Research Article

The Effectiveness of Task-based Learning Module on Speaking Skill Achievement of Literacy and Numeracy Screening Students

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Abstract: English is taught as a second language in Malaysian primary and secondary schools. However, students still have difficulties to speak English as it is not their native language. Many students were reported to have the ability to write well, but they failed in their speaking test due to lack of speaking ability in English. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the task-based module of speaking lessons towards the achievement of Literacy and Numeracy (LINUS) students from one of the primary schools in Kelantan, Malaysia. This study employed a qualitative approach to collect data. Samples were selected using purposive sampling, comprising 30 Year One students from a primary school Kelantan. The research instrument used was the focus group discussion. The results showed the effectiveness of the task-based learning module in assessing the speaking skill of the LINUS students. Majority of the students obtained high achievement in English subject, and their performances increased after learning through task-based speaking activities. Task-based learning methods may affect the achievement of students' speaking skill. The study suggested that task-based learning module should be applied for teaching the new curriculum syllabus in Malaysian schools, known as Common European Framework (CEFR). This study contributes to students as a guide to master the speaking skill through task-based learning activities in classroom.

Keywords: task-based; LINUS; speaking skill; Malaysia; achievement; literacy

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Public Interest Statement

The emergence of globalization era leads to high demand in language proficient skills. With the insistence in professional career, education, health and management, English has become one of the most important languages as it is the international language as well. Previous studies showed that students faced many difficulties in practising the English language outside classroom as they have less authentic chances to use the language. From this study, it was observed that the achievement of the students'

speaking skill might affect by task-based learning module. This research is conducted in one of the primary schools in Kelantan, Malaysia which involved 30 Year One students from the same classroom. This research may help to improve the students' speaking skill to achieve the targeted level.

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, English is widely used for most office and administration affairs. Therefore, the Ministry of Education had come out with new planning to uphold and strengthen English education, as stated in Malaysian Education Blueprint (2012). In order to enhance the language itself, the Education Ministry of Malaysia has also written down the five learning skills that should be mastered by students, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar, which aims to develop students by strengthening the delivery of English language lesson. By 2025, the Ministry aims to meet the following targets; 70% of students achieve Cambridge 1119-equivalent minimum credit in English at SPM level. Nazariyah and Abdul Rahmad (2013) claimed that the focus areas, as stated in chapter four of PPP, are curriculum and assessment, language skill enhancement, intervention for improving school performance, special education, the education of indigenous and other minorities, and education for smart students. Therefore the program named LINUS (Literacy and Numeracy Screening) was implemented. LINUS is an abbreviation of Literacy and Numeracy Screening to verify that every average child can adept basic literacy and numeracy skills after attending three years of primary education. Starting in 2010, year one, pupils all over Malaysia were exposed to this program, which endeavors to achieve at expanding access to an excellent education. The target aimed at mastering the basic literacy and numeracy skills after three years of primary education by the end of 2012. As mentioned by Masnah Ali Muda in English Literation, the objectives of the Literacy in English Programme are two-pronged; the first is to increase English literacy rates among all Level 1 primary school pupils except for special needs pupils and the second objective is to provide remedial support to help Level 1 primary school pupils acquire basic literacy in the English language (Education Ministry, 2014). In line with this, the implementation of the LINUS Program has gained schools' awareness in providing more attention to the local students to master literacy skills.

1.1. Current achievement of the students towards task-based learning module in speaking lesson

The Education Ministry has indicated that they would like the students to be able to understand, read, speak and apply the language with full confidence and be fully prepared when English is made a compulsory pass subject. Numerous experimental studies, such as the 10th Malaysia Plan (2010) have shown that all countries in the world have focused on literacy in their education agenda. There were many difficulties in sufficiently practicing the English language outside the classroom, whereby students have less authentic chances to use the target language. Therefore, the focus of language teaching has been placed on changing the classroom practice from the traditional passive lecture to more active group learning that learners can be more easily exposed to target language use (Jeon & Hahn, 2006:138). Thus, this paper aims to determine the achievement of task-based learning that is associated with the achievement of young learners due to poor implementation and conventional ways of learning in classroom lessons. This study is guided by the following research question:

- **Research Question**: Will the implementation of task-based learning influence the achievement of the students?

2. Literature Review

This section briefly describes what task-based language learning entails by defining the tasks and explains the use of task-based learning in enhancing the speaking skill for Literacy and Numeracy Screening students (LINUS).

