Using Online Task-Based Learning to Improve EFL Speaking Skills of Secondary Stage Students in Nigeria

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Abstract:
This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of using online task-based learning to improve the EFL speaking skills of Nigerian secondary stage students. The study used a quasi-experimental design to investigate the effects of online task-based learning. Fifty (50) students were chosen to participate in the research. Both experimental and control groups consisted of intact classes of twenty-five (25) students. A self-developed instrument titled "EFL Speaking Skills Test" was administered to determine the pretest and post-test performance of the two groups. The data were analysed with a t-test for independent samples. Students' EFL speaking skills have improved as a result of using online task-based learning. It was recommended that the government should ensure adequate provision of teaching and learning facilities such as ICT-integrated classrooms, learner-friendly spaces, premium subscriptions to LMS suites, and adequate provision of networks and internet in schools in order to facilitate smooth interactions between teachers and students. The teachers' capacity for task-based learning should also be enhanced, along with their ability to effectively utilise online resources.
Keywords: Online Task-Based Learning, EFL Speaking Skills, Task-Based Speaking & Nigeria

Introduction

English is an international language spoken in many countries and is taught in schools in almost every country. It is the official language of communication in Nigeria and is used as a lingua franca in some regions. It has become the language of knowledge, learning, working, business, research, communication, and justice in the world. Hence, investigating how skills of English language are acquired, transmitted, and improved is a paramount.

Speaking is one of the four traditionally classified EFL skills. It is an interactive construction of meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information (Nopiyanti, 2012). Speaking involves both the speaker and the listener. The speaker produces utterances that are meaningful and contain information. Speaking is one of the most difficult skills for language learners to acquire. It is the most complicated since L1 speakers use some mechanisms to facilitate their speech. These mechanisms

are not too simple for L2 speakers and involve simplifying the language by creating simple structures; they typically omit parts of sentences (ellipsis) and employ idiomatic expressions to enable oral fluency. In addition, fillers and hesitation devices are also frequent. To offset their hardships, L1 speakers may self-correct, reformulate, or rephrase sentences, which is a common form of modification accepted by the community of speakers (Kaur, 2011).

Even though speaking skills are important, the researcher noticed that secondary stage students in Nigeria have trouble with these skills. The problems seem to have something to do with the methods language teachers use so often in the classroom. Most of the time, the methods teachers use aren't realistic to students linguistic needs; they're old methods that have been used for hundreds of years. Teachers seem to have made things worse for their students by using these methods over and over again and by being resistant to change. The fast growth of technology, which has affected every part of human life, has led to the development of many new ways to teach and learn. Online Task-Based Learning is one of these ways (OTBL).

Online Task-Based Learning (OTBL) was founded on the notion that learning should be focused on engaging in online experiments and activities as opposed to simply listening to lectures. The fundamental focus of this method is learning by doing, and the more a person learns, the longer he or she retains it (Ellis, 2018). Online Task-Based Language Learning is a method for teaching second languages based on the most recent discoveries in second language acquisition research. It is a method in which learning resources and instruction sessions are prepared based on the completion of an online task. In online task-based learning, the linguistic content is established by the activity that students must complete. Because they are directly related to the learners' actual needs, the assignments might reflect real-world scenarios. It can be incredibly motivating and advantageous for students. For instance, the objective of a lesson or unit is to assist students make a reservation, plan a trip, or organise a meeting.

So, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the use of online task-based learning to improve the EFL speaking skills of Nigerian secondary sage students.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is that secondary stage students in Nigeria have difficulties with EFL speaking subskills such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. This conclusion is based on a review of the relevant literature, the findings of a pilot study, and the

researcher's own experience. Given these obstacles, it is possible that they will perform poorly in English. The researcher prompted to examine effectiveness of using online task-based learning to improve EFL speaking skills of secondary stage students in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This research attempted to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the EFL speaking skills necessary for secondary stage students in Nigeria
2. Examine the effectiveness of Online Task-Based Learning in improving EFL speaking skills of secondary stage students in Nigeria

Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses were tested

1. There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the control and experimental group in EFL speaking skills test in favour of the experimental group
2. There is statistically significant difference between the experimental group`s pre-post administration of the EFL speaking skills test in favour of the post-administration.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study could be used by both the federal and state governments, as well as by language educators and scholars in the future.

