The Effect of Task-Based Instruction in Improving the English Speaking Skills of Ninth-Graders

Seanghai Nget
Faculty of Education, Naresuan University, Thailand
seanghain61@nu.ac.th

Omthajit Pansri
Faculty of Education, Naresuan University, Thailand
omthajitp@nu.ac.th

Chanadda Poohongthong
Faculty of Education, Naresuan University, Thailand
chanaddap@nu.ac.th

Abstract

Given the difficulty of teaching Cambodian learners the English speaking skills due to large, mixed-ability classes, and inappropriate applications of existing resources, the approach of Task-Based Instruction (TBI) was tested with ninth-grade students. This article, therefore, investigates the effect of TBI on ninth-graders' English-speaking skills and their satisfaction toward the experience with this approach. The pretest-posttest non-equivalent quasi-experimental group design was utilized with two Grade 9 classes totaling 78 students. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected by using the speaking tests and the student satisfaction questionnaire. Quantitative and qualitative analyses indicated that the TBI made significant contributions to the experimental group's speaking skills in general as well as in all sub-skills either when comparing the pretest and posttest within the group or the posttests between groups. Analyses of the satisfaction questionnaire found that the experimental group was 'satisfied' with their experiences with the TBI. Students also viewed TBI as an approach that provided them appropriate conditions for language learning, helped improve their speaking skills, increased their confidence in speaking, and motivation in learning English despite the difficulty with the language of instruction. Based on these findings, some recommendations for pedagogical implications and further research have been proposed.

Keywords: speaking skills, student satisfaction, task-based Instruction

Introduction

Background

English has become a necessity in people's lives in our contemporary world. Advanced English proficiency has potentially determined the educational and economic life chances of many people across the world and will predictably remain prominent throughout the twenty-first century (Long, 2014; Lyons, 2017). Cambodia has been greatly influenced by the spread of English since the 1990s with the presence of English-speaking international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Clayton, 2006). Since then, the ability to speak English has given Cambodian people better education and employment opportunities, enabling them to pursue higher education either at

home or abroad and making them more competitive in local and regional job markets, especially the fast-growing tourism industry.

However, the integration into these institutions may also put countries like Cambodia at a linguistic disadvantage because of its low English proficiency due to its colonial history under the French (Tweed & Som, 2015). The level of English proficiency of Cambodian adults is among the lowest in Asia (42%), according to EPI (2019). Although the Ministry of Education has launched many efforts to improve English language education such as introducing English as a subject in primary school and updating the curriculum and English textbooks for grades 7 to 9 (Ministry of Education, 2019), the situation has seen little if any improvement. It is believed that, for any improvement efforts to take effect, the true causes of challenges in implementing English language learning programs must be addressed. Moreover, of the four macro skills, the improvement of speaking skills is considered the most important and should be the priority as they are essential for communication in the academic, business, industry and many other sectors in our society. In daily communication, we speak twice as much as we read and write (Rivers, 1981). Moreover, many language learners tend to focus on speaking skills because they see them as 'success in language learning' and they resemble 'knowing a language' to 'knowing how to speak it' (Nunan, 1991, p. 39; Ur, 1996). Oral interaction is also considered as the best way through which children could learn a foreign language, develop their literacy skills (reading and writing) and improve their academic learning (McKay, 2006, p. 180).

Statement of the Problem

Speaking is a crucial skill for the social development of the individual. Nevertheless, it is a skill that is often neglected in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom for such reasons as the strong influence of the grammar-translation method, lack of native speaker teachers in EFL classrooms, and large class size (Nation, 2011). For the case of Cambodia, although some pieces of literature have mentioned some situations of the language education programs in general, few if any have specifically discussed the challenges in teaching and learning English speaking skills in EFL classrooms. However, in a pilot survey conducted at the beginning of this study, it was found that the most common reasons behind Cambodian learners' poor speaking skills are low background knowledge of the language and the topic, large, mixed-ability classes making it hard for students to gain comprehensive practice and inappropriate applications of existing materials. In Cambodia, where traditional approaches like the grammar-translation and the presentation, practice, production (PPP), have long been practiced (Neau, 2003), a satisfactory level of communicative language skills is hardly fulfilled among learners (Meas, 2010).

A series of recent criticisms against traditional approaches such as PPP have consequently led to the introduction of new teaching methods that focus on developing learners' communicative competence like the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Richards, 2006). One of several methodologies in the extensions of the CLT is Task-Based Instruction (TBI) or Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Richard, 2006; Santos, 2011). TBI is an approach that employs a variety of interactive tasks to engage learners in meaningful communication to achieve communicative purposes, which have gained increasing levels of interest and become the most fashionable pedagogical approach among foreign language teachers in the past few years (Oxford, 2006; Santos, 2011). A large amount of empirical evidence can also be found regarding the effectiveness of implementing the TBLT or TBI. This approach helps to improve learners' speaking fluency by maximizing their speed of speech production, increasing grammatical accuracy, elaborating on their utterances, and developing interactional language (Albino, 2017). It also improves speaking

skills in terms of accuracy and fluency, specifically pronunciation and vocabulary (Muhsin & Muhsin, 2015) and promotes student-centered and cooperative learning (Ismaili, 2013).

The importance of language skills, especially speaking skills, may be seen in the increasing interest in the effectiveness of TBI in improving speaking skills. This improvement has been observed by many researchers and teachers around the world. Nevertheless, TBI has never been officially implemented in Cambodian classrooms, nor has its effectiveness been investigated. In other words, as there is currently no task-based material for the Cambodian context, perhaps it would be necessary to change or adapt currently available materials (Meas, 2010), which could serve to improve the English speaking skills of Cambodian learners, thereby implying the need to conduct the current study.

