# Task-based Language Teaching and its Impact on
# Oral Presentation Skills of Thai Vocational Learners

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## Abstract

*It cannot be denied that in the age of globalization and information technology, the English language will never stop dominating the world as a language that more than half of the world's population can understand, and which we must put every effort to master; it is the king of language. However, the process of learning foreign language is time consuming and discouraging especially in grammar acquisition because of the difficulties in stimulating desire to learn a language that has no practical impact on a day-to-day basis. Content taught in language classrooms is not relevant to learners' life styles. Therefore, it is very common that EFL learners are not confident to communicate with foreigners when their command of English is limited. This study is designed to serve the needs of a specific group of EFL learners who require oral presentation skills. The materials and tasks were chosen by considering learners needs as well as the nature of work they have to do. This study attempts to examine how task-based language teaching strategies help EFL learners to develop oral presentation skills, and what impact they have on learning outcomes. t The researcher also aims to examine learner engagement in the language classroom through a variety of tasks provided based on their work experiences, which gives them the opportunity to control the learning processes. The research participants are 10-male vocational students, completing their last year of Higher Vocational Certificate in Industrial Technology through a program called School in Factory, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Chiang Mai, Thailand. The researcher uses different strategies for assessment in order to provide a clear window into learner progress and found that learners who used to say they have never had courage to come in front of people and talk in English language did better than what teachers expected.*

*Keywords: Task-based Language Teaching, Oral Presentation Skills*

## Introduction

As a result of emergence of ASEAN economic community (AEC), the English language has increasingly become a powerful factor in recruiting new employees among international companies, and there will be a high possibility of skilled labors mobility among ASEAN countries. Besides, globalization has brought rapid changes in workplace and it demands new skills and knowledge to fit in this competitive work environment of organization. Technicians and engineers of the 21$^{st}$ century need to possess an adequate knowledge of effective communicative competence in presentation skills. Technical oral presentations are frequently practiced in workplace events. Thus, a student's presentation in the classroom becomes an important element in delivering positive learning experience.

One of the most challenging tasks is to change learners' attitudes towards oral presentation using English a medium of communication. According to M Htang Dim (2013), most of EFL students learn English just to pass school test, high school

equivalency and university administration exams. Moreover, it cannot be denied that this is a result of a   teacher-centered educational background, which allowed students to become accustomed to a passive learning style especially in English class.

A variety of English textbooks have been compiled and developed for students; yet it seems there are no appropriate course books that perfectly serve students' needs due to the rapid changes in all aspects of life, especially the technology advancement. Arum, Beattie and Ford (2011) stated that in the 20th century students spent twice as much time reading textbooks as they do today (P.758). As a teacher, I have observed that it is not easy to encourage students to learn a foreign language that they feel is impractical in their daily life. One of my curiosities is that if students have to use their work experiences as a means to communicate, would it increase their motivation and involvement?

My research seeks the possibility to apply task-based approach to teaching oral presentation skills to EFL learners from a vocational background and to examine how it impacts learning outcomes. The participants are 10 students completing their last year in Higher Vocational Certificate in Industrial Technology at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna. They are the first batch of participants in a project called "School in Factory," in which they acquire work skills in the factory and learn how to work with real machines in an on-the-job situation.

This research is the first cycle in a project which plans to design English language tasks focus on learners' work needs and to ensure that the learners get an opportunity to be exposed to an authentic use of language. Moreover, it aims to help learners to become independent in learning the English language, which will be useful for their future study and work.

**Background Literature**

*Task-based Language Teaching*

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) provides opportunities for learners to involve themselves in the target language through tasks. It is the authentic use of language. In the task-based approach, the tasks provide the main context and focus for learning experience, and they encourages language use similar to the way language is used outside of the classroom (Ellis, 2003a). Many researchers and teacher educators have varied definitions of tasks in literature (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). According to Willis (1996), "tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome". Nunan (2004) further extended that "a task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language … and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form". Both Willis's and Nunan's definition agrees that tasks should be meaningful and learners can try anything to achieve the goal.

Task-based Language Teaching is learner-centered approach emphasize on purposeful communication where teacher helps learners to build extra-linguistic skills. The learners are made to explore language that arises from their needs and experiences. According to Prabhu (1987) "students learn more effectively when their minds are focused on the task, rather than on the language, they are using". Language teachers do not decide what learners should learn but design, select and create meaningful tasks or activities. The

teachers also help learners to learn a language independently. The lesson provided to the learners is based on task completion and the language is determined by what happens as the learners complete it.

