

Examining the Effects of Task-Based Language Teaching strategies on ESL Students' Speaking skills at college level: An Action Research Study

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ABSTRACT

Speaking skills are considered as the most significant of all four skills of a language and it happens to be the most challenging skill for EFL learners. In Pakistan, traditional pedagogical methods make EFL classrooms monotonous, boring and less productive. It is anticipated that the use of interactive and communicative modern methods in EFL classes may help students improve their speaking skills. Hence, the present paper aimed to investigate whether and to what extent Task Based Language Teaching Strategies help students improve their speaking ability and to describe the teaching and learning situation of EFL classrooms when TBLT was implemented as perceived by the students. To carry out the set objectives, the researchers conducted this classroom-based action research using Mixed-Methods of research in a public Girls college, Hyderabad. The research tools included questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, TBLT lesson plans, evaluation forms and follow-up interviews. The participants of the study were 150 randomly selected undergraduate female students, 15 female students of B.S. II (Computer Science department) and 5 female language teachers in a public college, Hyderabad. The subjects were pre and post tested to determine their speaking ability before and after the intervention. Speaking skills were assessed in terms of Fluency and accuracy. The scores of pre-test and post-test were compared to find out the difference in their oral performance before and after the intervention. The research findings showed that the ESL students outperformed orally in post-test. The qualitative data analysis revealed that the ESL students had positive perception about TBLT and they noticed a good change in the environment of English compulsory class and found it a conducive teaching situation to learn speaking. Moreover, the researchers found TBLT strategies effective in improving students' speaking skills, for increasing their fluency and confidence level in speaking. However, to make learners more accurate in speaking, they need to practice speaking more.

KEYWORDS

EFL students, speaking skills, fluency, accuracy, EFL class, Task Based Language Teaching

JOURNAL INFO

HISTORY: Received: November 25, 2022

Accepted: December 20, 2022

Published: December 31, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is the most significant, of all four language skills, in an EFL/ESL settings. Speaking skill distinguishes human beings from other living species. All human languages are primarily spoken in form and written form comes later. For EFL learners, speaking happens to be the most challenging of all four skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. The success of second language learners is measured in terms of their oral ability (Nunan, 2001). Fan and Yan (2020) state that speaking happens to be very vital skill of a language that is used to express our thoughts, to venture our individuality and to interconnect with other human beings.

Like many other countries of the world, in Pakistan, EFL students are expected to express themselves fluently and accurately in English language academically and professionally and the central aim of teaching English language remains to enable learners communicate effectively. Since speaking skill proves to be a complicated skill and it involves many other competences the students often face difficulty in expressing fluently and accurately, even after passing many years of education. Students who are good in speaking can achieve better position and grades than those who always keep silent in the class (Khadija, 2010). It is furthermore, assumed that in Pakistani context, students' oral performance can be bettered if the teachers adopt new teaching approach and shift their focus on listening and speaking instead of reading and writing skills.

Many researchers and experts narrate various reasons for this dismal figure in Pakistan. Aftab (2011) states in Pakistan, curriculum is outdated and the methodology to teach English is obsolete and conventional. She furthermore says all main concerns and stakeholders like curriculum developers, curricula, textbooks and teachers fail to deal with the students' present needs in the global context and they are lagging behind. It is the need of hour to upgrade the curricula, textbooks and learning material, and teaching methodologies (Aftab, 2011). Traditional methods which are unimpressive and ineffective (Skehan 1996) are used to teach English language. Bughio (2016) states large classrooms are the main reason for which teachers tend to rely on lecture methods. Pakistani students find difficult to learn and speak English because syntax of Urdu language and other Pakistani languages are opposite to English (Gulzar et al., 2018)



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In Pakistan mainly English language teachers rely on old teaching methods and do not adapt current teaching methods of language teaching and English is taught as a subject rather than a language. Majority of English language teachers use traditional methods that make their classroom boring, unattractive and less productive which ultimately do not encourage students to speak English in class. A conventional method implemented in the speaking class has been likely uninteresting and does not motivate them to speak English (Mudra, 2016). Ali (2015) mentions that the Pakistani English language classrooms do not support students to speak hence the students are reluctant to speak and practice speaking in the class. The students are usually disinterested in learning English language because the method is not appropriate to use in the classroom. Under the conditions created by traditional methods students are not involved or engaged in any activity in the class. Some of the researchers report that these problems could be bettered by adapting recent English language teaching methods. Thus, the study in hand was launched to implement an innovative teaching method that could make students involved in different activities in the class and thereby to improve their speaking ability. Available literature supported the use of TBLT for improving different language skills in EFL students particularly speaking skills in different contexts of the world.

