
Task-Based Language Teaching to Develop Japanese Language Speaking Skills among Thai Secondary Students

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Received: 20 Nov, 2024

Revised: 18 Dec, 2024

Accepted: 14 Mar, 2025

Abstract

Japanese is a widely taught foreign language in Thailand, with secondary school students being the largest group of learners. However, many students struggle with speaking Japanese. This study aimed to address this issue by: (1) developing task-based language teaching (TBLT) lesson plans to improve the speaking skills of Thai learners, targeting an efficiency criterion of 75/75; (2) evaluating the influence of TBLT on students' anxiety related to speaking Japanese; and (3) exploring students' attitudes towards the TBLT lesson plans. The study used a single-group quasi-experimental design. Data were collected over four action research cycles, involving 42 purposively selected secondary school students enrolled in a Japanese elective course. The instruments used included post-cycle tests, post-tests, and questionnaires. The findings revealed that: (1) the TBLT lesson plans achieved an efficiency criterion of 83.13/85.94, exceeding the target of 75/75; (2) a paired samples *t*-test indicated a significant reduction in students' anxiety levels, with scores before the intervention ($M = 20.190$, $SD = 1.131$) compared to after the intervention ($M = 16.595$, $SD = 1.594$); $t(41) = 14.217$, $p < .01$; and (3) the questionnaire results showed positive attitudes towards the TBLT lesson plans. Additionally, the study discussed the challenges encountered and provided pedagogical implications for future practice.

Keywords: task-based language teaching; Japanese language education; speaking skills; Thai secondary students

Introduction

Learning a foreign language is increasingly important not only for economic cooperation and cultural exchange but also for enhancing career opportunities. According to the International Monetary Fund (2024), Japan ranks among the top five largest economies in the world by nominal GDP. Proficiency in Japanese can be a valuable asset in international business, as it opens doors to opportunities in trade, diplomacy, and global business relations. In addition, Japan's cultural exports, particularly in the entertainment sector through anime and manga, have sparked

greater interest in learning the Japanese language (Japan Foundation, 2023). McGibney (2022) notes that there are approximately 4 million Japanese-language learners worldwide, ranking sixth after English, French, Mandarin, Spanish, and German.

McGibney's statement aligns with findings from a survey conducted by the Japan Foundation in fiscal year 2021. The Japan Foundation (2023, pp. 7-32) reports that Japanese language education is being implemented in 141 countries and regions, with a total of 3,794,814 learners. Particularly in Southeast Asia, the number of institutions, teachers, and learners has increased to more than 100,000 people in the region overall. Notably, Indonesia ranks as the country with the second-largest number of Japanese language learners in the world. The primary goal of learning Japanese in Southeast Asia is to foster interest in the language, which accounts for 60.1% of the motivation. Thailand ranks fifth in terms of total learners, with 183,957 students.

According to the Japan Foundation (2020, p. 34), approximately 80% of students studying Japanese are enrolled in secondary schools. This trend is attributed to the establishment of World Class Standard Schools (WCSSs) by the Thai Ministry as part of its policy to enhance the quality of secondary education. Consequently, Japanese is taught as a second foreign language alongside other languages. Additionally, student enrollment in Japanese language programs has increased due to the expansion of these programs and the annual dispatch of Japanese volunteers, known as NIHONGO partners, to secondary schools.

Kaewkitsadang and Srisattarat (2012) found that Thai teachers encounter significant challenges in teaching Japanese at the secondary level, primarily due to students' limited opportunities to communicate in Japanese outside the classroom. This lack of practice is a major hurdle for many educators. To encourage language students to apply what they have learned, it is essential to offer opportunities for speaking in real-life contexts based on everyday situations (Lantolf, 2000).

During a Japanese listening and speaking class at a school in Northeastern Thailand, the researcher observed that some students struggled with speech issues such as stuttering, incorrect intonation, a lack of confidence, and passivity in the classroom. To identify classroom-related issues, the researcher conducted a pre-intervention survey focused on anxiety associated with speaking Japanese. The results showed that the majority of these students experienced high levels of anxiety. Many students expressed concerns about the embarrassment of speaking Japanese in class and the fear of making mistakes in their communication.

Since the 15th century, various methodologies for language teaching have been developed, including the audio-lingual method, traditional grammar-translation, structural approaches, and the natural approach. Currently, communicative language teaching (CLT) is regarded as the primary method used by educational institutions worldwide for language instruction (Hein, 2021; Nishino, 2012; Richards, 2006).

Littlewood (2007) also noted that improving learners' communication competence is a national policy for teaching foreign languages in ASEAN countries (Tay, 2015; Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is one of these methods, allowing students to utilize their skills to communicate in the classroom through the completion of tasks (Nunan, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Robillos & Bustos, 2023).

In Thailand, TBLT has mainly been applied to teaching English. Research indicates that it is effective in enhancing language learners' performance in areas such as vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and particularly in listening and speaking skills (Bunmak, 2017). However, there is a noticeable lack of published research on the effectiveness of TBLT for teaching Japanese within the Thai context (Kobayashi, 2015).

For this reason, this study aims to develop TBLT lesson plans specifically designed to enhance the speaking skills of Thai learners studying Japanese to meet the efficiency criterion (E1/E2) of 75/75. The need for these TBLT lesson plans arises from the lack of TBLT applications in Japanese language instruction in Thailand. While TBLT has proven effective in improving language learners' performance in other languages, such as English, it is rarely utilized in Japanese classrooms. This scarcity indicates a gap in teaching methods that could enhance learners' speaking skills through practical, task-oriented activities. The development of TBLT lesson plans aims to fill this gap by providing a structured, task-oriented approach to language instruction that fosters meaningful communication and active participation. Traditional Japanese language instruction may not adequately emphasize real-world language use, which could hinder students' speaking skills. By incorporating TBLT, this study aims to provide an innovative solution that not only meets students' educational needs but also addresses the limited research on TBLT for Japanese language instruction in Thailand.

The research questions are as follows: (1) Do the TBLT lesson plans meet the efficiency criterion of 75/75? (2) Does the implementation of TBLT lead to a reduction in students' anxiety? (3) What are students' perceptions of TBLT?

