

APRENDIZAJE BASADO EN TAREAS Y EL DESARROLLO DE LA FLUIDEZ DEL IDIOMA INGLES

TASK BASED LEARNING AND THE ENGLISH SPEAKING FLUENCY DEVELOPMENT

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3926935>

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Fecha de recepción: 15 / 02 / 2020

Fecha de aceptación: 01 / 06 / 2020

RESUMEN

Las habilidades o competencias comunicativas son una de las cuatro habilidades macro que se desarrollarán como un medio de comunicación efectiva en contextos de aprendizaje de idiomas. En el entorno pedagógico del inglés como lengua extranjera los docentes de todos los niveles educativos tienden a formularse una pregunta crucial el ¿cómo desarrollar la destreza oral y la confianza en los estudiantes? Esta preocupación condujo al diseño de la presente investigación cuyo objetivo fue analizar la incidencia del aprendizaje basado en tareas en el desarrollo de la fluidez del habla en el idioma inglés. Se trabajó con un pre-test y un post-test para evaluar, tomando en cuenta vocabulario, pronunciación, fluidez al hablar y uso de la gramática. Las pruebas se tomaron de la página web de Cambridge que consistía en una muestra de la prueba para hablar KET (2019). Dos grupos de estudiantes del II Nivel paralelos K y L fueron seleccionados para la experimentación en el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo. Se construyó un programa basado en tareas para enseñar dos unidades del texto correspondiente a este nivel. Se administró una prueba de desempeño oral acompañada de una rúbrica de evaluación

PALABRAS CLAVE: Enseñanza del idioma inglés, aprendizaje basado en tareas, desarrollo de la fluidez oral.

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ABSTRACT

Communication skills are one of the four macro skills that will be developed as an effective means of communication in language learning contexts. In the pedagogical environment of English as a foreign language, teachers at all educational levels tend to ask a crucial question: how to develop oral skills and confidence in students? This concern led to the design of the present investigation whose objective was to analyze the incidence of task-based learning in the development of fluency in English language speech. We worked with a pre-test and a post-test to evaluate, taking into account vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency in speaking and use of grammar. The tests were taken from the Cambridge website which consisted of a sample of the test to speak KET (2019). Two groups of students from II Level “K” and “L” were selected for experimentation at the Language Center of the Technical University of Babahoyo. A task-based program was built to teach two units of the text corresponding to this level. An oral performance test was administered accompanied by an evaluation rubric. Ten students from II level K representing experimental group, how studied two units using the task-based program, while eleven students from II level L represented the control group who studied the same units following traditional techniques. The data were analyzed and the results mentioned that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the subjects in the experimental group and the control group in both the one-way monologue and the two-way dialogue tests in favor of the experimental group. These results support the effectiveness of using task-based learning in teaching English as a foreign language.

KEYWORDS: Teaching English, Task Based Learning, Oral English Performance

INTRODUCTION

Around the world English has been the most prominent language spoken in different countries; so, in most of educational institutions English language has become one of the principal subjects to study. It has become an essential tool of communication for humans in different knowledge areas and in the development of professional and economical life. The study of language in the twentieth century has tended to concentrate on spoken language. Communication is a principal element in social interaction among people. We cannot do anything without communication.

UNESCO reported that studies carried out based on the theme "English in Latin America" in May 2015, it was stated that students from Latin America have managed to develop a level of learning English as a foreign language by 40%. This topic has been considered important since the purpose is that a high percentage of learning English as a foreign language can be achieved in Latin countries such as: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru. In view of this issue, UNESCO has stressed that according to the Foreign Languages Competencies Development Programme, Latin American countries must project the development of English as a foreign language more inclusive based on social parameters manner according to the Ministry of Education in order to achieve excellent proficiency in the language, promoting the use of teaching methods and useful materials by teachers and in this way meet the needs of Latin American students.

During several years in Ecuador students' speaking fluency development has been a big deficit, due to limited motivational English activities. Students learn this language as a compulsory subject, they do not realize the necessity to learn the language for their future studies. On the other hand, it is very difficult to know which are the reasons why the methodologies, techniques and strategies are not effective to develop oral skills. However, some studies mention that the process of teaching foreign language in our country is focused on grammar and the socio-cognitive processes and the nature of the speaking process and oral message produced have received scant attention.