To shape the context for this study, the following research questions were set forward.

- What are the differences between the control and experimental groups in terms of their speaking test scores?
- To what extent are students in the experimental group satisfied or unsatisfied with the TBI experience?

Literature Review

Speaking Skills

Speaking may be referred to as speech, or oral language or spoken language or verbal language; it is the medium through which one expresses thoughts, feelings, and emotions; conveys information; reacts to other persons and situations; influences other human beings and communicates intentions with others (Fulcher, 2003; Rivers, 1981). Speaking involves both linguistic *knowledge* and *skills* for actual use in the production of linguistic utterances. Canale and Swain (1980) refer to the former as 'competence', while the latter as 'performance'. When testing whether or not learners can speak, it is necessary to get them to say something or to perform based on their language competence or knowledge ; (Bygate, 1987; Canale & Swain, 1980); therefore, it is necessary to identify the construct of oral language ability so that effective and comprehensive assessments can be made.

Although categorization techniques and the terms used to describe the elements are different, the underlying constructs of speaking overlap. This variation makes it almost impossible to design a speaking test that can elicit the learner's speaking skills in all the areas of knowledge in real practice. Therefore, the operationalized definition of the speaking construct must be identified. McKay (2006) suggests that the content or the scope of oral language to be assessed should be derived from the curriculum, the context the learners encounter the target language in the classroom and the teacher's theory of language ability so that the purpose of the test can be well served. Literature suggests that one of the most fundamental components of oral language ability involves the knowledge of *grammar*, *vocabulary*, and *phonology (pronunciation and intonation)*, which is referred to as grammatical competence (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980), grammatical knowledge (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), or language competence (Fulcher, 2003). The ability to use these language functions to produce correct language sounds and structures is called motor-perceptive skills. When one uses motor-perceptive skills to achieve or solves problems in spoken communication, he is using *interaction* skills. Using motor-perceptive skills and interaction skills together can help the user to become *fluent* (Bygate, 1987). Based on this justification, the operational construct of speaking skills for this study including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, interaction, and fluency was used.

Task-Based Instruction

Since the emergence of CLT in the 1970s, attention in language teaching has shifted from viewing grammar as a central unit of instruction to equipping learners with communicative competence, the ability to use grammar and other aspects of the language for communicative purposes, e.g. making requests and offers, giving advice, etc. (Richards, 2006, p. 9). Howatt (1984) distinguished between what he called 'weak' and 'strong' versions of CLT. In the weak version, communicative tasks were integrated into linguistic-based approaches to teaching, (i.e. into the production stage in PPP). In other words, learners were provided with the opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes with the methodology remaining essentially the same (Ellis, 2012, p. 60; Howatt, 1984, p. 279). The strong version of CLT claimed that language was acquired through communication (Howatt, 1984), that is, learners learned to communicate by communicating (Nunan, 2004). Instructional content was therefore no longer linguistically oriented. Rather, communicative tasks became the central units for teaching and course design (Ellis, 2003a, 2012). As time passed, the strong version transformed into what is now known as task-based instruction (TBLT) (Ellis, 2012; Nunan, 2004; Richard, 2006; Santos, 2011).

TBI (also referred to as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)) is an approach to language teaching that engages learners in meaningful communication and interaction, which enables them to acquire knowledge of grammar through authentic language use (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). As one of the offshoots of CLT, TBI experienced a similar distinction to that of its predecessor, the distinction between the weak and strong versions. In the weak version of TBI, known as task-supported teaching, tasks are viewed as a means of offering learners' communicative practice of linguistic features presented in a traditional, grammar-based classroom, e.g. PPP. In the strong version, called TBI, tasks are seen as central units in the planning and delivery of instruction. Tasks in this version are both necessary and sufficient in their own right (Ellis, 2003b; Nunan, 2004). Willis (1996) asserts that TBI is the solution to problems experienced by the traditional PPP approach because it provides suitable conditions for language learning. Through TBI, learners can acquire language effectively because they are exposed to authentic spoken and written language in use, have chances to use the language to do things, are motivated to process the use and exposure, and have the chance to focus on forms (p. 11). Other scholars even attempt to propose TBI as a new language teaching approach that could meet the psycholinguistic and communicative needs of language learners in the twenty-first century (see, for example, Long, 2014).

The implementation of TBI also comes with some challenges. The first has to do with teachers' limited understanding of TBI, which hinders them from properly executing the approach in their classrooms. Moreover, TBI, being an approach that targets general communication skills, seems inappropriate in many countries where traditional, grammar-based examinations are favored. TBI may also cause the problem with language accuracy due to the fact that the task work may promote fluency at the expense of accuracy. Learners' avoidance of using English as a language of classroom communication is also an issue. Students' excessive use of the mother tongue may contradict the teacher's initial goals and beliefs that learning English means using it to communicate (Richards, 2006; Meas, 2010).

