

Effects of Tasks on Spoken Interaction and Motivation in English Language Learners¹

Efectos de las Tareas en la Interacción Oral y en la Motivación de Aprendices del Idioma Inglés

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Abstract

Task based learning (TBL) or Task based learning and teaching (TBLT) is a communicative approach widely applied in settings where English has been taught as a foreign language (EFL). It has been documented as greatly useful to improve learners' communication skills. This research intended to find the effect of tasks on students' spoken interaction in English and motivation towards speaking English in the classroom. Thirty-five adolescent tenth grade students from a public school in Bogota, Colombia, participated in the study. They reported positive influence of tasks in their English oral interaction improvement as well as on their motivation towards speaking English in the classroom.

Keywords: Task based learning, TBL, TBLT, tasks, spoken interaction, speaking English, motivation, students' perceptions.

Resumen

El aprendizaje basado en tareas es un método comunicativo ampliamente aplicado en contextos donde el inglés se enseña como idioma extranjero. Se ha documentado ampliamente como de gran utilidad para mejorar las habilidades comunicativas de los aprendices. Esta investigación pretendió encontrar el efecto de las tareas en la interacción oral en inglés y en la motivación de los estudiantes hacia hablar inglés en el salón de clase. Treinta y cinco adolescentes de grado décimo de un colegio público en Bogotá, Colombia, participaron en el estudio. Ellos reportaron influencia positiva de las tareas en el mejoramiento

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de su interacción oral en inglés y en su motivación hacia hablar inglés en el salón de clase.

Palabras Clave: Aprendizaje basado en tareas, TBL, TBLT, tareas, interacción oral, hablar inglés, motivación, percepciones de los estudiantes.

Resumo

A aprendizagem baseada em tarefas é um método comunicativo amplamente aplicado em contextos onde o inglês se ensina como idioma estrangeiro. Tem-se documentado amplamente como de grande utilidade para melhorar as habilidades comunicativas dos aprendizes. Esta pesquisa pretendeu encontrar o efeito das tarefas na interação oral em inglês e na motivação dos estudantes para falar inglês na sala de aula. Trinta e cinco adolescentes de segundo ano do ensino médio de um colégio público em Bogotá, Colômbia, participaram no estudo. Eles reportaram influência positiva das tarefas escolares no melhoramento da sua interação oral em inglês e na sua motivação para falar inglês na sala de aula.

Palavras chave: Aprendizagem baseada em tarefas escolares, TBL, TBLT, tarefas escolares, interação oral, falar inglês, motivação, percepções dos estudantes

Introduction

In the last years there has been a growing interest for the learning of English language in developing countries due to the position it has taken all over the world in many areas of the society development. This fact has provoked recurrent inquiry of applying a method that benefits learners in their communicative skills improvement in the English learning process. Specifically, there has been great concern about speaking skill since it is the least practiced in contexts where this language is taught as a foreign language (EFL). According to Guide 22 of the Colombian Ministry of National Education (2006), “a foreign language is the one which is not used among the immediate or local environment and it can be principally learned inside a classroom where students are generally exposed to the language during controlled class periods” (p. 5).

Throughout the time, teachers at schools have applied traditional teaching systems focused on grammar learning and on reading / writing processes, leaving aside the progress in listening and speaking skills. Jones and Hodson (2012) reaffirm this when they point out that “the explicit teaching of speaking and listening has been neglected” (p. 2). However, when the interest is to give more opportunities for oral interaction in the classroom, TBL / TBLT is one of the communicative approaches that has granted notorious results in environments where students have little contact with English language (Lochana & Deb, 2006; Mangu, 2008; Shintani, 2011; Thanh & Huan, 2012; Yim, 2009). Indeed, research acknowledges TBL advantages in issues related to motivation, communication, oral interaction when learning a foreign language (Barnard & Viet, 2010; Naznean, n.d.; Plews & Zhao, 2010; Tabatabaei & Atefeh, 2011; Xiongyong & Moses, 2011). Although research highlights the mentioned attributes, it lacks description of the TBL implementation process.

The present research intended to find an effective strategy to improve students' English spoken interaction at a public school where it is taught as a FL. There thus emerged the inquiry about the effect of communicative tasks on adolescent students' oral interaction and the impact of tasks on their motivation to speak English in the classroom. The questions that guided this study were 1) What is the effect of communicative group tasks on students' spoken interaction in English as a foreign language? And 2) What is the effect of communicative group tasks on students' motivation towards speaking English in the classroom? The findings reveal that communicative tasks positively impacted students' spoken interaction in the FL and were successful

in increasing their motivation towards speaking English when solving them in the classroom.

