

Task-Based Learning: Enhancing Speaking Skills Among Alternative Learning System Students

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach in enhancing the speaking skills of learners within the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in Santa Cruz, Marinduque. ALS students often face unique challenges in language acquisition, frequently struggling with low self-efficacy and limited opportunities for authentic verbal interaction. The research utilized a quantitative experimental design, specifically the one-group pretest-posttest design, involving a purposive sample of Thirty (30) ALS students. The researcher employed oral interviews as the primary assessment tool to evaluate the participants' speaking accuracy and fluency during both the pretest and posttest phases. To determine the impact of the intervention, the data were analyzed using a paired t-test as the statistical treatment. The results showed that the participants' speaking abilities were in the "Beginning" and "Developing" levels before the intervention, with cautious delivery and a little vocabulary. However, the post-test results demonstrated a notable improvement in performance once TBL activities were implemented. The paired sample t-test results showed that the computed p-values for all variables were less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. The study concludes that task-based learning offers a useful framework for real-world language use, it is a beneficial educational technique for improving the speaking abilities of ALS learners. In order to develop more competent and self-assured communicators, it is strongly advised that educators and ALS implementers include TBL activities into their teaching methods.

Keywords: Task-Based Learning, Alternative Learning System (ALS), Speaking Skills, Oral Interview, One-group Pretest-Posttest, Santa Cruz Marinduque, Paired t-test

1. Introduction

Communication means sharing or exchanging information, news, or ideas that you have with them. Language is primarily the medium we use to communicate through. Language has 2 functions: one is speaking, and the other is listening. The most effective way to improve your communication and your ability to interact with people and convey your message more effectively is to improve your speaking ability. Speaking is not only a matter of choosing words but also making sure you deliver those messages in a clear manner, confidently, and with authority.

Being able to become a better speaker will improve both your personal and professional life by allowing for a more engaging experience when having conversations with others and by helping you to create a more powerful presentation when speaking in front of others. Developing your skills as a speaker will also give you greater influence over others and open up new opportunities for you personally or professionally. In the global community of today, effective communication skills, particularly when speaking English, are critical to all of our interactions with others on a daily basis. Speaking provides individuals with the means to express

their thoughts and ideas, participate in discussion, and engage in various contexts, such as social, educational, or otherwise. Improving your communicative competence as it pertains to speaking is significant, especially in a context where English is a second language.

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a program in the Philippines designed to offer out-of-school youth and adults the chance to enhance basic literacy skills and achieve completion of basic education. The ALS seeks to offer an alternative educational opportunity that accommodates students' individual circumstances and learning preferences. ALS gives an opportunity to out-of-school youth and adult learners to easily access education that is flexible, inclusive, and customized to cater to their needs. Although ALS has fewer opportunities to have first-hand experiences in practicing the English language due to limited learning resources, class size, socio-economic factors, learning environment, and other learning difficulties within and beyond the classroom setting.

Moreover, for the Alternative Learning System (ALS), being fluent in speaking English is essential, as English serves as a global language for communication, business, and technology. Given the flexibility of the ALS setting, which is designed to meet the needs of learners who are unable to access education traditionally, the development of speaking fluency in English broadens their access to opportunities for education and employment, both locally and internationally. Task-based activities often provide immediate feedback, enabling the development of learners' speaking skills in real-time. The interactive and goal-oriented components of TBL enhance language learning interaction, enabling learners to develop linguistic skills along with communicative competence, which encompasses body language, tone, and cultural nuances.

Furthermore, Task-Based Learning (TBL) was developed as a widely supported method in language education through its focus on authentic, meaningful communication tasks, which directly boost our speaking fluency (Willis & Willis, 2007). Unlike traditional approaches, TBL focuses on students' engagement in activities that reflect real-life situations, requiring them to use language authentically rather than memorizing phrases and completing grammar activities. Studies affirm that TBL is more effective and offers less pressure to students whose language form is not a priority. While it has shown effectiveness in a formal classroom setup, the ALS setting remains unexplored. TBL presents an effective means to bridge these gaps and enhance speaking fluency in ALS learners by offering them practical, goal-oriented tasks.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of TBL on developing speaking fluency specifically for ALS learners, which focuses on the benefits of language to communication and the challenges encountered in applying this approach in an ALS setting. It will contribute to a deeper understanding of effective teaching strategies for ALS students. This will ultimately help ALS achieve its goal to provide quality and inclusive education for all.

2. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of integrating the Task-based Learning approach in enhancing the speaking skills of Alternative Learning System Students in Santa Cruz, Marinduque.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- 1. What are the pretest scores of ALS learners before using Task-based learning activities?*
- 2. What are the post- test scores of ALS learners after using Task-based learning activities?*
- 3. Is there a significant difference between pretest and post-test scores of ALS learners before and after using Task-Based Learning Activities?*

3. Methodology

This research used a one-group pretest-posttest research design under pre-experimental study to determine the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL) in improving the speaking abilities of the students in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). The design is suitable for evaluating the effect of TBL on a single group of ALS students, eliminating the necessity for a control group, and concentrating on improvements in their speaking abilities pre- and post-intervention. This design enables a direct analysis of the probable advantages of TBL by evaluating students' performance over time, rather than in comparison to a distinct group.

To measure the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning activities, the respondents of this study are twenty (20) ALS students from Santa Cruz East District enrolled in Community Learning Centers with various levels of formal education exposure. Due to the varied backgrounds and educational histories of ALS learners, participants may differ in age, educational experience, and language proficiency, thereby introducing real-world diversity and relevance to the findings.

The study employed purposive sampling as its methodology. This method was selected to ensure that participants show the necessary characteristics to engage meaningfully with the Task-Based Learning (TBL) activities, in view of the absence of a control group. Purposive sampling is appropriate for this study as it enables the researcher to intentionally select individuals who are likely to benefit from the intervention and offer valuable insights into its efficacy. The participants of the study consisted of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners currently enrolled at Santa Cruz East District within the Junior High School (JHS) level, Santa Cruz, Marinduque during the School Year 2025–2026.

To support the growth of participants' communicative competence, the study utilised a researcher-produced lesson exemplar and a pretest-posttest speaking task to assess the language performance of participants using an adapted analytical rubric. The researcher designed these tools to accommodate the unique educational and academic needs of the ALS students to generate findings with high degrees of reliability and validity, with a primary focus on the functional use of English within authentic contexts. As a result, the three primary tools used in this study were a three-part oral interview guide for pre-and post-assessments, a five-week exemplar course based on Task-Based Learning (TBL), and an analytic rubric used to evaluate speaking performance.

The methodology for data collection in this research adhered to the ethical principles of engaging in a systematic method and implementing an instructional intervention. The goal of these methods were to establish procedural legitimacy through institutional approval and formal permission to conduct research in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program. Following the completion of the ethical requirements and procedures, the researcher conducted a pretest to establish the speaking abilities/skills of all the participants before implementing task-based language learning (TBL) lessons. This information was necessary to identify pre-existing deficiencies related to fluency and/or accuracy to ensure that the implementation of TBL would be effective.

After ethical procedures were completed, researchers conducted a pretest to identify a baseline for learners' speaking skills. The purpose of this assessment was to determine the amount of fluency and accuracy deficiencies before a task-based learning approach was implemented. The assessment was conducted orally and divided into three sections: one focused on personal introductions, another about challenges experienced while studying or in life as an adult learner, and a third on the students' plans after completing their program. The method used to achieve this was by following an unstructured approach that allowed for spontaneous, follow-up questions according to the learners' responses. These follow-up questions were necessary during the learners' interviews to assist in determining learners' ability to communicate effectively and produce longer, more fully formed utterances in their speech. To establish an objective, reliable assessment, the learners' recorded pretest performances were rated by three experts using a standardised rating scale in order to establish a benchmark for subsequent comparisons of growth.

After the completion of the pretest, a five-week intervention incorporating task-based learning (TBL) was conducted. The purpose of the lessons was beyond traditional, repetitive teaching to focus on developing competencies in communicating. All TBL activities (role play, collaborative activities, and problem-solving) were designed to simulate situations that learners could encounter in everyday life, enabling learners to negotiate their meanings and use English as an effective and practical tool. Role play allowed learners to engage in a realistic dialogue, and collaboration encouraged peer negotiation for meaning; problem solving provided a means for learners to express complex ideas and thoughts. Through the use of specific rubrics and prompt feedback, the researcher also monitored learners' progress during the five weeks.

Following the intervention, a posttest was administered using the same interview structure and types of questions as the initial pretest. This ensured that an accurate comparison could be made to measure the improvement resulting from the TBL activities. The researchers used the modified three-part interview structure to evaluate improvement in learners' fluency, organisation, and delivery. To ensure methodological consistency, the researchers also used the same panel of three English experts who rated the learners' pretest performance to rate their posttest performance.

The data from both the preintervention and postintervention were compiled, processed, and analysed using appropriate statistical techniques. The data were validated by a panel of three native-English-speaking experts, and the use of a structured, yet flexible, TBL framework produced a significant and measurable improvement in hanging skills and confidence in communicating as an adult learner.