2.1. Task Definition

Many studies have been done on task-based learning and the term has been explained in different ways and beliefs. Izadpanah (2010) had chronologically summarized the task definitions from various perspectives of the research experts in the table 1 below:

Table **1.** Task Definition

Researchers	Key Concepts
Long (1985)	What people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between?
Breen (1987)	A range of work plans for exercise and activities in language instruction.
Littlejohn (1988)	Any proposal within the materials for action undertaken by the learners to bring up the foreign language learning.
Skehan (1996)	Meaning, task completion, the real-world and outcomes are focused.
Willis (1996)	A classroom undertaking for a communicative purpose to achieve an outcome.
Ellis (2003)	A work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically to achieve an outcome.
Nunan (2005)	A piece of classroom work to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form.

Source: (as cited in Izadpanah, 2010, p.3)

As cited in Izadpanah, (2010, p.3), Long (1985) defined task as the association to the actual world. Long highlighted the task to the language use and without language use. In other words, the requirement of language use does not have to be involved in task definition. Breen (1987) simplified the task definition as all kinds of activities which relate to learning of language. Breen did not make clear how the practices are differing from exercises. Littlejohn (1998) suggested a wider definition;

> … *"Task" refers to any proposal contained within the materials for action to be undertaken by the learners, which has the direct aim of bringing about the learning of the foreign language (p.198).*

Littlejohn emphasized three features of process, content, and participation. Process means the experience of teachers and learners; content is what the learners concentrate on and participation is more about during the process, who will be working with the learners (as cited in Izadpanah, 2010, p.4).

Skehan (as cited in Izadpanah, 2010, p.4) listed out the features of tasks as (1) Meaning is primary (; (2) Learners are not given other people's meaning to repeat; (3) A task has some connection to the real-world; (4) Task completion has some priority; and (5) The assessment of the task is in terms of outcome. Ellis (2003) defined task as 'a work plan' which involve learners to practise the language realistically so that the learning objectives can be achieve to ensure the 'appropriate propositional content' has been delivered. (Ellis, 2003, p.16)

As cited in Izadpanah, (2010, p.3), Ellis (2003) definition is pedagogical since it relates to meaning attention and grammar engagement. While Nunan (2004) defined task as an activity that necessarily involve language as stated as;

A piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, middle and an end. (p.4)

Furthermore, Nunan (2004) also added that conveying meaning by means of form, or grammatically knowledge should be focused on a task itself. Nunan divided types of task into five categories which were cognitive, interpersonal, linguistic, affective and creative. Those categories are applied in the stages of task-based activities and learning including the 'pre' stage, 'during' stage and 'post' stage.

2.2. Task-based Lesson Framework

Ellis (2006) came out with a design of task-based lesson that involves three phases namely pre-task, during task and post task (as stated in Figure 1).

Table **2.** Ellis's (2006) Task-based Lesson Framework

Phase	Example of options
Pre-task	• Framing the activity (e.g. establishing the outcome of the task) • Planning time • Doing a similar task
During task	• Time pressure
Post task	• Number of participants • Learner report • Consciousness-raising • Repeat task

Before the teachers and students start the task, the first phase which is pre-task covers diverse of activities which both teacher and students can commence, for instance the performance of the task is being prepared by the students within the time given. The second phase is compulsory in task-based teaching. The students are required to operate under time-pressure or vice versa in the during task phase, interior around the task itself and provides assorted instructional options. In the third phase, post-task, it engages

methods of following-up on the task performance. Although the pre-task or post task phases are not compulsory, both still fulfill vital function in verifying that the task performance is successful for language development.

3. Methodology

The research draws on qualitative classroom observation data from case studies of standard one class in Malaysia primary school. It analyzes the classroom implementation of task-based learning with young learners relevant to the required skills needed, as stated by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, namely, speaking. For this skill, the task and strategies for classroom practice are discussed. It is suggested that the research carries implications for teachers carrying out tasks or activities with the pupils during the English lesson in other contexts.

The researcher conducted Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with the respondents to gather and analyze the data. Focus Group can be used alone or in conjunction with other methods by depending on the research objectives. In contributing information on how people feel, act, or think concerning a precise topic, the results achieved from the FG applications are mainly effective (Freitas et al., 1998).

Freitas et al. also claimed that FG is the answer for the application of method or technique, which signifying each person's experience, idea, or event. The FG is supervised by assembling people into groups, creating environmental conditions for the more natural expression of everyone, and facilitating the interaction of each one.

For six months, Year One class that involved with this study was observed. The researcher used semi-structured questions to discover the students' experience and views of the task-based activities in the LINUS lesson. The interviews were conducted in the middle of August 2017 until early September 2017 in a school library. The pupils' answers and reactions were observed and recorded using a video recorder. The interview lasted from 40 to 50 minutes. When the interview was over, the discussions were transcribed by the researcher word-by-word into Microsoft Word 2010. While this discussion was helpful in organizing the data analysis, some of the aspects might be missing when writing the notes. Thus, the tapes and transcripts were used as the "endless opportunities to redefine the categories" (Silverman, 2006:92). The data were read several times in order to identify the main points and themes highlighted for each focus group.