Definition of 'Task'

Nunan (2004) distinguishes between real-world and pedagogical tasks. Real world-tasks or target tasks refer to those used outside the classroom. When real-world tasks are transformed for classroom use, they naturally become pedagogical tasks (pp. 1-2). Breen (1987) defines a pedagogical task as a range of structured work plans with a specified objective, content, procedure, and outcome, which aims at facilitating language learning be they a short and simple exercise type or are more complex and lengthy activities. Similarly, Skehan (1998)

suggests that a task should have a goal to work toward, and an outcome that can be evaluated. He adds that the task should also have a primary focus on meaning, and a real-world relationship (p. 268). Other scholars such as Ellis (2003b), Nunan (2004) and Richards (2006) also share a similar view on a pedagogical task in that it requires learners to use specific interactional strategies and specific types of language (skills, grammar, vocabulary) to convey meaning and achieve a particular linguistic outcome than to manipulate the form.

The major emphasis of these definitions of a pedagogical task is on communicative language use where the user focuses more on meaning than grammatical form. The meaning and form, however, are highly interrelated since learners use grammatical knowledge to express different communicative meanings. According to Ellis (2000), a task is different from an exercise in that it has an obvious communicative goal. In contrast, in an exercise, learners are engaged in producing correct grammatical forms (p. 196). In designing a task-based course, tasks should be selected based on task types and topics or themes (Ellis, 2003a). Activities from textbooks could also be adapted as tasks but by following some criteria: a focus on meaning, a real-world relationship, an observable outcome and relevance to students' needs (Willis, 2006).

Task Types

A wide variety of task types exist. The following list consists of some key task types found in the literature: listing (Willis, 1996), ordering and sorting (Willis, 1996), information gap (Prabhu, 1987; Richards, 2006), comparing (Willis, 1996), problem-solving or puzzles and problems (Pattison, 1987; Willis, 1996; Richards, 2006), sharing personal experiences (Willis, 1996), reasoning gap (Prabhu, 1987), opinion gap or opinion exchange or discussions and decisions (Pattison, 1987; Prabhu, 1987; Richards, 2006), dialogues and role-plays (Pattison, 1987), jigsaws (Richards, 2006), creative (Willis, 1996; Nunan, 2004), communication strategies (Pattison, 1987), matching or matching activities (Pattison, 1987; Willis, 1996), etc. From these examples, it can be observed that despite being referred to with different terms or classified with varied techniques, these types of tasks have some shared characteristics. For instance, tasks involving spotting differences between pictures or sequencing pictures to tell a story may be referred to as the information gap (Prabhu, 1987; Richards, 2006), jigsaws (Richards, 2006), pictures and picture stories (Pattison, 1987), or matching (Willis, 1996). Composing a full list of task types is perhaps impossible or beyond the limit of this paper. Therefore, for the sake of the current study, a synthesized list of seven types of tasks was utilized: listing, ordering, information gap, reasoning gap, opinion gap, matching, and dialogues.

The Framework of TBI

Willis (1996) proposes the framework for introducing tasks that consist of three instructional stages. This framework starts with the *Pre-Task* stage, in which the teacher introduces the topic and task. In this stage, students may also have a chance to hear or read about others doing a similar task before they do the task themselves. In the second stage, *Task Cycle*, students use whatever language resources they have to complete the task(s) (*Task*), plan to report what they have achieved or decided about the task (*Planning*), and present their report to the class (*Report*). The final stage, *Language Focus*, involves the teacher highlighting important linguistic features that appear in previous stages (*Analysis*) and giving students some more form-focused practice of those language features (*Practice*).

Willis's (1996) TBI framework is seen as opposing the traditional PPP sequences (Oxford, 2006). The PPP starts with the teacher introducing the new grammatical structure through conversation or short text (presentation), followed by students practicing the structure in controlled (practice) and free contexts (production). Through this process,

students' language development is seen as leading from accuracy to fluency. In the TBI framework, especially in the task stage (task, planning, report), students use their existing language resources to complete the task, which is genuinely free of language control. Form-focused activities occur only in the final stage (Language Focus), where students are already familiar with important linguistic features. The TBI cycle leads from fluency to accuracy (see, for example, Willis (1996); Oxford (2006)).

Methodology

Sample, Sampling Design and the Location of the Study

This study employed total population sampling, a type of purposive sampling technique, in which a researcher chooses to examine the entire population that has one or more shared characteristics (Crossman, 2019). The participants of this study were two Grade 9 classes, totaling 78 ninth-grade students selected from Rohal High School, Banteay Meanchey, Cambodia in the academic year 2018-2019. The experimental group consisted of 42 students, while the control group consisted of 36 students. Students at this grade level, aged 13 to 15, presumably had an equal level of language ability (Table 2) because they had the same English learning experience. Most of them came from similar language learning backgrounds, i.e. started learning English formally at Grade 7, experienced the same textbook, curriculum, etc.

Research Design

Pretest-posttest non-equivalent-groups-quasi-experimental design was utilized. Using this design, the experimental group was given a pretest, received the treatment, and then was given the posttest. Meanwhile, the control group received the same pretest and posttest as the experimental group but was not given the treatment. The question, then, is not simply whether participants who receive the treatment improve, but whether they improve *more* than participants who do not receive the treatment (Price et al., 2019).

Instruments

The following research instruments were utilized to collect the data:

The speaking test: Using the content of the Grade 9 textbook, the speaking test was organized by following the Cambridge English's (2011) speaking test format. The students were tested in pairs; their performances were separately evaluated by two evaluators using the same rubric. The scores from both evaluators on each student's performance were then added together and divided by 2. The test was divided into three parts. In Part 1, each student was asked for some personal information (name, age, resident address, etc.), followed by Part 2, which involved some more general questions such as leisure activities, favorite food and drinks, and school activities. In the final part, the pairs performed information-gap activities using flashcards with some pictures and questions.