In determining whether the difference between the pre-test and post-test is meaningful, paired samples t-test (dependent samples t-test) will be used to compare pre-test and post-test performance of ALS learners on the job interview simulation. The paired samples t-test will determine whether a meaningful effect has occurred in relation to the use of Task-based Learning on the pre-test and post-test scores (speaking performances) of ALS learners versus the possibility that the change is due to chance. A significance level of 0.05 will be utilized,

which is conventional for educational research, therefore if the p-value obtained from the t-test analysis is <0.05 the null hypothesis (there is no difference between pre-test and post-test scores) will be rejected. Rejecting the null hypothesis will provide evidence that Task-based Learning has a positive, statistically significant effect on the speaking performance of ALS learners.

Through the data analyses, the purpose of this study is to not only quantify any improvement of ALS learners' speaking performance but to provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of Task-based Learning in improving ALS learners' speaking abilities.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Mean Pretest Scores of Students in Speaking Skills

Speaking Skills	Mean Pretest	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Accuracy			
Pronunciation	2.23	0.50	Developing
Vocabulary	1.84	0.45	Developing
Fluency			
Expression	1.91	0.64	Developing
Phrasing	1.82	0.55	Developing
Smoothness and Flow	1.97	0.60	Developing
Pace and Timing	1.99	0.58	Developing

Legend: 3.26-4.00 (Proficient); 2.51-3.35 (Approaching Proficiency); 1.76-2.50 (Developing); 1.00-1.75 (Beginning)

Table 1 presents the speaking skills of students were assessed using a pretest and analyzed to determine the overall level of proficiency in terms of language skills the group possessed. Overall, there appears to be a steadiness among students in relation to their language abilities. However, almost every student in the class appears to be functioning at what can be called a "developing" level. While they do have some proficiency and could be characterized as having exceeded what is euphemistically referred to as the "Beginning" level for basic everyday English, they still remain clustered closely in terms of their specific performance on the 4-point scoring rubric as reflected by their average scores which range from 1.82 to 2.23 and suggest that they are still experiencing difficulty mastering the complexity of natural flow of conversation. In short, students at this developing level possess an inadequate amount of polish, pacing, and variation to be considered professionally or academically excellent.

One important point to note is that each of the four mean score ranges of 1.76 – 2.50 serve to reflect where students currently are on the developing scale relative to their previous progress from beginning level English toward achieving conversational fluency without a large disparity between pronunciation performance and proficiency with phonological sounds used as their internal linguistic repertoire. With regard to accuracy, there are significant discrepancies between students' production of phonological sounds and what they internally possess as phonological sound resources. Therefore, it can be concluded that when students have difficulties with regard to producing accurate phonological sounds and experience difficulties tracking their phonetic output with what they maintain in their long term or permanent memory, these two things can be used as criteria by which to assess progress at the end of each session to determine if they continue to improve their overall accuracy.

Of the four areas of measurement, pronunciation produced the highest average of 2.23. ($SD = .50$). Although there are students at this level that can successfully convey a message to their respective listeners through their use of spoken words, they have produced an inconsistent number of phonetic patterns overall. An average of approximately eight to twelve discrepancies occurs over the course of an entire speaking session from start to completion, which results in additional effort required by listeners in order for them to understand what the speaker is attempting to communicate. Because this group of students produced the best overall results on the pronunciation, the overall sounds produced by the group are not produced with an adequate level of naturalness or clarity.

Vocabulary, on the other hand, had a much lower mean score of 1.84 ($SD = 0.45$). The data shows that learners communicate using very limited vocabulary—typically around 10 to 15 different phrases—as well as repetitive or very basic language. Due to their limited "word bank," the respondents frequently pause for extended amounts of time in an effort to figure out the appropriate words. This affects their capacity to directly communicate complicated or varied ideas.

Additionally, their vocabulary practice and warm-up activities serve as an influence on each task during the intervention. Most of the students remembered and utilized the words and phrases they had encountered on their previous activities. By giving students a "toolkit" of phrases to use in future activities, they could focus less on what to say and more on how to say it, which allowed them to think more and speak more. Involvement Load Hypothesis (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001) claims that the necessity for students to "search" for and "evaluate" appropriate terms to say original concepts significantly enhances their retention and accurate usage of the word, thereby resulting in the observed improvement in accuracy.

Fluency data from the pre-assessments shows that when students successfully produce isolated words or phrases, they cannot sustain the rhythm or flow of English. The average score on the expression section of the assessment is 1.91 ($SD = 0.64$), which means that students who are still in this developing stage display characteristics such as speaking with a very low volume and without much confidence when they are expressing their thoughts or feelings to others. At this stage of their development, students present themselves in a way that is unprofessional and have a voice that typically sounds natural for only a short duration of time before changing back to a flat, "recited" voice, thereby giving them a nervous appearance. The large standard deviation (0.64) of the mean scores for both expression areas indicates that while the average performance of these students has improved, the amount of difference in the amount of voice projection among the students is substantially greater than the range of differences in their level of accuracy.