This problem is partly affected by teaching methods, techniques and activities developed in the classroom. Most EFL teachers teach language focusing on grammatical rules or reading activities instead of language use. According to Ruso (2007), students do not like teachers who spend the time in the classroom practice grammar exercises. Grammar rules unmotivate them because they do not like being passive during the classes. As a result, students face serious problems at the moment of communicating because they are focusing on rules, structures, grammar punctuations, etc. so, they are poorly prepared to speak fluency without thinking much.

At the Technical University of Babahoyo in the Language Center, students are not the exception and they present difficulties with English speaking fluency. This is reflected in their evaluations and assessments; their scores are usually very low in speaking skills. In addition, they hesitate to speak English because they have problems using accurate, fluent,

and complex language. Lack of enough vocabulary and the ability to utter clear sentences are among the concerns that learners express for the speaking ability. On the other hand, the tasks performed inside the language classroom are inappropriate and the use of the language in a real context is limited. The exercises in their book do not have communicational purposes, they are focus in the form of the language and not on the use itself.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Shahini & Shahamirian (2017) claim that productive approaches are recommended in relation to the use of the dictionary and how to take notes. Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) necessitates that teachers of this language stay up with the latest and new propensities in instruction so as to furnish understudies with important learning doors to procure this language effectively. It additionally requests that EFL instructors have huge information about the crucial ideas and hypotheses that encompass EFL education and learning. These ideas incorporate academic and different originations, for example, educational plan, culture, the guidance itself, appraisal, and today's teaching tendency, innovation, which edge EFL classes (Ovando & Combs, 2018).

According to Jancic & Hus (2019) constructivist approach is a model for learning based on the belief that students construct their own knowledge and understanding by participating in shared discourse with others. People construct their knowledge through the transformation of experiences, linking new knowledge with existing knowledge. The learning takes place through the activity of the learner (Carter & McNulty, 2016).

The constructivist theory of education was developed by Lev Vygotsky (1896), his theory was centered in social constructivism principles. Jerome Bruner later combined Vygotsky's theories with those of Jean Piaget, a cognitivist who regarded students as learners in their own right that learned through their experiences. Vygotsky's ideas, along with those of Piaget, became widely influential in the 1960s as "child-centered" theory that challenged the more authoritative didactic teaching method previously favored. The constructivist model put forth by Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner has had reaching implications for contemporary classroom practice.

Nunan (2003) stated "pedagogical tasks involve communicative language use which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also

have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right.” Ellis (2003) stated “A task is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires the learners to give primary attention to meanings and make use of their own linguistic resource

Phases of the task based learning

The framework of a TBL lesson may vary. Richards (2015) claims that it is usually composed of the following phases: Pre-task, Task (which can be sub-divided in different stages), Post-task.

Pre-task: The pre-task phase of a TBL lesson is the moment when the teacher sets the task, contextualizes the topic of the lesson, raises students’ interest and prepares learners to perform the task. When preparing students to perform a task, teachers might need to help students with both content and language. This can be done by activating students’ general knowledge on a certain topic and by helping students anticipate the type of language they will need to perform the task proposed. It is extremely important that students understand the objectives of the task during this phase.

Task: In this stage, students perform the task proposed. They are supposed to perform the task in small groups or pairs, and use their existing knowledge of language to express themselves in a spontaneous way. As the focus is communication, the teacher is not supposed to carry out extensive error correction at this stage, but should monitor and provide support. When students finish performing the task, they need to plan how they are going to report it to the rest of the class or to other groups. They may rehearse and research the language necessary in order to share the outcome of what they had done. Finally, students report the outcome of the task to other students.

Post-task: The post-task stage is when students evaluate their performance. This might be done by comparing the outcome of their task to that of a proficient user of the language. It can also involve feedback provided by the teacher and subsequent practice of language items that emerged from the task. It is important to stress that form-focused language work should be in response to students’ production. That means that the teacher will not teach a grammar lesson and expect that learners use that specific structure while performing the task, neither

should the teacher work on a pre-selected language item in this phase of the lesson. This makes the role of the teacher as a monitor extremely important in TBL (Richards, 2015).