Willis (1996) claims that Task Based Language Teaching (a type of communicative language teaching method) has more perspective than the Grammar Translation Method (traditional teaching method). TBLT provides comprehensible input and provides with authentic material for output skills, hence it looks reasonable and realistic to adopt such innovative and modern methodologies in teaching. Lynch and Maclean (2000) support this statement and state that TBLT approach can be justified on the natural grounds as tasks in TBLT are selected to facilitate the learning and promote the speaking skill in the classrooms. Ellis (2003) argues the use of task based learning in speaking skill has many advantages in overall language development. Lynch & Maclean (2000) claim that TBLT promote effective learning and enhance the speaking skills in the classroom. Literature provides ample of evidences in support of TBLT in EFL class for improving speaking skills across the world. Thus, the researcher adapted TBLT as teaching method to use within the context of the study. The researcher tried to investigate the effectiveness of implementing TBLT in developing college students' speaking ability. The study attempted to answer the following questions: 1) whether and to what extent do TBLT strategies help ESL Students improve their speaking performance at college level? 2) what are the effects of implementing TBLT strategies on the environment of ESL speaking class at college level?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the impact of Task- Based Language teaching strategies on the fluency of ESL/EFL Students' speaking skills at college level.
2. To investigate the impact of Task- Based Language teaching strategies on the accuracy of ESL/EFL Students' speaking skills at college level.
3. To examine the effects of implementing TBLT strategies on the environment of EFL class at college level.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- R.Q1)** whether and to what extent do TBLT strategies improved the fluency of ESL Students' Speaking ability at college level?
- R.Q2)** whether and to what extent do TBLT strategies improved the accuracy of ESL Students' Speaking ability at college level?
- R.Q3)** What are the effects of implementing TBLT strategies on the environment EFL class at college level?

LITERATURE REVIEW

TASK BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a logical growth of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in which it is believed that learners learn language effectively when they are engaged in using the target language. According to Branden (2006), TBLT was coined by the SLA researchers and language educators. Long and Norris (2000) says TBLT was developed as a reaction to form-focused in the field of second language teaching. Long (1985) and Prabhu (1987) define TBLT as an educational approach to language teaching where learners are assigned functional tasks to invite them to focus on exchange of meaning and to use the target language for the real world. Willis and Willis (2007) declares in TBLT tasks are designed which are interesting and meaningful activities in which learners are engaged for promoting their interest and learning target language. Task completion is at priority and the learners are assessed in terms of task outcome. They view that it is very essential to arise learners' interest by making them engaged in meaningful activities such as tasks in learning second language.

Branden (2006) traces the history of TBLT around 20 years ago. According to Nunan (2004) TBLT emerged in 1980s and for many educational institutions and ministries of education, it gradually became a cornerstone around the world (Nunan, 2004). Today TBLT has attracted many language educators and experts, Nunan (2004) cites a great number of volumes available on TBLT like (Bygate et al., 2001; Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003; Le, 2000; Long, 2015; Nunan, 2005; Willis, 2007 etc...) today TBLT is popular with many different names like Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Task Based Language Learning (TBLL), Activity Based Language Teaching or Task Based Instruction (TBI).