Literature Review

Studies by Plews & Zhao (2010), Barnard & Viet (2010), Xiongyong & Moses (2011), Jong (2006), Chuang (2010), Yim (2009), among others, report the application of Task Based Learning approach in public schools, especially in the context of developing countries where English is taught as a FL. Most studies refer to issues such as motivation and communication, students' perceptions, and learning the foreign language.

Motivation and Communication

Teachers have largely considered TBL / TBLT beneficial for increasing students' intrinsic motivation, participation, and collaborative and communicative skills interaction. In fact, in several studies they highlighted the relationship between motivation and communicative activities (Plews & Zhao, 2010; Barnard & Viet, 2010; Xiongyong & Moses, 2011; Jong, 2006; Chuang, 2010; Tabatabaei & Atefeh, 2011). In addition, Yim (2009) asserts that teachers believe that having students work together to complete tasks maintain them interested and actively involved. Thanh and Huan (2012) found that learners were highly motivated when working towards personally meaningful goals and challenging but achievable tasks.

Students' Perceptions

Chuang's 2010 study reports that what students loved most about task based lessons was that they could share and exchange information with their partners; doing exciting interactive group work and creative role-playing also interested them. They liked the feeling of self-fulfillment when completing the task and they were keen on learning actively not passively. Also, they enjoyed tasks because they were practical and similar to real life situations. Some participants pointed out that the task based activities trained not only their oral skills but also their problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

Another important impression that students report is their preference for TBL instead of traditional methods (Thanh & Huan, 2012). In this study, students showed interest in learning English,

were highly motivated by tasks, and were encouraged to participate in doing tasks because “classes are full of activities and play” (Lochana & Deb, 2006, p. 156). Students also had a more positive attitude towards learning English (Yim, 2009). They stressed the role of small group work through learning language in context, and they liked the opportunities for contributing to the group (Than & Huan, 2012).

Learning the Foreign Language

Naznean’s (n.d.) study found that TBL provides a variety of learning opportunities for students of all levels and capabilities. Plews and Zhao (2010) also found that TBL integrates the development of language skills and learning strategies, and that it establishes relevance for students’ needs. Xiongyong and Moses (2011) discovered that TBL provides a relaxed atmosphere that promotes target language use, the activation of learners’ needs as well as skills interaction. Besides, a correct execution of TBL seemed to comply with the acquisition of knowledge as regards the four language skills on the basis of social interaction. On the contrary, Choo and Too (2012) detected low-level students’ inability to cope with tasks, and only students with higher proficiency were able to reach the goal. To the contrary, in another study, tasks tended to hold bright students back (Jong, 2006).

Lochana and Deb (2006) observed that students started talking in English and using it for various purposes. Also they assert that some students expressed improvement in their writing skills because of the feedback they received from the teacher and the challenging nature of tasks given to them. Moreover, other studies report that teachers observed greater confidence in their students in speaking (Yim, 2009) and increased vocabulary, likely due to the utilization of TBLT (Thanh & Huan, 2012). Some other teachers reported that TBLT allowed learners to achieve greater accuracy of performance and to produce more complex language and fluency (Mangu, 2008). In the study carried out by Tabatabaei and Atefeh (2011), teachers highlighted the variety of language teaching methodologies and the creative, lively and collaborative learning environment that made the betterment of learners’ interaction skills possible. Shintani’s research (2011) showed that TBL lessons achieved interactional authenticity and provided opportunities for negotiation of meaning, which is presumably profitable for acquisition.

Some studies at public schools in Colombia perceived TBL’s suitability for encouraging EFL oral interaction. González and Arias (2009) found that “students negotiated meaning when interacting and

this permitted them to take advantage of communicative TBL activities to express what they wanted to say spontaneously” (p.7). Forero (2005) states that when solving tasks “the students interacted among themselves or with the teacher in most of the cases” and that “students practiced the language and improved their oral skill, although many of them had several problems with grammar and sentence building” (p.76).

Despite the advantages found and the fact that TBLT emphasizes students’ freedom to use the language they have when developing tasks, other teachers expressed concerns about students’ modest target language proficiency and use, and the uncertainty about the role of grammar (Plews & Zhao, 2010). Barnard and Viet (2010) also found that teachers stressed the need for their students to produce language correctly in terms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Jong (2006) discovered that the majority of the teachers perceived that students generally had difficulty expressing their ideas in full sentences, or finding words and structures to express meaning. Teachers stated that the reason was the lack of knowledge in grammar and vocabulary, and TBLT’s ineffectiveness in terms of grammar instruction. Additionally, more than a half of the teachers in this study showed some negative response regarding TBL’s integration of language skills in the classroom.