Literature Review

Importance of Learning Japanese

Learning Japanese has become increasingly important due to its influence on global economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and career opportunities. As one of the most studied languages in the world, Japanese occupies a significant place due to Japan's role in technology, industry, and cultural impact (The Thai Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade of Thailand, 2023). McGibney (2022) notes that Japanese is the sixth most popular language globally, a ranking supported by Japan's strong economic presence and cultural exports such as anime and manga. This

widespread interest is also demonstrated in a survey conducted by the Japan Foundation (2023), which reports that Japanese language education is active in 141 countries, with nearly 3.8 million learners worldwide. Particularly in Southeast Asia, there has been a substantial increase in the number of learners, driven by cultural fascination and the economic opportunities associated with Japan.

Despite positive trends, gaps still exist in research regarding the importance of learning Japanese. Current studies often overlook the impact of recent technological advancements and media trends on language learning (Robillos & Bustos, 2023). For example, there is a lack of updated research exploring how digital platforms and modern media influence learners' motivations and language acquisition processes. Furthermore, more detailed studies are needed to investigate the specific regional factors contributing to the growing popularity of Japanese in Southeast Asia, such as socio-economic changes and local educational policies. Addressing these gaps could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Japanese language learning trends are evolving in response to contemporary influences.

Teaching Japanese in Thailand presents several unique challenges, especially in developing students' speaking skills. According to Kaewkitsadang and Srisattarat (2012), Thai educators face significant difficulties due to the limited opportunities for students to use Japanese in real-world situations outside the classroom. This lack of practical application greatly impedes students' ability to achieve fluency and confidence in their language skills. Without regular and practical use of the Japanese language, students often find it challenging to apply what they have learned in class to everyday communication.

Jaisamak and Wechayaluck (2022, pp. 179-180) conducted a study on the management of Japanese language learning in the Northern region, collecting data from 133 administrators and teachers. They found that teachers strictly followed textbook-based instruction and lacked the skills to design activities allowing students to practice using the language in real-life contexts. Besides, the teachers were unable to create flexible learning management strategies that accommodated their students' current learning styles. Furthermore, they had a limited understanding of how to measure and evaluate learning outcomes, particularly in terms of formative and summative assessments.

Joemkhunthod (2020, pp. 60-61) discussed Japanese language teaching in Sisaket province, located in Northeastern Thailand. The report noted that the popularity of Japanese language instruction is limited, partly due to the province's proximity to the Cambodian border, which creates an environment less conducive to using Japanese. Also, teachers tend to focus more on grammar structures than on developing students' speaking skills, resulting in minimal time allocated for speaking practice. Furthermore, some scenarios presented in the textbooks are not relevant to students' everyday lives, leading to a lack of interest in the language. Students also encounter challenges such as

a lack of confidence in expressing themselves, fear of speaking, and embarrassment when trying to pronounce words correctly.

Cultural factors and the lack of immersive language environments significantly complicate the process of speaking Japanese, making it feel overwhelming for many students. Observations in secondary schools in Northeastern Thailand indicate that students encounter various challenges, including stuttering, incorrect intonation, and a general lack of confidence. These difficulties not only hinder their ability to communicate effectively but also negatively impact their overall learning experience and motivation to improve their Japanese language skills. To address these issues, innovative approaches and tailored strategies are necessary to better support students in overcoming their speaking challenges and enhancing their fluency.

TBLT in Language Instruction

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has gained recognition for its effectiveness in enhancing communicative competence through practical, real-world tasks (Bunmak, 2017; Robillos & Bustos, 2023). This approach significantly improves various aspects of language performance, including vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and, notably, speaking and listening skills (Bunmak, 2017). TBLT encourages meaningful language use, which fosters better communication skills (Willis, 1996). The TBLT framework, introduced by Willis (1996), consists of three stages: the pre-task stage, which presents the topic and relevant vocabulary; the task cycle, involving task completion, planning, and reporting with feedback on content and form; and the language focus phase, which provides explicit instruction on specific language features, including analysis and practice.

Many scholars and educators consider TBLT as an effective method for improving language proficiency (Chou, 2016; Siriwong, 2020). Research has shown that TBLT positively impacts students' speaking skills, with learners demonstrating a strong interest in developing their speaking skills through this approach (Joemkhunthod, 2020; Sae-ong, 2010; Shumin, 2002; Tareq, 2009). Furthermore, students exhibit positive attitudes towards communicative activities in the classroom, which leads to a notable increase in their motivation. Moreover, TBLT successfully promotes the development of target language acquisition. Notably, TBLT also provides learners with valuable opportunities to interact with their classmates, thereby supporting collaborative learning. (Crookes & Gass, 1993; Lochana & Deb, 2006; Pongsawang, 2012).

Despite its advantages, TBLT has several drawbacks. One major challenge is designing assignments that accommodate students with different levels of language proficiency (Ellis, 2003). Furthermore, creating context-specific tasks for TBLT requires a high level of teacher expertise, which can be time-consuming and may not align with conventional curricula (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). Additionally, some instructors argue that direct grammar instruction is essential; however, TBLT's

emphasis on communication often overlooks this component (Skehan, 1998). Finally, assessing students' progress in task-based learning can be challenging, as traditional assessment methods may not effectively measure the outcomes of this approach (Van den Branden, 2006).

Although the benefits of TBLT have been extensively studied in the context of teaching English (Pham & Do, 2021; Robillos & Bustos, 2023), its application to Japanese language instruction is still relatively underexplored, especially in the Thai educational context. Investigating how TBLT can be adapted to fit the Japanese curriculum could provide valuable insights. Addressing these gaps will not only enhance the understanding of TBLT's applicability for Japanese but also help develop more effective teaching strategies tailored to the needs of Japanese language learners.