TBLT is investigated and re-investigated by different experts of SLA. They studied it theoretically and empirically. Ample of researchers and experts of the SLA around the world are witnessed who are attracted by TBLT as cited in Zahoor (2018) (Bygate et al., 2001; Carless, 2009; Ellis, 2003, 2014; Robinson, 2011; Skehan, 2016; Skehan et al., 2012). In TBLT classrooms are learner-centered and language learners are given active role to use language as compared to the GTM or traditional PPP methods. In TBLT the maximum exposure of authentic material of target language facilitates learners to find the right models to follow during interaction. And when they perform pedagogical tasks in pairs or groups, they find the chance of peer interaction which helps them remove their shyness. TBLT has become a popular language teaching method since its evolution. The advocates of SLA support it as they found many theoretical assumptions as well as empirical research basis in favor of TBLT. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Many European countries, state Zahoor (2018) are implementing TBLT successfully namely Australia, America, and New Zealand and now several Asian countries like Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Iran, Thailand, India, China, Turkey and Vietnam i.e. (Carless, 2003, 2009; Rahimpour, 2008; Dailey, 2009; Ellis, 2009; Ducker, 2012; Newton, 2013; Shehadeh & Coombe, 2012) are also practicing TBLT.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), a form of communicative language teaching method emerged in 1980s. TBLT has become a cornerstone of many educational institutions and ministries of education around the world (Nunan, 2004). Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) refers to an approach where use of tasks are considered the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The notion of “task” is regarded as a central unit of planning and teaching. In Task-based learning, it is believed that learning arise from performing particular tasks in the classroom and that it is increasingly a logical development from communicative language teaching (Cook, 2008).

Richards and Rodgers state that in students “comprehensible input” is immersed when they negotiate meaning and engage in naturalistic and meaningful communication while performing the assigned “tasks”. They assert that processes of language learning is more activated by engaging learners in task work than form-focused activities, and, hence, ultimately better opportunities are provided for language learning to take place. Similarly, in TBLT learning is doing tasks and teaching is specifying and helping the learners with the tasks (Cook, 2008).

SPEAKING SKILLS

The speaking skill is considered the most significant skill among all the four language skills in English language (Zaremba, 2006) and the People who know a language are referred to as 'speakers of that language' (Ur, 2006). Proficient speaking ability guarantee promising results and achievements to second or foreign language learners in their academic and professional life (Osborn, et al 2008). Speaking is an active/productive skill that involves learners to construct meaning by producing, receiving and processing information (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Speaking skill, therefore occurs to be the most difficult skill. It happens to be very difficult skill to learn as it involves various components like semantics, phonology, pragmatics etc (Gilakjina and Sabouri, 2016). It demands learner's linguistic competence (recognizing how to produce specific points of language as grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation) and sociolinguistic competence (why and in what ways to produce language) (Cunningham, 1999).

The prime function of a language is to communicate and communication is impossible without using a language. We as human beings express our ideas, emotions, desires, feelings and daily life necessities by using language. Nurdin (2020) states that during speaking people build concepts in words, define their opinion, their approaches and goals, and listeners understand sense of speakers. We achieve our aims, objectives, and goals by using proper language. And speaking is enormously used by human beings in the world. When we speak, we tend to be getting something done, doing business, exploring ideas or simply being together to communicate. Out of four language skills, speaking is regarded as the most important one. And it is undeniable to say that most of the language activities are done orally. Human beings speak to exchange information, refer to an action or event in the past, present, or future, the possibility of something happening, and so on (Lindsay & Knight, 2006). In this era of competition, it is almost impossible to make progress with poor oral communication ability.

COMPONENTS OF SPEAKING SKILLS

There are many components of speaking skills. In this study, two specific components are assessed which are fluency and accuracy. Fluency and accuracy are considered as essential components of speaking skills. In a language classroom such tasks should be used that can promote the learners' communication in second language fluently and accurately (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996). Mazouzi (2013) states that there must be a balance in achievement of fluency and accuracy. Fluency and accuracy both are pivotal and hallmark of effective communication.

Fluency

Fluency refers to smoothness and easiness while speaking. A person is said to be fluent if he is able to speak without difficulty and less effort, if he can express himself with less number of pauses and stops. According to Harmer (2001, p. 269) Fluency in speaking needs language knowledge and ability to process information and language spontaneously without much effort.

According to Ellis (2003), fluency is the amount to which the language created in executing a task shows stopping, hesitancy, or reformulation. Fillmore (1979) also well-defined fluency as the skill to chat in comprehensible, coherent, and semantically compact sentences, have appropriate things to speak in extensive range of settings and be inventive and creative

in language use. Besides, Kormos and Denes (2004) suggested the components of speaking fluency such as language proportion, articulation rate, and phonation-time ratio, mean length of runs, total number of silent pauses per minute, mean length of silent pauses and total number of filled pauses per minute. Thornbury (2005) states that the learners should improve their speaking ability if they want to enjoy high positions in the world.