Methodology

Research Design

The proposed methodology for this project was based on the principles of qualitative research that pretends to describe and to interpret social realities, involves the researcher in the real setting, and lets the researcher observe evident situations to explore tendencies and recurrent behaviors over time (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The study sought to find the effect of communicative group tasks on the students’ spoken interaction in English and on the motivation towards speaking the foreign language in the classroom. To know this effect, an action research methodology was proposed as it emphasizes finding solutions to a problem through an intervention planning, implementation, reviewing, and evaluation (Cohen et al., 2007). A triangulation of methods of data collection were suggested since Campbell and Fiske affirm that it corresponds to the use of more than one method in the search of solutions for given objectives (as cited in Cohen et al., 2007). Cohen, et al. (2007) also ratify that triangulation gives great confidence to the researcher by more contrasted methods.

When attempting to improve oral interaction in the FL, there are variables found in the literature: the relevance of creating opportunities, like tasks, for using the foreign language for speaking purposes and the motivation that learners experiment when participating actively in such opportunities. Although the literature sets these variables among others, it does not detail specific procedures to be applied. Consequently, the proposed data collection sought to find the effect of communicative group tasks on students' spoken interaction in English and on the motivation towards speaking it in the classroom.

Setting and Participants

This research took place at a public school located in the Country Sur neighborhood of Bogota, Colombia. It serves students from lower income families. It is a large school covering about 4,900 students in morning and afternoon shifts. It offers school grades from pre-school through 11th grade. The school has inter-institutional agreements with three institutions for technical programs for 10th and 11th graders. Students in the study were tenth graders and belonged to the afternoon shift 1003 class. There were 24 girls and 12 boys, ages 14 to 17.

English is taught as a foreign language with two sessions weekly of two academic hours each. There are audio or visual resources available for teachers to use during lesson development but not all the English teachers can access to them. Teachers at public schools are not allowed to ask students to purchase textbooks or other materials for classes and the school library lacks of resources for English teaching and learning. Because of this and because of the large class sizes, listening and speaking are the least worked skills.

Data Collection Instruments

To gather information that gave answers for the research questions, three qualitative techniques were applied: Test, Observation, and Interview.

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Test. For the present study, an oral domain referenced test was applied to ten students before and after the intervention. Students were selected according to their performance and participation during previous English lessons: four outstanding students, three average students, and three students who show low performance. The test consisted of an oral interview in English, in which the questions ranged from easier to more challenging related to information about personal and education domains. Students who could continue to respond to basic

questions received more challenging questions. Students who were unable to respond to basic questions or more difficult questions did not receive more questions to answer. The purpose of the test was to assess whether students' speaking interaction domain corresponded to A2 scale established by the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001) which states that at this level language users:

Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his / her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. (p. 24)

Observation. For this research, observation through field notes and video recordings registered information of the students' oral interaction during ten sessions in which they were solving different communicative tasks according to the ones proposed by Jane Willis in her Task-Based Learning framework (1996). This instrument purposefully observed whether students used the foreign language, how they interacted when solving the tasks, and how motivated they seemed towards using English.

Interview. A five question interview in Spanish language was given to ten students at the end of the intervention; these ten students were the same ones selected for the test. Questions included inquiring about their opinion on tasks, how they perceived their interaction and motivation towards speaking in English, how they felt when solving tasks, and what tasks they liked most and why. The purpose of this interview was to know how the intervention affected students' motivation at solving tasks and towards speaking English in the classroom.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Collected data were analyzed through the following methods: Exploratory data analysis for pre- and post-test, and Content analysis for classroom observations and interview.

Pre- and post-test analysis. Ten students were asked to participate in a speaking interaction test which pretended to assess whether students speaking interaction domain corresponded to A2 scale established by the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001).

Students were selected according to their performance and participation during previous English lessons: four outstanding students, three average students, and three students who showed low performance. Each student was separately required to answer twenty questions related to information about personal and educational domains. If the student was able to respond to basic questions or more difficult ones, he / she was given more challenging questions; on the other hand if the student was not able to answer some questions, he / she was not given any more questions.

