The Effect of Incorporating Task - Based Language Learning in Teaching the Methodology Course on the English Oral Performance and Speaking Confidence Perception of the General Diploma Students at the College of Education

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Abstract

This study explored the effect of incorporating task – based learning in teaching the methodology course on the English oral performance and speaking confidence perception of the general diploma students at the college of education . To achieve this objective, a checklist of the English oral performance skills was defined. An oral performance test accompanied by an assessment rubric as well as a speaking confidence perception inventory were administered. Two groups of the general diploma students were selected for experimentation. Twenty one students representing the experimental group studied the methodology course while incorporating task based learning techniques. Eighteen students representing the control group studied the same course content using the lecture technique. Data were analyzed . A correlation analysis between variables indicated that there were statistically significant differences between mean scores of the experimental and the control group subjects in both the oral performance test and the speaking confidence perception inventory, favoring the experimental group. These results supports the effectiveness of incorporating task based learning in teaching English as a foreign language.

Key words: Task based learning – Oral performance – speaking confidence.

مستخلص البحث

أثر دمج تعلم اللغة القائم على المهام في تدريس مقرر طرق تدريس اللغة الانجليزية على الأداء الشفهي و على مفهوم التحدث بثقة لدى طلاب الدبلوم العام في كلية التربية

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هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى تعرف أثر دمج تعلم اللغة القائم على المهام في تدريس مقرر طرق تدريس اللغة الانجليزية على الأداء الشفهي و على مفهوم التحدث بثقة لدى طلاب الدبلوم العام في التربية. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف تم اختيار مجموعتين: إحداهما تجريبية، والأخرى ضابطة. تم تدريس مقرر طرق التدريس للمجموعة التجريبية و عددها(٢١) طالبا وفقا لاستراتيجيات تعلم اللغة القائم على المهام و المجموعة الضابطة و عددها(١٨) طالبا درست المحتوى نفسه وفقا للطريقة المعتادة في تدريس المحاضرة. وقد تم إعداد مهام للطلاب، واختبار لقياس الأداء الشفهي ومقياس لتقدير مفهوم التحدث بثقة. كما استخدم اختبار ت في تحليل نتائج الدراسة. وقد أشارت النتائج إلى أن استخدام تعلم اللغة القائم على المهام في تدريس مقرر طرق تدريس اللغة الانجليزية قد أسهم في تحسن الأداء الشفهي وفي تنمية مفهوم التحدث بثقة لدى طلاب المجموعة التجريبية

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعلم اللغة القائم على المهام – الأداء الشفهي – مفهوم التحدث بثقة

The Effect of Incorporating Task - Based Language Learning Techniques in Teaching the Methodology Course on the English Oral Performance and Speaking Confidence Perception of the General Diploma Students at the College of Education

Introduction:

The importance of English language is evident not only in the number of people who speak the language but also in what the language is used for. English is a worldwide and important language today. Its use is evident everywhere from international academic conferences to news reports to popular children games and programs. English is used for communication not only between native speakers and nonnative speakers of English but also between nonnative speakers themselves.

In spite of this importance of using English in many aspects of everyday life, the questions, 'Are graduates majored in English capable of using English in communication? Do they have speaking confidence perception that helps them speak English confidently? are still fuzzy.

There are many arguments and studies that support the low levels of Arab students in achieving communicative competence in the English language (Ghanem,1983; Seddik,1999; Al Khuli, 2000; Almaiman, 2005; Torky, 2006; AL- Jarf, 2009; Alsamadani, 2010) . In other words, the teaching of English language falls short of fulfilling its main goal: communication. Even after the learners finish their university studies, they still have not the confidence of using English in communication. Their output in the language is limited to writing answers for some texts and producing grammatically correct sentences. The communicative output of the English language should involve more than the writing activities. It

should involve - as Taylor (2003) states- expressing ideas, emotions, feelings, appropriateness and adaptability.

In spite of the fact that success in learning a language is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a correct oral performance in the target language (Burkart & Sheppard , 2004) , teaching the speaking skills is still a major problem both in schools and universities. Teaching speaking needs practice and practice. Developing advanced communication skills begins with simple interactions. Communication skills can be practiced every day in learning/teaching settings that range from the academic to the social. Each time the instructor gives his/her learners opportunities to practice the target language, learners find themselves progressing in communication.

On the other hand, many language learners lack confidence in their ability to participate successfully in oral interaction. They are hesitant to speak because they do not feel their input would be worthwhile; or they are afraid of making mistakes. Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) state that confidence is a reflection of the learner' ability and motivation because confidence grows as student ability increases and anxiety decreases, thus stimulating both motivation and ability. They add that confidence is the result of the cumulative experiences of the student, both in and out of the classroom. It improves or declines as the consequence of positive or negative experiences that motivate or de-motivate the students . As a result, EFL teachers have the unique opportunity to improve student confidence through fostering desirable student goals, stimulating active learning, and leading dialog about the purposes of learning.

It is apparent, therefore, that learning to speak is a lengthy and complex process. Many language learners regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language. These learners define

fluency as the ability to converse with others, much more than the ability to read, write, or comprehend oral language. They regard speaking as the most important skill they can acquire, and they assess their progress in terms of their accomplishments in spoken communication.

On the other hand, many foreign language instructors realize that oral performance represented in the speaking skill is the most difficult one among the other language skills because it - as Baily (2005) states- involves three areas of knowledge:

- Mechanics (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary): Using the right words in the right order with the correct pronunciation
- Functions (transaction and interaction): Knowing when clarity of message is essential (transaction/information exchange) and when precise understanding is not required (interaction/relationship building)
- Social and cultural rules and norms (turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pauses between speakers, relative roles of participants): Understanding how to take into account who is speaking to whom, in what circumstances, about what, and for what reason.

All of these requirements are essential for the development of the speaking skill. Probably for this reason this skill is frequently neglected or often conducted poorly in the context of teaching English as a foreign language. Teaching English as a foreign language in non-native context is basically dependent upon drilling patterns, reading passages, writing activities and answering questions. All these activities are controlled by the instructor, and students speak very little English.