Accuracy

According to Ellis (2003), accuracy is when language produced by a person while performing a task conforms to the norms of target language. The aspects in which accuracy is observed is to focus on specific types of errors like proper use of articles, correct verb forms and use of required form of verbs in the proportion of tense used. Ragini (2019) shares lexical aspects into three aspects namely lexical accuracy, grammatical accuracy and semantic accuracy. The researchers in this study assess the students' sentences by analyzing the lexical, grammatical and semantic accuracy.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology consists of mainly five components. a) Research framework, b) the participants of the study c) the research instruments, d) procedure of data collection, and e) the data analysis.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This is a classroom- based action research (CAR) with mixed-methods of research. CAR gives a way to teachers to study the immediate problems they have in their classrooms and to improve the quality of their work by understanding their problems of the classrooms (Mertler,2012b). The framework of the research is as follows:

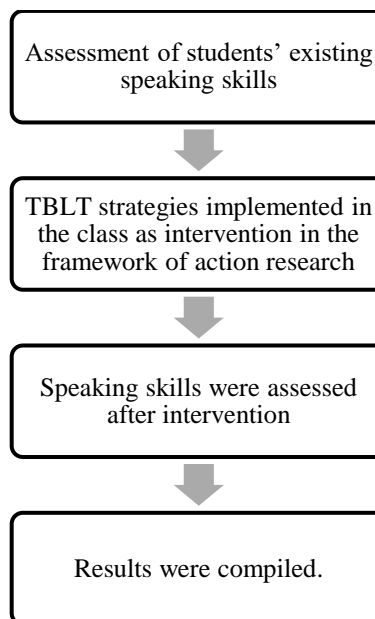


Figure 1 Research methodology

THE PARTICIPANTS

There were many participants of the study.

Students of different faculties

In the initial survey 150 students were randomly selected to administer the questionnaires. These students were all undergraduates from natural sciences and social sciences who were taught English as a compulsory subject. This survey aimed to diagnose the situation of speaking skills and English language teaching so they were asked to participate and response the questionnaires because they were in the same college and they could better opine about the situation of the context.

Subjects of the study

The subjects of the study who underwent the intervention was a whole class of B.S.II. There were 15 female students who were studying in B.S. II (Computer Science department) for the session 2020-2021 during second semester (September 2021- December 2021). They were selected as subjects of the study as in B.S. program English as a compulsory subject is taught only in Part I and part II and part II students were experienced and mature as compared to the students of part I.

Teachers

In Govt: Girls Shah Latif College, Hyderabad, in English department, there are 5 English language teachers altogether and they all were invited to take part in the research. They all responded to the questionnaires first used for initial

survey, then they participated in interviews. They were almost all senior teachers who had more than 10 years of teaching experience in the same college so they could better give authentic and rich data about the context of the study.

Co-teachers

Out of those 5 language teachers 2 teachers worked as co-teachers with the authors. They remained connected throughout the research process. They actively participated in the process of research. They helped in assessing subjects' pre and post oral performance. They observed the whole process of research and guided the researchers for necessary changes. They provided their feedback on the intervention process and its success of failure. They filled up evaluation forms without any fail. Overall they helped in the process of research a lot.

THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The research instruments utilized by the researchers are as follows:

1. Questionnaires
2. Semi-structured interviews
3. Speaking Pre-test and Post-test
4. TBLT lesson plans
5. Evaluation forms
6. Follow-up Interviews

The Questionnaire

Action research starts with the diagnostic phase in which the research needs to explore the existing situation of the context. For that purpose, a survey was conducted, initially, utilizing questionnaires to gather relevant information about existing situation of teaching and learning speaking in the context. The questionnaires were administered to 150 students (all from the faculty of natural sciences and social sciences where English is taught as a compulsory subject) and 5 teachers (all faculty members of English department of the college in which the research was carried out). These questionnaires were used as main research tool to get an in depth information of the context. The results from the analysis of the questionnaires were helpful in designing lesson plans for intervention of the research and for developing an understanding of the teaching and learning situation of the context.

The Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students and 5 college teachers in the initial stage of the study. This qualitative data was gathered to obtain information related to teaching and learning environment of the college. The items included in the questionnaire served as interview guide. These interviews were planned to triangulate the data obtained from questionnaires.

Speaking Pre-test and Post-test

Two speaking tests (Pre-test and post-test) were taken from the subjects of the study before and after intervention. These tests were adapted from previous studies. The components of speaking skills such as fluency and accuracy were assessed in both of tests. A pre-test was conducted before and post-test was conducted after the intervention. The students' individual and collective scores in pre and post-test were recorded separately which were later on compared to find out the difference.

TBLT Lesson plans

TBLT lesson plans were designed for intervention. These lesson plans were developed in the framework of TBLT proposed by Willis (1996) and in accordance with the prescribed English textbook for undergraduates. The activities and strategies were selected which could be done in the classroom according to their chapters of the textbook covered in the classroom. 2 strategies of TBLT were selected and 12 TBLT lesson plans were prepared. For instance the first chapter of the textbook is a short story 'A Day's Wait' that is a story of nine years old boy's illness so a role play of a doctor and a patient was carried out in the classroom. Likewise all other activities and strategies of TBLT for speaking practice were planned according to their lessons covered in the classroom.

Evaluation forms

Evaluation forms were adapted from available literature and utilized in the study to find out the feedback and teachers' and students' perception regarding the teaching and learning process going during research in the classroom. These evaluation forms served to guide researchers along with the observer teachers in making required changes in the research process.

Follow-up interviews

Finally follow-up interviews were conducted from all the participants of the study to explore their perception on TBLT strategies used in the research process and their effectiveness in improving their speaking skills and its effects on overall the class environment.

Procedure of data collection

To accomplish the set goals, the researchers used a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, a pretest, a posttest. The two speaking tests (pretest, posttest) and the questionnaires were used as the main instruments to collect the data for this study. The speaking tests aimed at measuring EFL learners' oral performance while the questionnaire was employed to investigate

EFL learners' attitude towards the use of TBLT. 12 TBLT lesson plans were designed within the framework of tasks suggested by Willis (1996) and subjects were taught using those lesson plans.

The following steps were used in conducting this study:

Surveying the existing teaching and learning of speaking;

In the very start a survey was conducted to investigate the teaching and learning environment of the context. In initial survey a questionnaire and interview was conducted. The questionnaires were administered to 150 randomly selected students of all four faculties in which English is taught as a compulsory subject. The questionnaires were also administered to 5 English language teachers to get a rich data regarding the context. The same participants were taken interview too after the questionnaires.

Taking speaking pre-test;

The subjects were pre tested to determine their oral competency before intervention. They were given a presentation which they prepared at their home and deliver in the class. Their presentations were recorded which teachers listened and scored them marks individually. Fluency and accuracy were examined in the test.

Planning the lessons for intervention;

Intervention was planned with TBLT lesson plans. The lesson plans were developed in the framework of TBLT suggested by Willis (1996) and in the light of the prescribed English textbook for undergraduates. Two strategies of TBLT were selected which were 1. Narrating an event and 2. Role play.

Teaching speaking with TBLT lesson plans;

Twelve TBLT lesson plans were carried out in 2 cycles with 12 meetings. In every class TBLT framework was followed and lesson was carried out with pre-task, main task and post-task phases. Three strategies which were included to teach speaking to students were 1. Sharing personal experiences. 2. Describing something or someone and 3. Role Play. These strategies were selected because these were more suitable to the chapters the students had covered in their textbook of English compulsory.

Evaluation forms and feedback forms

Throughout the process of intervention, all participants and students and teachers remained involved by evaluation forms and feedback forms. The necessary changes were made in the light of the responses of participants. Besides, the students and teachers' feedback were shared to the researchers through these forms.

Taking speaking post-test;

The subjects were post tested with the same pre-test and were scored accordingly by the co-teachers of the study. The scores were recorded to compare to find out the difference between students' pre-test speaking performance with their post-test speaking performance.

Finally comparing pre and post-test

The mean scores, and standard deviation of both the tests were compared in bar chart and table in order to identify the difference between the oral performances of the students.

DATA ANALYSIS

The Quantitative Data

The quantitative data included questionnaires, pre and post-test score and evaluation forms of feedback. These questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS.