Importance of Speaking Skills in Language Learning

Speaking skills are essential for effective communication and real-life interactions, especially in language learning (Pham & Do, 2021). For learners of Japanese, mastering speaking skills is crucial for both academic success and practical engagement in social and professional situations. Proficient speaking abilities allow learners to confidently interact with native speakers, participate in conversations, and navigate environments where Japanese is spoken. Research highlights that proficiency in speaking enhances overall language competence, leading to improvements in listening comprehension, vocabulary usage, and fluency (Nunan, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Despite the acknowledged significance of speaking skills, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically addressing how TBLT can enhance speaking skills in Japanese. While TBLT has been demonstrated to improve various language skills, such as writing (Siriwong, 2020), reading (Ngerndee & Chattiwat 2019), vocabulary acquisition (Shintani, 2012), and listening (Chou, 2016), its impact on speaking skills, particularly in the context of Japanese, is underexplored. Most existing studies focus on the effectiveness of TBLT for other language skills, leaving a gap in understanding how this approach can be specifically adapted to enhance speaking skills. In addition, there is limited research on which TBLT tasks are most effective for promoting speaking skills in Japanese, especially in non-native contexts like Thailand. Addressing this gap is crucial for optimizing TBLT to better support the development of speaking skills among Japanese learners.

Challenges and Opportunities in Developing Speaking Skills through TBLT

Implementing TBLT to develop speaking skills in Japanese presents both challenges and opportunities. One significant challenge is designing TBLT tasks that address the unique aspects of Japanese, such as its honorifics and speech levels, which are essential for effective communication but often difficult for learners to master (Shibatani, 1990). Ensuring that TBLT tasks are aligned with the specific linguistic and

cultural elements of Japanese is crucial for their effectiveness. Additionally, integrating TBLT into existing Japanese curricula requires careful planning to ensure that task-based activities complement traditional teaching methods and adhere to educational standards (Richards, 2006). This integration is essential for creating a cohesive and effective language-learning experience.

Despite these challenges, TBLT offers significant opportunities for enhancing speaking skills. By designing activities designed to reflect real-world interactions, such as role-playing or problem-solving activities, teachers can encourage students to use Japanese actively and meaningfully. Research suggests that such task-based approaches can significantly boost learners' speaking confidence and fluency by providing practical language use experiences (Robillos & Bustos, 2023). Also, the necessity of lesson plan design in TBLT is crucial for maximizing the effectiveness of TBLT. Well-structured lesson plans ensure that TBLT tasks are purposeful, contextually appropriate, and adapted to the particular needs of Japanese learners. Without careful planning, the potential of TBLT to improve speaking skills may not be fully realized. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities offered by TBLT, educators can develop more effective and engaging methods to improve speaking skills among Japanese language learners in Thailand.

Methodology

Method and Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design involving a single group to observe improvements in students' speaking skills in the Japanese language. Classroom action research was conducted over four cycles, following the framework established by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). The research process began with the first stage (planning), during which students' issues were identified through classroom observations. This was followed by a problem analysis and a review of relevant literature to find potential solutions. Based on these findings, teaching plans were developed, and a pilot study was conducted before administering a post-cycle test. In the second stage (acting), the teaching plans were implemented. During the third stage (observing), students' interactions in the classroom were monitored, and observations were recorded in post-lesson reports. Finally, in the fourth stage (reflecting), data from the post-cycle tests and post-lesson reports were collected and analyzed to identify challenges encountered during the cycle. This analysis guided the design of new lessons for continuous improvement in subsequent cycles.

Participants

This study involved 42 Grade 11 students who were selected through purposive sampling. These students were enrolled in Japanese as an elective subject, attending two consecutive classes each week, with a total duration of 100 minutes. In the first semester of Grade 10, they learned to read and write Japanese characters, including

[70]

Task-Based Language Teaching to Develop Japanese Language Speaking Skills among Thai Secondary Student

Hiragana, Hiragana special sounds, Katakana, and 30 basic kanji. During the second semester, they studied vocabulary and sentence structures from lessons 1 to 5 of the textbook *Minna no Nihongo*¹. By this point in their studies, the students were able to introduce themselves, count numbers, explain the locations of places, things, or people, express time, days, and months, and conjugate verbs to indicate affirmative, negative, and present/future tenses.

After reviewing the lesson plans from the previous semester and observing the teaching practices, it was noted that the teacher primarily focused on textbook content. Instruction centered on grammar and vocabulary, mainly through repetition drills. Very few speaking activities were incorporated into the classroom. This teaching approach aligns with the research findings of Jaisamak and Wechayaluck (2022). As a result, most students struggled with speaking skills, facing issues such as inaccurate intonation, lack of confidence, and minimal classroom participation. Many were hesitant to respond when teachers asked questions in Japanese.

During the first semester of Grade 11, students were taught using TBLT lesson plans, with the *Marugoto*² (Starter A1): Japanese Language and Culture textbooks as the primary teaching material.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

Lesson plans: This study was conducted over an 8-week period, excluding the pilot study. Each cycle lasted for 2 weeks. The lesson plan contents are outlined in Table 1. Most of the vocabulary and grammar covered had not been taught previously in Grade 10.

Table 1

The contents of lesson plans for Cycle 1-4

Cycle 1	
Content	Topic 8 Shopping: lesson 15
Can-do statements	1. Talk about what you want to buy 2. Talk about where to shop for something you want
Vocabulary	Souvenirs and counting numbers
Grammar	Watashi wa __ga hoshii desu. (I want to buy...) Watashi wa __ni__o agemasu. (I will give...to...) wa doko de kaemasu ka. (Where I can buy...)
Cycle 2	
Content	Topic 8 Shopping: lesson 16

¹ *Minna no Nihongo* was first published in 1998, and it is one of the most popular Japanese language textbooks, with translations in over 30 languages. It follows a structural syllabus, representing a traditional pedagogical approach.

² *Marugoto* is a comprehensive series of coursebooks developed by the Japan Foundation for learners of Japanese as a foreign language, structured according to the JF Standard for Japanese Language Education. The coursebooks encompass both language and culture, featuring communication between people in various situations. Learners can learn by listening to a variety of natural, contextualized conversations.

