

# Voices Unheard: Enhancing English-Speaking Skills among Technical Learners at Industrial Training Institute by Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching

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## Abstract

ITIs offer practical training in various technical trades, which enables students to enter the workforce faster than other traditional degrees. However, graduates from ITIs often need better communication skills to advance in their careers, leading to stagnant pay scales. To tackle this issue, a study was conducted to improve English-speaking skills among ITI students by implementing a task-based language teaching approach. A true experimental design was used for this study. The sample consisted of 76 ITI students who were randomly assigned to two groups: control (n=38) and experimental (n=38). Technical learners were given ample opportunities to practice their English-speaking skills and receive instructors feedback. The study showed significant improvement in the student's ability to communicate professionally. This study suggests that incorporating task-based language teaching into the ITI curriculum can significantly benefit students by enhancing their employment prospects and potential for career growth. Since the allocated tasks replicate the practical training, technical learners perceive them as readily achievable.

**Keywords:** employment, task-based language teaching (TBLT), speaking skills, technical learners

## 1. Introduction

Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) provide specialized training and education to a diverse group of students in various trades and technical fields. This group includes recent high school graduates, dropouts, and individuals seeking to acquire new skills or transition to a new career. Regardless of their educational background, ITIs cater to the learning needs of all students. Industrial Training Institute (ITI) programs provide practical, hands-on training to students that enables them to gain expertise in specific trades such as welding, plumbing, automobile repair, and electrical work (U. Ajithkumar & Pilz, 2019). These programs are designed to be shorter than traditional college degrees, making them an excellent choice for individuals who want to enter the workforce quickly without spending years in a classroom (Neroorkar & Gopinath, 2020).

The curriculums offered at ITIs are designed with great care to cater to the needs of the labor market, thereby benefiting the students (Maitra & Maitra, 2021; Upadhyay & RoyChowdhury, 2022). This ensures that they acquire valuable skills that are in high demand. Apprenticeships are a common feature of ITIs, which provide students with hands-on experience (Neroorkar & Gopinath, 2020). Upon graduating, students receive industry-recognized certifications, which validate their skills and open doors to various careers. All these measures make sure that students learn practical skills that are valuable and highly sought-after. ITI graduates play a vital role in bridging the skilled labor gap that exists in various industries, which, in turn, promotes infrastructure and economic growth and brings prosperity to the community (Dong, 2022; Srivastava & Hasan, 2016). Through their training, they develop strong troubleshooting skills, making them valuable assets when resolving technical issues in the real world (M. U. Ajithkumar, 2016). Additionally, vocational education is generally less expensive than traditional higher education at universities or colleges, making it more accessible to a broader range of people (Guo & Wang, 2020; Samani, 2018; Tsang, 1997).

### 1.1 Significance of English to Technical Learners at ITI

Acquiring English-speaking skills is crucial for students pursuing ITIs as it enhances their employability, safety, and productivity in the industrial sector (Bala & Singhal, 2019). Since English is the primary language used in business and technology worldwide (Hejazi & Ma, 2011; Rao, 2019), ITI graduates who are skilled in it possess an advantage over their peers in finding rewarding employment opportunities. In the industrial sector, ITI students frequently work with complex machinery and equipment, and clear communication is vital for ensuring safety and productivity. English-speaking skills also enable ITI graduates to access technical literature, research papers,

and online resources, which fosters continuous learning and professional development. Moreover, English-speaking skills promote effective teamwork and interpersonal skills (Menggo et al., 2019), enabling technical learners to build strong professional relationships and make meaningful contributions in the workplace. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that many ITI students struggle to acquire English-speaking skills (Nayana Tara & Sanath Kumar, 2017).

### 1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of the research study are,

- To enhance the speaking skills of the technical learners at ITI
- To analyze the role of TBLT in developing speaking skills among technical learners at ITI

### 1.3 Research Question

RQ1: Is there any significant difference in the speaking skills of the control and experimental groups?