For the test (Pre and Post) a Rubric was created, based on the CEFR A2 scale. In this Rubric there are three levels of classification: PROFICIENT A2 USER, ADEQUATE A2 USER, AND USER IS BELOW A2, which correspond to the number of questions correctly answered and the way they were answered. In this study “correct” means that the student was able to give appropriate answers for the questions by a word, an utterance or a complete sentence. Ten questions were asked about personal domain (family, friends, hobbies, sports, favorite music / singers / bands, daily activities) and ten more were asked about educational domain (school: actions, parts / places, friends, favorite subjects / teachers, feelings). The number of correct answers given by each student, in the pre- and post-test, were totalized into a grid and then tabulated through an Excel data base. The data were entered and then analyzed using exploratory data analysis since it is a form of analysis in which data are descriptive, self-explanatory, and can be simply understood (Cohen, et al., 2007).

Bar charts were created to see the total of each student’s correct answers, the average of correct answers given by all students, and the percentage of students classified in each one of the Rubric levels.

Classroom observations and interview analysis. Information collected from classroom observations and the interview was analyzed through content analysis. In accordance to Cohen et al. (2007), “content analysis takes texts and analyses, reduces and interrogates them into summary form through the use of both pre-existing categories and emergent themes in order to generate or test a theory” (p. 476).

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In this research, content analysis was initiated after all classroom observations and interviews were carried out and transcribed. Units of analysis were selected and condensed as categories, then a code was assigned for each one of them. Category descriptions were displayed in a chart and relevant findings were summarized combining the results from both the classroom observations and interview.

Classroom observations corresponded to each one of ten class sessions which included two or three communicative tasks or processes such as classifying, matching, ordering, comparing, draft mind map, jigsaw puzzle, and sharing personal experience. Topics for tasks were related to personal domain (family, friends, hobbies, sports, favorite music / singers / bands, daily activities) and to educational domain (school: actions, parts / places, friends, favorite subjects / teachers, feelings).

Questions in the interview included the students' opinion about the communicative tasks, their perception about the tasks usefulness to improve oral interaction and motivation to speak in the foreign language, what tasks were preferred by them and why, and how students felt at solving tasks.

Results

The results obtained from data analysis provide support to this study's hypotheses. In terms of oral interaction in the foreign language, the post-test results indicate an increase in the percentage of correct answers as well as in the percentage of students classified as Adequate A2 User or Proficient A2 user, according to the rubric created.

Observation results indicate that the use of English language was obvious when solving tasks, particularly at the "sharing personal experience" task. With regards to motivation towards speaking English in the classroom, observation results demonstrate an active and spontaneous participation of students, as well as the students' effort to use the foreign language when sharing information. These results also reveal that students consider communicative tasks as important since they promote interaction and motivation towards speaking English in the classroom.

Gains in English Proficiency based on Pre- and Post-test

In general, data from the pre- and post- test indicate that students' level of English improved in the period of ten weeks of carrying out task-based lessons in the classroom.

Test results show that students were able to answer twice as many questions correctly on the post-test than on the pre-test. Figure 1 shows the results of pre and post-test in respect of the average percentage of correct answers given to the twenty questions. The pre-test bar graph

shows an average of 5,5 correct answers while post-test bar graph shows an average of 11,8 correct answers.

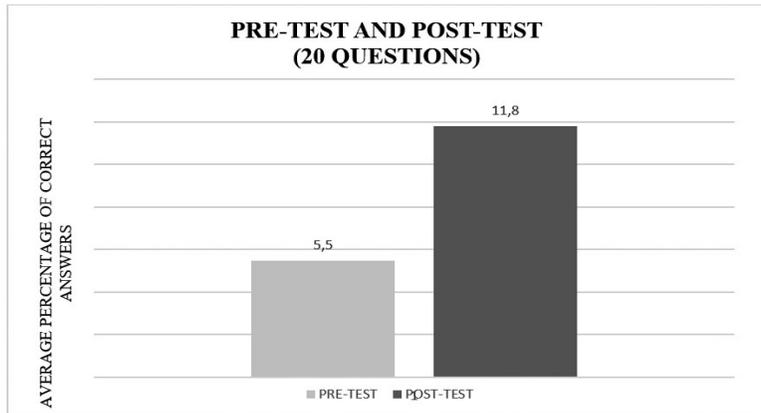


Figure 1. Pre and post-test number of correct answers.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students who were classified as Below A2 User and the percentage of students who were classified as Adequate A2 User or Proficient A2 User, in respect of correct answers given in the pre and post-test, according to the rubric. It can be observed that in the pre-test, 90% of the ten students were classified as User is Below A2 and 10% of the ten students were classified as Adequate A2 User or Proficient A2 User. In the post-test, 40% of the ten students were ranked as User is Below A2 and 60% were classified as Adequate A2 User or Proficient A2 User.