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*Task-based Language Teaching in Thailand*

In government universities in Thailand, students do not have many opportunities in daily life to be immersed in the English language. Oral communication classes typically taught by native speakers or non-native speakers in some universities, usually meet once or twice a week for a three to four hours period. Daroon (2001) expressed that "Thailand has low achievement in teaching English. Many different methods of teaching have been tried. When the results are unsatisfactory, the new method is replaced by another. Unsystematic trial and error seems to be used for the English language curriculum". According to Iemjinda (2003), "one of the significant factors involved in the failure appear to be the lack of continuing support for teachers at a practical school level, leaving them feeling insecure and lacking the confidence to implement the innovation individually in their schools". One of the factors effecting the implementation of the Task-based approach is that the teachers have less preparation time due to extra administrative work (Carless, 2003; Jeon & Hahn; Watson Todd). Likewise, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) explained that Thai teachers were challenged by limitation of class time available for completing tasks. Another challenge for the Thai education system is also the insufficient systematic knowledge of adjusting from a teacher-centered approach to a learner – centered approach and the lack of correct understanding in implementation of task-based approach. Moreover, the students themselves are not accustomed to this task-based learning process and the task complexity (Carless, 2009). Students cannot make connections between tasks (Watson Todd) and transitions between various materials and tasks (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol).

*Oral Presentation Skills*

The latest developments in globalization and technology demand students to obtain 21st century skills. Oral presentation is one of the most desirable skills that graduates must have in this competitive environment of organizations. According to a journal published in International Conference on Interactive Collaborative Learning (2014), many studies report that 75% of long term job success depends on soft skills such as communication, oral communication and presentation skills, while only 25% depends on the technical skills of engineering graduates. "Oral presentation skill functions as an effective tool to assist graduates to perform workplace jobs effectively and thereby excel in job promotion ladder too fast"(p. 758).

Oral Presentation is one of the most effective communication activities in the learner-centered classroom (King, 2002;Truong&strorch,2007; Al-Qubtan,2010;Alwi & Sidhu,2013). Presentations allow students to gain speaking practice in topics of their own choosing, as well as to gather and analyze information, from different sources and organize ideas (Meloni & Thompson, 1980, p. 503). It also creates a corroborative working environment in which the team works together within the time given. According to Meloni & Thompson (1980), "the oral report gives the adult student the opportunity to establish an identity as an individual with an interesting background and special knowledge. This leads to a more integrated and spirited class and markedly raises class interest". Sometimes, teacher preparation for classroom presentation could lead to failure. King (2002) explains that "when oral presentations are assigned in class, the teacher will get either complete silence or grumbles from students who find the idea of oral presentations frustrating and intimidating". This could happen due to the overwhelmed research and communication skills students need to prepare if they want their presentation to be successful. Oral presentations create extreme anxiety. This anxiety causes performance to decline EFL learners' self-esteem and confidence. According to King (2002), oral presentations are a face-threatening activity particularly for Asian students.

**The Study**

*Participants*

The research participants in this study are 10- male students who are completing their last year of higher vocational certificate in Industrial Engineering at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna. This group of students is the first trial in a project called School in Factory in which they acquire work skills in the factory and learn how to work with real machines in an on-the-job situation. There are over 13 well-established firms that our students are joining as full-time employees. The project aims at making connections between the classroom and the real world of work and work skills for our students.

The participants have to study all compulsory courses like other students, but inside the classroom provided by the factory. They also have to study English Language course every semester in RMUTL campus along with students of other majors. Therefore, the language learned did not specifically serve their needs and thus this research is the first attempt to teach English language at their work site.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Venting Post | PA Shop (Plaster Aluminum) | Casting Plaster Mold |
| | | Casting Aluminum |
| | | Breaking Plaster Mold |
| | EI Shop (Element Interchangeable) | Tooling |
| | | Injection Machine |
| | | Hand Finishing |
| | | Milling Machine |
| | | Venting |
| | | Last Check |

Table 1 shows different work tasks in the venting post

*Procedure*

*1. Learners' Needs Analysis*

Task-based language teaching gives an importance to the connection between the teaching methodology, the learners' needs and the nature of language practice. Knowing learners' need helps to establish good start between the teacher and learners. It provides a powerful framework for connecting course content and constructive participation (Xin-ming, 2010). According to the task-based language teaching, learner-centeredness should be the major focus. Therefore, I requested permission to have a factory tour during which visitors are prohibited from taking photos or videos. On this visit I saw different work posts and our participants are operators in "Venting Post". After that I conducted an interview in the first period to examine the participants' language needs. The participants were asked the following questions:

1. Do you work every day? And how many hours do you work per day?
2. Who do you have to speak English to?
3. How often do you have to communicate in English Language?
4. Do you think ability to communicate in English is necessary for your work?
5. Which skills of English would you like to improve?