Can-do statements	1. Make a brief comment on things in a shop 2. Read prices 3. Do some shopping
Vocabulary	Clothes and prices
Grammar	Kore wa ikura desu ka. (How much is this?) Kono shatsu o kudasai. (Please give me this shirt) Hoka no iro arimasu ka. (Do you have other colors?)
Cycle 3	
Content	Topic 9 Holidays and Day off 2: lesson 17
Can-do statements	1. Read a short blog 2. Say what you did on your day off 3. Say briefly what you thought about your days off 4. Write a short blog about your day off
Vocabulary	Holiday activities, how you felt about it
Grammar	Yasumi wa doo deshita ka. (How was your day off?) Kinoo depaato ni ikimashita. (I went to shopping mall yesterday.) Kimono wa takakatta desu. (Kimono was expensive) Watashi wa doko nim o ikimasendeshita. (I didn't go to anywhere.)
Cycle 4	
Content	Topic 9 Holidays and Day off 2: lesson 18
Can-do statements	1. Read a simple E-mail 2. Say what you did on your vacation trips 3. Say where you want to go next time
Vocabulary	Experiences in Japan and trips
Grammar	Otera o mimashita. Sorekara omiyage o kaimashita (I saw the temple. Then, I bought a souvenir) Osushi wa oishikatta desu. Demo, takakatta desu. (Sushi was delicious, but expensive.) Kyooto ni ikitai desu. (I want to go to Kyoto.)

The researcher developed lesson plans based on the TBLT frameworks proposed by Willis (1996) and Nunan (2004). Each cycle lasted for two weeks, with a total of four cycles. The details of each step are as follows:

Pre-task (100 minutes): Pre-task is a phase of learning vocabulary, grammar, listening, and speaking practice. The activities vary for each cycle, and students are assigned to follow these steps: 1) View pictures or video clips, then discuss the topic to be learned that day; 2) Check the Can-do statements;³ 3) Listen to the recording and associate the words with the illustrations; 4) Listen to the model conversation and practice shadowing; 5) Identify the grammar used and figure out its meaning; 6) Listen to a conversation and fill in the blanks with the missing information; and 7) Practice speaking in pairs.

³ The JF Can-do Statement is part of the Japanese-Foreign Language (JF) Standard, a framework designed by the Japan Foundation to guide the level of proficiency in various language skills. The statements are divided into different proficiency levels, from beginner (A1) to advanced (C2), similar to the CEFR levels. The purpose of Can-do statements is to help learners and educators set language learning goals.

Task cycle (60 minutes): Tasks in all four cycles were newly created by the researcher based on Can-Do statements for each cycle. The Marugoto textbook emphasizes listening and speaking exercises without any group activity tasks. Some situations and vocabulary are related to life in Japan, which does not align with everyday situations for all students. To address this, the researcher created additional tasks that allow students to practice real-life conversations, such as introducing famous products from their hometowns. Learners were encouraged to gather more information and expand their vocabulary beyond what is covered in the textbook. The tasks vary in each cycle, and students were grouped into teams of three to four to collaborate and share ideas. Due to limited classroom time, students utilized class time for planning and spent additional time outside of class recording video clips of their conversations, writing blogs, and presenting their work on Facebook.

Task for Cycle 1: Students were assigned to compose a conversation based on the following situation: [You are visiting your friend's hometown and want to buy some renowned products as souvenirs for your family members. However, you don't know what to buy and where to buy it. Ask your friend for advice.]

Task for Cycle 2: Students were assigned to compose a conversation based on the following situation: [You are preparing for travel abroad and want to buy clothes. Imagine you are selecting clothing at a department store. Inform the staff what type of clothing you want and ask if they have the color and size you need.]

Task for Cycle 3: Students were assigned to discuss holiday activities in groups. After this discussion, they were instructed to independently write a blog post on the topic and express their opinions about it.

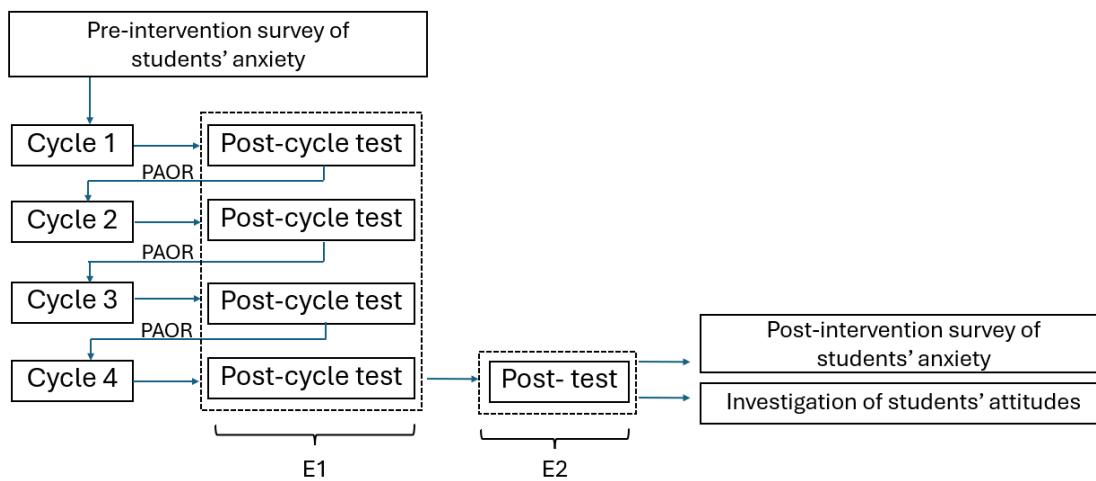
Task for Cycle 4: Students were asked to discuss their experiences during vacation trips. Following this discussion, they were required to write a short essay reflecting on this topic and expressing their feelings about it.

Upon completing their essays, students needed to share their writing in Japanese and upload a video presentation in the Facebook group. They were also expected to view and comment on their classmates' posts on Facebook.

Language focus (40 minutes): In the next class session, the teacher, along with classmates, will provide feedback to all students. The teacher will identify grammatical errors and misuse of particles, prompting students to correct their mistakes. Each student will then need to self-assess their work, highlight what they did well, identify areas for improvement, and review the Can-do statements.

Lesson plans were evaluated for the index of item objective congruence (IOC) by three experts, resulting in a score of 0.87.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Note: PAOR (Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect), is a framework used in classroom action research, a reflective activity in which teachers methodically examine their own teaching to improve students' learning outcomes.