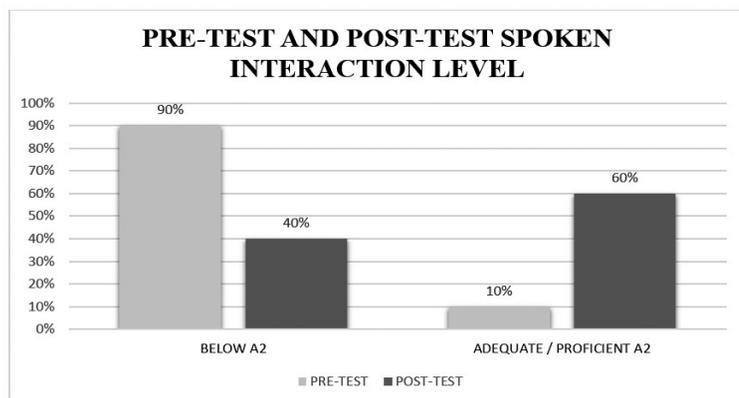


Figure 2. Pre and post-test spoken interaction level

Figures 3 and 4 show the number of students classified in each one of the three levels of the rubric in respect of the results in the pre-test and the post-test. Figure 3 shows that in the pre-test, 9 students were ranked as User is Below A2, none student was classified as Adequate A2 User, and only 1 student was classified as Proficient A2 User. Figure 4 shows that in the post-test the number of students ranked as User is Below A2 decreased to 4, 2 students were classified as Adequate A2 User, and 4 students were ranked as Proficient A2 User.

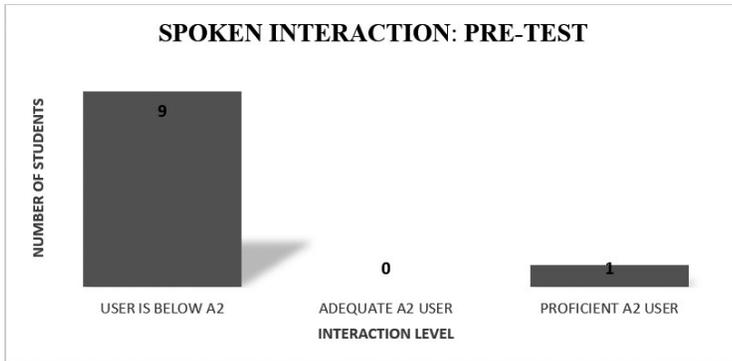


Figure 3. Pre-test spoken interaction

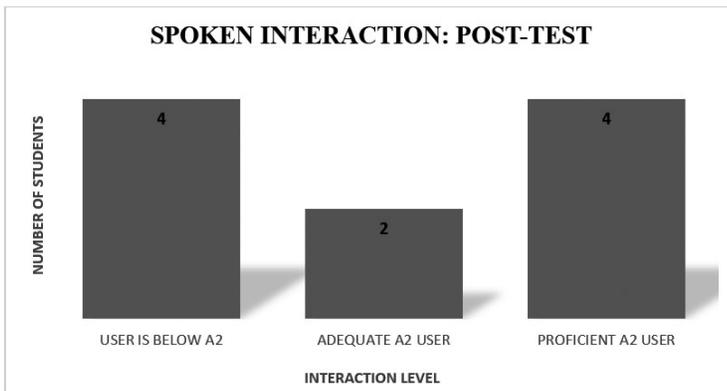


Figure 4. Post-test spoken interaction.

Figure 5 shows the number of correct answers given by each student in the pre- and post-test. It can be seen that the number of correct answers increased in the post-test for all students when compared with the results in the pre-test.