One way in which teachers might use the study's findings to enhance their pedagogical approach to language instruction is by implementing the study's recommendations. By adjusting their methods of instruction in real time, they can become more student-centered and ultimately more effective educators.

The results of this study will be useful to other researchers since they can be used as a starting point for their own investigations and as a place to gather secondary data. Future researchers can use the study's proposals for further research as a guide to focus in on previously unexplored regions and fill the gaps left by this study, which will strengthen the teaching profession's scientific inquiry.

Third, the results of this study are useful for language policymakers because they inform the revision of existing policies and the creation of more relevant and useful material for language classrooms.

The study's findings will help federal and state governments pick the right language strategy for schools, raising academic standards and boosting second-language education as a whole.

Delimitations of the Study

This research examines the effectiveness of using Online Task-Based Learning to improve EFL speaking skills of secondary stage students in Nigeria. The study was delimited to:

1. Total number of fifty (50) participants were randomly selected to participate in the study. The participants comprised twenty-five (25) experimental and twenty-five (25) control group.
2. The research focused on the speaking sub-skills such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and the task of speaking.
3. **Online Task-Based Learning:** Lessons for the control and treatment groups were delivered through a combination of face-to-face interaction and online platforms such as Google Classroom and Google Meet.

Review of Literature and the Related Studies

Speaking skill is a crucial language skill that have been viewed differently by many scholars. For instance, Baten, Ostern and Maele (2013) regarded speaking skills as the abilities required for speech production and interaction in a linguistic context. Similarly, Brenda and Lunna (2019) viewed speaking as skills that enable individual to express idea orally, accurately and coherently. Empirical studies have been conducted to examine speech-related variables, including factors that may affect speaking performance. Abrar, Mukminin, Habibi, Asyrafi, Makmur, and Marzulina (2018) documented the English-speaking experiences of Indonesian EFL student-teachers through qualitative study. Nazara (2011) evaluated the attitudes of students regarding the improvement of English-speaking skills using a combination of approaches. Juhana (2018) analyzed the psychological aspects, causes, and potential solutions that impeded students' ability to master speaking skills. Speaking proficiency is required to learn a foreign language, but it cannot be learned without a solid foundation in other subskills.

Nature EFL Speaking

Speaking is an important part of effective communication, as it involves both speaker and listener and is one of the most difficult abilities for language learners to master. Nopiyanti (2012) regarded speaking as an interactive process of meaning construction that comprises information production, reception, and processing. The average person generates tens of thousands of words per day, although some may generate even more (Zusana, 2014). Speaking is seen as the most crucial of the four skills in this

regard, requiring L1 speakers to employ certain techniques to facilitate communication. To compensate for their challenges, L1 speakers may self-correct, reformulate, or rework sentences, which is a common modification approved by the community of speakers. Speaking is a productive ability that can be scientifically examined through listening skill accuracy, which weakens the test's reliability and validity. Kurniati (2018) identifies five basic categories of speech: imitation, intensive, responsive, and interactive.

Imitative involves the capacity to repeat a word, phrase, or sentence, while intensive involves the creation of brief stretches of oral language. Responsive involves interaction and understanding testing, while interactive involves the length and complexity of the interaction, which can be transactional or interpersonal. Extensive consists of speeches, oral representations, and narrative, during which spoken contact from listeners is either severely limited or ruled out entirely.

EFL Speaking Sub-Skills

Speaking is a distinctive skill that comprises various parts, such as Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension, and Task. Pronunciation involves segmental articulation, rhythm, intonation, phrasing, and laterally gesture, body language, and eye contact, while grammar is the ability to correctly arrange language structures. Vocabulary is essential for generating coherent sentences, and the effectiveness of communication relies heavily on the potency of words. Vocabulary is the oral and written understanding of the meanings of words, particularly while speaking. It is a necessary linguistic building block for efficient oral and writing communication, and teachers must clarify the meaning, spelling, and pronunciation of each word.