The Qualitative Data

The qualitative data was analyzed with codes and themes identification.

Key Findings

The questionnaires were used to explore the existing teaching and learning environment of the context. Majority of the students revealed that they all were very much interested and had a positive attitude to English speaking but the teachings of English language do not support them to practice language in the classroom. They were shy, hesitant and less confident in speaking English. However, they agreed that activity based class will promote their learning of speaking. The students and teachers of Shah Latif Girls College expressed that the teachers of English compulsory class mostly tend to rely on mostly on lecture method. They focus more on completion of their syllabus and the class remains teacher-centered most of the time. The students opined that speaking is very important skill of English language which they feel very difficult to produce. They viewed that they could improve their speaking ability if their teachers focus on it and make their class activity based. They feel very much shy and hesitant to speak English and if they speak outside the class people laugh at them and make their fun. Moreover, they like to speak English and they would like if they are taught speaking English in their compulsory class. On the contrary teachers opined that they carry all the lessons with lectures due to shortage of time, lengthy syllabus and unavailability of sufficient source. They rush to complete their syllabus and do not get acquainted with new teaching methods as there are no training sessions or training opportunities for them. The researchers noticed that mostly teachers were unaware of TBLT and its use in classroom.

RESULTS OF PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

The following are the results and key findings of the study. The first two research questions and objectives are fulfilled with the following findings.

FLUENCY

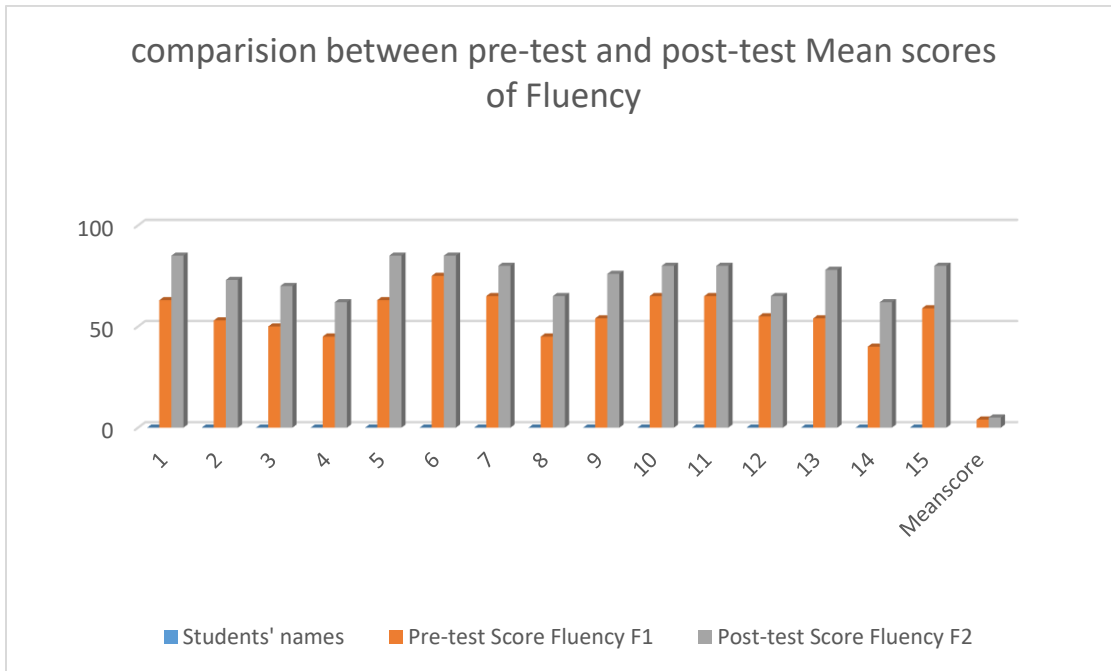


Figure.2. Graph showing comparison between Pre-test and Post-test of students’ fluency in speaking

