Enhancing EFL Learners' Speaking Skills through Task-Based and Strategic Learning Approaches

[1] Lars Johansson
[1] Faculty of Education, University of Manila, Philippines

Abstract

Speaking is widely recognized as a central skill in second language acquisition, yet EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners often encounter persistent challenges in achieving fluency, accuracy, and communicative competence. The complexity of oral proficiency arises from cognitive, psychological, and socio-cultural factors, which interact dynamically with the methods and strategies employed in language instruction. This study synthesizes contemporary research on enhancing speaking skills among EFL learners by integrating task-based learning, strategy instruction, and technology-mediated interventions. Drawing upon an extensive review of empirical studies, including the use of self-talk, voice chatting, games, multimedia, and motivation-driven approaches, this research elucidates how specific instructional strategies can mitigate speaking difficulties and foster learner autonomy. A qualitative-quantitative framework was employed, analyzing case studies, observational reports, and survey data from secondary, tertiary, and adult EFL learners in diverse cultural contexts. Results indicate that learners exposed to structured task-based activities demonstrate marked improvement in fluency, lexical variety, and confidence in oral production. The study also identifies key motivational factors, strategy preferences, and contextual variables that influence speaking performance. Limitations related to sample diversity, measurement consistency, and technology access are critically discussed. Finally, the paper provides recommendations for curriculum designers, teachers, and policy-makers to implement evidence-based practices in EFL classrooms, emphasizing the integration of cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of language learning. This comprehensive analysis contributes to bridging the theoretical-practical gap in EFL pedagogy, offering actionable insights for fostering effective speaking instruction.

Keywords: EFL, speaking skills, task-based learning, learning strategies, motivation, communicative competence, technology-mediated instruction.

1. Introduction

Speaking, as one of the four essential language skills, holds a central role in language acquisition and communicative competence. Yet, among EFL learners, it consistently emerges as the skill most resistant to mastery due to its dynamic interplay between cognitive processing, linguistic accuracy, socio-cultural adaptation, and affective variables (Chiu, 2019; Dornyei, 2005). Unlike receptive skills such as reading and listening, productive skills demand real-time processing, immediate retrieval of lexical and syntactic resources, and simultaneous attention to pronunciation, fluency, and pragmatic appropriateness (Richards, 2008; Ur, 1996). The challenge of oral communication is further compounded by learners' limited exposure to authentic language use, classroom anxiety, and reliance on rote memorization rather than strategic engagement (Aleksandrzak, 2011; Gani, 2015).

Recent scholarship underscores the potential of task-based language teaching (TBLT) as a mechanism to address these challenges. By centering instruction on meaningful tasks rather than isolated linguistic forms, TBLT encourages learners to engage in purposeful interaction, negotiate meaning, and develop fluency within authentic communicative contexts (Willis & Willis, 2007; Ho & Nguyen, 2014). Empirical studies demonstrate that structured task sequences, when combined with explicit strategy instruction, can improve learners' oral output by scaffolding cognitive and metacognitive processes (Anjum et al., 2019; Albino, 2017). Simultaneously, technological innovations such as voice chatting applications, multimedia resources, and interactive games have emerged as potent tools to simulate real-life communication scenarios, offering learners safe yet dynamic environments for repeated practice (Hasri, 2019; Damayanti, 2016).

Despite the acknowledged benefits, there remains a gap in understanding how specific strategies, motivational factors, and task designs collectively influence speaking proficiency across different learner populations. While prior studies have investigated individual interventions, such as self-talk techniques (Humairoh, 2012), WhatsApp-mediated speaking practice (Hasri, 2019), and learning through movies (Ashrafuzzaman & Roy, 2019), an integrated framework that combines motivational, strategic, and task-based dimensions is largely absent. Moreover, there is limited cross-cultural analysis examining how learners' socio-educational contexts mediate the effectiveness of these approaches (Febrianti, 2021; Burkat & Joyce, 2004).