Fluency is the capacity to speak accurately and effectively, and comprehension is the ability to receive and process language in order to construct mental representations of meanings of sentences. Comprehension in speaking according to Rahmanis (2019) is the speakers' understanding of what they say to the listeners in order to avoid miscommunication and quickly assimilate information from the speech.

EFL Speaking Strategies

Speaking strategy is how language learners are assisted in acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue their learning objectives in an informed and autonomous manner. Speaking strategies are vital because they assist foreign language learners in negotiating meaning when linguistic structures or sociolinguistic conventions are not shared between the learner and the target language speaker (Lopez & Roo, 2011).

For students to communicate effectively in an oral setting, the following strategies be implemented:

a. Using context
b. Employing formulaic language
c. Buying time
d. Requesting help: repetitions and clarifications.
e. Paraphrasing
f. Embracing performance errors
g. Using mime and nonverbal expressions to convey meaning
h. Circumlocution is another strategy which involves the use of a synonym or a descriptive sentence for unknown words. For instance: an item you use to sit down (chair)

EFL Speaking Activities

Speaking activities are essential for English language instruction, and teachers must be aware of their students' skills and personalities. Suban (2021) outlined some of the fundamental speaking activities that have made teaching enjoyable. **Dialogue** is a fundamental form of oral communication that involves practicing language functions such as greetings and inquiring for information. Natkare (2015) argues that an effective dialogue needs delicacy, sensitivity, and exchanges of information. Surveys and questionnaires are a great technique to get students talking, and students should tailor the survey on the topic they've learned as it will be their input.

Picture Description is an activity that helps shy students speak in groups and practice speaking. Information Gap is an interactive language learning technique that encourages students to collaborate to find the needed information. Role-play is essential in the Communicative Approach because it allows students to practice communicating in different social contexts and roles.

Role-play helps shy or reluctant students speak and promotes class discussion. Story completion is an exciting speaking activity in which students sit in a circle and listen to the teacher narration of a story. It boosts confidence, interest, and speaking skills.

Storytelling or telling the story improves listening, speaking, reading, writing, interactional, vocabulary, and literacy. Repeating these speaking practices over weeks or months will boost retention and enhance its effect.

Assessing EFL Speaking Skills

Speaking assessment has received a great deal of study focus and effort in the field of language assessment, with research papers in renowned

journals. To select the most appropriate activity for the assessment, test designers must comprehend how the test scores will be utilized and what type of information test takers require (Carter & McCarthy, 2015). Assessment experts have categorised speaking test activities differently based on how they have characterized language knowledge. Recently, communicative and intercultural communicative competence (ICCC) models have emphasized the significance of interactional ability-based tests. As asserted by Norris and Soloway (2016) "Task-Based Language Teaching has been developed to give tasks that more effectively reflect test-takers' command of the new language, allowing teachers and test developers to concentrate their teaching, learning, and assessment away from rote memorization and multiple-choice questions.

Challenges of EFL Speaking Skills

Speaking is a skill that exposes a speaker's proficiency in a language to others and is particularly difficult for beginning L2 students. According to Ratnasari (2020), the most major problems for L2 learners include a restricted vocabulary, shyness, uneasiness, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation. Lack of confidence is the most important aspect for students' success in language learning, and teachers should provide students with adequate support to build a high level of self-confidence. Lack of motivation can also negatively affect students' speaking performance, and 6% of less-motivated students have reduced self-confidence in speaking activities.

