### **Participants**

The study was conducted with 30 B1 leveled students 7 male and 23 female who studied English for Academic Purposes in Biochemistry and Pharmacy school in a Public university in Ecuador. The mean age of the study group was 26.0 years (SD = 2.74).



The Task-based learning methodology was applied for 5 months including vocabulary building, reading comprehension, listening comprehension and speaking tasks.

**Table 1** *Participants*

<b>Genre</b>	<b>N° of students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	23	76.67%
Male	7	33.33%
Total	30	100%

### **Instrumentation**

Following the instructional period, data were collected using a Perception Questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions focused on determining the effectiveness of the tasks performed in the study and the Task-Based Learning (TBL) methodology in the context of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) including questions related to the effectiveness to build vocabulary. Improve reading and listening comprehension, as well as speaking skills. The students also validate the strategies to reduce language anxiety when speaking and. Two questions were focused on getting information about acceptance and recommendation of the strategy in teaching English for academic purposes. The instrument utilized a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 'Very Ineffective' to 'Very effective') to assess students' attitudes toward the efficacy of the TBL methodology.

### **Procedure**

This study was conducted from August 2025 to January 2026 and was carried on twice a week for twenty-eight sessions. The study consisted of a sequence of activities including vocabulary building, reading comprehension, listening comprehension and speaking tasks applying the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).

The professor used authentic materials and all the exercises and class activities were designed around a specific theme. The researcher used realia, videos, audios, books and technological aids (gamification), to feedback and strengthen the learning of the subject matter.

At the end of the study, an 11-item validation survey assessed the methodology's effectiveness. The questions as well as the tasks developed in the course were sequenced to provide complementary data, focusing on the integration of language skills, such as; reading, listening, and speaking.

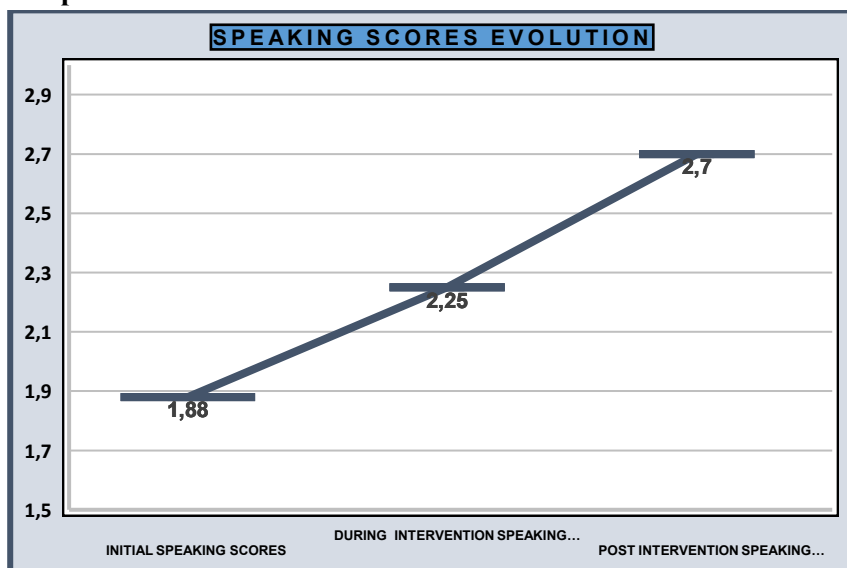


## Data analysis

The collected data was collected carried out through an online survey and analyzed with SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, including mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) was used to determine the effectiveness of the intervention, an Independent Samples T-test was conducted

## RESULTS

Graph. 1



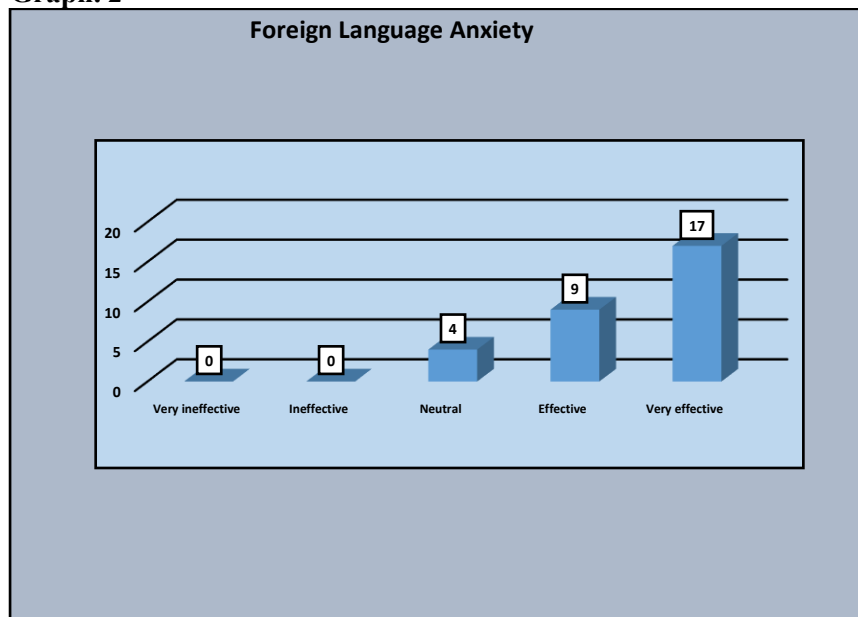
**This chart illustrates the positive impact and effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on students' speaking abilities over three distinct stages of pedagogical intervention.**