Learning to speak is more effectively achieved by speaking than by listening or reading and writing. Teaching practices based

on such traditional methodologies have their impact on this type of output. Swain (2005) confirms that the most tenable argument suggests that the philosophy, assumptions and traditional classroom methodologies employed in language arts education have failed because they have been prescriptive and corrective and have focused too much on language structure rather than on communicative competence. In other words, the main purpose of the language teaching course, i.e., developing communication skills, is unfortunately, overlooked.

Influenced by the social and cognitive sciences, there is a new vision of teaching and learning which has emerged to cope with the challenges of education in modern age. Corbett and Kearns (2003) state that "the educational system is gradually adopting a greater focus on learning rather than on teaching and the developments of learning theory have changed the perception of the learner and our understanding of learning". Similarly, as it is assured by Duckworth, (2006), cognitive and constructivist perspectives on learning emphasize the importance of understanding the learner's perspective, and how learners' interpret information. Constructivists, in particular believe that knowledge does not exist outside of the human mind. The role of instructor moves from the transmission of information to helping students build bridges by linking new ideas to prior knowledge and experiences. The learning paradigm embodies a constructivist view of learning, and from this perspective the instructor's role is quite different . Although constructivist instruction is not away from criticism, yet it encompasses strategies that "ideally include active engagement of learners in authentic contexts and activities, instruction that is personally relevant to the learner, opportunities for collaboration and engagement in communities of practice, time for reflection, potential for creativity and instructional strategies

including nurturing the birth of new knowledge; modeling; coaching; articulation; and exploration" (Dick 1996).

Real life experiences have also proved that human beings learn well when they are involved in the activities they are interested in. Students are not away from such real experiences. Students do not learn by attending classes where teachers fill in their minds with information while they are taking notes, but by becoming involved in the content to be learned. Prensky (2001) echoing the views of Dewey (1928) and Lindeman (1926) among others, asserts that people learning by doing and experience is the basis of all learning. The link between learning and experience is a recurring theme in learning theories.

Task-based learning is a natural extension of the constructivist and situated approaches to learning. The essence of task-based learning is to actively engage learners in authentic learning activities and to put learners in the kinds of situations in which they need to use these skills. One of the best ways to understand something is to get ones hands on it and actually experiment with it. Teachers of English should keep their students on task for as much class time as possible, actively involved in using English in both oral and written activities. As educators, we know that the more students participate in the learning process, the more they learn. And the more our students use the foreign language, the more they retain and improve their language skills. Lee (2000) states that task based instruction provides comprehensible input and promotes communicative interaction among the learners using the target language.

Many students - the researcher believes - want to participate in class activities. However, they lack self confidence. Some of them refrain from participating and expressing themselves because of their fear of making mistakes in front of their colleagues.

Confidence is one of the most important components in learning a new language, especially English. It is all about believing in your abilities to understand and articulate English well. According to the researcher's belief, and not assurance, task-based learning may offer students an opportunity to develop speaking confidence. The students' primary focus while doing a task is the task itself while language is the instrument which they use to complete the task. Thus, a language task is an activity in which students are involved in using the language to achieve a specific outcome. The tasks, as Krashen and McField (2005) state, "generate their own language and create an opportunity for language acquisition". Thus, if we can take the focus away from form and structures we can develop our students' ability to do things in English. That is not to say that there will be no attention paid to accuracy. In each task, work on language is there and feedback and language focus have their places in the lesson plans. Teachers are responsible for enriching their students' language when they see it is necessary. But students should be helped and given the chance to use English in the language classroom in a natural context.

Background of the Problem

Among the four language skills, speaking is increasingly important in second/foreign language settings. However, it is difficult for students to communicate in English effectively. Students want or need to communicate in English but they cannot perform the task successfully due to such possible reasons as lack of confidence, tension, shyness and/or lack of effective communication skills in English. Most students finished their college English courses as good test-takers, but poor communicators . It is true that English is learned as a foreign language (EFL) to college graduates ; and EFL graduates rarely speak English in their daily life. Nevertheless, in order to,

for example, take part in international seminars, or present research papers at international conferences, situations which students may eventually encounter in their academic and/or working lives, they do need to be able to give oral presentations and discuss with other people in English. To sum up, it is hypothesized in light of what has previously mentioned that task based learning is an approach which provides relevant and appropriate techniques in teaching English as they engage the students in the process of constructing their own learning rather than passively receiving information which may or may not have meaning for them. Therefore, being able to speak English efficiently has a particular importance to Saudi university students and thus also to the L2 learning and teaching processes. Continual attention must therefore be given to the processes of learning and teaching speaking for EFL university students .

At the first meeting of teaching the methodology course to the general diploma students , the researcher – as usual- tried to check the students' communicative competence. Students were divided into cooperative learning structures and some discussion tasks about what they expected to learn in the methodology course were assigned. Many students refrained to participate and when they were encouraged to participate, they told the researcher that the teaching programs they received at the underground level did not qualify them to use the language communicatively. Students claimed that the techniques followed in teaching the English courses to them at the English department were test driven. Students were encouraged to learn what will come on exams. Learning for its own sake, or sharing one's knowledge with others in the class had no place in the lecture hall. They also claimed that the majority of the students in the lecture hall were passive

recipients and they rarely took the initiative for participation. Thus, teaching English courses was away from its specific objective-communication. English courses, thus, suffered from the test-driven mania, and students were required to score well on the discrete-item, multiple-choice, reading-oriented English exams. Teaching, thus, was obsessed with the written language to the exclusion of speech, and concentrated all its attention on the rote-learning of grammatical rules and their application to isolated sentences.

Such techniques of teaching English are incapable of preparing learners to be competent communicators of the language. Thus, the need for language teaching that encourages transformation of knowledge within the learner rather than the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student is needed. It is hypothesized, accordingly, that incorporating some task based language learning techniques in teaching the methodology course may improve and promote the students oral performance in English.