4. Results

This section focuses on the data gathered from the focus group discussion conducted with five groups of respondents to answer the research question one. The information obtained was transcribed after the discussion for five groups completed.

The research question asked, "Will the implementation of task-based learning influence the achievement of the students?" The question focuses on determining the achievement of task-based learning that is associated with the achievement of young learners. The pilot discussion was carried out by the researcher and validated by an experienced English teacher, a regional English education officer, and an English lecturer. The focus group discussion was conducted in a dual language, which was English and Malay language, since the respondents were young learners, and the researcher had to explain the questions in detail in their mother tongue to help the respondents for better understanding. The answers were given in both languages. The researcher made some changes to ensure that the questions would not be too difficult or too easy for the respondents to comprehend in actual discussion. The respondents were

asked to share and express their personal experience towards self-achievement in learning English with a task-based learning module. The data were presented in the following figure.

4.1. Focus Group Discussion on Research Question: Achievement Theme of Why Students Enjoy Learning

Table **3.** Evidences for Achievement Theme on Sub-theme of Why Students Enjoy Learning

Sub-theme	Categories	Quotation
Why enjoy learning	Fun	**P 1: Verbatim 1.docx - 1:1 (16:16)** R4: It's fun.
		P 2: Verbatim 2.docx - 2:1 (17:17) R5: Fun
		P 3: Verbatim 3.docx - 3:1 (17:17) R1: I like-Fun
		P 4: Verbatim 4.docx - 4:1 (17:17) R2: Because it is fun
		P 5: Verbatim 5.docx - 5:1 (16:16) R6: Because English is fun
	Beautiful	**P 1: Verbatim 1.docx - 1:3 (22:22)** R4: Beautiful
		P 4: Verbatim 4.docx - 4:3 (23:23) R5: Beautiful
		P 5: Verbatim 5.docx - 5:2 (19:19) R2: English (.) The language is (.) beautiful.
	Inspiring	**P 4: Verbatim 4.docx - 4:4 (26:26)** R6: Best (.) Inspiring
	Happy	**P 2: Verbatim 2.docx - 2:2 (22:22)** R2: Happy. Can play
		P 3: Verbatim 3.docx - 3:2 (20:20) R2: It makes me happy
		P 4: Verbatim 4.docx - 4:2 (20:20) R6: Happy
	Interesting	**P 3: Verbatim 3.docx - 3:3 (23:23)** R3: Interesting

More time for English	**P 5: Verbatim 5.docx - 5:3 (22:23)**
	R3: We want more time for English.
	R4: Uh-huh (.) Now we feel bad when
	not enough time for more activities

In the analysis for the sub-theme of why students enjoy learning, it was found that the majority of respondents enjoyed learning English through task-based activities in speaking lesson. All five groups gave the positive answers which were 'Yes." Mostly, they agreed that they really enjoyed learning through LINUS activities which have been done in their English class. Next, the respondents were asked to give reasons to share their experience regarding their enjoyment of the activities. Generally, from the discussion data, all five groups shared the same answers which highlighted the word 'fun'. Five respondents claimed that they enjoyed the learning because the lessons were really fun as:

P 1: Verbatim 1.docx - 1:1 (16:16)

R4 : It's fun.

P 2: Verbatim 2.docx - 2:1 (17:17)

R5 : Fun

P 3: Verbatim 3.docx - 3:1 (17:17)

R1 : I like-Fun

P 4: Verbatim 4.docx - 4:1 (17:17)

R2 : Because it is fun

P 5: Verbatim 5.docx - 5:1 (16:16)

R6 : Because English is fun

The second respond from the first question indicated that some of the respondents discovered that learning English through task-based activities was beautiful. The word 'beautiful' closely revealed how they felt the subject was too meaningful for them. It can be seen from the quotation below.

P 1: Verbatim 1.docx - 1:3 (22:22)

R4 : Beautiful

P 4: Verbatim 4.docx - 4:3 (23:23)

R5 : beautiful

P 5: Verbatim 5.docx - 5:2 (19:19)

R2 : English (.) The language is (.) beautiful.

Under the same question asked, respondent six from group four gave a single answer by saying that they enjoyed learning English because it was the best and inspiring.