Assessment Rubric: The assessment rubric was composed of five criteria adapted from Harris (1969), Ur (2006), Waluyo (2019): Can-do, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. Scores spanned from 1 to 4, with a total maximum score of 20. The assessment rubrics were evaluated for the index of item objective congruence by three experts, resulting in a score of 0.74. The speaking assessment rubric is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Speaking Assessment Rubric

Criteria	4- Excellent	3-Good	2-Satisfactory	1-Needs Improvement
Can-do	Understands and responds appropriately to a wide range of topics and questions	Understands most topics and questions, with few misunderstandings. Responses are generally appropriate	Struggles to understand, requiring frequent clarification. Responses were incomplete	Cannot understand the questions
Vocabulary	Uses a wide range of appropriate and varied vocabulary.	Uses appropriate vocabulary with some variety. Occasional repetition or minor inaccuracy.	Uses limited vocabulary, often repetitive, or sometimes inaccurate in word choice.	Uses limited vocabulary, frequently incorrect
Grammar	Uses a wide range of accurate	Uses mostly accurate grammar	Uses grammatical structures with frequent errors	Frequently makes grammar mistakes that

	grammatical structures without errors	with occasional minor mistakes.	that occasionally hinder meaning.	significantly hinder communication.
Pronunciation	Clear and natural	Generally clear with minor mispronunciations	Frequent mispronunciations	Unclear and frequent mispronunciations
Fluency	Speaks smoothly and confidently	Speaks fairly smoothly with some pauses or hesitations	Hesitates frequently and has noticeable pauses or self-corrections	Struggles to speak fluently, hesitates, or pauses often

Post-cycle tests: These assessments were conducted outside of class hours and aimed to evaluate each student's speaking skills individually by two teachers. The speaking tasks were adapted from textbooks and aligned with Can-do statements to assess students' speaking skills after each cycle. The tests comprised four short question-and-answer sessions and one role-play scenario. During the assessments, the subject teacher posed questions, and students responded based on information derived from pictures. Additionally, the reliability of the post-cycle tests was confirmed through a pilot study. To ensure inter-rater reliability, 15 students not involved in the main study were selected for evaluation. Their speaking skills were assessed by three experts, and inter-rater reliability was analyzed using Fleiss' Kappa statistic, which returned a value of 0.63, indicating a good level of agreement.

Post-test: The post-test comprised eight short question-and-answer sessions and two role-play scenarios. The questions were adapted from textbooks that aligned with the Can-do statements of each cycle. Although the questions in the post-test were similar to those in the post-cycle tests, the researcher modified the vocabulary and the information presented in the pictures.

Questionnaire on Anxiety in Speaking Japanese: The questionnaire was adapted from Bhattarachaiyakorn and Phettakua (2023) and designed to measure anxiety across three main categories: negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. Students responded to five items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (Strongly agree) to 1 (Strongly disagree). The mean responses were categorized into five levels of anxiety: Very High Anxiety (4.21-5.00), High Anxiety (3.41-4.20), Moderate Anxiety (2.61-3.40), Little Anxiety (1.81-2.60), and Very Little Anxiety (1.00-1.80). The maximum possible score for the questionnaire was 25. The anxiety scores collected before and after the intervention were analyzed for statistical significance.

Attitudinal Questionnaire: The attitudinal questionnaire was adapted from Hadi (2013) and Tan (2016) to assess students' attitudes towards the TBLT lesson plans. Tan adapted some items from Jeon (2005) and Willis and Willis (2001). The questionnaire was divided into two sections. In the first section, students responded to nine items using

a 5-point Likert scale. Responses were categorized into five levels of agreement: Strongly Agree (4.21-5.00), Agree (3.41-4.20), Neutral (2.61-3.40), Disagree (1.81-2.60), and Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.80). In the second section, students were asked to write their opinions freely regarding the implementation of TBLT. The reliability of the first section was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, resulting in a value of 0.84, which indicates a good level of reliability.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the post-cycle tests and post-test were collected as scores and analyzed using the mean, percentage, and standard deviation (S.D.). The efficiency of the lessons was evaluated through the E1/E2 model. E1 represents the process efficiency, calculated as the percentage of the average scores from the four post-cycle tests, which served as formative assessments. E2 represents the outcome efficiency, calculated as the percentage of the average scores from the post-test, used for summative evaluation. Additionally, quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed by assigning ratings on a scale and calculating the arithmetic mean and standard deviation. This rigorous approach ensured a comprehensive assessment of both the pedagogical approach and the learning achievements.

Results

Scores of Post-Cycle Tests and Post-Tests

The researcher collected speaking assessment data, which was divided into four post-cycle tests and a post-test. The assessment covered five aspects, with each aspect having a maximum score of 4 points, totaling 20 points. The speaking assessment scores for all cycles are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3
Speaking Assessment Scores

Cycle	Total score	Mean	S.D.	Percentage
1	20	15.84	1.05	79.22
2	20	17.00	1.02	85.00
3	20	16.84	1.02	84.22
4	20	16.78	0.91	83.91

As shown in Table 3, the average scores demonstrate a clear trend of improvement across the four cycles. In Cycle 1, the average score was 15.84 (79.22%), reflecting the initial implementation stage of the lessons. By Cycle 2, the average score increased to 17.00 (85.00%), indicating significant progress. Scores experienced a slight decrease in Cycles 3 and 4, falling to 16.84 (84.22%) and 16.78 (83.91%), respectively. This suggests that while notable improvement was observed initially, performance stabilized with only minor fluctuations in the subsequent cycles.

Table 4*Efficiency of TBLT Lesson Plans on Students' Speaking Skills*

Efficiency	Total score	Mean	S.D	Percentage
Process efficiency (E1)	80	66.50	3.1 6	83.09
Outcome efficiency (E2)	20	17.19	1.0 6	85.94
task-based language teaching (TBLT) lesson plans' efficiency (E1/E2=83.09/85.94)				

Table 4 reveals that the efficiency of the TBLT lesson plans, both in terms of process and outcome, was 83.09 and 85.94, respectively. These values exceed the established criteria of 75 for both measures. This indicates that the TBLT lesson plans not only met but surpassed the expected criterion for effectiveness, highlighting their successful implementation and positive impact on learning achievements.