### 1.4 Research Hypothesis (Null)

H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no significant difference in the speaking skills of the control and experimental groups.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview of Language Learning among Technical Learners

The variation in language proficiency among language learners poses a significant challenge that hinders establishing a consistent approach to language learning. Implementing standardized language instruction in vocational programs with a uniform curriculum can ensure effective and consistent language learning. However, in vocational education, the importance of English-speaking skills is often overshadowed by the emphasis on technical skills (Rauner & Maclean, 2009). This can lead to graduates who may struggle with effective communication in the workplace. Another obstacle to language learning in vocational education is the need for qualified language instructors and adequate learning materials (M. U. Ajithkumar, 2016). Additionally, the emphasis on regional languages may limit the development of English language abilities, which are crucial for employability in the global job market (Ushioda, 2017). These issues prevent the production of graduates who are well-equipped to communicate effectively and compete in the job market.

### 2.2 Importance of English-Speaking Skills in the Job Market

English-speaking skills are crucial in today's job market as it facilitates effective communication, and multinational companies and industries require it. Many employers prefer candidates with strong English communication skills because they are more adaptable and can work in multicultural environments (Ismail et al., 2011). English-speaking skills are essential for ITI students because it improves their employability and communication skills in a globalized and competitive job market. Communication skills are equally valued as their technical expertise. As English is the primary language for communication, documentation, and project management in business, every ITI student must learn at least basic spoken English to survive. This is because technical learners prioritize practical skills over English-speaking skills, resulting in persistent language gaps. (Nayana Tara & Sanath Kumar, 2017).

### 2.3 Challenges Faced by Technical Learners in Acquiring English-Speaking Skills

ITI students may face challenges in developing their English-speaking skills due to various factors. These factors can include limited exposure to English (Thakkar et al., 2020), inadequate resources, an unfocused curriculum (Maitra & Maitra, 2021), a lack of confidence, a shortage of quality instructors (M. U. Ajithkumar, 2016), a heavy workload, peer pressure, cultural and regional differences, a lack of immersion in an English-speaking environment, and limited access to technology. Limited exposure to English can hinder students' ability to comprehend and speak fluently (Derwing et al., 2008; Hutabarat & Simanjuntak, 2019). Insufficient resources and an unfocused curriculum can also impede their progress. It can be difficult to learn a new language, especially if one does not have enough time to devote to the learning process. Learning a second language can also be a challenging task for technical learners at ITI, due to complex psychological barriers that may arise from individual differences as they are from different educational backgrounds. Shyamal Majumdar says, "TVET in India is often seen as second-class education and as the last recourse for those who are unable to succeed in academic learning." (Majumdar, 2008) And he also stated that "In India, occupational education and training has a negative association with manual labor, leading to lack of societal recognition." (Majumdar, 2008) Learners at ITIs choose technical trades due to the perceived incapability of pursuing higher education. Students who perform poorly in school may develop feelings of incapability, leading to a lack of motivation and confidence in their studies. Furthermore, their sense of societal recognition may result in a lack of motivation to learn and succeed in life. As a result, previous experience leads to a lack of confidence when speaking English. They may fear being judged for making mistakes or feel overwhelmed by the language, which can make it difficult to understand and speak fluently. Pressure from peers can make it difficult for students to improve their English-speaking skills (Chien et al., 2020). Moreover, a lack of motivation or interest in English can also be a common barrier. Additionally, cultural differences and social norms may further complicate the formation of psychological barriers. For example, one may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed when speaking a language in front of people from their culture or feel pressured to conform to certain language expectations. These barriers can be particularly evident in educational settings such as English classes or training institutes, where students may feel evaluated or judged based on their English-speaking skills. Overcoming these psychological barriers often requires a combination of language practice, confidence building, and a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment (Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022). Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an approach that

emphasizes task completion in a supportive environment, fostering student confidence through positive reinforcement by instructors. Hence, researchers adopted TBLT to enhance the speaking skills of technical learners at ITIs.

