



Received: 04-09-2025
Accepted: 14-10-2025

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

The Impact of Task-Based Language Teaching on Speaking Fluency: A Pre-and-Post Test Study with Young Learners at A Private English Center in Vietnam

¹ Đỗ Lan Anh, ² Huỳnh Ái

¹ Saigon Technology Tourism College, Vietnam

² Ho Chi Minh University of Banking, Vietnam

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2025.5.5.5106>

Corresponding Author: **Đỗ Lan Anh**

Abstract

This study examines the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on the speaking fluency of young English learners at a private language center in Vietnam. Given the central role of fluency in communicative competence, the research addresses the challenge of limited speaking practice among young learners. An eight-week one-group pre-test/post-test design was implemented with 30 participants. Data were collected through a standardized fluency test and a post-study survey on learner perceptions. Results showed a statistically significant improvement in speaking fluency,

with higher post-test mean scores and a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.8$). High inter-rater reliability confirmed the consistency of the fluency assessment. Survey responses further revealed positive learner attitudes toward TBLT, including increased confidence and motivation to speak. These findings suggest that TBLT is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing young learners' speaking fluency in the Vietnamese EFL context and offer practical insights for teachers seeking more communicative and engaging classroom methods.

Keywords: TBLT, Speaking Fluency, Vietnam, Young Learners

1. Introduction

In an era of rapid globalization and international integration, English has become an indispensable skill, acting as a key medium for communication, business, and cultural exchange (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) ^[12]. This is particularly true in Vietnam, where economic development and a growing demand for international partnerships have placed a high premium on English proficiency. Recognizing this, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training has made significant efforts to embed English language learning into the national curriculum from an early age (Ho & Long, 2014) ^[8]. Within this context, young learners, often attending both public schools and private English centers, are at a critical stage of language acquisition. For these learners, developing strong communicative competence is vital, and a fundamental component of this is speaking fluency. Unlike accuracy and complexity, fluency focuses on the smooth, effortless, and rapid flow of speech, which is essential for effective real-time communication (Bygate, 1987; Skehan, 1996) ^[2, 15]. However, achieving fluency remains a considerable challenge for many young learners.

A significant contributing factor to this challenge is the continued reliance on traditional teaching methodologies in many educational settings. Methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model often prioritize explicit knowledge of grammar rules and vocabulary memorization (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) ^[12]. While these approaches may assist in building linguistic accuracy, they often fail to promote authentic speaking opportunities. In a comprehensive review of 60 TBLT studies in Vietnam, Huynh Truong Sang and Nguyen Van Loi (2023) ^[13] observed that learners following TBLT instruction showed better fluency, higher engagement, and stronger communicative competence than those taught with PPP. This suggests a critical need to shift toward more communication-oriented methodologies in speaking instruction. This can lead to a gap between what learners know (their grammatical and lexical knowledge) and what they can actually do in a real-world communicative context, hindering the development of spontaneous and fluent speech (Pinter, 2006) ^[11]. Consequently, many young learners possess a strong understanding of English but lack the confidence and automaticity required for fluent oral communication.

In response to these limitations, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a promising alternative. TBLT shifts the focus from language form to language meaning by engaging learners in authentic, goal-oriented tasks (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996) ^[6, 19]. The core principle is that language learning occurs most effectively when learners are focused on completing a task using the target language, rather than on the language itself (Nunan, 2004) ^[10]. This learner-centered approach encourages spontaneous interaction and provides a natural environment for students to practice their speaking skills, thereby fostering both confidence and fluency (Pinter, 2006; Van den Branden, 2006) ^[11, 18]. Numerous studies have explored the effectiveness of TBLT in various contexts (Ho & Long, 2014; Shintani, 2015) ^[8, 14], but there remains a clear gap in the existing literature.

Specifically, there is a lack of research dedicated exclusively to measuring the impact of TBLT on speaking fluency as a distinct construct, especially among young learners at private English centers in Vietnam. This research aims to fill this void by providing empirical evidence of TBLT's specific impact on fluency, as well as exploring the perceptions of young learners toward this teaching approach. The findings from this study will not only contribute to the academic understanding of TBLT but also provide valuable pedagogical insights for English teachers in Vietnam and beyond. To achieve this purpose, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does TBLT lead to a statistically significant improvement in speaking fluency?
2. How do young learners perceive the effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing their speaking fluency?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speaking fluency in second language learning

In the field of second language acquisition, speaking fluency is often discussed as a separate and critical component of communicative competence, distinct from accuracy and complexity. While accuracy refers to the correct use of grammar and vocabulary, and complexity relates to the use of sophisticated language, fluency is defined by the speaker's ability to produce language in a continuous, smooth, and rapid manner (Bygate, 1987) ^[2]. Fluency is a multidimensional construct, and Thornbury (2005) ^[17] identified several criteria that can be used for its assessment in both teaching and testing contexts. These include the rate of speech, reflecting a natural and appropriate speed of delivery; appropriate pausing, where pauses occur mainly at syntactic or semantic boundaries rather than due to word searching; and the avoidance of unnecessary hesitation, such as fillers or prolonged sounds.