This research addresses these gaps by synthesizing existing empirical evidence and theoretical models to explore the intersection of task-based instruction, strategy use, and motivational constructs in enhancing EFL speaking skills. The study aims to: (1) identify prevalent speaking difficulties among EFL learners; (2) evaluate the efficacy of task-based and strategic interventions; (3) examine the role of motivation and technology-mediated practice; and (4) propose a comprehensive framework for improving communicative competence. By doing so, the research provides actionable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policy-makers seeking to enhance oral proficiency outcomes in diverse EFL contexts.

2. Methodology

A descriptive-analytical approach was employed to explore the relationship between instructional strategies and speaking proficiency. The methodology integrates qualitative synthesis of case studies, observational reports, and semi-structured interviews with quantitative analysis of learner outcomes reported in prior research. A purposive sampling strategy was utilized, selecting studies that specifically addressed speaking interventions among EFL learners, covering secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and adult learning environments across Asia, Europe, and Latin America (Chiu, 2019; Febrianti, 2021).

The framework emphasizes three interrelated dimensions: task-based instruction, strategic learning, and motivational engagement. Task-based instruction was analyzed through criteria such as task complexity, communicative authenticity, and learner autonomy (Willis & Willis, 2007; Ho & Nguyen, 2014). Strategic learning was examined via learners' reported use of cognitive strategies (e.g., repetition, summarization), metacognitive strategies (e.g., self-monitoring, planning), and socio-affective strategies (e.g., peer interaction, self-talk) (Gani, 2015; Humairoh, 2012). Motivation was operationalized according to intrinsic and extrinsic components, including goal orientation, self-efficacy, and affective factors like anxiety and confidence (Dornyei, 2005; Saeed & David, 2012).

Data synthesis involved coding and thematic analysis of intervention outcomes, strategy effectiveness, and contextual variables. Quantitative metrics, such as pre- and post-intervention oral proficiency scores, fluency ratings, lexical diversity, and error frequency, were descriptively analyzed to ascertain trends across studies (Albino, 2017; Anjum et al., 2019). Cross-study comparisons facilitated identification of consistent patterns and divergences in strategy efficacy, task implementation, and motivational influence. Special attention was paid to technology-mediated interventions, including WhatsApp voice chatting (Hasri, 2019), video-based self-learning (Ashrafuzzaman & Roy, 2019), and game-based speaking activities (Damayanti, 2016). Ethical considerations from original studies, such as voluntary participation, informed consent, and cultural sensitivity, were maintained throughout the synthesis.

3. Results

The synthesis of empirical evidence reveals multiple dimensions of speaking difficulties among EFL learners. Common challenges include lexical insufficiency, syntactic errors, pronunciation difficulties, low fluency, and limited pragmatic competence (Chiu, 2019; Aleksandrzak, 2011). Learners frequently report anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of motivation as significant impediments to oral performance, which interact with cognitive and linguistic constraints (Dornyei, 2005; Saeed

& David, 2012). Task-based activities consistently demonstrate improvements in fluency and confidence by providing authentic contexts for negotiation of meaning, scaffolding cognitive load, and encouraging repeated interaction (Ho & Nguyen, 2014; Carolina, 2016).

Strategic interventions such as self-talk, role-play, and peer feedback are associated with enhanced lexical retrieval, sentence construction, and communicative spontaneity (Humairoh, 2012; Gani, 2015). Technology-mediated approaches, particularly WhatsApp voice chatting and video-based exercises, facilitate learner engagement outside traditional classroom settings, promoting autonomy and repeated practice (Hasri, 2019; Ashrafuzzaman & Roy, 2019). Game-based learning is found to reduce affective barriers, stimulate intrinsic motivation, and increase active participation (Damayanti, 2016).

Motivational factors play a pivotal role in mediating outcomes. Learners with higher intrinsic motivation exhibit sustained engagement, proactive strategy use, and increased willingness to communicate, whereas extrinsically motivated learners show variable persistence depending on task relevance and perceived reward (Dornyei, 2005; Appel & Roger, 2002). Quantitative trends indicate that combining task-based learning with explicit strategy instruction results in measurable improvements in oral proficiency, including enhanced fluency, grammatical accuracy, and interactional competence (Albino, 2017; Anjum et al., 2019).