Statement of the Problem:

The problem of the study - in light of what has been mentioned above in the 'background of the problem' - was concentrated on the fact that the diploma students at the college of education were inept in the speaking skill and suffer from the ability to express themselves orally in English . Besides, they lack speaking confidence perception. Thus, the need for language teaching that encourages learners to use the language communicatively is needed. Teaching English should encourage learners to participate actively in the language activities. Learning English should be more self-directed rather than teacher directed. It is hypothesized, accordingly, that incorporating some task based

language learning techniques in teaching the methodology course may improve and promote both the students oral performance in English and their confidence perception.

Purpose of the Research:

This research tried to experiment with incorporating some task based techniques in teaching the methodology course to the general diploma students in an attempt to find out their effects on their oral performance in English as well as their speaking confidence perception.

Significance of the research:

This research is significant because it is designed to interest and serve a number of people involved in language teaching as follows:

The general diploma students:

Since most of the general diploma students in this study are teachers of English this research provides them with some task based techniques which they can make use of in their teaching. Besides, it gives them some variations of these techniques that help them modify them according to the content they teach.

Pre-service Teacher Trainer:

This research is helpful to the pre-service teacher trainer as it presents a theoretical framework as well as some samples of task based techniques which should be included in the teaching practice program presented to the pre-service teachers of English in order to be familiar with this approach and in order to incorporate them in their teaching practice. Moreover, the pre-service teacher trainer can ask the trainee to devise their own activity based language techniques.

Research Questions:

This research attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the English oral performance required of the general diploma students?
2. What is the effect of incorporating some task based language learning techniques in teaching the methodology course on the general diploma students' English oral performance?
3. What is the effect of incorporating some task based language learning techniques in teaching the methodology course on the general diploma students' speaking confidence perception?

Hypotheses of the research:

To answer the question of the study, it was hypothesized that:

1- There were no statistically significant differences between mean scores of the experimental and the control group subjects on the post-testing of the English oral performance test utilized in the study.

2- There were no statistically significant differences between mean scores of the experimental and the control group subjects on the post-testing of the speaking confidence perception inventory utilized in the study.

Limitations of the research:

This research was limited to the general diploma students at the first semester of the academic year (2009/2010) at the College of Education,. The research was also limited to the ten chapters to be studied in the methodology course. These chapters were incorporated with the task based techniques taught to the experimental group. Testing was also limited to the oral

performance test and the speaking confidence perception inventory utilized in the study.

Research Tools:

1. A checklist for the oral performance required of the general diploma students.
2. An oral performance test accompanied by rating rubric devised by the researcher.
3. A speaking confidence perception inventory devised by the researcher.

The Experimental Design:

This research adopted the quasi – experimental design. The pretest-posttest control-group design was used in this research where the experimental and the control groups were treated as nearly alike as possible except for the treatment variable represented in the task based learning techniques corporate in teaching the chapters to the experimental group. The score results of this study were also correlated to the progress of students before and after teaching the selected chapters incorporated with the task based learning techniques regarding the students' oral English performance and their confidence perception.

Definition of terms:

The language task:

Wills (2001) defines the language task as "a classroom undertaking .....where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome".

Ellis (2003) defines the instructional task as "some kind of activity designed to engage the learner in using the language

communicatively or reflectively in order to arrive at an outcome other than that of learning a specified feature of the L2.

Nunan (2004) defines a language task as " a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing the grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form."

In this research, the language task is an activity where the English is used by students for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome such as sorting, rearranging ideas, making posters ....etc.

Task -Based learning:

It is a method of instruction in the field of language acquisition and learning. It focuses on the students doing meaningful tasks using the target language. Assessment is primarily based on task outcome (i.e.: the appropriate completion of tasks) rather than simply accuracy of language forms. This makes TBLL especially popular for developing target language fluency and student confidence (Frost, 2004).

"Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an approach which offers students material which they have to actively engage in the processing of in order to achieve a goal or complete a task. TBLT seeks to develop students' interlanguage through providing a task and then using language to solve it" (Skehan, 1998).

Nunan (2004) defines a task based language learning as " an approach which seeks to allow students to work somewhat at their own pace and within their own level and area of interest to process and restructure their interlanguage. It moves away from a

prescribed developmental sequence and introduces learner freedom and autonomy into the learning process. The teacher's role is also modified to that of helper".

Oral performance:

The researcher defines oral performance as ' the ability to provide information and give explanations orally to the topics and subjects studied in the methodology course with acceptable degree of fluency and accuracy'.

Speaking Confidence perception:

The researcher defines " speaking confidence perception" as " one's belief in his ability to express himself comfortably in English".

Theoretical Framework

1. Oral Performance:

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Brown, 2007). Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable. Language functions (or patterns) that tend to recur in certain discourse situations (e.g., declining an invitation or requesting time off from work), can be identified and charted (Burns &Joyce, 1997). Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary (linguistic competence), but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language (sociolinguistic competence). Finally, speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions different from written language (Burns & Joyce, 1997; Carter &

McCarthy, 1995; Cohen, 1996). A good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

A speaker's skills and speech habits have an impact on the success of any exchange (Van Duzer, 1997). Speakers must be able to anticipate and then produce the expected patterns of specific discourse situations. They must also manage discrete elements such as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, or redirecting (Burns & Joyce, 1997). The learner must also choose the correct vocabulary to describe the item sought, rephrase or emphasize words to clarify the description if the clerk does not understand, and use appropriate facial expressions to indicate satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service. Other skills and knowledge that instruction might address include the following: producing the sounds, stress patterns, rhythmic structures, and intonations of the language; using grammar structures accurately; assessing characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge or shared points of reference, status and power relations of participants, interest levels, or differences in perspectives; selecting vocabulary that is understandable and appropriate for the audience, the topic being discussed, and the setting in which the speech act occurs; applying strategies to enhance comprehensibility, such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing, or checking for listener comprehension; using gestures or body language; and paying attention to the success of the interaction and adjusting components of speech such as vocabulary, rate of speech, and complexity of grammar structures to maximize listener comprehension and involvement (Brown, 2007).

The difficulty of teaching the English oral performance lies in the fact that communicating in English has many purposes. Unless teachers and learners become familiar with the different purposes of oral communication , oral performance canot take place.