Component of the task based learning

Ellis (2003) identified the components of task-based learning as follows:

- Goal refers to the general purpose of the tasks the teachers of the language plan for the learners, e.g., to enhance the ability to describe objects concisely; to provide an opportunity for the use of communicative language.
- Input refers to the verbal or non-verbal information supplied by the task; e.g. pictures; a map; written text.
- Conditions refer to the way in which the information is presented, e.g. split vs. shared information, converging vs. diverging.
- Procedures refer to the methodological procedures to be followed in performing the task, e.g. group vs. pair work; planning time vs. no planning time.
- Outcome refers to the “product” that results from completing the task, e.g. a completed table; a route drawn on a map; a list of differences between two pictures. The predicted product can be ‘open’, i.e. allow for several possibilities or ‘closed’, i.e. allow for only one ‘correct’ solution.
- Process refers to the linguistic and cognitive processes the task is hypothesized to generate.

Nunan (2004) presents a graphic guideline that indicates of goals, input, activities, teacher role, student role and settings, as shown in figure.



Figure 1: A framework for analyzing task-based learning components (Nunan, 2004)

Nunan believes that goals refer to the general intention for learning the task. Input refers to the data that forms the point of departure for the task. Activities indicate what students will

actually perform with the input. Teacher’s role and the student’s role refer to the social and interpersonal relationship between students and teachers in a task. Settings refer to the classroom arrangement affecting interaction which entails in the task, such as pair work or group work. Specification of all these components are needed when selecting, adapting, modifying and creating communicative tasks. (Nunan, 2004)

Research questions

What is the incidence of task-based learning on speaking fluency development in students of the Language Center at Technical University of Babahoyo?

Research Approach

This research approach is quasi-experimental because it will make a comparison of similar groups. One of the strengths of quasi-experimental designs is that they are sufficiently versatile as to be useful in the evaluation of virtually any social or educational intervention, regardless of the theoretical basis of that treatment.

This research applied the qualitative and quantitative approaches which the researcher utilized to collect the data. The quantitative approach helps to collect and analyze the data which was transformed into statistics. Moreover, was comparing the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test to know the difference before and after the application of Task-Based Learning to improve speaking fluency. In order to understand the underlying reasons why the problem happens and the qualitative approach helped to describe data that is subjective.

Population and sample

The research will be carried out on the Language Center at Technical University of Babahoyo, students who participated in the experimentation and control groups will be made up of 10 students each, whose ages ranged from 16 to 18 years’ old who are taking II Level of English.

	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
CONTROL GROUP	5	5	10
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP	6	4	10

Method of data collection

To collect the data, it was necessary to apply, both the control group and the experimental group, a validated pre-test at the beginning of the investigation and a post-test at the end of the study, as an instrument for data collection. These tests were taken from the Cambridge web page that consisted of a sample of the KET test for speaking. Task- Based Learning was implemented for two months. A rubric based on Cambridge parameters in order to assess speaking fluency was used, taking as reference the aspects that are considered in the Common European Framework, in particular the performance standards of speaking production. Also a survey was applied to English teachers and observations files were used during the intervention process. This suggestion is according from Cambridge ESOL and these kind of tests are standardized and have international validity (ESPE, 2017).

RESULTS AND DATA INTERPRETATION

The measurement of the speaking fluency was developed based on the analysis of the recordings. In order to assess the students, the KET exam was applied (Annex 1) with specific rubric criteria for it (Annex 2). A quantitative evaluation was developed on 5 points where four aspects related to fluency in speech were evaluated: giving 1 point to grammar, 1 point to vocabulary, 1 point to pronunciation and 2 points to interactive communication since this is a fundamental aspect to conveying an oral message.

During the pre-test in both groups some phenomena such as the invention of words, transfer and excessive generalization among the group of speakers were presented in the evaluation process and we observed that the students simply did not want to lose track of their ideas, so they used these strategies as a valuable resource for the message to be transmitted. However, observing the development of the pre-test, students took just enough time to give basic information. There are long pauses and relevant grammar mistakes; nevertheless, we could observe that memorization favored fluency but worked against speaking naturally. Similar results were obtained in the post-test for the control group.

The following tables show the scores obtained by students in each criterion evaluated to maintain effective communication.

