

USING TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT) TO IMPROVE ORAL PROFICIENCY IN BEGINNER FRENCH LEARNERS

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Abstract: This study explores the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving oral proficiency among beginner learners of French as a Foreign Language (FLE). Grounded in communicative language teaching principles, TBLT emphasizes real-world language use through meaningful tasks. The research employed an experimental design involving two beginner-level French classes over a six-week period. One group was taught using TBLT, while the control group followed a traditional grammar-based approach. Results show that the experimental group demonstrated significant improvements in fluency, accuracy, and confidence in oral expression. These findings suggest that TBLT is a viable and effective methodology for developing oral communication skills in novice learners.

Keywords: Oral proficiency, French as a foreign language, beginner learners, communicative approach, speaking skills, language pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of foreign language education, the importance of developing oral proficiency remains paramount, especially for beginner learners. Mastery of spoken language is not only a central communicative skill but also a foundational element for linguistic confidence, motivation, and long-term engagement in language learning. In the context of French as a Foreign Language (FLE), oral proficiency poses a considerable challenge to novice learners due to the phonetic complexity, morphological variability, and sociolinguistic nuances of the French language. Traditional approaches, such as grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods, while offering structural clarity, have often failed to equip learners with the ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. This gap has catalyzed the emergence and integration of more communicative methodologies, among which Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has gained increasing academic and pedagogical attention.

TBLT, grounded in the communicative language teaching paradigm, focuses on the use of authentic, goal-oriented tasks as the primary unit of planning and instruction. Unlike traditional methods that emphasize language forms and prescriptive rules, TBLT promotes learning through doing, engaging students in meaningful communication that mirrors real-world use of the target language. As Ellis (2003)

notes, tasks in TBLT are defined as activities that require learners to use language pragmatically to achieve specific outcomes. This approach shifts the emphasis from language as an object of study to language as a tool for communication, thereby fostering fluency, interaction, and strategic competence.

The theoretical underpinnings of TBLT draw heavily from cognitive and sociocultural perspectives on language learning. From a cognitive standpoint, TBLT supports the idea that meaningful language use in context leads to deeper processing and greater retention (Skehan, 1998). Learners are encouraged to draw on their linguistic resources to complete tasks, which promotes automatization and procedural knowledge of the language. From a sociocultural view, tasks serve as mediational tools through which learners co-construct meaning in interaction, thus facilitating language development within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). These dual perspectives reinforce the multidimensional value of TBLT in enhancing both the internalization of linguistic structures and the social use of language.

Empirical studies across various linguistic contexts have provided substantial support for the efficacy of TBLT in developing oral proficiency. For example, research conducted by Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2011) revealed that learners exposed to task repetition demonstrated significant gains in fluency and syntactic complexity. Similarly, studies by Samuda and Bygate (2008) and Shintani (2016) have shown that task-based instruction improves interactional competence, turn-taking, and strategic use of language. In the FLE context, research by Lemoine (2017) highlights the positive impact of task-based interaction on French learners' pronunciation and pragmatic skills, especially when supported by scaffolding and feedback mechanisms.

In beginner-level FLE classrooms, where learners often lack both lexical repertoire and confidence, TBLT provides a supportive framework for progressive skill development. Tasks such as role-plays, information gap activities, and problem-solving simulations enable learners to engage in structured communicative exchanges while focusing on meaning. For instance, tasks like “Commander au restaurant” (Ordering in a restaurant), “Demander le chemin” (Asking for directions), or “Planifier un voyage à Paris” (Planning a trip to Paris) not only introduce situational vocabulary and relevant grammatical structures but also foster cultural awareness and conversational strategies. These task types allow learners to practice useful expressions such as “Je voudrais...”, “Où est la gare, s’il vous plaît?”, or “Nous voulons réserver une chambre double,” in authentic and meaningful contexts.

Despite its pedagogical advantages, the implementation of TBLT in FLE instruction, particularly at the beginner level, remains limited due to several factors. These include a lack of teacher training, insufficient resources, and concerns about classroom management and assessment within task-based frameworks. Moreover, the transition from form-focused to meaning-focused instruction requires a paradigm shift

in teacher beliefs and institutional practices. Nonetheless, the growing body of research and the increasing availability of task-based materials suggest that these challenges can be addressed through targeted professional development and curriculum reform.

METHODS

This study employed a task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach grounded in communicative language teaching theory, which prioritizes meaningful interaction as the core mechanism of language acquisition. The methodological design centered around the implementation of pedagogically structured tasks intended to enhance learners' oral proficiency in French.