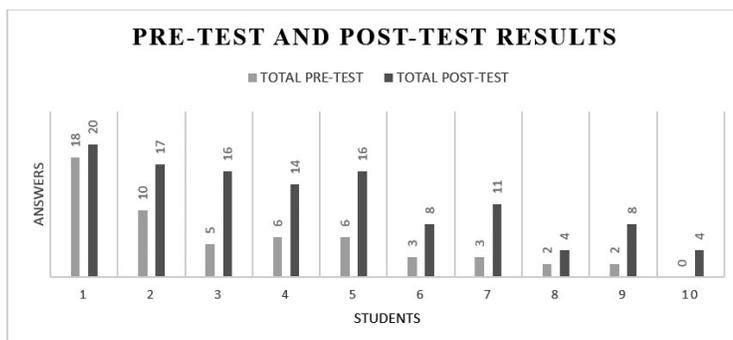


Figure 5. Total of answers given by each student in both the pre-test and post-test

Tasks Promoting Free Spoken Interaction

In general, it was possible to observe that when students were solving communicative tasks, they interacted freely and spontaneously in the foreign language, used the vocabulary, asked, or answered without worrying about making mistakes. Students helped each other with pronunciation, vocabulary, or how to answer. Particularly, outstanding students were frequently consulted: “Let’s ask Elkin, he knows. - Elkin, is husband ‘esposo’? - yes, it is.”³ “-Karen, what is leather craftsman? -I think it is related to making things using leather.”⁴ “Hairdresser? Ah my mom ‘es’ a hairdresser -you don’t say ‘es’, you must say ‘is’ -so, my mom is a hairdresser.”⁵ Students said English words while solving the tasks, for example “Postman corresponds to jobs or professions,”⁶ “This is the image for watch TV,”⁷ “Intelligent positive qualities.” When giving answers to questions, students did not worry about structuring sentences, just using the vocabulary “Falcao, Messi soccer players,” “Free time swim, watch soap operas,” “Teacher economy arrogant.” Outstanding students tried to respond saying some more structured sentences like “On holidays drink beer with friends, play billiards y go to concerts with they,” “At school, study for tests,” “I learning play trumpet.”

³ “Preguntémosle a Elkin, él sabe -Elkin, husband es esposo? -sí.”

⁴ “Karen, qué es leather craftsman? -creo que tiene que ver con hacer cosas en cuero.”

⁵ “Hairdresser? Ah entonces mi mom es hairdresser -no dices ‘es’, dices ‘is’ -entonces mi mom is hairdresser.”

⁶ “Postman va en jobs o professions”

⁷ “Esta es la imagen de watch TV”

Tasks as Motivation to Use the Foreign Language

It was also noticed that when working on most tasks, a great deal of students used both Spanish and English language, but when participating in “sharing personal experience” task, students struggled using the foreign language. Students used the native and the foreign language when sharing experiences or anecdotes as well as when describing images or confirming vocabulary. For example it was heard “That’s go swimming because the man is swimming,”⁸ “The three groups must be genre, instruments, and singers / bands,”⁹ “Study for tests corresponds to actions as well as talk to friends,”¹⁰ “Arrogant, oops! negative quality –yes, like Economy teacher,”¹¹ “Lazy is ‘perezoso’, isn’t it? –Haha like Social Studies teacher.”¹² . When participating in “sharing personal experience” task, students used Spanish but incorporated English words: “I live with my mother, I also live with my father and sister,”¹³ “In my free time, I play soccer and my parents sometimes take me to play bowling, bowling? At ‘Salitre’ Coliseum Lanes, near ‘Simon Bolivar’ Park.”¹⁴

Students’ Perceptions about Tasks

In general, students reported in the interviews (in Spanish) that communicative tasks are excellent, interesting, and practical since they are different from traditional lessons. They motivate students to speak in English, promote participation, are a useful tool to learn the foreign language, help develop speaking and listening skills, as well as creating the need to talk without worrying about accuracy. When asked about their opinion it was affirmed that tasks “are cool because we changed things we were doing,”¹⁵ “They make us interact,”¹⁶ “They are different from current English lessons,”¹⁷ “They are more practical than theoretical things.”¹⁸

⁸ “Eso es go swimming porque el señor está nadando.”

⁹ “Los tres grupos deben ser genre, instruments y singers / bands”

¹⁰ “Study for tests va en actions, también talk to Friends”

¹¹ “Arrogant, uy negative quality –sí como el professor de economía”

¹² “Lazy es perezoso, cierto? –hahaha como la teacher de social studies”

¹³ “Yo live con mi mother, también live father, sister”

¹⁴ “In mi free time, soccer player y algunas veces mis papás me llevan a jugar bolos, Bowling? In lanes coliseum cerca del park Simon Bolivar”.