A review of the scores for the phrases by participants (1.82, $SD = 0.55$) also showed the development of an average level of phrase construction, which is considered to be the primary obstacle for students at this level of proficiency trying to develop their skills in constructing sentences. Students at this level are capable of using fragmented sentences, but they are not constructing coherent sentences in a grammatically correct manner. Students are still incapable of emphasising the key points in their responses through an appropriate and effective use of intonation and/or logical pauses. The staccato speech pattern that is being produced by the students makes it difficult for a listener to determine how the speaker's main ideas fit together logically. This finding suggests that the students are continuing to progress as if they are reading a word-by-word format as opposed to being able to "chunk" the information into meaningful pieces.

At the developing level, the mean score for smoothness and flow of speech (1.97, $SD = 0.60$) indicates that both mean scores were influenced by many instances of long, frequent pauses or hesitations in speech. These typical interruptions in flow of voice are usually an indication of either the speaker trying to convey a complex idea that is not readily accessible to them or trying to recall a series of appropriate phrases. The jagged pattern of speech productions indicates that the speaker is having difficulty self-correcting or operating from a fluent level of development. The disjointed rhythm of the speaker's voice results in increased frustration for listeners because they are not able to experience continuous flow of the information being provided by the speaker as a result of being required to frequently pause and reflect on the language being communicated.

In conclusion, both the pace and timing (.99) levels of development based on the oral interviews were still in the developing stages. The data collected during the assessment of pace and timing indicated that students are continuing to master the ability to speak at an intermediate pacing level. Often times speech produced by students appears to be extremely slow or difficult to follow because it requires the speaker to use significant effort to develop and formulate words that would normally be developed and formulated at a higher speed or level. More proficient speakers often demonstrate consistent pacing and timing within their speech while the developing speakers typically demonstrate consistent slow pacing and timing. Therefore, the slow pace of conversational speech by these developing speakers is an indication of how much further these speakers need to progress to use their cognitive to express themselves orally.

Task-based learning bridged the gap between knowing a word and using and pronouncing it correctly. According to Samuda (2001), TBL guides learners to use more sophisticated and accurate words because students were often pushed to use simple words to more complex terms that they wouldn't normally use in a free-flow conversation. It allows them to expand their vocabulary since their words are very limited. The Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) says that when students "notice" the difference between their own quiet, flat delivery and the animated, clear speech needed to do well in a professional setting, their accuracy improves; therefore, the students are in need of authentic situations where they can use practical English language.

Table 2. Mean Posttest Scores of Students in Speaking Skills

Speaking Skills	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Accuracy			
Pronunciation	2.72	0.39	Approaching Proficiency
Vocabulary	2.79	0.48	Approaching Proficiency
Fluency			
Expression	2.68	0.55	Approaching Proficiency
Phrasing	2.61	0.50	Approaching Proficiency
Smoothness and Flow	2.80	0.40	Approaching Proficiency
Pace and Timing	2.77	0.40	Approaching Proficiency

Legend: 3.26-4.00 (Proficient); 2.51-3.35 (Approaching Proficiency); 1.76-2.50 (Developing); 1.00-1.75 (Beginning)

Table 2 presents the analysis of post-intervention data concerning the students' speaking skills, as illustrated in the results table and in accordance with the established assessment standards. The study evaluated the students' performance in the areas of Accuracy and Fluency. Statistical data indicates a significant alteration in performance, with all mean scores now falling within the range of 2.51 to 3.35. According to the data, there is evidence that the students' level of proficiency has increased significantly since their previous stages of development this indicates that the students are at the next level of proficiency and reflects the movement toward greater and more complete access to linguistic resources as it pertains to Accuracy in the domain of Pronunciation. The average score for Pronunciation was 2.72 (SD = 0.39) and students' deliver their speech predominantly with clarity and approximately 95% of their speech can be understood by the listener with very little effort although there are some occasional errors related to word stress and phonetic accuracy, the low standard deviation of 0.39 is indicative of a high level of consistency within the students and this shows that the group has established a degree of stability in their pronouncing words.

When it comes to Vocabulary, the mean score is 2.79 (SD = 0.48) and at this proficient/near proficiency level the students have expanded their Vocabulary to 16 to 19 unique words. The language they possess is sufficient to complete the communication task. The results show that the students make clear statements consistently, but they continue to use basic Vocabulary and express feelings of needing clarification. The results reveal that respondents have eliminated barriers to Vocabulary Diversity in their learners, and demonstrates that the same patterns displayed previously continue to exist.