Pre-test Results Experimental Group

CRITERIA	GRAMMAR (1)	VOCABULARY (1)	PRONUNCIATION (1)	INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION (2)	TOTAL
1	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	2,5
2	0,5	0,4	0,3	0,8	2
3	0,2	0,2	0,4	1	1,8
4	0,4	0,4	0,4	0,5	1,7
5	0,8	0,5	0,5	0,7	2,5
6	0,4	0,5	0,5	0,8	2,2
7	0,2	0,4	0,4	1	2
8	0,5	0,5	0,5	1,5	3
9	0,5	0,3	0,2	0,5	1,5
10	0,4	0,4	0,4	1	2,2
X	0,44	0,41	0,41	0,88	2,14

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Post-test Results Experimental Group

CRITERIA	GRAMMAR (1)	VOCABULARY (1)	PRONUNCIATION (1)	INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION (1)	TOTAL
1	0,8	1	0,8	2	4,6
2	0,8	0,5	1	1,5	3,8
3	1	1	0,8	2	4,8
4	0,8	1	1	2	4,8
5	0,8	1	1	2	4,8

6	1	0,8	0,8	1,7	4,3
7	1	1	0,5	2	4,5
8	1	1	1	2	5
9	1	1	1	1,5	4,5
10	0,4	0,5	1	1	2,9
X	0,86	0,88	0,89	1,77	4,4

Created by: The Authors.

Pre-test Results Control Group

CRITERIA	GRAMMAR (1)	VOCABULARY (1)	PRONUNCIATION (1)	INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION (2)	TOTAL
1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,2	1,7
2	0,5	0,4	0,3	1	1,6
3	0,2	0,2	0,4	0,8	1,6
4	0,4	0,4	0,4	1	1,6
5	0,8	0,5	0,5	0,2	2
6	0,4	0,5	0,5	0,5	1,9
7	0,2	0,4	0,4	0,5	1,5
8	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1,9
9	0,5	0,3	0,2	0,2	1,2
10	0,4	0,4	0,4	0,4	1,6
X	0,44	0,41	0,41	0,4	1,66

Created by: The Authors.

Post-test Results Control Group

CRITERIA	GRAMMAR (1)	VOCABULARY (1)	PRONUNCIATION (1)	INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION (2)	TOTAL
1	0,5	0,5	0,2	0,5	1,7
2	0,5	0,3	0,4	1	2,2
3	0,5	0,4	0,8	1	2,7

4	0,8	0,4	0,4	1,4	3
5	0,5	0,5	0,2	1,5	2,7
6	0,2	0,5	0,5	0,5	1,7
7	0,5	0,4	0,5	0,8	2,2
8	1	0,5	0,4	1	2,9
9	0,4	0,2	0,2	0,2	1
10	0,4	0,4	0,4	0,4	1,6
X	0,53	0,41	0,4	0,83	2,17

Created by: The Authors.

Comparison between pre-test and post-test in the grammar criterion.

GRAMMAR		
Experimental Group	Pre-test	0.44
	Post-test	0.86
Control Group	Pre-test	0.44
	Post-test	0.53

Note. From pre-test and post-test using KET exam.

Created by: The Authors.

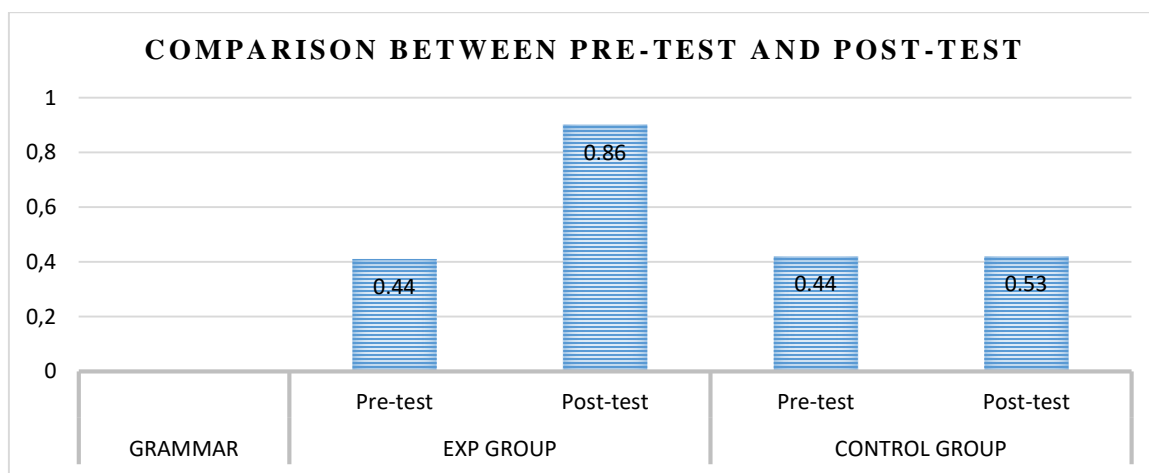


Figure N° 1. Comparison between pre-test and post-test grammar criterion.