Here the participants introduced themselves and explain their education background and their responsibilities in the company. I observed that most of the participants have broken English and lack of confidence. However, they claimed that they have never made a presentation in English before. Moreover, all participants realized the importance of communicative English abilities needed for work, and therefore they wanted to improve their oral presentation skills.

| Listening | Listen to the non-Thai supervisors, staff and visitors |
| Speaking | Speak to non-Thai supervisors, staff and visitors about their work, |
| Reading | Read instructions and manuals |
| Writing | Write a daily QC records |

Table 2 shows different language skills needed

*2. Task design: theory and practice*

According to Lievens (2015)**, "**teachers are advised to ensure that the task given to their students is goal-oriented and that goal must be meaningful for the students' ensuing professional career and the task support that goal". In my research, tasks given to the participants are based on their experiences and knowledge. The participants were asked to work in pairs, and the presentation topics were as follow;

Topic 1: Describing company background
Topic 2: Describing work process
Topic 2: Describing the machine that you have to operate
Topic 3: Describe signs and safety instructions, warning and rules in the factory
Topic 4: Give us a factory tour

Each topic was presented twice; the first presentation took place among the participants and mentors in orders for them to practice and to gain confidence. Second presentation was conducted in front of students from different major. Due to the availability of

classrooms and teachers, I selected a class of Business English students. Therefore, participants needed to realize that their presentation content had to be designed as simple as possible in order for Business English students to understand. Since task-based approach demands interaction between teacher-students and students-students, the task must necessitate interaction between them. Even though it is pair work task, learners are open to communicate with other pairs in order enhance collaborative learning atmosphere.
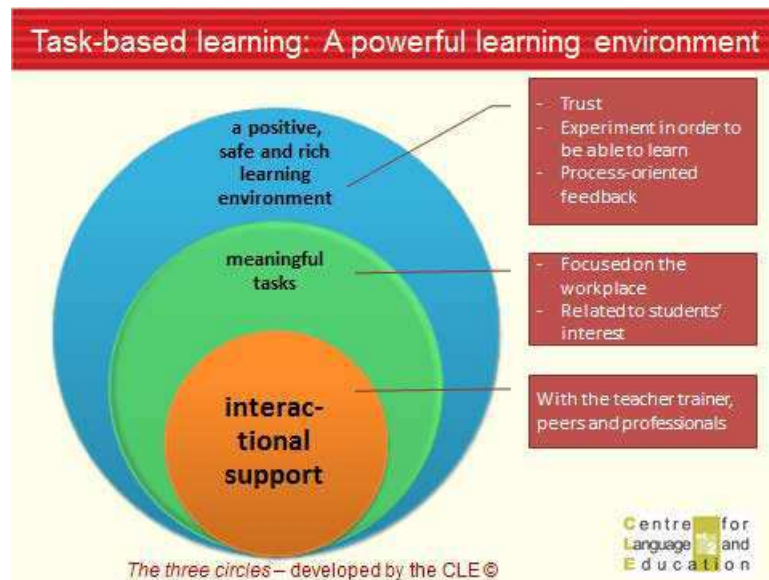


Figure 1 represents the geometry of a powerful learning environment for task-based teaching and learning (developed by CLE, KU Leuven).

Stage 1: At the factory site, participants were asked to talk about their personal backgrounds and their responsibilities using real objects or flowcharts allowed by the factory. The participants employed their professional knowledge as a means for communication without worrying about language form or grammar. From this stage, the researcher learned that the participants had knowledge about their work and technical terms used in their work.

Stage 2: Language input and functions and structure for a good presentation were introduced and explained through listening activities (Appendix 1). The participants were then assigned to give a short talk to their company using the same presentation structure and language pattern from the presentation they had listened to.

Stage 3: After that, the participants were given variety of language options that could be selected (Appendix 2). Participants were then asked to apply the topics given using new language input for their second presentation.

Stage 4: Second listening and writing activities were used in order for the participant to see the similarities in presentation structure and difference in language options used. Next topic was given to the participants.