¹⁵ “Son chéveres porque cambiamos lo que llevábamos haciendo”

¹⁶ “Nos hacen interactuar”

¹⁷ “Son diferentes de las clases de inglés que se hacen”

¹⁸ “Son más prácticas que teóricas”

About the statement that tasks promote students' interaction, some students said that "Everybody participated,"¹⁹ "There were people that before were not interested but during these lessons there were many people that participated,"²⁰ "As everybody saw each other talking in English, they were not worried about people's comments,"²¹ "One did not any more feel ashamed for participating."²² When talking about the usefulness of tasks, students stated that "I liked when we saw videos because we learn to listen,"²³ "Speaking is the best way to learn another language,"²⁴ "They were useful to us learn how to talk more in English,"²⁵ "They help us to improve our vocabulary a lot,"²⁶ "I think before of this I hadn't been able to talk and to answer in such a way."²⁷ Students also affirmed that tasks create a need to talk freely "Here, everybody talked without feeling ashamed, they needed to talk,"²⁸ "There were people that dared to speak no matter if that was wrong,"²⁸ "Many students dared to talk despite pronunciation was not good."²⁹

Students' Preferred Tasks

It was also affirmed that students preferred tasks related to motivating topics or those which represent a challenge to be solved. About motivating topics it was said that "I liked when we talked about our hobbies, about our favorite music,"³¹ "I liked so much the free time video,"³² "I liked all activities because they were about topics that called our attention,"³³ "When we were organizing actions that you

¹⁹ "Todas las personas participaban"

²⁰ "Hubo personas que antes no se interesaban pero en esas clases había mucha gente que participaba"

²¹ "Como veían a todos hablando en inglés, no se preocupaban del qué dirán ni nada de eso"

²² "A uno ya no le daba pena participar"

²³ "Me gustó cuando vimos videos porque se aprende a oír"

²⁴ "La forma oral es como la mejor forma de aprender otro idioma"

²⁵ "Sirvieron para que uno aprendiera a hablar más en inglés"

²⁶ "Nos ayudan a mejorar mucho nuestro vocabulario"

²⁷ "Creo que antes de esto no hubiera sido capaz de hablar y dar respuestas así"

²⁸ "Acá todos hablaban sin que les diera pena, se veían en la necesidad de hablar"

²⁹ "Había gente que se atrevía a hablar así estuviera mal"

³⁰ "Muchos se lanzaron a hablar así no estuviera bien la pronunciación"

³¹ "Me gustó cuando hablamos de nuestros pasatiempos, sobre nuestra música favorita"

³² "Me gustó mucho la del video del free time"

³³ "Me gustaron todas las actividades porque tenían temas que a uno le llamaban la atención"

displayed on the TV.”³⁴ When referring to tasks like jigsaw puzzle or mind maps, students affirmed that “I liked the one about the words we knew, when the mind map,”³⁵ “The jigsaw puzzle, the one about the school map because we had to set pieces,”³⁶ “The jigsaw puzzle and the mind map because we had to think a lot, look carefully, not doing wrong,”³⁷ “They help us to think through doing, organizing sentences, organizing images, joining parts.”³⁸

Conclusions

This study attempted to establish the effect of communicative group tasks such as classifying, matching, ordering, comparing, draft mind map, jigsaw puzzles, and sharing personal experience, on students’ spoken interaction in English as a foreign language, and the effect of these tasks on students’ motivation towards using English language to communicate in the classroom. The findings provide support to the literature reviewed and allow to conclude that there was a positive impact of communicative group tasks on students’ speaking skills, and that these tasks promoted free and spontaneous oral interaction among students when solving them.

The tests in this study made it possible to conclude that students improved their English spoken interaction and interviewed students appreciated tasks as a useful tool for getting that improvement. This conclusion is consistent with some assertions reviewed in the literature including Plews and Zhao (2010), who state that tasks integrate the development of language skills and are beneficial for increasing students’ communicative skills. Yim (2009) also affirms that participants achieve confidence in speaking, and a study by Tabatabaei and Atefeh (2011) also asserts that tasks help learners’ interaction skills improve.

Chuang’s (2010) study demonstrates that participants feel that TBL activities train their oral skills as well as problem solving and critical thinking skills. This is re-affirmed in the present study when students reported that solving tasks strengthened these skills because

³⁴ “Cuando estábamos organizando las acciones que nos colocabas en el televisor”

³⁵ “Me gustó la de las palabras que sabíamos cuando el mind map”

³⁶ “La del rompecabezas del plano del colegio porque tocaba organizar las fichas”

³⁷ “La del rompecabezas y la del mind map porque teníamos que pensar muchísimo, mirar bien, no equivocarnos”

³⁸ “Lo ayudan a uno a pensar haciendo, armando oraciones, organizando imágenes, uniendo las partes”

they involved processes such as thinking through doing, matching words or sentences to images, grouping vocabulary, solving jigsaw puzzles or mind maps, organizing and joining parts, among others.