The speaking rubric: The students' speaking performances were evaluated using a speaking rubric adapted from Cambridge English (2011) and Ulster University (2018), which was divided into five marking categories: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, interaction, and fluency, each of which was marked out of five points and then multiplied by a different weighting factor to give it a different level of importance [vocabulary (x3), grammar (x3), pronunciation (x2), interaction (x1) and fluency (x1)]. The experts' judgment of the Index of Items-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to measure content validity. The IOC was equal to 1, meaning that this instrument had an acceptable content validity. Moreover, the analysis of the test scores indicated that the rubric had a 'good' inter-rater reliability of $r = 0.80$.

The lesson plans: 2 sets of 9 lesson plans (total 18), each for a 90-minute session, were designed with consideration to some of the basic elements suggested by Haynes (2010),

i.e. aims, objectives, pedagogical methods, etc. Willis's (1996) framework was adapted for the TBI lesson plans. To fit the 90-minute sessions, two optional stages (Opening and Closing) were added to the beginning and the end of the framework, while two task cycles were employed. Therefore, there were six instructional stages: *Opening, Pre-Task, Task Cycle (1&2), Language Focus* and *Closing.* Following Willis's (2006) criteria (a primary focus on meaning, an observable outcome, relevance to students' needs and a real-world relationship), eighteen activities from the English Grade 9 coursebook were selected as 'tasks' for the Task Cycles. These comprised 7 task types: dialogues (x5), opinion gap (x4), matching (x3), reasoning gap (x2), ordering (x2), information gap (x1) and listing (x1). They were chosen based on the consideration that they could involve learners in the interactions that required a two-way exchange of information, which could facilitate the learners' second language acquisition (Ellis, 2000). The same sections and content of the coursebook were also used to teach the control group, but with the PPP lesson plans, which were made based on the PPP lesson format consisting of three stages: *Presentation, Practice, and Production* (The detailed instructional procedures of TBI and PPP are indicated in Table 1). The lesson plans were submitted to three experts who were lecturers in English language, curriculum development, and assessment and evaluation for inspection. These lesson plans had good content validity, but with some modifications being made based on comments from the experts.

Table 1: Instructional Procedures of TBI and PPP

TBI	PPP
1. Opening: The teacher does some classroom administrative work (e.g. checks attendance) and maintains the disciplines. **2. Pre-Task**: The teacher introduces the topic and task. **3. Task Cycle (1&2)** **3.1 Task**: Students do the task individually, in pairs or in groups. **3.2 Planning**: Students prepare for task reports. **3.3 Report**: Students present a task report to the class in spoken or written forms. **4. Language Focus** **4.1 Analysis**: The teacher highlights important linguistic features from previous stages. **4.2 Practice**: Students practice linguistic features in controlled/free contexts. **5. Closing:** The teacher asks some reflection questions or assigns homework.	**1. Presentation**: The teacher • pre-teaches some new words, and introduces the topic. • introduces the new language. through a short text or dialogue. • highlights important features of the language (form, meaning, use) • checks students' comprehension of the new language. **2. Practice**: Students practice the new language in controlled way, e.g.: • Drills • Controlled practice **3. Production**: • Free practice: Students use the target language to produce new information.

The student satisfaction questionnaire: The questionnaire was partly adapted from Huang (2015) and was provided to students in the experimental group at the end of the treatment. It was divided into three parts. Part 1 sought to find out the students' profiles in terms of gender and age. Part 2 consisted of fifteen 5-point Likert scale items in which the students rated the given statement from 1 to 5, where 1 expressed their strong disagreement and 5 expressed their strong agreement. Part 3 was an open-ended question seeking to elicit

students' comments on their experience with the TBI. This instrument was inspected by three experts and had an acceptable content validity. The Cronbach's alpha (α) of .824 indicated that the questionnaire had high internal consistency reliability.

Data Collection

At the beginning of the experiment, the speaking pretests were given to students of the control and experimental groups. After that, the experimental group was given the treatment with TBI for nine consecutive sessions, while simultaneously the control group was taught with the traditional PPP approach by the same teacher, the researcher. The teaching of each group lasted for 18 hours or four and a half weeks after which students were given the speaking posttests. At the end of the experiment, sets of satisfaction questionnaires were given to the treatment group to elicit their satisfaction towards the application of TBI. Because of students' limited levels of English proficiency, a translated version of the questionnaire was provided. Overall, the whole data collection process took about six and a half weeks, from the end of April to the end of June 2019.

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed using the following methods:

Frequency and **mean** were used for analyzing the number of responses and average in data from parts one and two of the student satisfaction questionnaire.

One sample t-test compared the speaking posttest scores of the experimental group against the criterion of 60% or 30 marks.

Paired-sample t-tests made in-group comparisons of the students' scores between the pretest and posttest of the control group and experimental groups.

Independent sample t-tests compared between pretests and between posttests of the control and experimental groups.

Effect size or treatment effect is the magnitude of any detectable difference or relationship, which is determined by the ratio of the size of the difference between sample means divided by the population standard deviation (Peers, 2006, p. 133).

Qualitative analysis: Students' responses to Part 3 of the satisfaction questionnaire were translated into English and analyzed qualitatively by following these steps: developing and applying codes; identifying themes, patterns, and relationships, and summarizing the data.

Results

This section presents the analyses of the scores from the speaking tests and the data from the student satisfaction questionnaire to answer research questions 1 and 2, respectively.

Research Question 1: What are the differences between the control and experimental groups in terms of their speaking test scores?