The instructional cycle was organized following Willis' (1996) TBLT framework, consisting of three key phases: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task. Each instructional unit was designed to simulate authentic communicative situations and to encourage learners to use the target language purposefully in contextually rich environments.

During the pre-task phase, learners were introduced to key vocabulary and grammatical structures necessary for the completion of the main communicative activity. For example, prior to a task such as *Commander au restaurant*, learners reviewed lexical sets related to food, beverages, and politeness formulas (e.g., *Je voudrais, l'addition, s'il vous plaît, C'est délicieux*).

In the task cycle phase, learners engaged in pair or group work to complete a real-world inspired task. The activities were carefully sequenced to move from controlled practice toward more spontaneous language production. Sample tasks included:

- Demander le chemin (asking for directions),
- Décrire une personne (describing someone),
- Préparer une invitation (preparing an invitation for an event).

These tasks emphasized fluency and interaction, requiring learners to negotiate meaning, take turns, ask clarification questions, and adapt their speech to various communicative needs. The post-task phase focused on form-focused activities aimed at reinforcing linguistic accuracy. This included peer and teacher feedback, correction of recurring errors, and re-performance of the task with improved linguistic precision. Activities in this phase included reformulation exercises, sentence restructuring, and brief grammar workshops based on observed needs.

Additionally, reflection components were embedded into the lessons to foster metacognitive awareness. Learners were encouraged to assess their own speaking performance, identify areas of difficulty, and set goals for subsequent tasks. This reflective practice was facilitated through learner journals, peer feedback sessions, and short oral debriefings conducted in simplified French.

The overall methodological framework integrated communicative interaction, task completion, and performance-based evaluation, offering a holistic approach to developing oral proficiency in beginner-level French learners.

RESULTS

The implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) methodology yielded notable improvements in the oral proficiency of beginner-level learners of French as a foreign language. The data obtained from classroom-based interventions and pre/post oral assessments indicate significant developments in learners' lexical range, syntactic complexity, fluency, and phonological accuracy.

From the outset of the study, learners demonstrated limited ability to construct coherent oral discourse in French. Their speech was often fragmented, hesitant, and reliant on L1 transfer. For instance, learners initially produced utterances such as “*Je suis... école... manger*” or “*Je parler football avec ami*”, which reflect both lexical insufficiency and syntactic interference.

Following the structured implementation of tasks such as *Je me présente*, *Faire les courses*, *Demander son chemin* there was a discernible shift toward more accurate and autonomous production. Learners began to formulate sentences that adhered more closely to French morphosyntactic norms, for example:

- “*Bonjour, je m'appelle Diyor. J'ai douze ans et j'habite à Bukhara.*”
- “*Je voudrais un sandwich au jambon et un verre d'eau, s'il vous plaît.*”
- “*Excusez-moi, où est la pharmacie ? Prenez à droite, puis continuez tout droit.*”

These examples reveal a strengthened command of grammatical constructions, including subject-verb agreement (*je voudrais*), noun-adjective agreement (*un verre d'eau froide*), and use of politeness strategies (*s'il vous plaît*, *excusez-moi*).

Moreover, the tasks provided contextual scaffolding which encouraged the use of topic-specific vocabulary. Learners acquired and used lexical items relevant to daily life (e.g., *le marché*, *la boulangerie*, *un kilo de pommes*, *tourner à gauche*), thereby expanding their functional communicative competence. The transition from isolated words to meaningful interaction marked a qualitative evolution in their speech acts.

Pronunciation also improved through targeted feedback and post-task phonetic correction activities. Initially, learners struggled with nasal vowels and liaison, often saying [*ban*] au lieu de [*bã*] or omitting liaison in phrases like *ils habitent à Orléans*. By the end of the intervention, learners correctly produced *un bon pain* [œ bõ pẽ] and made appropriate liaisons in *vous avez* [vu.z_ave].

Fluency, measured through mean length of utterance and hesitation frequency, also showed progress. Learners' average utterance length increased from 3.6 words to 7.5 words per sentence. The frequency of hesitation markers such as *euh* or silent pauses was reduced by approximately 40%, indicating increased automaticity and confidence in language use.

Qualitative data, drawn from classroom observations and learner journals, support these findings. Learners reported feeling more comfortable speaking in French and showed higher levels of engagement during task performance. Teachers noted

improved classroom interaction and spontaneous speech production. One learner stated in their final reflection:

“Avant, j’avais peur de parler. Maintenant, je peux poser des questions et répondre sans traduire. J’aime parler en français avec mes camarades.”