#### *2.4 Task-Based Language Teaching as an Effective Pedagogical Approach*

TBLT is a widely adopted approach in the field of language education. It emphasizes the practical application of language in real-life situations, effective communication skills, active participation, intrinsic motivation, learner-centeredness, critical thinking, tolerance for mistakes, alignment with assessments, adaptability, and efficacy. This approach is reinforced by empirical research. (Bula-Villalobos & Murillo-Miranda, 2019; Chaika, 2023; Vitta et al., 2023). The objective of TBLT is to prepare students to effectively use language in various real-life situations where language is employed for communication and problem solving (Ali et al., 2023). It is also designed to develop practical language skills such as planning, giving advice, and solving problems. TBLT is engaging and meaningful, attracting learners who see the immediate relevance of the language they are using, and integrates context with language learning, making language acquisition more significant and memorable (Bhandari, 2020; Yildiz, 2020). Even though TBLT promotes active language learning, it can be applied to fulfill various learning goals and accommodate a wide range of proficiency levels. Assessments are closely related to the tasks that students have completed, ensuring that students are evaluated on their ability to use language effectively for real-world purposes (Gan & Leung, 2020). TBLT is adaptable to various teaching contexts, learner levels, and age groups, making it suitable for multiple educational settings. Research has shown that TBLT effectively enhances English-speaking skills. It immerses students in authentic, communicative situations, emphasizing effective communication over accuracy (Yildiz, 2020). The tasks are designed to mimic real-world situations, allowing students to connect their language learning to their everyday needs. After each task, students get feedback and time to think about it, which helps them improve their speech skills step by step.

### **3. Research Methodology**

In this study, a true experimental design is employed. This research design was implemented to prove the importance of the study statistically and to highlight the distinction in performance between the experimental and control groups. The speaking skills of both groups were evaluated using rubrics derived from the framework provided by the American Council of Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The evaluation results demonstrated the effectiveness of both TBLT and traditional methods in improving speaking skills.

#### *3.1 Participants*

The data was collected from students at the Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in India who were studying various trades. The sample consisted of 76 ITI students who were randomly assigned to two groups: control (n=38) and experimental (n=38). The study participants were Tamil and Telugu native speakers aged between 16 and 20 years and had undergone at least ten years of general education in English.

#### *3.2 Instruments*

This study used pre-test, activities, progressive tests, and post-test as the instruments. A pre-test is conducted to check the entry-level proficiency of the ITI students, while a post-test was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. Video was recorded to analyse the aspects of speaking skills. During the intervention, TBLT was administered. The intervention was carried out for five weeks. Students' goals and needs were identified to select an appropriate and meaningful task. Language needs of the students are to learn English for interview purposes. Tasks were developed based on real-life incidents to cater to students' specific language needs. Tasks administered in this study were mock interviews, narrative tasks, descriptive tasks, role-playing everyday interactions, and discussions.

#### *3.3 Research Procedure*

Every task has pre-task preparation, task introduction, and task performance, followed by monitoring the performance and task completion. Pre-task preparation involves introducing relevant vocabulary and language functions relevant to the task. Then the task must be clearly introduced along with the objectives. Students are assigned to work in pairs or small groups. The researcher observes the task, records errors, and identifies areas for additional support. Once the task was completed, the researcher gathered all the students together and discussed the outcomes and challenges of the task.

#### *3.4 Data Collection*

Primary data was collected through video recordings to assess the English-speaking skills of the technical learners. The Experimental Group (EG) participated in task-oriented language acquisition activities, while the Control Group (CG) followed traditional teaching methods. Both groups employed distinct approaches to language learning over five weeks, with the students' progress closely observed by the researchers. After the intervention phase, a post-test was given to both the Experimental and Control Groups.

