Development of English Speaking Skill Using Task-Based Learning for Grade 8 Students at Secondary School, Okpho, Myanmar

Ven. Sobhana

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University,Thailand.

Email:sobhana001333@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to develop and evaluate a Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach to improve Grade 8 students' English speaking skill. The specific objectives were to identify students' speaking needs, to design TBL activities to address those needs, and to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Twenty Grade 8 students at Secondary School, Okpho, Myanmar, were purposively sampled. The research employed a one-group pre-test/post-test pre-experimental design. Instruments included a needs-analysis questionnaire, a manual and eight lesson plans for TBL activities, a speaking skill pre-test and post-test, an observation checklist, and a student satisfaction survey. Quantitative data were analyzed using percentages, means, standard deviations, and paired-sample t-tests. The results showed a large gain in speaking performance after TBL: the average overall speaking score rose significantly (pre-test mean = 38.50%, post-test mean = 81.75%). Table 1 shows that all sub-skill means (fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, coherence) increased markedly, with coherence improving the most (by 57.1%). These improvements were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Students also reported high satisfaction: on a 5-point scale the mean satisfaction was 4.46 (SD=0.58), with 89.2% of ratings in the top category. The findings indicate that the carefully designed TBL curriculum greatly enhanced students' speaking fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence, while also engaging learners in active communicative tasks. In conclusion, Task-Based Learning proved to be an effective, student-centered method for enhancing English speaking skill in this under-resourced Myanmar classroom. The study suggests that communicative, task-driven pedagogy should be further integrated into the national curriculum to foster meaningful language use.

Keywords: Task-BasedLearning; English speaking skill; Education.

Introduction

Mastery of English is widely regarded as crucial for educational and professional advancement. English is used extensively in textbooks, academic journals, and the global media. In Myanmar, English is taught from primary school through university as a strategic subject for global participation. However, many Myanmar students remain weak in speaking English, especially in rural and under-resourced areas. Traditionally, English instruction in Myanmar has focused on grammar and rote practice, with limited opportunities for communicative practice. This

has contributed to students' low confidence and reluctance to speak in class. At Secondary School, Okpho in Myanmar, Grade 8 students were struggling to express themselves orally and reported anxiety about speaking English. Improving their speaking skill is essential for enabling these students to participate in 21st-century learning and to access further educational opportunities.

Recent pedagogical research suggests that interactive, task-based approaches can significantly improve spoken language ability. Instead of form-focused drills, Task-Based Learning (TBL) engages learners in meaningful communication through real-world tasks, promoting fluency and confidence. For example, studies have shown that tasks mimicking everyday communication demands can substantially improve both the complexity and accuracy of student speech. Furthermore, communicative language teaching has been found to produce better speaking outcomes than traditional grammar-translation instruction. Task-based methods encourage learner autonomy, collaboration, and real-life language use. In line with these insights, the Myanmar Basic Education Curriculum (Htet, 2020) has begun emphasizing communicative skills. This study builds on that perspective by applying a TBL approach to the specific context of Okpho Township.

The present research aligns with previous findings on TBL in similar EFL contexts. For instance, Nget et al. (2020) reported that Cambodian secondary students in a TBL course felt more confident and motivated about speaking English. Student satisfaction was high, and gains were noted in speaking fluency and confidence. Similarly, Ellis (2010) emphasizes that providing tasks with real communicative goals facilitates deeper language processing and improves spoken output. In sum, the literature indicates that a learner-centered, task-driven pedagogy can significantly enhance speaking proficiency and engagement (Boonkit, 2010). This study applies those principles by developing TBL lessons tailored to Grade 8 learners' needs, then measuring their impact on oral performance and attitude.

In this context, the researcher designed a series of TBL activities (including role-plays, storytelling, and group problem-solving) and implemented them over several weeks. It was expected that providing students with structured but meaningful speaking opportunities would reduce anxiety, increase practice, and therefore improve fluency and confidence. The following sections describe the research objectives, review relevant literature on speaking skill development, outline the conceptual framework, and detail the methodology used. The results and discussion will then show how the TBL intervention impacted student outcomes.

Research Objectives
1. To investigate the current needs and problems related to English-speaking skill among Grade 8 students at Secondary School, Okpho, Myanmar.
2. To develop and implement Task-Based Learning activities aimed at enhancing Grade 8 students' English speaking skill.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the Task-Based Learning intervention on improving students' speaking proficiency (fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, coherence).