The t-tests were used to compare different scores from the speaking tests. The analyses sought to assess the differences between the control and experimental groups in terms of speaking skills both before and after the experiment.

Table 2: The Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Tests	Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	t	p	Effect Size
Pretests	Experimental	42	22.083	6.028	.596	.553	-
	Control	36	21.264	6.089			
Posttests	Experimental	42	30.024	7.391	2.679*	.009	.608
	Control	36	25.667	6.881			

**p < .05*

Table 2 shows that in the pretests, there was no significant difference between the means of the experimental and control groups (p=.553>.05). This indicates that students in both groups had the same levels of English-speaking skills before the experiment. In the posttests, the means of both groups increased significantly. However, the mean of the experimental group was significantly greater than that of the control group at level .05, indicating a higher level of speaking skills. Moreover, the effect size between the two groups was equal to .608, which can be interpreted as 'moderate'.

Table 3: The Comparison of the Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups in All Speaking Subskills

Tests	Categories	Experimental		Control		t	p	Effect Sizes
		$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.			
Pretests	Vocabulary	6.821	1.909	6.667	1.912	0.357	0.722	-
	Grammar	6.143	1.955	5.750	2.012	0.873	0.385	-
	Pronunciation	4.952	1.324	4.861	1.246	0.312	0.756	-
	Interaction	2.262	0.683	2.069	0.709	1.219	0.226	-
	Fluency	1.905	0.607	1.917	0.660	-0.083	0.934	-
Posttests	Vocabulary	10.071	2.697	8.375	2.494	2.867*	.005	.651
	Grammar	8.321	2.101	7.125	1.877	2.633*	.010	.598
	Pronunciation	6.191	1.469	5.500	1.440	2.086*	.040	.475
	Interaction	2.798	.750	2.444	.674	2.173*	.033	.494
	Fluency	2.643	.665	2.222	.626	2.860*	.005	.650

**p <.05*

Shown in Table 3 are the between-group comparisons between the speaking pretests and posttests of the control and experimental groups in all speaking subskills. In general, the mean scores of speaking subskills of both groups were statistically equal in the pretests. In the posttests, however, the means of the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the control group at .05 level. When observing individual subskills, it is indicated that the vocabulary of the experimental group was significantly higher than that of the control group with a 'moderate effect size of .651. This is followed by 'fluency', 'grammar', 'interaction' and 'pronunciation', having the effect sizes of .650, .598, .494 and .475, respectively.

Table 4: The Comparison of the Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Experimental Group

Tests	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{D}$	t	p	Effect Size
Pretest	22.083	6.028	7.940	19.329*	.000	1.177
Posttest	30.024	7.391				

**p < .05*

According to Table 4, the mean ($\bar{X}$) of the experimental group increased significantly from 22.083 in the pretest to 30.024 in the posttest at level .05. The magnitude of the difference (effect size) between the two aspects was 'large' with a value of 1.117.

Table 5: The Comparison of the Pretest and Posttest of the Experimental Group in All Speaking Subskills

Categories	Pretest		Posttest		t	p	Effect Sizes
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.			
Vocabulary	6.821	1.909	10.071	2.697	15.457*	.000	1.391
Grammar	6.143	1.955	8.321	2.101	10.587*	.000	1.073
Pronunciation	4.952	1.324	6.191	1.469	11.050*	.000	.886
Interaction	2.262	.683	2.798	.749	8.931*	.000	.748
Fluency	1.905	.607	2.643	.665	12.921*	.000	1.159

**p < .05*

In Table 5, the results of the comparisons between the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group in all speaking subskills, which are vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, interaction, and fluency, are presented. In general, the speaking subskills in the posttest are significantly higher than those in the pretest at the significance level of .05. Regarding the t-scores and the effect sizes, 'vocabulary' sees the greatest improvement. This is followed by 'fluency', 'grammar', and 'pronunciation', respectively. The smallest improvement is observed in 'interaction'.

Table 6: The Comparison of the Experimental Group's Posttest with the 60 Percent Criteria (30 Marks)

Test	Full Score	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Posttest (9A)	50	42	30.024	2.50	.021	.983

**p < .05*

Table 6 compares the mean of the posttest of Grade 9A, the experimental group, with a benchmark of 30 scores. The analysis of the one-sample t-test with the score of t = .021 and p-value of .983 indicates that there is no statistical difference between the two categories, which means that the posttest score of 30.024 is statistically equal to the benchmark score of 30.

Figure 1 below summarizes all aspects of the comparisons between the two sample groups under study: the control and experimental groups. The pretests of the two groups were statistically equal, indicating the same levels of speaking ability before treatment. After the trial period, the scores of both groups increased significantly, indicating improved speaking skills. The experimental group, however, not only performed noticeably better than the control group but reached the predetermined criterion of 30 marks out of 50 marks i.e. 60 %.