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Comparison between pre-test and post-test in the vocabulary criterion.

VOCABULARY		
Experimental Group	Pre-test	0.41
	Post-test	0.88
Control Group	Pre-test	0.41
	Post-test	0.41

Note. From pre-test and post-test using KET exam.

Created by: The Authors.

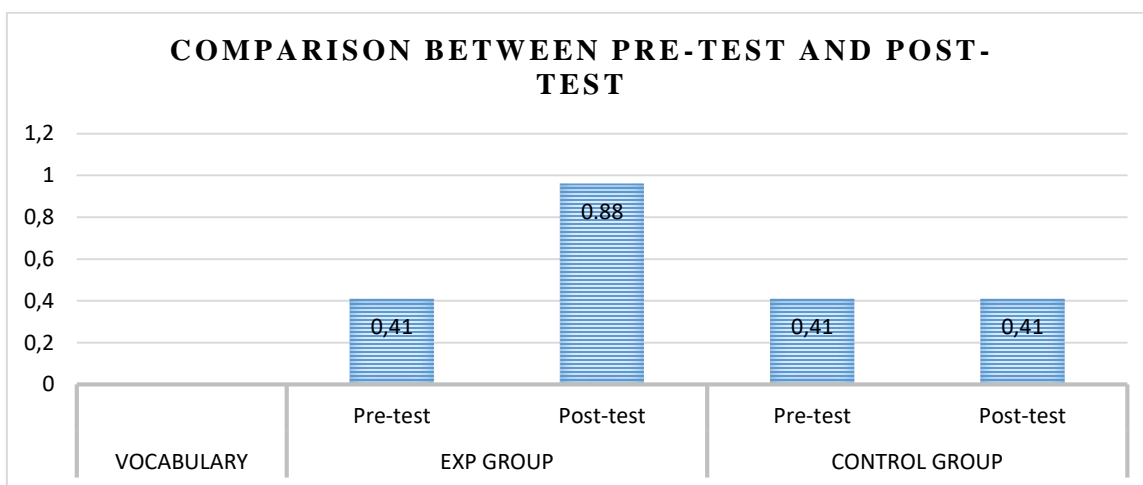


Figure N° 1. Comparison between pre-test and post-test vocabulary criterion.

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Table N° 3. Comparison between pre-test and post-test in the pronunciation criterion.

PRONUNCIATION		
Experimental Group	Pre-test	0.41
	Post-test	0.89
Control Group	Pre-test	0.41
	Post-test	0.41

Note. From pre-test and post-test using KET exam.

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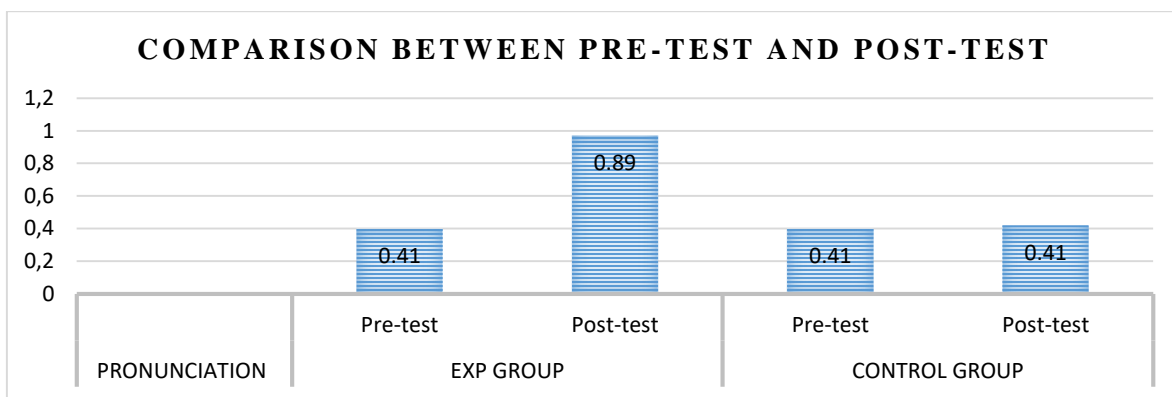


Figure N° 1. Comparison between pre-test and post-test pronunciation criterion.