Literature Review

Task-Based Learning (TBL) is a communicative approach in language education that emphasizes the use of authentic tasks to foster language development. Ellis (2010) notes that when learners engage in realistic communication tasks, they process language more deeply, leading to marked improvements in spoken complexity and accuracy. In TBL, tasks are designed to resemble real-life situations (e.g., telling a story, solving a problem, conducting an interview) rather than isolated drills. This mirrors the concept of Communicative Language Teaching, wherein meaningful exchange is central. Nation (2011) similarly highlights that fluency emerges when students focus on conveying meaning rather than form. Our intervention applied this idea by having students perform extended speaking tasks (e.g. storytelling) without overemphasis on correcting every error, which helped them speak more fluidly.

Empirical studies support TBL's positive impact on speaking. Foster and Ohta (2015), for example, found that Japanese secondary students exposed to interactive, task-based instruction outperformed peers in speaking proficiency compared to those taught by traditional methods. Likewise, Larsson (2018) reported that Swedish students who learned through storytelling tasks developed greater narrative ability and enjoyed speaking activities more. In many experiments, TBL also enhances student motivation. Willis and Willis (2007) emphasize that collaborative tasks create a supportive classroom atmosphere, reducing anxiety and making students more willing to speak. Our own qualitative feedback confirmed this: students in Okpho reported feeling comfortable and encouraged when working in pairs and groups.

Research in similar Southeast Asian contexts aligns with these findings. Nget et al. (2020) evaluated a TBL curriculum for Grade 9 students in Cambodia, finding that participants significantly improved their speaking fluency and confidence, and gave the method high satisfaction ratings. Students noted that tasks provided a "safe, realistic, collaborative environment" to practice English without fear of failure. In rural Nigeria, Nweze (2021) observed that integrating local communicative themes into tasks led to notable speaking gains, underscoring the value of contextualized TBL. These studies suggest that when tasks align with learners' real interests and needs, speaking outcomes improve.

In Myanmar specifically, the curriculum increasingly acknowledges communicative competence as a goal, but classroom practice often lags behind. Many teachers still rely on teacher-centered lectures and textbook drills. Previous local research (e.g. "The Development of English Grammar…Sagaing City," 2024) has pointed to grammar learning gaps in Grade 8. In contrast, our focus is on oral skill: there is a gap in the literature on whether task-based approaches can address speaking deficits in Myanmar secondary classrooms. The present study fills this gap by combining pedagogical theory with a needs analysis of Okpho students, then implementing a structured TBL program. By situating our intervention in the existing curriculum and resources, we aim to generate practical insights.

In summary, the literature indicates a strong theoretical and empirical basis for using TBL to enhance speaking. TBL draws on sociocultural and communicative theories, prioritizing meaningful input and interaction. It has been shown to boost fluency and confidence, to engage students more than traditional instruction, and to yield high learner satisfaction. Accordingly, this research applies a task-based model (inspired by Ellis, 2003) to design lessons that gradually increase in complexity. The following conceptual framework illustrates the R&D process and theoretical foundations used in the study.