#### *3.5 Data Analysis*

This study adopted quantitative data analysis to find the differences in the speaking levels of students taught using task-based activities and traditional teaching methods. The factors utilized to analyse the technical learners' speaking skills were vocabulary and fluency. To assess their speaking skills, the pre-test and post-test were designed using interview-related criteria. Collected data have been analysed in SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences)

**4. Results**

*4.1 Analysis of the RQ1*

RQ1: Is there any significant difference in the speaking skills of the control and experimental groups?

A pre-test conducted for 50 marks determined the learners' entry-level proficiency. The pre-test included a self-introduction, a Q&A session, and a product description. A paired sample test was conducted to find the significant difference in the speaking skills of the control and experimental group. Descriptive statistics for the pre-test and post-test of both control and experimental groups are shown in Table 1. The statistics indicate the mean value of the control group's pre-test is 6.2105 and the post-test mean value is 6.5263. However, the mean value of the experimental group's pre-test is 6.5789 and the post-test is 25.1579.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	CG-Post-test	6.5263	38	2.44382	.39644
	CG-Pre-test	6.2105	38	2.31514	.37557
Pair 2	EG-Post-test	25.1579	38	5.08589	.82504
	EG-Pre-test	6.5789	38	2.90974	.47202

Paired differences between the pre-test and post-test mean values of both control and experimental groups are shown in Table 2. The mean difference between the pre-test and post-test of the control group is .31579. With a significant difference of .118, higher than the estimated standard error of 0.05, which shows that there is no significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test of the control group. This could be attributed to the employment of a traditional teaching method for the control group. The experimental group shows a mean difference in pre-test and post-test of 18.57895. With a significant difference of .000, less than the estimated standard error of 0.05, which shows that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group. This could be attributed to the employment of TBLT activities in the experimental group.

Table 2. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences		Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation					
		Lower	Upper					
Pair 1	CG-Post-test CG-Pre-test	-.31579	1.21600	.19726	-.08390 .71548	1.601	37	.118
Pair 2	EG-Post-test EG-Pre-test	18.57895	4.18899	.67954	17.20206 19.95583	27.340	37	.000

Independent sample T-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the control and experimental groups. Table 3 presents the mean difference between the post-test scores of the control and experimental groups. The control group's post-test score has a mean value of 6.5263, while the experimental group's score has a mean value of 25.1579 (Table 1). The mean difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups is 20.355. The significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups is .000, which is less than the estimated standard error of 0.05. It represents that there is a significant difference between the post-test scores of the control and experimental groups.

Table 3. Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means						
		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Post-test scores of EG and CG	Equal variances assumed	20.355	74	.000	18.63158	.91535	16.80771	20.45544

During the intervention, weekly tests were administered for 30 marks to measure the improvement of the student's speaking skills. Figure 1 illustrates that the mean test values progressively increased over five weeks. The mean value for week one was 6.02, followed by 8.18 for week two, 11.13 for week three, 14.05 for week four, and 17.42 for week five. The linear line of the mean value indicates a gradual development from week one to week five, which can be attributed to tasks in TBLT. The implementation of TBLT activities has been found to have a constructive impact on the development of speaking skills among technical learners at ITI.