Table 5*Percentage of Each Language Aspect*

Language Aspects	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4	Overall
Can-do	89.06	93.75	95.31	94.53	93.16
Vocabulary	71.09	78.13	78.91	77.34	76.37
Grammar	80.47	84.38	78.13	79.69	80.66
Pronunciation	79.69	89.06	90.63	89.06	87.11
Fluency	75.78	79.69	78.13	78.91	78.13

The results indicate that students exhibited the strongest performance in the Can-do aspect, with consistently high scores across all cycles, peaking at 95.31% in Cycle 3 and achieving an overall score of 93.16%. Pronunciation also showed significant improvement, beginning at 79.69% in Cycle 1 and reaching 90.63% in Cycle 3, with an overall score of 87.11%. Grammar scores remained relatively stable, starting at 80.47% in Cycle 1 and experiencing a slight decline to 77.34% in Cycle 4, leading to an overall score of 80.66%. Fluency improved gradually over the cycles, increasing from 75.78% in Cycle 1 to 78.91% in Cycle 4, resulting in an overall score of 78.13%. Vocabulary showed notable improvement, but it still had the lowest overall score at 76.37%, starting at 71.09% in Cycle 1 and reaching 77.34% in Cycle 4. These findings suggest that while students excelled in Can-do and made notable progress in pronunciation, there was less advancement in vocabulary and grammar.

Results of the Questionnaire on Anxiety in Speaking Japanese

The results of the questionnaire on anxiety in speaking Japanese, presented in Table 6, were compared before and after the intervention.

Table 6*Level of Anxiety Compared before and after the Intervention*

item	Statement	Before			After		
		Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
1.	It embarrasses me to speak Japanese in my speaking class.	4.45	0.50	Very high anxiety	2.76	0.48	Moderate anxiety
2.	My vocabulary is limited.	3.60	0.73	High anxiety	3.29	0.64	Moderate anxiety
3.	I worry about making mistakes in communication.	4.83	0.49	Very high anxiety	3.93	0.71	High anxiety
4.	I worry about grammatical accuracy.	4.05	0.49	High anxiety	3.60	0.66	High anxiety
5.	I feel unconfident about my pronunciation.	3.26	0.70	Moderate anxiety	3.02	0.68	Moderate anxiety
Overall		4.04	0.82	High anxiety	3.32	0.76	Moderate anxiety

Before the intervention, students exhibited high levels of anxiety when speaking Japanese. Particularly, they were concerned about making mistakes during communication (mean score: 4.83) and felt embarrassed to speak in class (mean score: 4.45). These concerns were interpreted as “Very high anxiety.” After the intervention, overall anxiety levels decreased from “High anxiety” (mean score: 4.04) to “Moderate anxiety” (mean score: 3.32). Although anxiety related to pronunciation and vocabulary remained at a “Moderate anxiety” level, there was a significant reduction in the embarrassment students felt when speaking in class, which dropped to a mean score of 2.76. Despite these improvements, concerns about making mistakes and grammatical accuracy remained relatively high. These findings indicate that the intervention was effective in reducing overall anxiety, though specific issues, such as fear of communication mistakes, continue to pose challenges for students.

Table 7*Comparison of Anxiety Score before and after the Intervention*

	Mean	S.D.	t	df
Before the intervention	20.190	1.131	14.217**	41
After the intervention	16.595	1.594		

**p<0.01

A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the anxiety scores of students before and after the intervention. The results revealed a significant difference in anxiety scores: before the intervention ($M = 20.190$, $SD = 1.131$) and after the intervention ($M = 16.595$, $SD = 1.594$), with $t(41) = 14.217$, $p < .01$. This indicates that the implementation of TBLT had a significant effect on reducing students' anxiety. To summarize, the implementation of TBLT led to a reduction in students' anxiety levels.

Results of the Attitudinal Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire showing students' attitudes toward the TBLT lesson plans are presented in Table 8.

Table 8
Students' Attitudes toward the TBLT Lesson Plans

item	Statement	Mean	S.D.	Level of Agreement
1.	TBLT helps create a relaxed atmosphere for language learning	4.47	0.35	Strongly agree
2.	TBLT helps create motivation for language learning.	4.12	0.35	Agree
3.	TBLT helps develop integrated skills and collaboration skills.	4.08	0.39	Agree
4.	TBLT creates a collaborative learning environment.	4.34	0.41	Strongly agree
5.	TBLT takes time to complete tasks.	4.63	0.26	Strongly agree
6.	TBLT helps students practice using the language in real-life situations.	4.54	0.14	Strongly agree
7.	TBLT focuses on practical communication than grammar accuracy.	4.48	0.37	Strongly Agree
8.	TBLT is appropriate for small group work	4.41	0.57	Strongly Agree
9.	TBLT is suitable for examination preparation	2.87	0.71	Neutral

The results from the attitudinal questionnaire regarding students' insights on the TBLT lesson plans are presented in Table 8. Students expressed their strongest agreement with the statement items 1,4,5,6,7, and 8. However, students were neutral regarding the suitability of TBLT for exam preparation, with the lowest mean score of 2.87. Overall, these findings suggest that students value the benefits of TBLT, particularly in promoting active learning and interaction, although they recognize the time-consuming nature of the preparation.

The information presented in Table 9 is summarized from quotations provided by four selected students. These statements were chosen for their feedback on all five key points: classroom experience, teaching approach, group work benefits, speaking confidence, and learning motivation.