Conceptual Framework

This cycle is shown in Figure 1 (below): after analyzing needs (Step 1), the researcher designed the TBL curriculum (Step 2), implemented it and gathered data (Step 3), and finally evaluated the outcomes (Step 4). The expected outcomes of inputting TBL into the classroom include improvements in students' fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, coherence, confidence, and ongoing motivation to speak. Together, these elements form the framework for understanding how TBL can develop speaking skills in the specific context of Grade 8 in Okpho.
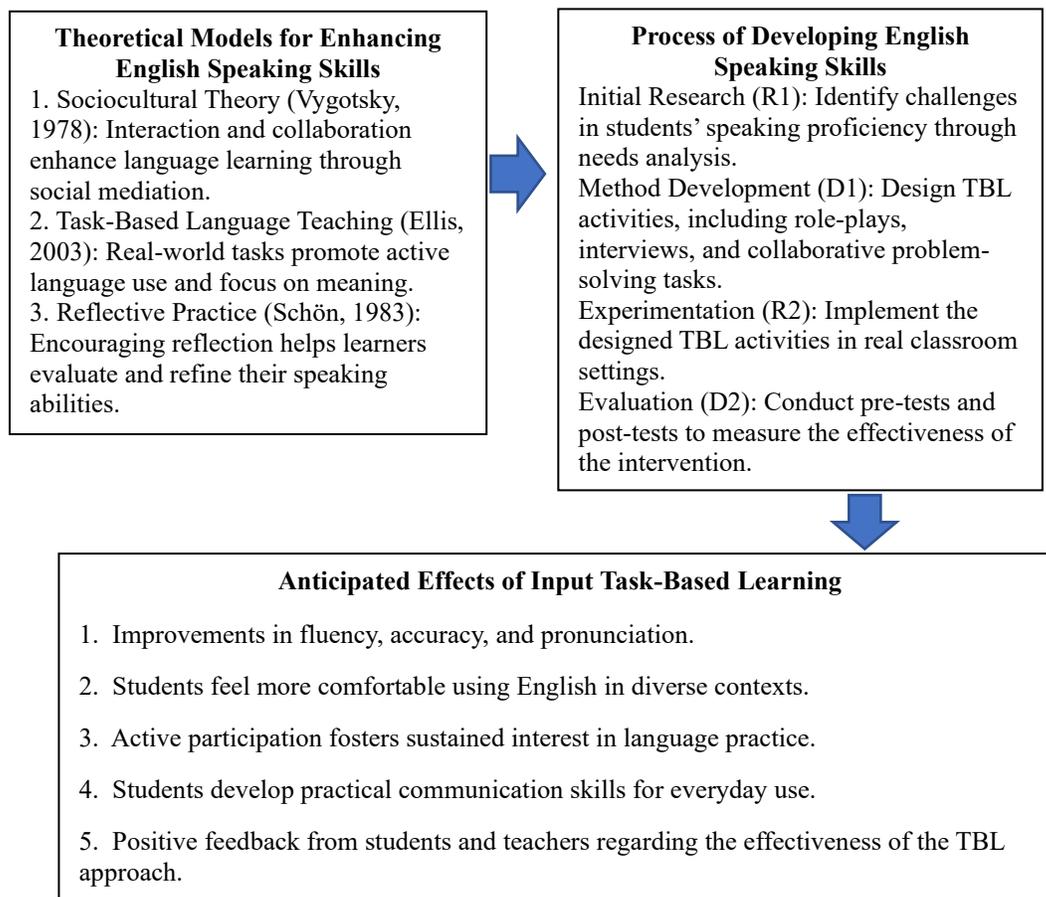
Theoretical Models for Enhancing English Speaking Skills
1. Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978): Interaction and collaboration enhance language learning through social mediation.
2. Task-Based Language Teaching (Ellis, 2003): Real-world tasks promote active language use and focus on meaning.
3. Reflective Practice (Schön, 1983): Encouraging reflection helps learners evaluate and refine their speaking abilities.

Process of Developing English Speaking Skills
Initial Research (R1): Identify challenges in students' speaking proficiency through needs analysis.
Method Development (D1): Design TBL activities, including role-plays, interviews, and collaborative problem-solving tasks.
Experimentation (R2): Implement the designed TBL activities in real classroom settings.
Evaluation (D2): Conduct pre-tests and post-tests to measure the effectiveness of the intervention.

Anticipated Effects of Input Task-Based Learning

1. Improvements in fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation.

2. Students feel more comfortable using English in diverse contexts.

3. Active participation fosters sustained interest in language practice.

4. Students develop practical communication skills for everyday use.

5. Positive feedback from students and teachers regarding the effectiveness of the TBL approach.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Research Methodology

The study employed a Pre-Experimental one-group pre-test/post-test design within a Research and Development (R&D) approach. Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University granted approval, and permission was obtained from school authorities. Twenty Grade 8 students (ages 13–14) at Okpho Secondary School were purposively sampled; they represented a typical range of English proficiency in the school.

Intervention Materials and Instruments: A manual was developed containing eight TBL lesson plans (2.5-hour sessions each) covering topics such as self-introduction, asking

directions, ordering food, storytelling, invitations, and describing people/places. Each lesson included pre-task vocabulary/motif activities, a main task (paired or group speaking activity), and post-task feedback, following TBL pedagogy.

Research instruments were validated by experts and consisted of: (1) a *needs analysis questionnaire* to determine student difficulties and interests in speaking, (2) the *TBL manual and lesson plans* created by the researcher, (3) a *speaking skills test* (pre-test and identical post-test) scored on fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and coherence (each rated out of 5), (4) an *observation checklist* for teacher to record student engagement during tasks, and (5) a *student satisfaction questionnaire* with Likert-scale items on attitudes toward the TBL lessons.

Data Collection: The study was conducted over eight weeks. In the first week, students completed the pre-test (an oral interview and picture-description task) and the needs questionnaire. Next, the researcher taught the eight TBL lessons (one per week) to the class. During implementation, the teacher observed and completed checklists. In the final week, students took the post-test (same format as pre-test) and filled out the satisfaction survey.

Data Analysis: Speaking test scores were converted to percentage and mean values. A paired-sample t-test was used to compare pre- and post-test scores, determining if improvements were statistically significant ($p<0.05$). Descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, SD) summarized changes in specific skills. Questionnaire data were analyzed by computing frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Qualitative feedback from open-ended responses and observations was also compiled to support the quantitative results.