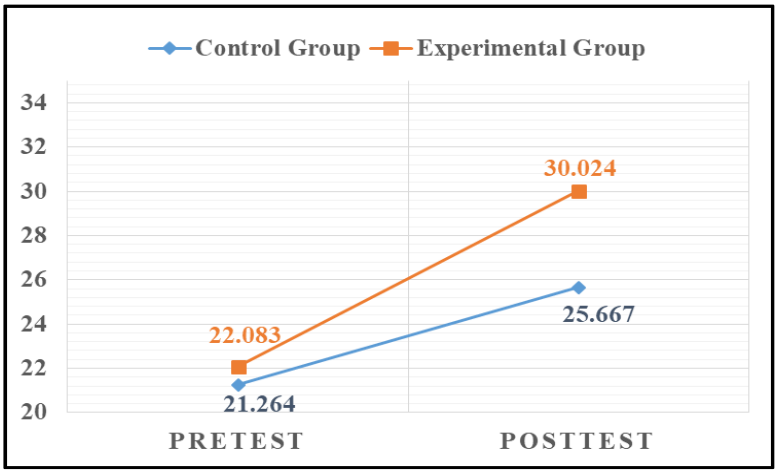

Figure 1: The Comparisons of Pretests and Posttests of the Control and Experimental Groups

Research Question 2: To what extent are students in the experimental group satisfied or unsatisfied with the TBI experience?

Table 7: The Result from Part 2 of the Student Satisfaction Questionnaire

Item	Statements	$\bar{X}$	SD
1	Task-based learning helps me enjoy learning English.	4.00	.584
2	I am more willing to speak English now.	4.24	.656
3	Task activities gave me more opportunities to practice speaking English.	4.29	.554
4	Using task activities helped me remember more English grammar and vocabulary.	4.05	.661
5	Using task activities gave me more chances of practicing grammar and vocabulary items.	3.83	.581
6	I enjoyed doing pair work and group work.	4.33	.612
7	I believe that I can learn English faster when I use it more often.	4.45	.633
8	Task-based learning provided a relaxed atmosphere.	3.60	.544
9	Task-based learning fulfilled my needs and interests.	3.88	.670
10	I am more motivated by the task that connects to real-life situations than the activities in the book.	4.00	.796
11	I have improved my communication skills through group discussion and result presentation.	4.36	.656
12	I was willing to exchange ideas with my classmates in the group discussion.	4.36	.656
13	The TBLT was more interesting than any other approach I ever experienced.	4.26	.627
14	I could get a sense of improvement in my English-speaking skills after the TBLT treatment.	4.14	.647
15	I would rather that my teacher used the TBLT more often in the future.	4.57	.668
	Total mean	**4.16**	**.636**

Table 7 demonstrates the results from Part 2 of the student satisfaction questionnaire, which contains fifteen 5-point Likert scale items. The total mean of all the items is 4.16 (SD = .636), implying that students in the experimental group, in general, were "satisfied" with

the TBI classroom. Item 8 "Task-based learning provided a relaxed atmosphere" has the lowest mean of 3.60 (SD = .544), while Item 15 "I would rather that my teacher used the TBLT more often in the future" has the highest mean of 4.57 (SD = .668). The students' satisfaction levels range from being "satisfied" (Item 8) to "very satisfied" (Item 15).

Part 3, the last part of the satisfaction questionnaire, aimed at eliciting students' suggestions or opinions towards their experience with the TBI classroom during the experiment. Qualitative analysis classified students' comments into five themes: language improvements, appropriate learning conditions, method of interest, confidence and the language of instruction. The first four themes reflect their positive comments, while the last one their complaint (see Table 8).

Table 8: Results from Part 3 of the Student Satisfaction Questionnaire: Themes, Key Concepts and Supporting Quotes

Themes	Key concepts and supporting quotes
Language improvement	**Key concepts** Students mentioned the improvement in their English language skills after the TBI experience including grammar, vocabulary. **Supporting quotes** "I enjoyed the one-and-a-half-month experience studying with the teacher using this approach. I enjoyed the pair work because we could help each other and practice speaking English more often, which helped us improve our grammar." [S19] "…it [TBI] helped me to speak better English, and remember more words that I never learned before." [S08] and [S25].
Appropriate learning condition	**Key concepts** Students were satisfied by language learning conditions they experienced during the treatment including task variety, practice opportunities, settings, and being able to exchange their opinion with friends. **Supporting quotes** "…. I had more chance of practicing speaking English in pairs, in groups and in front of the class, which made me understand the lesson more easily. [I want to learn like this in the future.]" [S26]. "…I would like my teacher to use this approach in teaching more often because it gave us more chance for practicing speaking and writing the [English] language, and exchange our opinions through discussion." [S01]
Confidence	**Key concepts** After experiencing the TBI, students had a sense of being more confident or became more motivated in speaking English in pairs, in groups or as a whole class. **Supporting quotes** "…I feel happy when the teacher used this method of teaching, and after the experience, I noticed that I have more confidence in speaking than before." [S16]. "…Although I could not do well during the test, I feel that I gained more confidence in speaking through activities in the class…." [S26]
The method of interest	**Key concepts** Students in the experimental group said they would like to be taught with the TBI in their future classes. They also wished their friends in other classes could experience the TBI environment as well. **Supporting quotes** "…I would like other teachers to follow this teaching method because I think it is an interesting method…Unlike previous classes, I hardly felt sleepy during class

Themes	Key concepts and supporting quotes
	because there were various activities for me to enjoy….” [S20] “… I enjoyed the experience with the TBI very much and I wish my other friends could experience this teaching method as well…” [S17]
Language of instruction	**Key concepts** Some students found it hard to follow the teacher’s language as he tried to use English as a medium of instruction most of the time. They requested the teacher to use more simple language in giving instructions or even translate those instructions in Khmer. **Supporting quotes** “…I enjoyed learning English when the teacher used such a method of teaching. However, I would rather that my teacher did not use English too much in the classroom because I do not believe all students could understand.…” [S04]. “…I wish the teacher gave the instructions of each task more slowly, and if possible, translate it in Khmer so that I could understand it more clearly…” [S18]

Discussion and Conclusion

As presented in the Results section, in the pretest, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of their speaking skills. However, in the posttest, students in the experimental group performed significantly better than in the pretest. They also achieved higher scores than the control group as well as reaching the predetermined criterion of 30 marks out of 50 as well.