The researcher and observers kept written records of the learners' performance and progress throughout the teaching and learning processes. Learners' presentations were video-recorded and selected spoken discourse outcomes from the classroom were transcribed and analyzed to examine the relationship between tasks and how the learners regulate in the target language in order to convey messages. Communication strategies were used to analyze how learners use English and manage to communicate even when their command of English is limited. Oral presentation rubrics were used to assess participants' performance.

Moreover, I put my effort to make the participants must feel comfortable and safe in the learning environment. They were always told that mistakes are hotspots for learning. While the learners were trying to learn building sentences, they must feel that it is common that presentations have some mistakes. I teachers are there to help them correct the mistakes.

## Presentation Transcript

*Introduction*
My name is Kitti..nickname Nueng ..errr..I am from Phijit .. Err I finish
My year 12 Haudongratchanupatam School. Errmm..I am working in
the Element Interchangeable,Venting Post in Michelin ..

*Presentation 3: Describing the a machine*
Hello everyone my name is Nattachat Sawichakul. My nickname is Nat. Im.. I am an operator in Siam Michelin Company Limited.

Err.. Today I will present the operation of band saw ..band saw machine… ahh this band saw name of machine is band saw machine .. ahh model number is G4235..ahhh it is use for cutting mold after casting ..errr. it is made of still (steal)… weight of machine is err.. 1600 we import from China..Err it cost twenty hundred Eeey tweny-one thousand US dollar. So let me begin with safety instruction errr..then I will talk about part and function of band saw machine.. after that describe how to control machine ..next I will show you step in cutting process..

*Question and answer*

Observer : What is alim ?

Participant: Errr..alim is for camping ..errr this (try to illustrate using slide) err for camping.. after casting..yes…..( continue trying to explain) errr after we casting mold ..err this is before camping work piece..yes after casting…..Err we cut alim for.. for work piece separate..

It is observed that the participants used communication strategies into their attempt to convey message especially when the language has not been prepared and practice. In achievement strategies, the participants used repetition strategy, modified interaction, and self-repaired. For time stalling strategies, the participants simply employed non-lexicalized fillers (e.g., ur and umm).

*Assessment*

Self-assessment is carried out throughout the course using video recorders. Students are convinced to recognize the advantages of the self-assessment as a major means of improvement. According to my teaching experiences, students tend to ignore how their classroom presentation performance went and refuse listening to what I have recorded. This is because students feel that they might lose confidence to speak again. Teacher and mentors' feedback and evaluation were given to all presentation of each topic. Three English language specialists were invited to evaluate students' oral presentation skills using oral presentation rubrics (Appendix 3).

*Learning Outcomes/ Research Findings*

The findings of this study provide valuable insight on authentic communication which drew from the students' own professional knowledge and experiences and which greatly supported and enhanced the verbal and non-verbal expression required for presentation skills. The learners rather tried to communicate with the audience focusing more on message than language form or grammar. Furthermore, as the students worked on their presentation, they developed speech building strategies which helped them to generate content and organize information. A task-based strategy promotes collaborative work because participants are involved in pair work and group work throughout the course. The participants develop critical thinking skills through designing content and organization of contents and accounting for the background of their audience to provide appropriate content. Moreover, in the participants' feedback form, which was given at the end of the course, it shows that many students reflected that a task-based strategy could motivate them towards learning the English language if it were consistently adopted in classroom. They also expressed that they preferred to have presentations in the next semester. Since this is my first cycle to implement task-based strategies into oral presentation classroom, due to the availability of students and time allotted, I did not have a control group to be compared. In my further research, I will create more generalizable results.

*Conclusion:*

Oral communication skill of vocational students is an indicator of success of modern organizations. Teachers should prepare the learners with effective oral presentation skills according to the demands of multinational organizations, so they can then run the organizations productively. This study provides concrete evidence that task-based language teaching makes the language classroom more interactive and enjoyable. The learners actively participated throughout the teaching and learning process. This research was useful for language classroom in Thailand in terms of the encouragement of students' speaking skills, motivation and attitude towards language learning, confidence, sense of engagement and control over the learning process. Task-based language teaching allows the teachers to build the class around learners' knowledge and experiences to obtain more authenticity in the language and content learned. The process of teaching and learning has also greatly strengthened teacher-student relationship and also empowered learners to take more responsibilities for their learning.

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## Appendix 1 : Company presentation

**Company presentation transcript**

I'd **like to start** by welcoming you all here today. My name is Mandy Wong and I'm one of the managers for Eco-car Ltd. The presentation today **is about** our company, its history, location, products and advertising.