Contextual variables, including cultural norms, classroom dynamics, and technological access, significantly influence intervention efficacy. For instance, collectivist classroom cultures may encourage peer collaboration but inhibit risk-taking in oral output, whereas access to smartphones or multimedia resources enhances opportunities for autonomous practice (Febrianti, 2021; Burkat & Joyce, 2004). The results underscore the necessity of integrating cognitive, affective, and contextual considerations into speaking pedagogy to optimize learning outcomes.

4. Discussion

The findings substantiate the theoretical premise that EFL speaking proficiency is a multidimensional construct shaped by linguistic competence, strategic skill, motivation, and contextual facilitation. Task-based language teaching emerges as an effective pedagogical approach, providing structured yet flexible platforms for learners to negotiate meaning, engage cognitively, and develop fluency in real-world scenarios (Willis & Willis, 2007; Ho & Nguyen, 2014). When coupled with strategic learning instruction,

TBLT enhances learners' metacognitive awareness, enabling them to self-monitor, plan, and evaluate their oral output (Gani, 2015; Humairoh, 2012).

Motivation is intricately linked to strategy use and task engagement. Dornyei's (2005) model of language learning motivation illustrates that intrinsic factors, such as personal interest and mastery orientation, enhance persistence and strategic application, whereas extrinsic motivators, like grades or recognition, yield variable effects. Integrating motivational scaffolds, including positive feedback, culturally relevant tasks, and gamified activities, can mitigate affective barriers and foster sustained engagement (Appel & Roger, 2002; Damayanti, 2016).

The use of technology-mediated interventions presents both opportunities and challenges. Voice chatting applications and video-based learning extend classroom interactions into flexible, learner-driven environments, promoting autonomy, repetition, and peer collaboration (Hasri, 2019; Ashrafuzzaman & Roy, 2019). However, unequal access to technological resources and varying digital literacy levels may constrain implementation, highlighting the need for equitable design considerations and blended learning approaches.

Limitations of the synthesized research include heterogeneity in study design, sample populations, and measurement tools, which complicate direct comparisons and generalizability. Many studies rely on self-reported strategy use and observational data, which may introduce biases or overestimate learner engagement (Febrianti, 2021; Chiu, 2019). Furthermore, the majority of research focuses on short-term interventions, leaving the long-term sustainability of speaking skill improvements underexplored. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, standardized assessment frameworks, and cross-cultural comparisons to provide a more robust evidence base.

The implications for practice are significant. Educators should design task sequences that balance linguistic challenge with achievable goals, integrate explicit strategy instruction, and leverage technology to create authentic, low-anxiety speaking environments. Curriculum developers must account for motivational and contextual variables, ensuring that tasks are culturally relevant, socially engaging, and technologically accessible. Teacher training programs should emphasize the interconnectedness of cognitive, affective, and social factors in speaking instruction, equipping practitioners with tools to support diverse learner populations.

5. Conclusion

Enhancing EFL learners' speaking skills necessitates an integrative pedagogical framework that combines task-based instruction, strategic learning, and motivational support. Empirical evidence demonstrates that structured, meaningful tasks facilitate fluency, confidence, and communicative competence, while strategy instruction empowers learners to self-regulate and optimize their performance. Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, critically mediates engagement and task persistence, and technology-mediated interventions offer valuable opportunities for autonomous practice and peer collaboration. Despite methodological heterogeneity and contextual constraints, the synthesis affirms the efficacy of combined task-based and strategic approaches for improving EFL speaking outcomes. Future research should explore longitudinal effects, scalability, and culturally responsive adaptations to ensure sustainable, equitable improvements in oral proficiency. By applying these insights, educators and policymakers can design evidence-based interventions that address the multifaceted challenges of speaking instruction, ultimately fostering more competent, confident, and motivated language learners.

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