Kingen (2000) analyzed the speaking purposes into twelve categories as follows:

1. **Personal** : expressing personal feelings, opinions, beliefs and ideas.
2. **Descriptive** : describing someone or something, real or imagined.
3. **Narrative** : creating and telling stories or chronologically sequenced events.
4. **Instructive**: giving instructions or providing directions designed to produce an outcome.
5. **Questioning**: asking questions to obtain information.
6. **Comparative**: comparing two or more objects, people, ideas, or opinions to make judgments about them.
7. **Imaginative**: expressing mental images of people, places, events, and objects.
8. **Predictive**: predicting possible future events.
9. **Interpretative**: exploring meanings, creating hypothetical deductions, and considering inferences.
10. **Persuasive**: changing others' opinions, attitudes, or points of view, or influencing the behavior of others in some way.
11. **Explanatory**: explaining, clarifying, and supporting ideas and opinions.
12. **Informative**-sharing information with others.

In the communicative model of language teaching, instructors are responsible for helping their students express all these speaking purposes by providing authentic practice that prepares students for real-life communication situations.

Students often think that the ability to speak a language is the product of language learning, but speaking is also a crucial part of the language learning process. Effective instructors teach students

speaking strategies - using minimal responses, recognizing scripts, and using language to talk about language - that they can use to help themselves expand their knowledge of the language and their confidence in using it. These instructors help students learn to speak so that the students can use speaking to learn.

2. The relationship between speaking a foreign language and speaking confidence:

To many EFL learners, speaking a foreign language can be really intimidating . Learners know that they are probably making mistakes. They are worried that they might say something wrong in front of their colleagues and instructors. It is hard for some learners to make themselves speak when they do not feel confident. But, how can instructors help learners to become more confident with speaking English? Practicing speaking will make you a better speaker. Thus, instructors should think of some speaking tasks and activities that help learners be involved in speaking. Practice helps learners gain confidence.

3. Task –Based Language Learning:

As early as the 1970s, the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach became popular among second and foreign language acquisition researchers and teachers (Skehan, 2003). During the 1980s, "task" replaced the term "communicative activity." The task-based language teaching (TBLT) became a new teaching method that has been broadly adopted in language classroom. As with content-based instruction, the task-based approach aimed to provide learners with a natural context for language use. As learners work to complete a task, they have abundant opportunity to interact with each other as well as the teacher and the content. Such interaction is thought to facilitate language acquisition, as learners have to work to understand each other and to express their own meaning. By so doing, they have to

Feedback on the learners' performance at the reporting stage may also be appropriate at this point.

When is an activity not a task?

Task-based teaching - as Wills (2008) states is about creating opportunities for meaning-focused language use. In other words, learners doing tasks will not just be:

- speaking to practise a new structure e.g. doing a drill or enacting a dialogue or asking and answering questions using the 'new' patterns;
- or writing to display their control of certain language items,

These are primarily form-focused activities, designed to practise language items that have been presented earlier. There is a place for form-focused activities in task-based learning (TBL), but activities such as these are not tasks. Learners doing tasks (i.e. focusing on meanings) will be making free use of whatever English they can recall to express the things that they really want to say or write in the process of achieving the task goal.

What kind of activity is a task?

Willis and Willis (2007:12-14) offer the following criteria in the form of questions. 'The more confidently you can answer yes to each of these questions, the more task-like the activity.

1. Will the activity engage learners' interest?
2. Is there a primary focus on meaning?
3. Is there a goal or an outcome?
4. Is success judged in terms of outcome?
5. Is completion a priority?
6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?'

Thus, task based language learning is based on the development of communicative language teaching and learning. It not only focuses on "learning by doing things " but also doing things meaningfully. The aim of the tasks utilized in the learning / teaching process is to integrate all four skills and to provide opportunities

for the learners to practise the language in meaningful context. Tasks, therefore, should be designed in a way that allows students to engage in the authentic, practical and functional use of language for meaningful purposes.

Review of literature

Much literature has been documented to support the value of task based language learning techniques in language learning and teaching. Here are some (and not all) of the previous studies that dealt with the plausible relationship between task based language learning and teaching English as a second or foreign language.

Carless (2005), in his study entitled "The Suitability of Task-Based Approaches for Secondary Schools: Perspectives from Hong Kong" pointed out that task-based teaching has a high profile within contemporary ELT. Carless analyzed the suitability of task-based teaching for Hong Kong secondary schools. The research method for the study involved semi-structured interviews with 11 secondary school teachers and 10 teacher educators based on purposive sampling. Carless concluded that the use of task based activities showed significant results in teaching the oral skills as well as reading and writing.

Mc Donough & Mackey (2000) conducted a study to investigate the effect of some communicative tasks on students' turn taking and negotiation skills. The study consisted of eight intermediate FL learners in a high school in Thailand who carried out tasks in three fifty minute class session over a one-week period. Nine communicative tasks were designed to target both form and meaning and a small scale study was carried out to test these tasks. The tasks selected were jigsaw tasks in which learners worked in pairs to determine how two pictures of a similar scene were different, information-gap tasks in which one learner described a

picture while another learner drew it, and story sequencing tasks in which learners interacted orally to create a story by putting pictures in order. The results showed that the tasks were effective in promoting skills related to negotiation and recasts. It was concluded that tasks can be designed to promote conversation interaction involving specific linguistic forms. Such tasks provide learners with the opportunity to focus on particular linguistic and discourse structures while being involved in meaning - based communication.

In Egypt, Torky (2006) conducted a study with the aim of investigating the effectiveness of a task- based instruction program in developing the English language speaking skills of secondary stage students. The study provides evidence for the effectiveness of using communicative interactive tasks in developing first year secondary students' speaking skills. These tasks can increase their motivation and positive attitudes towards learning to speak. Moreover, they help them take risks. As a result, students' ability to speak fluently and correctly increases.