Table 9
Overview of Students' Attitudes toward the TBLT Lesson Plans

Key points	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D
Classroom Experience	Felt the textbook-based approach was	Hesitant to speak due to concerns about	Traditional activities focused on repetition drills.	Struggles with shyness and expressing

	repetitive and lacked variety.	vocabulary and grammar.		oneself confidently.
Teaching Approach	TBLT introduced activities not in the textbook, improving engagement.	TBLT allowed for more interactive learning through peer feedback.	Enjoyed role-playing and real-life situations in TBLT, fostering better communication skills.	TBLT encourages creativity and motivated exploration beyond the classroom.
Group Work Benefits	Group work encouraged the sharing of knowledge, making learning collaborative and fun.	Group work increased confidence by reducing anxiety about speaking in front of the whole class.	Group work made learning more enjoyable and led to increased speaking practice through role-play.	Group activities fostered communication, supported peer relationships, and increased self-expression.
Speaking Confidence	TBLT gave me a safe environment to practice speaking, which built my confidence over time.	Group support helped overcome hesitation and allowed for constructive feedback.	TBLT gave opportunities to practice speaking, boosting confidence in communication.	I was constantly involved in discussions and had to think quickly, which helped me overcome shyness.
Learning Motivation	TBLT made concepts more applicable to real life, enhancing motivation to learn.	Peer feedback and group interaction made learning feel more rewarding.	More speaking practice in TBLT motivated a deeper engagement with the language.	TBLT stimulated curiosity, and group work made learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

Discussion

The findings indicated that the efficiency of the process and outcomes in the TBLT lesson plans was 83.09/85.94, surpassing the established criteria of 75/75. As shown in Table 5, mean scores for speaking skills improved significantly from Cycle 2 to Cycle 4, with notable enhancements in Can-do and pronunciation. These results are consistent with previous studies by Brigitte and Inthaphithim (2019) and Omar et al. (2021), which demonstrated that TBLT significantly enhances the speaking skills of ESL learners. Although the context of this study differs from previous studies, the findings consistently show that TBLT can enhance the confidence and fluency of beginner-level foreign language learners in communication. Furthermore, Bunmak (2015) emphasized that TBLT provides many advantages, such as motivating learners to practice the target language and offering opportunities for conversations in contexts similar to those encountered outside of the classroom.

When analyzing the speaking skills in each aspect, it was found that the Can-do and pronunciation components achieved an average score of approximately 90%. This success can be attributed to the TBLT approach, which emphasizes communication to achieve objectives and allows students to assess their own performance. This has contributed to the high scores in both areas. Fluency, grammar, and vocabulary followed closely behind, each averaging around 80%, with vocabulary receiving the lowest score at 76.37%. This lower score can be explained by the fact that vocabulary and grammar introduced in each cycle were entirely new to the students, who rarely had opportunities to use Japanese outside the classroom. As a result, students needed additional time to memorize vocabulary and practice sentence composition. The limited research timeframe did not allow for extensive practice on these topics. In this study, TBLT primarily focuses on communication skills. This means that even if vocabulary recall or sentence structure is not entirely accurate, as long as the communication achieves its purpose, the learning goals are considered met. In real-life situations, students can compensate for a lack of fluency by using body language or translation applications to aid comprehension. While TBLT might not directly improve vocabulary retention and grammar accuracy to the same level as Can-do or pronunciation, it can motivate students to engage more in speaking the target language and contribute to the expansion of their vocabulary. These benefits align with the findings of Albino (2017).

The comparison of anxiety levels among Japanese-speaking students showed a significant decrease in anxiety following the intervention. However, concerns about grammatical accuracy and mistakes in communication remained high. This is consistent with Bhattarachaiyakorn and Phettakua's (2023) findings, which identified grammar as the primary source of anxiety among Thai learners of English. Therefore, it can be inferred that grammar is a significant source of anxiety for Thai learners of both English and Japanese. In contrast, the most significantly reduced form of anxiety was the fear of embarrassment when speaking Japanese. Based on the researchers' observations, Thai students often hesitate to express themselves confidently or share their opinions in public due to a fear of criticism or standing out too much. These personality traits can negatively impact language learning. Furthermore, language classes in Thailand typically accommodate large numbers of students, which can restrict teacher-student interactions and contribute to heightened levels of anxiety among learners. To address these challenges, working in small groups can offer students additional chances to engage in speaking and reduce anxiety. It is also crucial for teachers to foster a supportive classroom environment and serve as positive role models, helping students build the confidence to express themselves freely.

According to the results from the questionnaire in Table 8, students had a positive perception of the TBLT lesson plans. This finding is consistent with research by Sae-ong (2010), Hasan (2014), Bao and Du (2015), and Fatima et al. (2021), all of which emphasize the positive impact of TBLT on speaking skills. TBLT creates a low-anxiety environment that allows learners to engage effectively with the target language. Small group tasks foster confidence and collaboration among students. Initially, in

Cycle 1, students were nervous and focused on language accuracy. However, when assigned small group tasks, they felt more relaxed and engaged in increased interaction. TBLT also helped students set clear communication goals and achieve them through task completion. Positive feedback further motivated learners to use the target language, promoting vocabulary acquisition as students encountered new words relevant to their tasks. These observations support Ellis's (2003) assertion that TBLT boosts students' enthusiasm to acquire a target language.

Based on the questionnaire results, students generally had a positive view of TBLT and understood its concepts and benefits. However, some concerns were raised. Students noted that TBLT involves multiple steps, which can be time-consuming, and the limited classroom time is often not sufficient to complete all the tasks. Additionally, a few students expressed that TBLT can be burdensome due to the increased workload it requires. This sentiment is reflected in the lowest mean score of 2.87 on questionnaire item 9. Some students also felt that TBLT is less suitable for exam preparation, as exams typically focus on grammar and vocabulary knowledge. This traditional view aligns with the findings of Littlewood (2007), Deng and Carless (2010), and Tan (2016), who suggest that examinations are often seen as barriers to implementing communicative or task-based approaches in educational settings.

According to a study by Jaisamak and Wechayaluck (2022), teachers in Thailand have limited knowledge regarding the measurement and assessment of learning outcomes. The typical language testing emphasizes vocabulary and grammar through traditional paper-based tests. However, this approach may not align with the TBLT framework, which prioritizes communication skills. Furthermore, TBLT integrates multiple language skills, making it challenging for teachers to assess each skill individually.

Implementing TBLT involves several processes, and teachers must be highly skilled in designing activities and managing time effectively. However, it is not always feasible for teachers to apply all these processes consistently throughout the semester. This limitation is consistent with the views of Van den Branden (2006) and Samuda and Bygate (2008).