Fluency indicates that the students are developing the ability to maintain the rhythm and intonation of Spoken English as demonstrated by the production of a mean score of 2.68 (SD = 0.55), at an approaching proficiency level; all of the students at this level are producing Fluent Speech and using an adequate Volume to produce their Speech. Occasionally, they may have an element of rehearsed, or monotone style about them that makes the conversation less "natural" as they have moved beyond the tentative, unsure tones associated with the "Developing" stage; the students show a greater sense of self-assurance, which is important for continuing toward achieving true communication competence.

With the average phrasing score of 2.61 (SD = 0.50), the data indicates that the respondents are nearing the proficiency level. They appear to have begun the process of integrating effective phrasing with a more complex sentence structure than they did at the "Beginning" stage. They have replaced most of their previous "choppy" fragments with more smoothly flowing groups of responses formed from cohesive clusters of words. The increase in proficiency in phrasing has enabled them to categorize sounds more effectively and maintain consistency in their answers.

The last criterion relates to time and rhythm with respect to the learner's delivery, and there were considerable improvements in delivery as assessed by this measure. The highest mean score of all measures of smoothness and flow was 2.80 (SD = 0.40). The results suggest that the students are developing greater fluency in their speech. They are able to sustain their contributions to the conversation with occasional disruption of flow when responding to very difficult questions or complex grammatical forms. The long and frequent periods of "silence" that used to occur in their conversations are no longer present. 2.77 (SD=0.40) for the mean score of Pace and Timing suggests we have evaluated our students (at levels approaching proficiency) so that they are no longer consistently "sluggish" in terms of their apparent rate of activity.

In reviewing the students' improved performance, we found evidence of greater fluency in their ability to move throughout the different sections of a given response; however, the students are still somewhat uneven in their ability to maintain this speed. For example, students tend to speed up when navigating familiar areas of the response, but experience a significant decrease in speed when they have to navigate through places of uncertainty. This inconsistency in the ability to maintain a specific pace is supportive of the Trade-off Hypothesis, which states that while managing more complex vocabulary and/or phrasing often requires more cognitive effort than one has to use for more simplistic vocabulary and/or phrasing, as a result, speech fluency will be interrupted (Slavin, 2006). The trend of improvement toward faster speeds or faster and more complex timing is clearly a step forward toward the ability to speak conversationally.

The statistical data collected indicate that the group of learners within my study has also achieved comparable levels of Approaching Proficiency for all six characteristics of speaking. The average score range of scores from 2.61 to 2.80 demonstrates a total of an increase in both technical accuracy as well as coherence of communication. The relatively low standard deviations (.39 for the 30 student group to .55) and the indications of success within the teaching model suggest that the majority of the learners experienced a gain in both technical and coherence-related improvements.

Evidence from the data demonstrates that the primary areas of concern from earlier assessments relating to limited vocabulary as well as fragmented speech have primarily been addressed. The students now have sufficient vocabulary in order to express clear ideas; in addition, the students have developed an adequate understanding of how language is structured so that they can now express their ideas more coherently. To achieve the seamless "naturalness" and self-correction associated with a "Proficient" speaker; however, they will need additional practice; however, the present level of performance clearly indicates there is a movement from uncertain communication toward fluent communication. The movement of the students from "Developing" skills to "Approaching Proficiency" indicates the students have developed both the verbal confidence and the mechanical stability necessary for successful spoken interactions.

In contrast to rote memorization of vocabulary words, the students were engaged in what Swain (1985) refers to as "pushed output" due to TBL activities, and therefore their use of language became more accurate when they needed to demonstrate professional level sound as opposed to only practicing. As a consequence of

their language being viewed as an effective tool for engaging in conversation at a professional level, the students began to speak in a manner which became more natural to them and with more confidence, rather than through repetitive practice.

Table 3. Paired Sample t-test Results

Speaking Skills	Mean		SD		t	df	Sig
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest			
Fluency							
Expression	1.91	2.68	0.64	0.55	8.880	29	<.001
Phrasing	1.82	2.61	0.55	0.50	7.950	29	<.001
Smoothness and Flow	1.97	2.80	0.60	0.40	8.070	29	<.001
Pace and Timing	1.99	2.77	0.58	0.40	6.850	29	<.001
Accuracy							
Pronunciation	2.23	2.72	0.50	0.39	4.570	29	<.001
Vocabulary	1.84	2.79	0.45	0.48	8.360	29	<.001

Legend: If the p-value is < 0.05, then it is statistically significant.

If the p-value is > 0.05, it is NOT statistically significant.

Table 3 presents a detailed a comprehensive summary of students' results by comparing their overall performance in the two identified major areas of performance: Accuracy (which includes both Pronunciation and Vocabulary) and Fluency (which incorporates Expression, Phrasing/Smoothness/Flow, and Pace/Timing). This reveals that all computed p-values were .001 (represented as < .001), which is significantly lower than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest results across all components of speaking. This means that the null hypothesis is rejected. More importantly, the data show a big improvement in the quality of students' oral communication when looked at through the rubric criteria. Each skill went from Developing to Approaching Proficiency.