In Thailand, McDonough also (2007) conducted a study entitled " Teachers' and Learners' Reactions to a Task-Based EFL Course in Thailand" in which he demonstrated that although many studies have described the L2 learning opportunities created by individual tasks, considerably less research has investigated task-based syllabi and courses . This case study investigated teachers' and learners' reactions to a task-based EFL course at a Thai university. A team of Thai EFL teachers created the syllabus, which was pilot tested and revised before being introduced universitywide. For this study, the teachers' and learners' impressions about the course over a 12-month period were collected during the pilot testing and revision phases. Their reactions were identified using a qualitative analysis of oral and

written data elicited through (a) task evaluations, (b) learning notebooks, (c) observations, (d) course evaluations, and (e) interviews. The findings indicated that, despite initial reservations, the task based course encouraged learners to become more independent and addressed their real world academic needs.

Dinapoli (2000) in a paper entitled " Promoting Discourse with Task-Based Scenario Interaction" presented at the International Conference on Language for Specific Purposes assured that tasks have become an essential feature of second language (L2) learning in recent years. Tasks range from getting learners to repeat linguistic elements satisfactorily to having them perform in "free" production. Along this task-based continuum, task-based scenario interaction lies at the point midway between controlled and semi-controlled extremes. This paper provides examples of how linguistic and pragmatic elements can be developed in natural discourse using a task-based system in the context of scenarios. The paper focuses on language for specific purposes (English for Tourism courses at the tertiary level), it is suggested that these methods can also be used in second language education. In second language learning, the quality and quantity of the learners' exposure to the target language is not nearly as intense as it was for first language acquisition. Planned and unplanned role-playing are explored as pedagogic tools, as well as how space for these devices can be created in the L2 classroom by inducing spontaneity and the use of tutorials.

Bruton (2005) in a study entitled "Task-Based Language Teaching: For the State Secondary FL Classroom?" tried to evaluate the applicability of task-based language teaching (TBLT) to State secondary foreign language classes. Bruton presented a good description for the task based approach and he concluded that

tasks are assessed as the basis for syllabus and then as the basis for method.

De Ridder, Vangehuchten, and Gomez (2007) conducted a study entitled " Enhancing Automaticity through Task-Based Language Learning" believed that task-based learning seems not incompatible with automaticity either, since it incorporates activities that respect "transfer-appropriate processing and other positive features of communicative practices" (Segalowitz 2003: 402) and thus allows students to creatively apply previously acquired knowledge in new communicative contexts. In order to test this assumption, an experiment was conducted at Antwerp University with a group of intermediate-level students of Spanish. Two groups were evaluated: an experimental group and a control group. The control group attended a traditional communicative course, whereas the experimental group's course had a task-based component built into it. The results of the experiment indicate that the experimental group outperformed the control group for automaticity.

Iwashita (2003) in a study entitled " Negative Feedback and Positive Evidence in Task-Based Interaction: Differential Effects on L2 Development" examined the role of task-based conversation in second language (L2) grammatical development, focusing on the short-term effects of both negative feedback and positive evidence on the acquisition of two Japanese structures. The data were drawn from 55 L2 learners of Japanese at a beginning level of proficiency in an Australian tertiary institution. Five different types of interactional moves made by native speaker interlocutors during task-based interaction were identified, by way of which learners received implicit negative feedback and positive evidence about the two target structures. The relative frequency of each interactional move type was calculated, and associated changes in

the learners' performance on immediate and delayed posttests were examined. It was found that, although native speaker interactional moves containing positive evidence about the two target structures were 10 times more frequent during task-based language learning than those containing implicit negative feedback, only learners who had an above-average score on the pretest benefited from the positive evidence provided. Implicit negative feedback, on the other hand, had beneficial effects on short-term development of the grammatical targets regardless of the learner's current mastery of the target structures.

Framed under a cognitive approach to task-based L2 learning, De la Fuente (2006) in her study entitled " Classroom L2 Vocabulary Acquisition: Investigating the Role of Pedagogical Tasks and Form-Focused Instruction" used a pedagogical approach to investigate the effects of three vocabulary lessons (one traditional and two task-based) on acquisition of basic meanings, forms and morphological aspects of Spanish words. Quantitative analysis performed on the data suggested that the type of pedagogical approach had no impact on immediate retrieval (after treatment) of targeted word forms, but it had an impact on long-term retrieval (one week) of targeted forms. In particular, task-based lessons seemed to be more effective than the Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) lesson.

Lee (2002) in her study entitled "Enhancing Learners' Communication Skills through Synchronous Electronic Interaction and Task-Based Instruction" discussed a pilot study using synchronous electronic chats combined with task-based instruction (TBI) to enhance learners' communication skills. TBI focused on the two-way exchange of information on real-life topics. Results showed that computer-mediated communication using less

structure-controlled but more open-ended exchange had a significant impact on the process of language learning.

Bantis (2008) in a study entitled " Using Task Based Writing Instruction to Provide Differentiated Instruction for English Language Learners" investigated the impact of task based writing instruction (TBWI) on English language acquisition and differentiated instruction for minority language students during the Independent Work Time instructional component of the Open Court Reading program. One teacher and 10 third grade students (8-9 years old) participated in this mixed methods study. TBWI was a platform for communicative language teaching. Together they recast the students' written interlanguage embedded within the writing samples into standard English. The study took place after school, 45 minutes per day for one month, resulting in 35 transcribed writing conferences, writing samples, and interviews. Results indicated that TBWI proved to be a useful vehicle for differentiated instruction, constructivist pedagogy, and principles of second language acquisition to address the diverse needs of second language learners.

Mann (2006) in a study entitled "A Task-Based Approach to the Development of the Oral Skills of International Law Students" provided an account of a study which set out to explore methodological issues associated with the development of oral skills on a Bar Vocational Course at the University of the West of England, Bristol, UK. The study involved overseas law students who were exposed to traditional teaching approaches involving teacher-led drills and exercises and to a task-based approach which placed an emphasis on message conveyance and learner-owned language. The study indicated that the task-based approach was capable of providing learners with great benefits in terms of language skills.

From the previously-mentioned survey of the studies dealt with the task based approach, the benefits of implementing this approach in course design or in course instruction are great and prominent. Again, this survey has also revealed that although many studies have described the L2 learning opportunities created by task based instruction, less research has investigated the effectiveness of task-based instruction in developing the oral performance of L2 learners.