The graph shows a consistent upward trend in speaking performance scores, which can be broken down as follows:

In the Initial Speaking Stage (Baseline) the students began with a mean score of 1.88/3 points. This represents the starting point before the TBL and dubbing and more frequent oral presentations were fully implemented. During the implementation of the methodology, which underwent both formative and summative evaluation between weeks 4 and 8. A constant improvement was evidenced. There was a significant increase to 2.25/3 points. This suggests that as students navigated the TBL sequence (Pre-task and Task-cycle), their oral proficiency began to improve through constant familiarization and reproduction tasks. During the Post-Intervention Stage, the final score reached 2.7/3 points, indicating a substantial overall gain. This peak reflects the successful consolidation of speaking skills after completing the full methodology, including the creative and autonomous dubbing tasks.



**Graph. 2**



**The bar chart illustrates the students' perception of how effective the TBLT methodology and dubbing strategy was in managing their language anxiety**

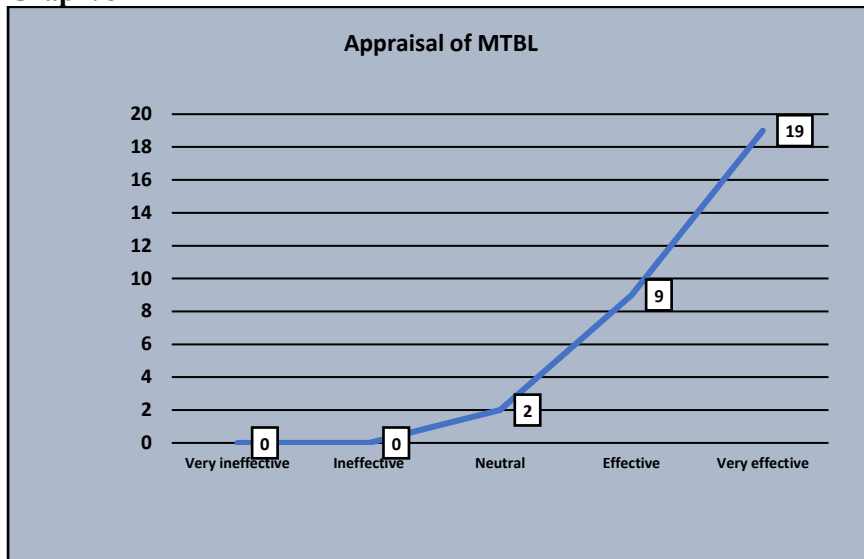
A significant majority of the participants 17 students (56.66%) rated the intervention as "Very Effective" in reducing their linguistic anxiety. 9 students (30 %) found it "Effective," A total of 26 out of 30 students reported a positive impact on their emotional state during speaking tasks. While 4 students (13.3 %) reported their perception as Neutral.

Upon completion of the course, a survey was administered to validate the effectiveness of the pedagogical strategy.

The instrument was designed to gather data regarding the level of acceptance of the methodology employed within the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum for students majoring in Biochemistry and Pharmacy



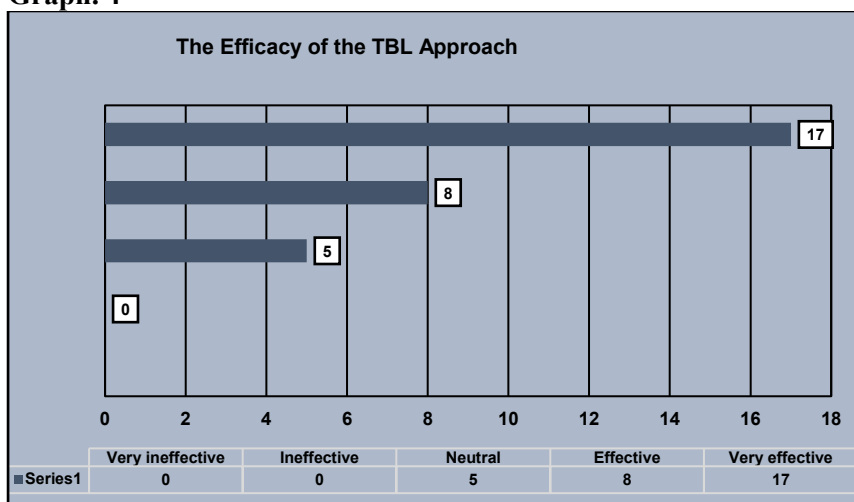
**Graph. 3**



The Appraisal of TBL chart shows the validation results of the methodology from the learners' perspective.