Pronunciation is the basis of being able to understand someone when they speak. The average score for Pronunciation went up from 2.23 in the pretest to 2.72 in the posttest in this study. This gain is statistically significant ($t=4.570, p<.001$), but it is the smallest t-value of all the categories. This means that even though students got better, pronunciation is still a hard skill to learn in a short amount of time.

The pretest score of 2.23 shows that the students were at a "Developing" level. This level was probably marked by a lot of interference from their first language and a lot of mispronunciations that made it hard to communicate. TBL required students to do "meaning-focused" tasks, which meant that they had to be understood in order to do well. This required a deliberate endeavor to enhance articulation. The score of 2.72 on the posttest shows that the person is getting closer to "Approaching Proficiency." The drop in Standard Deviation (from 0.50 to 0.39) shows that the students' pronunciation became more consistent across the group. Students participated in an intervention that helped them improve their articulation skills. By utilizing less specific sounds and more standard pronunciation of words, the students were able to perform their assigned communicative tasks much more effectively.

In general, vocabulary reflects both the number of words you know, as well as how well you use those words. The data revealed a dramatic improvement from an average score of 1.84 for the pretest to an average of 2.79 for the posttest. With a very large t-value of 8.360, TBL had a significant impact on the students' ability to learn and use words.

When students scored an average of 1.84, it placed them in the "Beginning" to "Developing" stages of vocabulary, which meant that they probably used the same few words repeatedly as well as had difficulty finding an appropriate word to express their intended meaning. TBL, however, provided a context with an immediate "need-to-use" component, as the students were provided learning opportunities to accomplish specific tasks or

problem-solving missions. The fact that students transitioned from an average of 1.84 to 2.79 showed that the students went from using only a small number of common words to using more specific and accurate vocabulary. Instead of just using words because they were easy to say, students were using words that were appropriate to the task they were completing. These data support the belief that ALS students are much more likely to retain the correct use of vocabulary when they have a functional reason for using the new language than they would be if they were learning new vocabulary by memorizing it.

The students' ability to recall and use vocabulary from their vocabulary practice and warm-up activities positively influenced the ability of students to complete their assignment successfully. The majority of the students were able to remember and use vocabulary from their previous activities. A "tool kit" of suggested phrases helped students concentrate less on what they need to say and give them the opportunity to think of other ways to say it, which increased their ability to think and improve their speaking ability. They need to realize that all of these students are not proficient. As a result, they also need more unique vocabulary and topic-specific words rather than repeating the same ones.

The evidence clearly shows that students have progressed from being "vocabulary-poor" and using repetitive speech to having the ability to think and clearly communicate. The evidence indicates that students need additional help to increase the range of words that are available to them in order to achieve proficiency by using enriched or complex vocabulary.

Task-based language learning can help students cross the bridge between merely knowing a word and actually using and pronouncing it correctly. Samuda (2001) argues that task-based language learning (TBL) will help all learners reach a more sophisticated and accurate level of vocabulary through the progression of becoming more proficient in word use due to being encouraged to use simple vocabulary in more complex forms that would not typically occur in normal conversation. Task-based language learning has enabled students to expand their vocabulary because their vocabulary is presently quite limited. Also, the task-based nature of the intervention appears to have impacted the way students responded to the interview questions.

According to Saito (2012), the preference for "intelligibility" to "isolation" (whereby isolation was reduced from 30% of all students at beginning level—and 0% at Advancing Proficiency) is confirmed in this study. At the Advancing Proficiency level, a substantial increase in proficiency had occurred (53.3%). Interviewing tasks allowed students the opportunity to determine meanings through their interactions. When communication became difficult, students tended to change the volume of their speech and alter their accents automatically in order to facilitate comprehension. Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis posits that as students "notice" the contrast between their own monotone and the animated and clear speech necessary for professional interaction, their performance improves.

In contrast to rote learning, TBL tasks encouraged students to participate in what Swain refers to as "pushed output" (1985), where they were motivated by the need for professionally delivered and naturally sounding output to achieve linguistic accuracy. The shift towards a more natural sounding tone, as well as the increase in student confidence, was due to the use of language as an instrument for professional exchange rather than just for practice.