Studies Related to Using Online Task-Based to Improve EFL Speaking Skills

Task-Based speaking is a term used in Task-Based language instruction that refers to any activity or task conducted in the classroom to enhance students' speaking skills through interaction. Humanez and Arias (2009) demonstrated that task-based speaking activity is an effective method for promoting oral interaction. Awang and Pendidikan (2011) viewed tasks as vehicles that encourage students to practice the language in a real-world setting. Erten and Altay (2009) compared the effects of task-based and topic-based speaking activities on student collaboration and interaction in EFL speaking classes. Pham and Nguyen (2014) transformed task activities into TBSA, considered the offspring of the TBLT and designed to improve students' oral performance. Many empirical reports evidenced the effect of Task-Based learning on speaking skills.

For instance, Santhosh and Keenakshi (2017) conducted an experimental study to examine the efficacy of the Task-Based Approach in

teaching polytechnic college students oral communication skills. 50 students were recruited and divided into two groups. The results revealed statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups. The listening and speaking results of B1+ task-based learning groups were highly significant after implementation, indicating that their participation in task-based activities in the classroom positively reflected the results. Hassan (2014) investigated the impact of a task-based learning program on the oral English performance of secondary school students learning English. Two groups of second-year secondary students were chosen to participate in an experiment. Results showed statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups' mean scores, favoring the experimental group.

Similarly, Zuniga (2016) investigated the extent to which the Task-Based Language Learning Approach contributed to the oral production of eighth graders in public schools in Medellin, Colombia. Ravirot (2015) investigated how task-based language teaching strategies help EFL students develop oral presentation skills and their impact on learning outcomes. Ten male vocational students completing their final year of Higher Vocational Certificate in Industrial Technology through School in Factory at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna in Chiang Mai, Thailand, are the subjects of this study.

Feiteiro (2018) investigated how Task-Based Learning promotes the growth of speaking abilities in 25 fourth-graders. Akbulut (2014) investigated the effect of TBLT on language skills of young learners. The main conclusion of this study is that teachers should consider the following criteria when designing speaking tasks: the level of freedom, the role of pretending in a child's world, the enjoyable nature of the task, and the appropriate level of difficulty.

Methodology

The quasi-experimental design was used to investigate the effectiveness of online task-based learning in improve EFL speaking skills of Nigerian secondary stage students. Fifty (50) participants were randomly selected from two sets of year II senior secondary classes. Both experimental and control groups consisted of intact classes of twenty-five (25) students. The "EFL Speaking Skills Test" was administered to establish the baseline and endline performance of the two groups before and after the treatment. A t-test for independent samples was used to analyse the data.

Results and Discussions

The results were compared using an independent t-test to determine whether any differences between the two groups were statistically significant. And the results were presented in accordance with the hypotheses:

Results of the first hypothesis stated that:

"There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the control and experimental group in EFL speaking skills in favour of the experimental group"

To test this hypothesis, the researcher used independent t-test (see table 1)

Table 1: Comparing the control and experimental group in EFL speaking skills test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
									Lower	Upper
Speaking Skill in Post-test	Equal variances assumed	13.281	.001	10.310	48	.000	30.000	2.910	24.150	35.850
	Equal variances not assumed			10.310	28.654	.000	30.000	2.910	24.046	35.954

Table 1 presents the results of an independent t-test of students' EFL speaking skills for both groups in the post-test. The results of the post-test established a statistically significant effect size, with the experimental group achieving significantly better results than the control group at the 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, it has been proven that utilizing OTBL has a significant effect on the EFL students' speaking skills.

Results of the Second Hypothesis

"There is a Statistically Significant Difference between the Experimental Group`s Pre-Post Administration of the EFL Speaking Skills Test in Favour of the Post-administration"

In order to test this hypothesis, the researcher used t-test (see table 2).