Naznean's (n.d.) study concluded that TBL provides variety of learning opportunities for students no matter their level or capability. The current research permitted to observe that all students, outstanding and weaker, participated actively when solving the tasks and tried to do their best when using English, particularly in "sharing personal experience" tasks. These findings contradict Choo and Too (2012), who stated that teachers detected that low-level students were not able to cope with tasks and that only outstanding students were able to achieve the goals.

Studies such as the ones of Ilin, Inozu and Yumru (2007) and Xiongyong and Moses (2011) state that tasks facilitate the communicative practice of language items and provide a relaxed environment that promotes the target language use, the activation of learners' needs and skills interaction. This can be concluded from the present study as well since it could be observed that students struggled using the foreign language and helped each other with pronunciation, vocabulary or how to answer. Many students, freely and spontaneously, dared to use the vocabulary, asked, or answered despite their mistakes. Besides, interviewed students stated that tasks created a need to talk freely, helped to improve their vocabulary, and that these activities were useful to talk more in English language.

The reviewed literature and the current study permit to conclude that tasks' characteristics such as group interaction, nature of topics, and types, greatly influenced the students' motivation and participation towards speaking English in the classroom. With respect to group interaction, Yim (2009) stated that having students working together allows them to stay interested and actively involved. Chuang (2010) affirms that the thing that students liked most about tasks was that they could share and exchange information with their partners. Plews & Zhao (2010), Barnard & Viet (2010), Xiongyong & Moses (2011), Jong (2006), Chuang (2010), and Tabatabaei & Atefeh (2011) highlighted the benefit of tasks for increasing students' intrinsic motivation, participation, and collaborative learning. Tabatabaei & Atefeh (2011) also considered that tasks promote a creative, lively, and collaborative learning environment. In the present study, students expressed that they liked helping each other for language items or those related to tasks solving, and that tasks are better if they are solved with friends.

Besides, it could be noticed that students liked sharing information and that there was cooperation of students for solving the different tasks.

Regarding the nature of topics and type of tasks, Thanh and Huan (2012) affirm that learners were highly motivated when working towards personally meaningful goals and challenging but achievable tasks. In the present study, students expressed that they liked tasks related to motivating topics such as hobbies, music, friends, and school among others. Students also manifested that they preferred tasks which represented a challenge to be solved like jigsaw puzzles or mind maps.

In terms of participation and motivation towards speaking English, Chuang (2010) states that students are keen on learning actively not passively. Yim (2009) affirms that students display more positive attitudes towards learning English. Choo and Too (2012) assert that teachers reported having improved classrooms dynamics and observed effective team work, social interaction and lively atmosphere in the classroom. This study allowed to observe that tasks promoted interaction, and every student wanted to participate without feeling ashamed. Interviewed students expressed that the tasks motivated them to speak English and that they promoted active participation. These two studies dissent from Yim (2009) and Chuang (2010) among others, in which teachers expressed negative perceptions related to classroom management when solving tasks because of the noise that they were not able to control.

Finally, it can be concluded from the present study that tasks motivate students to speak in English since they are different from traditional lessons and because they are practical. This is in accordance with Thanh and Huan (2012)'s study, which asserted that students preferred TBL instead of traditional methods.

The present study offers information about the effect of communicative tasks on students' spoken interaction in English and on their motivation towards speaking English as a FL in the classroom. However, there are some undesirable conditions that should be considered. The development of oral tasks in the classroom implied a noisy environment, but this was also intensified by external noise from outside the classroom that sometimes affected the lesson development. There were some limitations related to the availability of audio visual devices since in some opportunities it was too difficult to access to them. Consequently, the order of the planned tasks had to be modified or they had to be postponed. Occasional unplanned school activities negatively interfered with the continuity of some lessons and again they had to be restarted or completed afterwards. It would have been profitable to

develop these communicative tasks with students belonging to other classes, but it was not possible because the large number of students in each class would have implied the creation of more resources in not enough time.

In a subsequent research, some points could be considered as the ones related to the continuity of this project, the inclusion of tasks in wider lesson plan methodologies like Ubd or Ganag, the implementation of tasks for other communicative skills, as well as the creation of resources according to school grades, students' ages, and their topics of interest.

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