The expression of meaning includes the use of intonation, volume, and emotional tone. The mean improvement of 1.91 to 2.68 for this construct was the largest t-value (8.880). This statistic provides insight into the increased confidence level of students. According to the pretest data, the majority of the students who fell within the developing range had difficulty expressing themselves vocally. Because the majority of students were developing, their delivery was not energetic because they were not confident in their ability to answer the questions. In the beginning stage of their delivery, many students had no emotion or expression; they simply sounded like they were reading answers from memory rather than engaging in a conversation. At this stage, only a handful of students ($f=5$; 16.7%) had progressed to a point where they were beginning to develop proficiency with their ability to speak clearly although they sometimes sounded rehearsed or monotonous.

Conversely, posttest results demonstrate a tremendous shift toward increased expressiveness when communicating. The majority of the students ($f=16$; 53.3%) transitioned from the beginning level to developing

level, meaning that they now communicate effectively at an approaching proficiency level and use clear loud voices; although a few may sound somewhat "scripted," they have developed a level of clarity that enhances their ability to communicate with others.

The developing level decreased from 36.7% ($f=11$) to 0%, and the beginning level completely disappeared. Most importantly, three students (10.0%) were at the proficient level on the posttest; therefore, the students learned how to employ dynamic variations based on volume and levels of enthusiasm in their voice. While they may not sound as "professional" as before, their tone is now natural and confident and is consistent with the type of questions they were responding to.

Furthermore, by comparing the pretest and posttest scores showed that the teacher-led instruction did not assist in students progressing from "reciting" to "conversing" due to the change from student-centered to task-based instruction. The changes we have seen with many students still sound somewhat stiff, but the large number of students who no longer have to perform at the first level indicates that these strategies for active learning helped them bridge the gap between the first and second levels and changed the way they express their responses to questions about the elements of speech, specifically volume and excitement when speaking.

Many students who score low on the expressive pretests show "monotone" speech patterns due to anxiety or lack of familiarity with the language. The dramatic increase in scores from pretest to post-test demonstrates how the cooperative and collaborative nature of the TBL approach gave students a sense of "belonging" with the language and allowed them to express themselves in a much fuller manner. Because the TBL tasks were interactive, the students were required to use emphasis and enthusiasm in order to persuade, describe, or interact with other students. The high level of statistical significance ($p<.001$) indicates the use of the TBL approach effectively eliminated the barrier of monotone speech. Students moved from being "producers of sound" to "communicators of ideas," proving that TBL is an effective strategy for developing the affective side of language acquisition and transforming the shy, uncertain language learner into a fully-fledged, self-assured and confident communicator.

Phrasing is the ability to group words into meaningful grammatical (as well as semantic) chunks. In the case of the mean performance score improvement, from 1.82 (pretest) to 2.61 (post-test) is excellent ($t=7.950$). This represents an extremely important indicator of cognitive processing in spoken language. On the expressive pretest, the low scores suggest the students were speaking as "word by word," which is typical of learners who are "translating" from one language to another in their heads. This leads to speech that is disjointed and difficult to comprehend. The posttest data indicate that students were starting to internalize language patterns and use them to speak in phrases instead of with individual words. Transitioning to using phrases to display as opposed to using words is critical for students who are pursuing the "Approaching Proficiency" level. Demonstrating a capacity to interact frequently through a common conversational form helped ALS students practice the rhythm of speech which is commonly found in conversational forms. As the students improved their phrasal use, they became more effective in retrieving language from their brains in blocks of information, an indicator of moving from being a basic learner to becoming a functional speaker of the language.

The second measure used to quantify the fluency of ALS students is their use of Smoothness and Flow. Smoothness and flow measure the absence of inappropriate hesitations, false starts, and the use of vocal fillers such as "uh or ah." The mean score for smoothness and flow in the posttest of this study was 2.80, which is the highest mean score for the posttest for any of the measures collected in this study, and represents an increase from pretest mean score of 1.97 ($t=8.070$).

The pretest mean score for this measure indicated students were at a "Developing" level, as there were numerous pauses in their speech that may have distracted the listener. The posttest mean of 2.80 is the closest mean score for any measure to the "Proficient (4)" level. The findings indicate that TBL provided sufficient rehearsal and task-cycles for ALS students whereby they became proficient in using speech flow with fewer interruptions. Additionally, the reduction in Standard Deviation from 0.60 to 0.40 indicates that even the lowest-performing students show significant improvement in his or her ability to speak in a smooth manner. Thus, TBL seems to reduce the cognitive load on students in completing the task; as students become more comfortable

with the task structure, they can continue to produce continuous speech without needing to frequently self-correct.

Pacing and timing relate to how fast one provides a task and how long an individual should pause or delay using words in order to complete the task. The mean score increased from 1.99 to 2.77 ($t=6.850$). Students transitioned from speaking slowly and at a laborious pace to a more natural, conversational pace.