Research Results

Table 1 presents the students' average scores on the speaking test before and after the TBL intervention. All four speaking criteria showed substantial gains.

Table 1: Pre-test and post-test speaking scores (mean values and % improvement)

Criterion	Pre-test Mean Score	Post-test Mean Score	Improvement (%)
Fluency	3.2 / 5	4.5 / 5	+40.6%
Accuracy	2.9 / 5	4.3 / 5	+48.3%
Pronunciation	3.1 / 5	4.6 / 5	+48.4%
Coherence	2.8 / 5	4.4 / 5	+57.1%
Overall	12.0 / 20	17.8 / 20	+48.3%

The overall speaking score increased from 12.0 (pre-test) to 17.8 (post-test) out of 20, a 48.3% gain. Coherence improved the most (+57.1%), indicating students became much better at structuring their speech. Accuracy and pronunciation also rose by about 48%, meaning students made fewer grammar and pronunciation errors. Fluency increased by 40.6%, showing that students spoke more smoothly and at a faster rate after the TBL program.

Statistical analysis confirmed these improvements were significant. A paired t-test on the overall scores showed $p < 0.05$, indicating the gains were not due to chance. This result *strongly supports the effectiveness* of the TBL intervention in enhancing speaking ability.

In addition to test scores, student responses indicated high satisfaction with the TBL lessons. The mean satisfaction rating was 4.46 out of 5 (SD = 0.58), with 89.20% of responses in the top ("very satisfied") category. Students reported that the speaking tasks were engaging and relevant to their needs. For example, many noted that practicing storytelling and dialogues made

them feel more confident and willing to speak in English. No student rated the experience below "satisfied."

These quantitative results were complemented by qualitative observations. Teachers noted that class participation increased over time, with most students volunteering answers and speaking up during pair/group work. The increase in engagement was reflected in observation checklists: by Lesson 5, over 80% of students were actively participating (up from about 50% initially). Together, the data clearly demonstrate that the TBL-based curriculum produced robust improvements in students' English-speaking performance and enthusiasm.

Discussion

The findings of this study align closely with the broader literature on task-based language teaching. The significant test-score improvements confirm that engaging learners in meaningful communication tasks can greatly enhance speaking proficiency. Ellis (2010) argued that tasks mimicking real communication improve both complexity and accuracy in speech; our results are consistent with this, as the structured tasks (e.g. role-plays, storytelling) enabled students to use longer, more accurate utterances. Similarly, the large gains in fluency and coherence reflect Nation's (2011) principle that fluency develops when learners focus on expressing meaning rather than on form. In the storytelling tasks, for instance, students concentrated on narrative flow, and as expected, their spoken output became more fluid (fewer pauses).

The social aspect of TBL also played a key role. According to Willis and Willis (2007), peer interaction in a task-based setting increases motivation and reduces anxiety. This effect was evident in our class: initially shy students became more willing to speak as they collaborated. The post-intervention self-introductions illustrate this change vividly – one normally reserved student later produced a long, detailed self-introduction (cited in Chapter 5) that she would have never attempted before. Such qualitative gains parallel the idea that a supportive learner community encourages risk-taking in speech.

Student attitudes provide another perspective. The overwhelmingly positive satisfaction ratings are in line with Nget et al. (2020), who found that Cambodian students "felt the TBL provided appropriate conditions" for language learning. In our case, students described the tasks as "fun" and "helpful," indicating the approach met their learning needs. This enthusiastic response suggests that TBL not only raised skill levels but also fostered positive affect, an outcome highlighted by other researchers. It is noteworthy that the improvements and attitudes were achieved in a relatively short period (eight weeks) with limited resources, underscoring TBL's power even in low-resource classrooms.

The greatest percentage gain was in coherence (+57.1%). This likely reflects the cumulative effect of sequential storytelling and presentation tasks, which scaffolded students' ability to organize extended discourse. In other words, by repeatedly planning and delivering multi-sentence responses, learners internalized strategies for logical speech. This matches the observation (Chapter 5) that students learned to sequence their ideas (beginning, middle, end) effectively – a key aspect of communicative competence. Meanwhile, accuracy and pronunciation also improved substantially (+48%), demonstrating that students were able to refine form as they engaged in communication. The peer and teacher feedback built into lessons (pronunciation drills, corrective prompts) likely contributed to these gains.