Table 2 Experimental Group`s Pre-Post Administration of the EFL Speaking Skills Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
									Lower	Upper
Fluency Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.058	.811	.568	48	.572	.680	1.196	-1.725	3.085
	Equal variances not assumed			.568	47.922	.572	.680	1.196	-1.725	3.085
Post-test Fluency	Equal variances assumed	8.900	.004	7.773	48	.000	6.920	.890	5.130	8.710
	Equal variances not assumed			7.773	34.970	.000	6.920	.890	5.113	8.727
Pronunciation Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.005	.942	1.515	48	.136	2.000	1.320	-.655	4.655
	Equal variances not assumed			1.515	46.436	.137	2.000	1.320	-.657	4.657
Post-test Pronunciation	Equal variances assumed	16.693	.000	6.228	48	.000	6.000	.963	4.063	7.937
	Equal variances not assumed			6.228	28.231	.000	6.000	.963	4.027	7.973
Vocabulary Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.143	.707	1.017	48	.314	1.440	1.416	-1.406	4.286
	Equal variances not assumed			1.017	47.981	.314	1.440	1.416	-1.406	4.286
Post-test Vocabulary	Equal variances assumed	1.609	.211	8.286	48	.000	8.280	.999	6.271	10.289
	Equal variances not assumed			8.286	39.138	.000	8.280	.999	6.259	10.301
Grammar Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.787	.379	1.857	48	.069	2.480	1.336	-.205	5.165
	Equal variances not assumed			1.857	45.596	.070	2.480	1.336	-.209	5.169
Post-test Grammar	Equal variances assumed	5.701	.021	9.179	48	.000	8.800	.959	6.872	10.728
	Equal variances not assumed			9.179	33.972	.000	8.800	.959	6.852	10.748

Table 2 above presents analysis of students' performance based on the subskills. The aim of this analysis is to measure the magnitude of the effect on a distinctive subcomponent of the speaking skill. The performance

of the experimental group in fluency in the pretest was measured at 0.572 which statistically higher than 0.05 level of significance. Thus, affirming no statistical difference in the students performance in the pretest. However, post-test result measured at 0.01 level of significant.

On the pronunciation, the effect size measured at 0.136 in the pretest and 0.01 in post-test. This established that experimental group performance in the post-test is higher. When it came to vocabulary, the pre-test performance of experimental group was at the 0.314 level of significance, whereas their performance on the post-test was at the 0.01 level of significance. The result of the analysis of the grammar yielded a score of 0.070 on the pre-test and a score of 0.01 on the post-test. Consequently, establishing a statistically significant effect size in favour of the experimental group.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:
- Post-test results showed that the experimental group had done better than the control group. This further supports the claim that online task-based learning improves the language proficiency of EFL students.
- Upon receiving the treatment, the experimental group's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking performance has dramatically increased.

Discussions

the data showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the control group and the experimental group, with the experimental group having a higher overall score. The results of the pre-test were very similar for both groups. The experimental group fared significantly better than their counterpart in the post-test, achieving a level of significance of 0.05. This provided evidence that OTBL is effective in enhancing speaking abilities in English as a Foreign Language. It is in line with the findings of Erten and Altay (2009), who discovered that task-based speaking activities improve students' speaking abilities, foster a more collaborative learning environment, and provide learners with more opportunities that mimic real-world situations. The findings agreed with several other studies, such as the one by Feiteiro (2018), which documented that task-based learning promoted the development of speaking skills. A similar finding was made by Awang and Pendidikan (2011), who found that students have positive views about the implementation of task-based speaking exercises in order to develop their oral abilities. Interestingly, students generally agreed that their oral performance, as well as their

communication skills, grammatical knowledge, and vocabulary, had greatly improved as a direct result of participating in task-based speaking exercises.

The considerable influence may be attributable to a number of things, such as the degree of autonomy that students are given in completing the task, the fun that they get out of it, and the level of challenge that is just appropriate for keeping their interest and conforming to their own level of competences.

Conclusion

The results of the study provided empirical proof that Online Task-Based Learning helps secondary school students enhance their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) communication skills. Other more research on the topic of language education found similar results.

Recommendations

The government should facilitate an ideal environment for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators and students, which includes ICT-integrated classrooms, learner-friendly environments, premium subscriptions of LMS suites, and sufficient provision of networks and internet. The management of secondary schools should facilitate open forums where instructors can discuss their successes and failures in implementing Task-Based Learning and making effective use of online resources.

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