Instrumentation

1. The Methodology course content to be taught to general diploma students at the college of education:

The following is a list of the topics included in the methodology course taught to general diploma students:

Chapter one:

- Goals of teaching English a a foreign language.
- Language acquisition and language learning
- Principles of teaching English as a foreign language.

Chapter two:

- Approaches and Methods of TEFL

Chapter 3:

- Teaching Pronunciation

Chapter four:

- Teaching vocabulary

Chapter five:

- Teaching grammar

Chapter six:

- Teaching listening

Chapter seven:

- Teaching speaking

Chapter eight:

- Teaching reading

Chapter nine:

- Teaching writing

Chapter ten:

- Classroom practices

2. **Selecting the tasks to be incorporated in teaching the methodology course:**

In addition to the pertinent literature review, content analysis of the methodology course was done. Accordingly, some tasks were designed by the researcher to be incorporated in teaching the course. Here are examples of these tasks (For all tasks and task procedure, see the appendices of the study).

1. **Listing**: the outcome is a list.
2. **Ordering and sorting**: it involves sequencing, ranking, categorizing or classifying items.
3. **Comparing**: it involves finding differences or similarities in information.
4. **Problem-solving**: it demands intellectual activity as in puzzles or logic problems.
5. **Sharing personal experiences**: they allow learners to talk freely about themselves and share experiences.
6. **Creative tasks**: projects which may involve various types of tasks.

- Where is the .....
- Can you find.....

a. **Defining task objectives:**

The behavioral objectives of each task were defined according to the content to be taught . For more details, see the appendices.

3. **Deciding on the teaching model utilized in teaching the program units:**

Since the core of a task based lesson is, as the name suggests, the task, all language components used are deemphasized during the task itself, in order to get students to focus on the task. To design a task-based lesson, the teacher should consider the components of a lesson that has a task as its main component. There are various designs that have been proposed for a task-based lesson (e.g. Estaire and Zanon 1994; Lee 2000; Prabhu 1987; Skehan 1996; Willis 1996). However, they all have in common three principal phases: a pre-task phase, a during task phase, and a post task phase. Ellis (2006) states that only the 'during task' phase is obligatory in task-based teaching. Thus, minimally, a task-based lesson consists of the students just performing a task. Options selected from the 'pre-task' or 'post-task' phases are non-obligatory but can serve a crucial role in ensuring that the task performance is maximally effective for language development. The following model was adopted in teaching the task based lessons in this research:

a. <u>The pre task phase</u>:

In the pre-task, the teacher introduces and practices items needed for task completion. In other words, the teacher presents what will be expected of the students in the task phase.

b. <u>The during task phase</u>:

In the during task phase, the students perform the task, typically in small groups, although this is dependent on the type of activity. And unless the teacher plays a particular role in the task, then the teacher's role is typically limited to one of an observer or counselor—thus the reason for it being a more student-centered methodology.

c. The post task phase:

While the task is being carried out, the facilitator may wish to make notes on the language : could any vocabulary be added ? Were there any structures that caused misunderstanding or confusion? Were there any phrases which could have been expressed differently ? Could any of the language have been used to better effect e.g. made less abrupt, more persuasive etc.? After the task has been completed, participants may wish to look at the material again to gain a better understanding of the language: to look at structures, difficult/unusual vocabulary etc.

4. Feedback and evaluation

The facilitator may wish to conduct a feedback session to discuss the success of the task and consider suggestions for improving it. Participants may wish to discuss such issues as working together, performing in a group, reactions to the topic, amount of language input, things they enjoyed doing, things they didn't enjoy and so on. Evaluation of the task will provide useful information for facilitators when planning further tasks.

A checklist of the oral performance skills required of the general diploma students

A checklist of the oral performance skills required of the diploma students was devised in light of pertinent literature as well as the objectives of teaching English to college students majoring in English. The checklist included skills related to linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, discourse, and fluency. All these skills are supposed to be assessed by the oral performance test utilized in the study through an assessment rubric. For more details of the oral performance skills checklist, see the appendices.

The EFL Oral Performance Test Utilized in the Study

1. The main aim of the test:

The test aimed at assessing the effect of using task -based techniques in teaching the methodology course on the diploma students' oral performance as well as their speaking confidence perception.

2. Description of the oral performance test:

2.1General Directions for the examinees:

In this test, you will be able to demonstrate how well you speak English. The test will last approximately ten minutes. You will be asked questions by an interviewer. You are encouraged to answer the questions as completely as possible in the time allowed. The questions on the test are directly related to the lessons you have studied. They are designed to tell the raters about your oral language ability. The raters will evaluate how well you communicate in English.

As you speak, your voice will be recorded. Your score for the test will be based on your speech sample. Be sure to speak loudly enough for the machine to record clearly what you say.

2.2 Directions for the examiner:

start the tape recorder so that it will record what the examinee says.

Do not stop the tape recorder while it is running and recording at any time during the test.

If you have a problem with the tape recorder during the test, notify the test supervisor immediately.

This Speaking test is divided into four parts as given below:

Part 1: General Introduction (1 minute)

The examiner converses with the candidate. Simple warm up questions based on the candidate's name, his likes and dislikes as in the following short interview:

Interview

Now, start the test by asking the examinee some questions about himself. These questions will not be scored.

Good morning

My name is ..... What's your name?

Are you happy with your school?

Do you like your teachers?

What subject do you like best?

Part 2: Mini Presentation (3 minutes)

In this section the examiner gives each candidate the choice to pick up a a Cue Card with a topic written on it.

The candidate is given 1 minute to prepare. The examiner gives the candidate a sheet of paper and a pencil to help him organize his ideas.

Please note that candidates are not allowed to write full length answers. They may jot down points only in the sheets given by the examiner. Therefore, pencil and paper should be provided on the table. After one minute, each student will be given 2 minutes each to present his/her ideas.

In case, a student is unable to speak during /for the allotted time, the examiner may ask some rounding off questions.

Cue card # 1

Describe a game you like, you should say:

- its name
- How you play it.
- Why you like it.

Part 3: Discussion (3 minutes)

The examiner starts discussing with the examinee some questions related to the topic on the cue card.