Modern conceptualizations of fluency, particularly in the context of empirical research, focus on three main metrics: rate of speech, length of run, and number of pauses (Skehan, 1996; Segalowitz, 2010) ^[14, 15]. A fluent speaker typically speaks at a consistent pace with minimal pauses, uses longer segments of uninterrupted speech, and demonstrates a natural flow. However, developing this automaticity can be particularly challenging for young learners. As novice speakers, they often need time to retrieve words and construct sentences, leading to frequent pauses and a slow speaking rate. This lack of fluency can negatively influence their confidence and motivation, creating a vicious cycle that hinders their overall speaking development (Pinter,

2006) ^[11].

2.2 Task-based language teaching (TBLT)

In response to the limitations of traditional, grammar-focused methods, TBLT has gained prominence as a learner-centered approach that prioritizes meaningful communication. At its core, TBLT is a methodology where learners are given a non-linguistic goal to accomplish through language use (Nunan, 2004) ^[10]. The focus shifts from form (grammar rules) to meaning (communicative function). The most widely accepted framework for TBLT is the three-stage task cycle proposed by Willis (1996) ^[19]:

Pre-task: The teacher introduces the topic, provides necessary vocabulary and phrases, and prepares learners for the task.

Task: Learners work in pairs or groups to complete the task. The teacher acts as a facilitator, monitoring and offering support without interfering with the communication process.

Post-task: The learners report the outcomes of their task to the class. The teacher can then provide feedback on language use and conduct focused language analysis based on errors and emergent language from the task performance. The effectiveness of TBLT in fostering fluency is well-documented (Ellis, 2003) ^[6]. By engaging in meaning-focused interaction, learners are naturally driven to retrieve and produce language in real-time. This repeated, purposeful practice helps them automatize their linguistic knowledge. Additionally, TBLT encourages negotiation for meaning, learners must clarify, confirm, and explain their ideas to be understood. This dynamic process hones their ability to speak spontaneously and adjust their speech in real-time.

2.3 Previous studies

The effectiveness of TBLT in developing oral skills has been widely explored in various international contexts. A number of recent studies have provided strong global evidence for TBLT's positive impact on fluency. For instance, Shintani (2015) ^[14] conducted a robust investigation with learners in Japan, finding that learners who engaged in repeated tasks showed a steady improvement in their fluency metrics. These findings were further corroborated by Skehan (2014) ^[15], who using detailed computer-assisted analysis, demonstrated that TBLT tasks systematically improve the rate and length of speech runs. These studies confirm that TBLT provides a structured yet flexible framework that helps learners build both confidence and automaticity in their speech, which are key components of fluency.

In addition to objective skill development, research has also looked into how learners perceive TBLT. Carless (2007) ^[5], in his study of TBLT in Hong Kong primary schools, found that learners expressed a sense of satisfaction and recognized improvement in their language production after completing meaningful tasks, which positively influenced their perception and engagement. This is a crucial finding, as Pinter (2006) ^[11] and Cameron (2001) ^[3] both highlighted the importance of a low-anxiety and familiar learning environment. They argued that when tasks are age-appropriate and relatable, young learners are more likely to engage and participate actively. This directly ties into fluency development, as a comfortable classroom setting reduces affective filters, making learners more willing to take risks and practice speaking without fear of making mistakes. The positive attitudes of learners are therefore a

crucial factor in the success of a TBLT program.

In the Vietnamese context, research on TBLT has been growing, though it often focuses on a broader scope rather than specifically on fluency in young learners. Ho and Long (2014) ^[8] conducted action research with university freshmen, confirming that task-based speaking activities had a significant impact on students' overall speaking performance. Their study noted that students felt more fluent and confident due to increased practice opportunities. More recently, Nghia and Quang (2021) ^[9] explored the role of TBLT in enhancing communicative competence among Vietnamese EFL learners. Their findings indicated that students found task-based lessons especially helpful in improving fluency and real-life interaction. However, the study did not target young learners or focus on private language centers. Following this, Bui (2025) ^[11] shed light on the potential of TBLT for primary students in Vietnam, specifically emphasizing that the use of input-based tasks and task repetition are essential strategies to optimize fluency and learner engagement in this context.