So, let me begin by **giving you an outline of** my talk today. **First of all**, I'll give you a brief account of the history of Eco-car Ltd. Then **I'll run through** our current product range. **After that** I'll give you a brief description of our new advertising campaign. Please feel free **to ask any questions** at the end of the presentation.

Right, **let's start by looking** at the history of our company. The company was founded in 2004 by two brothers who had the idea of producing a car which runs off 100% organic energy. They started with just one small room to build it in! Now we have two large factories in the Northern Territories.

So, **let's move on to** the current product range. At the moment we have five different Eco-car products. These range from our original car – the Friendly Juicer – to the highly successful Wonder Car which has won several international prizes. We believe that these products will continue to be particularly popular because they go against the modern trend around the world of luxury items that run at a great cost to the world's environment.

Good. **I hope you now have a clear idea** of the kind of products we have introduced since we started out in 2004. Now **I'm going to turn** to our new advertising campaign and how I believe it is going to perform in the face of some very strong competition in this sector.

Think Green, Think Eco-Car. That's our new slogan and our idea is to offer a range of cars on the market that are three different types of green – only green – a light, a pale and a dark green. I hope you like this idea.

Ok then **to sum up**. Eco-car is now a well established player in the car manufacturing market of Hong Kong, focussing on organic fuels. We face strong competition in the market but we feel we are in a strong position with our highly specialised products. Our plan to move into the international export market should ensure that the company continues to grow in the coming years.

That **brings me to the end** of my presentation today. Now, if there are any questions…

| 1. Introducing yourself, your colleagues and your talk | 2. Stating the title / subject / purpose |
|---|---|
| Good morning. My name's (…). I'm the project director.<br><br>This is my colleague (…) who is in charge of… | We are here to talk to you about…<br>We are going to present our findings on…<br>The purpose of this presentation is to…<br>This talk is designed to… |
| 3. Outlining / sequencing | 4. Stating the length |
| We have divided our presentation into (…) sections. They are…<br><br>We can break the project down into the following fields (…)  OR<br>We can break the project down into the following fields(:)  (followed by 'Firstly', 'Secondly', etc.) | I will only take (…) of your time to give you the basic background. My colleagues will then take over.<br><br>We are planning to be as brief as possible. The presentation should last about (…) |
| 5. Referring to questions | 6. Convincing your audience |
| We'd be glad to answer any questions at the end of the talk.<br><br>If you have any questions, please feel free to interrupt. | We strongly believe…<br>We are convinced…<br>In our experience, these types of websites are extremely… |

**Appendix 2: Presentations – functions and language**

| 7. Summarizing and concluding | 8. Inviting questions |
|---|---|
| That covers all we wanted to say today. | Are there any questions? |
| Let me just run through the points we have covered. | Would you like to ask us some questions? |
| | Are there any unclear points? |

## Appendix 3: Oral Presentation Rubrics

**Student Name:** _____

| Check Point | Presentation | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **1  Content and Organization** | | | | | |
| 1.1 Very clear information, well-organized, interesting | | | | | |
| 1.2 Moderately clear information, organized, interesting | | | | | |
| 1.3 Unclear information, Poorly organized, uninteresting | | | | | |
| **2  Grammatical structures** | | | | | |
| 2.1 No or almost no grammatical errors | | | | | |
| 2.2 Some grammatical errors | | | | | |
| 2.3 Almost no correct grammatical structures | | | | | |
| **3  Non-verbal Communication** | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 3.1 Looks at audience often, expressive face. | | | | | |
| | 3.2 Sometimes looks | | | | | |
| | 3.3 Look down away, head down, etc. | | | | | |
| 4 | **Pronunciation and paralanguage (stress, pitch, volume, intonation)**<br>4.1 Minor pronunciation errors, good attempt to speak target language, good volume, not hesitate to speak | | | | | |
| | 4.2 Some pronunciation errors, fair attempt to speak target language, good volume, little hesitate to speak | | | | | |
| | 4.3 Major pronunciation errors, no attempt to speak target language, poor volume, hesitate to speak | | | | | |
| 5 | **Time management** | | | | | |
| | 5.1 3-5 minutes | | | | | |
| | 5.2 2 to 2:30 minutes | | | | | |
| | 5.3 Less than 2 or long pauses. | | | | | |
| | **TOTAL SCORE** | | | | | |

Observer comment:

_____

_____

_____