P 4: Verbatim 4.docx - 4:4 (26:26)

R6 : Best (.) Inspiring

Other than that, three respondents from three groups stated that they were happy in learning as respondent six from group four said she was happy while respondent two from group two responded that he was happy because he could play. Respondent two from group three stated that learning English through task-based learning made her happy as shown in the quotation below.

P 2: Verbatim 2.docx - 2:2 (22:22)

R2 : Happy. Can play

P 3: Verbatim 3.docx - 3:2 (20:20)

R2 : It makes me happy

P 4: Verbatim 4.docx - 4:2 (20:20)

R6 : happy

Likewise, the respondent three from group three claimed that it was interesting to learn more on task-based learning lesson. Two respondents from group five insisted that they wanted more time for English as they felt bad when they did not have enough time for more activities.

P 3: Verbatim 3.docx - 3:3 (23:23)

R3 : Interesting

P 5: Verbatim 5.docx - 5:3 (22:23)

R3 : We want more time for English.

R4 : Uh-huh (.) Now we feel bad when not enough time for more activities

The findings for research question one on achievement theme of why students enjoy learning was summarized and presented in the following table and figure.

Table **4.** Summary of Why Students Enjoy Learning

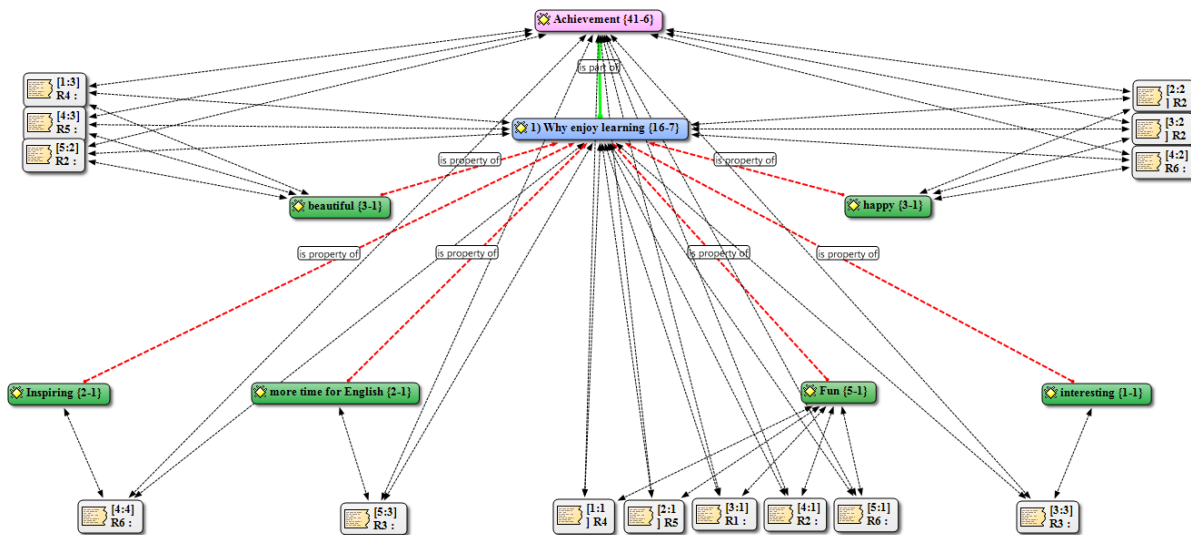| Sub-theme	Categories	Respondents	Groups
Why enjoy learning	Fun	4, 5, 1, 2, & 6	1,2,3,4, & 5
	Beautiful	4, 5 & 2	1, 4 & 5
	Inspiring	6	4
	Happy	2, 2 & 6	2, 3 & 4
	Interesting	3	3
	More time for English	3 & 4	5

Figure 1. Summary of Findings for Achievement Theme of Why Students Enjoy Learning.

5. Discussion

In this research, the results from focus group discussions (FGD) indicates that using the task-based module in a speaking lesson increases the students' achievement. The respondents claimed that they enjoyed learning English through task-based learning and activities. The keyword 'fun' mentioned by the respondents indicates that task-based learning helps to create the successful lessons because when the students enjoy learning, they give their full cooperation to complete any task given by the teacher without any further delay. Thus, the objectives of the lessons can be fully achieved, which leads the students to acquire as well as improve their speaking skills. As the students perceive their lesson as fun learning, they always get ready to learn any new topics introduced by their teacher. Therefore, the task-based activities which require the speaking skill to be practiced almost every day will help the students to achieve their learning objectives. This issue also indicates that the achievements of the students are influenced entirely by task-based learning. This finding is parallel to the study found by Sariannur (2017), who believed in

achievement as a thing do successfully, primarily when related to effort, skill, action, or process of the students to attain something. Sariannur also stated that achievement is a process of improving skills or knowledge. Moreover, a standardized process in developing the measurable skills and knowledge learned in a giving grade level, usually through plan instruction, is known as the most common type of achievement.