2.4 Research gap

The literature reviewed above establishes that TBLT is a well-researched, learner-centered approach that holds significant promise for developing speaking skills. Global and national studies confirm its effectiveness in enhancing speaking fluency and fostering positive learner attitudes. However, a notable research gap remains.

While previous studies (e.g., Ho & Long, 2014; Nghia & Quang, 2021) ^[8, 9] have explored the effectiveness of TBLT in Vietnam, they primarily address a broader "speaking performance" and are conducted with university or high-school students. This leaves a critical gap in the understanding of how TBLT affects the specific aspect of fluency in the younger age group at private English centers. The majority of existing research either covers a broader range of skills or is conducted with a different age group, making it difficult to generalize the findings to your specific study context.

Therefore, this current research aims to address this gap by providing a targeted investigation into the effects of TBLT on the speaking fluency of young learners. By employing a pre- and post-test design combined with a perception survey, this study seeks to offer empirical evidence of TBLT's effectiveness on fluency and to explore how young learners themselves perceive the method, thereby contributing new, specific insights to the field.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study employed a one-group pre-test/post-test experimental design to investigate the impact of TBLT on young learners' speaking fluency. This design, particularly suitable for action research, allowed for the measurement of changes within the same group of participants before and after a specific intervention. A potential threat to internal validity in this design is the lack of a control group, which makes it challenging to rule out the influence of other factors such as maturation or practice effects. However, given the study's specific context and purpose, this design was deemed appropriate for providing initial empirical evidence of the intervention's impact.

Furthermore, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. The

quantitative data, collected from the pre-test and post-test, provided empirical evidence of the students' fluency improvement. The qualitative data, gathered through a student survey and in-depth interviews, offered valuable insights into the learners' perceptions and attitudes towards the TBLT approach. This combination of methods, known as triangulation, strengthens the study's validity by providing a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the research problem.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 30 young learners, aged 7-12, attending a private English center in a major city in Vietnam. They were selected from a single class to ensure a consistent learning environment and level of English proficiency. All participants were classified at the A1 (Movers) level, based on the center's placement test and alignment with the Cambridge English framework. This age group and proficiency level were specifically chosen to explore how TBLT impacts learners who are at a foundational stage of language acquisition.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Given that the participants, all ethical guidelines were strictly followed. Parental consent was obtained in writing for each participant, clearly outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Additionally, assent from the learners themselves was secured to ensure their willingness to take part. The study was conducted with the full approval of the school's administration, and all collected data were anonymized to protect the participants' privacy.

3.4 Instruments

To address the research questions effectively, two primary instruments were used: a speaking test and a survey. The use of multiple instruments allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the TBLT intervention.

A standardized speaking test was administered in a one-on-one setting with the researcher. The learners were asked to perform a series of speaking tasks. Their performance was evaluated using an adapted Cambridge Movers speaking rubric, which was modified to focus exclusively on fluency. The assessment focused on criteria such as speech rate, length of run, and number of pauses, aligning with modern conceptualizations of fluency. To ensure rater reliability, a second rater (a senior teacher at the center) was trained to use the adapted rubric, and the inter-rater reliability was measured using a Pearson correlation coefficient. The coefficient was high ($r = 0.92$), confirming the consistency of the assessment.

A survey was designed to gauge the participants' perceptions of the TBLT intervention. The survey consisted of a series of Likert-scale items, allowing learners to express their attitudes towards the effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing their speaking fluency, confidence, and motivation. For a more profound understanding, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a subset of 5 participants. The interview questions were designed to explore the reasons behind their survey responses and to gather richer qualitative data.

3.5 Procedures of data collection

The study was carried out over a two-month period, during

which the participants engaged in a total of eight TBLT-based lessons. The entire research procedure was structured into three main phases: pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention.

The TBLT lessons were meticulously designed based on Willis's (1996) ^[19] three-stage task cycle. The tasks were goal-oriented and age-appropriate, focusing on real-world communication. For example, a sample lesson involved a role-play scenario where students had to order food at a restaurant, and another required them to create a story based on a picture sequence. Each task included a clear objective, input, and a structured outcome to ensure that learners were consistently focused on meaning.