What are the popular games in your country?
Which of them do you like most?
Why do you like these games?
Do you have free time to play theses games?
Who do you play these games with?

Part 4: Closing: (1 minute)

The closing is for 1 minute duration only. In case a student has not been able to speak or has been unable to speak owing to nervousness or any other factor, then, the examiner may use the 1 minute to give a fresh opportunity to that student.

3. Validity of the test:

The validity of the test was judged by some jury members who were experienced in the field of TEFL.

4. Test Raters

As Lee (2001) point out, in language performance assessment involving multiple raters, the "score adjudication process" is often necessary to deal with the apparent intolerable level of rating discrepancies among raters. Two qualified EFL Ph.D faculty at the college of Education were selected to be the raters in the present study.

5. Inter-rater reliability

To achieve inter-rater reliability, each of the two raters in this study was given two pre-recorded samples of speech produced by four diploma students. Each rater then was asked to score the recorded speech in accordance with the scoring criteria that would

be used in scoring the experimental and the control groups testing. Utilizing Cohen's Kappa, 'inter-rater reliability' was established (0.70).

6. The scoring technique:

Studying different scoring rubrics used in scoring oral performance test , the researcher designed the following rubric to be used in scoring the control and experimental group students' oral performance.

The Speaking Rubric

7. Administration time:

Category	Needs improvement (1 point)	Satisfactory (2 points)	Good (3 points)	Excellent (4 points)
Grammar	Student was difficult to understand and had a hard time communicating their ideas and responses because of grammar mistakes.	Student was able to express their ideas and responses adequately but often displayed inconsistencies with their sentence structure and tenses.	Student was able to express their ideas and responses fairly well but makes mistakes with their tenses, however is able to correct themselves	Student was able to express their ideas and responses with ease in proper sentence structure and tenses.
Pronunciation	Student was difficult to understand, quiet in speaking, unclear in pronunciation.	Student was slightly unclear with pronunciation at times, but generally is fair.	Pronunciation was good and did not interfere with communication	Pronunciation was very clear and easy to understand.
Vocabulary	Student had inadequate vocabulary words to express his/her ideas properly, which hindered the students in responding.	Student was able to use broad vocabulary words but was lacking, making him/her repetitive and cannot expand on his/her ideas.	Student utilized the words learned in class, in an accurate manner for the situation given.	Rich, precise and impressive usage of vocabulary words learned in and beyond of class.
Comprehension	Student had difficulty understanding the questions and topics that were being discussed.	Student fairly grasped some of the questions and topics that were being discussed.	Student was able to comprehend and respond to most of the questions and topics that were being discussed.	Student was able to comprehend and respond to all of the questions and the topics that were being discussed with ease.
Fluency	Speech is very slow, stumbling, nervous, and uncertain with response, except for short or memorized expressions. Difficult for a listener to understand	Speech is slow and often hesitant and irregular. Sentences may be left uncompleted, but the student is able to continue.	Speech is mostly smooth but with some hesitation and unevenness caused primarily by rephrasing and groping for words.	Speech is effortless and smooth with speed that comes close to that of a native speaker.

Seven minutes were allotted to each examinee. One minute was given to each student for simple warm up questions based on the his name, his likes and dislikes ....etc. Three minutes were given to each student in a mini presentation where the examinee was given the choice to pick up a a Cue Càrd with a topic written on it. The candidate is given 1 minute to prepare. After one minute, each student will be given 2 minutes each to present his ideas. Two minutes were given to each student for the discussion phase. The examiner asked the examinee to discuss some questions related to the topic on the cue card. One minute was given to each student in the closing session In case a student was unable to speak owing to nervousness or any other factor, then, the examiner might use the 1 minute to give a fresh opportunity to that student.

The Speaking Confidence Perception Scale utilized in the study

1. Rationale for including the speaking confidence perception scale in this study:

The researcher included the speaking confidence perception scale in this study for the following reasons:

1. Empirical evidence has shown that there is a close relationship between speaking confidence perception and being an effective speaker of English. That is, satisfactory results are produced by confident students.
2. Developing the learner's speaking confidence requires participation in the classroom interaction, activities and discussions. Unless learners are well confident, they are unable to do so.
3. Since, " confidence is not an inborn trait and can be learned", it can be changed and developed. Thus, learners who lack

speaking confidence can learn how to develop their confidence.

2. Description of the speaking confidence inventory utilized in the study:

This inventory took the form of a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly agree" to " strongly disagree". It consisted of 15 items selected with the purpose of denoting the diploma students' speaking confidence perception. (For the whole inventory and more details, see the appendices).

3. Piloting the speaking confidence perception inventory:

The inventory was piloted and internal consistency, index discrimination of the items, reliability and validity were proved.

Experimentation

1. Sample:

This study involved two groups of diploma students . The experimental group consisted of 21 male students while the control group consisted of 18 male students. Before the project commenced, a two-way dialogue represented in a live face to face interview and a speaking confidence perception scale were used to check for group equivalence . Using t-test, means of scores obtained by the students of the experimental group and the control group revealed no statistically significant differences concerning the students' oral performance and speaking confidence perception as shown in tables (1) and (2) below. Thus, the two groups were taken to be equal in oral performance prior to the implementation of the research.

Table 1:

t-test for the experimental and the control group subjects in the two-way dialogue prior to the experimentation for group equivalence

Group	n	M	SD	t	p
Experimental	19	9.86	2.68	0.26	NS *
Control	15	9.33	1.99		

* NS = not significant

Table 2:

t-test for the experimental and the control group subjects in the speaking confidence scale prior to experimentation

Group	n	M	SD	t	p
Experimental	19	32.76	8.54	0.60	NS *
Control	15	33.56	7.53		

* NS = not significant

Conducting the experimentation:

The pretest-posttest control-group design was utilized in the experimentation. The sample of the research was assigned to an experimental and a control group from amongst the population of the diploma students majored in English. After completing the pre testing, the methodology course started to be taught in corporation with task based learning techniques to the experimental group while the subjects of the control group started to study the same course according to the regular lectures. That is, the subjects of the experimental and the control groups were taught the same content. The main difference between the experimental and the control group was that the subjects of the

experimental group utilized the task–based techniques while the subjects of the control group did not utilize these techniques.