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Analysis and interpretation:

Table N° 3. Comparison between pre-test and post-test in the interactive communication criterion.

INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION		
Experimental Group	Pre-test	0,88
	Post-test	1,77
Control Group	Pre-test	0,4
	Post-test	0,83

Note. From pre-test and post-test using KET exam.

Created by: The Authors.

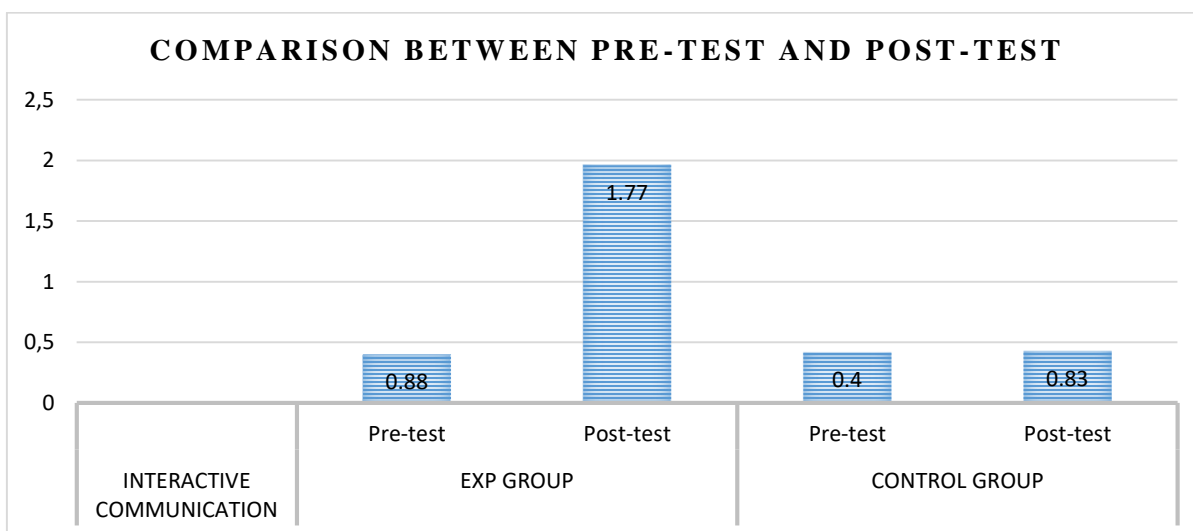


Figure N° 1. Comparison between pre-test and post-test grammar criterion.
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DISCUSSION

Sánchez, L. (2016) claims that in his research “Fostering the speaking skill through task based learning in EFL” students not only improve meaningfully in speaking, they also strengthen affective relations that are linked to the principles of task based learning. The classes were observed through tools and activities such as games and songs, which are essential in English teaching. L2 teachers need to feel confident that the research is applicable in helping individual students to discern which actions are more relevant to their tasks and goals. This assertion is in direct connection with Carless, D. (2002) in his research “Implementing task-based learning with young learners” where the analysis of data collected by different data collection methods revealed that both students and the classroom teacher were highly satisfied with TBL approach mainly in terms of adding variety to the classroom activities and increasing learning in class. On another hand, it could also be interesting to point out aspects related to the type and quality and quantity of input, since students need enough and adequate material to understand and feel the confidence to participate. It is relevant to point out the lessons' goals when teachers design their classes, taking into account the students' English level and mental stage. Learners need to develop self-esteem and self-confidence to allow them to achieve better results.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the application of the data analysis and research finding the following conclusions are drawn. Task-Based learning has a positive incidence on speaking fluency development in the students of the Language Center at Technical University of Babahoyo. Students participated in a series of sessions using Task-Based learning activities that facilitated the learning process. As a result, evaluation criteria such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, interactive communication had remarkable improvement on learners. Progress in pronunciation and fluency have been identified, as well as decreased boredom for students when carrying out tasks through apply Task-Based learning. Students were mindful to the

importance to improve their speaking fluency for their academic development. Learners felt motivated with the development of different tasks applied Task-Based Learning proposes. All language teachers are invited to become familiar with TBL which is a very popular and adaptable framework in language teaching. Students in this study were quite receptive to TBL framework. When adopting this framework, language teachers should provide their students with a variety of enjoyable tasks. Carrying out a variety of tasks influences students' progress and attitudes towards the success of the lesson.

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