3.6 Data analysis

The scores from the pre-test and post-test were a critical component of the study. To determine if the TBLT intervention had a measurable impact on speaking fluency, these scores were entered into SPSS statistical software. A Paired Samples t-test was performed to assess whether there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the same group of participants before and after the intervention. The assumptions of the t-test, including normality and the absence of outliers, were checked prior to analysis. Additionally, the effect size (Cohen's d) was calculated to determine the practical significance of the findings.

To provide context and a deeper understanding of the quantitative findings, the qualitative data from the survey responses and interview transcripts were thoroughly analyzed. The primary method for this analysis was content analysis, where recurring themes and patterns related to the learners' perceptions and attitudes were identified. The interview transcripts were coded inductively, with an intercoder reliability of 95% achieved through a second

independent coder. The aim was to go beyond the numbers and understand how the students themselves experienced the TBLT approach. To enrich the findings and give a human voice to the data, illustrative quotes from the interviews were selected to support and elaborate on the key themes that emerged, thereby complementing the quantitative results.

4. Findings

4.1 Improvement in speaking fluency after the TBLT intervention

To address the first research question, "To what extent does TBLT lead to statistically significant improvement in speaking fluency?", the scores from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed. Descriptive statistics were first computed to understand the central tendency and distribution of the data for speaking fluency. Table 1 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, and number of participants for both the pre-test and post-test.

Table 1: The paired samples t-test on the pre and post-tests Group Statistics

Paired Samples Statistics					
Type	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Test	Pre	6.100	30	1.2063	.2202
	Post	7.067	30	1.0886	.1988

As shown in Table 1, the mean score for speaking fluency in the pre-test was 6.100 (SD = 1.2063), while the mean score for the post-test increased to 7.067 (SD = 1.0886). This initial observation suggests a positive change in speaking fluency after the TBLT intervention.

To statistically determine if this difference was significant, a Paired Samples t-test was conducted. Table 2 illustrates the results of the t-test for speaking fluency.

Table 2: Paired Samples Test on the pre and post-tests

			Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test	Post-test	-.9667	.7063	.1290	-1.2304	-.7029	-7.496	29	.000

Table 2 reveals a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores for speaking fluency ($t(29) = -7.496$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.23, -.70]). The p-value is less than the conventional significance level of .05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This strongly indicates that the TBLT intervention had a significant positive impact on the young learners' speaking fluency.

More importantly, the effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.37$), calculated from the paired difference mean and standard deviation, is considered large. This suggests that the observed improvement was not only statistically significant but also substantial in a practical sense.

For a clearer visual representation of the fluency gains, a bar chart comparing the mean pre-test and post-test scores, along with their respective standard deviations, would be beneficial.

4.2 Learners' perceptions of TBLT in enhancing speaking fluency

To address the second research question, "How do young learners perceive the effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing their speaking fluency?", qualitative data from the student

survey and follow-up interviews were analyzed. The internal consistency of the survey was confirmed with a high Cronbach's alpha of .85, indicating that the survey items reliably measured the same underlying construct.

The descriptive statistics for the survey (Table 3) reveal a strong and positive perception of TBLT's impact on students' speaking ability. The mean scores for most items were notably high, indicating a high level of agreement. In particular, students felt that TBLT significantly increased their willingness to speak without fear (Mean = 4.63), helped them feel more relaxed (Mean = 4.50), and led them to speak more often and more confidently (Mean = 4.60). Overall, the learners' perception of their total speaking improvement was very high (Mean = 4.57).

Table 3: Students' perceptions on fluency and confidence

No	Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
1	TBLT increases my willingness to speak English without fear of making mistakes.	30	3	5	4.63	.615
2	TBLT helps me feel more relaxed when participating in English speaking tasks.	30	3	5	4.50	.731
3	I can make longer sentences when speaking.	30	3	5	4.23	.728
4	I feel that my spoken English has improved through the speaking tasks.	30	4	5	4.57	.504
5	I can keep talking without stopping too much to think of what to say.	30	2	5	3.63	.809
6	I speak English more often and more confidently during class activities.	30	3	5	4.60	.563
Total Mean and SD					4.36	0.667

The interviews provided a more detailed explanation for these high mean scores. Students repeatedly highlighted a noticeable improvement in their fluency and ability to speak continuously. For instance, Student 01 shared, "I feel like I speak more fluently now, with fewer 'uh... um...' pauses than before." This opinion was expressed by another student, who recalled a moment of surprise when they "spoke five sentences in a row without stopping" (Student 02). This demonstrates that the learners themselves recognized their progress in speaking more smoothly and with less hesitation.