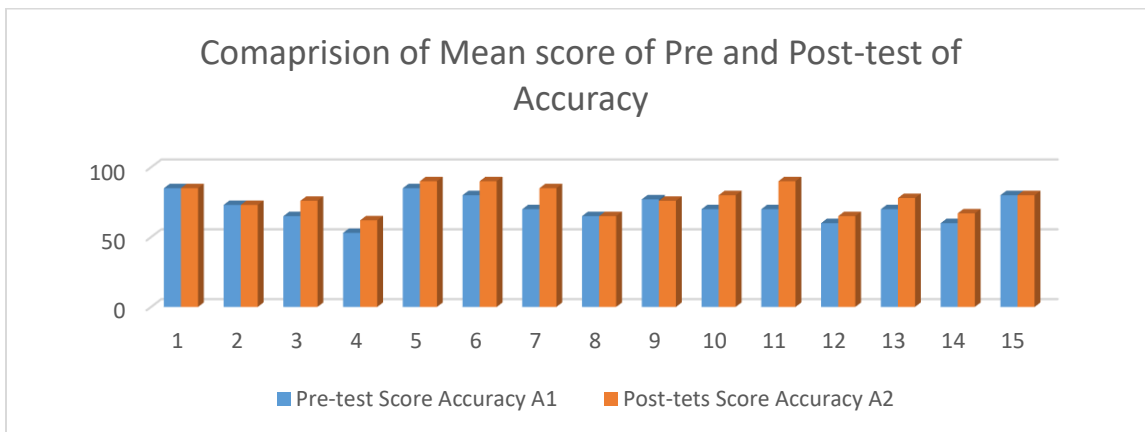


Figure.3. Graph showing comparison between Pre-test and post-test of Students’ accuracy in speaking

The comparison between both tests one conducted before and one conducted after intervention showed that there is a difference between the students’ performance before and after intervention. The comparison between mean score of fluency pre-test and post-test showed that the fluency in students’ performance is increased in post-test that indicates the effectiveness of TBLT strategies for improving students’ fluency in speaking English language. However, there is not much change or increase in the post-test score of accuracy that reveals that accuracy is not much affected after implementation of TBLT strategies in speaking class. There might be some reasons for this situation or it is possible that the students while performing tasks and tasks completion focus more on speaking fluently rather than accuracy.

STUDENTS' POINT OF VIEW ABOUT TBLT

The last research objective was to find out the students' opinion about the use and implementation of TBLT in English compulsory class for improving their speaking ability. The students had a positive perception and opinion of TBLT and its use in their class. They were happy to be taught with TBLT strategies and activities. They liked more role play and actively participated in it. According to their point of view TBLT changed their class room environment, they became more active and focused in these activities. It boosted their confidence level. Since all of them were busy in talking in English so nobody laughed at them and they did not remain hesitant while speaking English in the class. They were very happy to participate in doing different task and one thing that they liked to be dominant and authoritative in their class. They expressed that TBLT entirely changed their class and their behaviors. After implementing TBLT, their class became more democratic and their behaviors were transformed from passive listeners to active participants of the class.

DISCUSSIONS

In Pakistani colleges teaching of English language is still challenging as it ever have been. Today all over the world, new teaching pedagogies are being implemented but in our country we still rely exclusively on teaching language by lecture method. This teaching method makes students less interested in learning English language and results in students' incompetence and unable to produce the desired written and spoken language. Through this research it was intended to implement an innovative teaching method TBLT to improve college students' speaking ability. In the framework of action research, TBLT lesson plans were implemented in B.S. II semester. The results showed that the intervention was effective in improving fluency in students' speaking while accuracy was not much affected by new lesson plans. It was observed that the students had positive attitude towards use of TBLT lesson plans and they like to be taught with the new methods and activities in class. It was helpful in improving students' confidence level and removing their hesitation while speaking English language. The teachers who worked in the research as co-teachers they also found it conducive teaching method particular in enhancing students' speaking ability. Moreover, it is anticipated that the study in hand would be helpful in improving other language skills of English language for other researchers to work on.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Sahira Bano: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Data analysis, Writing- Original draft preparation., **Dr. Abdul Hameed Panhwar:** Introduction; Methodology, Data analysis, Data interpretation. **Abdullah Laghari:** Results, Writing- Reviewing and Editing, **Dr. Tania Laghari:** Literature Review, Methodology, Data Collection, Editing, Proofreading.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

It is declared that all authors don't have any conflict of interest. It is further declared that although data were collected from students of secondary schools, but informed consent was obtained from all individual participants (and their parents) included in the study.

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