Students in the experimental group who were taught with the TBI experienced a huge amount of language work either individually, in pairs or in groups, which affected the development of their speaking performances a great deal. Being exposed to the task work, students had the opportunity to practice using the language to communicate their meaning. According to Ellis (2000), who draws on Long’s (1983) and Long’s (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, the opportunity for learners to engage in meaning negotiation enables learners to obtain comprehensible input, which facilitates second language (L2) acquisition (p. 199). The improvements in students’ speaking skills, especially the interaction skill, also may have resulted from the use of specific types of tasks, i.e. dialogues, opinion gap, reasoning gap, information gap, etc., that required learners to exchange information among their peers. Ellis (2000) points out that the kinds of interactional modifications that could contribute to L2 acquisition are likely to be more frequent in tasks that: (1) require information exchange; (2) involve a two-way exchange of information; (3) have a closed outcome, etc. (p.200). Additionally, through the Task Cycles, as students had to complete tasks, plan and present their reports, they were required to use their linguistic knowledge in combination with their interaction and communication skills, e.g. self-correction, rephrasing, repetition, etc. to communicate their meanings. These, according to Bygate (1987, p. 20), could be expected to help learners become more fluent. Moreover, after the students used their language resources to express meanings during the Task Cycles, they were exposed to more language exercises in the Language Focus stage. This gave them more opportunities to focus on linguistic forms that were already familiar to them, which ensured that the students did not develop their fluency at the expense of accuracy (Willis, 1996). This might have been one of the reasons behind the significant improvement in their speaking skills in terms of grammatical accuracy (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation). These findings are parallel with those of Albino (2017), Muhsin and Muhsin (2015) and Torky (2006) who found that students improved speaking accuracy in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary, and fluency after experiencing TBI. To this end, it can be concluded that TBI made a significant contribution to the improvement in the students’ speaking skills in general as well as in all the speaking subskills (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, interaction, and fluency).

The quantitative analyses of the experimental group's responses to the satisfaction questionnaire indicated that most students in this group were 'satisfied' with the TBI; their ratings of individual items ranged from being 'satisfied' to 'very satisfied'. The qualitative analysis also divided their comments into five categories: language improvements, appropriate learning conditions, confidence, the method of interest, and the language of instruction.

According to the responses from the students, opportunities for practice provided in TBI made it an appropriate platform for language development and therefore helped improve the students' speaking skills. Because students were provided with greater exposure to real language use in every lesson, they could remember more words, use more correct grammatical structures, articulate better pronunciation, speak more fluently and with more confidence and be able to interact in conversations more effectively. Simultaneously, when the teacher used a variety of tasks from session to session, students had a chance to communicate and express what they think, which engaged them in the learning process rather than making them bored. By doing this, therefore, the teacher created a relaxed and supportive learning atmosphere, which was necessary especially for less confident students to develop creativity and take risk (Willis, 1996). As a result, students became more confident in speaking. They also felt more motivated to study English; therefore, they insisted that their teacher use TBI in the future. These similar claims were also made in the survey of Huang (2015) and Ho (2014). Despite the benefits, however, the students also mentioned the challenge involving the language of instruction when learning through TBI. At this point, it is worth noting that in the mixed-ability classroom, students had varying levels of language ability, they might not have fully understood the instructions provided in English rather than their mother tongue. That is why when the teacher did so in the TBI classroom, the students complained. Based on these justifications, it can be interpreted that most of the students in the experimental group were 'satisfied' with TBI because it was the method that could fulfill their needs and interests and help improve their speaking skills. Listening skills are also important when the students are expected to follow verbally given instructions.

This study found sufficient evidence for the effectiveness of TBI in improving English-speaking skills in Cambodian classrooms. The findings suggested that TBI was an effective approach to improving learners' English-speaking skills. It helped fulfill their needs and interests and offered an appropriate condition for language learning despite the class size. These claims are in line with the proposals of Long (2014) and Willis (1996). The adaptation of the English Grade 9 coursebook to fit the TBI approach, moreover, was a small and inexpensive change that promoted academic achievement. For that reason, although the current intervention 'moderately' raised students' achievement, it could be a very significant improvement (Coe, 2002, p. 5). With all that being said, TBI could be a potential pedagogical alternative in dealing with common problems encountered in teaching and learning English speaking skills in Cambodian classrooms.

Limitations

The potential limitation of this study was the duration of the experiment. The duration of 18 hours was not long enough for the treatment to produce a large effect on the development of language skills. This might have been one of the reasons behind the 'moderate' growth experienced in the experimental group's speaking scores from around 22 to just over 30 marks.

Recommendations

Results from the speaking tests and the student satisfaction questionnaire indicated that the TBI can be used to solve common problems in learning and teaching the English speaking skills in Cambodian classrooms such as the large class size because it takes advantages of pair work and group work activities that can give students more comprehensive and adequate practice in using the language. Therefore, it is recommended that the teacher training colleges in Cambodia consider including the TBI in their EFL teacher training programs. Teachers who have challenges in teaching English speaking skills could also adapt TBI for their classrooms.

Other researchers who wish to repeat this TBI experiment in the future should conduct it for an extended period to figure out whether or not it can produce larger effect sizes of the students' speaking skills. Further research should also be extended to explore the effectiveness of the TBI in improving students' speaking skills or other skills such as reading, writing and listening at other public educational institutions and at other academic levels such as upper secondary ones.