At first, it was likely that students were speaking very slowly while searching for their words. This can be frustrating to the listener. However, the post-test indicates a much more even speech rate for the students. A speaker's comfort level with the material will dictate how fast they speak. The more comfort the student has with the material, the more "human" their speaking will sound. Data shows that TBL has provided students with the ability to regulate their speed of speech, when to pause for emphasis, and when to speak at a rate that would keep the audience engaged. This skill will be extremely important for ALS students who may use these skills in future job interviews or community leadership positions, where a steady, confident speech rate is crucial for professional credibility.

A thorough analysis of the data demonstrates Task-Based Learning has had a highly effective impact on the ALS students' speaking skills. All of the measured variables across both the Accuracy and Fluency domains showed statistically significant improvement at the $p<.001$ level. This indicates that shifting from a traditional, lecture-based style of instruction to a task-based style of instruction is beneficial for this target population.

Looking at the overall means provides a holistic view of the change from the developing (2.0) to the approaching proficiency (3.0) levels. Even though there were no categories that achieved full "proficiency" (4.0), the continued improvement on all six sub-skills indicates balanced growth. The greatest gains were made in the fluency components (with the exception of smoothness and expression). TBL is found to lower the "Affective Filter" as well, allowing ALS students greater freedom of speech and more expressiveness than they experienced prior to the treatment, according to this evidence. The decreased Standard Deviation for most of the categories, particularly in the areas of Pronunciation, Smoothness and Pace, represents an important finding, displaying that the TBL implementation did not only help the top-performing students but also helped to narrow the achievement gap for the class as a whole by pulling students previously at the "Beginning" level up through the collaborative and interactive nature of the task they completed.

The implementation of task based learning across the curriculum has proven to be a cornerstone of the total fluency development for the students. This has been illustrated by the continual improvement of the four criteria measured. The learners' delivery has changed from the fragmented and robotic delivery seen at pretest to a cohesive and polished delivery as learners participated in a real world context. Significant increases in the areas of Expression and Timing & Pace were seen as students moved from mechanical and boring recitals to a lively and conversational delivery. This is consistent with what Ibrahim (2020) and Chen and Yuan (2022) found that learners are encouraged to adjust their speed and tone of voice to the demands of real-time engagement. Vocabulary underwent the most critical change in this study with an increase in average number of words known from 1.84 to 2.79. This finding correlates with the Vocabulary Threshold Theory (Nation, 2001), which argues that a person must reach a certain level of lexical knowledge in order to produce unscripted speech. According to the research, students are unable to produce unscripted speech when they are below this threshold as evidenced in the pre-test where students are experiencing lexical arrest; they are unable to produce unscripted speech because they are focusing too much on finding the correct word rather than producing the speech.

The data collected from the areas of Phrasing, Smoothness, and Flow demonstrate that students are through the "word searching" phase that negatively impacted their delivery of those words due to having worked together on the tasks. A marked decrease in the Beginning and Developing level indicates that students have moved toward Skehan's (2024) concept of automaticity, which means they can create a coherent discourse without being impeded by doubts about grammar. According to Phan et al. (2022), social negotiation is integral to the task-based approach and provides language support by helping students transition from choppy, word by

word utterances to purposeful professional phrases with intentional pauses. Ultimately, the evidence in this study indicates that when training focuses on communicative proficiency instead of memorization, students will possess the clarity, energy, and confidence necessary to communicate professionally. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that learners have developed a professional voice that meets the requirements of clear, engaging, and logically structured communication needed in an academic and professional setting as demonstrated by their cumulative progress through the rubric.

In conclusion, there is clear and compelling evidence reflecting that the gains made by the students are not a result of coincidence; therefore, the results of these data demonstrate high t-values and consistent results across all metrics, demonstrating that Task-Based Learning is a highly effective pedagogy that successfully connects theoretical language experience to real-world, pragmatic oral communicative proficiency and provides ALS students with the competency needed in both their personal and professional success.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the null hypothesis, which claims that there is no significant difference between ALS learners' pretest and posttest scores before and after utilizing Task-Based Learning (TBL) activities, is rejected. The empirical evidence from the paired sample t-tests show that each of the three speaking subskills had a p-value less than .001 indicating that the learners' performance was statistically significantly improved as a result of the intervention. The evidence from the paired sample t-tests also shows that TBL provides a very effective way of learning accuracy and fluency as can be seen by learner's transition from the Beginning and Developing stages to the Approaching Proficiency level. When taking this improvement from a holistic standpoint, ALS learners were not simply improving on one isolated skill area but were experiencing a concurrent transition from a Developing Stage to an Approaching Proficiency Stage. The statistical data from the paired sample t-tests with p-values less than .001 for all six performance indicators indicates that TBL provided the pedagogical bridge necessary for ALS learners to develop their speaking skills in a way that was more confident (accurate and fluent).

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