These findings confirm that TBLT not only enhances the linguistic aspects of oral proficiency but also contributes to learner motivation and willingness to communicate. The contextualized nature of tasks appears to have facilitated meaningful learning and led to sustainable improvements in spoken French.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study provide compelling evidence that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing oral proficiency among beginner learners of French. These results are consistent with previous research which has emphasized the benefits of communicative task design in second language acquisition (Ellis, 2003; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). The improvement observed in learners' fluency, lexical repertoire, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation supports the theoretical assumption that meaningful interaction fosters deeper linguistic processing.

In contrast to traditional grammar-translation or drill-based methods, TBLT situates language use in real-world communicative scenarios. This aligns with the interactionist perspective on language learning, which posits that negotiation of meaning and output practice are crucial for interlanguage development (Long, 1996). Learners in this study engaged in tasks such as *faire les courses*, *demandeur son chemin*, and *se présenter*, all of which required the spontaneous production of speech, thereby activating procedural memory and automatizing language structures.

These results also confirm the central role of input and output in the development of oral proficiency. Swain's Output Hypothesis (1995) posits that producing language pushes learners to process language at a deeper level. The tasks employed in this study required learners to retrieve and organize vocabulary (e.g., *un kilo de pommes*, *tournez à gauche*), apply syntactic rules (e.g., subject-verb agreement in *je voudrais*, *nous habitons*), and manage turn-taking in dialogue. These elements contributed to the development of both fluency and accuracy.

Another salient point is the positive impact of contextualized vocabulary acquisition. Through thematic tasks, learners internalized lexis relevant to communicative domains such as food, family, and travel. This supports the findings of Nation (2001), who argued that vocabulary is best learned through meaningful use rather than isolated memorization. The lexical chunks acquired (e.g., *je voudrais un sandwich*, *où est la bibliothèque?*) became communicative tools, enabling learners to participate in real-life-like exchanges.

In terms of pronunciation, targeted feedback during the post-task phase played a key role. Learners showed improved articulation of phonemes and prosodic features, particularly in nasal vowel production and liaison. This aligns with research by Derwing and Munro (2005), who emphasized the importance of intelligibility-focused instruction. The shift from *je suiz* to *je suis* [ʒə sɥi], and from *bon* [bɔn] to [bɔ̃], reflects an increased awareness of phonological rules in French.

Furthermore, learner motivation and willingness to speak in French improved noticeably throughout the task-based sessions. This motivational impact is in line with Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System (2009), which suggests that enjoyable, goal-oriented tasks can enhance learners' engagement. Learner reflections in this study confirm that using French in a functional and socially meaningful way boosted their confidence and lowered affective filters.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the study reaffirms that TBLT is especially well-suited to beginner contexts, where learners may lack metalinguistic awareness but benefit from rich input and structured interaction. The progression from short, hesitant utterances to full, semantically coherent statements supports the notion that tasks serve as scaffolds for linguistic development. Additionally, the inclusion of feedback and reflective discussion after each task allowed for form-focused instruction within a communicative framework.

However, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted with a small sample size within a single school setting, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, learners’ written skills and receptive abilities were not assessed in detail, which would have provided a more comprehensive picture of linguistic development.

Despite these limitations, the study offers meaningful contributions to both theoretical and practical domains. It demonstrates how TBLT can bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge and communicative competence, particularly in the early stages of language learning. These findings suggest that curriculum designers and language teachers in Uzbekistan and elsewhere should consider integrating task-based approaches to foster learner-centered and communicatively rich environments in FLE (Français Langue Étrangère) classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a highly effective approach for improving oral proficiency in beginner French learners. Through carefully designed communicative tasks that mimic real-life situations such as introducing oneself, asking for directions, and shopping learners significantly enhanced their fluency, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation. The findings align with established theories in second language acquisition, including Long’s Interaction Hypothesis and Swain’s Output Hypothesis, which emphasize the

importance of meaningful interaction and active language production for successful learning.

Moreover, the integration of contextualized vocabulary within task-based activities facilitated functional language acquisition, enabling learners to use lexical items appropriately in practical settings. The positive shift in learners’ confidence and motivation, supported by Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System, underscores the affective benefits of TBLT. The method not only supports linguistic development but also promotes learner engagement and reduces communication anxiety.

Targeted feedback on phonological features further contributed to improved intelligibility, highlighting the importance of form-focused instruction within communicative frameworks. Although the study focused primarily on oral skills and was limited to a small sample, its results offer valuable pedagogical insights for language instructors and curriculum designers, particularly in contexts similar to Uzbek secondary education.

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