2. Post-testing:

After teaching the program of the research, both the oral performance test and the speaking confidence perception scale were administered to the subjects of the experimental and the control groups as a post test. A comparison of scores of the subjects of both groups was made to measure the effect of using task-based techniques upon the diploma students' oral English performance and speaking confidence perception as well.

Results and Discussions

The present research aimed at assessing the effect of using a task based program on developing the diploma students' oral English performance and speaking confidence perception. To measure the extent of achieving this goal, some task based techniques were incorporated in teaching the methodology course to the diploma students. Results were tallied and tabulated to decide the effect of incorporating task based techniques on the students' oral performance and speaking confidence perception. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used in the treatment of the results of the study. t-test formula was used in analyzing the students' scores on the oral performance test.

Hypothesis 1:

There were no statistically significant differences between mean scores of the experimental group and the control group subjects on the post-testing of their oral performance in the speaking test utilized in the study.

To test this hypothesis, students' scores on the English Oral Performance test were calculated and tabulated . t-test formula for

independent samples was employed to decide on the significance of the difference between mean scores of the experimental group and the control group students. See table (3) below:

Table 3

t-test results of post testing of students' English oral performance test

Group	N	M	SD	t-value	Effect size
Experimental	21	12.7 4	2.83	7.76**	0.86
Control	18	9.47	2.26		

** $P \leq .05$

A close inspection of data presented in table (2) revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between mean scores of the experimental group students and the control group students regarding the oral performance , favoring the experimental group students. Since the control group shares with the experimental group all other variables save the new program, the significant improvement in the experimental group students' oral performance in the test utilized in the study can be attributed to the effectiveness of the new program. Hence, the task based program had a significant effect on developing the experimental group students' oral performance compared to the control group students.

These results also proved the prominent role of task based instruction in the English language classroom. Task-based instruction provided learners with opportunities to use the English language contextually, and to explore it through situational activities. In this way, the English classroom can serve as an invaluable environment in the language learning and teaching process. Again, in the task-based program utilized in this research , basic pair work and group work were often used; and that helped to increase student interaction and collaboration.

These remarkable findings of the study regarding the English oral performance may be due to the following:

1. Task based learning is useful for moving the focus of the learning process from the teacher to the student.
2. It gives the student a different way of understanding language as a tool instead of as a specific goal.
3. It can bring teaching from abstract knowledge to real world application.
4. A Task is helpful in meeting the immediate needs of the learners and provides a framework for creating classes, interesting and able to address to the students needs

Thus, Task based learning is a different way to teach languages. It can help students by placing them in a situation like in the real world. A situation where oral communication is essential for doing a specific task. Task based learning has the advantage of getting the student to use his skills at his current level. To help develop language through its use. It has the advantage of getting the focus of the student toward achieving a goal where language becomes a tool, making the use of language a necessity.

Hypothesis 2:

There were no statistically significant differences between mean scores of the experimental group and the control group subjects on the post-testing of their confidence perception in the confidence perception inventory utilized in the study.

To test this hypothesis, students' scores on the speaking confidence perception inventory were calculated and tabulated . t-test formula for independent samples was employed to decide on the significance of the difference between mean scores of the

experimental group and the control group students. See table (4) below.

Table 4

t-test results of post testing of students' speaking confidence perception inventory

Group	N	M	SD	t-value	Effect size
Experimental	21	47.62	4.90	7.24**	0.59
Control	18	36.22	4.89		

** $P \leq .05$

The data in table (4) revealed a remarkably significant difference between the scores of the subjects of the experimental and the control group subjects (favouring the experimental group subjects). Mean scores also showed that the subjects of the experimental group obtained higher scores that expressed their high speaking confidence perception when they utilized the task based language learning techniques in studying the methodology course. These findings agree with much literature that confirms the effectiveness of using task based language learning in teaching English as a foreign language in promoting learners' speaking confidence (Oxford and Young, 1998; Matsuda, 2004; Sawir, 2005; Gallagher, 2007). The higher speaking confidence perception shown by the experimental group subjects are definitely related to the task based language learning utilized in teaching the methodology course for the following reasons:

1. Teaching the methodology course was employed in a student – centered classroom where students' interests and needs were respected and put into consideration while practicing the tasks. The tasks used in teaching the course gave the

students opportunities to express their opinions and beliefs. Students used the language to express the ideas they feel strongly about.

2. The tasks used with the experimental group subjects provided anxiety-free atmosphere in the English classroom. The effects of foreign language anxiety- as Gregerson, (2003) states - are particularly evident in the foreign language classroom and anxiety is a strong indicator of academic performance. Anxiety is found to have a detrimental effect on students' confidence and level of participation. Anxious learners suffer from mental blocks during spontaneous speaking activities, lack confidence, are less able to self-edit and identify language errors.

In conclusion, task based language learning were found to be very effective in enhancing the speaking confidence perception that , in turn, has its effect on promoting the English oral performance.

Recommendations

In light of the results of the research. The following recommendations are presented:

1. Oral skills should be stressed in teaching English as a foreign language at the college level. Instructors of English are thus required to prepare their students be able to use oral communication in the language classroom.

2. Oral skills should be seriously included in the students' evaluation program. It is not enough to prepare the students for the summative written achievement tests as these tests cannot measure the very qualities proposed by the Ministry

of Higher Education as the goals of teaching English as a foreign language at the college level.

3. Awareness of the importance of oral communication should be recognized by the students because instructors of English are thus between a rock and a hard place. If they try to follow the task based instruction, then students will complain, since for them any lesson content that is not covered by the exam questions is a waste of time, and is depriving them of their opportunities to get high marks at the achievement test.

Suggestions for further research:

1. A similar research can be conducted at the primary and preparatory stages to investigate the effectiveness of task based learning in developing the students' oral skills.
2. Content analysis research for the English textbooks at different stages can also be conducted to see how much task based activities included and needed in these textbooks.
3. Training programs for teachers on how to devise tasks should be conducted.

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