Conclusions

This study demonstrated that TBLT significantly enhances students' speaking skills. The high efficiency scores of the TBLT lesson plans ($E1/E2 = 83.13/85.94$) and the substantial reduction in language anxiety, as indicated by the paired samples t -test (pre-intervention $M = 20.190$, $SD = 1.131$; post-intervention $M = 16.595$, $SD = 1.594$; $t(41) = 14.217$, $p < .01$), provide strong evidence of TBLT's effectiveness. These findings highlight the value of TBLT in improving not only students' speaking skills but also their overall language learning experience. Additionally, positive feedback from students further emphasizes the benefits of this approach, which include enhanced language skills, reduced anxiety, authentic language use, and a supportive

[82]

collaborative environment.

Implications

The implications of these results are significant. TBLT can effectively create a more engaging and less stressful environment for language learning, which is essential for developing speaking skills. The decrease in anxiety suggests that TBLT creates a more supportive environment for students to practice and improve their language skills.

However, the study furthermore identified several constraints, such as the lack of explicit grammar instruction, which may affect grammatical accuracy, and the substantial planning and resource demands on teachers. To address these issues, it is recommended that teachers adapt TBLT to their specific contexts by integrating traditional grammar instruction with TBLT tasks, considering practical constraints such as preparation time and class size, and using feedback effectively. Additionally, while TBLT is effective for improving communication skills, it may not fully address grammar and vocabulary development; thus, combining TBLT with traditional methods like the audio-lingual approach can be beneficial. Based on the researcher's experiences teaching Japanese at both the higher secondary schools and university levels, integrating explicit vocabulary and grammar instruction with TBLT creates a balanced approach that enables students to not only acquire language structures and vocabulary but also apply them in meaningful contexts. During the pre-task phase, it is advisable for teachers to introduce conversations that include new vocabulary and sentence structures, encouraging students to infer their meanings. Following this, the teacher should clarify the sentence structures and engage students in speaking practice through various drills, such as repetition drills, combination drills, and question-and-answer drills. Furthermore, teachers can enhance vocabulary and grammar practice through activities such as group vocabulary games, chain drills, pairing students to make sentences, or utilizing interactive applications like Blooket and Kahoot. In the researcher's opinion, the pre-task phase is crucial for students to acquire new vocabulary and sentence structures. During this phase, the teacher should focus on teaching grammar and provide students with the opportunity to practice speaking until they feel confident in forming correct sentences. Only after this should the teacher guide the students through tasks during the task cycle. Since the complexity of each grammar topic varies, the teacher can adjust the duration of the pre-task phase based on the difficulty of the content.

TBLT is an instructional method that encourages students to work collaboratively in groups on various tasks. This approach presents several advantages, as detailed in Table 9. Among the benefits of TBLT are the opportunities it provides for students to share their perspectives and the increase in their speaking confidence. The findings presented in Table 6 suggest that TBLT is effective in reducing communication anxiety. While students reported moderate anxiety regarding vocabulary and pronunciation, they experienced higher levels of anxiety related to communication errors and grammatical accuracy. To address these issues, teachers are encouraged to

create a supportive and low-pressure environment where mistakes are viewed as a natural part of the learning process. Students should be encouraged to prioritize clear communication of their ideas rather than striving for perfection. It is important to reassure them that even native speakers make mistakes. Providing constructive feedback and making corrections when necessary is also essential. Incorporating activities such as role plays, discussions, and real-life contexts can help practice grammar in a meaningful way. Finally, teachers should help students develop a growth mindset by emphasizing improvement over perfection and encouraging regular reflection on their progress.

Small group work and project presentations can help reduce speaking anxiety. It's important to focus on students' strengths when providing feedback to avoid increasing anxiety through excessive corrections. Tasks should be designed to relate to students' real-life situations and cultural backgrounds, using relevant visual media to make the target language more relatable.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This research has a limitation in terms of duration, as it lasts only one semester. Consequently, it is unable to observe the long-term development of students. Throughout each cycle, the researcher spent the same amount of time collecting data; however, the difficulty of the content varied between cycles. Some students needed additional time to understand the content and wanted to practice sentence structures before completing tasks during the task cycle. Even though some students did not fully understand the grammar concepts, they still needed to complete the tasks, which led to communication issues for some of them. Additionally, data collection was not conducted continuously due to school activities that interrupted classes, resulting in delays in the research process. When students returned to class, they often forgot the content previously taught by the teacher, leading the researcher to extend review hours beyond the scheduled data collection time. Limited classroom time and extracurricular activities may disrupt language acquisition and hinder student progress. Students often do not have enough time to practice speaking, which can make it difficult for them to master essential language skills. In developing listening and reading writing skills, students have the opportunity to practice outside of class. However, for speaking skills, practice is generally limited to class time. Speaking involves several key components, including pronunciation and fluency. Beginner-level learners often face challenges such as difficulties with tone, mispronunciations, and a lack of confidence. It is crucial for students to practice speaking during lessons and to receive feedback from their teachers. Without adequate practice, their speaking skills may not develop as effectively as needed.

According to TBLT theory, the pre-task phase should not take much time. However, in actual teaching, this period is used to introduce vocabulary and practice sentence formation before starting the task cycle. If the teacher does not allocate enough time for practice, students may encounter difficulties in completing tasks. Japanese is a

new language for the students, as it is not taught at the elementary level, leading to a longer pre-task phase. It is advisable to increase the number of practice exercises. Although TBLT does not emphasize grammar, most learners are concerned about grammatical accuracy. Insufficient practice can affect their confidence in communication. In future research, it would be beneficial to incorporate technology or applications that support self-directed learning outside the classroom, as this would help students better understand the content and save time on exercises in class.

Data collection in cycles enables instructors to monitor students' progress effectively. The length of each research cycle should be flexible and tailored to the complexity of the content. If the content is not overly complex, the duration can be shortened to allow for more time on complex topics. Additionally, more time should be allocated at the beginning of class to review content through engaging activities, such as games, sentence creation, or vocabulary practice.

The research is an action study aimed at addressing problems that arise in the classroom. The target group was selected specifically. If this method is applied to other classes where students have different characteristics, the research results may differ from those of this study. In future research, it would be beneficial to compare the TBLT teaching method with other teaching approaches to effectively highlight TBLT's relative strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, conducting research in classrooms with diverse student characteristics will help identify effective teaching strategies tailored to each group.

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