Besides, the FGD findings also show a few of the respondents from group one, four, and five mentioned that English was beautiful. They described how meaningful was the English subject for them through the word 'beautiful.' This evidence also indicates that they believe in acquiring the English language is a must after they had learned it through task-based learning because they did not feel as the language was a burden anymore. Other than that, the respondents showed their ability to utter some words, including the word 'beautiful' in explaining their answers when they got the questions from the researcher. This evidence reveals that using a task-based learning module is sufficient to increase the achievement of the students in speaking skill mainly because through task-based activities. The students feel easier to utter the words or phrases as well as share the main idea of the topics that they have learned and discussed.

Under the same question, respondent six from group four answered by saying that he enjoyed learning English because it was the best and inspiring as well. Although the task-based activities introduced by the teacher were unfamiliar for them, they still enjoyed the lesson without any doubt since the environment of the class is also enjoyable and unstressed. Similarly, Promruang (2012) claimed that from the study done in one of the schools in Thailand, task-based learning is the best way of learning which they have ever experienced, as commented by most students. They also perceived that learning English is not difficult anymore in addition to learning a lot from their friends through pairs and group works. It indicates that task-based learning is accepted for most students who learn the English language because of the exciting and attractive activities which it can provide.

The researcher remarks that from the findings, three respondents from three groups did mention the word 'happy' when the researcher asked them why they enjoyed learning through task-based activities too. The word 'happy' is actively used to show their emotional feeling toward the lessons. This finding shows that their fear of speaking has slowly demolished after they learned through task-based learning in the classroom. They might think that speaking is not even tough anymore since they are capable of uttering some simple English words and phrases without any help from the teacher. The researcher also perceives their abilities to speak good English during the whole process of the focus group discussion. This result is parallel to the study done by Mercado (2017), which emphasized students' comments as they felt emotion when they had the opportunity of sharing ideas with others in the English language. Sharing their feelings with others became a routine for them because the teachers always asked them to say out or share anything with others after completing every lesson. It is also agreed by Taylor (2003), who stated that ideas, emotions, feelings, appropriateness, and adaptability are the main criteria involved in using the language communicatively. The students can freely express themselves through task-based learning. It is seen from the focus group discussion where the students try to opine their feeling towards task-based learning and activities.

Besides, Hassan (2014) mentioned of the condition where the learners mastered the speaking skill, they would have the feeling of happiness when they were able to convey their message perfectly as it would encourage their self-esteem and realization as well. Speaking can make the students feel happy because they are surely able to express themselves other than conveying some ideas or answer any questions given

to them. It is also supported by Taylor (2003), who claimed that it implicated the feelings, emotions, ideas, adaptability, and appropriateness in using the language effectively. Furthermore, this finding is also closely related to one of the multiple intelligences by Armstrong (2009, p.18), who mentioned that intrapersonal intelligence includes the inner mood attentiveness, intentions, motivations, personalities, needs, self-confidence, self-control, and self-understanding. Henceforth, some students are able to acquire the English speaking skill when the task-based activities help their intrapersonal intelligence to occur during the classroom learning.

The researcher also finds out that some respondents felt that task-based learning lesson was impressive as they wanted more time for English lessons and activities than before. They feel relaxed during the lessons since task-based learning turns the lessons to become less stressful for the students. The students are not bothered to make mistakes or being judged by others every time they enter the English class. The students also manage to build rapport with other students, although some of them might feel cautious in the early process of learning. This study coincides with Barnes (as cited in Ellis, 2006), who indicated that communicating the language was best applied in task-based teaching since the participants were trained to forget where they are and why they are there. They only needed to learn the language indirectly through communication, not direct studying. Therefore, through communicating, the speaking lesson became an exciting experience for them.

6. Conclusion

This study finds out that most year, one student from this primary school in Kelantan accepts that task-based learning increases their achievement of English speaking skills. Besides, the achievement increases when the task-based learning has influenced the students' physically and emotionally. This finding is parallel to the study done by Hassan (2014), who claimed that when the learners master the speaking skill, they will feel emotionally happy because they can deliver their message correctly, which helps them to build their self-confidence and motivation as well.

Therefore, a task-based learning module should be applied for teaching the new curriculum syllabus, namely known as CEFR. Since CEFR for primary schools is examined according to banned B1 until B2, so the lower-level students who are also known as remedial students can be taught and guided using the task-based module as it will lead to more excellent results and achievements of the students.

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