The results show that 93.3% of the participants (28 out of 30) validated the TBL framework as a successful pedagogical strategy indicating that the task sequence met the diverse needs of the student group.

**Graph. 4**



The graph 4 chart displays the perceived effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) among a group of 30 participants

The quantitative data illustrated in graph 4 confirms a high level of student satisfaction regarding the efficacy of the TBL approach. The results reveal that 83.3% of the participants perceived the methodology as either effective or very effective, while no negative perceptions were recorded.



This overwhelming consensus supports the transition toward learner-centered, task-based frameworks to enhance speaking skills.

## DISCUSSION

The behaviors and opinions observed among the students at the beginning of the course indicated that the required content and skills were demanding, rigorous, and challenging, despite all participants having achieved B1-level English proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). While the students recognized that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) was essential for their professional development, they perceived their linguistic competence—specifically speaking skills—as insufficient. The Task-Based Learning (TBL) methodology facilitated a logical sequencing of tasks, ensuring that receptive and productive skills, such as vocabulary acquisition, reading and listening comprehension, and oral production, were consolidated throughout the course. The findings of this research are supported by similar studies (Rattanawong, 2004; Sittichai, Thummapon, & Churngchow, 2005), which found that TBL could improve English communicative competence.

Regarding the utility and efficacy of Task-Based Learning for developing oral skills, this study aligns with Nhung, N. T. (2023). in observing quantitative improvements in speaking performance following the implementation of this methodology.

Regarding foreign language anxiety and its adverse impact on oral production, this study aligns with Guanuche (2024), who indicates that stress and performance anxiety (stage fright) lead to demotivation and a diminished interest in speaking activities. Conversely, the implementation of voice-over strategies significantly reduced linguistic anxiety, leading to increased student motivation to refine their speaking skills, a finding consistent with Guanuche (2025). The results of this research indicate that TBL's learner-centered approach reduces anxiety, boosts confidence, and enhances motivation by creating a sense of relevance and personal engagement in the learning process, as noted by Ok (2024). Furthermore, the strategic planning of authentic resources—aimed at achieving specific lesson objectives and strengthening oral proficiency—is reflected in the quantitative improvements observed in speaking assessments. This correlates with the findings of Abdelhafez and Abdallah (2015), who emphasize that meaningful activities have a profound impact on mitigating language anxiety.



## CONCLUSIONS

The validation survey regarding the implementation of the Task-Based Learning (TBL) methodology confirms its effectiveness in enhancing oral proficiency. The logical sequencing of diverse tasks, coupled with the integration of authentic resources aligned with specific lesson objectives, facilitated superior student performance in speaking activities. Furthermore, through active socialization and engagement with the subject matter, students demonstrated a significant reduction in foreign language anxiety. Consequently, the methodology fosters a more supportive emotional environment, thereby promoting self-confidence, psychological security, and overall academic achievement.

The quantitative results of the speaking assessments reveal a consistent upward trend increasing from 1.88/3 to 2.7/3 points—throughout the various stages of implementation, further substantiating the efficacy of this pedagogical approach. This intervention received overwhelming validation from the participants, with 93.3% appraising the TBL framework as an effective tool for language learning. This positive reception is intrinsically linked to the reduction of Foreign Language Anxiety, as the majority of learners (86.6%) felt the strategy provided the secure environment necessary for practice. Ultimately, this dual validation—both psychological and methodological—is reflected in the quantitative success of the study, which saw a significant rise in speaking proficiency scores.

From a pedagogical perspective, these results suggest that transitioning toward a TBL framework is a necessary step in addressing the affective needs of L2 learners. By prioritizing tasks that mirror real-world communicative demands, educators can lower the 'affective filter,' ensuring that cognitive development is not hindered by performance anxiety. While these results are compelling, future research should explore the long-term retention of these gains through longitudinal studies across different proficiency levels. In conclusion, this research underscores that when language learning is rooted in meaningful action rather than rote memorization, students not only perform better academically but also develop the communicative resilience necessary for their professional futures.



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