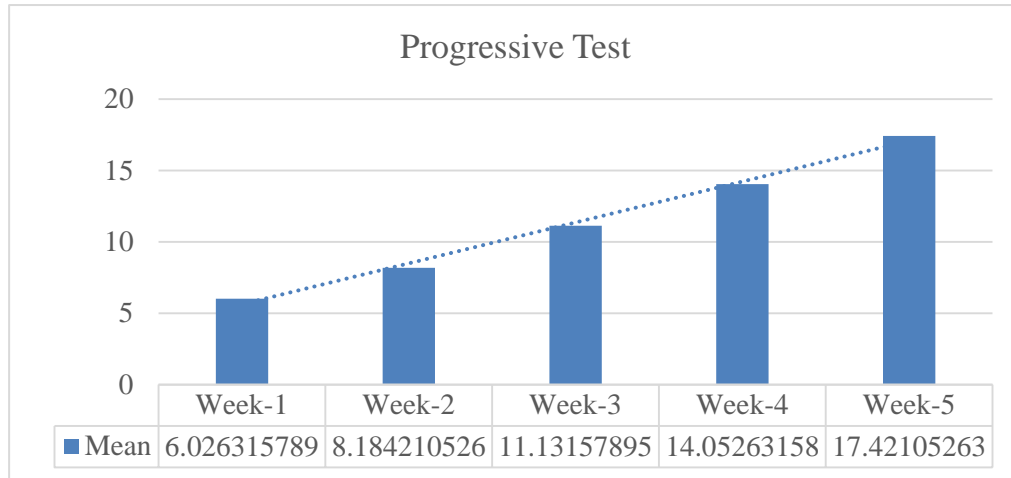


Figure 1. progressive test chart

5. Discussion

The data analysis of control and experimental groups shows that the use of TBLT has proved to be effective in the ESL classroom. The analysis results show that there is no difference between the pre-test values of both the control and experimental groups (as displayed in Table 1). The mean difference between the post-test of the control and experimental group was 20.355, and the significant difference p=0.000<0.05. Researchers assessed the null hypothesis by conducting a paired sample t-test on the experimental group to answer the research question. The null hypothesis stated that there would be no significant difference in the speaking skills of the control and experimental groups. However, the pre-test and post-test results of the control group showed no improvement with a mean difference of .31579 (p=.118>0.05), whereas the experimental group showed considerable improvement, and the mean difference between the pre-test and the post-test was 18.57895 (p=.000<0.05) as displayed in Table 2. Therefore, null hypothesis H01 has been rejected, and alternate hypothesis Ha1, "There is a significant difference in the speaking skills of the control and experimental groups." has been accepted.

Therefore, this study reveals several merits, particularly emphasizing the positive impact of TBLT on enhancing speaking skills. The success of TBLT in enhancing technical learners' speaking skills can be attributed to the purposeful and systematic development of activities and tasks that form the fundamental components of the approach (Al-Tamimi et al., 2020; Yaprak & Kaya, 2020). By incorporating interactive exercises that mimic authentic communicative situations, TBLT allows students to apply language concepts contextually and meaningfully. This focus on practical language use ensures that learners acquire theoretical knowledge and develop the practical speaking skills necessary for effective communication (Waluyo, 2019). The study's positive outcomes suggest that the tailored activities and tasks within the TBLT framework contribute significantly to the observed improvements in speaking skills, reinforcing the pedagogical value of incorporating real-world language activities into language teaching methodologies.

6. Conclusion

In this study, researchers utilized a task-based approach to improve the speaking skills of technical learners at ITI. The task involved real-world situations, which helped the technical learners to understand better and utilize the language in practical settings. Since task-based learning encourages students to take risks and express themselves freely, it helped to develop autonomy and self-confidence in technical learners. Furthermore, placing more emphasis on communication than accuracy reduced students' anxiety about making mistakes, which has boosted their willingness to participate in speaking activities. Overall, this method has helped students speak more fluently and has made them want to learn and use the language for a long time. The findings of the study revealed that students who were taught using task-based activities had significantly improved their levels of speaking skills than those who were taught using traditional approaches. The task-based activities provided students with more opportunities for real-world communication and encouraged them to use a broader vocabulary as pre-task activities prepare students with sufficient vocabulary, verbs, and frequently used sentences. Moreover, their speaking skills improved as they were required to complete various tasks within a limited amount of time. Overall, the results suggest that task-based activities can be an effective and practical approach for enhancing learners' speaking skills while promoting their cognitive and personal growth. Further research can be carried out using TBLT to develop other skills, such as listening, reading, and writing, among technical and other ESL learners.

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Authors contributions

Kiruthiga E. has conceptualized, collected data, analyzed the data, and written the initial draft, while Dr. G. Christopher is the corresponding author and supervisor who edited, reviewed, and finalized the draft.

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No additional data are available.

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