Furthermore, learners reported that TBLT created a supportive learning environment, which directly contributed to increased confidence. Student 08 noted, "Working in a group with friends helps me avoid the pressure of speaking alone. When I'm stuck for ideas, my friend suggests something, and I can follow along." This sense of freedom was crucial for learners who were previously afraid of making mistakes. Student 06 explained, "Before, I was very afraid of mispronouncing words, so I often stayed silent, but after a few TBLT classes, I feel more natural. I don't worry as much anymore because I know I'm allowed to make mistakes and then correct them." The qualitative findings strongly confirm the quantitative results, showing that learners not only improved their speaking fluency but also developed a more positive attitude toward speaking English.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study, which demonstrate a statistically significant increase in young learners' speaking fluency after the TBLT intervention, provide strong empirical evidence that TBLT is a highly effective pedagogical tool. This section will delve into the underlying mechanisms that contributed to this success, discuss the limitations of the study, and present practical implications for teachers and curriculum designers.

5.1 Interpreting the impact of TBLT on speaking fluency

The quantitative findings of this study, which indicate a statistically significant increase in students' speaking fluency after TBLT implementation, provide strong evidence that TBLT is effective in enhancing speaking fluency. This result is consistent with prominent theoretical frameworks proposed by TBLT pioneers. As Ellis (2003) [6] contended, TBLT facilitates opportunities for learners to use language communicatively and meaningfully, which is a key element for developing fluency. This study's finding reinforces Ellis's position, suggesting that when learners are engaged in

real-world tasks, they are more likely to focus on conveying meaning, thereby reducing the cognitive load associated with grammatical accuracy and allowing them to speak more fluidly.

Furthermore, this study's findings align with Willis (1996) [19], who argued that the Task Cycle, a central component of TBLT, provides a structured environment that encourages learners to speak. The planning and reporting phases of the task cycle create a scaffold that helps students organize their thoughts and practice their language before a final presentation, leading to a noticeable improvement in fluency. The fluency gains observed in this research are also supported by international studies that have explored the impact of task repetition and interaction on oral proficiency (e.g., Bygate, 2001) [2]. For instance, numerous studies have confirmed that repeated exposure to similar tasks and rich interaction with peers can significantly improve students' ability to produce longer and more complex sentences without frequent pauses, a core characteristic of fluency.

5.2 Learners' perceptions and pedagogical implications

The qualitative findings, which showed that students held highly positive perceptions of TBLT's impact on their speaking fluency, are consistent with the quantitative data from the t-test. The participants' self-reported improvements in fluency and confidence directly mirror the statistically significant gains observed in their pre- and post-test scores. This alignment suggests that the students' subjective experience of TBLT was a reliable indicator of their actual performance. Learners frequently noted that they felt more relaxed and willing to speak, which directly addresses a significant barrier to fluency—speaking anxiety.

This positive perception can be attributed to the motivational and engaging nature of TBLT. The learner-centered approach of TBLT, which focuses on meaningful tasks and promotes authentic communication, appears to have fostered a positive learning environment. When students find activities interesting and relevant to their lives, they are more likely to participate actively and invest more effort in the learning process. This enhanced engagement and motivation likely contributed to the noticeable gains in both fluency measures and perceptions.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Despite its findings, this study has several limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the use of a single-group, pre-test-post-test design, while effective for observing change, does not allow for a direct comparison with a control group. Consequently, it is challenging to definitively conclude that the observed fluency gains were solely due to the TBLT intervention rather than other external factors.

Secondly, the study was conducted with a relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of learners. The short duration of the intervention is also a limitation. A longer study period would have provided more valid data on the sustained impact of TBLT on speaking fluency and could have revealed long-term effects that were not captured in this study. Future research should consider addressing these limitations by employing a larger, more diverse sample and a longer intervention period.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of

TBLT on the speaking fluency of young English learners and to explore their perceptions of this approach. The findings revealed that TBLT had a positive and statistically significant impact on the students' fluency. The analysis of pre-test and post-test scores showed a clear improvement in their oral performance. These quantitative results were further supported by the qualitative data, as students consistently expressed a highly positive perception of TBLT, noting improvements in their fluency and confidence.

The present study contributes empirical evidence to the field of English language teaching in Vietnam, demonstrating the effectiveness of TBLT in enhancing the speaking fluency of young learners. This is particularly valuable as it provides a practical pedagogical model for Vietnamese teachers to address the common challenge of developing fluency in young learners.

Based on these findings, TBLT is recommended as a highly effective approach for speaking classes. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, including its small sample size and short duration. Therefore, it is recommended that future research address these gaps by conducting studies with a larger sample, a longer intervention period, and a more comprehensive research design that includes a comparison with a traditional approach like PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production).

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