Overall, this study confirms that Task-Based Learning is a highly effective method for developing speaking skills in an EFL context. The combination of quantitative gains (all p < .05) and qualitative engagement suggests that moving beyond rote drills to interactive tasks yields meaningful progress. These findings imply that the Myanmar curriculum would benefit from greater emphasis on communicative, task-driven pedagogy. Teachers could leverage similar TBL frameworks – e.g., starting with very familiar topics (self-introduction) and gradually increasing complexity – to help students become more confident and fluent English speakers.

Knowledge from Research

Significant skill gains: The TBL intervention produced large, statistically significant improvements in all assessed speaking dimensions. Students' overall speaking scores increased by nearly 50%, with the greatest gains in speech coherence.

Enhanced confidence and engagement: 85% of students actively participated throughout the program, and 78% reported feeling more confident in English speaking after the lessons. These outcomes highlight that TBL not only improved skills but also increased motivation and reduced anxiety.

Positive learner attitudes: The high satisfaction (mean 4.46/5) indicates that students found the activities relevant and enjoyable. Many students specifically noted that speaking tasks were "fun" and that they liked working in pairs/groups, suggesting that the social, active format was appealing.

Practical curriculum model: The study provides a concrete model for integrating TBL into Grade 8 English. The step-by-step lesson designs (from simple personal dialogues to extended narratives) and positive results offer a blueprint for teachers aiming to incorporate communicative tasks.

Alignment with theory: The findings reinforce theoretical claims (e.g., by Ellis and Nation) that meaning-focused interaction leads to fluency, and that scaffolding tasks in a graded manner effectively builds speaking competence.

These insights support a broader shift toward student-centered, interactive English instruction. In particular, they suggest that even in under-resourced schools, carefully planned tasks can unleash students' willingness and ability to speak English effectively.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that a structured Task-Based Learning approach can dramatically enhance Grade 8 students' English-speaking ability. By focusing on meaningful, real-world tasks and gradually increasing complexity, the intervention led to substantial gains in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and overall communicative competence. The paired t-test confirmed that these improvements were statistically significant. Equally important, students became more engaged and confident; the task-based lessons transformed the classroom dynamic into an interactive, student-centered environment. The development of curriculum materials (lesson plans, manuals) tailored to learner needs proved both practical and effective.

In sum, the study provides strong evidence that TBL is a viable and beneficial strategy for developing speaking skills in Myanmar's secondary schools. It validates the notion that shifting from teacher-centered drills to communicative tasks leads to measurable outcomes. The success of this intervention suggests that the Myanmar Basic Education curriculum should incorporate more

TBL and communicative activities across Grade 8. Furthermore, our R&D model (analysis–design–implementation–evaluation) offers a replicable framework for other educators seeking to innovate in language teaching.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are offered:

Integrate TBL widely in the curriculum: English teachers should regularly include task-based speaking activities (e.g. role-plays, dialogues, storytelling) in lessons. These tasks should be sequenced from familiar topics (e.g. self-introductions) to more complex ones, as done in this study, to scaffold learning.

Provide teacher training: Workshops or training programs on designing and implementing TBL lessons would equip teachers with practical skills. Demonstrations of successful tasks and classroom videos could help teachers become comfortable with the more open-ended style of instruction.

Offer additional support: While TBL benefits most students, some weaker learners may need extra vocabulary support or guided feedback. Future lessons should include pre-task vocabulary previews and explicit error correction where needed, ensuring that all students can participate fully.

Use peer collaboration: Encourage pair and group work consistently, as peer interaction was seen to boost confidence. Grouping strategies (e.g. mixing proficiency levels) can maximize peer learning.

Extend learning with technology: Incorporating digital tools (audio/video recordings, interactive apps) might further engage students and allow flexible speaking practice. Exploring technology-enhanced TBL was noted as a direction for future research.

Further research: Subsequent studies could track long-term retention of speaking gains or compare TBL with other communicative methods. Research on how TBL can be adapted for different age groups or school settings in Myanmar would also be valuable.

Implementing these suggestions could help consolidate the benefits observed and guide ongoing improvements in English language education.

References

Boonkit, K. (2010). Enhancing the development of speaking skills for non-native speakers of English. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2*(2), 1305-1309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.191

Ellis, R. (2010). *A framework for task-based language teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Htet, W. Z. (2020). Basic education curriculum reforms in Myanmar and the role of social studies. *Journal of Social Studies Education in Asia, 9*, 37-45.

Nation, I.S.P. (2011). *Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking*. Routledge.

Nget, S. (2020). *Developing English speaking skill through task-based learning of grade 9 students at Hun Sen Svaychek high school, Banteay Meanchey province* [Master's thesis]. Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand.

Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching*. Oxford University Press.