About the Authors

Seanghai Nget: an M.Ed. student in Educational Research and Evaluation, Faculty of Education, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand.

Omthajit Pansri: an Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand.

Chanadda Poohongthong: an Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand.

References

Albino, G. (2017). Improving speaking fluency in a task-based language teaching approach: The case of EFL learners at PUNIV-Cazenga. *SAGE Open, 7*(2), 1-11.

Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests*. Oxford University Press.

Breen, M. P. (1987). Learner contributions to task design. In C. N. Candlin & D. Murphy (Eds.), *Language learning tasks* (pp. 23-46). NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bygate, M. (1987). *Language teaching: Speaking*. Oxford University Press.

Cambridge English. (2011). *Assessing speaking performance: Level A2*. University of Cambridge.

Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. Richards & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 14-40). London: Routledge.

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*. *1*(1), 1-47. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1

Clayton, T. (2006). *Language choice in a nation under transition: English language spread in Cambodia (language policy)*. New York: Springer.

Coe, R. (2002). *It's the effect size, stupid: What effect size is and why it is important*. Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association, England.

Crossman, A. (2019). *Understanding purposive sampling: An overview of the method and its applications.* ThoughtCo. https://www.thoughtco.com/purposive-sampling-3026727

Ellis, R. (2000). Task-based research and language pedagogy. *Language Teaching Research*, *4*(3), 193-220.
Ellis, R. (2003a). Designing a task-based syllabus. *RELC Journal*, *34*(1), 64-81.
Ellis, R. (2003b). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford University Press.
Ellis, R. (2012). *Language teaching research and language pedagogy*. John Wiley & Sons.
EPI. (2019). *English proficiency index: Cambodia.* EF English Proficiency Index. https://www.ef.co.th/epi/regions/asia/cambodia/
Fulcher, G. (2003). *Testing second language speaking*. Peason.
Haynes, A. (2010). *The complete guide to lesson planning and preparation*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
Ho, P. (2014). The impacts of task-based speaking activities on English-majored freshmen's oral performance at Ba Ria-Vung Tau teacher training college. *Journal of Science Ho Chi Minh City Open University*, *3*(11), 71-82.
Howatt, A. P. R. (1984). *A history of English language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
Huang, D. (2015). A Study on the application of task-based language teaching method in a comprehensive English class in China. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. *7*(1), 118-127. http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0701.13
Ismaili, M. (Eds.). (Year). The effectiveness of the task-based learning in developing students' speaking skills in academic settings on the EFL classroom. *Albania International Conference on Education (AICE).*
Long, M. (2014). *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching*. New Tork: Wiley-Blackwell
Lyons, D. (2017). *How many people speak English, and where is it spoken?* Babbel Magazine. https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/how-many-people-speak-english-and-where-is-it-spoken/
McKay, P. (2006). *Assessing young language learners*. Ernst Klett Sprachen.
Meas, S. (2010). *Investigating the feasibility of adopting task-based language teaching in a university setting in Cambodia.* M.Ed. thesis. University of Hong Kong.
Ministry of Education. (2019). *Education strategic plan*. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kdtxQD1F4Pym1_h056hzoJqQHy7C7CqZ/view?usp=sharing
Muhsin, M., & Muhsin, M. A. (2015). Using task-based approach in improving the students' speaking accuracy and fluency. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, *4*(3), 181-190.
Nation, I. (2011). Second language speaking. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning 2* (pp. 444-454). New York: Routledge.
Neau, V. (2003). The teaching of foreign languages in Cambodia: A historical perspective. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, *16*(3), 253-268.
Nunan, D. (1991). *Language teaching methodology: A textbook for teachers*. NJ: Prentice Hall.
Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Oxford, R. L. (2006). Task-based language teaching and learning: An overview. *Asian EFL Journal*, *8*(3), 94-121.
Pattison, P. (1987). *Developing communication skills: A practical handbook for language teachers, with examples in English, French and German*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Peers, I. (2006). *Statistical analysis for education and psychology researchers: Tools for researchers in education and psychology*. London: Routledge.
Prabhu, N. S. (1987). *Second language pedagogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Price, P. C., Jhangiani, R., Chiang, I.-C. A., Leighton, D. C., & Cuttler, C. (2019). *Non-equivalent groups designs.* Washington, DC: Pressbooks. https://opentext.wsu.edu/carriecuttler/chapter/non-equivalent-control-group-designs/

Richards, J. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J., & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Rivers, W. M. (1981). *Teaching foreign-language skills*. University of Chicago Press.

Santos, P. (2011). Evidence-based teaching: Implications for task-based language teaching. *Asian EFL Journal*, *56*(4), 4-15.

Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Torky, S. A. E. (2006). *The effectiveness of a task-based instruction program in developing the English language speaking skills of secondary stage students.* [Unpublished Ph.D thesis]. Ain Shams University. Eric.

Tweed, A. D., & Som, M. (2015). English language education in Cambodia and international support ahead of ASEAN integration. In R. Stroupe & K. Kimura (Eds.), *ASEAN integration and the role of English language teaching* (pp. 13-40). Phnom Penh: IELTS.

Ulster University. (2018). *Guidelines for building marking rubrics*.

Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching: Practice and theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. Essex: Longman.

Willis, J. (2006). *Adapting your text book for task-based teaching*. IATEFL Conference, Harrogate.